THE EFFICIENCY OF A PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATOR

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Abstract: The present article tries to highlight issues concerning the efficiency of a modern translator in a globalized world, through the prism of a possible case study of legal terminology. We argue that predictions about the disappearance of translators in favor of machine translation and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools are far from coming true. Nevertheless, the efficiency of a translator is strongly connected to translation software (term bases and translation memories), which come to assist professional translators rather than replace them in a McWorld of rush, but taking into consideration quality assurance as well. The conclusion offers a possible recipe for the challenges of human translation in the 21st century, focusing on one keyword: efficiency.

Keywords: translator, efficiency, term bases, machine translation, CAT-tools.

Introduction

There have been many allegations regarding the end of human translation, which is somewhat similar the allegations regarding the end of the world on 21st December 2012, based on eschatological beliefs or a misinterpreted Mayan calendar[1]. Still, there are doomsayers regarding the end of human translation, who build upon the fear of human translators in the age of technological revolution. This revolution brought about changes never imagined before via computers and the Internet, thus it seemed a logical possibility to predict that 'machines will take over'. Seemingly, humans did not really focus on the funny side of a movie from 1999 entitled *The Mating Habits of the Earthbound Human*[2] (the combination of comedy and sci-fi). The movie starts with the setting of a 'universal translator' machine, which can be set to the desired language: "*Please adjust your universal translator to the language of your understanding. We will begin in ten seconds.*" Although a comedy, we suspect that these type of humor only fuels the fear and resistance of human translators to accept the revolution of technology triggering the revolution of translation as well (Imre, 2013, p. 155). Another sci-fi movie series of much greater impact (evidently, we refer to the *Star Wars*, more particularly to Episode VI, *Return of the Jedi*[3]) uses a humanoid robot (C-3PO) who/that[4] is capable of 'speaking' in many languages. Upon a purchase, C-3PO rightly embodies the fear of all human translators, unless we remember, we are watching a sci-fi movie:

[1] http://www.nasa.gov/topics/earth/features/2012.html, 24. 07. 2015.
[2] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0165874/, 24. 07. 2015.
[3] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086190/?ref_=nv_sr_5, 24. 07. 2015.
[4] We believe that it is a matter of interpretation whether robots can referred to as humans (*he* or *she*), similarly to pets, ships, etc.

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EV-9D9: *How many **languages** do you speak?*

C-3PO: *I am **fluent** in **over six million forms of communication**, and can readily...*

EV-9D9: *Splendid! We have been without an **interpreter** since our master got angry with our last protocol droid and disintegrated him.*

The highlighted parts show the essence: this robot can *communicate* in much more ways than the 'total' number of all languages on planet. According to a most authoritative website[5], there are more than 6,000 languages, and the number is shrinking. If we take into consideration that a multilingual person can speak four to eight languages the most (although some of them can reach to more than twenty), and their fluency and correctness is questionable, C-3PO (a mass product) would be a real threat to human translators.

Today we know that beginning with the 1950s (the Cold War era with the advent of machine translation) people involved in the development of machine translation (MT) made predictions / allegations that MT will take over. One of the most recent predictions comes from Raymond Kurzweil, an American author of books on health, AI, futurism. He stated that by 2012 MT will dominate the field of translation. His statement is rather questionable, we should add, although MT has had some advances over the last two decades, especially in certain fields, such as weather forecast or gist translation. Still, the results of MT are not acceptable when high quality translations are needed. Even the Wikipedia's section on MT states that "current systems are unable to produce output of the same quality as a human translator", and Biau Gil and Pym are sure that MT is not replacing human translators as fully automated MT is not a viable solution (2006, p. 17).

