



Human-Centred AI in the Translation Industry.

**Questions on Ethics,
Creativity and Sustainability**

Katharina Walter,
Marco Agnetta
[eds.]

5.1/2025

**Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics
Jahrbuch für Übersetzungshermeneutik**

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Table of Contents

Inhaltsverzeichnis

INTRODUCTION | ZUR EINFÜHRUNG

KATHARINA WALTER, MARCO AGNETTA Automated Translation, Creativity and Ethics: General Considerations	11
--	----

Automatisierte Übersetzung, Kreativität und Ethik: Allgemeine Überlegungen.....	33
--	----

ESSAYS | AUFSÄTZE

STEFAN BAUMGARTEN Welcome to the Machine? Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Translations- wissenschaft in Zeiten ungebremster Maschinisierung.....	59
---	----

ROBERT LUKENDA, RUT TWARDON From an “Experience of the Foreign” to an Experience of Alienation? Translating in the Age of AI	87
---	----

ROBERTO LAGHI From Human to Binary and Back: On the Need to Explain and Understand Digital Machines in the Humanities	117
--	-----

SUSANNE HAGEMANN Skopos as a Source of Human Creativity in an AI Environment	137
--	-----

MEHMET ŞAHİN, ENA HODZIK, SABRI GÜRSES, TUNGA GÜNGÖR, ZEYNEP YIRMİBEŞOĞLU, OLGUN DURSUN, HARUN DALLI Stylistic Features and Creativity in Machine Translation of Literary Texts	165
---	-----

KATHARINA WALTER Creativity in Human and AI-Enhanced Literary Translation: A Keylogging Experiment	197
--	-----

IBRAHİM BADŞAH Reading Political Economy at the Level of the Sentence: Automated Translation and the Global South	225
---	-----

P. SHYMA Translating Indigeneity: Adivasi Literature in the Age of AI	247
---	-----

REVIEW ARTICLES | REZENSIONSARTIKEL

MARCO AGNETTA Im Niemandsland KI-generierter Übersetzungen..... Rezensionartikel zu: MjÖLSNES, Ettore (2022): <i>Der stumme Text. Eine Kritik der maschinellen Übersetzung</i> . Küsnacht: Digiboo. ISBN: 978-3-03906-030-6.	271
---	-----

REVIEWS | REZENSIONEN

KATHARINA WALTER.....289
Rezension zu: HAMM, Claudia [Hrsg.] (2024): *Automatensprache*
(= *Akzente* 3/2023 und 1/2024). München: Hanser. 192 S.
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Introduction | Zur Einführung



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Automated Translation, Creativity and Ethics: General Considerations

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1 Lead-in

Wherever you look in the language industry at present, one thing is certain: Tools based on artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming workflows, reshaping communicative practices and shifting power relations. This inevitably raises the question of responsibility: Who decides what AI is allowed to do—and who bears the consequences? Who benefits from these technologies? Who bears their potential disadvantages or the risks that come with them? These seemingly simple questions touch on fundamental issues regarding ethics, politics and society. They also permeate current debates in translation and language studies, where automation affects not only technical processes but also cultural and normative dimensions of both theory and practice. For translation studies in particular, this entails challenges that should not be underestimated. With the present is-

sue, we therefore place the interests of human beings and specific collectives at the center of attention.

From different perspectives, the contributions gathered here aim to prevent the discussion on AI from being reduced to questions of technical feasibility. Instead, they frame the debate on AI as a profoundly human and societal one. After all, AI systems are not developed and deployed in a vacuum, but always operate within social, economic and cultural contexts. Although the ongoing technologization and automation of translation have the potential to greatly enhance productivity, they may also limit translatorial agency and consequently reduce the quality and creativity of translations. By the same token, translation tools based on AI, such as DeepL and ChatGPT, may also devalue human labor. While these critical issues require rigorous examination, the significant opportunities afforded by AI-based translation tools should also not be overlooked.

2 Translation, Creativity and AI

Conceptions of translatorial creativity remain elusive, even though this term has been widely discussed, not just in association with the AI-based transformation of the language industry that started to gain momentum when machine translation went neural in 2016 (for general perspectives on translatorial creativity, see Bayer-Hohenwarter 2011; Cercel et al. 2017; Kußmaul 2000; O’Sullivan 2013; Reynolds et al. 2020; Schreiber 2023). Since by now automation has also entered areas of translation that are perceived to require particularly high levels of creativity, such as literary or audiovisual translation, there has been concern that machine-based, post-edited translations tend to be more homogenized and impersonal, as well as engage readers and viewers less than human translations (see

Guerberof-Arenas/Toral 2022: 207 and 2024: 240–41; Kolb 2024: 64–66). At the same time, new AI-related creative possibilities and workflows in- and outside translatorial contexts have also been explored. One seminal text that takes a positive outlook on the manifold relationships between AI and creativity in general terms is du Sautoy’s *The Creativity Code* (2019). Within translation studies, it has been demonstrated that AI-based tools can potentially enhance creativity in the interlingual transfer of particularly challenging terms, including occasionisms or neologisms often used on a one-off basis in Nestroy’s plays (see Kolb et al. 2023: 564). Furthermore, Macken et al. (2022: 109) have stated that for full-length literary texts post-editing can achieve human parity, provided that enough space is given to a bilingual and subsequent monolingual revision of machine output.

In a significant attempt to provide a concrete, hands-on definition of creativity in association with both human and automated translation, Guerberof-Arenas/Toral (2022: 190) have identified textual “units of creative potential” (UCPs). The interlingual transfer of such UCPs involves implementing “creative shifts,” a term coined by Bayer-Hohenwarter (2011: 669) that refers to changes made to the wording or sentence structure of a source text in the target language. While translation usually transforms a source text significantly, Schreiber highlights that a genuinely new solution is not required every time such a change occurs:

The need for creativity therefore arises when there is a gap that must be filled for the first time in the translation being produced by creating a new solution. If the same translation problem arises again in a later text, the translator can rely on the preliminary work of translators, lexicographers, or translation scholars and, provided the preliminary work is of sufficient quality, no longer needs to be creative themselves. (Schreiber 2017: 357; our transl.)

Accordingly, for Schreiber explicit knowledge of and recourse to a (once) creative solution in a subsequent text is no longer creative.

No matter how closely related some languages may be, no two language systems are identical. The more remote from each other two languages are, the more rewording and restructuring is required in translation. In fact, Reynolds et al. (2020: 131) state that “*Translation generates multiple new texts: it is inherently creative*” (see also Kußmaul 2000: 16; original emphasis). Among other things, this implies that both texts and languages are inherently flexible, so that the meaning of a text is strongly contingent on how it is concretized in each specific receiving situation. Interlingual translation, which for Venuti (2013: 10)—and in general for translatorial hermeneutics—is always interpretive, magnifies the shifts in meaning, however subtle they may be, that inevitably occur when a written text is received by any new reader. As automated translation tends to reproduce patterns found in the source language and select normative structures in the target language, especially for texts with many UCPs, the benefits of a potential increase in productivity due to AI-generated raw translations has to be weighed against the disadvantages that can arise, for example, from “priming” (see Kolb 2022: 20 and 2024: 55). This term refers to a limitation in the variety of translation options a human translator can conceive of due to being influenced by machine output, a phenomenon that frequently occurs with post-edited automated translations.

When the limiting effects of AI-based translation tools on translatorial creativity are concerned, priming is certainly not the only issue. Post-editors’ work can also be compromised by a “fatigue” and an “obstacle effect” (Hamm 2024: 16). The former is a consequence of working with two drafts, the source text and an automatically generated target text that always re-

quires revision. The latter term refers to the difficulty of detecting errors in machine output, which resembles human language but operates on fundamentally different principles, based on probabilistic algorithms. Another problem worth mentioning is that post-edited machine output typically manifests reduced linguistic diversity compared to human translations (see Toral 2019: 276; Helm et al. 2024; Walter 2025a). In any case, following Schreiber (see above), a translation solution based on probabilities alone cannot be considered as “creative.” Another significant question in this context is whether one wants to allow for creativity, a feature normally reserved for humans, to characterize machines at all. Ultimately, only humans may designate an operation performed by machines as a “creative act.”

3 Automation, Agency and Ethics

In fact, some AI-critical publications discuss whether AI-generated or AI-translated texts might not ultimately put into question an essential reason for human creative endeavors. The processes underlying human creativity have always been linked to the search for answers to fundamental questions of humanity—a task that arguably cannot or should not be taken over by machines (see Mjøltnes 2022: 65; Kissinger et al. 2021: 52). Since the very beginnings of writing, for example in Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs, texts have gone beyond a mere functional level to also address religious and mythological issues that concern the possible reason for and purpose of human life and seek to describe and understand human societal orders. When seen in this light, outsourcing writing and translation to AI-based tools seems nothing short of absurd. Nevertheless, when in autumn 2022 large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT began to be widely used for

both generating and translating texts, less than a decade after neural machine translation (NMT) systems such as DeepL had already massively transformed the language industry, many people thought that the end of language mediation as a viable professional field for humans was imminent. The fact that the current chairman of the German Social Democratic Party, Lars Klingbeil, predicted the demise of the profession in November 2018 is not merely anecdotal but believed to have led to a decline in student numbers in the relevant degree programs all over German-speaking countries (see Hansen-Schirra/Maaß 2019: 2; Krüger 2025: xiii).

While some studies on the impact of AI on the language industry have established an overall decline in the need for language skills (Frey/Llanos-Paredes 2025: 20), most researchers emphasize that, despite the partial automation of many language mediation processes, the translation industry continues to grow and requires staff skilled in both languages and technology (see Hackenbuchner/Krüger 2023; Krüger 2023: 321; Łukasik 2024: 38). The question even arises whether skills required for handling generative AI should already be taught or learned in foreign language and translation classes at school (see Kapnas et al. 2025). However, one problem many language service providers now face as a result of AI-based changes is that their work tends to be undervalued, leading to pricing pressure and income loss (see ELIS Research 2025: 13–14; Agnetta 2025: 155).

The question whether the potentially sustaining practices of writing and translation should be taken out of human hands and transferred into the algorithmic landscapes of AI-based tools is, first and foremost, an ethical question. In fact, machine-generated language output entails many such ethical questions, which often also have important legal repercussions. Well before general-purpose AI models such as ChatGPT

once more transformed the already highly technologized language industry, Bowker (2020: 265–71) identified a number of key issues related to automation, which will be outlined below:

- the ownership of technology-related resources, such as translation memory tools,
- data privacy and confidentiality,
- the quality of translation output,
- translatorial agency and professional satisfaction,
- the need for ongoing technological training,
- productivity gains and remuneration, and
- linguistic and cultural diversity.

Echoing Bowker's apprehensions, Park (2023) draws attention to the importance of reconciling translation practice with the legal copyright framework for translation memory tools. Undoubtedly, issues around data privacy, confidentiality and copyright have also been amplified by the omnipresence of automatically generated and translated LLM output (see Zhuk 2023; Walter 2025b). This applies not only to (literary) text translation in the narrower sense, but to all practices associated with the intercultural transfer of all kinds of goods—in audio-visual translation, for example, to the translation of scripts, to unsolicited subtitling corpora, and to speech synthesis, which literally steals the voices of professional speakers (see Agnetta 2025). Also, since generative AI has shifted translation and writing towards more collaborative modes of production, traditional conceptions of translation copyright as secondary to the copyright on original texts may well be difficult to sustain in the long term (see Walter 2025b). A homogenization of language output that would limit intralingual diversity and consolidate the hegemony of global languages such as English at the cost of smaller languages, which Cronin (2020: 281) aptly calls “globotics,” was firmly in progress when general-purpose LLMs hit the market in 2022. Moreover, concerns around the

attractiveness of the language industry as a professional field have been addressed for years in the European Language Industry Survey, which in 2025 identifies a downward pricing trend and drop in profitability as key issues associated with automated translation (ELIS Research 2025: 13–14). As early as 2020, Bowker (2020: 272–3) established the need to discuss the technologization of translation as an overarching societal issue that requires a substantial adaptation of translator training. By now, new models for translator training that emphasize AI, data and machine translation (MT) literacy are well under way (see Hackenbuchner/Krüger 2023; Krüger 2023; Agnetta/Walter 2025).

Apart from the obvious legal consequences, one also needs to consider the effects of automatic text, image, and sound generation once these outputs—often unnoticed—enter into people’s everyday communication. While in some cases a distinction between human- and AI-generated material may still be possible, a clear-cut dichotomy, as is frequently drawn in the research literature, appears increasingly untenable. Generative AI has, within a very short time, become embedded in the communicative practices of entire social groups. This implies, first, that AI-generated communication essentially builds on human input—one might speak of a *generative human-machine continuum*—and, second, that such communicative outputs are reintroduced into the cycle of human communication, where they are, perhaps mistakenly, interpreted either as genuinely human texts or through the genuinely human interpretive apparatus—we could call this the *interpretive human-machine continuum*. The creative, ethical, and political dimensions of human meaning-making do not simply vanish because a text did not flow directly from a human pen. Perhaps humans cannot but approach these (hybrid) texts as *homo narrans* (see Katan 2023: 87 and Hagemann in this issue) or *homo hermeneuticus*—

that is, as individuals engaging with them through the entirety of their experiential background, their embodied existence and their socialization. Nevertheless, this development entails innumerable risks (see Pym 2025). It is therefore not surprising that voices are now being raised calling, on the one hand, for stronger regulation, if not the outright prohibition, of the exploitation of human-produced work by AI corporations¹, and, on the other, for clear labeling of machine-generated and/or post-edited communicative outputs (see Pym 2025: 40–41²).

The contributions in this *YTH* special issue address these and other central questions concerning the societal implications of automated translation; however, they cannot provide definitive answers. Nor do they offer generalizable solutions to the problems identified.

4 This Special Issue

Contributions gathered in this thematic *YTH* issue on ethics and translatorial creativity in the age of AI address some or all of the following questions:

- Which ethical, legal and hermeneutical challenges arise from the widespread use of AI in different language services?
- How is sustainable, high-quality and creative translation possible in the age of AI?

1 One manifestation includes recent demands by professional associations (see Agnetta 2025).

2 Pym (2025: 41) proposes a rough, two-part framework for labeling translations: In his model, “UMT” stands for *Unedited Machine Translation* and designates any purely computer-generated translation output, whereas “BRT (Bilingually Reviewed Translation)” refers to translations that have been produced by a human translator or, at the very least, reviewed and approved by one.

- How is the language industry changing due to new and ever-improving AI tools?

From different philosophical angles, the contributions by Baumgarten, Lukenda/Twardon, and Laghi respectively cover emerging ethical and legal challenges arising from the rapid development of AI-enhanced translation. Hagemann's, Şahin et al.'s and Walter's articles, on the other hand, offer more hands-on perspectives on creativity and hermeneutics in automated and post-edited translations. The extent to which creativity as a quality can be associated with automated translation at all (before and after post-editing) is also addressed. With the geopolitically relevant contributions by Badshah and Shyma P., international power relations are examined: for instance, how minority languages are (further) disadvantaged by current developments, or how the cultures and languages of indigenous tribal communities, such as those known in India as the *Adi-wasis*, are pushed to the margins as a result of algorithmic bias in AI models.

Baumgarten explores the social and cultural interplay between translation technologies and society, identifying it as a focal point of an emerging field known as sociotechnical translation studies. First, he suggests that transcultural communication and technology have long been closely intertwined. While acknowledging that technological and economic issues concerning translation technologies have received significant critical attention, Baumgarten argues that the individual, sociocultural, and ecological consequences of new technologies and labor practices have been overlooked. He proposes a consequentialist ethics to examine the sociotechnical implications of translation technologies in today's globalized, digitally networked world. Baumgarten states that revolutionary leaps in the development of the latest communication technologies, including the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022, are steady-

ly influencing human perception, communication, and societies in general. His contribution explores various philosophical frameworks and societal discourses concerning technology and digital translation, including critical theory, posthumanism, and the Anthropocene. Specifically, he highlights that the political economy of translation is heavily influenced by neoliberal ideology and characterized by significant power imbalances.

Lukenda/Twardon's article draws on Antoine Berman's genuinely hermeneutical concept of the "experience/trial of the foreign" to explore the ethical dimensions of translation in the age of AI. Using Berman's definition of translation as an ethical and hermeneutic practice as a foundation, the authors examine how the experience of translation (and of the foreign) changes with AI-assisted translation. They emphasize that, from a professional translator's perspective, AI-assisted translation engenders a Marxian sense of alienation from the product of their labor. They continue that this alienation is compounded by AI models' prior appropriation of foreign-language text content. Lukenda/Twardon suggest that translators must return to and reconsider the original text, bearing in mind that this process is facilitated by the "lens" of the AI-generated text. They argue that this shift in perspective has the potential to profoundly transform the experience of translation and reshape the dynamic relationship between languages and cultures.

By zooming in on the operational mechanisms of AI technologies and identifying their potential creative and critical applications, Laghi directs attention to frequently overlooked aspects of the relationship between humans and complex digital technologies. Laghi emphasizes the importance of discussing the problems associated with current AI definitions and suggests making a creative effort to re-translate these terms to find more suitable expressions. Although specialized lan-

guages have always relied on the metaphorical transfer of familiar terms or concepts to new technologies and insights, the author inquires into the implications of the pervasive anthropomorphization of “the machine” through terms such as “artificial *intelligence*,” “deep/machine *learning*,” “*neural networks*,” and the like. Even the staunchest critics, however, draw on and thereby reinforce the very same framing mechanisms when they promote strategies such as “data poisoning” as a way of countering the unlawful use of human-generated data by AI corporations. A novel approach to translation, Laghi explains, should mediate between the capabilities of machines and our ability to understand them. This ability is often obstructed by the fact that the internal processes of machines are difficult to explain in a way that is understandable to humans. By elaborating on creative forms of interaction with language and image models that support artists, writers, and creators who resist copyright infringement, Laghi helps build an ethical, critical, and sustainable relationship between humans and digital machines.

Hagemann explores the term creativity, whose definition in a translatorial context has been further complicated by the rise of AI. Hagemann shows that recent advancements in neural machine translation (NMT) systems and large language models (LLMs) have produced translations that can be considered creative. According to Kußmaul (2000: 31), translatorial creativity is characterized by changes to the source text that result in novelty and appropriateness in the target culture. Hagemann notes that the question of whether human creativity can thrive in automated translation remains unresolved. Hagemann continues to suggest that functionalist approaches, such as Vermeer’s *skopos* theory, may offer a potential answer. Using concrete translation examples from two post-editing courses taught at FTSK Germersheim during the summer of 2023,

Hagemann demonstrates that certain *skopoi* continue to pose significant challenges for AI systems in various translation scenarios.

Şahin et al. discuss the impact of computer-assisted literary translation on creativity and voice. Specifically, the authors focus on distinctive stylistic features and evaluate the creativity of outputs generated by three English–Turkish machine translation (MT) models. The first one is a customized MT model trained with literary texts. The second one is a pre-trained MT model with general texts. The third one is an online MT model, namely Google Translate. The examined texts pertain to two subgenres within the literary domain: fiction and nonfiction. The analysis of style and creativity is based on two primary methodologies, human evaluation of samples and qualitative corpus analysis of full texts. Then, the outputs of the three models are compared with translations by two renowned translators, Nihal Yeğinobalı and Belkıs Dişbudak. Using a range of methods to investigate style and creativity, Şahin et al. observed a higher level of creativity in the human translation and in the fine-tuned model for the nonfiction. Furthermore, the authors also established that a customized MT model trained with Turkish literary translations generated outputs that were stylistically closer to the human translation than those created with a pre-trained model or an online MT tool.

Walter investigates the role of creativity in human and AI-assisted literary translation with the help of a keylogging experiment performed at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. Six MA students translated Virginia Woolf's prose poem "Green" (1921), half of them working solely with dictionaries and the other half post-editing a draft produced with DeepL's next-generation language model. Using Inputlog and screen recordings, Walter's study examines both the final translation products and the underlying processes. The findings show that

post-edited translations tend to be more homogeneous and less creative than human translations, often adhering closely to machine output. Human translations, by contrast, exhibit greater diversity and more deliberate creative interventions overall, particularly in handling metaphorical and anthropomorphic imagery. Contrary to expectations, in this experiment post-editing did not involve significant time savings, as thorough revision proved to be nearly as time-consuming as translating from scratch. Moreover, translatorial agency and target text engagement were restricted by the difficulties associated with personalizing the machine draft and detecting machine errors, as well as by the strain resulting from having to forge the final version from both a source text and machine output. The experiment thus confirms that for literary texts whose translation requires a high degree of creative shifts, post-editing may be counterproductive, offering little improvement in terms of efficiency while diminishing interpretive richness and creative variety.

Badshah states that while AI-based translation tools, such as Google Translate and DeepL, are highly accurate when translating between high-resource languages, the efficacy of automated translation for languages from the Global South is inconsistent. The underlying reasons for this discrepancy are often overlooked or wrongly attributed to the inherent complexities of these languages, according to Badshah. In his article, Badshah draws on the theoretical framework of world-systems analysis to argue that the suboptimal performance of automated translation technology in certain languages is the result of a deliberate project to subordinate the Global South. Badshah concludes that, although the roots of this development lie in European colonialism, automated translation continues to function as a mechanism for propagating the ideologies that underpin prevailing structures of power.

In her article, Shyma P. explores the ethical challenges of translating indigenous epistemologies in the era of AI. While also acknowledging other important challenges AI presents to a human-centric world order, Shyma P. foregrounds its inability to mitigate the crisis posed by social inequality. She emphasizes that the abundance of indigenous intelligence, coupled with social exclusion and segregation, significantly interferes with the effective translation of indigeneity with AI-based tools. The article further analyzes how enforced peripherality amplifies the risk of the misrepresentation and erasure of indigenous knowledge in Kerala. The first part elaborates on the multiple facets of indigenous knowledge abundance based on select texts. The complexities of translating this abundance by humans are juxtaposed with the homogenized rendering by AI tools to illustrate the ethical issues of AI-enhanced translation. The second part of Shyma P.'s article analyzes stereotyped representations that subsume Adivasi communitarian identity into a monolithic, timeless entity.

5 Outlook

Based on a 2024 survey study with professional translators, Jiménez-Crespo (2025) suggests that in increasingly technologized work environments language professionals require “flexible, adaptive, usable, and customizable tools and tool environments developed with the input of translators, paired with translators’ control and autonomy over the outcome of the translation process.” Collectively, the contributions gathered in this special *YTH* issue also show that it is irresponsible to use AI without human guidance or quality control not only in high-risk situations, which may, for instance, occur in the healthcare sector. With good reason, risk management has been established as a key term related to negotiating the possibilities and

limitations of AI-based translation technology (see Nitzke et al. 2019; Pym 2025)—thus making translation-related technology assessment indispensable (see Suppan 2025). However, critical voices in literary translation studies have shown that significant risks also arise from irresponsible uses of automation in domains where poor translation quality does not involve a risk to life and limb, such as literary translation. An original author's reputation may suffer from poor translation quality, as will readers of the target text and translators themselves, whose important contribution to cultural exchange must be valued as ever, even if also in this field workflows are becoming increasingly more technologized (see Taivalkosky-Shilov 2019, Kolb 2024).

Sustainable, high-quality and creative language mediation requires an efficient teaming of humans and machines that puts humans at the center. This human-centered approach ensures accountability, ethical responsibility and cultural sensitivity—standards that machine output alone cannot guarantee. As the field evolves, collaboration between AI developers and language professionals will be key to building tools that truly support expert human judgment.

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Automatisierte Übersetzung, Kreativität und Ethik: Allgemeine Überlegungen

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1 Zur Einführung

Wohin auch immer man derzeit im Sprachdienstleistungssektor blickt, eines steht fest: Auf künstlicher Intelligenz (KI) basierende Werkzeuge prägen kommunikative Praktiken, revolutionieren gängige Arbeitsabläufe und verschieben etablierte Machtverhältnisse. Damit stellt sich unweigerlich die Frage nach der Verantwortung: Wer entscheidet, was KI darf und was nicht? Wer trägt die Verantwortung für die entstehenden Konsequenzen? Wer profitiert von diesen Technologien? Wer muss mit den möglichen Nachteilen oder Risiken umgehen, die mit ihrer Benutzung einhergehen? Diese scheinbar einfachen Fragen berühren grundlegende Problemfelder von Ethik, Politik und Gesellschaft. Sie durchziehen zugleich die aktuellen Debatten in der Translations- und Sprachwissenschaft, in denen die Automatisierung nicht nur technische Prozesse be-

trifft, sondern ebenso kulturelle und normative Dimensionen von Theorie und Praxis tangiert. Für die Translationswissenschaft im Besonderen ergeben sich daraus Herausforderungen, die nicht unterschätzt werden dürfen. Mit dem vorliegenden Band rücken wir daher die Interessen des Menschen und spezifischer Kollektive ins Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit.

Aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven verfolgen die Autor:innen der in dieser Zeitschriftennummer versammelten Beiträge das Ziel, die Diskussion über KI nicht auf Fragen bloßer technischer Machbarkeit zu verengen. Vielmehr erachten sie die Debatte um KI als eine, die zutiefst menschlich und gesellschaftlich geprägt ist. KI-Systeme werden nicht im luftleeren Raum entwickelt und eingesetzt, sondern operieren stets innerhalb sozialer, ökonomischer und kultureller Kontexte. So sehr die fortschreitende Technologisierung und Automatisierung des Übersetzens auch das Potenzial besitzen, die Produktivität erheblich zu steigern, so sehr können sie zugleich die translatorische Autonomie einschränken und damit die Qualität und Kreativität von Übersetzungen mindern. Ebenso bergen KI-gestützte Übersetzungswerkzeuge wie DeepL oder ChatGPT die Gefahr, menschliche Arbeit zu entwerten. Bei aller berechtigten Kritik dürfen jedoch auch die erheblichen Chancen nicht übersehen werden, die mit KI-basierten Translations-technologien verbunden sind.

2 Translation, Kreativität und KI

Konzeptionen translatorischer Kreativität bleiben schwer zu fassen, obwohl der Begriff bereits seit einiger Zeit Gegenstand einschlägiger Diskurse ist – und dies nicht erst im Zusammenhang mit der KI-induzierten Transformation des Sprach- und Translationsmarktes, die seit der Lancierung neuronaler maschineller Übersetzungs-Tools im Jahr 2016 an Dynamik ge-

wonnen hat (allgemein zur translatorischen Kreativität vgl. Bayer-Hohenwarter 2011; Cercel et al. 2017; Kußmaul 2000; O’Sullivan 2013; Reynolds et al. 2020; Schreiber 2023). Inzwischen hat die Automatisierung auch jene Bereiche des Übersetzens erreicht, die traditionell als besonders kreativ gelten, etwa die literarische oder die audiovisuelle Übersetzung. Stimmen werden laut, die beklagen, maschinell erzeugte und eventuell nachbearbeitete Übersetzungen seien tendenziell stark homogenisiert, wirkten unpersönlicher und fesselten Leser:innen und Zuschauer:innen weniger als Humanübersetzungen (vgl. Guerberoﬀ-Arenas/Toral 2022: 207 und 2024: 240–241; Kolb 2024: 64–66). Gleichzeitig werden jedoch auch neue, KI-gestützte kreative Möglichkeiten und Arbeitsprozesse innerhalb wie außerhalb translatorischer Kontexte ausgelotet. Ein grundlegender Beitrag, der die vielfältigen Beziehungen zwischen KI und Kreativität im Allgemeinen positiv betrachtet, ist du Sautoys *The Creativity Code* (2019). In der Translationswissenschaft konnte zudem gezeigt werden, dass KI-basierte Werkzeuge die Kreativität im interlingualen Transfer besonders herausfordernder Termini oder Syntagmen steigern können, etwa bei so genannten Okkasionalismen – Neologismen, die in Nestroys Stücken häufig nur einmalig verwendet werden (vgl. Kolb et al. 2023: 564). Darüber hinaus haben Macken et al. (2022: 109) festgestellt, dass bei umfangreicheren literarischen Texten durch ein Post-Editing Ergebnisse erzielt werden können, die nahezu gleichwertig mit Humanübersetzungen sind – vorausgesetzt, die maschinelle Ausgabe wird sowohl einer gründlichen bilingualen als auch einer nachfolgenden monolingualen Revision unterzogen.

In ihrem Versuch, Kreativität sowohl in Verbindung mit dem Humanübersetzen als auch mit maschinellen Übersetzungen konkret und praxisnah zu definieren, haben Guerberoﬀ-Arenas/Toral (2022: 190) sogenannte „Texteinheiten mit

kreativem Potenzial“ (*units of creative potential*, UCPs) identifiziert. Der interlinguale Transfer solcher UCPs erfordert die Umsetzung „kreativer Verschiebungen“ (*creative shifts*) – eine von Bayer-Hohenwarter (2011: 669) geprägte Bezeichnung, die Veränderungen der Wortwahl oder Satzstruktur bei der Übertragung eines Ausgangstextes in die Zielsprache beschreibt. Zwar modifiziert das Übersetzen einen Ausgangstext stets in gewissem Maße, doch nicht immer ist, Schreiber zufolge, eine solche Verschiebung zwingend ‚kreativ‘:

Die Notwendigkeit zur Kreativität ergibt sich also dann, wenn eine Lücke vorliegt, die in der anzufertigenden Übersetzung zum ersten Mal geschlossen werden muss, indem eine neue Lösung geschaffen wird. Taucht das gleiche Übersetzungsproblem in einem späteren Text erneut auf, kann der Übersetzer sich auf die Vorarbeiten von Übersetzern, Lexikographen oder Translationswissenschaftlern stützen und muss – bei entsprechender Qualität der Vorarbeiten – selbst nicht mehr kreativ werden. (Schreiber 2017: 357)

Dementsprechend gilt für Schreiber: Die explizite Kenntnis einer (einst) kreativen Lösung und der Rückgriff auf selbige in einem späteren Text sind nicht mehr als kreativ zu betrachten.

So eng auch manche Sprachen miteinander verwandt sein mögen – zwei Sprachsysteme sind niemals identisch. Je weiter sie voneinander entfernt sind, desto mehr Umformulierungen und Umstrukturierungen macht eine Übersetzung erforderlich. Reynolds et al. (2020: 131) halten daher fest: „*Translation generates multiple new texts: it is inherently creative*“ (vgl. auch Kußmaul 2000: 16; Hervorh. im Original). Dies impliziert unter anderem, dass sowohl Texte als auch Sprachen inhärent flexibel sind und dass der Sinn eines Textes maßgeblich davon abhängt, wie er in einer konkreten Rezeptionssituation jeweils aktualisiert wird. Die interlinguale Übersetzung, die für Venuti (2013: 10) – und ganz allgemein für die Übersetzungshermeneutik – stets interpretativ vorgeht, verstärkt jene, mitunter subtilen, Bedeutungsverschiebungen, die unvermeidlich auftre-

ten, wenn ein geschriebener Text von einer neuen Rezipientenschaft aufgenommen wird. Da eine automatisierte Übersetzung dazu tendiert, Muster der Ausgangssprache zu reproduzieren und in der Zielsprache konventionelle Strukturen auszuwählen, müssen insbesondere bei Texten mit vielen UCPs mögliche Steigerungen von Produktivität und Effizienz durch KI-generierte Rohübersetzungen gegen die Nachteile abgewogen werden, die sich etwa aus dem „Priming“ ergeben können (vgl. Kolb 2022: 20 und 2024: 55). Diese Bezeichnung beschreibt eine Einschränkung der Vielfalt der für Humanübersetzer:innen denkbaren Transferoptionen aufgrund der Beeinflussung durch die maschinelle Ausgabe – ein Phänomen, das bei post-editierten maschinellen Übersetzungen recht häufig zu beobachten ist.

