

5 Reasons Why Machine Translators Can Never Replace Human Translators



Machine translation tools like Google Translate and Yahoo! Babelfish have gained popularity in recent years, offering fast and accessible translations. Undeniably, they come in handy when one needs to get the gist of a text in a short time.

However, if what you need is market-ready translations of a publishable quality, then it is a business taboo to use machine translated materials. Documents presented to an audience need to be grammatically correct and capture the essence and meaning of the original, something that machine translations simply cannot promise.

1. You cannot program a machine to understand culture

Machines are not complex enough to recognize idioms, slang and in some instances, names. These are lexical items that are unique to each culture. While these pose challenges, native, in-country human translators who are well-versed in both languages will be skilful enough to find a suitable equivalent in the target language. They have soaked up the culture and are attuned to pick up nuances in text that are undetectable by machines. On the other hand, machine translators are not advanced enough to render these accurately and can only rigidly perform word-for word translations.

2. Machines cannot relate words to context

Words with dual meanings have to be related to the context to determine their true meanings. For instance, in the English language, the word 'tears' could mean tears shed when someone is sad. It could also refer to tears or holes in a plastic bag. A competent human translator would be able to identify the correct meaning instantly, unlike a machine. Running a document with such words through the machine translator would leave inaccurate translations that disrupt the flow of the text.

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3. Only humans can replicate style and tone

There is a certain style and tone to each document, be it funny, poetic or persuasive. Only human translators can attempt to recreate something similar. Machine translators often lose the intricate nuances and intended tone of the original, producing something that is flat and soulless. Certain types of texts such as poetry, in particular present an insurmountable challenge for machine translators, which are unable to capture the mood accurately.

4. The creators of machine translation programs themselves acknowledge that they are not meant to replace human translators.

The complexity of language is something only humans can fully comprehend; this is a fact that even the masterminds behind automated translation tools have to concede to.

One of the most established translation software carries this disclaimer: 'SYSTRAN strives to achieve the highest possible accuracy, however no automated translation is perfect nor is it intended to replace human translators. 'Bing Translator' emphasizes a similar clause for its free translation program: 'Automatic' translation can help you understand the gist of the translated text but is no substitute for a professional 'human translator'.

5. No translation can ever be complete without the human touch

As machine translators become more efficient, the quality of translations they churn out may become more understandable, but the need for humans to be part of the equation is always there. Proofreaders and copyeditors have to be factored in to ensure that a piece of translation is comprehensible and grammatically correct. A human translator can put in the finishing touches to a piece of work, enhancing and localizing it for your target audience. If a piece of text puts in local references and you need it translated for Koreans, these references can be changed to suit the new context. This is definitely something that the machines cannot beat.

Finally, here's some food for thought: Translation is most likely needed as one is not equally proficient in the source and target language. If you can barely comprehend text in the target language, how can you judge if a piece of text is translated well enough? Is it foolhardy if you then entrust important documents to an automated system?

Why risk putting your brand and reputation at stake with unreliable machine translations? Do the wise thing and engage professional and trustworthy translators to get your documents geared up for the market. Only professional native translators can fully grasp how languages work and convert your materials into something publishable and market-ready renditions.

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