The politics of developers of computer-assisted translation tools (CAT-tools) are noteworthy regarding the issue. Whereas in the initial stage they were focusing on proving that CAT-tools are much more suitable for human translators than MT, urging them to purchase their products, they somehow failed to highlight the second word in the expression: computer-*assisted* or computer-*aided* translation tools. However, they soon recognized that – after having convinced a certain number of human translators – they have a wonderful solution to settle the dispute between CAT and MT, and they simply 'encapsulated' MT into CAT. For instance, *memoQ* (a very powerful challenger to *SDL Trados Studio 2015*, which is probably the world leader translation environment) has built-in MT options, such as *GoogleMT, iTranslate4.eu, Let's MT!, Microsoft MT, Systran MT,* etc. Thus the question is not whether MT is useful or not, but do translators using CAT-tools want to enable the MT plugins or not?[6] But in order to answer the question, we should investigate the efficiency of MT compared to a professional translator in matters of time, money and energy.

1. The project and its preliminary results

There is no doubt that within specialized translations the ones connected to medical and legal field are among the most demanding ones. This is due to the fact that mistranslations or translations leaving space to ambiguous interpretations may lead directly to

[5] http://www.ethnologue.com/, 24. 07. 2015.

[6] http://kilgray.com/memoq/60/help-en/index.html?options___machine_translation.html, 24. 07. 2015.

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loss of human life or legal intervention beyond the intended consequences, as one of the specialized sites warns us[7].

Terminology research has always focused on proper terms belonging to a certain field, which used to appear in specialized (mono-, bi- or multilingual) dictionaries containing words and expressions called 'terms'. However, printed dictionaries seem to be outdated as the revolution of translation also means 'going online'. And this is where we observed that there are complaints[8] regarding Romanian–English online and offline (printed) dictionaries regarding legal terms. Our project (POSDRU/159/1.5/S/133652) aimed at collecting as many printed dictionaries as possible over the past fifteen years in Romania (1999–2014) containing legal terms. Although our aim not to evaluate them in this article, we can agree with the comments on proz.com, according to which many of them are below the standards. For the sake of statistics, we can say that we have browsed through more than 300,000 entries in 16 dictionaries (Romanian–English, English–Romanian) containing legal terms, trying to build a collection of relevant entries for this field. Seemingly, the final version will contain around 50,000 entries the most, as many of them are identical in these dictionaries, whereas some of them are irrelevant or do not belong to the legal terminology (e.g. economics).

A 'legitimate' question is whether it is worth or not the invested effort, but instead of speculation we propose to test a collected database against MT and discuss the results, detailed in the next section.

2. Testing the new Romanian Penal Code

Many people believe that all our life is a constant rush and change in the 21st century, and from the perspective of a translator we can say that it is true: ever diminishing deadlines, ever increasing amount of texts to be translated with the mushrooming of printing presses, websites, etc. in the digital era. Thus professional translators specialize, having in mind the keyword: *repetitiveness*, referring to the fact that within a field keywords and phrases must repeat. So, a collection of repetitive elements may serve two aims: on the one hand we can assure better quality (cf. quality assurance), as specific terms are translated systematically in a similar war, whereas on the other hand we have enhanced productivity, as seeking time is much reduced in repetitive cases. However, the collection of terms seems to be more productive in the case of specialized texts, as they tend to appear more often than longer chunks of texts, unless we have an updated version of a previous document (see, for instance, manuals of various electronic devices). Thus CAT-tools providers offer their products with at least these two functions: term base (TB) and translation memory (TM) management.

More developed CAT-tools have further functions available, for instance an almost direct access for previous parallel texts in two languages, in order to aid the translation of a similar document; *LiveDocs* in *memoQ* can re-use previously translated text-pairs by converting them with a few mouse clicks into an effective TM.

As we are interested in the legal field, we noticed that the Romanian Penal Code (NCP) underwent changes and a new version was published at the beginning of 2014. We selected the first two cases of Article 229 (*Noul Cod penal; Noul Cod de procedură penală*,

[7] http://www.professional-translations.ro/traduceri/traduceri+specializate/traduceri+juridice, 24. 07. 2015.
[8] For instance on proz.com, "the largest directory of professional translation services", 24. 07. 2015.

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2014, pp. 101–102) to compare the efficiency of a TB based on the printed dictionaries versus *Google Translate*.

