

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

WRITERS ON AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

AI and 'small' languages

Lavinia Braniște

My books have so far been translated into three languages, and each time the process started with a passionate and enthusiastic translator who discovered the book, translated a sample and then started knocking on publishers' doors. That's something a robot couldn't do.

Romanian is a 'small' language, our literature is not very well known abroad and is not of interest to foreign publishers, so it needs 'ambassadors' who are the translators. I'm a translator myself (but as I work from 'big' languages into Romanian, I am not needed as an ambassador), so I can well understand the effort it takes to find a publisher who is interested in seemingly obscure books. My intuition is that translators don't necessarily enjoy this stage of their work, but as we Romanian authors don't work with agents and our institutions don't put much effort into promoting our books abroad, human translators are and will be indispensable for a long time to come.

As the quality of AI translation into and out of Romanian isn't very good, I'm not too afraid of it – for now. However, it's amazing how fast technology is advancing and how fast software is improving, so we'll probably have to face this prospect at some stage.

In relation to the translation of my books into other languages – I wouldn't mind if the translator used AI, as long as they then went through the text again and again until they found the human voice in the original (after all, machine translation software is a more efficient dictionary, working at sentence level, not word level). However, I would like to know if the publisher used AI directly and then, after no more than a rushed, cursory proofreading, put the book on the market.

I don't think robots are something abstract, existing independently of the people who create or use them. It seems to me that in recent discussions about AI





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Photo: Adi Bulboacă

there's a lot of talk about robots and the ethics of whether translators should or should not use these tools, but we should also think about the non-translators in the chain, those people who created the robots and who profit from their use.

I must admit that I haven't had much time to think about copyright and profit-sharing issues in the use of AI. I'm a freelance writer and translator, I have many collaborations and many battles to fight on my own, and I don't know where another fight could fit in my professional life right now. For me, the translation of my books abroad is more a matter of portfolio than profit, and the biggest gain has actually been befriending the translators.