



THE ROLE OF THE TRANSLATOR IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

The field of translation has been fundamentally changed by the fast development of artificial intelligence (AI), which also begs questions regarding the future function of human translators. Although AI-driven machine translation (MT) systems have raised accessibility and efficiency, they also provide difficulties with accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and ethical issues. This research investigates the changing function of human translators in an AI-dominated environment, contending that AI, rather than replacing translators, acts as an augmentative tool changing their duties and skill set. First, the research looks at the dependability of AI translating systems on large datasets and pattern recognition, therefore stressing its shortcomings (e.g. struggles with context, idioms, and domain-specific language) and subsequently highlighting the ongoing need of human knowledge, especially in delicate domains as legal, medical, and literary translation. Second, the paper looks at the translators' evolving roles from direct text conversion to more difficult chores including linguistic validation, cross-cultural adaptation, and post-editing machine-generated translations (PEMT). To properly work with artificial intelligence systems, translators today need not only language ability but also digital knowledge. At last, the study addresses the ethical and professional ramifications of artificial intelligence in translation. It contends that in an environment going more and more computerized, human translators are still absolutely essential for upholding ethical standards and linguistic diversity, arguing that artificial intelligence is not a substitute but rather a catalyst for reinventing the function of the translator. Translators will have to change as artificial intelligence develops, stressing creativity, critical thinking, and multicultural experience to negotiate this new technical age.

Keywords: *automated translation; AI tools; accuracy; equivalence; 'human touch'.*

It goes without saying that in today's globalized world translation is of utmost importance, thus becoming one of the main fields where AI has started to play a crucial role. Thanks to rapid advancements in technology, artificial intelligence (AI) translation systems are now widely accessible to the general public, mostly free of charge. The general accessibility and ease of use have turned AI-powered translation tools into a readily available and valuable resource in the translation field, thus becoming a source of concern for the professional career of human translators, who have found themselves in a position to compete with 'the machine'. The translator's traditional role as an artisan, cultured person, artist and/ or transcreator is undergoing significant changes brought about by the advent of AI technologies that are transgressing into his/her field of activity. Although prominent scholars dismiss the abilities of AI translation instruments and refuse to acknowledge that users are able to obtain the essence of a text written in a foreign language, MT systems have proved their reliability and can no longer be ignored.

The increasing importance granted to AI in translation is visible in the huge amounts spent for the development of digital tools on the language translation market: about USD 2.34 billion in 2024, and USD 2.94 billion in 2025, with a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of ~25.2% over that period. By 2029, this market is forecast to reach approximately USD 7.16 billion, assuming the same growth rate¹. The broader machine translation market (which overlaps but is not exactly the same) was at about USD 9 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow to USD 23.53 billion by 2032². Of this substantial investment, a remarkable 90 percent was allocated specifically towards research and development as well as deployment strategies. These impressive figures speak volumes about the increasing reliance on AI tools in all aspects pertaining to translation as a whole (both as process and product), especially when it comes to their rapid evolution from word-for-word translation to deep learning and machine learning.

¹https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/ai-in-language-translation-global-market-report?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed on April 3rd, 2025.

² https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2025/08/13/3132701/0/en/Machine-Translation-Market-Size-to-Surpass-USD-23-53-Billion-by-2032-Fueled-by-Rising-Demand-for-Real-Time-Multilingual-Communication-Across-Global-Industries-Research-by-SNS-Insid.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed on April 3rd, 2025.

Of course, the results obtained when resorting to MT vary widely depending on the MT tool quality, as well as the text type and degree of difficulty (be it linguistic or cultural). One may even go so far as to assert that the accessibility of AI translation systems would certainly do away with copyright (of literary works) worldwide, since it would be pointless to pay for any translations if you can have the machine do all the work for free. For the moment it seems that none of these translation systems is fully operational and that standard requirements for projecting context and the specific style and tone of an author go beyond the current boundaries of these systems, resulting in mostly stilted, bland, and uninteresting target texts. In any case, AI-driven translation is improving as we speak, and these remarks are not going to remain valid in the foreseeable future.