Wenn es um die einschränkenden Effekte KI-basierter Übersetzungswerkzeuge auf die translatorische Kreativität geht, ist „Priming“ gewiss nicht das einzige Problem. Die Arbeit von Post-Editor:innen kann ebenso durch einen „*Fatigue*“-Effekt und einen „*Obstacle*“-Effekt beeinträchtigt werden (Hamm 2024: 16). Der erstgenannte bezeichnet die Müdigkeit, die sich häufig dann einstellt, wenn mit gleich zwei Vorlagen gearbeitet wird: dem Ausgangstext und einem automatisch erzeugten Zieltext, der stets überarbeitet werden muss. Die zweite Bezeichnung verweist auf die Schwierigkeit, Fehler in der maschinellen Ausgabe zu erkennen, da diese zwar der menschlichen Sprache ähnelt, in Wirklichkeit jedoch auf völlig anderen, probabilistischen Prinzipien beruht. Ein weiteres Problem besteht darin, dass post-editierte maschinelle Übersetzungen in der Regel eine geringere sprachliche Vielfalt aufweisen als Humanübersetzungen (vgl. Toral 2019: 276; Helm et al. 2024; Walter 2025a). In jedem Fall gilt, basierend auf Schreibers (2017) Ausführungen, dass eine Übersetzungslösung, die sich allein auf Wahrscheinlichkeiten gründet, nicht als „kreativ“ gel-

ten kann. Grundlegend erscheint in diesem Zusammenhang die Frage, ob man Kreativität als Merkmal, das gewöhnlich mit menschlichem Schaffen assoziiert wird, überhaupt auch Maschinen zugeschrieben werden sollte. Letztlich ist es aber auch wieder ausschließlich dem Menschen vorbehalten, einer von Maschinen ausgeführten Operation das Prädikat einer „kreativen Handlung“ zuzuschreiben.

3 Automatisierung, translatorisches Handeln und Ethik

Tatsächlich thematisieren einige kritische Publikationen die Frage, ob KI-generierte oder KI-übersetzte Texte nicht letztlich eine wesentliche Motivation für menschliches kreatives Schaffen infrage stellen. Die Prozesse, die der menschlichen Kreativität zugrunde liegen, sind seit jeher mit der Suche nach Antworten auf fundamentale Menschheitsfragen verknüpft – eine Aufgabe, die Maschinen weder übernehmen können noch übernehmen sollten (vgl. Mjølunes 2022: 65; Kissinger et al. 2021: 52). Schon seit den Anfängen schriftlicher Kommunikation – etwa in der sumerischen Keilschrift oder in ägyptischen Hieroglyphen – überschreiten Texte ihre bloße Funktionalität und wenden sich religiösen und mythologischen Fragen zu, die den möglichen Sinn und Zweck menschlichen Lebens betreffen. Auch widmen sich Texte seit jeher dem Versuch, gesellschaftliche Ordnungen zu beschreiben und zu verstehen. Vor diesem Hintergrund erscheint es fast absurd, KI-basierten Werkzeugen das Schreiben und Übersetzen zu überantworten. Als im Herbst 2022 – weniger als ein Jahrzehnt, nachdem neuronale maschinelle Übersetzungssysteme (NMT) wie DeepL die Sprachindustrie bereits massiv verändert hatten – Large Language Models (LLMs) wie ChatGPT auf den Markt kamen und sowohl zur Textgenerierung

als auch zur Übersetzung angewendet wurden, hielten es dennoch viele für naheliegend, das Ende der Sprachmittlung als zukunftssträchtiges Berufsfeld auszurufen. Dass der Vorsitzende der SPD, Lars Klingbeil, bereits im November 2018 das Ende der Zunft prognostizierte, ist nicht bloß eine Anekdote, sondern wird für den allseits beobachtbaren Rückgang der Studierendenzahlen in den translationsorientierten Studiengängen im gesamten deutschsprachigen Raum mitverantwortlich gemacht (vgl. Hansen-Schirra/Maaß 2019: 2; Krüger 2025: xiii).

Während einige Studien zu den Auswirkungen von KI auf den Sprach- und Translationsmarkt insgesamt einen Rückgang des Bedarfs an Sprachkenntnissen verzeichnet haben (vgl. Frey/Llanos-Paredes 2025: 20), betonen die meisten Forschenden, dass die Übersetzungsbranche trotz der partiellen Automatisierung von Sprachmittlungsprozessen weiterhin wächst und dass Personal benötigt wird, das sowohl in sprachlicher als auch technologischer Hinsicht qualifiziert ist (vgl. Hackenbuchner/Krüger 2023; Krüger 2023: 321; Łukasik 2024: 38). Dabei stellt sich sogar die Frage, ob Kompetenzen im Umgang mit generativer KI bereits im Fremdsprachen- und Übersetzungsunterricht an Schulen vermittelt bzw. erlernt werden sollten (vgl. Kapnas et al. 2025). Ein Problem, mit dem viele Sprachdienstleister:innen infolge KI-induzierter Veränderungen konfrontiert sind, besteht darin, dass menschliche Arbeit zunehmend entwertet wird. Abzulesen ist dies an Phänomenen wie einem erhöhten Preisdruck und Einkommenseinbußen (vgl. ELIS Research 2025: 13–14; Agnetta 2025: 155).

Ob die sinnstiftenden Praktiken des Schreibens und Übersetzens dem Menschen entzogen und den algorithmischen Logiken KI-basierter Werkzeuge überantwortet werden sollten, ist in erster Linie eine ethische Frage. Tatsächlich werfen maschinell erzeugte Sprachausgaben zahlreiche ethische Problemstellungen auf, die oftmals auch nicht zu unterschät-

zende rechtliche Konsequenzen nach sich ziehen. Lange bevor generative KI-Modelle wie ChatGPT den bereits hoch technologisierten Sprachdienstleistungssektor abermals transformierten, hat Bowker (2020: 265–271) eine Reihe an Schlüsselfragen im Zusammenhang mit Automatisierungsprozessen identifiziert, die (im Vorhinein) einer Klärung bedürfen. Im Folgenden sollen sie kurz umrissen werden:

- Wie gestalten sich die Eigentumsverhältnisse an technologischen Ressourcen wie etwa Translation-Memory-Systemen?
- Wie wird mit Fragen des Datenschutzes und der Vertraulichkeit umgegangen?
- Welche Qualität weist der Übersetzungsooutput auf?
- Wie verändern sich translatorisches Handeln und berufliche Zufriedenheit?
- Wie wird der Notwendigkeit kontinuierlicher technologischer Weiterbildung begegnet?
- Wer profitiert von Produktivitätsgewinnen und wie gestaltet sich die Vergütung von Sprachdienstleistungen?
- Was passiert mit sprachlicher und kultureller Vielfalt?

In Anknüpfung an Bowkers Bedenken hebt Park (2023) z. B. hervor, wie wichtig es sei, die Übersetzungspraxis mit dem urheberrechtlichen Rahmen für Translation-Memory-Systeme in Einklang zu bringen. Zweifellos haben sich Fragen des Datenschutzes, der Vertraulichkeit und des Urheberrechts durch die Omnipräsenz automatisch generierten und übersetzten LLM-Outputs noch verschärft (vgl. Zhuk 2023; Walter 2025b). Dies betrifft nicht nur die (literarische) Textübersetzung im engeren Sinne, sondern sämtliche Praktiken, die mit dem interkulturellen Transfer unterschiedlichster Güter verbunden sind – etwa im Kontext der audiovisuellen Übersetzung die automatisierte Erzeugung und Übersetzung von Drehbüchern, die unaufgeforderte Kompilation von Untertitelkorpora oder die Sprach-

synthese, die professionellen Sprecher:innen buchstäblich ihre Stimme raubt (vgl. Agnetta 2025). Zudem macht generative KI Übersetzen und Schreiben zunehmend zu kollaborativen Angelegenheiten, sodass sich herkömmliche Auffassungen der Nachrangigkeit des translationsbezogenen Urheberrechts gegenüber den Urheberrechten am Originaltext langfristig kaum aufrechterhalten lassen dürften (vgl. Walter 2025b). Die Tendenz zur Homogenisierung von Sprachausgabe, welche die sprachliche und kulturelle Vielfalt beschränkt und die Hegemonie globaler Sprachen wie des Englischen auf Kosten kleinerer Sprachen verfestigt – ein Phänomen, das Cronin (2020: 281) treffend als „Globotics“ bezeichnet –, war bereits in vollem Gange, als 2022 universelle LLMs auf den Markt kamen. Darüber hinaus werden Fragen nach der Attraktivität des Sprachdienstleistungssektors als Karriereweg seit Jahren in der European Language Industry Survey aufgegriffen, die 2025 im Zusammenhang mit automatisierter Übersetzung den Abwärtstrend bei der Preisgestaltung und Gewinneinbußen als zentrale Probleme identifiziert (ELIS Research 2025: 13–14). Schon 2020 stellte Bowker (2020: 272–73) daher die Notwendigkeit heraus, die Technologisierung des Übersetzens als ein gesamtgesellschaftliches Thema zu diskutieren, das auch eine substanzielle Anpassung der Translator:innenausbildung erforderlich macht. Inzwischen sind neue Modelle für die Ausbildung von Sprachmittler:innen, die den Schwerpunkt auf KI-, Daten- und maschinelle Übersetzungskompetenz legen, bereits weit vorangeschritten (vgl. Hackenbuchner/Krüger 2023; Krüger 2023; Agnetta/Walter 2025).

Von den offensichtlichen rechtlichen Konsequenzen abgesehen, stellt sich die Frage nach den Auswirkungen automatisch generierter Texte, Bilder und Sounds, sobald diese, oft unbemerkt, in die alltägliche Kommunikation von Menschen Eingang findet. Zwar mag es in manchen Fällen noch möglich

sein, zwischen von Menschen gemachtem und KI-generiertem Material zu unterscheiden, doch eine eindeutige Dichotomisierung, wie sie auch in der Forschungsliteratur häufig vorgenommen wird, erscheint zunehmend unhaltbar. Generative KI hat nämlich in kürzester Zeit Eingang in die kommunikativen Praktiken ganzer Gesellschaftsgruppen gefunden. Daraus folgt erstens, dass KI-generierte Kommunikation im Wesentlichen auf menschlichen Vorleistungen basiert – man könnte von einem *generativen Mensch-Maschine-Kontinuum* sprechen –, und zweitens, dass diese Kommunikate wieder in den Kreislauf menschlicher Kommunikation eingespeist werden, wo sie, womöglich fälschlicherweise, als genuin menschengemachte Texte bzw. mit dem genuin menschlichen Interpretationsapparat gedeutet werden; dies ließe sich als *interpretatives Mensch-Maschine-Kontinuum* bezeichnen. Die kreativen, ethischen und politischen Dimensionen menschlicher Deutungsarbeit verschwinden keineswegs nur deshalb, weil der Text nicht direkt ‚aus der Feder‘ eines Menschen stammt. Der Mensch kann diese (hybriden) Texte vielleicht gar nicht anders denn als *homo narrans* (vgl. Katan 2023: 87 und Hagemann in diesem Heft) oder *homo hermeneuticus* angehen – das heißt als Individuum, das ihnen mit seinem gesamten Erfahrungsschatz, seiner leiblichen Verfasstheit und seiner Sozialisierung begegnet. Gleichwohl birgt diese Entwicklung auch vielfältige Risiken (vgl. Pym 2025). Es überrascht daher nicht, dass gegenwärtig Stimmen laut werden, die einerseits eine stärkere Regulierung, wenn nicht gar das Verbot der Verwendung von Menschen erzeugter Produkte durch KI-Konzerne¹ und andererseits eine klare

1 Ein Ausdruck dessen sind die jüngsten Forderungen von Berufsverbänden (vgl. Agnetta 2025).

Kennzeichnung maschinell generierter und/oder post-editierter Kommunikate fordern (vgl. Pym 2025: 40–41²).

In den Beiträgen dieses *YTH*-Themenhefts werden diese und andere zentralen Fragen rund um die gesellschaftlichen Implikationen automatisierter Übersetzung angesprochen; diese können jedoch nicht in jedem Fall abschließend beantwortet werden. Auch liefern die Ausführungen keine – und schon gar nicht allgemeingültige – Lösungen für die identifizierten Probleme.

4 Zum Themenheft

Die hier gesammelten Beiträge zu Ethik und translatorischer Kreativität im Zeitalter der KI greifen folgende Fragen auf:

- Welche ethischen, rechtlichen und hermeneutischen Herausforderungen ergeben sich aus der weitverbreiteten Nutzung von KI im Sprachdienstleistungssektor?
- Wie lassen sich im Zeitalter von KI nachhaltige, qualitativ hochwertige und kreative Übersetzungen gewährleisten?
- Wie verändert sich der Sprach- und Translationsmarkt durch die neuen, sich ständig verbessernden KI-Werkzeuge?

Aus unterschiedlichen philosophischen Perspektiven befassen sich die Beiträge von Baumgarten, Lukenda/Twardon und Laghi mit den neuen ethischen und rechtlichen Herausforderungen, die sich aus der rasanten Entwicklung KI-gestützter

2 Pym (2025: 41) schlägt ein grobes, zweiteiliges Raster zur Kennzeichnung von Übersetzungen vor: In seinem Modell steht „UMT“ für *Unedited Machine Translation* und bezeichnet jeglichen rein computergenerierten Übersetzungsausgang, während „BRT“ (*Bilingually Reviewed Translation*) jene Übersetzungen ausweisen soll, die von Humanübersetzer:innen erstellt oder zumindest von solchen überprüft und freigegeben wurden.

Übersetzung ergeben. Die Aufsätze von Hagemann, Şahin et al. sowie Walter hingegen bieten stärker praxisorientierte Perspektiven auf Kreativität und Hermeneutik in automatisierten und post-editierten Übersetzungen. Dabei wird auch die Frage behandelt, inwieweit Kreativität als Qualität überhaupt mit automatisierter Übersetzung – vor oder nach einem Post-Editing – in Verbindung gebracht werden kann. Mit den geopolitisch relevanten Beiträgen von Badshah und Shyma P. werden internationale Machtverhältnisse untersucht: etwa wie Minderheitensprachen durch die gegenwärtigen Entwicklungen (noch weiter) ins Hintertreffen geraten oder wie die Kulturen und Sprachen indigener Stammesgemeinschaften wie jene, die in Indien als Adivasi bekannt sind, infolge algorithmischer Verzerrungen in KI-Modellen an den Rand gedrängt werden.

Baumgarten untersucht das sozio-kulturelle Wechselspiel zwischen Translationstechnologien und Gesellschaft und deklariert dessen Erforschung zum Desiderat eines aufkommenden Forschungsfeldes, das er als *Sociotechnical Translation Studies* bezeichnet. Zunächst zeigt er auf, dass transkulturelle Kommunikation und Technologie seit jeher eng miteinander verflochten sind. Während technologische und ökonomische Fragen im Zusammenhang mit Translationstechnologien bereits erhebliche kritische Aufmerksamkeit erfahren haben, argumentiert der Autor, dass die individuellen, soziokulturellen und ökologischen Konsequenzen neuer Technologien und Arbeitspraktiken bislang vernachlässigt wurden. Er schlägt daher eine konsequentialistische Ethik vor, um die soziotechnischen Implikationen von Translationstechnologien in unserer globalisierten, digital vernetzten Welt zu untersuchen. Baumgarten betont, dass revolutionäre Sprünge in der Entwicklung der neuesten Kommunikationstechnologien – darunter die Einführung von ChatGPT im November 2022 – die menschliche Wahrnehmung, Kommunikation und Gesellschaften insge-

samt kontinuierlich beeinflussen. Sein Beitrag setzt sich mit verschiedenen philosophischen Rahmenkonzepten und gesellschaftlichen Diskursen über Technologie und digitale Translation auseinander, darunter mit der Kritischen Theorie, dem Posthumanismus und dem Anthropozän. Besonders hebt er hervor, dass die politische Ökonomie der Translation stark von neoliberaler Ideologie geprägt und durch erhebliche Machtasymmetrien gekennzeichnet ist.

In ihrem Beitrag greifen Lukenda/Twardon Antoine Bermans genuin hermeneutisches Konzept der „Erfahrung/Bewährung des Fremden“ auf, um die bereits bei Berman vorgezeichneten ethischen Dimensionen des Übersetzens im Zeitalter der KI zu untersuchen. Ausgehend von Bermans Definition des Übersetzens als einer ethischen und hermeneutischen Praxis analysieren die Autor:innen, wie sich die Erfahrung des Fremden durch das KI-gestützte Übersetzen verändert. Sie betonen, dass das KI-gestützte Übersetzen aus der Perspektive professioneller Übersetzer:innen ein im marxistischen Sinne verstandenes Gefühl der Entfremdung vom Produkt der eigenen Arbeit hervorruft. Diese Entfremdung, so führen sie weiter aus, werde noch dadurch verschärft, dass sich KI-Modelle Inhalte fremdsprachiger Texte bereits im Vorfeld aneignen. Lukenda/Twardon schlagen vor, dass Übersetzer:innen auf den Originaltext zurückgreifen und ihn neu überdenken müssen, wobei dieser Prozess ‚durch die Linse‘ des KI-generierten Textes auch erleichtert werden kann. Sie argumentieren, dass dieser Perspektivwechsel das Potenzial berge, die Erfahrung des Übersetzens tiefgreifend zu transformieren und die dynamische Beziehung zwischen Sprachen und Kulturen neu zu gestalten.

Indem Laghi in seinem Beitrag die Funktionsmechanismen von KI-Technologien in den Blick nimmt und deren potenziell kreative wie auch kritische Anwendungen herausarbei-

tet, lenkt er die Aufmerksamkeit auf häufig übersehene Aspekte der Beziehung zwischen Menschen und komplexen digitalen Technologien. Laghi betont, dass es wichtig sei, die mit aktuellen KI-Definitionen verbundenen Probleme zu diskutieren, und schlägt vor, diese Bezeichnungen neu zu übersetzen und kreativ umzudeuten, um geeignetere Ausdrucksweisen zu finden. Zwar haben sich Fachsprachen schon immer der metaphorischen Übertragung vertrauter Bezeichnungen und Konzepte auf neue Technologien und Erkenntnisse bedient; jedoch fragt sich der Autor nach den Implikationen der allgegenwärtigen Anthropomorphisierung der „Maschine“ durch Termini wie „Künstliche *Intelligenz*“, „Deep/Machine *Learning*“, „*Neuronale Netze*“ u. Ä. Selbst die vehementesten Kritiker:innen, so wird in Laghis Beitrag deutlich, greifen auf eben jene Framing-Mechanismen zurück und verstetigen sie, wenn sie z. B. Strategien wie „Data Poisoning“ propagieren, um der unrechtmäßigen Nutzung von Menschen generierter Daten durch KI-Konzerne entgegenzuwirken. Ein neuartiger Ansatz des Übersetzens, so führt Laghi weiter aus, sollte zwischen den Kapazitäten der Maschinen und unserer Fähigkeit, diese zu verstehen, vermitteln. Letztere werde häufig dadurch erschwert, dass sich die internen Prozesse von Maschinen kaum in einer für Menschen verständlichen Weise erklären lassen. Indem Laghi kreative Formen der Interaktion mit Sprach- und Bildmodellen entfaltet, die Künstler:innen, Autor:innen und andere kreativ Tätige darin unterstützen, sich gegen Urheberrechtsverletzungen zu wehren, trägt er dazu bei, eine ethische, kritische und nachhaltige Beziehung zwischen Mensch und Maschine aufzubauen.

Hagemann untersucht den Begriff der Kreativität, dessen Bestimmung im translatorischen Kontext durch den Aufstieg der KI zusätzlich verkompliziert wurde. Die Autorin zeigt, dass jüngste Fortschritte in der NMÜ und auf dem Gebiet der

LLMs Texte hervorgebracht haben, die durchaus als kreativ gelten können. Nach Kußmaul (2000: 31) ist translatorische Kreativität dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass Veränderungen am Ausgangstext vorgenommen werden, die in der Zielkultur zu Neuartigkeit und Angemessenheit führen. Hagemann weist trotzdem darauf hin, dass die Frage, ob menschliche Kreativität im Rahmen automatisierter Übersetzung gedeihen kann, weiterhin offenbleibt. Funktionalistische Ansätze, wie etwa Vermeers *Skopostheorie*, könnten hierauf mögliche Antworten bieten. Anhand konkreter Übersetzungsbeispiele aus zwei Post-Editing-Kursen, die im Sommer 2023 am FTSK Germersheim durchgeführt wurden, zeigt Hagemann, dass bestimmte *Skopoi* in verschiedenen Übersetzungsszenarien für KI-Systeme nach wie vor erhebliche Herausforderungen darstellen.

Şahin et al. erörtern die Auswirkungen computergestützter literarischer Übersetzung auf Kreativität und Stimme. Im Mittelpunkt stehen dabei charakteristische stilistische Merkmale sowie die Bewertung der Kreativität von Outputs, die von drei englisch-türkischen maschinellen Übersetzungssystemen erzeugt wurden. Das erste ist ein speziell mit literarischen Texten trainiertes MÜ-System. Das zweite ist ein mit gemeinsprachlichen Texten vortrainiertes MÜ-System. Das dritte ist das Online-MÜ-System Google Translate. Die untersuchten Texte stammen aus den fiktionalen und nicht-fiktionalen Subgenres der literarischen Produktion. Die Analyse von Stil und Kreativität basiert auf folgenden zwei Methoden: der menschlichen Evaluation von Textproben und der qualitativen Korpusanalyse vollständiger Texte. Die Ausgaben der drei Systeme werden anschließend mit den Übersetzungen zweier renommierter Übersetzerinnen, Nihal Yeğinoğlu und Belkıs Dişbudak, verglichen. Bei Anwendung unterschiedlicher Ansätze zur Untersuchung von Stil und Kreativität stellten Şahin et al. für

die nonfiktionale Literatur in den Humanübersetzungen sowie im speziell trainierten MÜ-System ein höheres Maß an Kreativität fest. Darüber hinaus konnten die Autor:innen nachweisen, dass ein mit türkischen literarischen Übersetzungen trainiertes, maßgeschneidertes MÜ-System Ausgaben erzeugte, die stilistisch näher an der Humanübersetzung lagen als jene, die mit dem allgemeinsprachlich vortrainierten System oder dem Online-MÜ-System erstellt wurden.

Walter untersucht die Rolle der Kreativität in der Humanübersetzung und im KI-gestützten Post-Editing literarischer Texte anhand eines an der Universität Innsbruck durchgeführten Keylogging-Experiments. Sechs Masterstudierende übersetzten Virginia Woolfs Prosagedicht „Green“ (1921), wobei die halbe Gruppe ausschließlich mit Wörterbüchern arbeitete und die andere Hälfte der Studierenden eine mit dem Sprachmodell der nächsten Generation von DeepL erzeugte Rohübersetzung post-editierte. Anhand von Inputlog-Daten und Bildschirmaufzeichnungen analysiert Walter sowohl die finalen Übersetzungen als auch die ihnen zugrunde liegenden Prozesse. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass post-editierte Übersetzungen tendenziell homogener und weniger kreativ ausfallen als Humanübersetzungen und häufig eng an die maschinelle Ausgabe angelehnt sind. Demgegenüber weisen Humanübersetzungen insgesamt eine größere Vielfalt und mehr kreative Interventionen auf, insbesondere im Umgang mit metaphorischer und personifizierender Sprache. Entgegen den Erwartungen brachte das Post-Editing in diesem Experiment keine nennenswerten Zeitersparnisse, da sich eine gründliche Überarbeitung als nahezu ebenso zeitaufwendig erwies wie eine reine Humanübersetzung. Darüber hinaus wurde nachgewiesen, dass Schwierigkeiten bei der Personalisierung der maschinellen Ausgabe und bei der Fehlererkennung in selbiger einerseits das translatorische Handeln und andererseits auch die Lesbarkeit

des Zieltexts einschränkten. Dabei war wohl auch belastend, dass die endgültige Fassung sowohl auf der Basis des Ausgangstexts als auch unter Berücksichtigung der maschinellen Ausgabe erstellt werden musste. Das Experiment bestätigt somit, dass Post-Editing bei literarischen Texten, deren Übersetzung ein hohes Maß an Kreativität erfordert, kontraproduktiv sein kann: Es bietet nur geringe Effizienzgewinne und mindert zudem die interpretative Tiefe und kreative Vielfalt.

Badshah vertritt in seinem Beitrag die Auffassung, dass KI-gestützte Übersetzungswerkzeuge wie Google Translate und DeepL zwar bei Übersetzungen zwischen ressourcenintensiven Sprachen (*high resource languages*, HRL) eine hohe Genauigkeit aufweisen, die Leistungsfähigkeit der automatisierten Übersetzung für Sprachen des globalen Südens jedoch uneinheitlich sei. Die Ursachen für diese Diskrepanz würden Badshah zufolge häufig übersehen oder fälschlicherweise der inhärenten Komplexität dieser Sprachen zugeschrieben. In seinem Beitrag greift der Autor auf den theoretischen Rahmen der Weltsystemanalyse zurück, um zu argumentieren, dass die suboptimale Leistungsfähigkeit automatisierter Übersetzungstechnologie in bestimmten Sprachen das Ergebnis eines gezielten Projekts zur Unterdrückung des globalen Südens sei. Badshah kommt zu dem Schluss, dass diese Entwicklung zwar in der europäischen Kolonialgeschichte wurzle, die automatisierte Übersetzung jedoch weiterhin Ideologien reproduziere, die den bestehenden Machtstrukturen zugrunde lägen.

In ihrem Beitrag untersucht Shyma P. die ethischen Herausforderungen der Übersetzung indigener Epistemologien im Zeitalter der KI. Während sie auch andere wesentliche Herausforderungen anerkennt, die KI für eine anthropozentrische Weltordnung mit sich bringt, rückt sie insbesondere die Unfähigkeit von KI-Modellen in den Vordergrund, die durch soziale Ungleichheit verursachte Krise zu bewältigen. Sie be-

tont, dass der Reichtum an indigenem Wissen in Verbindung mit sozialem Ausschluss und Segregation die wirksame Übersetzung von Indigenität mithilfe KI-gestützter Werkzeuge erheblich beeinträchtigt. Der Beitrag analysiert darüber hinaus, wie erzwungene Marginalität das Risiko der Fehlrepräsentation und Auslöschung indigenen Wissens in Kerala verstärke. Im ersten Teil werden die vielfältigen Facetten des indigenen Wissensreichtums anhand ausgewählter Texte herausgearbeitet. Die Komplexität seiner Übersetzung durch Menschen wird der homogenisierten Wiedergabe durch KI-Werkzeuge gegenübergestellt, um die ethischen Probleme KI-gestützter Übersetzung zu verdeutlichen. Im zweiten Teil analysiert Shyma P., wie stereotype Darstellungen die kommunitäre Identität der Adivasi in eine monolithische, zeitlose Einheit überführen.

5 Ausblick

Ausgehend von einer 2024 durchgeführten Umfrage mit professionellen Übersetzer:innen beobachtet Jiménez-Crespo (2025), dass Sprachmittler:innen in zunehmend technologisierten Arbeitsumgebungen „flexible, anpassungsfähige, benutzerfreundliche und individuell konfigurierbare Werkzeuge und Werkzeug-Umgebungen benötigen, die unter Einbeziehung von Übersetzer:innen entwickelt werden und ihnen im Hinblick auf das Ergebnis des Übersetzungsprozesses Kontrolle und Autonomie bieten“ (unsere Übersetzung). Die in diesem *YTH*-Sonderheft versammelten Beiträge zeigen ebenfalls, dass der Einsatz von KI ohne menschliche Steuerung oder Qualitätssicherung unverantwortlich ist – und zwar nicht nur in Hochrisikosituationen, wie sie etwa im Gesundheitswesen auftreten können. Zu Recht hat sich das Risikomanagement als ein Schlüsselbegriff zur Aushandlung der Möglichkeiten und Grenzen KI-basierter Übersetzungstechnologie etabliert (vgl.

Nitzke et al. 2019; Pym 2025) – und macht damit eine technologiebezogene Bewertung von Risiken im translatorischen Kontext unverzichtbar (vgl. Suppan 2025). Kritische Stimmen aus der Translationsforschung haben jedoch aufgezeigt, dass erhebliche Risiken auch aus einem unverantwortlichen Einsatz von Automatisierung in Bereichen erwachsen, in denen mangelhafte Übersetzungsqualität kein Risiko für Leib und Leben darstellt, etwa in der literarischen Übersetzung. Die Reputation von Originalautor:innen kann durch schlechte Übersetzungsqualität ebenso Schaden nehmen wie die Leser:innen des Zieltextes – und nicht zuletzt die Übersetzer:innen selbst, deren wesentlicher Beitrag zum kulturellen Austausch auch in einem zunehmend technologisierten Arbeitsumfeld uneingeschränkt wertgeschätzt werden muss (vgl. Taivalkosky-Shilov 2019; Kolb 2024).

Nachhaltige, qualitativ hochwertige und kreative Sprachmittlung erfordert ein effizientes Zusammenspiel von Mensch und Maschine, das den Menschen in den Mittelpunkt stellt. Dieser humanzentrierte Ansatz gewährleistet Verantwortlichkeit, ethische Integrität und kulturelle Sensibilität – Standards, die aufgrund der maschinellen Ausgabe allein nicht gegeben sind. Für die weitere Entwicklung des Fachgebiets wird die Zusammenarbeit zwischen KI-Entwickler:innen und Sprachmittler:innen entscheidend sein, um Werkzeuge zu schaffen, die das fachkundige menschliche Urteilsvermögen tatsächlich unterstützen.

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Essays | Aufsätze



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Welcome to the Machine? Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Translationswissenschaft in Zeiten ungebremster Maschinisierung

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Welcome to the Machine? Prolegomena to a Critical Translation Studies in Times of Unbridled Machinisation

Abstract: The social and cultural interplay between translation technologies and society has become a focal point of an emerging field which might be dubbed sociotechnical translation studies. Today's transcultural communication is inconceivable without technological aids. Alongside countless publications on purely technological and business issues concerning translation technologies, there are, however, only few studies on the individual, socio-cultural or ecological consequences of new technologies and labour practices. This paper suggests a broadly conceived consequentialist ethics for investigations of the sociotechnical implications of translation technologies in today's globalized and digitally networked world. By now, it has become evident that revolutionary leaps in the development of the latest communication technologies—e.g. the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022—steadily influence human perception, the dynamics of communication, and the entire social fabric. This contribution ponders on a selection of philosophical

paradigms and societal discourses surrounding technology and digital translation; it engages with broad paradigms and concepts such as critical theory, posthumanism and the Anthropocene, in an attempt to connect these with today's sociotechnical and ideological realities in a political economy of translation that remains to be governed by neoliberal dogma and highly unequal power dynamics.

Keywords: Translation technology, Philosophy of technology, Technocapitalism, Consequentialism, Posthumanism, Anthropocene.