The source text contains 114 words (automatic count within *Microsoft Office*), which can be translated instantly in *Google Translate*[9] (GT), after the source and target languages are set. Interestingly, the translation resulted 96 words, although translations usually tend to be longer (cf. explicitation):

	ART. 229	ART. 229
(1)	***Furtul calificat***	*Robbery*
(2)	*(1) Furtul **săvârșit** în următoarele împrejurări:*	*(1) Theft in the following circumstances:*
(3)	*a) **într-un** mijloc de transport în comun;*	*a) a means of transport;*
(4)	*b) în timpul nopții;*	*b) during the night;*
(5)	*c) **de** o persoană **mascată**, **deghizată** sau **travestită**;*	*c) a person disguised disguised or transvestite;*
(6)	*d) **prin** efracție, escaladare sau prin folosirea fără drept a unei chei adevărate ori a unei **chei mincinoase**;*	*d) burglary, climbing or unlawful use of a key or a key lying true;*
(7)	*e) prin scoaterea din funcțiune a sistemului de alarmă ori de supraveghere, **se pedepsește** cu închisoarea de la unu la 5 ani.*	*e) decommissioning of alarm or surveillance system shall be punished with imprisonment of one to five years.*
(8)	*(2) Dacă furtul a fost săvârșit în următoarele împrejurări:*	*(2) If the theft was committed in the following circumstances:*
(9)	*a) **asupra unui bun** care face parte din patrimoniul cultural;*	*a) on a good part of the cultural heritage;*
(10)	*b) prin **violare de domiciliu sau sediu profesional**;*	*b) by trespassing or professional office;*
(11)	*c) **de** o persoană având **asupra sa** o armă, pedeapsa este închisoarea de la 2 la 7 ani.*	*c) a person having a gun, the penalty is imprisonment from 2 to 7 years.*

Table 1. NCP, fragment from Art. 229

We cannot draw far-reaching conclusions from this fragment, but the parts in bold may offer an insight. Our first impression is that GT managed the source text well and the core meaning is adequately rendered for the general public. However, in the case of a legal text, this is not enough, as the consequences are manifold. In (1) it is questionable whether *robbery* can be used for *furt calificat*, as the Romanian term refers to the felony of *aggravated*

[9] https://translate.google.com/, 25. 07. 2015.

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theft (Lister & Veth, 2010, Mezei, 2006), *grand* or *mixed larceny* (Botezat, 2011), or even *professional theft* (Dumitrescu, 2009). The first term is also used by the Official Journal of the European Union[10].

Our second observation is that important parts of the text are missing from the target text: *săvârșit* ('committed') in (2), *într-un* ('on' or 'in') in (3), *de* ('by') in (5), or *prin* ('through', 'by means of') in (6).

Thirdly, erroneous translations appear in at least three cases:

- we should have *a masked person* for *persoană mascată* in (5);
- the translation in (9) is close to incomprehensible, as the source text refers to *assets* belonging to the cultural heritage, whereas the target text refers to the "good part of the cultural heritage", which is impossible to carry out;
- if we accept *trespassing* as the valid term for *violare de domiciliu* ('breaking into a house'), then we are in trouble understanding the entire phrase: "by trespassing or professional office". One may argue that there are unprofessional offices, but the meaning of the GT version is far from *breach of domicile, breaking and entering, burglary, forcible entry* (Lister & Veth, 2010) or *house breaking* (Lozinschi, 2008, Lister & Veth, 2010), even if *trespass* is also listed in one of the dictionaries.

Finally, we can mention the 'aggravated cases of translation'. The translation of *cheie mincinoasă* in (6) is nonsense ("key lying true"), as the Romanian version refers to a *by-key, picklock* or *skeleton key* (Lozinschi, 2008). Further possible translations are *lock pick, master-key, pass-key* in this case[11], as *betty* or *screw* are only slang versions not to be used in legal documents.

The translation in (11) is also troublesome, as it is not as clear as the original; the English version states that any person "having a gun" is punishable with 2 to 7 years, although 'we know' – based on the Romanian source text – that only those persons are punished with prison from 2 to 7 years who broke into a house *having / carrying / with* a gun.

