

Sarah Bawa Mason

**THE STRENGTHS OF THE HUMAN TRANSLATOR
AND INTERPRETER IN THE AGE OF MACHINES**

 Thursday, May 28th  16:00 (GMT+3)



Where am I coming from?

Third World Institute

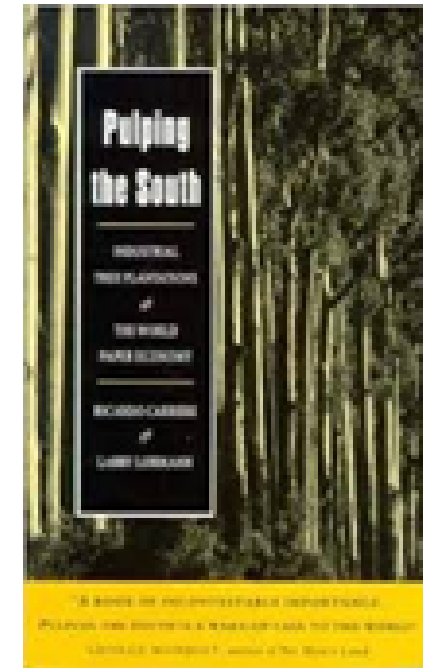
Instituto del Tercer Mundo – ITeM



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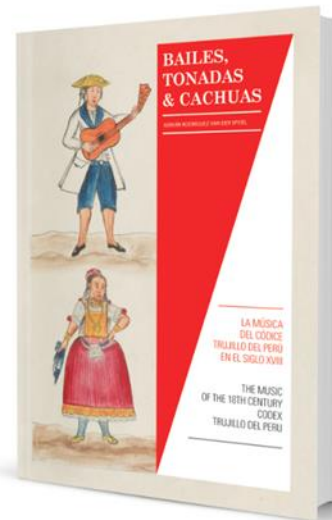
unicef  para cada niño

América Latina y el Caribe



Reinvention in the UK

- MA in Translation Studies
- Some work with translation company clients (agencies)
- Nicer work in teams with direct clients



Where I am now



Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies

Former Chair of ITI (UK Institute of Translation and Interpreting), now
Coordinator of the ITI Research Network



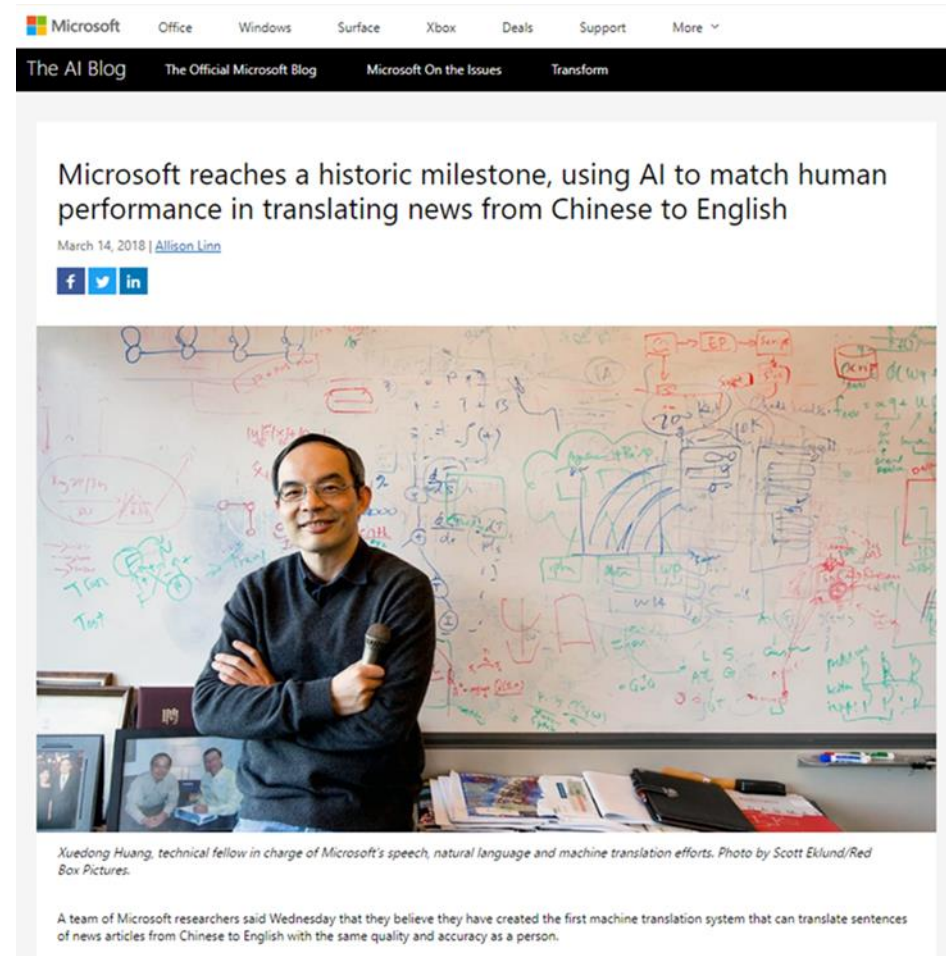
The biggest challenge facing translators and interpreters in the future:

Not Neural Machine Translation but -

establishing authoritative narratives on the capacity for human/machine symbiosis and complementarity in translation

Machine translation achieves human parity?

- <https://blogs.microsoft.com/ai/machine-translation-news-test-set-human-parity/>



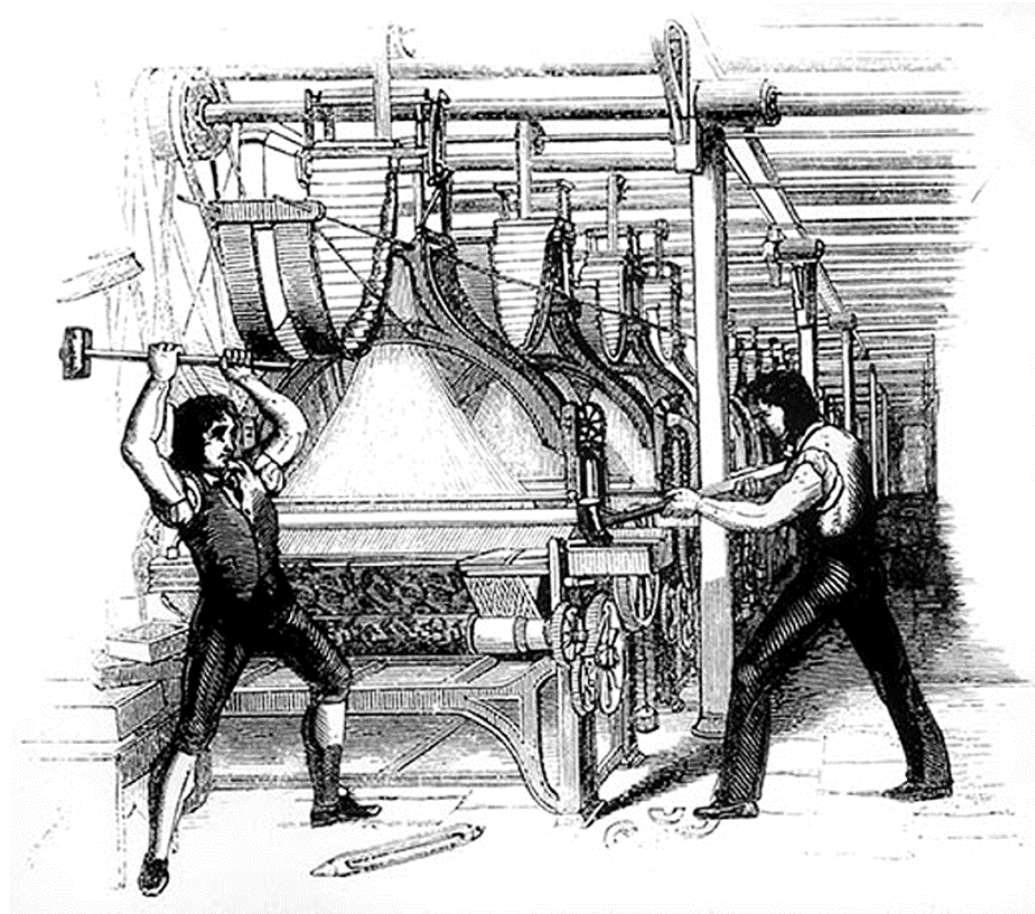
Actually:

Penultimate paragraph:

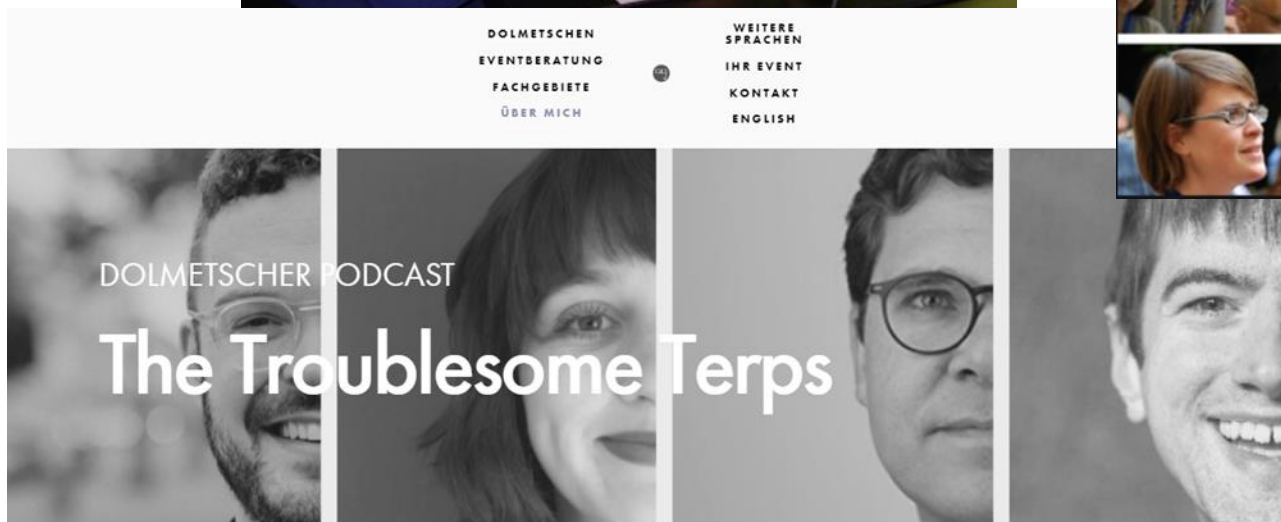
“Liu said no one knows whether machine translation systems will ever get good enough to translate any text in any language pair with the accuracy and lyricism of a human translator.”

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/uploads/prod/2018/03/final-achieving-human.pdf>

Translators and interpreters – the myth



Translators and Interpreters are technically adept early adopters



- What we can live with:



- What we hope not to get:



What we humans have been mis-sold

Machines will take all of the repetitive drudgery of work allowing we humans to pursue loftier purposes and to have more leisure time (Futurists as TC)

Shadow Work – we are all ‘online’ and we all therefore do the work of companies for them without being paid – doing invoicing on other people’s systems, logging in to services, paying our own bills, etc.