1 Einleitung

Ursprünglich sollte dieser Beitrag den Titel „Perspektiven Kritischer Translationswissenschaft“ erhalten. Nach einiger Überlegung kam mir jedoch der Gedanke, dass wir eigentlich kaum noch kritische Perspektiven haben. Wir scheinen ja fast am Ziel unserer utopischen Träume angelangt zu sein, oder besser, die wunderbar funktionierende Translationsmaschine ist da, oder noch genauer, sie ist uns allen vor die sprichwörtliche Nase gesetzt worden. Technologischer Fortschritt ist unaufhaltsam, weil er eben fast nie demokratisch legitimiert ist (vgl. Feenberg 2002: 3). Daher rührt also das Fragezeichen im Titel. Wirklich? Welcome to the (Translation) Machine? Die Musikliebhaber*innen unter Ihnen werden den Titel des bekannten Songs der englischen Rockband Pink Floyd erkennen, in dem sie unter anderem singen „Welcome my son / Welcome to the machine / What did you dream? / It's alright we told you what to dream“ (Waters 1975). Die maschinelle Metapher offenbart Frustration mit der Musikindustrie, in der die kapitalistische Gier- und Geldmaschinerie künstlerische Freiheit unterdrückt, anstatt sie zu fördern. Auf die derzeitige Lage der globalen Sprachindustrie und der transkulturellen Kommunikation übertragen: Wie können wir Translationswissenschaftler*innen kritisch, vielleicht sogar in aktivistischer Manier, der sprichwörtlichen Translationsmaschine gegenübertreten? Oder ist

eine solch formulierte Kritik viel zu kurz gefasst? Brauchen wir vielleicht doch eine grundlegendere gesamtgesellschaftliche Kritik?

Damit Sie, werte Leser*innen, mich nicht gleich zu Beginn falsch verstehen: Ich bin kein Technologiefeind. Ganz im Gegenteil. Wir alle wissen, dass Technologie in unzähligen Fällen unser Leben verbessert und aufgewertet hat, oder besser noch, sie hat in vielen Bereichen unser Leiden verringert. Man denke hier nur an die Medizin, die Waschmaschine oder auch an unsere modernen Transportmittel. Grundsätzlich gilt, dass es keine Kritik ohne Ethik geben kann. Wenn wir etwas kritisieren wollen, müssen wir, neben einer ethisch legitimierten Grundhaltung, unsere eigene ethische und ideologische Position offenbaren. Während nun wiederum eine deontologische Ethik die moralischen Folgen einzelner Handlungen ermisst, so befasst sich eine konsequentialistische Ethik mit den langfristigen Folgen, die sich durch das Zusammenwirken verschiedener Akteur*innen in komplexen Netzwerken ergeben (vgl. Zwischenberger 2022: 11). Eine konsequentialistische Ethik erscheint daher als geeignete Grundlage zu einer breit angelegten Kritik automatischer Translation innerhalb der gegenwärtigen gesamtgesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse.

In einer globalisierten und digital zunehmend vernetzten Welt können wir uns transkulturelle Kommunikation – also Übersetzen und Dolmetschen – ohne Technologie gar nicht mehr vorstellen. Es gibt eine sich langsam formierende Phalanx an kritischer Forschung zu den signifikanten ethischen Herausforderungen von Translationstechnologien (vgl. z. B. Kenny et al. 2020, Tieber/Baumgarten 2024). Der vorliegende Beitrag präsentiert diejenigen Vorüberlegungen, die meines Erachtens für eine umfassende gesamtgesellschaftliche Analyse von Translationstechnologien nötig sind. Eine solche Analyse ist gleichzeitig eine Analyse von Wechselwirkungen, die im

Folgenden in einen kulturtheoretischen Rahmen eingebettet werden, insbesondere um die ideologische und sozioökonomische Brisanz von Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien herauszustreichen.

2 Wechselwirkungen von Technologie, Kultur und Gesellschaft

Eine konsequentialistische Ethik berücksichtigt den netzwerkartigen Charakter und die langen Zeithorizonte hinsichtlich der Genese, Verbreitung und Verwendung moderner Technologien. Mehr noch, moderne, oder sollen wir lieber sagen, postmoderne oder gar posthumane Technologien, haben ein Ausmaß an weltlicher und geistiger Macht erlangt, deren fragwürdiger Faszination sich die Menschheit kaum noch entziehen kann. Allein aus diesem und einem weiteren Grund ist es an der Zeit, eine (translations-)technologische Entschleunigung einzumahlen in Zeiten (noch) ungebremsster Maschinisierung.

In seinem viel zitierten (und auch kritisierten) Werk *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* setzt Hans Jonas (1984: 55) wichtige Akzente in Richtung einer „neuen Ethik der Verantwortung für eine entferntere Zukunft“. Lehnt sich die traditionelle Ethik, in die sich auch Kants ‚kategorischer Imperativ‘ einreihet, eher an die einzelne Person und somit unmittelbaren Folgen singulärer Handlungen, so erfordern im Technikzeitalter „die neuen Arten und Abmaße des Handelns eine ihnen kommensurable Ethik der Voraussicht und Verantwortung“ (ibid.: 47). Während sich also die „Ethik der Gleichzeitigkeit“ (ibid.: 34) noch im unmittelbaren Wechselspiel zwischen den Menschen verliert, so zwingt uns die immer mächtiger werdende Technologie eine planetarische und zeitlich unabgeschlossene Ethik auf:

Im Zeichen der Technologie aber hat es die Ethik mit Handlungen zu tun (wiewohl nicht mehr des Einzelsubjekts), die eine beispiellose kau-

sale Reichweite in die Zukunft haben, begleitet von einem Vorwissen, das ebenfalls, wie immer unvollständig, über alles ehemalige weit hinausgeht. Dazu die schiere Größenordnung der Fernwirkungen und oft auch ihre Unumkehrbarkeit. All dies rückt Verantwortung ins Zentrum der Ethik, und zwar mit Zeit- und Raumhorizonten, die denen der Taten entsprechen. (Jonas 1984: 8–9)

Der implizierte utopische Impuls moderner Technologien und das für deren Verwirklichung nötige weit verzweigte quasi-rhizomatische Netz an vor- und nachgelagerter Wissen (vgl. Deleuze/Guattari 1980/1992: 11–42) ruft uns den Neologismus *planetarische Ethik* auf den Plan, wenn auch Jonas selbst über diese Bezeichnung wohl schmunzeln würde. Nichtsdestotrotz ließe sich vor diesem Hintergrund eine *longue durée* und gesamtgesellschaftliche Betrachtung der Auswirkungen von Translationstechnologie anhand miteinander interagierender individueller, soziokultureller und ökologischer Dimensionen vorstellen.

2.1 Individuelle Dimension:

Mensch und Translationstechnologie

Translationstechnologie hat uns an vielen Stellen die oft mühsame Übersetzungsarbeit erleichtert. Schon lange können wir Übersetzer*innen auf Papier verzichten, dank der seit den 1980er Jahren weit verbreiteten *Translation Memory Software* (TMS) halten wir mühelos begriffliche Konsistenz in unseren Texten, und dank neuronaler maschineller Übersetzung (NMÜ) brauchen wir viele unserer Texte nicht einmal mehr manuell übersetzen, sondern müssen sie ‚nur noch‘ nachbessern. Zudem lässt sich seit der Einführung von ChatGPT im November 2022 nicht nur die Hintergrundrecherche auf Knopfdruck erledigen, denn die KI eignet sich ebenfalls sehr gut als Übersetzungsanwendung und kann überdies Übersetzungsaufträge per Prompt erledigen (vgl. He 2024). Ganz ab-

gesehen davon gibt es auch die neuartigen Modelle sogenannter ‚mehrsprachiger kommunikativer KI‘, mit denen wir uns in unmittelbarer Zukunft auseinandersetzen müssen (vgl. Guzman/Lewis 2020: 71; Hepp et al. 2022: 456). All diese Erleichterungen lassen sich also zunächst anhand einer individuellen Dimension von Wechselwirkungen zwischen Mensch und Technologie fassen, die sich weiter in allgemein kognitive, inner- und sozialpsychologische Wirkungen unterteilen lässt. Gemäß der Kantschen deontologischen Ethik lägen dann die unmittelbaren kognitiven Vorteile von Technologien wie Translation-Memory-Systemen auf der Hand, da die vom System vorgeschlagenen Übersetzungsoptionen eine Reduktion der normalerweise benötigten kognitiven Anstrengung beim Übersetzungsprozess bewirken. Zudem könnte man spekulieren, dass sich eine produktive Mensch-Maschine-Interaktion in psychologischer Hinsicht positiv auf die menschliche Befindlichkeit auswirkt. Letzlich können Übersetzer*innen an einem TMS parallel zusammenarbeiten, was einen positiven Kooperationseffekt auslöst.

All diese unmittelbaren Vorzüge von Translationstechnologie lassen sich jedoch nur in dem engen Korsett einer deontologischen Gleichzeitigkeitsethik evaluieren, weshalb langfristige Wechselwirkungen nur mit einer ganzheitlichen – in Ermangelung eines besseren Begriffs – ‚planetarischen‘ Ethik in den Horizont der möglichen Erkenntnis gebracht werden können. Denn vor dem Hintergrund individueller menschlicher Disponiertheit verändern die neuen KI-basierten Sprachtechnologien das gesamte Kommunikationsgeschehen in radikaler Weise. Nicht nur unsere Wahrnehmung von übersetzerischer Tätigkeit wird sich drastisch ändern, sondern es ergibt sich graduell eine durch KI-basierte Technologien hervorgerufene neuartige Kommunikationsdynamik. So entstehen neue hybride Kommunikationsräume, in denen multilinguale künst-

liche Intelligenzen als quasi-autonome Kommunikatoren agieren (vgl. Guzman 2018: 3), was wiederum mittel- und langfristig psychologische und zwischenmenschliche Effekte nach sich zieht. Beispielsweise fordern die drei Verbände deutschsprachiger Literaturübersetzer*innen (2024: 2) in einem offenen Brief Politik und Zivilgesellschaft dazu auf, „kritische Technik- und Sprachkompetenz zu fördern“. Ähnliches gilt für die AVT-Verbände (vgl. Agnetta 2025).

2.2 Soziokulturelle Dimension:

Gesellschaft und Translationstechnologie

Menschen sind natürlich nicht ausschließlich individuell, sie sind integriert in die unterschiedlichsten soziokulturellen Institutionen, Strukturen und Systeme. In der Translationswissenschaft der 1990er und 2000er Jahre gab es viele theoretische Debatten und Diskussionen zu ideologischen und machtorientierten Fragestellungen, also inwiefern gruppenspezifisches Denken und soziale Abhängigkeiten das Übersetzen und Dolmetschen beeinflussen (vgl. Calzada-Pérez 2003). Die gesellschaftliche Wechselwirkung von Translationstechnologien spielte zu diesem Zeitpunkt noch keine Rolle in der Forschung, und erst 11 Jahre später bildeten sich die ersten zarten Knospen einer – nennen wir es – soziotechnischen Kritik der Translationsforschung, befördert durch Tomasz Rozmysłowicz' (2014) zeitlich gut gewählte Publikation „Machine Translation: A Problem for Translation Theory“. Mit Berechtigung verweist Rozmysłowicz auf die Vernachlässigung der maschinellen Übersetzung in der bis dato – eigentlich bis heute – eher akteurs- und kulturzentrierten Translationsforschung. Wiederrum 10 Jahre später und, überspitzt formuliert, im Rahmen der soziotechnischen Überrumpelung durch – zumindest für manche Textsorten – hochqualitative automatisierte Übersetzung,

Crowd-Translation und multilinguale KIs, zunehmend auch flankiert von auf automatischer Spracherkennung basierten Dolmetschsystemen, steht die Translationsindustrie und -praxis vor einer existentiellen Zäsur, die es in diesem Ausmaß noch nicht gegeben hat. Überrumpelung deshalb, weil die Entwicklung hochpotenter Sprachtechnologien von einer profitorientierten Produktions- und Verwertungslogik vorangetrieben wird, und weil sich durch deren ubiquitäre Verwendung und die massenhafte Generierung von synthetischen Translationsprodukten der öffentliche und auch wissenschaftlich differenziertere Blick auf das Translationsgeschehen in radikaler Weise wandeln wird (vgl. Baumgarten 2024). Ebenfalls rückt eine schleichende KI-getriebene ‚Synthetisierung‘ der menschlichen Sprache zunehmend in den Blick der kritischen Forschung (vgl. Hamm 2024).

Neben all diesen mit sehr breiten Pinselstrichen aufgetragenen Langzeitfolgen transformiert sich seit schon einigen Jahren das Berufsbild, das Berufsethos, das Selbstbild und das Außenbild des Übersetzungswesens in erheblicher Weise. In ökonomischer Hinsicht wiederum drücken Maschinisierung, Automatisierung und veränderte Workflows die Produktions- und Servicekosten und somit den Tauschwert der erzielten Translate in bisher ungekannte Tiefen (Sandrini 2017: 146f.; do Carmo 2020: 51; Baumgarten 2024: 175). Letztlich ist in kultureller Hinsicht noch nicht abzusehen, inwiefern sich das Trainieren von immer mehr, auch kleineren, Sprachenpaaren für die maschinellen Übersetzungssysteme positiv oder negativ auf die globale Sprachenvielfalt auswirkt. Helm et al. (2024: 12) plädieren in diesem Zusammenhang für eine deutlich gerechtere globale Verteilung sprachlicher Datenressourcen, um der Bevorzugung hegemonialer Sprachen entgegenzuwirken. Gleichzeitig betonen sie die Notwendigkeit, sowohl bei Technologieentwicklern als auch in der Zivilgesellschaft ein stärker-

res Bewusstsein für die ‚epistemische Ungerechtigkeit‘ zu schaffen, die dieser Bevorzugung zugrunde liegt und auch letztlich als Fortführung kolonialer Machtstrukturen betrachtet werden kann.

2.3 Ökologische Dimension:

Natur und Translationstechnologie

Die eben erwähnte globale Sprachenvielfalt zählt ja eigentlich auch als eine ökologische Variable. Sie verweist auf die fließenden Übergänge und brüchigen Konturen zwischen Kultur, Gesellschaft und Natur. Mittlerweile gibt es einen recht gediehenen Diskurs zu den Wechselwirkungen zwischen der globalen Ökologie und den Translationstechnologien (vgl. z. B. Cronin 2017, Dasca/Cerarols 2024). Diese ökologische Analyseebene verweist nicht ausschließlich auf die endemische Ausbeutung von Arbeitskräften, den industriellen Extraktivismus bei der Rohstoffgewinnung oder den CO₂-Fußabdruck von digitalen Sprachtechnologien und künstlicher Intelligenz, sondern auch auf eine Sensibilisierung für das Thema einer emergenten „political ecology of translation“ (Cronin 2017: 3). Die Motive und Ziele eines solchen, salopp ausgedrückt, umweltbewussten Forschungsprogramms skizziert Cronin folgendermaßen:

Political ecology draws attention [...] to the infrastructural unconscious of societies, the resource base that allows activities to happen. A political ecology of translation technology must critically evaluate the resource implications of current uses of technology and advance alternative scenarios for the development of the translation cyborg in the age of the Anthropocene. (Cronin 2017: 102)

Ein solches Programm soll, in klassischer soziologischer Manier, das in postmodernen Gesellschaften schlummernde „infrastrukturelle“ kollektive Unbewusste in das Licht einer kriti-

schen Betrachtung rücken. Zunächst hat die technologische Kolonisierung der Welt der Menschheit das fragwürdige Alleinstellungsmerkmal Anthropozän beschert, denn im hiesigen ‚Zeitalter des Menschen‘ greift eine einzige Lebensform unter unzähligen anderen – einmalig in der Weltgeschichte – bewusst und unbewusst ein in die geophysikalischen und biologischen Grundlagen des Planeten. Zweitens, vor dem Hintergrund schwindender natürlicher Ressourcen bedarf es einer Neuausrichtung im Sinne einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung und Verwendung von Technologien. Für die technologiegesättigte transkulturelle Kommunikation bedeutet dies die Beförderung einer alternativ ausgerichteten Mensch-Maschine-Interaktion, *idealerweise* anhand einer hocheffizienten „translator-machine interaction“ (Ramírez-Polo/Vargas-Sierra 2023: 4). In diesem Zusammenhang ist Cronin’s *cyborg translator* nicht als bloße Metapher fehlzudeuten, denn die graduelle Verschmelzung des Naturwesens Mensch mit der (Translations-)Technologie ist nicht erst seit Donna Haraways (1991) wegweisenden Schriften, auf die sich auch Cronin eingehend bezieht, auf dem stetigen Vormarsch.

3 Translation, Technokapitalismus und Kritische Theorie

Die Idee eines Übersetzungs- oder gar Dolmetschcyborgs mag für die Verfechter*innen transhumanistischer Phantasmen attraktiv klingen. In den letzten Jahren hat sich der Transhumanismus zu einer veritablen ideologischen Bewegung entwickelt, deren Vordenker*innen tatsächlich an die unmittelbar bevorstehende Optimierung menschlicher Kräfte und Sinnesindrücke glauben (vgl. Spreen et al. 2018). Eine optimierte humanoide Translationsmaschine wäre also ein Translations-Cyborg, ein kybernetisch-organisches Mischwesen, das in der

Lage ist fremdsprachige Kommunikationen in höchster Qualität zu übersetzen und zu dolmetschen, ganz egal um welchen Skopos es sich jeweils handelt. Die Auferstehung solcher Cyborgs mag bald nicht mehr lediglich als narratives Beiwerk von Science Fiction-Szenarios dienen, auch wenn sich zur nächsten Entwicklungsstufe wohl noch ein langer und steiniger Weg auftut: zu humanoiden Kommunikationsrobotern wie z. B. C3-PO aus dem Star Wars-Universum, der über sechs Millionen Sprachen beherrscht. Eine umfassende gesamtgesellschaftliche Analyse von Translationstechnologien darf sich natürlich nicht an fiktiven Szenarien aufreiben (vgl. Italiano 2020), doch bieten populäre zukunftsgerichtete Imaginationen eine gute Projektionsfläche für eine tiefschürfende ideologische und sozioökonomische – nicht nur an der gesellschaftlichen Oberfläche verharrende – Kritik.

Die Erarbeitung einer breit angelegten kritischen Betrachtung von Translationstechnologie im Rahmen einer konsequentialistischen Ethik, welche die Wechselwirkungen zwischen Technologie, Natur und Kultur aushandelt, bedarf eines soliden sozial- und kulturtheoretischen Erkenntnisrahmens. Ungeachtet jedweder erkenntnistheoretischen Umrahmung ist es mittlerweile eine Binsenweisheit, dass sich der eigentliche Ursprung moderner politischer Macht weniger in der Exekutive eines Staates, also im Gewaltmonopol, sondern eher in dessen Wirtschaftskraft manifestiert. Das postmarxistische Konzept des Technokapitalismus führt diesen Gedanken noch einen Schritt weiter, denn hier wird die historische Genese von Technologie mit den Ausbeutungs- und Entfremdungsmechanismen kapitalistischer Lohnarbeit in engster Weise aufeinander bezogen. Der Soziologe Suárez-Villa (2009) bezeichnet den Technokapitalismus als eine neue Spielart einer profit- und wachstumsorientierten Denk- und Handlungsweise, tatsächlich als Vorboten einer entstehenden technokapitalistischen

Zivilisation, in der die Ausbeutung technologischer Kreativität seitens weniger mächtiger Wirtschaftskonzerne – in der Form eines allmächtigen *corporatism* – eine herausragende Rolle spielt.

Eines der bekanntesten kritischen Forschungsprogramme zu den Auswirkungen von Technologie auf Natur, Kultur und Gesellschaft ist die *Critical Theory of Technology* des US-amerikanischen Technikphilosophen Andrew Feenberg (2002). Vereinfacht dargelegt, handelt es sich zunächst um eine Kritik des sogenannten Technikdeterminismus, dessen Anhänger*innen – leider ein Großteil der Menschheit – technologische Artefakte nur als ein Mittel zum jeweiligen Zweck betrachten. Gemäß dieser großteils unbewusst applizierten Denkweise ist Technologie gesellschaftlich neutral und hat somit einen rein funktionalen Nutzwert. Der Technikdeterminismus ist aber nur ein Aspekt einer noch weitreichenderen Problemlage, und zwar der nach Max Horkheimer (1985: 13) betitelten „instrumentellen Vernunft“. Diese Art des Denkens und Handelns scheint seit der Aufklärung und der damit einhergehenden industriellen Revolution im 19. Jahrhundert, zumindest in den westlichen Zivilisationen, eine sehr dominante Stellung eingenommen zu haben. Eine von instrumentell-rationaler Vernunft durchdrungene Zivilisation birgt aber die große Gefahr einer ebenso technologisch-rationalen Lebens-, Produktions- und Konsumptionsweise, wie Horkheimer und Adorno gleich zu Beginn ihrer einflussreichen, unter dem Eindruck des industriellen Massenmordens im zweiten Weltkrieg geschriebenen *Dialektik der Aufklärung* konstatieren:

Seit je hat Aufklärung im umfassendsten Sinn fortschreitenden Denkens das Ziel verfolgt, von den Menschen die Furcht zu nehmen und sie als Herren einzusetzen. Aber die vollends aufgeklärte Erde strahlt im Zeichen triumphalen Unheils. Das Programm der Aufklärung war die Entzauberung der Welt. Sie wollte die Mythen auflösen und Einbildung durch Wissen stürzen. (Horkheimer/Adorno 1947: 13)

Wie lässt sich aber nun das industriell-maschinelle Übersetzen innerhalb einer technokapitalistischen Gegenwart lokalisieren – in einer Gegenwart, die von instrumenteller Vernunft und einer ideologischen Haltung durchdrungen ist, die Technologie als ‚asozial‘, also als neutral betrachtet?

Realiter muss zunächst festgehalten werden, dass Globalisierung und Digitalisierung einen weltweit steigenden Bedarf an Translationsdienstleistungen nach sich ziehen. Das globale Volumen an Übersetzungen steigt stetig, während in zunehmend mehrsprachigen Gesellschaften auch ein Aufwärtstrend bei Dolmetschdiensten zu beobachten ist (vgl. Nimdzi 2024: 42). Man könnte also vermuten, dass wir immer mehr Übersetzer*innen und Dolmetscher*innen brauchen. Da jedoch die Qualität von maschinenübersetzten Texten ebenfalls steigt, allein aufgrund des Zwangs zu Schnelligkeit, Effizienz und Produktivität (vgl. Baumgarten/Bourgadel 2024: 519–520), wird sich in Zukunft wohl ‚die Maschine‘ die meisten Übersetzungsaufträge sichern. Heutige und zukünftige Translator*innen sollen technikaffin, effizient, schnell und produktiv sein, und sie sollen neuartige professionelle und technologische Kompetenzen aufweisen. Ralph Krüger (2018: 122) spricht vor dem Hintergrund des „digitalisierten und datafizierten“ Übersetzens von einer MÜ-relevanten „Textrezeptionskompetenz“, „Textselektionskompetenz“ und einer „Textadaptions-/ -optimierungskompetenz“. Insgesamt betrachtet, ist das Übersetzen eine eminent wichtige, gesellschaftlich verantwortliche und ethisch sensible Tätigkeit, und dies gilt für alle zu übersetzenden Texte, also für alle Textsorten. Dieser hohen Verantwortlichkeit wird die rasante Automatisierung des Übersetzens in keinsten Weise gerecht. Wir verfügen zwar über umfassendes Wissen zu den architektonischen Grundlagen und technischen Funktionsprinzipien neuronaler Übersetzungssysteme, doch werden ideologisch und soziolinguistisch relevante Fragen,

z. B. hinsichtlich der Herkunft, Legitimität und Verbreitung von Sprachdaten, kaum gestellt. Wie gestalten sich denn bspw. die ideologischen Hintergründe, die rechtlich-institutionellen Zusammenhänge, oder die politischen Zwänge im Kontext der Entwicklung und des Designs neuer Translationssysteme? Welche Personen sind involviert, wer profitiert am meisten?

Minako O'Hagan (2016) stützt sich in einer empirischen Studie zur Translationstechnologie auf Andrew Feenbergs technokritischen Ansatz, insbesondere um auf eine demokratischere Ausrichtung neuer Translationstechnologien hinzuweisen. Gegenstand ihrer Ausführungen ist die Tätigkeit von Crowd-Übersetzer*innen auf Wikipedia und Facebook, wobei O'Hagan das Phänomen der Crowd-Translation – also die Mitarbeit mehrerer Translator*innen an einem großen Auftrag oder mehreren Aufträgen – unter dem potentiell emanzipatorischen Begriff einer „massively open translation“ subsumiert, den sie wiederum ethisch einordnet als eine Art „new technical feasibility to afford a translation activity that is open to participants on a massive scale“ (ibid.: 932). Gemäß der *Critical Theory of Technology* ist der entscheidende gesellschaftlich und somit ethisch relevante Faktor beim Design und Nutzen von Technologie der *technical code*. Feenberg beschreibt diese Theorie im Kontext unserer gegenwärtigen, sagen wir, kapitalistischen Grundordnung folgendermaßen:

Capitalist social and technical requirements are condensed in a “technological rationality” or a “regime of truth” that brings the construction and interpretation of technical systems into conformity with the requirements of a system of domination. I will call this phenomenon the social code of technology or, more briefly, the *technical code* of capitalism. *Capitalist hegemony, on this account, is an effect of its code.* (Feenberg 2002: 76; Hervorh.: S. B.)

Der *technical code* bezeichnet also grundlegende – jedoch unhinterfragte – kulturelle und ideologische Annahmen beim Design und der Verwendung von Technologie. Der Umgang mit

Technologie ist aus diesem Blickwinkel nicht ausschließlich zweckgerichtet, sondern steht in einer direkten Kausalität zum herrschenden gesellschaftlichen Wertesystem, in unserem Fall also zum kapitalistischen Wertesystem. Bezogen auf O'Hagans Studie erscheint es nun als offensichtlich, wenn sie die Crowd-Translation bei Facebook – im Gegensatz zu Wikipedia – als undemokratisch betrachtet, denn „despite the apparent freedom and democratic decisions regarding translation given to user-translators in the case of Facebook, the technical code suggests the deliberate restriction on such authority, in contrast to Wikipedia translation“ (O'Hagan 2016: 943). O'Hagans Interpretation des *technical code* unterliegt die – wohlgemerkt unausgesprochene – Annahme, dass kapitalistisches, also profitorientiertes Streben, nicht mit einem demokratischen Ethos vereinbar sei. Aber ihre Interpretation greift zu kurz. Jegliche Technologiekritik muss nämlich gleichzeitig als immanente Hegemoniekritik fungieren, also als eine Kritik internalisierter und somit unsichtbarer Herrschaft. Nur dann kann Kritik den Kern des Problems an der Wurzel packen, der nicht nur in den jeweiligen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen und ideologischen Grundannahmen begründet liegt. Nicht allein die Abwesenheit von demokratischen Entscheidungsprozessen beim Design und der Entwicklung von Technologie verhindert das Aufkommen von ethisch vertretbaren Übersetzungspraktiken, wie am Beispiel von Facebook, sondern vielmehr müsste der unhinterfragte quasi-Zwang zum instrumentell vernünftigen Denken und Handeln – innerhalb des auf Warenproduktion und Warenkonsum ausgerichteten kapitalistischen Herrschaftssystems – einer eingehenden ideologischen Kritik unterzogen werden.

4 Translation, Posthumanismus und Anthropozän

Die grundsätzliche Triebfeder von sozialer und kritischer Theorie, wie bisweilen hoffentlich deutlich wurde, besteht darin, unhinterfragte Grundannahmen und Überzeugungen ans Tageslicht zu rücken. Die Kritische Theorie diagnostiziert darüber hinaus eine quasi-Verselbständigung des instrumentellen Denkens – grob gesehen seit der Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert – also eines primär auf Nutzen und Effekt ausgerichteten Denkens und in der Folge Handelns. Der historische Siegeszug der liberalen Ideologie (vgl. Fukuyama 1992), inklusive des Glaubens an das unendliche Wachstum von Märkten, hat zu einer zunehmenden Verdinglichung sozialer Beziehungen geführt. Wir Menschen sehen uns in unseren täglichen – auch intimen – Beziehungen zunehmend als austauschbare Ware (vgl. Honneth 2015: *passim*). Der heutige globalisierte Neoliberalismus kokettiert zudem mit einer künstlichen Trennung von politischer und wirtschaftlicher Macht, wobei augenscheinlich Politik und Wirtschaft oder auch Kultur und Wirtschaft lediglich zwei Seiten derselben Medaille darstellen. Besonders problematisch hierbei: Grundlegende Fragen sozioökonomischer Ungleichheit fristen ein politisch-diskursives und akademisches Schattendasein. Die sozioökonomische Ungleichheit ist ein wichtiges Thema in der Translationswissenschaft, besonders hinsichtlich der ungleichen Behandlung und Anerkennung translatorischer Tätigkeiten im Vergleich zu anderen text-generierenden Berufen. Zentrale Problemlagen wie soziale und wirtschaftliche Ungleichheit muss die Translationswissenschaft jedoch vor dem Hintergrund technokapitalistischer Verselbständigungsprozesse betrachten, die sich in neue Formen von Herrschaft und Unterdrückung umwandeln. Was

ist aber nun mit „technokapitalistischer Verselbständigung“ gemeint?

Die permanenten ökonomischen und gesellschaftlichen Krisen, die gemäß Naomi Kleins (2007) fast verschwörungstechnisch anmutender Theorie seitens neoliberaler Entscheidungsträger*innen angeblich bewusst als eine Art ‚Schockstrategie‘ herbeigeführt werden, repräsentieren nichtsdestotrotz dauerhafte existentielle Bedrohungen. Diese Krisen werden heute noch getoppt von der allgegenwärtigen Klimakrise. Nun sehen wir uns nicht mehr nur den Herausforderungen einer technokapitalistischen Hegemonie und ungleicher sozioökonomischer Machtverhältnisse ausgesetzt. Wir haben es mit einem viel größeren Dilemma zu tun. Wir haben es fertiggebracht – als einzige Spezies bisher auf diesem Planeten – in die Geologie und Biodiversität der Welt einzugreifen, und dies natürlich mit tatkräftiger Unterstützung von Technik und Technologie. Somit haben wir einen Klimawandel herbeigeführt. Aufgrund dieser Tatsache etablierte sich der Begriff des Anthropozäns, der das Zeitalter des Anthropos – das Zeitalter des Menschen – einläutet und semantisch fixiert. Im Kompetenzbereich der Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften liegt natürlich weniger die schwindende Biodiversität als die zeitgleich dahinschwindende kulturelle und sprachliche Diversität (vgl. Bauer 2018). Auch für die translationswissenschaftliche Forschung wird es immer bedeutender, sich für die Bewahrung von Menschenrechten, Sprachen und Kulturen einzusetzen. Vor kurzem erschien eine hochinteressante und auf gründlicher Feldforschung basierende Studie zur Sprach- und Kulturmittlung zwischen dem indigenen Volk der Waorani in Ecuador, deren Territorium in einem der drei artenreichsten Gebiete der Welt liegt, sowie staatlichen und wirtschaftlichen Akteur*innen. Christina Koraks Studie verdeutlicht den ungleichen Kampf und die Ohnmacht einer indigenen Gemeinschaft im Ange-

sicht einer – in diesem Fall mit neo-missionarischem Eifertum verknüpfte – globalen Ausbeutungsmaschinerie:

Sprache, Translation und indigene Rechte können nicht isoliert von ökonomischen und politischen Interessen in Amazonien und im Territorium der Waorani betrachtet werden. Zwar hat sich mit dem starken Auftreten indigener Bewegungen auch der mehrheitsgesellschaftliche Blick auf die Waorani verändert und sie gelten zumindest auf dem Papier als Bürger:innen mit dementsprechend verbrieften Rechten. Das staatliche Interesse an ihrem Territorium wandelte sich von Amazonien als Brachland jedoch zu einer im neoliberalen aggressiven Extraktivismus auszubeutenden Ressource... [...] Hinsichtlich der fundamentalen Rolle, die Translation für erzwungene Kontaktierung und darauffolgende Evangelisierungsmaßnahmen beispielsweise durch Bibelübersetzungen spielt, erscheint es angezeigt, auch sprachliche Handlungen, die einen Ethnozid bewirken, in eine umfassendere strafrechtliche Charakterisierung einzuschließen. (Korak 2024: 86–87)

Die tendenziell genozidal motivierte Zerstörung von kultureller und sprachlicher Vielfalt ist in letzter Instanz auch auf die Technikentwicklung zurückzuführen, bspw. bezüglich der aggressiv durchgesetzten Holz- und Erdölförderung in den Waorani-Gebieten. Eine konsequentialistische Ethik der Translationstechnologie eruiert in diesem Sinne die Gesamtheit individueller, soziokultureller, ideologischer und materieller Interessenlagen.

