IN DEFENCE OF THE HUMAN-MADE TRANSLATION

Bianca-Oana HAN, Assistant Professor PhD,
"Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureş

Abstract: *This article attempts to shed light on the idea that, since translation appears to be the aid to inter-human communication among people belonging to different cultures and using different languages, the mere idea of engaging technology to solve this evergreen communication issue has its drawbacks.*

Keywords: *translation technology, change, machine translation, CAT tools*

It might seem redundant to underline again the importance of translation in the process of inter-human communication. This issue has been debated upon for several decades already and chances are it will remain an ardent one in the decades to follow. Obviously, languages all over the world are subject to evolution, just like any other living entity. This is the reason they cannot escape the mark of time. And time can be "translated" as change. Again, another overly-debated-upon issue is *change*, perceived as a vulnerability-prone process, as change brings along alteration, modification which is not always or completely and serenely embraced by the subjects it affects.

One cannot fight or stop change. We daresay one shouldn't even try. We believe that trying to embrace it and to make the most of it might work better for us, the subjects it affects. Truth be told, there are certain ground-based rules or directions that help us keep our equilibrium, that help us remain in the safe area we need to in order to survive. But, survival is not all there is to it. Paradoxically enough, the safe area, the comfort zone might change into a trap, our trap, preventing us from evolving to our better selves. The best and worst (paradoxically, in the same time) news is that there are no rules as to how to do that, i.e. exit the comfort zone. That is probably due to the fact that every individual is a unique entity, with unique self, unique means of adapting to change, unique ways to evolve and unique ways of being unique.

Just as some of us are fair or brown haired, coloured or white skinned, left or right handed, male or female, young or elder, just the same, change changes us, imposes upon us differently. In all the fields of life.

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True, we love what is to love and hate what is to hate, but not the same stuff, not in the same way, nor in the same time.

Time. It is about time we admitted that our lives on Earth have been affected, influenced, altered, made better or worse by the evolution of technology. It is not the place here to underline the beneficial effects of evolution upon humans and their activity.[1] What we will try to underline here would be the idea that, when it comes to the process of translation, change due to technological development might have certain drawbacks, just as much as it has steps forward. One should rest assure from the start that we are, under no circumstances, implying that the translation process should be left technology-free, since we have come to understand and admit that technological development in this field supports the work of translators rather successfully. What we attempt to say here is that such aids ought to be handled with care.

We are all familiar to the evolution of translation[2] in time, how in the beginnings, there were the translations performed by "primitive" means such as pen-and-paper as tools. According to Gouadec[3], this evolved to PRAT, which is *Pencil and Rubber-Assisted Translation*, considered "clearly on the way out", quickly followed by *machine-translation* (MT), in the immediate phase and by the more acceptable *computer-assisted translation* (CAT). "Samuelsson-Brown believes that 'technology is now an inescapable reality, as well as an absolute necessity in the world of the translator"[4], some sort of a necessary evil.

It is needless to say that the technological evolution in the field of translation was not embraced with enthusiasm by all the actors of this stage. Just like in any other such situation. Imre[5] underlines how, in his study, "Bowker gives an insight into the psychology of translators, stating that overall, they are 'largely unenthusiastic' about the revolution of technology, "with attitudes lying somewhere between sceptical and scathing." The same author cited above, righteously continues by explaining that the translators' worry might be caused by the fear of

[1] A certain related aspect will be debated in a future article (see a forthcoming article in Studia Universitatis Petru Maior - Philologia. 19/2016)

[2] we refer here to written translation

[3] cited in Attila Imre, *Traps of Translation, A practical guide for translators*, Ed. Univ. Transilvania, Brasov, 2013, p. 102

[4] Bowker 2002, quoted in A. Imre, *op. cit*.

[5] idem

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seeing their job overtaken by machines and computers. The fact is that translators are, open-heartedly or not, adapting their work to the new trends, since they have become aware that, in order to cope and manage this (r)evolution in the field, they need to adapt, to be and stay on the translation market, and not just that, also to be productive and efficient.