Ongoing and increasingly rapid changes in technology to keep up with

Information overload

The next biggest challenge facing our sector:

- Establishing **authoritative narratives** on relative **strengths and value** of human/machine translation outputs

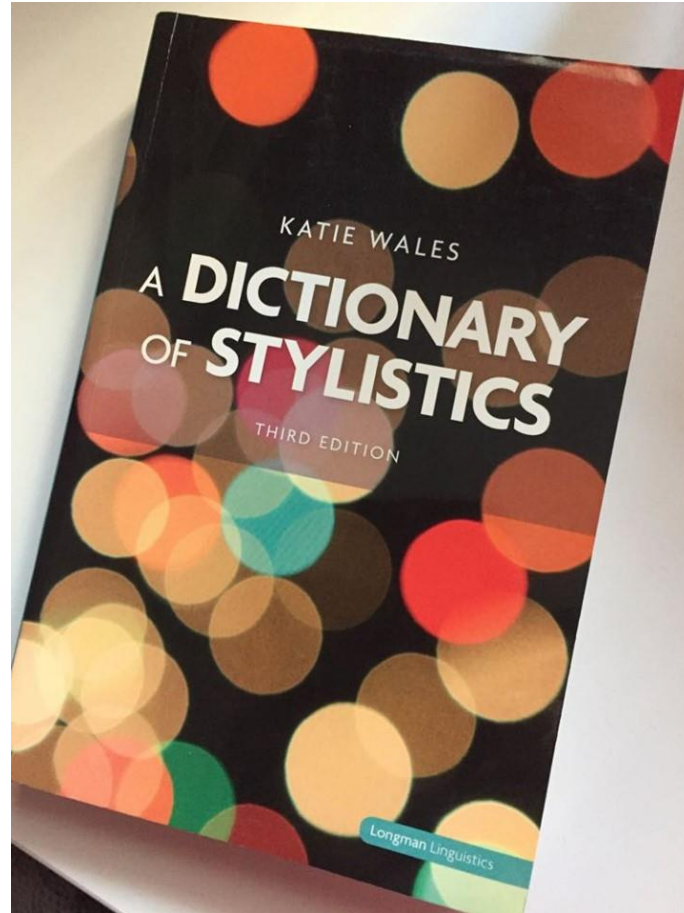
What the machines are good at:

- Speed
- Gist translations
- Term-heavy texts for product descriptions

What the humans are good at:

- Any text where the impact on the human readership actually counts!

A 500 page summary of just some of the things machines cannot do:

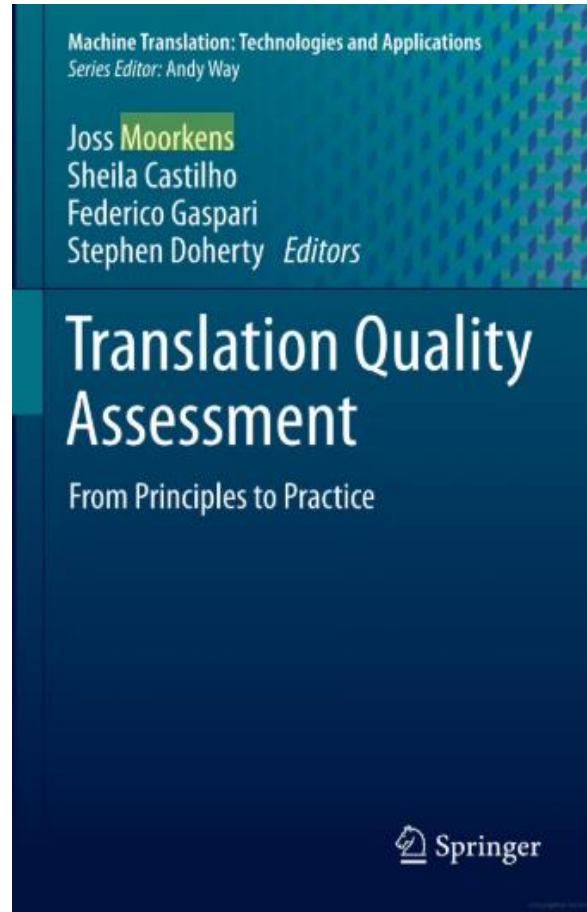


Measures of MT 'quality' bear no relation to measures of human translation 'quality'