Parallel zur Begriffsgenese des Anthropozäns hat sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten ein neues philosophisches und wissenschaftstheoretisches Paradigma unter der Bezeichnung Posthumanismus herausgebildet. „Parallel dazu“, weil sich ein posthumanistischer Diskurs aufgrund der Klimaproblematik und der fortgeschrittenen techno-wissenschaftlichen Rationalisierung unserer Lebenswelt (vgl. Pellizoni/Ylönen 2012) ebenfalls allmählich herauskristallisiert hat. Auch wenn ich nicht mit allen Prämissen des Posthumanismus ganz *d'accord* gehe – z. B. dessen schon fast erotisierte Technologiebejahung – so ist posthumanistisches Denken doch eine Art ‚vernünftiges‘ Ge-

genstück zu den tolldreisten Phantasmen transhumanistischen Optimierungswahns. Laut Rosi Braidotti impliziert kritisches posthumanistisches Denken

den Abschied von einigen Grundprämissen der Aufklärung [...], nämlich vom Fortschreiten der Menschheit durch einen selbstregulierenden, teleologisch angelegten Gebrauch der Vernunft und von der säkularen wissenschaftlichen Rationalität, die auf die Perfektionierung ‚des‘ Menschen angelegt ist. (Braidotti 2014: 50)

Demnach steht der Posthumanismus mit den Prämissen Kritischer Theorie im Einklang, hält jedoch eine gewisse Distanz zu marxistischen Grundpositionen wie bspw. die vom Marxismus postulierte Entfremdung der Arbeit und Verdinglichung der sozialen Beziehungen innerhalb kapitalistischer Gesellschaften. Was die geologisch motivierte Semantik der Epoche des Anthropozäns betrifft, so tut sich hier eine semantische Kluft auf zu dem explizit propagierten Post-Anthropozentrismus eines posthumanistischen Selbstverständnisses. Zum einen geriert sich das Anthropozän als ein von Menschen für Menschen im Kampf gegen die Natur – im Sinne von Hannah Arendt (1960: 18–21) – in permanenter Herstellung befindliches Phänomen. Überdies generiert das neoliberale Anthropozän für die Menschen eine illusionäre Scheinwelt, deren ideologische Strukturen – diesmal im Sinne von Slavoj Žižek (1989/2021) – sich als unbewusste, meist unerreichbare Phantasmen manifestieren, in der sich Sein und Anschein unentwirrbar miteinander verknäueln. Der Posthumanismus hingegen reduziert den Menschen in erster Instanz zu einem mit dem technologisch Anderen sich langsam verschmelzenden biokybernetischen Hybridwesen. Anhand dieser Denkfigur – und mit dem Gedanken einer noch umzuschreibenden Translationstheorie – konstruiert Mark O’Thomas eine direkte Verbindungslinie zwischen neuen Machtkonstellationen, Technologie und Wissenschaftsgeschichte:

With the onward march of technology to puncture what remains of the Cartesian coupling of mind and body, the prospect of a transhuman or posthuman world posits opportunities for new forms of power to emerge, including and moving beyond the contemporary discourses of biopower and biopolitics. The ways in which translation theory constructively engages with these discourses will help shape the ways in which we think about and question our understanding of its processes as well as how we will come to define “translation” itself in the future. (O’Thomas 2017: 285)

Der Posthumanismus zelebriert eine explizit positive Einstellung zu Technologie und Wissenschaft. In einem im letzten Sommer erschienenen Beitrag zur Mensch-Maschine-Interaktion in der *Translation* schlussfolgert Sharon O’Brien, wir sollten uns in erster Linie auf die jeweiligen Vorzüge menschlicher und maschineller Translation fokussieren, insbesondere auf eine für Mensch und Maschine gelungene Interaktion, denn

[i]n a human-centered augmented translation paradigm, the machine is neither mean nor meek and we have no need of antagonistic dualisms. [...] Accepting the narrowing of relationships between human and machine is a challenge for those in the world of translation, whether that be the academic discipline of translation studies or the commercial translation profession. The HCAI [human-centred artificial intelligence] focus on intelligence amplification (IA) rather than on replacement of human ability, on a move from emulation to empowerment, is pointing the way forward. (O’Brien 2023: 403)

O’Briens pragmatische Argumentation unter Zuhilfenahme eines allseits bekannten Ermächtigungs- oder Empowerment-Diskurses mag uns versöhnlich stimmen und Hoffnung schüren, führt jedoch an denjenigen kritischen Fragen weit vorbei, denen sich eine rigoros argumentierende konsequentialistische Ethik stellen muss. Zum Beispiel, welche ideologischen Haltungen und diskursiven Rede- und Schreibweisen, in anderen Worten, welche Fortschritts- und Technologiediskurse be- und verhindern denn eigentlich das so oft herbeigesehnte Empowerment der Menschen im Allgemeinen und der Transla-

tionsgemeinschaft im Speziellen? Dies führt uns wiederum zu der – wenn wir O’Brien zustimmen, vielleicht ja wirklich ärgerlichen – aber trotzdem leider zu oft ignorierten Dichotomie von Herrschaft und Unterdrückung, denn welche unterliegenden und gleichzeitig übergreifenden Machtverhältnisse bestimmen das Schicksal der Translationstechnologien der Gegenwart und der Zukunft?

5 Ausblick

Dieser Beitrag hat sich einem noch im Entstehen begriffenen Forschungsanliegen gewidmet, einer breit angelegten gesamtgesellschaftlichen Kritik der Translationstechnologie. Kritik und Ethik gehen Hand in Hand, weshalb sich meines Erachtens eine konsequentialistische Ethik, welche die netzwerkförmigen und langzeitlichen Folgen von Translationstechnologien kritisch in den Blick nimmt, für ein solches Unterfangen anbietet. In diesem Zusammenhang habe ich eingehend erörtert, dass Translationstechnologien sowie neue Arbeitsverhältnisse und Arbeitsweisen für Translator*innen erhebliche Wechselwirkungen in kultureller, gesellschaftlicher, wirtschaftlicher und (sozio-)psychologischer Hinsicht nach sich ziehen. Eine konsequentialistische Ethik und Kritik kann sich nur vor dem Hintergrund grundlegender erkenntnistheoretischer Fragen entfalten. Um nur drei zu nennen: Welchen unhinterfragten Grundannahmen liegt die Entwicklung und Verwendung von Translationstechnologien zugrunde? Welchem dominanten Denkstil liegen wiederum diese Grundannahmen zugrunde? In welchem ideologisch-wissenschaftlichen Paradigma lassen sich diese Grundannahmen mehr oder weniger einordnen? Zu diesen epistemischen Fragen gesellen sich dann die eher bodenständigen praxisorientierten Überlegungen im Kontext der Technologieentwicklung insgesamt, bspw. hinsichtlich des

dringenden Abbaus der heute noch größtenteils extraktivistisch agierenden industriellen Produktion, im Einklang mit dem dringenden Desiderat einer demokratischen, fairen und ökologisch nachhaltigen Technologiegestaltung. Darüber hinaus gilt es, die Auswirkungen auf verschiedene Translationsformen genauer zu untersuchen. Hier bieten sich zahlreiche Konstellationen und Vergleiche an, wie etwa zwischen menschlichem, hybridem und maschinellm Übersetzen oder zwischen Literatur- und Fachübersetzen sowie audiovisuellem Übersetzen und Dolmetschen. An dieser Stelle vollendet sich der Kreis zumindest teilweise in theoretischer Hinsicht mit einem Zitat von Michael Cronin, der seine Idee einer politischen Ökologie der Translation folgendermaßen schildert:

In a political ecology of translation, the machine must be crafted so as to allow for the flourishing of a digital connoisseurship that will make for the most transformative and least harmful use of human and non-human resources in translation. [...] [T]he race that now needs to be won is not so much the race against the machine as against the time of resource exhaustion and cultural depletion. Otherwise, things will indeed go terribly wrong. (Cronin 2017: 119)

Cronins Hoffnung auf ein ökologisch nachhaltiges Miteinander von Mensch, Gesellschaft und Translationstechnologie mag zuversichtlich stimmen. Zudem umgeht er geschickt das zahnlose – von vielen Translationswissenschaftler*innen angeführte – Argument der Selbstermächtigung, welches eher die eigene politische Ohnmacht als eine Anleitung zu selbstbestimmtem Handeln offenbart. Ein solches selbstbestimmtes Handeln erscheint jedoch erst dann zumindest ansatzweise als real gegeben, wenn sich ein Bewusstsein technologischer Langzeitfolgen – im Sinne einer konsequentialistischen planetarischen Ethik – bei den meisten Menschen durchgesetzt hat. Ob dies dann die endgültige Schließung des Kreises, oder eher dessen Quadratur bedeutet, werde Leser*innen, überlasse ich Ihrer eigenen Vorstellungskraft.

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From an “Experience of the Foreign” to an Experience of Alienation? Translating in the Age of AI

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Abstract: This article explores the hermeneutic and ethical dimensions of translation in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). Drawing on Antoine Berman’s concept of the “experience/trial of the foreign,” which conceptualises translation as an ethical and hermeneutic practice, the article examines how AI-assisted translation transforms the experience of translation and the encounter with the foreign. From the professional translator’s perspective, AI translation not only engenders alienation from the product of their labour in the Marxist sense but also introduces an alienation caused by the prior appropriation of foreign-language text content by AI systems. Translators must therefore return to the original text and reconsider it through the “lens” of AI-generated text. This fundamentally alters the translation experience and is likely to reshape the relationship between languages and cultures.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Antoine Berman, Translation, Ethics, Hermeneutics.

1 Introduction

For some time now, the *technological turn* has been proclaimed in Translation Studies and the thesis has even been put forward that “technology can now be considered as the connective tissue of the discipline” (Jiménez-Crespo 2020: 328). The rapid development of translation technologies has led to an increased focus on the nature of translation as a technical process and to in-depth research into the interactions between translators and machines from the perspective of their convergences and divergences, i.e. a more or less ‘successful’ agency of humans and machines.

In this context, it has long been pointed out that the boom in translation technology—which with artificial intelligence (AI) is producing new types of actors who are committed to a technical principle of rationality¹—potentially strengthens the agency status of ‘computer agents’ and reduces that of the human actors. As translation technology appears to be increasingly replacing the central role of the human translator, the following challenge for Translation Studies that arose with the neural turn of machine translation is gaining new momentum:

This emergent practice is potentially challenging both for translators and translation scholars, as embracing the full potential of machine-

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- 1 To summarise Russell/Norvig, AI aims to develop “rational agents”: “An *agent* is just something that acts (agent comes from the Latin *agere*, to do). But computer agents are expected to have other attributes that distinguish them from mere “programs” such as operating under autonomous control, perceiving their environment, persisting over a prolonged time period, adapting to change, and being capable of taking on another’s goals. A rational agent is one that acts so as to achieve the best outcome or, when there is uncertainty, the best expected outcome” (Russell/Norvig 1995/2003: 4). We are therefore faced with a competitive or convergent relationship at the level of the actor. This makes it difficult to speak of AI as a ‘tool’ for translation.

driven translation seems to require a rethinking of human agency, and the understanding of translation as a predominantly human endeavour can be difficult to let go. [...] The issue of human versus machinic agency is thus a crucial question for contemporary Translation Studies, and we urgently need to enhance our understanding of translator-computer interaction. (Ruokonen/Koskinen 2017: 310f.)

The revolutionary upheavals outlined above were often described as experiences of crisis at the level of the actors, especially as they fundamentally challenge not only the practice but also the self-image of translators.² In addition to economic, cognitive, psychological, social, political and methodological questions, they also raise the problem of the experience of translation in its hermeneutical and ethical implications, not only because—as we have seen—they call into question an understanding of translation that is characterised by the translator’s autonomy and agency, but also by a specific (ideal) conception of the cultural relationship established through translation: an experience of translation that is open and dialogical, that expresses, in other words, an ethical relationship to the ‘foreign.’

In this article, we want to look at this experience of translation in its actor-orientated, hermeneutic and, above all, ethical dimensions in the age of AI. Our aim is to present reflections on the changing experience of translation in the ethical context outlined above, which we believe will result from the boom in AI-driven translation practice. These considerations are based on the following observation: Instead of a direct encounter with the foreign language text and the associated culture, AI-assisted translation initially centres on the product of an invisible, intangible ‘agent.’ A text in the target language that is al-

2 As early as 2013, Cronin, for example, speaks of a “sense of confusion” (2013: 1) as the prevailing state of mind of translators in the digital age.

ready more or less perfectly or adequately formulated (but in need of revision). From the professional translator's perspective, this not only manifests an alienation from the product of their labour in a Marxian sense, but also an alienation caused by the upstream appropriation of the foreign-language text content by the AI. Translators must therefore go back to the original text and look at it again, but with the premise that this is done through the 'lens' of the AI-generated text. This has consequences that are likely not only to fundamentally transform the experience of translation, but also, as will be seen, to change the ethical relationship between languages and cultures.

Rather than being based on an empirical study, this article represents an attempt to connect the poles of (non-theoretical) practice on the one hand and (non-practical) theory on the other. Providing reflections on translation in the digital age, it draws its theoretical framework from a time long before the current boom of generative AI models such as ChatGPT, but in which the effects of translation memory tools were already being discussed vigorously and controversially.

The next chapter (ch. 2) explores the theoretical premises, by firstly examining the *traductive* debate on the impact of machine translation tools on translation, and subsequently Berman's concept of the "experience/trial of the foreign." Chapter 3 will present reflections on the transformation of this experience, exploring its impact on the ethics and practice of translation, and the related network of relationships between languages and cultures.

2 Technologisation, Translatability, and the "Experience of the Foreign"

The theoretical framework underpinning the phenomenon of alienation, as previously delineated, finds its roots in the semi-

nal work on Translation Studies by the French philosopher and translator Antoine Berman during the 1980s. Berman's theoretical approach to translation is founded on a hermeneutic and actor-oriented paradigm. One of the central aspects of his understanding of translation is the idea that translation embodies a fundamentally existential experience and confrontation with the source text, the source language and culture, which, in Berman's words, creates an *experience of the foreign*, according to the title of his most important study *L'Épreuve de l'étranger* (1984), which made him one of the most influential figures in the history and theory of translation in the 20th century.³ As such, it is both a hermeneutic and an ethical practice, because in Berman's view this experience cannot or must not be a pure appropriation of the foreign, but rather contains a decentralising and dialogical component.

Although Berman draws his theory of an ethics of translation from his preoccupation with the translation reflections of German Romanticism, his gaze is directed towards a present of translation—a present that is, and this was already apparent in the 1980s, characterised by an unstoppable technologisation that fundamentally endangers translation in its existential dimension as an *épreuve*. If we assume that AI is based on an ideology of fundamental, universal translatability or creates such translatability with technical means (which ultimately only re-

3 Venuti's seminal study *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation* (1995) played a pivotal role in the reception of Berman's ideas and œuvre. The distinction between *domestication* and *foreignisation*, omnipresent in modern Translation Studies, and the equally omnipresent criticism of an ethnocentric translation practice can be traced back in important parts to Berman's reception of Schleiermacher and German Romanticism. In his thinking Berman focussed in particular on literary translation or, to put it more generally, the translation of "works". The concepts of "*own*" and "*foreign*" used in this context are not fixed, antagonistic categories, but rather elements of a mutual dialogue.

quires human intervention in the sense of post-editing), then any “experience of the foreign” seems to become more difficult or impossible.⁴ This may be true at first glance, but the problem lies deeper: in our view, it is rather the experience of difference that changes in character, because it no longer marks the beginning of the translational dialogue but is retroactively constructed into a pre-translated text in the process of post-editing. Drawing upon Berman’s conceptualisation of translation, our objective is to undertake a more thorough examination of this dual experience below.

2.1 Traductique vs. Traductologie

First of all, however, it should be mentioned that Berman himself has repeatedly dealt with machine translation—with what the French neologism “traductique,” a composite of “traduction” (translation) and “informatique” (computer science), which emerged in the 1980s, refers to. This is not the place to analyse this debate in detail.⁵ Here we see that *traductique* “ne désigne pas simplement l’application de l’informatique à la traduction inter-langues” (Berman, as quoted in Talbot 2023: 26),

4 In this respect, an examination of translation history can provide valuable insights into the ideologies and debates surrounding translation in the digital age. This perspective reveals that these debates are not as novel as they may initially appear, but rather, they are to a certain extent historically ‘prefigured.’

5 The emergence of the term *traductique* and the debates surrounding this neologism in Translation Studies have been analysed by Aurélien Talbot (2023) in an article which we largely follow in this chapter. Due to the unavailability of the special issue of the journal *Protée* (“La traductique,” 1987, 15/2), a central contribution to the *traductique* debate, important quotations from articles of the aforementioned issue are also drawn from Talbot. According to the author, the term is best rendered in English as “translation technology” (2023: 28).

but “le ‘savoir technico-scientifique’ sur la traduction, par opposition à la traductologie qui en est le ‘savoir philosophique’” (Annie Brisset, as quoted in Talbot 2023: 24) Translation Studies in the “proper” sense—*traductologie*—focuses on “la réflexion de la traduction sur elle-même à partir de sa nature d’expérience” (Berman 1999: 17).⁶

As Talbot (2023: 29–30) aptly observes, the distinction between *traductive* and *traductologie* coincides with the fundamental distinction between literary and technical translation that Berman draws from his examination of German Romanticism and, in particular, Friedrich Schleiermacher’s ideas (“On the Different Methods of Translating,” originally published in 1813, translated version cited here from 2020/2021) on the two types and two fields of translation (cf. Berman 1984: 226–242). Whereas in the fields of literature and science—i.e., wherever *works* (“Werke”/“œuvres”) are involved—translation is used, in the fields of business and commerce—i.e., in those areas where communicative goals take centre stage—interpretation is employed (cf. Schleiermacher 2000/2021: 52). According to Berman, literary works focus on “la transmission de l’expérience de l’être-dans-le-monde humain,” whereas specialised texts focus on “la transmission d’informations déterminées” (Berman 1991: 10).⁷ In the first case, language is the

6 In this sense, translation has a profoundly philosophical and reflexive character, as Berman makes clear with reference to a tradition during German Romanticism (the Schlegels, Hölderlin, Schleiermacher, Goethe, Humboldt) as well as to a philosophical tradition (Kant, Hegel, Heidegger), at the centre of which is the reflection of experience and which extends to a more recent tradition, to Rosenzweig and Benjamin, who “pensent la traduction dans le langage philosophique de la réflexion et de l’expérience” (Berman 1999: 17).

7 Although, as Berman recognises, there are in reality many connections between these fields. Berman shows that the aim of literary translation cannot simply be communication, referring to Benjamin’s rhetorical

(expressive) medium of an experience, in the second an instrument of communication (Berman 1991: 10; similarly Berman 1999: 70). Since the transfer of technical language information follows a clear linguistic, discursive and cultural framework of rules, this transfer is particularly suitable for “technologisation” and “informatisation” (Berman 1991: 12). In this case, translation is a largely technical or mechanical act. (*Traductique* is therefore to be understood primarily as the science of specialised translation.⁸) In the case of literature and philosophy, translation is, following Schleiermacher (2000/⁴2021: 52–54), the medium of a deeper and intricate engagement with the foreign work, its form and language, which are inextricably linked, and with its culture of origin. (It is therefore also the medium of a hermeneutic interpretation, which is reserved for works of art). Moreover, the translation of works and of specialised texts respectively obey different imperatives or laws: the literary one obeys the imperative of fidelity (*fidélité* “à la lettre, à la *texture*”), the specialised one that of reliability (*fiabilité*) (Berman 1991: 14).⁹ The distinction between two principles is also of central importance: While specialised translation (expectedly) follows the principle of *communicability*, literary translation, in its quality as a medium for the transmission of experience, is subject to the principle of *traditionality* (in the sense of ‘transmission’):

Si les œuvres langagières, avant d’être de la « littérature », sont des manifestations d’expérience, la tâche de leur traduction est d’assurer la transmission interlinguistique de ces manifestations et, ce faisant, d’assurer leur « vie continuée ». Cette transmission, si elle veut être « fidèle

question of what a poem is supposed to say/express and what it actually communicates (Berman 1999: 73).

- 8 In the current era of AI, an increasing number of researchers are exploring the impact of machine translation on literary translation (cf. Rothwell et al. 2024).
- 9 Unless otherwise indicated, emphasis is taken from the original.

le », est une transmission du tissu langagier qui, toujours, est la réalité d’une œuvre. *Traduire, c’est donc transmettre des formes d’expérience*. Mais la transmission des formes d’expérience, c’est ce qu’on a toujours appelé « la tradition » avant que ce mot n’en vienne à désigner le poids d’un passé figé. La traduction des œuvres, qu’il s’agisse des œuvres du passé ou de celles du présent lointain, est donc *traditionnalisante*. (Berman 1991: 14)

As a reaction to the advancing logic of the expansion of the “univers de la communication technico-scientifique” (Berman 1991: 14), which is increasingly penetrating and jeopardising all areas of translation, including the field of the transmission of works, traditions and experiences, the task of *traductology* must, according to Berman, be the “critique de la raison traductique” (Berman 1989: 678), which should set limits to the advance of technoscience. As Talbot shows, however, Berman’s relationship to *traductique* and the development described is more ambivalent and differentiated than it appears at first glance. For Berman, a successful and fruitful convergence of machine and literary translation is quite conceivable, especially since the new technical possibilities open up new potentials for the literary translator, such as the possibility of systematising and increasing the coherence of translated texts (Berman 1988: 121).¹⁰ Following an appeal by translator Elmar Tophoven—“il vaut mieux relever le défi de l’informatique que de l’ignorer” (Tophoven, as quoted in Talbot 2023: 34)—Berman also recognises the potential applications of machine translation for literary translation. He sees them above all in areas where one would hardly expect them at first glance. Paradoxically, this instrument, which is associated with the destruction of tradition and

10 These include aspects such as increased productivity and efficiency in the areas of editing, documentation, terminology and publishing—aspects that Berman takes from an article by Annie Brisset on Elmar Tophoven (cf. Berman 1988: 121).

the passing on of experience, could prove to be the facilitator of a tradition of translation by equipping it with a memory: “l’un des outils les plus modernes du monde moderne, en dotant la traduction d’une mémoire analytique, pourrait enfin permettre l’émergence d’une *tradition de la traduction*” (Berman 1988: 121). Acting as an archive of translation that allows the process of translation to be documented and thus made transparent, technology could even enable translation to “de devenir, peut-être pour la première fois, pleinement expérience” (ibid.).¹¹ In this sense, machine translation even contributes to the constitution and communication of a history of translation—an “archéologie de la traduction,” as Berman (ibid.) puts it, following Annie Brisset. It thus creates a basis for constituting it as an independent research discipline—a goal to which Berman feels particularly committed.¹²

In any case, this seems to pave the way for placing—in the words of Bernard Stiegler—the link between technology and translation practice at the centre of Translation Studies and for understanding translation not only as an *épreuve de l’étranger*, but also as “l’épreuve de la *techné*” (as quoted in Talbot 2023: 36), even in the field of literary translation.¹³ In Talbot’s words, it could instead be the task of Translation Studies (and a “critique de la raison traductique”) to ask about the possibilities of

11 It provides “la communicabilité d’une expérience gardée en mémoire” (Berman 1988: 122).

12 See above all Berman (1984). He even goes so far as to claim that “la traduction informatiquement assistée est en vérité potentiellement *plus artisanale* que la traduction prétendument ‘traditionnelle’” (Berman 1988: 122).

13 As Cronin (2013: 25) points out, historical distinctions between machine translation and human translation ultimately prove to be problematic on closer inspection, not least due to the inherent reliance of translation on media and technology.

a “sustainable convergence” of translation and computer science, instead of unnecessarily expressing outrage at the excesses of technology.¹⁴

This is not the place to pursue the possibilities and conditions of “successful” or “sustainable convergence” further.¹⁵ Rather, we will continue to ask where the tipping points mentioned in the *traductive* debate might lie that are associated with the increasing technology and the associated industrialisation of translation (cf. Talbot 2023: 36)—tipping points that are capable of fundamentally changing the practice of translation because they deprive translators of their potential for action vis-à-vis technology, imposing their own dominance on them, thereby, on the one hand, plunging translational action “into an aveuglement au moins égal à celui des pseudo-artisans-traducteurs solipsistes du passé” (Berman 1988: 123).¹⁶ At the same time, transcending the “pas technologique” (ibid.) also has an effect on the relationship between languages and cultures because, according to Berman, technology creates a universal translatability that follows a logic of currency convert-

14 “Réinterprétée en ce sens, la ‘critique de la raison traductive’ viserait effectivement à dégager les conditions de possibilité d’une convergence soutenable de la traduction et de l’informatique, tenant compte du fait que la technique peut aussi bien être facteur d’homogénéisation que de diversification, à la fois productrice et destructrice des différences. Dans la mesure où ce qu’on entend par ‘traduction’ et par ‘traducteur’ ne cesse d’évoluer, il ne faut pas s’étonner des évolutions aussi de ce qu’on peut entendre par la réflexion, la théorie ou le ‘savoir de la traduction’” (Talbot 2023: 37).

15 In the empirical study by Ruokonen/Koskinen (2017: 311), “successful convergence” is assessed by “whether the human and machinic agents are seen as convergent and moving in the same direction, or divergent and pulling in different directions.”

16 “[C]onvergent agency is considered positive as long as the human leads” (Ruokonen/Koskinen 2017: 318).

ibility and thus negates linguistic and cultural differences. It is the experiential nature of translation at the actor level and the resulting network of relationships between languages and cultures that Berman has analysed in his studies on translation.

It should be added that, for Berman, this logic of translatability according to economic criteria is by no means exclusively the result of a modern technisation of translation. Rather, he sees it as being rooted in the historical epoch that particularly interested him as a translation historian: the era of (German) Romanticism, in which the foundations for modern translation theory emerged, centred on the “infinite versatility” (Novalis) that makes all arts and disciplines transformable into one another (but pays surprisingly little attention to the concrete act of translation)—a way of thinking about convertibility that, according to Berman, seems to have been taken to extremes with the modern mechanisation of translation. We will return to this aspect below. Before that, however, we need to look at the existential experience at the heart of literary translation.

2.2 Translating as an “Experience” / “Trial of the Foreign”

If, as seen above, the works of literature and science are to be regarded as manifestations of world experiences, this means for Berman: “*Traduire, c’est donc transmettre des formes d’expérience.*” In this respect, it is appropriate to understand and conceptualise translation itself as experience (Berman 1988: 119). Berman draws the essence of this experience from his study of the reflection on translation during the German Romantic period. Fundamental to the “experience of the foreign” in and through translation—a formula that Berman attributes to the German

poet Hölderlin¹⁷—is a shift in meaning that manifests itself in the translation of the word “experience” (“Erfahrung”) as “épreuve” in Berman’s work. The latter term does not refer to an “experience” in the conventional sense, but rather to a “challenge” or “trial”.¹⁸ For Berman, the “experience of the foreign” is therefore always also a touchstone for one’s own and its “practice”—an experience which, as he shows using the example of Hölderlin and his translations of ancient Greek tragedies, faces the resistance of the other language and uses this to transform (even violently) one’s own language through translation (Berman 1984: 250–271).¹⁹

The idea that translations make a certain form of truth claim—and thus have a fundamental ethical dimension—is fundamental to Berman’s hermeneutic and actor-oriented approach, which distinguishes him from the more system-oriented, social-scientific and empirical model of translation history within *Descriptive Translation Studies*. However, a translation that does not face up to the challenge of the foreign and does not communicate this challenge to its readers; that is, in Berman’s words, one that is not open, dialogical and decentralising, is not a translation at all in this sense. It squanders its genuine ethical value; it is pure appropriation. If Berman’s engagement with

17 In reality, however, it originates from a study by Heidegger on Hölderlin’s poem *Andenken*.

18 This alteration in interpretation has now also become widely established in the English-speaking world: While Heyvaert translates the title as “The Experience of the Foreign” (1992), Venuti (2000/42021) renders it as “The Trials of the Foreign” in his *Translation Studies Reader*.

19 According to Heidegger (1981: 115), Hölderlin’s poetry is based on the formula: “Die Erfahrung des Fremden und die Einübung des Eigenen” (“The experience of the foreign and the practice of one’s own”). On the nature of this experience cf. the remarks on Berman’s concept of *pre-translation* below.

the translation reflections of German Romanticism provides him with essential theoretical foundations for translation, his view of early Romanticism (the Jena circle around Novalis and the Schlegels) as well as later Romanticism is not uncritical. Berman sees the limits of Romantic thinking on translation above all in its powerful tendency towards meta-linguistic and metapoetic abstraction, which universalises translation. The core of this thinking is the concept of “infinite versatility” (“*unendliche Versabilität*,” Novalis 1957: 159f.). This concept posits that all forms of art and science are transformable into one another, following a pattern analogous to that of currencies. It thus establishes a general translatability (Berman 1984: 135f.), which detaches itself from translation in the narrower sense, or “translation proper.” For Berman, this tendency towards abstraction is ultimately also the reason why late Romanticism moved away from its original enthusiasm for translation and why the Romantic transformation of natural language into artificial language turned into a cult of untranslatability. On the one hand, we are thus confronted with the paradox that this cult of untranslatability, which is the consequence of an idealisation of individual linguistic differences, ultimately threatens to put an end to the fundamental hermeneutic and ethical quality of the translational endeavour. On the other hand, the early Romantic logic of making poetic form, language and aesthetics absolute not only leads to a loss of contour of the foreign, but also to the paradoxical consequence that any “experience of the foreign” becomes impossible, because ultimately there is or can no longer be anything foreign in the sphere of universal art and language. One might add, and Berman has already recognised this problem, that the current triumph of machine translation seems to lead to a similar result in its own way. From this perspective, machine translation is precisely the form of translation that threatens to destroy or fundamentally

change the experience of the foreign, especially in its existential dimension as *épreuve*, as a challenge from the foreign.

3 From an “Experience of the Foreign” to an Experience of Alienation? Translating in the Age of AI

In Berman’s terms, translation can be described as an experience that is characterised by the linguistic and cultural confrontation with supposed untranslatabilities of a morphological, syntactic and lexical nature. There are countless strategies for dealing with the supposed “loss experience” of translation and with those linguistic and cultural elements of the source language for which there seem to be no or only inadequate equivalents in the target language: Borrowing, paraphrasing, substitution, compensation, etc. (Berman 1984: 302f.).²⁰ These are strategies that have a kind of dialogic, even decentralising force, because, in Schleiermacher’s words, they bring the reader towards the author (and the source culture), but also move the author (and the source culture) towards the reader. In any case, it is a kind of “processus de rencontre intersubjectif” (ibid.: 235), which, however, by no means articulates a harmonious or balanced relationship (for Schleiermacher, an “authentic” translation exists when the first case occurs).

These strategies are characterised by the fact that they create translatability, which can be regarded as a “natural” expression of a relationship between cultures and languages on a textual level:

20 Cf. also Eco’s (2003) famous definition of translation as a negotiation process. For a detailed exposition of the strategies alluded to by Berman, cf. Eco (ibid., chapter 5).