THE RISE OF AI IN TRANSLATION

The ascendancy of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in contemporary society has engendered novel problem-solving modalities and paradigms that ameliorate various aspects of human existence. Among the numerous domains amenable to AI facilitation, translation functions prominently due to its ubiquitous pertinence.

Machine translation systems and tools such as Google Translate, DeepL and ChatGPT, to name just the most commonly used, proffer comprehensive services predicated upon readily accessible Internet sites, applications, and programs. These AI-based systems operate at a velocity exponentially surpassing that of a human translator, and in the context of large-volume textual requirements, prove significantly more economical. Consequently, numerous individuals favour the employment of such technologies despite the attendant hazards concomitant with a complete abdication of human intervention. The historical trajectory and present capacities of machine translation suggest that the latter's prospective development may ultimately eclipse the need for human involvement in the translational enterprise (Yanisky-Ravid and Martens).

Google Translate has become one of the most widely used machine translation tools due to its accessibility and wide range of features. One of its main advantages is speed and availability: it provides instant translations at no cost, making it highly accessible to users across the globe. It also supports over

130 languages, including many that are considered low-resource, thereby facilitating cross-linguistic communication on a global scale. With the introduction of neural machine translation (NMT), Google Translate has improved significantly in terms of fluency and contextual accuracy compared to earlier phrase-based systems. Additional features, such as voice input, image translation via camera, and offline functionality, enhance its usability in travel, education, and everyday communication. Moreover, continuous updates and machine learning advancements contribute to the gradual improvement of translation quality over time. However, there are notable limitations. While effective for general communication, Google Translate often struggles with complex sentence structures, idiomatic expressions, and culturally embedded meanings, which can lead to inaccurate or misleading translations. It also lacks domain specialization, making it unreliable for technical, legal, or medical texts that require precise terminology and adherence to specific conventions. Privacy concerns arise when sensitive information is entered into the platform, as user data may be stored or analyzed. Additionally, Google Translate provides limited stylistic control, failing to adapt tone, register, or audience-specific language effectively. Finally, while its performance in high-resource languages is relatively strong, translations involving less commonly used languages often exhibit grammatical inconsistencies and awkward phrasing, highlighting the tool's uneven quality across different linguistic contexts.

DeepL, on the other hand, has built its reputation on translation quality rather than quantity. Although it currently supports fewer languages—approximately 30—it is often praised for its natural phrasing and contextual accuracy, particularly in European languages. DeepL's algorithms tend to preserve stylistic elements and idiomatic expressions, making it a preferred tool for literary texts, academic writing, and professional documents. Furthermore, DeepL offers data privacy options, such as a pro version where user input is not stored, which addresses concerns over confidentiality—a key issue in legal and corporate translation. However, its more limited language selection and lack of integrated features like offline translation or voice input make it less versatile for casual or travel-related use.

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is perhaps the best-known translation tool resorted to by various categories of users. It is an advanced conversational AI model based on the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) architecture,

which makes it extremely accessible and user-friendly, making it the top choice for the current public. It is designed to generate human-like text by predicting and producing language patterns based on extensive training data. Unlike traditional machine translation systems, ChatGPT is a general-purpose language model, capable of performing a wide range of tasks, including text generation, summarization, question answering, and translation, making it very versatile and able to solve multiple demands. Its strength lies in its context awareness, allowing it to produce coherent and contextually relevant responses over extended conversations. The most salient feature is that for translation, ChatGPT does not rely solely on word-for-word conversion but instead considers semantic meaning and discourse-level context, which often results in more natural and fluent translations compared to some rule-based or purely statistical systems. This makes it particularly useful for handling complex sentences, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic variations. However, as a generative model, it may occasionally produce inaccurate or fabricated information, a phenomenon known as hallucination, which may be as high as 30%. In this respect, a recent paper authored by Algaraady et al. points out two main limitations emerging repeatedly when using this particular tool: hallucinations (factual fabrications) when the Large Language Model (LLM) made unsupported factual claims, and domain-specific terminological failures requiring human correction. Translators valued the LLM for ideation and consistency checks but rejected fully automated drafts for high-risk domains. The paper recommends explicit evaluation protocols to detect hallucinations, hybrid toolkit designs (able to have suggestions flagged and provenance shown), and translator training in prompt framing and LLM verification. From a labour market perspective, the authors caution that treating LLMs as cheap assistants may depress fees if not governed; they call for contractual clarity about acceptable LLM roles. Overall, the study presents LLMs as strong adjuncts for improving consistency and ideation but not as replacements for domain expertise and final human responsibility.