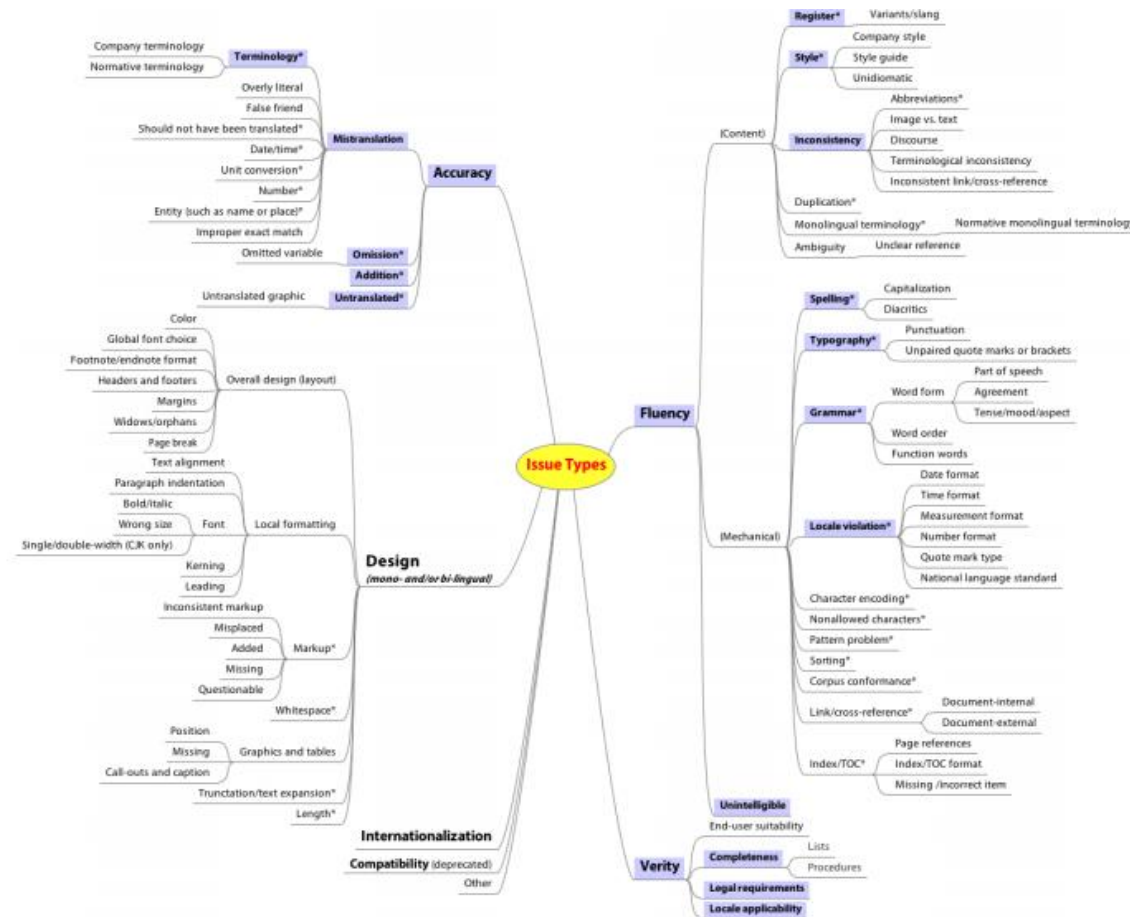
The overall mark represents an overall appreciation of the quality of the piece. It does not represent a simple aggregate of boxes ticked.¶