La prétendue intraduisibilité se dissout en traduisibilité sans reste, par le simple recours à des modes de rapports existant naturellement et historiquement entre des langues, mais modulés ici selon les exigences de la traduction d'un *texte*: l'emprunt et la néologie pour le domaine lexical. (Berman 1984: 302)²¹

It should be emphasised that translatability appears here as a product that reflects an experience of differences. (For Berman, the counter-model is an ethnocentric translation that levels out differences, as is the case in the historical current of the French *belles infidèles*). Translation is therefore not transparent. Rather, the different methods of translation, e.g. alienating translation, reflect personal or cultural intentions, e.g. the need to enrich one's own language through the "foreign."

With AI-supported translation, we are usually dealing with a text that has already been (pre-)translated. The translator's main task here is proofreading or post-editing to correct the errors produced by the technology. This means that translators have to go back to the original text, i.e. establish the network of relationships with the original retrospectively. As Berman argues, however, translational reading is more than just editing or hermeneutic reading. Rather, it is a specific form of reading that goes beyond a hermeneutic, i.e. primarily interpretive reading, because it is not in the first place a matter of grasping the literal meaning of a text, but also of uncovering the "système de son écriture" (Berman 1984: 248). It should be emphasised that this "lecture-traduction" is an action that precedes the actual translation. Only through this reading does the translator experience the full foreignness of a work. And only

21 Translation is based on a correspondence between languages, which according to Berman is virtual in nature: "Pour toute langue, on peut postuler une correspondance rigoureuse avec une autre langue, mais à un niveau virtuel" (Berman 1984: 303).

this reading forms the basis for a reading that, with Berman, can be called “critical”:

[L]ire pour traduire [...] c’est opérer une lecture-traduction – une *pré-traduction*. Cette pré-traduction peut apparaître si l’on regarde les mots, les phrases ou les segments de phrases qu’un traducteur a soulignés dans l’ouvrage à traduire *avant* de commencer la traduction proprement dite : non seulement les mots et les passages qu’il ne “comprend” pas (que l’on supposera peu nombreux), mais ceux qui, à la première lecture, posent un problème de traduction à cause de leur grande distance par rapport à la “langue d’arrivée”. On a là les lignes de crête de l’étrangeté de l’œuvre, ou sa ligne de résistance à la traduction. Et cette ligne coïncide en grande partie avec le système original de l’œuvre dans sa langue. De là, est possible une certaine lecture de l’œuvre, qui peut se transformer en lecture “critique”. (Berman 1984: 249)²²

In the context of AI-assisted translation, this “pré-traduction” is transformed into a “post-traduction”: the dialogue with the original largely takes place through the “glasses” of a text pre-translated by the AI, which forces the human translator into the role of a post-editor.²³ The latter is ultimately responsible for processing the machine-pretranslated text, which obeys a communicative, technical logic in which languages and texts are transformed by algorithms through the decomposition of linguistic units into tokens “en réalités a priori traduisibles, conformément aux exigences de communication des technosciences” (Berman, as quoted in Talbot 2023: 27). According to Ber-

22 On the limits of a hermeneutic approach to translation, which dissolves the specificity of translation “en en faisant un cas particulier de processus interprétatif” and which proves incapable “d’aborder, en tant que théorie de la conscience, la dimension inconsciente dans laquelle se jouent les processus linguistiques et donc la traduction” (cf. Berman 1984: 248).

23 This is also the case if translators not only receive a text already translated with the help of AI from an agency for editing, but also if they use the AI themselves and edit their own AI-generated text.

man, this logic is based on convertibility thinking, in which languages are traded and exchanged along the lines of currencies.²⁴

It is the translator's task here to transform such technically generated texts, which from an ontological point of view are still in the stage of an unfinished or artificial, *a priori* translated reality, into an (authentic) "réalité traduisible" or rather "traduite." In other words, the aim is to add "colour" and "depth" to texts that have been produced according to standardised technical procedures and that are perceived, if not necessarily as faulty, then often as "sterile," in other words to breathe "life" into them by making stylistic adjustments or incorporating certain peculiarities of the source text into the translated text.²⁵ For instance, in the process of translating essays into German, the insertion of conjunctions and adverbs (e.g. "sogar," "doch," "überhaupt"/"even, after all, at all") can be appropriate, despite the fact that they do not fulfil any evident function within the sentence and impede the readability of texts. This approach, however, serves to enhance the argumentation. In communicative logic, such filler words often appear to be misplaced and are frequently identified as superfluous by the autocorrect function of word processing programs ("more concise language would be clearer for your reader"). A further characteristic of AI translation from English into German is the prioritisation of the most prevalent syntactic structures. Sentences frequently conform to a predictable paradigm, with

24 It is this notion of convertibility that, in Berman's view, reduces translation to the simple practice of transferring meaning and thus to its communicative function: "Dès que l'on postule cela, la traduction acquiert la minceur d'une humble médiation du sens" (Berman 1984: 299).

25 Not to forget: In many respects, Berman's ideal of translation is based on Schleiermacher's idea of alienating translation.

subject–predicate–object order being a common example. However, the linguistic flexibility characteristic of German sentence structure lends itself to the restructuring of texts, thereby enhancing their dynamism. One may also mention strategies such as the use of neologisms and partial “naturalisation,” for example semi-Francisation of terms in order to convey local colour: “porteño, habitant de Buenos Aires, donne ‘portègne’” (Berman 1984: 302).²⁶ Post-editing therefore turns out to be a kind of difference amplifier: the focus on what is flawed and worthy of revision in the AI translation makes the translators, in a sense, guarantors of difference who endeavour to make the original, its “flavour,” visible in the machine-generated translation. They thus become the guardians of that more or less latent alterity of the original which manifests (is supposed to manifest) itself in the translation and which we generally mean when we speak of a “good” translation or of an “authentic” text. The experience of the difference between the work in the original language and the target-language context which Berman refers to does not come at the beginning here, as already mentioned; it is not the impetus or prelude to the actual translator’s engagement with the text, but rather comes at the end. The production of a text that is more or less different from the AI-generated translation, but has fewer differences compared to the original (one could also say that it is “more faithful”), usually forms the *scopos* of post-editing. Although this is mostly a pragmatic process, there is a danger that, in a kind of radicalisation of the ethical claim (being “faith-

26 The purpose of this article is not to provide empirical evidence on the quality and creativity potential of machine translation and post-editing. Nevertheless, studies such as Guerberof-Arenas/Toral (2020) indicate that increased use of machine translation and diminished human translator intervention leads to less creative and “enjoyable” translations, particularly in the literary domain.

ful” to the original), the translator in his role as defender of alterity appears here as the guarantor of the ideologems against which he is actually fighting: against the “*intraduisible comme valeur*” (Berman 1984: 298).²⁷ This value forms the flip side of the ideology of an *a priori*, universal translatability, which completely relegates translation to the level of solving problems of a technical nature and which is radicalised by the technisation and automation of translation.

The automation of translation by AI could therefore paradoxically lead to linguistic and cultural differences (the reluctance of the original) being overemphasised on the one hand and levelled out on the other. The general translatability and the emphasis on differences are to a certain extent the “enemies” of the previously described translational engagement with the foreign and thus also of ethical translation practice, which creates a dialogical, “natural” connection between languages and works. Metaphorically and pointedly speaking, the translator is transformed from a bridge builder into someone who has to tear down the technologically constructed bridge (at least partially) or repair its cracks and gaps.²⁸ The dialogical and decentring relational space that, according to Berman, characterises “authentic” translation and enables the experi-

27 There is a danger that AI-generated translation will activate the dictum of untranslatability that is deeply rooted in cultural discourse, according to which “[l]’essentiel d’un texte n’est pas traduisible” (Berman 1984: 298).

28 As can be seen in the age of nation-building, translation has always had a border-building effect between languages, cultures and nations. Nevertheless, there is a danger that this function will lose cultural significance between the ideological poles of general translatability and untranslatability, and that the deeper cultural meaning of defining borders—namely to sharpen the contours of the familiar through the foreign—can hardly be honoured anymore, because a resonant relationship between the familiar and the foreign seems less and less possible.

ence of the foreign outlined above cannot arise here. The result seems to be not only alienation in the Marxian sense—from the product of one’s own work and ultimately from oneself. Rather, in the context of Berman’s concept of translation, the experience of alienation also proves to be the result of what Hartmut Rosa calls the impossibility of a deeper, successful and thus “resonant” relationship, in our case with the translated text, as a kind of “relationship of unrelatedness” (cf. Rosa 2010, 2019), which is also the result of an experience of acceleration in translation.

We cannot survey all the consequences of this experience of alienation here, let alone thematise it. Nevertheless, it seems clear that, as a form of “relationship of unrelatedness,” it not only diminishes the cultural value and visibility of translation, but also, as already indicated, has a fundamental effect on linguistic developments (or, in a kind of vicious circle, is also driven by such developments of a linguistic and communicative nature). First of all, there is the relationship of humans to language itself in view of the loss of expressivity and the ability to speak (in German: *Sprachlichkeit*) of languages as stated by Berman in the course of the expansion of the “univers de la communication technico-scientifique” and the uniformisation tendencies of languages driven by them. It is these developments that make the automation of translation seem conceivable at all and jeopardise the natural relationship between humans and language:

[I] s’est produit un phénomène que maints auteurs de notre siècle ont dénoncé, et qui concerne la destruction de la *Sprachlichkeit*, de la capacité parlante des grandes langues modernes, au profit d’une langue-système de communication de plus en plus vidée d’épaisseur et de signifiante propres. On peut penser ici à l’appauvrissement de la créativité orale, à la mort des dialectes, à l’enfoncement de la littérature dans un espace de plus en plus clos où elle devient de moins en moins capable de “figurer” le monde. La dégradation du langage (du langage

naturel), voilà certes un lieu commun. *Notre* lieu commun. [...] Anéantissement des dialectes, de parlers locaux ; banalisation des langues nationales aplanissement des différences entre celles-ci au profit d'un modèle de non-langue pour lequel l'anglais a servi de cobaye (et de victime), modèle grâce auquel la traduction automatique deviendrait pensable ; prolifération cancéreuse, au sein de la langue commune, des langues spéciales – il y a là un processus qui attaque en profondeur le langage et le rapport *naturel* de l'homme au langage. (Berman 1984: 288f.)²⁹

There is also the relationship between languages and cultures. For Berman, the central aspect here is that the dynamic (and danger) of the homogenisation of languages and communication systems associated with the mechanisation of translation destroys the natural and dialogical network of relationships between languages and cultures. For it seems clear that *a priori* translatability obeys interlinguistic power relations, “qui tendent à annuler la différence des langues, et souvent à étouffer la spécificité de la langue dominée, taxée d'inférieure” (Berman 1984: 276). The result of *a priori* translatability is global, uniform languages, which are ultimately languages into which much is

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- 29 As can be observed, the amount of AI-generated data is constantly increasing. However, the quantity of texts produced by AI does not seem to automatically lead to an increase in quality, especially as many translations remain unchecked and uncorrected, enriching the universe of (poorly translated) texts that AI in turn draws on. In any case, it should be investigated in the future whether AI not only leads to linguistic standardisation effects, but also to a loss of quality in translations. The field of AI has seen significant advancements in recent years, with the development of algorithms capable of producing literary works such as poems and novels. However, at present it seems difficult to imagine that AI, without substantial and guiding intervention by human translators, will embark upon those innovative paths that demand ‘courageous’ translation strategies and completely new linguistic choices. There are numerous historical exemplars of such epoch-making translations into German, including Luther’s translation of the Bible and Hölderlin’s of *Antigone* and *Oedipus*.

translated and from which much is retranslated—languages that are the opposite of processes of *métissage*:

Il suffit de songer à cette masse croissante de textes modernes, débordant largement l’aire du technique ou du diplomatique, certes “rédigés” en français, en espagnol, en allemand, etc., mais paraissant de mauvaises traductions d’un mauvais anglais qui, néanmoins, est leur *maître suprême* et dans lequel, finalement, ils sont destinés à être retraduits. “Confusion des langues”, véritable “incendie”, en effet, l’inverse d’un métissage. Quand une langue investit les autres en vertu de sa position dominante et consent elle-même à se transformer pour devenir une “langue universelle” il se produit un processus de destruction généralisé. Les métissages linguistiques, par contre, sont féconds : pensions, dans le domaine français, aux parlers créoles. (Berman 1984: 276)

In other words, the expansion of the “univers de la communication technico-scientifique” not only marks the end of an idea, an ideal and an intention of translation, at the centre of which is the idea of enriching one’s own language, but also the end of relationships in which languages mutually fertilise each other (in the sense of an expansion of their *Sprachlichkeit*).³⁰

The technically generated egalitarianism in the age of *machine translation* (everything is *a priori* translatable!)³¹ thus endangers the actual egalitarianism of translation, which is an ethical one: “l’essence de la traduction est d’être ouverture, dialogue, métissage, décentrement. Elle est mise en rapport, ou elle n’est

30 With reference to Hölderlin, for Berman, translating literary works always also means working on the linguistic nature and capacity of one’s own language. “*L’épreuve de l’étranger et l’apprentissage du propre*” are two interconnected, albeit not always harmonious, dynamics (Berman 1999: 86).

31 Behind the indiscrimination that AI demonstrates towards texts, there is, as is well known, an opaque and unreflected culture of differentiation, because ultimately algorithms programmed by human actors (which often reflect their world views, cultural imprints and associated stereotypes) determine what becomes visible and how it does.

rien” (Berman 1984: 16). There is therefore a real danger that translation will act as an agent of uniformisation (which, with AI, is reaching unprecedented dimensions in terms of quantity) and thus undo the achievements that go hand in hand with postcolonial developments, which brings a new topicality to the question of the ethics of translation: protecting interlingual relationships from the standardisation tendencies of the present. The experiences outlined by Berman (1984: 288) “situent désormais la tâche de traduire dans une lumière nouvelle ou, sinon nouvelle, du moins infiniment plus crue il s’agit de défendre la langue et les rapports inter-langues contre l’homogénéisation croissante des systèmes de communication”:

Ré-ouvrir les chemins de la tradition ; ouvrir un rapport enfin exact (non dominant, non narcissique) aux autres cultures, et notamment à celles de ce qui est maintenant devenu le “Tiers Monde” ; mobiliser les ressources de notre langue pour la mettre à la hauteur de ces diverses ouvertures – c’est évidemment lutter contre ce phénomène destructeur, même s’il est d’autres manières de le conjurer. Et tel est, peut-être, l’essentiel de la conscience traductrice moderne : une exigence maximale de “savoir” au service d’une certaine ré-alimentation de la capacité parlante du langage, d’une certaine manière lucide d’habiter et de défendre Babel à l’heure où la Tour-des-Multiples-Langues (c’est-à-dire celle des Différences) est menacée par l’expansion d’un jargon déracinant qui n’est même pas l’espéranto, ce rêve humaniste naïf qui révèle maintenant son vrai visage de cauchemar. (Berman 1984: 289)

It is precisely the translator’s task to work against a machine-generated *a priori* translatability, i.e., to oppose the reduction of *Sprachlichkeit* to communicative functions, that makes the translator a guardian of diversity and difference—but not in the ideological sense mentioned above as the defender of an “*intraduisible comme valeur*” that essentialises the foreign and the own, but in the sense of an actor who brings it into a dialogue through applying suitable translation strategies, making it tangible and communicable.

4 Conclusion

Similar appeals to the ethical and cultural role of translation, which act as a force that resists the present-day tendencies towards linguistic and cultural uniformisation on the one hand, while becoming a medium for cultural hybridisation and *métissage* on the other, have become commonplace today.³² Nevertheless, in a digital world dominated by economic interests and non-transparent actors, in which carefully guarded algorithms regulate processes of communication and interaction, the question of the ethical dimension (and the associated claim to truth of translation) has lost none of its topicality—on the contrary!³³ It is this problem of intransparency that makes the search for answers to questions about the effects of AI on practices, methods and theories of translation more difficult.

Despite or precisely because of the many unanswered questions and the new challenges to theory and practice that arise, it seems clear that the experience of translation in the age of AI is an experience of discomfort because it is characterised by experiences of loss and a supposedly shrinking power of human actors and their agency. And yet the notion of discomfort should by no means be seen as generalised and absolute, especially as the experience of technology (which Berman does not regard negatively across the board either) and AI technology can also open up new scope and new forms of successful convergence between humans and technology, e.g. opportunities to respond quickly to current language developments that

32 Such appeals are known to have been formulated also within the field of Postcolonial (Translation) Theory. Cf. Bhabha's (1994) reflections on the so-called *third space*.

33 For example, it is important to consider that the utilisation of AI consumes enormous amounts of energy, a fact that should be incorporated into a contemporary ethic of translation.

have not yet manifested themselves in the traditional media (dictionaries etc.) that translators still often rely on. Both within and outside the professional domain, the digital space creates new potential and horizons for resonance experiences through translation. One example of this can be found in the field of crowdsourcing and online fan/amateur translation, which sometimes defies the economic logic of the translation market (cf. Jiménez-Crespo 2017).

And yet it is obvious that in the digital sphere, where social relationships are subject to a process of automation, the relationships between languages and cultures and the channels through which they run, and of which translation is one of the central ones, are also becoming increasingly opaque, even invisible. In the face of a seemingly overpowering technology that is changing their practice and professional image, translators are not only becoming alienated from themselves, their work and the “products” they generate. Rather, it has led to a downright alienation of society from this practice and the people involved, if you look at the sharp decline in the number of students across Europe who choose to study translation, even though the public demand for translations does not seem to be declining at all. Paradoxically, academic research and teaching in Translation Studies do not appear to be innocent of these developments, as they are increasingly dominated by translation technology and its application, yet increasingly lose sight of the aspects of translation relevant to Cultural Studies.

This article has focussed on precisely this aspect of Cultural Studies and Cultural History, from an actor-oriented, ethical and hermeneutic perspective, shedding light on the changing experience of translation in the brevity offered here. What is the experience of translation? In Berman’s words, it is an experience of the *foreign*, which is an experience of the difference between languages and cultures, but which loses its absolute

status in translation because it is made tangible. While a human, ethical translation practice leads to mediating between the poles and essentialisms of universal translatability on the one hand, and untranslatability as a value on the other, without dissolving them in the process, AI translation seems to reinforce this kind of polarity thinking: in the current political and social situation of Western countries, a universal, *a priori* translatability generated by technology and committed to a communicative logic encounters societies that, as Andreas Reckwitz (2020) has shown, are characterised by singularisation tendencies, the idealisation and absolutisation of differences—tendencies that, as has now been researched, are driven by social networks. The insistence on the uniqueness of individuals and social groups, which manifests itself, for example, in the accusation of cultural appropriation, is expressed here in the (ideological) notion of the untranslatability of cultures and languages. Just as in Romanticism general translatability thinking, the universalisation of poetics, literature and art, and the absolutisation of differences, and thus untranslatability, form two sides of the same coin, the technical claim to translate everything and make it translatable conjures up resistance. It is to be feared that this logic of “*intraduisible comme valeur*” is likely to be radicalised by the AI translation machine and the lack of transparency of its algorithms (which are often suspected of being manipulation tools).

What is lost from view here is the space of the in-between outlined by Berman, in which languages and cultures “tout en se mélangeant, manifestent aussi leur pure différence”—“cet espace de métissage qu’est la traduction, et peut-être elle seule” (Berman 1984: 275), which ethically and practically also makes translation an instrument against cultural essentialisms, fantasies of autarky and nationalisms which are currently booming around the world.

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From Human to Binary and Back: On the Need to Explain and Understand Digital Machines in the Humanities

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Abstract: This article aims to bring attention to some usually overlooked aspects of the relationship between humans and complex digital technologies. Before engaging with artificial intelligence (AI), it is indeed pivotal to address some key questions about it. Specifically, I will try to focus on our ability to understand how AI technologies work and determine creative and critical uses we can make of them. To do so, I will first discuss problems associated with using the current definitions of AI and suggest that we should make a creative effort to re-translate these terms in order to find better-suited expressions. I will call attention to the need for a different kind of translation, which negotiates between what machines do and what we can understand about them, because one of the biggest challenges of machine learning is to make the internal processes explainable and understandable for us humans. I will close with elaborations on some creative forms of interaction with language models and image models which support artists, writers and creators (who do not want to see their work stolen by AI crawlers and used to train datasets), with the overall goal of building an ethical, critical and sustainable relationship between humans and digital machines.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI ethics, Explainability, Data poisoning, Anti-computing.

1 Introduction: On Artificial Intelligence and its Possible Definitions

In this article I will not address specific issues on translation and artificial intelligence (AI) but rather bring the focus to some aspects of AI and of our relationship with it, aspects that I consider foundational for developing a digital hermeneutics able to engage the humanities (and thus translation studies as well) in a deeper understanding of digital tools that are already in common use. This is why, throughout this article, I will use the word ‘translation’ in a broader sense, which includes forms of encoding and decoding, and this is because of the cultural and social impact of these forms (cf. Laghi 2023: 52).

Digital technologies are ubiquitous, and they always involve writing (at least as computer code) and translation (between computer code and human language, or between different languages). If we consider every interaction with digital technologies as an act of writing and translation, we can understand how our use of devices based on AI is always an act of writing and translation as well. This is why I would like to start my argument with an effort to challenge the current use of the expression “artificial intelligence,” a “magic” marketing catchphrase that creates confusion about what this technology is capable of and about the actual dangers it entails, and I intend to do so as an experiment in translation, to help us better define some of the key concepts related to AI. Although the expression ‘AI’ is already widely accepted and has entered common usage (even in academia), I still believe that, as scholars, we need to be very careful when we define new technologies, because how we define them can change the way we perceive them, thus influencing the way we critically think about them.

To make a provocative point, what if, instead of AI, we talked about “SALAMP”? This acronym was created by the

Italian tech journalist Stefano Quintarelli in 2019, and it stands for “Systematic Approaches to Learning Algorithms and Machine Inferences” (Quintarelli 2019). If we use the acronym SALAMI instead of AI, the questions that we often hear in the AI debate seem to lose meaning completely, as Quintarelli provocatively asks:

Will we still support the idea that SALAMI will develop some form of consciousness [sic]? Will SALAMI have emotions? Can SALAMI acquire a “personality” similar to humans? Will SALAMI ultimately overcome human limitations and develop a self superior to humans? Can you possibly fall in love with a SALAMI? Can we suddenly perceive a sense of how all these far flung (unrealistic) predictions look somewhat ridiculous? (Quintarelli 2019)

Of course, Quintarelli’s questions are just a provocative invitation to think about our relationship with technology, starting from how we define it, and about the supernatural/magical approach we often have (cf. Mohamed 2022; Dalmasso 2020: 177).

The main point still remains, however, that we do not have an accepted definition of AI and, even more importantly, we do not have a shared and accepted definition of intelligence or, better, “we have a lot of partial definitions [of intelligence], all of which are bound to specific contexts” (Loukides 2022). The philosopher Luciano Floridi argues that “AI is better understood as a new form of agency, not intelligence,” which prompts him to say that “the digital has changed the nature of agency, but we are still interpreting the outcome of such changes in terms of modern mentality, and this is generating some deep misunderstanding” (Floridi 2023: XIII, 10). He then argues that the success (and usefulness) of AI lies in the “decoupling [of] the ability to solve a problem or complete a task successfully from any need to be intelligent to do so” (Floridi 2023: 12). It is true that AI relies on statistics and probability and not on understanding: As we know, large language

models (LLMs) and other automatic translation tools do not understand the meaning of the texts they are prompted with and their outputs, but they still manage to produce results that are often satisfactory or, at least, good enough. If this happens, however, Floridi argues that it is because the world is becoming an infosphere better and better adapted to what AI can do:

If drones, driverless vehicles, robotic lawnmowers, bots, and algorithms of all kinds can move “around” and interact with our environments with decreasing trouble, this is not because productive, cognitive AI (the Hollywood kind) has finally arrived. It is because the “around,” the environment our engineered artefacts need to negotiate, has become increasingly suitable to reproductive engineered AI and its limited capacities. (Floridi 2023: 26)

However, if we consider definitions of intelligence such as the one proposed by Cristianini, that is, “the ability to behave effectively in novel situations” (Cristianini 2023: 116),¹ then the perspective changes completely because this definition also includes AI, as these systems are increasingly able to relate to novel situations by finding effective solutions.²

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- 1 Cristianini proposes a definition that is in line with the one given by Max Tegmark: “ability to accomplish complex goals” (Tegmark 2017: 869; Cristianini 2023: 116).
 - 2 It does not make sense, for the purpose of this article, to enter the debate about the concept of intelligence, because it would take us too far. We can, however, underline the need for a change in our anthropocentric view, in order to take into account different forms of intelligence, cognition and agency. Moreover, Cristianini stresses how important it is “to give up the illusion that we, human beings, are the paragon of all intelligent things, an illusion that is hindering our understanding of the world” (Cristianini 2023: 293). We are faced with the need for a paradigm shift, and the need for this shift comes from the advent of digital technologies as a fundamental part of our lives, our relationship to knowledge, to reality and to the way we experience it. Likewise, it is also appropriate to develop new critical capacities and new logics of resistance to explore “the configurations of meaning

We can see that the issue is not resolved, and better-defining expressions could be helpful to understand the technologies we are dealing with. Floridi (2023: 14) says that “the absence of a definition for AI is evidence that the expression is not a scientific term. Instead, it is a helpful shortcut for referring to a family of sciences, methods, paradigms, technologies, products, and services.” AI is first and foremost a marketing expression or, as Lanier/Weyl (2020: n.p.) say, it “is an ideology, not a technology.”

The expression was created in 1956 by John McCarthy for the organization of a conference, the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence. Before that date, the same field was referred to as ‘automata studies’ and the reason for this change was due to the fact that McCarthy wanted “to escape association with ‘cybernetics’” (McCarthy 1996: 73) but also, apparently, because using ‘AI’ instead of ‘automata studies’ made it easier to access research funding (cf. Hunger 2023). Moreover, we should not forget that “[a]ll artificial intelligence is built on the same foundation of code, data, binary, and electrical impulse. Understanding what is real and what is imaginary in AI is crucial” (Broussard 2018: 186). The distinction between what is real and what is imaginary passes through the use of appropriate definitions for the kinds of technologies we have, because the terminology that has been imposed on the public debate is deceiving and confusing. Whilst using more specific expressions and proposing concepts that better define what AI is and does, my use of the term ‘AI’ should be taken as a “helpful shortcut,” as intended by Floridi (2023: 14).

made possible today by the unprecedented alliance between biology, philosophy, and cybernetics” (Malabou 2017: 30).

2 Translating AI Concepts to Better Define them

Instead of using AI, we could try to be more specific, also in order to avoid biological metaphors that foster a pernicious tendency toward anthropomorphizing these technologies. To highlight the difference between what is real and what is imaginary, we can start with the expression “machine learning,” because

[w]hen a machine ‘learns’, it doesn’t mean that the machine has a brain made out of metal. It means that the machine has become more accurate at performing a single specific task according to a specific metric that a person has defined. This kind of learning does not imply intelligence. (Broussard 2018: 1754)

The ambiguity of the term ‘AI’ that I explained in these first paragraphs makes the debate about it more difficult, as Bender and Hanna point out:

In one sense, it is the name of a subfield of computer science. In another, it can refer to the computing techniques developed in that subfield, most of which are now focused on pattern matching based on large data sets and the generation of new media based on those patterns. Finally, in marketing copy and start-up pitch decks, the term “AI” serves as magic fairy dust that will supercharge your business. (Bender/Hanna 2023: n.p.)

This is why Francis Hunger proposes to use a different terminology: Instead of AI, for example, “automated pattern recognition” seems more appropriate and correct to Hunger (2023: n.p.). Instead of “machine learning” he suggests the use of “machine conditioning”; instead of “deep learning,” “deep conditioning”; instead of “neural network”, “weighted network”; and “node” or “weight” instead of “neuron” (ibid.). We would probably not imagine an existential threat posed by “automated pattern recognition,” nor would we ask questions about whether a “deep conditioning” system could gain con-

sciousness (as we have already seen with the provocative acronym SALAMI).

A better definition can lead us to a better understanding. But to better understand what these technologies do, it is not enough to define them properly. We also need to take a look at what happens inside them. Technologies are a human product. Therefore, we should be in a position to understand what they do, based on what assumptions and for what purposes. This means adopting a sociotechnical approach capable of investigating digital services and devices (such as LLMs and neural machine translation systems such as DeepL) not just in terms of their mere technical functions, but also for the socio-cultural meaning they have in the context of our relationship with them and within society at large. The questions we ask about these technologies can also mirror the questions we ask about human beings as scientific progress transforms what we know. But, if understanding how the human brain works is indeed a challenge (and will still be for a long time), understanding what complex technologies do is pivotal for them to be implemented and used safely and ethically.

3 Inside the Black Box: Understanding ‘the Machine’

As digital systems become more and more complex, the problem of explaining and understanding what they do and how they do it is increasingly crucial. Can we understand “the machine”? How can we translate its functioning in ways that humans can understand and trust? Cynthia Rudin (2019) has pointed out the importance of building interpretable machine learning models that are transparent and accurate instead of building new models which can try to explain what “black boxes” models do. Her hypothesis is convincing, especially in a

time when machine learning is applied to fields like criminal justice, medicine and finance. But we could add some insights from the humanities to her approach as a computer scientist in order to get a wider perspective on the issue. Floridi, whose work focuses on AI ethics, proposes five core principles for an ethical development of these systems: beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy, justice (these first four are commonly used in bioethics) and explicability (cf. Floridi 2023: 57). This last principle is “understood as incorporating both the *epistemological* sense of *intelligibility*—as an answer to the question ‘how does it work?’—and in the *ethical* sense of *accountability*—as an answer to the question ‘who is responsible for the way it works?’” (Floridi 2023: 57–58).

“How does it work” and “who is responsible for the way it works” are fundamental questions. When it comes to creative uses of LLMs or text-to-image models (TTIs), researcher and poet Allison Parrish argues that coders, artists and engineers are responsible for the outputs of models based on machine learning since digital machines cannot be considered responsible for their outputs (cf. Parrish 2021).³ Understanding how AI systems work and establishing forms of accountability should be a strong imperative in computer science and in the humanities, and a combined approach to the problem could be greatly beneficial. This sociotechnical approach is made quite clear in the concept of “understandability,” coined by David Berry, who argues that

rather than providing descriptions purely from the domains of a formal, technical and causal model of *explanation* (dominant in the sci-

3 This is extremely important on another level: on one side, systems like ChatGPT would have been impossible to develop without (often not legally granted) access to copyrighted material to be trained on (cf. Milmo 2024), on the other, because copyright might not be applicable to AI-generated art (cf. Brittain 2023).

ences), these technologies would benefit from critical approaches that take account of *understanding*, more common in the humanities and social sciences [...]. (Berry 2023: §37)

The impact of AI is social and cultural in a broad sense before it is technical, and the same goes for explainability, but it is difficult to add explainability after these complex technologies have already been developed. The best option is probably to embed explainability/interpretability directly at the beginning of the development process, but this is in harsh contrast with what the companies developing AI are doing—making profits from “the intellectual property afforded to a black box” (Rudin 2019: 209)—and with the technologies that are already available to the public.

