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HUMAN-CENTERED AI IN TRANSLATION: PARTNERSHIP OR PRETENSE

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Abstract

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the field of translation has radically altered the process of text creation, mediation, and dissemination across linguistic and cultural borders. Defenders of "human-centered AI" argue that these innovations can increase efficiency and expand accessibility, and in turn create a harmonious rapport between human translators and cognitive systems. However, critics warn that such collaborations are often shallow, befogging salient questions of labor displacement, cultural homogeneity, and ideological hegemony. This paper responds to the timely question: is human-centered AI in translation truly a partnership, or an illusion disguising structural inequalities?

Keywords: Human-focused artificial intelligence in translation, automated translation, computer-aided translation tools, collaboration, translation agency, post-editing procedures, ethical implications.

Introduction

The Rise of Artificial Intelligence in Translation

The field of translation has always kept pace with technological developments. From the invention of the printing press to the creation of computer-aided translation (CAT) tools, technological improvements have constantly impacted the strategies utilized for transferring text across languages. Over the last few decades, Machine Translation (MT) has been a notably revolutionary force within the field. Early MT systems, such as SYSTRAN and rule-based systems, produced simple, literal translations. However, the widespread implementation of statistical approaches, followed by the advent of neural network architectures, has improved the quality of translations, reaching unprecedented levels of fluency

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and coherence. Modern systems, such as Google Translate, DeepL, and OpenAI's GPT-based tools, are now capable of generating translations that, under certain conditions, match human output in terms of speed and usability.

The advent of such tools has brought with it a double reaction marked by excitement and fear. On the one hand, they increase access to translation services for millions of end-users, reduce costs for organizations, and ease communication in the context of globalization. On the other hand, they create urgent questions about the translator's profession, cultural sensitivity, and the ethics of automation. Translators often find themselves in a dilemma, between welcoming greater efficiency and fearing the potential devaluation of their profession.

The Promise of Human-Centered AI

In reaction to these tensions, human-centric artificial intelligence has taken a particularly central place. Companies involved in the tech industry, government officials, and research from universities ever more frequently frame their vision of AI as a collaborative project: tools meant to augment human agency more than replace it. Human-centric AI is concerned with ensuring that people are always "in the loop" and emphasizing interpretative, creative, and ethical skills that outperform machines. Practically, this often entails putting AI in the place of a supportive tool—handling mundane chores, suggesting drafts, or enabling greater access—while people control meaning, nuance, and accountability.

However, such critics argue that this description is largely rhetorical and not substantive. They argue that behind the façade of purported collaboration lies the motivation of cost-cutting in the form of transferring human labor into post-editing tasks that ultimately undermine creativity and autonomy. The use of the phrase “human-centered” might, in fact, be a cover for hiding the structural inequalities between prevailing AI providers and often precarious translators.

Translation as a Humanistic Practice

It is crucial to understand that translation involves more than simple mechanical substitution of words; instead, it is a task that is cultural, political, and ethical in scope. Scholars such as Lawrence Venuti have highlighted the translator's role as a frequently invisible intermediary struggling with questions of inequality and power relations. Machine translation's growing demand poses the risk of undermining this transparency by replacing complex negotiations with

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standardized outcomes. Thus, a human-centered approach that overlooks these cultural and ethical considerations can indeed become human-centered in name only.

Research Questions

This paper asks:

1. To what degree is artificial intelligence in translation a working partner instead of simply a misleading presence?
2. How do translators working in different fields—international organizations, commercial localization, and literary translation—see the potential of "human-centered" artificial intelligence?
3. How are these interactions of value considered through ethical, cultural, and educational lenses?

By exploring these questions, the article seeks to move beyond broad abstract theoretical claims and validate the topic of pretense and pair-bonding using empirical data and strict analysis.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a comparative qualitative case study approach. It does not rely solely on theory but aims to research specific contexts where human translators interact with artificial intelligence. The three domains selected—international organizations, commercial localization, and literary translation—have been selected because each poses a specific challenge and potential advantage: bureaucratic efficiency, commercial competitiveness, and artistic integrity.

Data Sources

The evaluation is based on three main sources of evidence:

Reports by organizations like the European Union, the United Nations, and other translation organizations provide useful information on how artificial intelligence has been integrated into organizational systems.

Surveys of Translators: Information acquired from the International Federation of Translators (FIT), the American Translators Association (ATA), and academic studies of post-editing offer discipline-wide authoritative sources.

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Academic Literature: Scholarship from translation studies, critical AI studies, and digital humanities informs the conceptual framing.

Analytical Framework

Analytical framework is built around the juxtaposition of collaboration and facade. Collaboration is defined as genuine co-creation, where human translators maintain their agency, creative control, and autonomy to make decisions. On the other hand, a facade is a situation where deployment of artificial intelligence is touted to empower but end up suppressing autonomy, undermining labor, or obscuring unbalanced power relations.