Additionally, while ChatGPT can handle many languages, its accuracy varies greatly depending on the availability of training data for each language, so it is no surprise that for “minor” languages like Romanian it is not as high-performance as for English, French or German. Overall, ChatGPT represents a

fast, flexible and powerful AI tool for translation and other language-related tasks, but like all AI systems, it benefits from human oversight to ensure precision and reliability, especially in specialized or sensitive domains such as literary, legal or medical translation.

It is rather interesting to note how prominent companies in the MT field, like Lilt (founded in 2015) and Smartling (founded in 2009) chose to integrate the human element in their activity, in order to ensure their success. Lilt combines machine translation/ large-language models with human feedback (“human-in-the-loop”) to generate higher quality translations, adapt to brand voice, and continuously improve. It supports many languages and is able to handle diverse content types (text, documents, websites, marketing collateral, technical content etc.), being used by governments, enterprises and organizations that need both scale and high quality in translation, especially when local voice, domain specificity, or speed matter. Similarly, Smartling combines machine translation, AI tools, and a network of human translators/ linguists. According to its own presentation, it is positioned for enterprises that need to localize digital content (website, software, documentation, marketing) at scale, with visibility, consistency, and control, offering machine translation with human validation.

It is obvious that these companies chose to combine the strengths of machine translation with the human translator support, mainly visible in the final document oversight/post-editing, plus workflow/automation. While the more “mechanistic” parts, such as speed, volume, cost-efficiency, are left to the AI, the human input refers to the more complex tasks, such as style, tone, nuance, idioms, etc., and generally everything that is not necessarily “rule-based” and thus opaque to what the automated tool can learn and integrate. While AI is better for standard/ non-creative content, human translators can catch and fix errors, refine content, review the AI-generated translation and add the final touches.

Therefore, what these companies propose is the “hybrid” type of approach, mixing the reliability, endurance and high-volume processing ability of AI-driven tools with the more intuitive, creative and experience-driven skills of the human translators.

AI VS HUMAN TRANSLATORS

When comparing MT to human translation, the immediate conclusion is that the former provides speed and scalability, while the latter is more concerned with cultural sensitivity, nuances and the general ‘fine tuning’ of the finished product. Human translators still hold the edge when quality, nuance, and domain expertise are critical. More advanced tools like Lilt or Smartling make it possible to scale, reduce cost and turnaround time, while retaining much of what humans have to offer—especially when set up well (good glossaries, reviewers, editors). That is why in many real-world workflows the best solution is hybrid, i.e. the initial machine/AI translation drafts are followed by human post-editing or review.

No doubt, the specific circumstances of translation production should be taken into consideration, alongside with text typology and the intended audience. It is apparent that the most challenging case seems to be that of literary translation, which raises the most obstacles to the bland, stylistically-levelling output generated by AI tools.