Many researchers work on the explainability issue, though, and a few tools have been developed which can help us take a look inside these tools and understand how decisions are taken and outputs are created. This includes the What-If tool developed by *Google* (Wexler et al. 2020) or *AI Explainability 360* (by IBM and now a Linux Foundation project), even if many of the LLMs built by companies like *Google*, *Meta* and *Microsoft* are not really open, in the sense commonly used for open source but also meaning open to independent investigations (cf. Gibney 2024). It is worth mentioning the research conducted by institutes such as *DAIR* (*Distributed AI Research*), whose work goes in the direction of building “frameworks for non-exploitative community rooted research practice” including, for example, datasets accountability (Khan/Hanna 2022) and Data&Society, especially on AI and algorithmic accountability and justice (cf. Moss et al. 2021). There are also more experimental efforts, such as the one by Thomas Parr and Giovanni Pezzulo, who draw on the theory of “active inference” to create a theoretical model of machine understanding “such

that, when queried, a machine is able to explain its behaviour” (Parr/Pezzulo 2021: 1).

While the research on explainability and interpretability continues, we need tools to engage critically and creatively with the AI models already available right now. We cannot limit ourselves to a passive use of these black boxes, unaware of the bias embedded in them and the real harm they are already causing (cf. Bender/Hanna 2023).

4 Critical Creative Engagement with AI

As an introduction to this part, I would first like to start with an observation that I found interesting: “Surprising errors are AI imagery’s best approximation of genuine creativity, or at least its most joyful” (Herrman 2022: n.p.). Of course, AI has no imagery: the only imagery we are talking about is the one we, as humans, project on AI outputs. But looking for errors and glitches helps us to look at what happens behind the screen, inside these models. These errors can reveal some aspects of the functioning of LLMs or TTIs in unexpected ways because they show us these machines going wrong, as we can see in the research by Giuseppe Sofo about translating the city in the digital era (cf. Sofo 2025). I then would like to refer to a literary author to highlight an idea that should be taken into consideration whenever we interact with a language model or image model with a creative intent. Science fiction writer Ted Chiang, in a piece that appeared in the *New Yorker*, defines ChatGPT as “a blurry jpeg of the web” and he underlines the fact that using AI is not a good way to create original work because the process of writing itself is what enables the eventual creation of something original.

Some might say that the output of large language models doesn’t look all that different from a human writer’s first draft, but, again, I think this is a superficial

resemblance. Your first draft isn't an unoriginal idea expressed clearly; it's an original idea expressed poorly, and it is accompanied by your amorphous dissatisfaction, your awareness of the distance between what it says and what you want it to say. That's what directs you during rewriting, and that's one of the things lacking when you start with text generated by an A.I. (Chiang 2023: n.p.)

Even if Chiang does not speak for all writers, authors and artists, we may think that short-circuiting a large part of creative work to machines, whose functioning we essentially know nothing about, could not only impact human creativity capabilities, but also make us the weakest part of the relationship between humans and digital machines. Moreover, we need to add another element to these remarks, and this is the fact that the scraping of texts and images produced by writers and artists to train AI is the

largest and most consequential theft in human history. Because what we are witnessing is the wealthiest companies in history (Microsoft, Apple, Google, Meta, Amazon...) unilaterally seizing the sum total of human knowledge that exists in digital, scrapable form and walling it off inside proprietary products, many of which will take direct aim at the humans whose lifetime of labor trained the machines without giving permission or consent. (Klein 2023: n.p.)

In this light, we can see that the issue with AI and its use is not just a matter of defining the concept of AI properly and understanding and explaining what it does, but also of regaining control over human cultural production and creativity. This is also to reclaim more control over the digital tools that are pervasively taking an ever-increasing space in our lives, limiting our agency to what the affordances of the devices and black boxes allow us. Critical analysis of the co-existence of human and machine cognition are necessary—especially in the fields of learning and education (cf. Markauskaite et al. 2022; Tafani/Pievatolo 2024)—, also when they take the form of creative resistance to the unilateral imposition of AI technologies.

5 From Algorithmic Sabotage to Data Poisoning

Forms of critical engagement and creative resistance to AI are being developed by artists, researchers and hacktivists. The Algorithmic Sabotage Research Group (ASRG) published a “Manifesto on ‘Algorithmic Sabotage’” (2024) that claims to be “a figure of techno-disobedience for the militancy that’s absent from technology critique” and “a form of counter-power” which aims at “dismantling contemporary forms of algorithmic domination and reclaiming spaces for ethical action from generalized thoughtlessness and automaticity”. The intent of ASRG goes in the direction of a “dissonant reading of computational history” and of “an alternative understanding of the technological,” thus working on an “alternative account of the actual and potential impacts of the computational” (Bassett 2021: 206), inscribing itself in the line of anti-computing positions.

It is of extreme interest that some of these forms and tools are developed inside universities, thus combining academic research with a creative/subverting intent and an overall focus on the common good of society. *Glaze*, for example, is a data poisoning tool developed by a team led by Ben Zhao and Shawn Shan at the University of Chicago. As the research team explains on their website, they wanted to develop “technical tools with the explicit goal of protecting human creatives against invasive uses of generative artificial intelligence or GenAI” that “artists can use to disrupt unauthorized AI training on their work product. Ultimately our goal is to ensure the continued vitality of human artists, and to restore balance and ensure a healthy coexistence between AI and human creatives, where the human creatives retain agency and control over their work products and their use” (*The Glaze Project: “Our Mission and Vision”* n.d.).

Another data poisoning tool is *PhotoGuard*, and it was developed by a research team at MIT: it uses an encoder attack which makes the AI model interpret the image it tries to scrape as something else, and a diffusion attack which disrupts the way the AI models generate images (cf. Salman et al. 2023). *Kudurru*, another tool that helps artists to protect their work from AI crawlers, is also worth mentioning because it “gives artists two options to disrupt scraping. First, they can simply block the blacklisted IP addresses. Second, [...] they can also choose to sabotage or ‘poison’ the scrapers’ efforts by sending back a different image than the one requested” (Knibbs 2023: n.p.). Data poisoning ranks among the actions of data leverage (cf. Vincent et al. 2021), one of the few tools in the hands of users to counter the indiscriminate use of their data by large companies for their sole economic profit.

The examples mentioned in this section should show that a critical engagement with AI is pivotal in order to fully grasp the social and political implications of its development and diffusion. If we consider that AI models are trained, as we have seen, on stolen human writing, visual arts, music and even voices, we can understand that disrupting the digital forms of enclosure AI companies are imposing could be considered a practical contribution to the critical reflection about technological development. These disruptions are also a practical way to reappropriate digital tools and to deepen our understanding of how the digital affects artistic creation and human cognitive processes. It seems to me that the knowledge and awareness I tried to highlight in this article should be at the foundation of every interaction with AI, be it creative, professional or academic.

6 Conclusions

This article attempted to illustrate a three-stage process to deal with the challenges posed by artificial intelligence in a creative and informed way: at first, by translating the concepts that are hidden in AI companies' marketing jargon to better-defining expressions; secondly, by taking a look inside digital machines to try to translate their inner functioning for human understanding; thirdly, by engaging with AI in a critical and creative way which aims to rebalance the inequality of forces at play when it comes to complex technologies such as machine learning. And this is because "[u]nderstanding AI means understanding its specific computational operations and everything that is being carried along by them; the history that AI has absorbed, the world in which it is emerging, and the futures that it calls forth" (McQuillan 2022: 2).

To properly understand the challenges we are facing with AI applications (automatic translation, general-purpose LLMs, TTIs, but also the use of AI in fields such as the criminal justice system and healthcare) we should therefore take into account the social, economic and political underpinnings—that is to say, the ideology—that inform the development of AI technologies from their very beginning.

The critical analysis proposed in this article aims to demonstrate that an up-to-date digital hermeneutics can only be developed through a profound and critical engagement with the technologies with which we are constantly interconnected. This means opening up the devices and services we use to the critical scrutiny of research, with a multidisciplinary approach that calls upon different fields, such as philosophy of technology, computer science, cognitive science, critical code studies, just to name a few. This socio-technical analysis will help us not only to be informed and knowledgeable users but also to

translate demands for social justice into concrete actions that counter technological determinism, helping society as a whole to shape digital technologies for the common good.

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Skopos as a Source of Human Creativity in an AI Environment

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Abstract: The term ‘creativity’ has been defined and/or used to designate a variety of different concepts in Translation Studies. In recent times, the rise of artificial intelligence has further complicated the term’s semantics. Both neural machine-translation systems and large language models are able to produce translations that can be considered creative in terms of definitions such as Kußmaul’s (2000: 31), according to which “a creative translation springs from an obligatory modification to the source text and constitutes something that is more or less new and is accepted as more or less appropriate in a (sub-)culture of experts [...] at a specific time and with regard to a specific intended purpose.” Where, then, is the scope for human creativity? I shall suggest that functionalist approaches such as Vermeer’s skopos theory may provide one answer to this question. My starting point will be a version of Kußmaul’s creativity concept modified to meet the requirements of a skopos-theoretical approach. On this basis, I shall show that some skopoi, in a variety of translation situations, are still quite hard for AI systems to achieve. The examples I shall discuss will be taken from two post-editing courses I held in summer 2023 at FTSK Germersheim.

Keywords: Human creativity, Skopos, Functionalism, Translation situation, Post-editing, Output quality.

1 Introduction

Where is the scope for human creativity in the age of neural machine translation and large language models? In the following, I shall argue that functionalist approaches such as Vermeer's skopos theory (cf., e.g., Vermeer 1978, 1996) can help us to exploit the potential of human creativity because some skopoi are still quite hard for artificial intelligence (AI) to achieve. I shall begin by outlining Kußmaul's (2000) concept of creativity, which he implements using scenes-and-frames semantics, and proceed to propose a version of this concept modified to meet the requirements of a skopos-theoretical approach. On this basis, I shall then discuss a number of examples to illustrate the varied translation situations in which human creativity at present still appears to be indispensable. In terms of Rojo's (2017: 352) typology of creativity research areas, my approach will be product-based, though in contrast to the majority of studies classified as target-text-oriented by Rojo (ibid.: 353), the main objective of my product analysis will be to explore the potential and limitations of AI translation rather than "to make inferences about the translation process."

My examples will be taken from two post-editing courses I taught in spring/summer 2023 at Mainz University's Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies (FTSK). They will include an online description of a tourist attraction that contains obvious factual errors and other defects, a museum flyer where both the layout and the target audience's prior knowledge constitute translation problems, and a business text where the translation is to be used as an aid to semantic and syntactic understanding by language learners. Solutions to the problems raised by translation situations such as these can be creative in Kußmaul's sense but go beyond the field of scenes-and-frames semantics. I shall argue that focussing on

the concept of skopos can promote a type of human creativity that is closely linked to the translator's self-image and sense of responsibility.

The source language in my post-editing courses was Turkish; the target language, German. Generally speaking, machine translation output for this language pair requires more post-editing than does the output for, say, English into German. At present, DeepL tends to produce results that are linguistically somewhat better than those of Google Translate and ChatGPT, but as will be seen, ChatGPT can prove useful as well. Machine-generated translations and ChatGPT responses obtained in spring/summer 2023 were checked for significant changes on 28 November 2023 and once more on 15 May 2024. In November 2023, ChatGPT 3.5 was used; in May 2024, GPT-4o. Unless otherwise stated, the three versions were either identical or very similar with regard to the issue under discussion.

While the texts I shall use were originally translated from Turkish into German, most of the problems on which I shall focus are not language-pair-specific but relate to the various translation briefs and skopoi. Their origin is translatorial rather than mainly linguistic. This will enable me to use machine-generated translations into (British) English as well as German in my discussion of examples. English translations were obtained on 15 May 2024.

One of my two post-editing courses was part of FTSK's bachelor's programme in translation; the other, of our master's programme. However, owing to the flexible structure of both of these degree programmes, students' backgrounds in translation can vary widely. The bachelor's group may include students in their first, second, and third years. Members of the master's group range from first-year students with no previous translation experience to second-year students with a first de-

gree in translation. In other words, it is impossible to specify the extent of exposure to translation issues for either of the two groups. Moreover, the extent of exposure does not necessarily correlate with those aspects of translation competence that are most relevant to my present purpose. When, in the following, I speak of how students handle certain translation issues, this refers to a sizeable number of bachelor's and/or master's students both in the two post-editing groups and in other skopos-based translation courses that I have taught over the years.

2 Creativity and Skopos Theory

In her overview of creativity research in Translation Studies, O'Sullivan notes that

creativity has proven a rather slippery concept for translation scholars. Much work which invokes the concept does so without an explicit definition, or invokes the complexity of the concept as a way of avoiding the necessity for definitions. References to creativity tend to presuppose the existence of a *tertium comparationis*, a literal translation against which non-literal translation strategies can be labeled as creative. [...] The result of such a state of affairs is that creativity becomes linked with the general concept of translation shifts. (O'Sullivan 2013: 42–43)

In line with O'Sullivan's observation, my *tertium comparationis* will be a literal translation. However, I shall not focus on shifts in the linguistic sense.¹

My starting point will be Kußmaul's definition of creativity. According to the author,

1 For a survey of approaches to translation shifts, see Cyrus (2009).

a creative translation springs from an obligatory modification² to the source text and constitutes something that is more or less new and is accepted as more or less appropriate in a (sub-)culture of experts (= representatives of a paradigm) at a specific time and with regard to a specific intended purpose.³ (Kußmaul 2000: 31)

Kußmaul's main interest is in linguistic and cultural patterns. His typology of creative translations (2000: 150–188), based on Fillmore's (1977) scenes-and-frames semantics, involves modifications to scenes and frames such as reframing, scene changes, or a new selection of scene elements within a scene or frame. One of the examples Kußmaul (2000: 174–177) discusses is a scene change: two students translated the verb “dot” in the sentence “Enormous supermarkets, furniture stores and shopping emporiums dot the east German landscape” as “schießen wie Pilze aus dem Boden” (literally, “shoot up from the ground like mushrooms”). However, modifications such as these are no longer the preserve of humans. Thus, in May 2024, Google Translate suggested “prägen” (literally, “mint”; here, metaphorically, “characterize”) for “dot,” and DeepL as well as GPT-4o produced an entire range of more or less appropriate metaphors. In Kußmaul's terms, these AI systems are creative.

In exploring the scope for human creativity, my theoretical framework will be skopos theory rather than the ‘Germersheim functionalist school’ to which Kußmaul belongs. While

2 I have translated Kußmaul's German term “Veränderung” as ‘modification’ because it seems less technical and less specific to me than ‘shift.’ In his translation of the same quotation, Kautz (2002: 380) uses “change.” Kußmaul himself, however, occasionally refers to ‘shifts’ in English (cf., e.g., Bayer-Hohenwarter/Kußmaul 2021: 311). Unless otherwise indicated, translations from languages other than English are mine.

3 For discussions of Kußmaul's creativity concept in English, see e.g. Kußmaul (1995: 39–53) and Bayer-Hohenwarter/Kußmaul (2021).

both approaches regard translation as an act of communication intended to fulfil a specific purpose, skopos theory has a stronger focus on translation situations and therefore makes it somewhat easier to discuss translatorial decisions that are not primarily linguistic. Such decisions are implicitly included in the wording of Kußmaul's definition, and as will be seen, this is an area in which humans at present continue to have a considerable advantage over AI systems.

However, in the context of skopos theory, it seems to me that Kußmaul's emphasis on obligatory modifications needs to be adjusted. According to Vermeer (e.g. Reiß/Vermeer 1984: 106–109; 2013/2015: 95–98), a successful translation is one that occasions no protests by any of the interaction partners against the transmission as such, the manner of transmission, and/or the recipients' reaction. Obligatory modifications can therefore only occur in situations in which a more literal translation would lead to protests. It is doubtful whether this would be the case even in Kußmaul's own example.⁴ If “dot” were to be translated by the non-existent verb ‘*überpunkten’ (literally, “dot over”), German readers might well be surprised, but this purely local lexical issue would not prevent them from understanding the sentence, let alone the text as a whole. The translation brief specified by Kußmaul (2000: 151) reads: “Translate the text from *Newsweek* under the aspect of ‘How foreign countries see us’ for the Press and Information Office of the German Federal Government.” The Office might of course protest if made-up words were to be used repeatedly, but a single occurrence would be much less noteworthy. As Vermeer (1978: 101) puts it, “[t]here are plenty of ‘erroneous’ yet entirely successful translations!”

4 For a different objection to the concept of obligatory modifications, see Schreiber (2017: 351–352).

A distinction should therefore be made between two quality levels: translation solutions that are functional and translation solutions that are (largely) free of defects. The former include all obligatory modifications; the latter, all obligatory and desirable ones. By ‘desirable,’ I mean optional modifications that constitute a demonstrable improvement on a more literal translation in the context of the translation situation. For my present purposes, creative solutions can be desirable as well as obligatory. I refer to ‘translation solutions’ rather than ‘translations’ to make it clear that creativity may involve individual aspects of a text as well as the text as a whole. On the level of the text as a whole, functional solutions will result in a translation that has a fair chance of being successful in Vermeer’s terms. Solutions that are (largely) free of defects will result in a translation that has a fair chance not only of being successful but also of being accepted as more, rather than less, appropriate by Kußmaul’s “(sub-)culture of experts.” I shall make use of the distinction between obligatory and desirable modifications in the following discussion of examples.

My functionalist approach to creativity, based on Kußmaul and Vermeer, has some affinities with Katan’s (2023) concept of narrativity. The author claims that,

while machines may successfully translate texts in the sense of copying or transcribing text from one language to another, the creation of texts meaningful for a particular readership in a particular moment is a uniquely *homo sapiens* or rather [...] a *homo fictus* or *narrans* ability. (Katan 2023: 74)

According to Katan (2023: 77, 75), the importance of narrativity “in making sense of the world” is most evident in “those contexts where the translation is targeted towards an unforeseen, secondary, communication situation [...], in particular where the new communicative situation includes epistemic

and cultural outsiders.” Contexts such as these will play a role in my subsequent discussion of examples.

3 Source-Text Defects

My first example is a tourist text describing Roman remains in the ancient town of Soli, in southern Turkey (“Soli” n.d.). The fictitious translation brief reads:

As part of the twinning arrangement between the municipality of Mezitli, Mersin Province, and the borough of Tempelhof-Schöneberg, city-state of Berlin, the text is to be translated into German and published on a new German-language website belonging to Mersin Province’s Tourist Board. The target audience are speakers of German who are interested in history. More specifically, the translation will be promoted in Mezitli’s twin borough. The purpose of the translation is to convey a positive impression of Mezitli’s tourist attractions, chief of which is Soli.

The source text includes a number of defects, the most obvious being a factual error that is clearly recognizable as such. Example 1 shows a short extract from the verbal text, which I will subsequently contrast with the nonverbal text.

Example 1: Verbal and nonverbal text

Sütunlu Cadde: Bugün caddede toplam 33 sütun ayaktadır. Bunlardan 4’ü batı 29’u doğu sütun dizisine aittir.

Säulenstraße: Insgesamt 33 Säulen stehen heute noch an der Straße. Davon gehören 4 zu der westlichen und 29 zu der östlichen Kolonnade. (DeepL, 19 June 2023)

Colonnaded Street: A total of 33 columns are standing on the street today. Of these, 4 belong to the western and 29 to the eastern colonnade. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

The German translation that DeepL generated at the time of my post-editing course is quite similar to the English version it produced in May 2024. Both are fairly close to the Turkish ver-

bal text. However, the nonverbal text, in the shape of photographs of the colonnaded street, makes it clear that the information provided in the verbal text is inaccurate. Figure 1 shows a picture similar to those in the source text.



Figure 1: Soli, colonnaded street (Raddato 2017, CC BY-SA 2.0)

It is obvious from the photograph that the western colonnade must have more than four columns. In fact, as an archaeologist (Yıldırım 2017: 76) confirms, there are seven. It is not surprising that DeepL, Google Translate, and ChatGPT 3.5 did not correct the error. When I later gave the same task to GPT-4o, this more recent version was likewise unable to provide a factually correct translation. At first, I simply pointed out in the prompt that there was a mismatch between the text and the picture I had uploaded. When this proved to no avail, I asked GPT-4o to describe the picture and count the columns on the two sides, which it did. Subsequently I prompted it with the text and asked for a translation that fitted the picture. It again failed to make the connection, insisting that “4” was correct. What is interesting is that the students in my post-editing course did not notice the error either. None changed the information, and our subsequent discussion showed that the dis-

crepancy between the verbal and nonverbal parts of the text had escaped their attention.

In the context of the translation brief as it stands, correcting the error is not vital. As Rozmysłowicz (2020: 291–297) points out, recipients of the target text play a significant role in making texts, including defective texts, viable. Some readers will not perceive the discrepancy at all, and among those who do, some may well regard it as inconsequential. Others may feel confused, but whether or not this will affect the impression they receive of Meztli’s tourist attractions is a matter of speculation. Thus, we cannot assert with any degree of certainty that the error will lead to protests, or that it will make it more difficult for the translation to achieve its purpose. Rectification is therefore not obligatory, but ensuring factual correctness does constitute a clear improvement. In terms of my above modification of Kußmaul’s definition, the translation solution “seven” is creative because it is new, appropriate, and desirable.

A similar argument can be made for comprehensibility. The source text includes a passage the structure of which is somewhat difficult to follow (Example 2).⁵

Example 2: Structure

Antik Liman: Kalıntılarının bir bölümü bugün de görülebilen liman, birbirinden 200 metre aralıklarla düzenlenmiş iki dalgakırandan oluşmaktadır. Bunlardan batıdaki daha iyi korunmuştur. Büyük kalker blokların, demir perçinlerle tutturulduklarını gösteren izler halen görülebilmektedir. Batıdaki dalgakırının batısı kum yığıntısı ile dolmuştur. Yapılan ölçümlere göre korunmuş olan uzunluğu 160 metre, eni ise 23 metredir. Yapı malzemesi olarak kullanılan kalker taşların yaklaşık olarak uzunluğu 160 santim, eni 60 santim ve derinliği 60 santimdir.

5 As with Example 1, the German translation of Example 2 that DeepL generated at the time of my post-editing course is quite similar to the German and English versions it produced in May 2024. The same applies to Example 3 and Example 4.

Doğudaki dalgakırının çok azı kaldığı için ancak 40 metre kadarı ölçülebilmektedir.

Antiker Hafen Der Hafen, von dem heute noch einige Reste zu sehen sind, besteht aus zwei Wellenbrechern, die im Abstand von 200 Metern zueinander angeordnet sind. Der westliche ist besser erhalten. Es sind noch Spuren der Befestigung von großen Kalksteinblöcken mit Eisennieten zu sehen. Der Westen des westlichen Wellenbrechers ist mit Sand gefüllt.⁶ Nach den Messungen beträgt die erhaltene Länge 160 m und die Breite 23 m. Die als Baumaterial verwendeten Kalksteine sind etwa 160 Zentimeter lang, 60 Zentimeter breit und 60 Zentimeter tief. Da von dem Wellenbrecher im Osten nur sehr wenig übrig geblieben ist, konnten nur 40 Meter davon vermessen werden. (DeepL, 4 June 2023)

[G] Ancient harbour The harbour, some of the remains of which can still be seen today, consists of two breakwaters arranged 200 metres apart from each other. [W] The western one is better preserved. [G] Traces of the fastening of large limestone blocks with iron rivets are still visible. [W] The west of the western breakwater is filled with sand.⁶ According to the measurements, its preserved length is 160 metres and its width is 23 metres. [G] The limestone stones used as building material are approximately 160 centimetres long, 60 centimetres wide and 60 centimetres deep. [E] Only 40 metres of the eastern breakwater could be measured since very little of it remains. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

I have added abbreviations in square brackets to the English translation in order to highlight the structure of this paragraph. [G] precedes general information on the harbour and its two breakwater arms; [W] indicates information on the western arm, and [E], on the eastern one. As can be seen, the structure is not entirely coherent. GPT-4o likewise retained the sequence of sentences, despite being prompted with a request to

6 This is misleading. Since the breakwater consists of limestone blocks, it is presumably not filled with sand but buried under sand. Cf. Yıldırım (2017: 75), who explains that only half of the original western breakwater is visible, the rest, like the eastern breakwater, being covered with sand and silt.

improve the structure. A clearer thematic progression might facilitate comprehension (cf. Göpferich 2002/²2006: 103, 175). For instance, the section could begin with the general information and proceed to describe the western and eastern breakwater arms one by one, rather than interspersing general points with specific ones relating to individual arms. As with Example 1, the structural incoherence will not necessarily prevent the translation from being successful, but the target text as it stands is less good than it might be and leaves scope for human creativity.

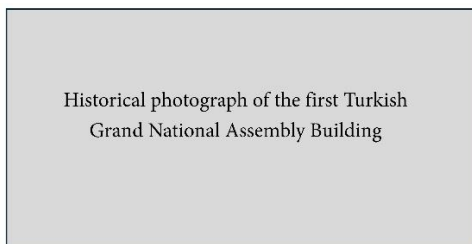
In my experience, students often find it difficult to handle source-text defects both in translating and in post-editing.⁷ If they recognize the defects, they are often unsure about whether to correct them in their target versions. Encouraging them to think about what the translation brief implies and, if appropriate, to produce a target text that is creative, rather than merely viable, will not only enable them to discharge their responsibility as translators in a wide range of translation situations. It will also give them an advantage over machine-translation systems, which do not (yet?) display this type of creativity when confronted with factual and structural defects.

4 Layout and Prior Knowledge

A different set of issues arises in translating or post-editing a Turkish museum flyer (KSM n.d.). The flyer shows and describes the first building of the Turkish Grand National As-

⁷ As mentioned in my introduction, the extent of students' exposure to translation issues does not necessarily correlate with specific aspects of their translation competence. The way students handle source-text defects is a case in point. Some act confidently and responsibly at an early stage, while others require a long learning process.

sembly, which houses the War of Liberation⁸ Museum. Figure 2 illustrates what the flyer layout looks like. The relationship between image size and character count is the same as in the original flyer.



History of the Grand National Assembly Building

The War of Independence Museum (First Turkish Grand National Assembly Building) was designed in 1915 by Salim Bey, the architect of Evkaf (Foundations Administration), by order of Enver Pasha, to be used as a clubhouse by the Committee of Union and Progress, and the task of executing the project was assigned to Mahmut Şevket (İscandal) Bey, the Ankara representative of the Committee of Union and Progress of the period, and the project construction work was assigned to Hasip Bey, a military architect working in the Corps. Hasip Bey successfully completed the masonry part of the building, but the roof and other parts were left unfinished due to the ongoing war and the shortage of materials; Architect Hasip Bey was martyred during the War of Independence.

When Ankara was occupied by British and French troops for a short time after the First World War, a small French detachment settled in this building, which had not yet covered part of the roof, but upon the arrival of Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Ankara on 27 December 1919, they evacuated the building and left the city.

When it was decided to open the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on 23 April 1920, it was observed that there was no building in Ankara with the necessary size and equipment for the Assembly to convene. Under these circumstances, it is decided to use the unfinished Union and Progress Party Club Building as the Parliament Building, and the task of repairing and completing the building is given to Necati Bey (later Bursa MP for the 1st term).

Constructed with pink-purple coloured local andesite stone known as Ankara stone and one of the first examples of the 'First National Architecture Period Style' in Ankara, the building was completed with the tiles brought from the houses of Ankara residents and the Numune School (now Cumhuriyet Primary School) in Ulucanlar, with the dedication of the people. Used between 23 April 1920 and 15 October 1924 as the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the building was later used as the headquarters of the Republican People's Party and hosted the Law School for a short time during the same period. In 1952, the building was transferred to the Ministry of National Education (Ministry of Education), and in 1957, with the decision taken by the Ministry Commission, works were started to transform it into a museum and it was opened to the public on 23 April 1961 under the name of 'Grand National Assembly Museum'. As a result of the renovation works carried out by the Ministry of Culture within the framework of the 'Programme to Celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Atatürk's Birth', the museum was opened to visitors on 23 April 1981.

Figure 2: Layout of museum flyer (English text by DeepL)

8 The official English designation is *National War of Liberation*.

The translation brief reads: “Please produce a flyer with the same layout for a German-speaking target audience. The flyer is to be published both online and in print. The printed version will be made available for instance to museum visitors.”

Irrespective of whether a German-language flyer should be crammed with as much text as this, translators will face two related problems in trying to meet the requirements of the brief. First, the source text presupposes some prior knowledge that target readers cannot be expected to have. For instance, the title of the flyer is “War of Liberation Museum,” but no general background information on the war is provided. A Turkish audience will not require this information, but many target readers will be less knowledgeable about Turkish history. It would therefore make sense to contextualize the description of the museum by adding some basic historical facts.

Another presupposition can be seen in Example 3. All educated Turkish readers will know that “Mustafa Kemal Pasha” was the founder of the Republic of Turkey, who was dubbed Atatürk in 1934. Educated target readers might well be familiar with the surname Atatürk, but they might not associate this with the “Mustafa Kemal” mentioned in the text. The reason why the French left Ankara will in this case be less clear to them.

Example 3: Prior knowledge

Birinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında Ankara, kısa bir süre için İngiliz ve Fransız askerleri tarafından işgal edildiğinde küçük bir Fransız müfrezesi, henüz çatısının bir bölümü örtülmemiş olan bu binaya yerleşmiş, ancak 27 Aralık 1919’da Mustafa Kemal Paşa’nın Ankara’ya gelmesi üzerine binayı boşaltarak kenti terk etmiştir.

Als Ankara nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg für kurze Zeit von britischen und französischen Truppen besetzt war, richtete sich ein kleines französisches Detachement in diesem Gebäude ein, das einen Teil des Daches noch nicht gedeckt hatte, aber bei der Ankunft von Mustafa Ke-

mal Pascha in Ankara am 27. Dezember 1919 räumten sie das Gebäude und verließen die Stadt. (DeepL, 18 April 2023)

When Ankara was occupied by British and French troops for a short time after the First World War, a small French detachment settled in this building, which had not yet covered part of its roof, but upon the arrival of Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Ankara on 27 December 1919, they vacated the building and left the city. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

However, providing background information is made difficult not only by the layout, which does not leave much space for additions, but also by a second problem, namely the fact that it is not unusual for translations from Turkish into German to become longer in terms of character count. Even without additions, the German text may well require more space than the Turkish one. The translator will therefore have to consider leaving out some of the details included in the source text. For instance, in Example 3, the reference to the unfinished roof, while not irrelevant to the history of the building, is not essential for understanding its use and could be omitted if necessary (cf. also Example 4).

Additions aimed at providing background information for a target audience from a different culture constitute a desirable modification, but they are not indispensable. For one thing, readers of this flyer can be assumed to have a stronger interest in Turkish history than average, and therefore to be somewhat more knowledgeable about it. For another, the translation could be read despite a lack of prior knowledge, though not necessarily with ease, even if it contained no more than the facts included in the source text. By contrast, preserving the layout is explicitly required by the brief. Omissions are therefore obligatory if the number of characters cannot be kept within the necessary limit by means of a more economical wording. Protests would almost certainly result if the print were so small as to be virtually illegible.