Σ	Outstandin g 80+α	Excellent 70-79α	Good 60-69α	Fair 50-59α	Pass 40-49α	Fail 0-39α	Σ
TRANSLATION·(40%)α							
Accuracyα	Σ	ΧΣ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	
Usabilityα	Σ	Σ	ΧΣ	Σ	Σ	Σ	
Style·&·Registerα	ΧΣ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	
Vocabulary·α	Σ	ΧΣ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	
Syntaxα	Σ	ΧΣ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	
Cohesion·&·Coherenceα	○	ΧΣ	Σ	-Σ	-Σ	-Σ	
Spelling,·punctuation,· formattingα	Σ	Σ	ΧΣ	Σ	Σ	Σ	TOTAL ¶ 78Σ

MT Quality measurement is currently complex and constantly changing...



Lommel's Multidimensional Quality Metrics



We are limited by client understanding

Machine Translation

- Quick
- Cheap
- Perfect

Translator or Interpreter

- Slow
- Expensive
- Prone to error



What many clients actually want:

Simple solutions -

*Do this now, do this cheap,
make sure it's perfect, and
please don't ask any difficult questions!*

And what of the amount of work and ‘know how’ implicit in our tasks?

Why do we price by the word or even the hour?

“Work is a function of time spent, mental effort and judgment, technical skill and physical effort”

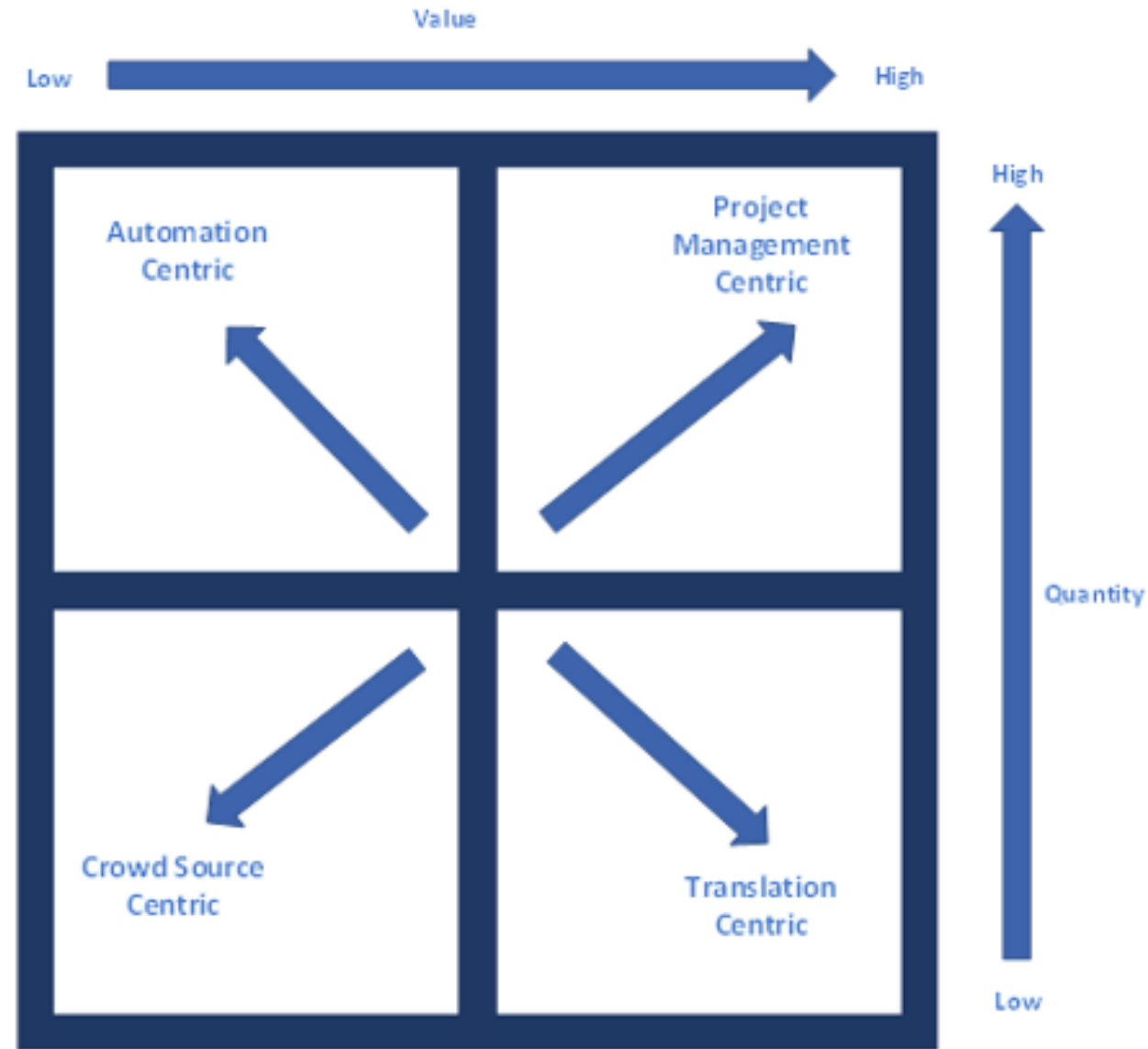
William Hsiao in Gawande (2008: 116)