Changing Translator Roles

When investigating the major changes affecting the traditional status of the translator as we all know it, Chen argues that nowadays “translation emerges from interactions among authors, communities, editors, and machine outputs” (2). So, it is no longer possible to view translation from a single-sighted perspective, and in this respect she introduces the very interesting concept of “multiple translatorship,” arguing that translation today involves a network of human and non-human actors, including authors, editors, communities, and AI systems. Using a posthuman theoretical framework, the author challenges the traditional image of the translator as an isolated individual and instead presents translation as a collaborative, interactive process where all the links, human or not, have to work together as a team: “the translator is moving away from being seen as a ‘monadic subject’ to a ‘pluri-subjectivity of interaction’”(10), thus acknowledging what is perhaps the fundamental change occurring in recent years in the translator’s status. The translator has lost his/her ‘privileged’ position in the ivory tower, being now only one of the multiple links in the whole enterprise that translation has come to be. She further explores how digital tools

and platforms shape relationships among stakeholders, emphasizing that attribution norms and compensation models must evolve to reflect this reality. This analysis has both theoretical and practical implications, especially for discussions about intellectual property and translator visibility. By situating translators within a broader assemblage of technological and social forces, this novel approach provides a fresh perspective on how digital tools are reshaping professional identities. It is especially valuable for researchers interested in the philosophical and sociological dimensions of translation in the digital era, since translation on the whole can never be separated from its cultural dimension.

Ethical considerations

The areas that seem to be the most affected by ethical challenges are more diverse than the mere aspect of copyright issues, including bias, accountability, authorship, confidentiality, cultural equity, among others. Yanisky-Ravid and Martens were among the first researchers to be concerned with the ethical dimension of AI tools in translation, warning against the biases apparent in MT, which can reinforce discrimination and misrepresent social groups, particularly when the end-users are unaware of such distortions. In addition, when addressing the salient issue of authorship, these authors draw the public's attention on the appearance of a "new form of invisible infringement", stemming from the lack of regulations in the manner in which MT systems collect their vast amounts of copyrighted data: in the absence of clear consent from the initial producers of these data, both developers and end-users risk unintentionally infringing intellectual property rights.

This 'fuzziness' and blurring of clear distinctions in authorship also lead to numerous problems related to professional accountability; when using AI tools it becomes virtually impossible to account for particular translation choices, and this opacity complicates error tracing and review, which is a rather undesirable feature in certain types of communication situations, like legal or medical contexts, where accuracy is key and lack thereof can result in serious liability. In the same vein, literary translation is not in a better position, as MT risks eroding the individuality and interpretive agency of human translators, who are traditionally seen as cultural mediators, and co-creators of meaning on an almost equal par with the source text authors (Kenny and Winters). In such cases, human post-editing is indispensable, to make sure that style and nuance

are preserved; unlike other types of translation, literary translation ethics should prioritize authorship, creativity, and cultural responsibility to the detriment of mere efficiency.

Confidentiality and data protection are another problematic issue occurring in MT. It is common knowledge that public platforms like Google Translate or DeepL may store, reuse, and recycle input from their numerous users in order to continuously improve their services, without much care for privacy or the potentially confidential data within the texts they employ. In order to ensure ethical translation practices, these platforms should introduce informed consent and anonymization in a much clearer manner, warning their users of potential confidentiality breaches.

Last but not least, attention should be paid to cultural equity in the ethical use of MT. In this regard, Mansouri and Ben Ali focus on cultural and linguistic inequality in AI-driven translation systems, arguing that MT reproduces dominant Western linguistic norms, and thus marginalizes underrepresented languages and cultures. Drawing from postcolonial translation theory, the authors contend that ethical MT design must account for linguistic justice and cultural pluralism, thus avoiding socio-cultural discrepancies and promoting diversity.

Despite the high-volume efficiency of automated tools, the human translator's ethical role—ensuring fidelity, fairness, and cultural sensitivity—remains central. Post-editing and quality control rely on human judgment, emphasizing the translators' responsibility as mediators between technology and meaning. PEMT is therefore on the verge of turning into a full-time occupation for human translators, with its own professional norms and regulations. Ranging from light (minimal edits aimed at ensuring comprehensibility) to detailed (thorough revision with stylistic nuances), PEMT makes full use of the uniquely tailored human ability to spot and correct errors from a larger perspective fuelled by intuition and experience, so far unparalleled by AI tools. If PEMT in the literary domain requires cultural sensitivity and artistic awareness, in specialized contexts, especially legal and medical translation, it must include expert editors, as well as clearly defined accountability between the human contribution and MT.