The worst case is *persoană travestită* in (5), as the Romanian term refers to a 'disguised person'[12] (first meaning of the expression), whereas the English version refers to the second meaning. This is a blatant mistake and a grievous offence against people wearing the clothes of the other sex, as the translation insinuates that all of them are thieves.

Conclusions

Many would argue that despite the errors listed in the previous section, MT (GT) managed the Romanian source text fairly well. This reminds us Lin Yutang's famous article entitled *Three American Vices* (Yutang, 1937, pp. 161–165), where we states that "Nearly Right Is Not Enough" in the USA. We tend to think that the same mentality should be used in case of all translations, especially when imprisonment is at stake. All translators should crave for an ever better translation, although we all know that there are no 'perfect translations'. In our view, GT is "nearly right", but still "not enough". Human translators know the proper

[10] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html, 25. 07. 2015.
[11] http://dictzone.com/magyar-angol-szotar/%C3%A1lkulcs, 25. 07. 2015.
[12] http://dexonline.ro/definitie/travestit/paradigma, 25. 07. 2015.

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meaning of a *picklock* or can correctly identify the notion of 'a disguised person', but most importantly, professional translators will not omit relevant parts of the source text, as prepositions, adverbs, etc. are all important in clarifying situations.

It is convenient to use *Google Translate* as it offers 'a version' in no time, but the question is whether it offers true efficiency or not. Longer texts can be difficult to follow in GT (even inserting them in the online translation tool), and the user can never be sure upon the exactness. GT is good for gisting (Bowker, 2002, p. 4), but we should also take into consideration the pre-editing and post-editing phases of translation. At present, we cannot say that MT is a viable solution without a proper, rather time consuming post-editing phase, as in the majority of cases a full translation may take shorter time and less energy than reviewing MT and searching for all the questionable items. If terms are to be checked anyway, then why not create a TB from the start and make use of the convenient and relaxing matches from a TB within a CAT-tool?

There are voices that creating an own TB is time consuming, but nobody takes into consideration how much time and energy (and probably money) was invested in MT (in our case, GT). In the age when we can speak of a translation *industry* with extremely large texts, term extraction may be a viable solution, which is based on the number of occurrences. Expert translators specialize in certain fields, and we believe that in the long run it is inevitable for them to have trustworthy TBs with relevant entries to ensure quality assurance (QA). When we discuss the efficiency of professional translators, it is beyond doubt that in a particular field they are much more effective than C-3PO (whose 'character' is funny exactly for the reason that 'he' cannot properly sense what is going on around, being helped by another robot). As Albert put it, machines do not translate and do not search for equivalents or look for meanings, and they cannot read between the lines (Albert, 2011, p. 81), searching only for matching strings of characters.

The above sample from the NCP proved on a small scale that MT only "automates the easier part of a translator's job", and the harder and more time-consuming part of translation is left for the human translator (Piron, 1994). Seeing that MT systems are "arch-enemies of clarity and perspicuity" (Kay, 2003, p. 223), the question remains: should translators make use of the benefits of MT or not?

The answer is simple, in our view. Translators should make use of all the resources available, which may contribute to efficiency in matters of time, money and energy, including MT as well. Many observed that MT can be really effective in the case of non-agglutinative languages (cf. the translation of nouns, adjectives, prepositions, etc.). As a result, CAT-tools having various MT options as a built-in feature that can be activated and de-activated may speed up the translation process if the translator is experienced enough to distinguish the results / matches and will not be 'lost in translation'. However, a carefully selected TB in a certain field will be fruitful, even if the start may be painstaking. We may live in a globalized McWorld and speak McLanguages (Snell-Hornby, 2006, p. 132), but the standards for a professional translator are much higher. The proof is simple: only the best translators in a field remain competitive on the market, more precisely, only those who have the necessary competences / skills to keep up with the technological changes in the translation industry.

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These are the ones who make use of the *assistive / aiding* possibilities lying in CAT-tools and MT, turning them to their benefit.

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