We need to advise professionally and responsibly

Adam Marshall of the British Chamber of Commerce:

“We get tired of being told we need a Rolls Royce when we only need a Mini.”

Peter Reynolds of memoq



Range of machine systems, range of human expertise



We need a coherent approach to
value

What it takes to train good...

...MT systems

Immense amounts of
carefully selected data

Brilliant engineers to
write algorithms

‘Linguists’ to feedback
on/check outputs and
terminology

...Specialist professional translators

Years and years of
language, cultural and
specialist learning

Training in appropriate
writing skills

What 'value' the client gets from the freelance translator

▲ TRANSLATION AND REVISION CONTRASTED WITH OTHER KINDS OF EDITING

	TRANSLATION	COMPARATIVE REVISION	UNILINGUAL REVISION	COPY EDITING	CONTENT EDITING	STYLISTIC EDITING	STRUCTURAL EDITING
TRANSFER							
Accuracy	XX	XX					
Completeness	XX	XX					
CONTENT							
Logic	X	X	X		XX		
Facts	X	X	X		XX		
LANGUAGE + STYLE							
Smoothness	XX	XX	XX	X		XX	
Tailoring	XX	XX	XX			XX	
Sublanguage	XX	XX	XX	X		XX	
Idiom	XX	XX	XX	X		XX	
Mechanics	XX	XX	XX	XX		XX	
PRESENTATION							
Typography	X	X	X	X			XX
Layout	X	X	X	X			XX
Organization	X	X	X	X			XX

A double X indicates areas that are particularly important in each function.

Source: Ailish Maher & Luci Vázquez, based on *Revising and Editing for Translators*, 2nd Ed. Brian Mossop. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2007. |

What the messaging needs to do:

- Increase public awareness of what exactly translators and interpreters and LSPs do (in very simple terms), highlighting the value added by our services
- Clarify key scenarios and processes for translation buyers (in buyer speak) to help them understand what they need
- Highlight the value of human translation and what it can add to their business/our economic future

We must:

1. Get a grip on the technologists' rhetoric
2. Add to it with evidence-based arguments
3. Take ownership of the argument and lead the conversation

Is 'translation' to be framed as a 'profession' or a 'service'?

Serious professions have professional associations to represent their interests and to provide advocacy for their sector.

Conclusions:

- Translator associations and language service professionals must take control of the conversation.

We are the experts.

A large, thick blue curved line that forms a speech bubble shape, pointing towards the top left towards the UTICamp Speeches logo.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

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28 May 2020

References

- Gawande, A., (2008) Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance, London: Profile Books
- Mossop, B., (2007) Revising and Editing for Translators, Manchester: St.Jerome

(There is a 3rd edition available from 2014)

Q&A

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