The Translator as a Cultural Mediator

In this particular context characterized by the rapid evolution of AI in translation, the translator seems to be relegated to the main role of a cultural mediator, whose fundamental responsibility deals with insuring cultural sensitivity, i.e. checking for and addressing any potential bias arising from the blind inclusion of culturally unfiltered information in the original sources aggregated by the various platforms and devices. According to Griffin-Mason, the immediate result of the interacting forces on the MT scene is the shift of the human role from raw translation to higher value tasks, like localization and cultural mediation, in addition to other post-editing and quality assurance activities. The opportunities created in this manner—like increased efficiency, fluency and scalability—are to be seen in association with the obvious disadvantages, like deskilling, and downward pressure on fees for routine work. It may well be said that the distinct human contribution related to cultural competence, ethical judgement and subject-matter expertise appear to be the salient reasons for advocating in favour of consistent professional recognition and visibility, as well as statutory protection for translators.

Cultural competence, the result of constant study and active participation in translation work, an element that is ostensibly hard to quantify, is a part of the translation process that automated systems, even the newer neural models, cannot reliably replicate.

Perhaps the most relatable illustration of how technology alone cannot provide viable solutions in all cultural contexts is the infamous incident that occurred in October 2017, when a Palestinian construction worker named Halawim Halawi posted “صباح الخير” (“Good morning”) on his Facebook page. However, Facebook’s AI translation system incorrectly translated it into Hebrew as ‘Attack them’ instead of the correct meaning, thus causing a major misunderstanding in an already politically volatile context. The mistake likely happened because Arabic script can look similar in different contexts, and AI translation models at the time were less sophisticated in handling nuances of language. In the total absence of a culturally competent human translator, able to assess the entire context of the situation in the Facebook post, the automated

translation algorithm exposed its shortcomings, and showed its inability to cope with high-stakes security situations.

However, even in low-stakes context, the lack of human supervision and oversight can lead to predictable errors, since LLMs model statistical patterns, devoid of all sociocultural competence, may hallucinate facts, miss pragmatic nuances, or produce feedback that only seems plausible, but eventually proves erroneous. In this respect, Godwin-Jones supports the cooperation among people, tools and contexts, integrating AI in a way that preserves human feedback and cultural mediation; AI tools' pragmatic competence should be constantly evaluated and monitored for bias and errors, so that MT is integrated thoughtfully, and thus manages to achieve its potential to amplify rather than replace human input.

AI does not usually cope well with communication situations which might require the necessary 'soft skills' that naturally come to human translators. Since they usually take on roles that go beyond mere linguistic transfer, translators should be valued for their cross-cultural expertise and domain knowledge, allowing them to actively participate in real-world settings (that most often require cultural mediation): "Some scholars and practitioners in Western society still consider translators to be walking dictionaries more than cultural mediators; however, in some settings and under certain conditions translators participate more actively in the communication process, producing oral or written texts in which forms and words are manipulated to extend further understanding across cultures." (Valero Garcés).

All in all, human translators are indispensable in providing the cross-cultural competence able to solve sensitive issues in both high and low-stakes environments, thus strengthening their role in PEMT. Their human and humanistic knowledge, part of their larger world view and general culture, are invaluable in ensuring accuracy and adequacy in issues related to culture-bound elements in all types of discourse, but especially in literary, legal and medical texts, where AI tools typically encounter difficulties of interpretation.