Shortening the text requires creative translations. When I first prompted ChatGPT with a limited character count (a maximum of 250 characters) on 18 April 2023, it chose a solution that was new but not appropriate and therefore not creative in Kußmaul's terms, namely cutting the text off at the end. This seemed to remain its preferred method of shortening texts for some months. In other words, it was unable to display the type of creativity needed here. However, when I gave it the same prompt once more in November 2023 and May 2024, it produced acceptable versions of the Turkish passage cited above in Example 3:

Example 4: Limited character count

Nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg besetzten britische und französische Truppen kurz Ankara. Eine kleine französische Einheit zog in dieses unvollständige Gebäude ein, verließ es aber am 27. Dezember 1919, als Mustafa Kemal Pascha in Ankara ankam. (GPT-4o, 15 May 2024)

After the First World War, British and French troops briefly occupied Ankara. A small French unit moved into this incomplete building, but left it on 27 December 1919 when Mustafa Kemal Pasha arrived in Ankara. (DeepL, translation of GPT-4o's German version, 15 May 2024)

If we compare the translations generated by DeepL (Example 3) and GPT-4o (Example 4), we can see that GPT-4o uses various translation procedures designed to shorten the text. On the level of accuracy, it omits the fact that the French left not only the building but the city. Moreover, it substitutes a generalization, “unvollständig” (“incomplete”), for the reference to the, as yet, only partly tiled roof. On a purely linguistic level, the phrase “für kurze Zeit” (“for a short time”) is replaced by the single short adverb “kurz” (“briefly”). Instead of DeepL's initial subordinate clause with its passive construction, GPT-4o uses a more concise main clause with an active predicate (“besetzten,” “occupied”). These linguistic solutions

make sense. So does the generalization in the context of the source text as a whole because the incomplete roof is mentioned in the previous paragraph, which I have not cited here. By contrast, the fact that the French withdrew from Ankara does seem a relevant piece of background information for the target audience. This omission is therefore somewhat problematic. However, it is noteworthy that GPT-4o is able to constructively respond to a prompt specifying a maximum character count at all.

Translation problems relating to layout and prior knowledge can be a challenge for students as well as AI systems. When faced with a layout such as that in Figure 2, students may well recognize text length as an issue that needs to be addressed. They may also be able to identify translation procedures that can be used to meet layout requirements. However, implementing them can be a different matter because some students are reluctant to take responsibility for the modifications that this involves. As far as additional explanations are concerned, one hurdle for some students seems to be realizing their desirability. Since students usually are to some extent familiar with the source culture, becoming aware of the target audience's lack of prior knowledge requires a perspective change that does not come automatically but can be learned.

5 Distinct Target-Text Function

In the previous two sections, the functions specified in the translation briefs were similar to the functions served by the source texts. However, functions can also be quite different. My third example text is the website of a company specializing in card payment systems, more specifically the page on which the members of the Board of Directors are introduced (cf. Bileşim 2021). The translation brief reads:

The target text is to be used together with the source text in a textbook on business Turkish. It is to help learners with a B1–B2 level to understand both the language and the contents of the Turkish text. For this purpose, further explanations can be provided in addition to the translation itself.

The fluent translations for which neural machine translation is notorious would help learners of Turkish less than a more literal version. In this case, however, the translation produced by DeepL is fairly literal. The problems it fails to solve are of a different nature (Example 5).

Example 5: Linguistic mismatches

Ergin KAYA
Yönetim Kurulu Başkanı
Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilimler Fakültesi Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü'nden mezun olmuştur.

Ergin KAYA
Vorsitzender des Verwaltungsrats
Er schloss sein Studium an der Universität Ankara, Fakultät für Politikwissenschaften, Abteilung für öffentliche Verwaltung, ab. (DeepL, 7 May 2023)

Ergin KAYA
Chairman of the Board of Directors
He graduated from Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Public Administration. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

In Example 5, the two linguistic issues that I want to discuss occur only in the German version. The first of these is the German term “Verwaltungsrat,” which DeepL uses to translate “Yönetim Kurulu” (“Board of Directors”). Turkey, like countries such as Britain and the United States, has a one-tier system with a single board of directors, whereas Germany’s two-tier system comprises two governance bodies, namely the management board (“Vorstand”) and the supervisory board (“Aufsichtsrat” or “Verwaltungsrat”). In German texts referring to the one-tier system, it is customary to use the English term “Board

of Directors” (cf., e.g., Welge/Eulerich 2011/³2021: 37–38). However, the correct term alone would not be the best possible solution. Since the target text is to be published in a textbook for learners of business Turkish, a desirable addition would be to explicitly draw attention to the difference between Turkish and German corporate governance. This information might, for instance, be provided in a footnote or in the margin, depending on the publisher’s preferences.

In addition to having DeepL translate the source text, I also prompted ChatGPT with the text and the brief (7 May 2023). Its first version was quite similar to that provided by DeepL. When I objected that this took no account of the needs of the target audience, it produced a new version, in which it retained most of the capitalized Turkish designations (e.g. “Yönetim Kurulu” and “Ankara Üniversitesi”) and added German translations in parentheses. GPT-4o’s response to the same brief in May 2024 consisted in adding a list of Turkish and German terms at the end of the translation (e.g. “Ankara Üniversitesi: Universität Ankara”). In the context of my translation brief, these solutions obviously make no sense because the text will be published in parallel in Turkish and German, and learners will be expected to read the source text itself with the aid of the target text.

The second linguistic issue that calls for a creative solution is the verb phrase “mezun olmuştur” (“graduated”). The German translation provided by DeepL, “schloss sein Studium [...] ab,” is perfectly correct on the level of denotation: literally, “mezun olmak” means “become a graduate,” and “sein Studium abschließen,” “complete one’s studies.” These translations are functional in so far as they will help learners understand the words of the source text. However, there is a clear difference on the level of pragmatics. The Turkish phrase “mezun olmak” is the one most commonly used in this type of

introduction. By contrast, a Google search shows that the German phrase “sein Studium abschließen” mostly occurs in specific microcontexts, for instance when the degree conferred or the graduation date is mentioned in the same sentence. In the translation produced by DeepL (as well as ChatGPT), it strikes me as odd because a relevant microcontext is lacking. Interestingly, in May 2024, GPT-4o chose a denotatively similar phrase, “seinen Abschluss machen,” whereas DeepL employed the most usual German solution, “studieren” (“to study”). However, this solution on its own will not necessarily tell learners all they need to know. It would be desirable to add an explanation alerting them to the pragmatic difference between the Turkish and German phrases.

Neither DeepL nor GPT-4o as yet achieves the creativity required by this specific translation brief. Some students, too, may find the brief a challenge for a variety of reasons. One reason is probably that their degree programmes do not systematically prepare them for what Nord (1989: 102–103; 2016: 32) calls documentary translation, i.e. a translation type that “‘documents’ a communicative interaction or any of its aspects in which a source-culture sender communicates with a source-culture recipient under source-culture conditions.” Outside optional masters’ courses devoted to official (certified) translation, students at FTSK will most often be expected to produce fluent target texts. While they will usually be aware of the importance of briefs and skopoi, their nascent repertoire of translation strategies may still be too restricted to fulfil the requirements of an aid to understanding the source text.

6 Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I have discussed three types of translation problems: source-text defects, the target audience’s prior

knowledge and its implications for text length, and a translation brief requiring a non-fluent target text. In all three cases, DeepL failed to produce appropriate solutions. So did GPT-4o (despite at least one follow-up prompt in each case), with the single exception that it was able to shorten a text, albeit in a less than fully satisfactory manner.

Interestingly, the issues that AI systems had difficulties handling often prove conceptually difficult for students as well. While some students may also struggle to achieve appropriate solutions on a purely linguistic level, linguistic translation procedures, whether reproductive or creative, seem to come more naturally to many than translatorial strategies derived from the brief and skopos. Weaknesses of ChatGPT identified by Giray et al. (2024: 45–47), such as a lack of contextual understanding, an overreliance on training data, and limited critical thinking, are not the exclusive domain of AI, though their origins and implications are of course quite different for AI and humans. This brings to mind Katan’s observations on narrativity:

Narrativity, the “understanding of the characters, events and experiences that are the subject of the discourse” (Alleyne, 2015, p. 62⁹) is a singularly human ability. It is not what machine translation (however deep learning and neural) can be programmed to do. Nor is this ability stressed as a competence that the *homo sapiens* translator is expected to excel at. Yet, when translation involves those higher stakes and where there is a clear audience shift to an outsider readership, the translator could stress their added value actively demonstrating what machines can’t do by becoming a *homo narrans* translator. (Katan 2023: 87)

While my skopos-based approach to translation has always involved expecting human translators to produce texts that first and foremost make sense in the target situation, I agree with Katan that this ability now constitutes a unique selling point for humans faced with AI competition. Yamada (2023) argues

9 The quotation is actually from p. 81.

that GPT-4, in contrast to tools such as DeepL and Google Translate, can be prompted with information such as the purpose of the translation and the target audience. However, the examples he discusses concern what Nida (1964: 166–176) calls “dynamic equivalence,” which may be substantially easier to achieve for an AI system than the variety of *skopoi* with which I have experimented. It remains to be seen whether or not AI will in the future make progress in the direction of *skopos* adequacy, but for the present, “locat[ing] the textual gap between what is written, the writer’s model of the world and that of the implied and the new readership,” and consequently “translat[ing] for the new implied readership” (Katan 2023: 87), seem to remain the preserve of humans.

If this is the case, then what can *skopos* mean in connection with AI? Is *skopos* something that AI could in the future learn to achieve mechanically, by means of predictions based on further and/or different training data? Rather than pursue this line of thought, I suggest that we might benefit from adopting the philosophical perspective taken by van Lier (2023).¹⁰ She argues in favour of viewing large language models (LLMs) and humans as collaborative agents:

LLMs do not generate texts *by themselves*. In practice, they *co-produce* texts together with their user. [...] Without a prompt, ChatGPT will not generate a text. Without the right prompt or critical feedback, ChatGPT will not generate *meaningful* texts. At the moment, then, ChatGPT, or any LLM for that matter, does thus not generate texts in isolation. Rather, producing (meaningful) texts in these cases is a *collaborative production*, one that necessarily involves both the (human) user and the system. (van Lier 2023: 80; emphasis in original)

The relationship between the two components in this collaborative agent is hierarchical. The human component is autono-

10 For the reference to van Lier (2023), I am indebted to Krüger (2024: 19).

mous, while the LLM component can be regarded either as a tool or as an artificial agent (cf. van Lier 2023: 80, 84). In van Lier's approach (2023: 83, 80), attributing agency to systems does not involve "any claim about whether things that appear to be up to certain systems are truly 'up to' them. I will merely hold that if it appears like they do, then it makes sense to refer to these systems as agents."¹¹ However, even if we consider LLMs agents in this sense, they are—at present—"supervise[d] and guide[d]" by the human component of the collaborative agent.

As far as translation is concerned, Asscher (2023: 16) points out that the translator's conscious agency may play a central role "[i]f future definitions of translation [...] attempt to differentiate human and machine translation." Adopting van Lier's perspective would involve questioning the attempt while retaining the concept of agency. Human translation and AI translation do not need to be regarded as clearly separable. Rather, the human component is the leading one in the collaborative agent that produces the target text. It is the human component that defines the skopos and determines in how far the AI component has achieved it. Likewise, it is the human component that decides in how far the prompts used have been appropriate and in how far training might be improved.

The examples that I have discussed in the context of skopos as a source of creativity suggest that human translators should see themselves as agents, irrespective of whether they work on their own or collaborate with an AI system. Their perceived agency would, among other things, involve a self-image

11 Cf. Rozmyslowicz (2020: 223–246), who argues that, from a theoretical point of view, the translator as agent is what Nietzsche calls a "grammatical habit" rather than an objective fact. It would be worth exploring connections between Rozmyslowicz's argument and van Lier's concept of agency as applied to LLMs.

of the translator as the person who is in charge of the target text and takes responsibility for its appropriateness. It would enable the translator to exploit the potential of a skopos-based approach to translation by implementing both obligatory and desirable creative solutions that are tailored to meet the requirements of the target situation.

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Stylistic Features and Creativity in Machine Translation of Literary Texts

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Abstract: Computer-assisted literary translation has become a trending topic of discussion with both its possible benefits and negative impact on creativity and voice. We investigate distinctive stylistic features and the degree of creativity in the outputs generated by three English–Turkish machine translation (MT) models: (1) a customized MT model trained with literary texts, (2) a pre-trained MT model with general texts, and (3) an online MT model, namely Google Translate. We focus on two sub-genres within the literary domain: fiction and nonfiction. Our analysis of style and creativity is based on human evaluation of samples and on qualitative corpus analysis of full texts, involving identification of creative translation strategies and stylistic

features. We compare the outputs of the three models with translations by two renowned translators, Nihal Yeğinoğlu and Belkis Dişbudak, on the test set. Our investigations of style and creativity involve different methods, yet we consider the possible relationship between the two in light of our findings. A higher level of creativity is observed in the human translation and in the fine-tuned model for the nonfiction; and a customized MT model trained with Turkish literary translations generates outputs stylistically closer to the human translation than a pre-trained model or an online MT tool.

Keywords: Literary translation, Machine translation, Style, Creativity, English–Turkish language pair.

1 Introduction

Computer-assisted literary translation started attracting machine translation researchers about a decade ago with experiments mainly on European language pairs (cf., e.g., Besacier 2014).¹ It has also become a widely discussed topic within Translation Studies in recent years, mostly from a critical perspective. Researchers highlighted MT's negative impact on creativity (cf., e.g., Şahin/Gürses 2019), reading experience (cf. Guerberof-Arenas/Toral 2020), and voice (cf., e.g., Kenny/Winters 2020), as well as ethical issues (cf., e.g., Taivalkoski-Shilov 2019). This line of research has proliferated, involving more language pairs and different contexts. In addition to MT, technologies such as corpus tools proved to have contributed to the translation process (cf. Youdale 2020). Nowadays, technology use in literary translation is seen as a more unexceptional practice, especially with the quick adoption of generative ar-

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tificial intelligence tools in writing and translation such as Grammarly and ChatGPT'.

This study focuses on creativity and style in translations generated by comparatively more controllable and customizable MT models (see section 2) as well as ones produced by generic, freely available online MT tools (see section 3). Creativity and style were investigated separately as they constitute different phenomena measured with different methods (see section 4). Nonetheless, we consider there to be an overlap between these two concepts, with creativity encompassing style, while the reverse does not necessarily have to hold true (see section 5).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Style

For the last quarter of this century, translator style has garnered significant interest, with pioneering work by Baker (2000) and subsequent contributions from Malmkjær (2003), Munday (2008), Boase-Beier (2011), Saldanha (2011), Winters (2007), and Kenny/Winters (2020), among others. Research has primarily explored two perspectives: one linking translator style to the source text author (cf. Malmkjær 2003, Boase-Beier 2011) and the other suggesting that translators have a distinct style independent of the source text (cf. Saldanha 2011).

Recent advances in corpus tools have shifted the focus from examining isolated stylistic choices to identifying broader stylistic patterns. Metrics such as type-token ratio, word/sentence length, keyness, and the frequency of morphemes and lexical categories are now used to assess vocabulary richness and structural complexity (cf. Baker 2000, Bosseaux 2001, Vajn 2009, Li et al. 2011, Saldanha 2011, Frankenberg-Garcia 2022).

While Baker's (2000) methodology primarily examines the target text, other approaches also consider the original author's style (cf. Boase-Beier 2011, 2019; Malmkjær 2003, Munday 2008). Boase-Beier acknowledges that "cultural and ideological positioning of the translator" (Baker 2000: 258, as quoted in Boase-Beier 2019: 80) is an important factor in the study of style, but emphasizes the risk of being speculative, even supported by computer-assisted analysis, since such an approach takes the study of style to a stage where various influences on translator's state of mind need to be investigated.

More specifically, keyword analysis has been employed in various studies (cf. Olohan 2004, Mastropierro 2018, Mikhailov 2021) to compare lexical items in translation corpora with those in reference corpora, comprised of texts by various translators and/or non-translated texts. Keywords are assessed not only for their frequency but also for their rarity and specificity. Analyzing their concordance—how they are used in context—reveals their grammatical, semantic, and discourse functions. For instance, Frankenberg-Garcia (2022) conducted both quantitative and qualitative keyword analyses in Portuguese-to-English translations, examining grammatical roles and broader discourse contexts. The comparison of human translations with MT's of the same texts highlighted significant differences: Human translations showed greater lexical consistency and explicitation, attributed to translators' efforts to enhance reader comprehension.

With recent developments in MT, it has also become compelling to explore whether MT systems can exhibit or mimic a translator's style. Research in literary MT has demonstrated that while MT models can achieve varying levels of success (cf. Besacier 2014, Besacier/Schwartz 2015, Şahin/Dungan 2014, Sluyter-Gäthje 2018 and Toral/Way 2018), the replication of a translator's unique style remains a complex

challenge. In our previous research (cf. Yirmibeşoğlu et al. 2023, Gürses et al. 2024, Dalli et al. 2024), we investigated two key questions: Does a literary translator have a distinctive style, and if so, can MT replicate this style? To examine the unique stylistic features of a prominent literary translator, Nihal Yeğİnobalı (1927–2020), we analyzed the following stylistic features:

- average morphemes per sentence,
- average words per sentence,
- type-token ratio,
- five most common morpheme combinations, and
- keywords.

We compared these features in relation to a reference corpus of 512 Turkish literary translations reflecting linguistic trends from 1946 to 2015, the translator’s career timeframe. Afterwards, we fine-tuned a pre-trained MT model (cf. Tiedemann/Thottingal 2020) using 48 of Yeğİnobalı’s manually aligned translations. We obtained the informed consent of the translator’s heirs in compliance with the pertinent copyright laws and used the fine-tuned model only for the purposes of the current research project as we are undoubtedly aware of the ethical issues around using existing translations in MT research (see Şahin/Gürses 2023). Our analysis revealed significant differences between the translator corpus and the reference corpus in the specified features, with the fine-tuned model’s keywords closely matching Yeğİnobalı’s. Additionally, a qualitative review of texts from both the pre-trained and fine-tuned models showed substantial similarities to Yeğİnobalı’s style.

Style in literary machine translation continues to be a topic of interest to scholars in Translation Studies. Hansen (2024) worked on adapting machine translation to individual human translators for young adult fiction books. The edited book titled *Computer-Assisted Literary Translation* (Rothwell et al. 2024)

features three chapters touching upon style and creativity by Winters/Kenny, Dorst, and Šplíchalová. Winters/Kenny (2024) continued their inquiry into Oeser's voice and style through keyword analysis. Dorst (2024) compares human translation and Google translation of a literary text with a focus on the transfer of metaphors in the target language. The researcher concludes that “the creative, more clearly literary metaphors appeared to be the easiest to translate, most likely since direct translation is simply the most suitable solution” (Dorst 2024: 183). Lastly, Šplíchalová (2024) explores how corpus tools can be employed to identify intensional functions in literary texts with an aim to help translators create the same stylistic effect in the target text.

In our previous study with a focus on English–Turkish literary machine translation, we investigated style in literary translation and showed that “adapting a pre-trained model to the works of a translator increases the BLEU score by about 45–56% on the literary data and captures the translator's style 18–40% better in terms of cosine similarity compared to the pre-trained model” (Yirmibeşoğlu et al. 2023: 426). Although style and creativity have started to be discussed more intensively within the context of generative artificial intelligence tools in the last couple of years, investigating these aspects in literary translation in more controlled settings can contribute to research in both Translation Studies and Natural Language Processing.

2.2 Creativity

Creativity presupposes some unexpectedness, novelty, originality from the agent. Yet, not everything which is unexpected is creative, and creativity has many definitions. Building on Kußmaul's (2000) work on creativity in translation which con-

siders creativity as an inherent component of any translation activity, translation and interpreting scholars elaborate on the topic from different perspectives (e.g., Cercel et al. 2017). For instance, it is even argued that “creativity in translation work and in the translation workplace is not necessarily restricted to linguistic aspects” (see Risku et al. 2017). In the same volume, Schreiber (2017) argues that creativity can be observed in instances where there is no standard solution for a specific translation problem in the language pair in question. Literary translation, in this respect, is likely to offer more opportunities for translators to produce creative solutions. As Hermans puts it:

Works of art in particular are expressions of creative selfhood which shape the language in which they are conceived as much as they are shaped by it. To grasp the singular genius of creative authors, one must know the language they had at their disposal and gauge how they moulded it, even awakening meanings the authors themselves may have been unaware of. (Hermans 2019: 229)

Translation as a human activity, too, is often more than a mere transfer of the source text to the target language, involving “rewriting” (Lefevere 1992) and adaptation, particularly in the literary domain.

The increasing degree of accuracy of MT tools for many genres in major languages has made creativity one of the distinctive features of translation. Turell (2004: 5–6) points out that “[w]hen looking at plagiarism in literature one has to bring into discussion the question of imitation—a common practice in literary production in all centuries and civilizations—understood as a steering wheel of creativity.” Yet, in today’s mainly profit-oriented publishing sector practices, the imitation of creative solutions is viewed as an indicator of plagiarism when comparing translations of the same source text—usually classics or best-sellers—conducted by different translators (cf., e.g., Gürses 2007: 9–16; Şahin et al. 2015: 205–213).

Trained with previous translations, MT is expected to show a limited level of creativity. The effect of MT on creativity was first investigated by Şahin/Gürses (2019) in a study with novice translators who were fourth-year students in a translation and interpreting studies BA program. The researchers focused on the impact of MT-aided retranslation activity on novice translators' creativity in literary texts for the English–Turkish language pair. They compared translations by novice translators with four previously published translations of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. The parts in the source text that would require creative solutions are marked and the solutions by each translator were evaluated based on the following categories:

- “literal translation,
- [imitation of the] MT solution (literal, creative, or erroneous translation),
- creative solution (going beyond literal translation),
- undertranslation (not conveying the message fully),
- mistranslation (conveying the message incorrectly), and
- untranslated (omitting the whole unit)” (Şahin/Gürses 2019: 28).

The researchers concluded that students were able to create more original solutions when they had no help from MT.

Guerberof-Arenas/Toral (2020, 2022) also focused on creative aspects in MT, post-edited MT, and human translation in two related studies. In their later study, to measure the level of creativity, the researchers counted “the number of creative solutions (shifts) provided for a given problem posed by the [source text] ST” (2022: 190). They used a Dynamic Quality Framework (DQF) combined with Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM) to classify errors according to the following categories: Accuracy, Fluency, Terminology, Style, Design, Locale Convention, Verity and Other. They marked the source

text with 15 different units of creative potential such as metaphors, idiomatic phrases, wordplay and puns, onomatopoeias, neologisms, and rhyme and metrics. The reviewers classified the units of creative potential as reproduction, omissions, errors, and creative shifts, a term which refers to “translations that deviate from the ST” by means of abstraction, concretization, and modification. Although the researchers created a customized MT model trained with English–Catalan literary data, their findings were in line with the ones by Şahin/Gürses (2019): The outputs were quite literal and post-editing such outputs hindered translators’ creativity.

English–Turkish literary MT was further investigated by Şahin/Gürses with a focus on the attitudes of novice and professional translators towards using online MT tools in the process. They argued that “the human-machine interaction may have decreased the participants’ sense of immersion in the act of ‘translation.’ In other words, the interaction probably caused a certain level of confusion about their role. Were they editors, or translators?” (2021): 197).

In her book titled *Translation and Creativity*, Malmkjær (2020: 28) argues that “[p]eople engage in creativity spontaneously in view of their humanness, but creativity can be nurtured and trained, and guidelines can be provided for such efforts.” This argument is in fact the backbone of translator education, where novice translators still outperform MT or generative AI tools. Nevertheless, it seems worth investigating whether MT systems can be “nurtured” for creative outputs. MT outputs are usually not considered copyrightable because they are not regarded as original or creative. In fact, as Malmkjær observes, “it is extremely rare that two translations of the same text into the same other language are exactly alike, either in a translation classroom or in a more professional context” (2020: 39). It is also important to see whether this applies to

customized MT models or not. In other words, identifying the level of creativity and distinctive stylistic features in customized MT outputs can modify our current understanding of copyright and our perception of the distinctions between human and artificial intelligence.

3 Methodology

In our study we address the following question: What are the distinctive stylistic features and the degree of creativity in the outputs (a fiction and a nonfiction literary work) generated by three English–Turkish MT models, namely (1) a pre-trained MT model with general texts, (2) a customized MT model trained with literary texts, and (3) Google Translate, a freely available online MT system? We are also interested in investigating the degree of proximity of the outputs produced by the abovementioned systems to human translation in terms of style and accuracy.

3.1 Texts

We used two different texts in our study. One representative each from a fictional and a nonfictional genre:

Fiction: *Ağ* (*Under the Net*) (1954) by Iris Murdoch (1919–1999) was translated in 1993 by Nihal Yeğinobalı (1927–2020), an author-translator. Interestingly, earlier in her career, back in the 1940s, she had published two novels under a fake American name after facing rejection from publishers for her own work. *Under the Net* echoes her experiences, as it portrays a writer who has become a translator after a poorly received novel. Notably, Yeğinobalı revealed her authorship of those pseudo-translated novels around the time she translated Murdoch's book, creating an intriguing parallel.

Nonfiction: Belkıs Dişbudak (1938–) has been working as an interpreter and literary translator for about 60 years. She has published around 200 translations and her translations from Ayn Rand, Trevanian and Tom Robbins have been most popular. *The Bookseller of Florence* (2021) is a nonfiction novel by the novelist Ross King (1962–). Dişbudak translated another non-fiction novel by King called *Brunelleschi's Dome* (2000) in 2010. It was about 180 pages long. When another publisher republished the translation in 2020, he also asked Dişbudak to translate King's latest book about the booksellers in Italy. And she translated *The Bookseller of Florence* (*Floransa Kitapçısı*) in her 80s, a book three times longer than the first one, about 500 pages long. The book has massive footnotes and bibliography. Even though these books are categorized as nonfiction, they can be put under fictionalized history books since the narration is very stylized. The translation was published in 2023.

3.2 MT Training

Our first model is an English–Turkish Transformer model², pre-trained on general text (on more than 108M sentences) from various domains as part of the OPUS-MT project by Helsinki-NLP. The second model is the same OPUS-MT model, which we fine-tuned with literary translations by renowned Turkish translators for 5 epochs with a batch size of 64 on 4 Tesla V100 GPUs. According to best practice guidelines, all translators or their heirs gave us permission to use the translations to train MT for research purposes (as explained in detail in footnotes 3-5). The literary fine-tuning dataset consists of 91 manually aligned books from 3 different translators

2 See <<https://huggingface.co/Helsinki-NLP/opus-mt-tc-big-en-tr>> (01.07.2025).

(Nihal Yeğinoğlu³, Sabri Gürses⁴, Belkıs Dışbudak⁵) with a total of 517,488 sentences (see Table 1).

Translator	Sentences	Books
Yeğinoğlu	322,822	62
Gürses	98,462	14
Dışbudak	96,204	15
Total	517,488	91

Table 1: Datasets used for fine-tuning OPUS-MT

3.3 Analysis

This section explains the criteria for selecting samples for the qualitative analysis. We also provide a detailed list of the translation strategies used to code translation solutions in different

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- 3 The Nihal Yeğinoğlu corpus was digitized with the informed consent of her heirs in compliance with the pertinent copyright laws. The digitization process involved procuring physical copies of the texts for scanning, revising the optically recognized digital versions, and manually aligning the target texts with their respective source texts to train the machine translation engine.
 - 4 The texts that form part of the Sabri Gürses corpus, which consists of 14 translations from English, were collected as digital texts by himself. The project members accepted responsibility to protect them and not to use them in other works or for any other purposes. These texts were automatically and manually aligned to train the MT engine for the purposes of the current project. The texts will be deleted afterwards from all locations and will not be included in any reference corpora.
 - 5 Due to the limited availability of most materials in electronic form, we obtained informed consent from Belkıs Dışbudak to digitize her texts and asked her for the digital versions while complying with relevant copyright laws. We declared to use them only for our work and not to use or share them in any other reference corpora or for any other purposes and to delete them afterwards.

outputs. Finally, we give brief information about the annotators and the inter-rater reliability.

3.3.1 Samples

We took two samples, each consisting of 50 segments (sentences) from the test books. The selection criteria were as follows: 10 random samples were selected from sentences with the highest BLEU and BERTscore F1 values (50th, 60th, 70th, 80th and 90th percentiles).

For the automatic evaluation of the machine translation models, we used BLEU, BERTscore, and COMET scores. Automatic evaluation of style is based on the methodology employed by Yirmibeşoğlu et al. (2023), where the stylistic features such as average morphemes per sentence, average words per sentence, type-token ratio, and keywords are counted, and their average normalized frequencies are converted into vectors. Each translation is represented as a separate vector, and their similarities to the translations by Nihal Yeğinobalı or Belkıs Dışbudak is assessed based on the cosine similarity of these vectors. In this comparison, higher cosine similarity indicates a closer style match between two texts.

3.3.2 Human Evaluation

Our analysis of style and creativity is based on human evaluation of samples and on qualitative corpus analysis of full texts, involving identification of creative translation strategies and stylistic features. We compare the outputs of the three models and the available human translations on the test set. We used a rubric of translation strategies adapted from Şahin et al. (2018), who compiled a set of translation strategies using a variety of sources (cf. Vinay/Darbelnet 1958/1977, Nida 1964, Váz-

quez-Ayora 1977, Margot 1979, Newmark 1988, Delisle 1993, Chesterman 1997, Molina/Hurtado Albir 2002). The researchers coded translation solutions in different translations of the same source text to identify the level of similarity and pinpoint plagiaristic works. Table 2 presents the strategies used in the current study. The strategies are divided into the three major semiotic categories: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (see Appendix A for the codes for each category).

Syntactic	Semantic	Pragmatic
unit shift cohesion change transposition noun phrase structure verb phrase structure sentence structure change naturalization loan	word choice emphasis change paraphrase	addition omission free translation theme/rheme change discursive creation coherence change paratextual visibility explicitation/implicitation cultural adaptation linguistic amplification linguistic compression variation modulation compensation illocutionary change

Table 2: Translation strategies according to the three semiotic categories

Four annotators—senior university students majoring in translation and interpreting studies—worked on the samples of outputs. A pilot analysis was conducted using a test translation. Two annotators were assigned for each sample dataset. The source of the outputs was not revealed to the annotators to avoid bias (see Table 3).

EN	#1	#2	#3	#4
“What do you mean?” she said.	“Ne demek istiyorsun?” dedi.	Ne demek istiyorsun?” dedi.	“Ne demek istiyorsun?” dedi.	‘Ne demek istiyorsun?’ dedi.
Both resemble the dynamism of water which runs through many channels to find its own level.	Her ikisi de birçok kanaldan geçerek kendi düzeyini bulan suyun dinamizmini andırır.	Her ikisi de pek çok kanaldan geçerek kendi seviyesini bulan suyun dinamizmini andırıyor.	İkisi de, birçok kanallardan akıp geçerek sonunda kendi düzeyini bulan suyun dinamizmini andırır.	Her ikisinde kendi seviyesini bulmak için birçok kanaldan geçen suyun dinamizmine benzemektedir.

Table 3: Sample annotation spreadsheet

Established methods of inter-rater reliability are based on methods such as Cohen’s kappa, Krippendorff’s alpha and other metrics that take agreement by chance into account. However, the number of categories involved in our approach, as well as the interchangeable nature of these categories leads to results that indicate little to no inter-rater reliability with these approaches. As a step in the direction to refine our categories and annotation guidelines, we have measured the inter-rater reliability based on simple match/no match percentage in several scenarios.

These scenarios are designed to mitigate the drawbacks of these complex annotation requirements. Exact Annotation Match occurs when two annotators use the same set of style codes. Partial Annotation Match happens when two annotators share at least one style code. Exact Category Match applies when two annotators use the same categories without counting duplicates; these categories can be syntactic, pragmatic, or semantic as described in Table 2. Partial Category Match takes

place when two annotators have at least one category in common. Literal or nonliteral match involves converting annotations into literal (if annotated as 1 or if there is no annotation) or nonliteral before comparison.

4 Results

This section provides the results of both automatic and human evaluation. The former involves three different metrics as well as cosine similarity whereas the latter is based on manual coding of text samples by four annotators. We also provide the results of the inter-rater reliability and the reflections of the annotators.