Limitations

The study excludes primary ethnographic information due to delimitations of scope. Instead, it incorporates existing studies and reports. This may provide an overall overview, but could enrich subsequent studies with the addition of interviews or field research.

Results

Case 1: Global organizations: Major multilateral institutions, such as the European Union and the United Nations, are often faced with requests to translate lengthy documents. Implementation of artificial intelligence-based tools has gained momentum to address this huge requirement. One such example is the European Commission's eTranslation platform, which generates outputs of neural machine translation to assist human translators.

Evidence shows that artificial intelligence has improved operational effectiveness; routine bureaucratic texts have been processed faster, thus making official documents more widely accessible. However, institutional translators report that their work is increasingly moving towards post-editing machine translations, an exercise they describe as cognitively demanding and less satisfying than conventional translation.

Though the technical terms define artificial intelligence as a "partner," translators often render it as a management strategy meant to optimize productivity, often without properly recognizing their expertise.

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Therefore, the case shows a degree of collaboration with an added element of deception: though efficiency gains are real, the language of empowerment hides an erosion of creative autonomy.

Case 2: Commercial Localization: In the commercial sector—particularly software, gaming, and e-commerce—speed and cost dominate. Companies like Netflix, Microsoft, and Amazon deploy AI translation at scale, combined with crowdsourcing or freelance post-editors.

Here, the promise of partnership is even more tenuous. Translators often report being pressured to accept lower rates for post-editing than for original translation, with less time per word. AI is marketed as assisting them, yet the reality is that human expertise becomes undervalued. Moreover, quality concerns emerge: in game localization, cultural nuance, humor, and idioms often fail in AI output, but deadlines leave little time for correction.

This sector exemplifies pretense most clearly: "human-centered" discourse is invoked in marketing, but labor realities reveal increased precarity.

Case 3: Literary Translation: Literary translation presents the strongest test for AI. Literature requires sensitivity to style, metaphor, rhythm, and cultural resonance. While AI systems like DeepL or GPT can produce surprisingly fluent drafts, they often flatten complexity. For example, attempts to render poetry into other languages frequently miss meter, metaphor, or intertextual play.

Several authors and publishers venture into considering AI-written drafts as preparation materials; however, literary translators overwhelmingly reject the idea of replacing the creative output of human beings with machines. Here, the human's role is central not only in discourse but practice. However, even here, publishers are likely to use AI drafts to save on costs, thus again relegating human authors to roles of correction.

The literary case reveals that while partnership remains possible in theory (AI as inspiration or support), in practice economic logics risk turning it into pretense.

Discussion

Teamwork or Dishonesty

Across cases, the findings reveal a consistent pattern: AI is often framed as a partner but functions as pretense when labor and creativity are subordinated to efficiency. In institutions, translators retain some visibility but are pushed into repetitive post-editing. In commercial localization, partnership rhetoric collapses

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almost entirely into cost-cutting. In literature, human creativity still resists automation, but economic pressures loom.

Ethical Implications

Human-centered AI must address ethical questions beyond efficiency:

Bias and Data Ownership: MT systems rely on massive corpora, often scraped without consent. Translators' past work fuels AI systems without compensation.

Invisibility of Labor: Post-editors remain unseen, their expertise uncredited.

Cognitive Load: Studies show post-editing is mentally taxing, leading to fatigue and dissatisfaction.

Cultural Considerations

Cultural nuances are often lost with artificial intelligence. Minority languages face greater marginalization when dominant languages are favored in training data. Claims of being "human-centered" would ring hollow if cultural diversity is sacrificed for global uniformity.

Educational Implications

Translation training must adapt. Students should learn not only how to use AI tools but also how to critique them, foregrounding human creativity and ethics. Critical digital literacy is essential to resist narratives of inevitability.

Policy and Professional Recommendations

Fair Compensation for post-editing, recognizing cognitive demands.

Transparency in how training data is sourced and used.

Ethical principles emphasizing the importance of human innovation and cultural responsibility.

Collaborative Design: AI systems should be co-developed with translators, not imposed on them.

Conclusion

This study has explored the potential benefits and drawbacks of human-focused artificial intelligence in translation in three different settings. The research concludes that, while AI greatly improves accessibility and expedience, its representation of a partner is frequently a cover-up, obscuring economic and cultural inequalities. Real cooperation requires fundamental reforms, such as

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clear data handling practices, balanced labor policies, cultural competences, and active translator participation in planning stages. The path of translation is bound to involve artificial intelligence; however, the character of this development—collaborative or imaginary—depends on the decisions made today. Without conscious efforts, the excitement of human-oriented AI can turn into nothing more than justification for exploitation. But guided by moral principles, AI can grow into a true partner—opening up more possibilities while retaining the inherent human elements characteristic of translation.

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