Collaboration between humans and AI in translation

Taking into account all these, it may well be said that the future of translation is increasingly defined by collaboration rather than competition between human

translators and artificial intelligence. While early debates framed MT as a potential replacement for human translators, contemporary research and professional practice have evolved toward a more nuanced understanding: translators and AI systems complement one another. This hybrid approach—combining human linguistic judgment, cultural awareness, and ethical reasoning with machine efficiency, scalability, and pattern recognition—represents the most sustainable and effective path for the translation industry, especially in today’s high-volume workflows.

The modern translation ecosystem is characterized by the coexistence of neural machine translation (NMT), large language models (LLMs), and professional human translators. Instead of operating in isolation, translators now engage in post-editing (PEMT), prompt design, and quality estimation (QE), working with AI outputs to refine and adapt them for specific contexts, notably in high-stakes cases, like literary, legal and medical discourse. As Lucas Nunes Vieira notes, “The focus of translation tasks involving MT is shifting towards more integrated and human-centred environments” (319). This integration reflects a redefinition of the translator’s professional identity—from a sole linguistic craftsman to an informed decision-maker, editor, and evaluator of AI-produced language.

AI tools are powerful at handling high-volume, formulaic content but remain limited in their ability to interpret cultural nuance, stylistic tone, or domain-specific implications. As Vieira emphasizes, we are now facing “a move from an MT-centred task to a human-centred one as a key underlying pattern of post-editing’s evolutionary process” (333). The future therefore lies in workflows where AI handles repetitive linguistic labour, while humans ensure semantic integrity, cultural relevance, and ethical compliance.

One of the most promising areas of human–AI collaboration is the use of quality estimation (QE) systems. QE tools assign confidence scores to machine outputs, allowing translators to prioritize their attention and thus acquire maximum productivity. Liu et al. found that “QE significantly reduces post-editing time” and that “QE serves multiple functions in MTPE, such as validating translators’ evaluations of MT quality and enabling them to double-check translation outputs” (485–86). Rather than replacing human translators, QE acts as a decision-support mechanism—enhancing efficiency while preserving

agency and judgment. The human translator remains in control, deciding when to trust the machine and when to intervene.

As stated previously, AI tools excel at generating drafts, suggesting synonyms, or maintaining consistency across terminology databases, which can dramatically improve speed and scalability. However, post-editing still requires interpretive and stylistic choices that reflect the intended audience and communicative goal. As Algaraady and Mahyoob found, “Human post-editing outperforms in all categories except efficiency” (7). In domains like law, literature, medicine, marketing or diplomacy, AI drafts may serve as starting points, but humans transform them into culturally resonant and rhetorically effective messages.

Thus, the future of translation will likely depend on symbiotic creativity: machines generate options, and humans select, reshape, and contextualize them. This creative mediation aligns with the translator’s traditional function as a cross-cultural communicator, reasserting human value in a technologically augmented workflow.

Educational systems must adapt to prepare translators for these hybrid environments. As Tian et al. recommend, modern translator training should incorporate PEMT, corpus building, prompt engineering, and ethical literacy (11). The translators of the future will need to understand how AI systems work, evaluate their outputs critically, and manage projects that involve automated and human processes. Policy makers and professional bodies should also establish standards for transparency, data use, and fair remuneration in post-editing contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

Today, as technology disrupts not only the few obvious fields of highly-refined innovative professions, but also simple manual work, the same applies to the profession of translation. The AI revolution will transform the profession of translation, not to say the whole communication realm. Automatic translation is constantly improving, and it seems we are very close to the point in which we can no longer differentiate between language translated mostly by human participant and entirely automatic translation.

In any case, taking into consideration the AI tools' performance in translation-related tasks, the translation profession seems to be currently moving toward a model of augmented intelligence rather than artificial replacement. AI tools enhance speed and scale, but humans safeguard meaning, cultural coherence, and ethical responsibility, becoming responsible for novel professional areas like PEMT and QE, especially where high-stakes discourse is concerned and accountability is key. As the field evolves, collaboration between translators and AI will define not only how language is processed, but also how knowledge, empathy, and cultural exchange are maintained in the global digital landscape.

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