Basically, when we refer to technology-supported translation, we mainly consider the MT and CAT translation. From the very first attempt to define them, we are informed about the fact that they are not 100% reliable translated variants, since both need some 'human-touch', (one more than the other). Therefore, according to the Wikipedia definition, the machine translation refers to "the use of software to translate text or speech from one language to another."[6] This could work just fine, should translation be concerned only with words, and not meaning. The fact that a certain word might have more than one meaning brings some difficulty into the whole MT approach.

"On a basic level, MT performs simple substitution of words in one language for words in another, but that alone usually cannot produce a good translation of a text because recognition of whole phrases and their closest counterparts in the target language is needed. Solving this problem with corpus and statistical techniques is a rapidly growing field that is leading to better translations, handling differences in linguistic typology, translation of idioms, and the isolation of anomalies." And this is achieved by means of human intervention, i.e. the human translator needs to supervise the output offered by the MT, also referred to as post-editing.

It was indeed interesting to discover that such a preoccupation for MT goes as back in time as the XVIIth century[7], meaning that certain linguists believed that the work of a human translator might be aided by technology development. This MT technology was somehow naturally followed by the CAT one, since the computer was invented and thus the MT updated. People apprehended that their job is not side-tracked by the invention of aiding tools and that they have the power to make these tools work for them, not against them. Therefore, even the Wikipedia definition of CAT tools contains this idea: "CAT is a form of language translation in which a human translator uses computer software to

[6] acc. to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machine_translation

[7] idem

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support and facilitate the translation process."[8], main focus here on human translator-software-support.

As seen previously, MT produces a text by itself, still to be considered by the human translator, i.e. post-edited and supervised, while in the case of CAT tools, things change a little, since they no longer perform the task alone, but support the human translator, by creating an entire "translation environment. This includes multilingual word processing, spell checkers, synonym lists, on-line dictionaries, reference sources, built-in MT, term base and translation memory."[9]

The existence of such a translation environment is the main and most notable difference between the two types of tools; the CAT tools developed this environment in order to increase translation efficiency and productivity. In a continuously evolving world, more people need to communicate sooner and better, thus translations have become longer and deadlines shorter; therefore, the need of such tools was of paramount importance.

Obviously, we are not implying that such CAT tools do the job of the translator instead of the translator himself. They are simply to be understood, managed and used with care, in such a manner that the job of a translator is achieved more rapid, when facing, for instance, repetitive terms or specialised terminology.

There are several such CAT tools already out there, some of them free, some others not; some more user friendly than others. It is, after all, a matter of learning the steps of the new game and coping with the idea that, no matter if we like it or not, evolution will catch us from behind. We should better be prepared. And by being prepared we mean keep our minds open to the sometimes scary and seemingly-impossible to handle novelty, and not cling desperately to the old and obsolete methods in which things used to be done. Not does it imply totally relying on the gadgets and technology-supported solutions.

Mankind evolution is an interesting process. People have been trying to evolve ever since they have become aware of the prerogative issued by their status as the most intelligent of the species. They have been trying to adapt with what they already had at hand, create what they could imagine they needed, invent tools and ways to make their lives easier.

[8] Acc. to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer-assisted_translation

[9] Acc. to A. Imre, *op. cit.*, p. 246

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They discovered the fire, created energy and developed machines. And now, when their creation works, some of them feel threatened. Someone once said that it was not enough to have power if you did not know what to do with it. Thus, if the humans have the power to create the machine, the computer, the humans need to know how to use it to aid themselves, not to harm themselves, to annul themselves.

People, in general, translators, in particular, should acknowledge the need of such tools, learn how to use them properly, how to make these tools work for them in order not hinder their activity. We believe that anyone believing that a translator can rely only on such tools to get the job done, is far from completely understanding their need and meaning. A translator's job cannot be performed by such tools with a 100% accuracy. Moreover, we should pin that that there is no such thing as a 100% accuracy in translation. This 'imperfection' associated to translation might be an explanation to reason why a translation cannot be completely completed by tools, other than the human tool, i.e. the brain.

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