4.1 Automatic Evaluation

The style vector cosine similarity shows that the fine-tuned model is the closest to the original translator's style, while the pre-trained model is even further away than Google Translate in terms of stylistic features. This shows that the base pre-trained model's lower stylistic similarity is being counteracted with the fine-tuning process, and the fine-tuned model also performs better than the pre-trained model according to the other evaluation metrics not related to style (see Tables 4–5).

Ağ (Fiction)*	BLEU	BERTScore F1	COMET**	Style Vector Cosine sim.
Google Translate	10.93	0.746	67.5	0.853
Pre-trained	9.27	0.724	79.7	0.807
Fine-tuned	14.32	0.751	81.9	0.944

Table 4: Automatic evaluation scores and style vector cosine similarity for the fiction

Floransa Kitapçısı* (Nonfiction)	BLEU	BERTScore F1	COMET**	Style Vector Cosine sim.
Google Translate	10.50	0.732	64.2	0.899
Pre-trained	9.11	0.712	77.4	0.850
Fine-tuned	9.77	0.717	78.7	0.909

Table 5: Automatic evaluation scores and style vector cosine similarity for the nonfiction

While automatic evaluation provides valuable evidence of stylistic convergence, it might prove insufficient in catching the subtleties of language used in literary and creative texts. Thus, although time-consuming and prone to bear a certain level of subjectivity, human evaluation is needed to supplement the automatic one so that more meaningful conclusions can be made.

4.2 Human Evaluation

We asked the annotators to take notes during their analysis. In their reflections on four different outputs, all annotators were able to identify the source of the outputs (i.e., pre-trained MT, fine-tuned MT, human translation, and Google Translate).

The human translations demonstrated superior fluency and stylistic freedom, characterized by a richer and more idiosyncratic lexicon. Translation universals, particularly explicitation and implicitation, were frequently observed, reflecting the translator's active intervention in shaping cohesion, coherence, and sentence structure. Deliberate theme/rheme alterations and modifications to verb structures were also evident.

The fine-tuned model exhibited many features akin to human translation, albeit with certain differences. It demonstrated greater fluency and reduced literalness compared to other machine-generated outputs, alongside a similarly rich

and idiosyncratic lexical profile. Explications and omissions were present. The model also incorporated theme/rheme changes and adapted verb structures, particularly in the use of modalities.

In contrast, the pre-trained model and Google Translate displayed more rudimentary characteristics. Both produced less fluent and more literal translations, often relying on repetitive lexical choices. They adhered closely to source text-based approaches for managing cohesion, coherence, sentence structure, and information flow, typically retaining default verb structures without significant modifications. Notably, these systems lacked the capacity to handle advanced translation features such as explication and implicitation, as indicated by the 'N/A' in the analysis. Table 5 summarizes the reflections of evaluators.

Human Translation	Fine-tuned Model	Pre-trained Model	Google Translate
most fluent and 'free'	more fluent, <u>less literal</u>	less fluent, literal	less fluent, literal
richer, <u>more idiosyncratic</u> lexis	richer, <u>more idiosyncratic</u> lexis	repetitive lexis	repetitive lexis
explication, implicitation	explication, omissions	N/A	N/A
intervention to cohesion, coherence, and sentence structure	intervention to cohesion, coherence, and sentence structure	<u>ST-based</u> cohesion, coherence, and sentence structure	<u>ST-based</u> cohesion, coherence, and sentence structure
theme/rheme change	theme/rheme change	<u>ST-based</u> info flow	<u>ST-based</u> info flow
verb structure change	verb structure change (modalities)	default verb structure	default verb structure

Table 6: General characteristics of each output

As explained in the methodology section, inter-rater reliability is measured based on the simple match/no match scenarios. As an example, Table 6 shows the inter-rater reliability scores for two annotators who annotated the same section of *Ağ*. Although the results are mixed, partial category matches and literal or nonliteral matches seem to be more acceptable than any exact or annotation code matches.

	Fine-Tuned	Google Translate	Pre-Trained	Yeğınobalı
Exact Annotation Match	50%	7.7%	42.3%	38.5%
Partial Annotation Match	53.8%	38.5%	53.8%	46.2%
Exact Category Match	57.7%	30.8%	61.5%	42.3%
Partial Category Match	61.5%	69.2%	73.1%	61.5%
Literal or Nonliteral Match	38.5%	100%	50%	76.9%

Table 7: Inter-rater reliability scores

In terms of literal or nonliteral matches, a very visible trend is traceable in almost all annotations, as shown in the authors' key annotations in Tables 8 and 9, where the nonliteral translations are the most prevalent in human-translated texts by Yeğınobalı and Dişbudak, followed by the fine-tuned model for the latter and Google Translate for the former. A more detailed look into the key annotations can be found in Appendix B.

<i>Ağ (Under the Net)</i>	Literal/Nonliteral Ratios Across Evaluations	
	Literal (%)	Nonliteral (%)
Google Translate	54.2	45.8
Pre-trained Model	62.5	37.5
Fine-tuned Model	58.3	41.7
Yeğenobalı	12.5	87.5

Table 8: Literal vs. Nonliteral translation solutions
for *Ağ (Under the Net)* by Annotator 2

<i>Floransa Kitapçısı (The Bookseller of Florence)</i>	Literal/Nonliteral Ratios Across Evaluations	
	Literal (%)	Nonliteral (%)
Google Translate	48	52
Pre-trained Model	56	44
Fine-tuned Model	36	64
Dişbudak	10	90

Table 9: Literal vs. Nonliteral translation solutions
for *Floransa Kitapçısı (The Bookseller of Florence)* by Annotator 2

The percentage of nonliteral translation solutions in the fiction book was higher in the outputs generated by Google Translate and the pre-trained model than the output by the fine-tuned model in all annotators' evaluations except for the one by Annotator 2 as seen in Table 9.

5 Discussion

Our study investigated differences in the level of creativity of English–Turkish translations generated in four different ways: (a) a published human translation, (b) a pre-trained MT model, (c) a fine-tuned MT model, and (d) a freely available online MT system. We measured the level of creativity by looking at the number of creative solutions produced for translation units in a sample of outputs for fiction and nonfiction. Human trans-

lations belong to two renowned translators, Nihal Yeğınobalı and Belkıs Dışbudak. The pre-trained model was developed using OPUS-MT and the fine-tuned model using a general literary corpus as training data. We chose Google Translate as the online MT system.

Our style analysis suggests that the fine-tuned model, even though trained with a mix of translations that did not include the translator's other works, is the closest to the original translator's style. This finding provides further evidence that a translator's style can be replicated to a certain extent with the help of customized MT models. We operationalized creativity as non-literal translation solutions which are identifiable through comparing the translation units in the target text with their source. To this end, a set of translation strategies were adapted from a previous study that focused on plagiarism in translation (cf. Şahin et al. 2018).

For both fiction and nonfiction books, human translation reflects the highest degree of creativity, based on the percentage of nonliteral translation solutions, in line with previous findings by Guerberofo-Arenas/Toral (2020, 2022) and Şahin/Gürses (2019). The higher number of nonliteral translation solutions observed in the outputs generated by the fine-tuned MT model for the nonfiction book can be interpreted as an indicator of creativity. This is due to the training datasets used in fine-tuning: human translations of literary texts. Our pre-trained MT model and Google Translate, on the other hand, opt mostly for literal solutions. In our sample analysis, human translations had almost no mistranslations.

On the other hand, based on the analyses of samples by four annotators, our fine-tuned model seems to have failed to produce more nonliteral solutions for the fiction book. Yet, the BLEU scores of the output generated by our fine-tuned model were the highest, indicating a higher level of accuracy.

This, in fact, is supported by the higher number of instances of mistranslations in the output by the pre-trained model. The total number of instances of mistranslations for the fiction book was equal in the outputs by the fine-tuned model and Google Translate and it was more than half of that in the pre-trained model's output.

Our study confirms that when the MT model is trained with literary texts, its translations become stylistically more distinguishable. However, as regards creativity, we were not able to obtain clear results. The number of nonliteral translation solutions in the 50-segment samples identified by four annotators was not always higher in the MT model fine-tuned with a dataset of Turkish literary translations. It is important to note that reflections by the annotators suggest that the outputs by the fine-tuned model showed more creativity but the statistical analysis of their codings for each output did not fully support this overall judgment.

Google Translate and other freely available MT systems work with anonymized, collective datasets. In our study, we focus on selected individual translators who have been known to have a distinct style and are also creative, where the latter does not necessarily follow from the former, as explained in our introduction and following definition of creativity used by Guerberofo-Arenas/Toral (2020, 2022) and Şahin/Gürses (2019). Creativity is very closely related to stylistic competence and individualism, and the present findings suggest that it is possible to recreate style with models trained on texts within the same genre but such models are not always enough to boost creativity for all sub-genres.

6 Conclusions

The present study employed a set of pre-existing features to examine style and creativity in literary fiction and nonfiction translations produced by a human, a pre-trained MT model, a fine-tuned MT model, and a freely available online MT system. Findings suggest that a model fine-tuned on literary (same-genre) text data is more successful at replicating a translator's style and is also more creative relative to a pre-trained model (trained on generic text data) and a commercial MT system (i.e., Google Translate) in nonfiction translation. It is well worth underlining that none of the MT models' translations were as creative as the human translation.

One explanation is that humans are determined by their biological and social conditions, and they are also capable of creating new things. When a machine or humanoid seems to be creative, this means that it is capable of creating complex syntheses or collages from its input. We believe that gifted people can create unexpected originals and this is also true for translations; we believe translators to be gifted people in the field of language and they have their own original ways of using language to create the target text, called styles. Because human styles are created by bio-social complexities we have to believe that they will always be better than their mechanical copies. The only problem is that mechanical copies can satisfy most needs; in daily life, people tend to work on a normal dosage of creativity. But MT models also help to develop their concept of 'normal.'

One of the limitations of our study is that the inter-rater reliability scores were not high in coding translation solutions, particularly in exact annotation matches. This can be partly due to the high number of codes used in the study. Moreover, the subjective nature of human evaluation may have contributed

to this fact. A longer period of annotator training and a more focused quest for a set of translation strategies can help increase the inter-rater reliability scores. For the analysis of creativity, we used small samples from both books; increasing the volume of texts analyzed can provide more reliable results. Finally, future research could explore the relationship between style and creativity and aim at developing more objective quantifiable measures of both.

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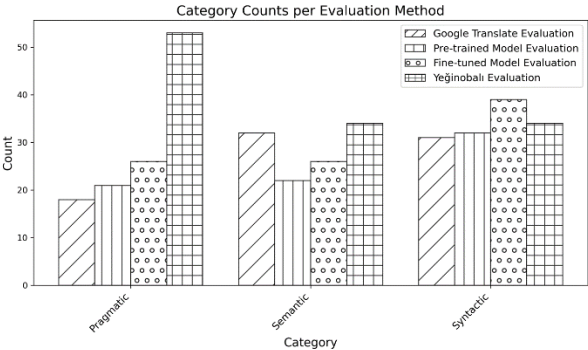
8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: List of codes for translation strategies

1. literal translation
2. addition
3. omission
4. unit shift
5. word choice
6. cohesion change
7. transposition
8. emphasis change
9. noun phrase structure
10. verb phrase structure
11. sentence structure change
12. paraphrase

- 13. free translation
- 14. theme/rheme change
- 15. discursive creation
- 16. coherence change
- 17. explicitation/implication
- 18. naturalization
- 19. loan
- 20. cultural adaptation
- 21. linguistic amplification
- 22. linguistic compression
- 23. variation
- 24. modulation
- 25. compensation
- 26. illocutionary change
- 27. other changes (e.g. word or syntactic transfer from the source language)
- 28. mistranslation

8.2 Categories of codes used in different evaluation sets by authors' key annotations



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Creativity in Human and AI-Enhanced Literary Translation: A Keylogging Experiment

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Abstract: Based on a recent experiment with MA students at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, this article analyzes the benefits and drawbacks of literary post-editing. Using the keylogging software Inputlog, six experiment participants documented not only the product but also the step-by-step process that led to their final German translation of a short prose poem by Virginia Woolf entitled “Green,” which was originally published in 1921. Some students worked only with monolingual and bilingual online dictionaries, while others post-edited an automated translation generated with the DeepL next-generation language model, which was launched in September 2024 and is based on a large language model infrastructure. Echoing previous research on literary post-editing, the experiment results show that AI-enhanced literary translation may entail a loss of creativity. At the same time, as the translation of Woolf’s prose poem with its novel images and expressions requires translation strategies that move underneath the textual surface level, the time gains that come with partial automation are negligible at best.

Keywords: Literary post-editing, Creativity, Keylogging, Translator training, DeepL next-generation language model.

1 Introduction

This article compares creativity in literary post-editing and human translation based on a keylogging experiment carried out in January 2025 with six MA students at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. The key aim of this experiment was to examine whether the post-edited German versions were as creative as the human translations of “Green,” a short literary text by Virginia Woolf originally published in 1921 as part of a collection of short prose texts called *Monday or Tuesday*. In this context, translatorial creativity is defined as manifesting in “creative shifts” or deliberate changes made to the structure of a source text in translation (for further information about this term, see Bayer Hohenwarter 2011: 669; Guerberof-Arenas/Toral 2022: 186 and 2024: 220), as opposed to “reproductive” translations (see Bayer-Hohenwarter 2011: 674).

The use of keylogging data collected with the open-source software Inputlog (see Leijten/Van Waes 2013) as part of this experiment allows for an examination not only of the outcomes but also of the respective processes underlying each post-edited version and human translation of Woolf’s literary sketch. During the experiment, Inputlog recorded each single keystroke, deletion and mouse click, together with a time stamp for the beginning and end of each of these actions respectively. Additionally, the students’ screens were recorded with OBS to back up and complement the keylogging data. While particularly Kolb (2021 and 2023) has recurrently used keylogging data to examine both machine-enhanced and human translation, other potentially useful research methods to document translation processes include think-aloud protocols, screen recording and questionnaires (see Angelone 2025). Due to its comprehensiveness and neutrality, keylogging is a particularly effective tool for analyzing creative processes, especially

when it is combined with other documentation methods, such as screen recording or questionnaires.

Overall, the results from this experiment echo previous research on post-editing compared to human translation, showing that time gains in AI-enhanced literary translation, if they exist at all, may come at the costs of a decline in translatorial creativity and in the joyfulness of the activity of translation. It will also be demonstrated that Woolf's text manifests a high density of "units of creative potential" (UCPs), defined by Guerberoef-Arenas/Toral (2022: 191) as "units that are expected to require translators to use problem-solving skills, as opposed to those that are regarded as routine units." The keylogging data indicate that, overall, the post-editing group spent less time actively working on their translation and produced less creative translations than the group that worked without machine assistance. This suggests that for texts rich in UCPs, such as Woolf's prose poem, automated pre-translation may ultimately be counterproductive.

In chapter two of this article, the technological framework and key terminology for this project are outlined before the machine output is compared to a recently published human reference translation by Christel Kröning (Woolf 2021). Afterwards, this chapter zooms in on three segments from each post-edited and human-translated version of Woolf's prose poem produced in class. In chapter three, the insights gained from this keylogging experiment will be evaluated with an eye toward potential future avenues for translator training.

2 Experiment Design

Before comparing Woolf's 1921 prose poem to Kröning's 2021 German version and the automated translation used in

the 2025 classroom experiment, this article outlines some preliminary technological and terminological information.

2.1 Technology:

The DeepL Next-generation Language Model

In a course on literary translation from English to German, six MA students pursuing a degree in translation studies at the University of Innsbruck transferred Woolf's literary sketch "Green" (1921) from English into German, with the overall aim of achieving equivalent effect in translation. Three of the experiment participants were not allowed to rely on automated translation and had to limit themselves to using specific monolingual and bilingual online dictionaries. *Duden* (n.d.) was recommended for monolingual queries regarding the German language, while for searches on bilingual and monolingual English entries the experiment participants were allowed to alternate between *Cambridge* (n.d.) and *Collins* (n.d.). The other three MA students had to work with both the source text and a pre-translated machine draft that was generated with the DeepL next-generation language model (henceforth shortened to DeepL next-gen). In addition, the three dictionaries the human translators were supposed to use were also recommended for this group.

DeepL next-gen was launched in September 2024 for some language combinations, including English and German. It has since been expanded to include all the languages the DeepL classic language model (DeepL classic) supports, 30 in total, as well as Hebrew, Vietnamese, Latin American Spanish and Thai. Apparently, this new language model "is powered by a large language model (LLM) infrastructure" (DeepL n.d.) and achieves higher quality in translation than DeepL classic, particularly for longer texts. Although the text analyzed in this ar-

ticle is not representative of this tendency, when using DeepL next-gen for the English–German language combination, often a slightly higher error rate seems to occur in the machine output compared to the classic language model, while at the same time the automated translations generated with DeepL next-gen also seem to contain more “creative shifts” (Bayer-Hohenwarter 2011: 669) or translation solutions that significantly transform the source text. This has been shown by Walter (2025a) in her analysis of the DeepL next-gen output for a section from a contemporary Irish short story by Mike McCormack entitled “Beyond.” The translation of the same section generated with DeepL’s classic language model, by contrast, was more “reproductive” (see Bayer-Hohenwarter 2011: 674), meaning that structures and expressions from the source text were transferred into the target language, sometimes at the cost of idiomaticity. Generally speaking, the classic language model also seems to be more reliable than DeepL next-gen, meaning that translation errors occur less frequently.

Given the limited information available on the precise technology underlying the DeepL Translator, any statements about reasons for the next-generation language model’s less reliable and more frequently paraphrased translation output have to remain speculative. What can be established, however, is that DeepL next-gen manifests similar tendencies in translation as general-purpose LLMs such as ChatGPT when they are used without task-specific prompting (see Walter 2025a). Hendy et al. (2023) argue that, in order to achieve strong, in-context multilingual capabilities, general-purpose LLMs such as ChatGPT require multiple times more training data than conventional neural machine translation (NMT) systems such as DeepL. One potential reason for the higher error rate in LLM translation output is thus a larger randomization of the results due to much more substantial training datasets.

To date, the term “creative shifts” (Bayer-Hohenwarter 2011: 669) as discussed in this article has usually been associated with deliberate choices made by humans, either in translation or post-editing. However, since machine output with new translation technology such as DeepL next-gen manifests patterns that sometimes *look like* the choices conventionally made by humans, a pragmatic decision has been made to also use this term for phenomena observed in the machine output. At the same time, this article does not seek to anthropomorphize when discussing technologies based on artificial intelligence (AI). Nor does the appropriation of a term conventionally used for human language indicate that humans are now less important as agents than before in literary translation workflows. In fact, the comparison of the post-edited versions to the human translations in this article shows that—particularly for texts that contain a higher percentage of UCPs—literary post-editing may not be a good option. This is because a translator’s choices are constrained by the machine output, which may negatively interfere with their creativity and the joyfulness of the activity of translating. How these constraints occur will be described in more detail in the next section of this article. However, before some key terms associated with literary post-editing are outlined, it should be noted that Orel Kos (2024) and Agnetta (2025) have gained similar insights regarding counterproductive effects of AI-enhanced workflows on translation quality and translator motivation in the context of audiovisual translation.

2.2 Key Terms

A selection of phenomena that frequently occur in post-edited literary translations will be briefly outlined here, starting with “priming” (see Hamm 2024: 16; Kolb 2022: 20 and 2023: 55).

Literary post-editors may be limited in the variety of translation options they can conceive due to their excessive reliance on machine output. On the other hand, some post-editors also find it difficult to accept any machine output, often due to negative or ambivalent attitudes towards the technologization of translation. This phenomenon, which is diametrically opposed to priming, has been described as “Distinktionswille” (a “desire to be different”; Förster et al. 2023: n.p.).

In fact, the cognitive influence of machine output on post-editors known as priming may not be the only reason for the limited creativity and appeal of many post-edited translations. Particularly in specialized translation, language service providers that have been assigned post-editing tasks are often encouraged to use as much of raw machine output as possible due to time constraints. This is another reason why post-edited target texts tend to retain many features of the original automated translations they are based on, especially when they are the product of minimally invasive “light” post-editing (see Nitzke/Hansen-Schirra 2021: 30–31). Apart from priming, post-editors have also witnessed a “fatigue” effect (Hamm 2024: 16) as a result of the exhaustion that may stem from having to base their final version on two drafts instead of just one, a source text and an automated translation. Finally, an “obstacle” effect (*ibid.*) has also been described. It occurs when post-editors find detecting errors in the machine output particularly difficult due to the fact that the algorithmic, probabilistic language of AI-based translation tools only *resembles* human language but operates on very different principles.

For reasons outlined above, post-edited translations are often said to contain examples of “post-editesé” (Torál 2019). This somewhat vague but conveniently encompassing term refers to the understanding that post-edited translations tend to be simpler and show more interference from the source lan-

guage than human translations. Compared to human translations, post-edited target texts therefore tend to include fewer creative shifts, particularly if they were produced with the help of systems such as the DeepL classic language model or Google Translate. The more imprecise but also more flexible LLM-based translation output of recent years tends to be less reproductive of the source text structures and may thus be more promising with regard to achieving idiomaticity in the target language.

2.3 Source Text

The source text used for this experiment is a literary sketch or prose poem called “Green,” which was originally published by Virginia Woolf in 1921 as part of a collection of short prose called *Monday or Tuesday*. Like the entire collection of which this text forms part, “Green” has been associated with literary impressionism. One of the author’s aims with this collection was to reconcile writing with other art forms, in the case of “Green” specifically painting. The text is part of a literary diptych called “Blue & Green,” where “Green” represents day, while “Blue” depicts a symbolic image of evening (see Louvel 2023). Both texts are largely descriptive, more like images than narratives with conventional storylines.

2.4 DeepL Output

In Table 1, Woolf’s original literary sketch (1921/2021: 174) is juxtaposed with the DeepL output from January 10, 2025, which the post-editing group had to base their final translations on. There were two significant errors in the translation generated with DeepL next-gen that are represented in bold letters,

which made this draft particularly interesting for this classroom experiment, and which will be analyzed in the next paragraph.

“Green” by Virginia Woolf (1921/2021)	DeepL next-gen, January 10, 2025
GREEN The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards. The light slides down the glass, and drops a pool of green. All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble. The feathers of parakeets—their harsh cries—sharp blades of palm trees—green, too; green needles glittering in the sun. But the hard glass drips on to the marble; the pools hover above the desert sand; the camels lurch through them; the pools settle on the marble; rushes edge them; weeds clog them; here and there a white blossom; the frog flops over; at night the stars are set there unbroken. Evening comes, and the shadow sweeps the green over the mantelpiece; the ruffled surface of ocean. No ships come; the aimless waves sway beneath the empty sky. It's night; the needles drip blots of blue. The green's out.	GRÜN Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten. Das Licht gleitet das Glas hinunter und lässt eine grüne Lache fallen. Den ganzen Tag lang fallen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf die Murmel. Die Federn der Sittiche – ihre schrillen Schreie – scharfe Klingen von Palmen – auch grün; grüne Nadeln glitzern in der Sonne. Aber das harte Glas tropft auf den Marmor; die Pfützen schweben über dem Wüstensand; die Kamele taumeln durch sie hindurch; die Pfützen setzen sich auf dem Marmor ab; Binsen säumen sie; Unkraut verstopft sie; hier und da eine weiße Blüte; der Frosch plumpst hinüber; nachts sind die Sterne ungebrochen dort gesetzt. Der Abend kommt, und der Schatten streift das Grün über den Kaminsims; die gekräuselte Oberfläche des Ozeans. Keine Schiffe kommen; die ziellosen Wellen schwanken unter dem leeren Himmel. Es ist Nacht; die Nadeln tropfen blaue Flecken. Das Grün ist aus.

Table 1: Original text versus translation with DeepL next-gen

One challenge in the source text that both the post-editors and the human translators struggled with is the term “lustre,” which is frequently used in the sense of “brilliance” or “Glanz” but which in British English is also a synonym of “chandelier” (“lustre”). Due to its inbuilt probabilistic approach to translation, DeepL next-gen generated the most likely equivalent of “lustre” in German, which is “Glanz,” rather than correctly

rendering the term as “Kronleuchter” or “Luster” in the given context. In the same sentence, “marble” is also mistranslated as “Murmel,” one of many small colored glass balls that children use to play Marbles, the rarely used singular form of which is also “marble” in English (“marble”). This mistranslation is somewhat surprising, as elsewhere in the text “marble” is correctly rendered as “Marmor,” a type of limestone, but the lack of training data for “lustre” in the British English sense of “chandelier” probably made a correct translation of other elements in this sentence more difficult.

While AI-enhanced translation tools occasionally generate erroneous translation output, sometimes errors in a source text are also corrected. There is a spelling error resulting in a different word from the one intended in Woolf’s original text, who used “dessert” (something you eat at the end of a meal and that is often sweet) instead of “desert” (an extremely dry area of land where it is usually hot). Based on the context, DeepL next-gen correctly translated “dessert” as part of the compound “Wüstensand” (“desert sand”), rather than generating the lexical equivalent, “Nachspeise” (“dessert”). While a potential correction of errors in a source text is certainly desirable in automated translation, this example highlights that human control of machine output remains key to ensuring high-quality, correct and adequate translations.

Even though for another source text translated with DeepL next-gen the output tended to be less reproductive than with DeepL classic (see Walter 2025a), the automated translation of Woolf’s text only manifests very few creative shifts. This is probably due to the fact that the collocations used in the source text are mostly very unusual, so that the training datasets did not yield any probabilistic combinations in the target language.

2.5 DeepL Output versus Human Reference Translation

In Table 2, the DeepL next-gen machine output from January 10, 2025, is juxtaposed with a recently published translation of “Green” by Christel Kröning (see Woolf 2021: 175). Subsequently, the key differences between both German versions will be briefly outlined.

DeepL next-gen, January 10, 2025	“Green” by Virginia Woolf, translated by Christel Kröning (2021)
GRÜN Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten. Das Licht gleitet das Glas hinunter und lässt eine grüne Lache fallen. Den ganzen Tag lang fallen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf die Marmor. Die Federn der Sittiche – ihre schrillen Schreie – scharfe Klängen von Palmen – auch grün; grüne Nadeln glitzern in der Sonne. Aber das harte Glas tropft auf den Marmor; die Pflützen schweben über dem Wüstensand; die Kamele taumeln durch sie hindurch; die Pflützen setzen sich auf dem Marmor ab; Binsen säumen sie; Unkraut verstopft sie; hier und da eine weiße Blüte; der Frosch plumpst hinüber; nachts sind die Sterne ungebrochen dort gesetzt. Der Abend kommt, und der Schatten streift das Grün über den Kaminsims; die gekräuselte Oberfläche des Ozeans. Keine Schiffe kommen; die ziellosen Wellen schwanken unter dem leeren Himmel. Es ist Nacht; die Nadeln tropfen blaue Flecken. Das Grün ist aus.	GRÜN Die spitzen Glasfinger hängen herab. Das Licht läuft am Glas hinunter und bildet Tropfen um Tropfen eine Lache Grün. Den ganzen Tag lang tropft von den zehn Kronleuchterfingern Grün auf den Marmor. Federn von Papageien – ihre schrillen Rufe – messerscharfe Palmblätter – grün auch sie. Grüne Nadeln, glitzernd im Sonnenlicht. Doch das Kristallglas tropft weiter auf den Marmor. Die Lachen schweben über dem Wüstensand. Die Kamele taumeln hindurch. Die Lachen werden heimisch auf dem Marmor. Schilf umsäumt sie. Algen durchdringen sie. Hier und dort eine weiße Blüte. Der Frosch springt plumpsend hinein. Nachts liegen ungebrochen die Sterne darin. Der Abend naht und der Schatten wischt das Grün über den Kaminsims. Aufgewühlter Ozean. Kein Schiff in Sicht. Die ziellosen Wellen wiegen sich unter leerem Himmel. Es ist Nacht. Von den Nadeln tropfen Kleckse Blau. Das Grün ist erloschen.

Table 2: DeepL next-generation language model versus human reference translation

The most important differences between Kröning's version and the DeepL output result from creative shifts that occur due to the translator's deliberate interventions in the source text structure. Unlike Woolf, Kröning uses many compounds, a frequent word formation strategy in German that normally features much less in English, thus naturalizing the target text. For instance, Kröning uses "Kronleuchterfinger(n)," rather than "Finger des Glanzes," and "messerscharfe Palmblätter" instead of "scharfe Klingen von Palmen," taking advantage of the flexible word combinations the German language facilitates. In general terms, compared to the DeepL output, Kröning's translation could be described as hermeneutic, as a product of intellectually engaging with the meaning of the source text, rather than reorganizing algorithmic patterns found at the textual surface level. Among other things, this difference manifests in the translator's choice of a number of target terms that are far removed from the textual surface constructed in the source language, whose meaning they interpret. For example, Kröning uses "werden heimisch" or "make themselves at home" for "settle on," "aufgewühlt" or "upset" for "ruffled," and "erloschen" or "extinguished" for "out." By contrast, the DeepL output for these passages remains much closer to the source text. For instance, target language equivalents used in the machine output include "sich absetzen" for "settle on," "gekräuselt" for "ruffled" and "aus" for "out."

In recent years, the Bilingual Evaluation Understudy (BLEU) score and other metrics have been developed to measure the quality of automated translations compared to a human reference translation. Using the open-source online evaluation tool MATEO (see Vanroy et al. 2023: 499–500), the BLEU metric is determined by rating the machine output on a scale from 0 to 100, 0 meaning that there is no similarity, while 100 indicates that an automated translation is identical to a hu-

man reference translation. Each translation is divided into n-grams, which may be words, syllables, a group of adjacent letters or punctuation marks, and quality is measured “in terms of surface n-gram matching” between the machine output and the human reference translation (Saadany/Orăsan 2021: 50). Although the BLEU score is mainly used to measure the progress made in the training of automated translation tools, the result will be provided for the machine output analyzed in this article, which in comparison to Kröning’s translation scored a value of 16.6. This fairly low score indicates that the differences between the machine output and the human reference translation are more substantial than they might seem at first glance.

2.6 Post-edited Versions versus Human Translations

In this section, three segments from the source text will be compared to the six different versions in the target language produced by the participants in the literary post-editing/translation experiment discussed in this article. For each segment, in a first step an overview of the post-edited versions and human translations will be shown and analyzed in general terms. For segments one and two, the post-edited versions and human translations respectively will then be explored in more detail. To substantiate the analysis, some keylogging data will also be presented to examine not only the final translations but also how they were produced.

2.6.1 Segment One

The first segment analyzed in this article is the opening sentence in the source text. The following overview shows the three post-edited and human-translated versions of this segment.

The pointed fingers of glass hang downwards.
(Woolf 1921/2021: 174)

Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten.
(DeepL next-gen)

Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten.
(DeepL next-gen post-edited, PE-A)

Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten.
(DeepL next-gen post-edited, PE-B)

Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen herab.
(DeepL next-gen post-edited, PE-C)

Die gläsernen Finger langen nach unten.
(Human translation, HT-D)

Die spitzen Glasfinger hängen von oben herab.
(Human translation, HT-E)

Die Fingerspitzen aus Glas zeigen nach unten.
(Human translation, HT-F)

Overall, the three human-translated target texts show more variety and more creative shifts than the post-edited versions. Interestingly, in two out of three human translations the anthropomorphism that is already present in the source segment is enhanced, as Woolf's "pointed fingers of glass" are given agency. In version D, the glass fingers "reach down," while in version F they "point downwards." This tendency towards giving the animated chandelier agency is not present in the post-edited versions, which are almost identical to each other and to the DeepL output, with the exception of version C, in which the end of the sentence was changed slightly.

Table 3 again shows the post-edited versions of the opening sentence and, in the second column, gives an overview of the keylogging data from the general analysis generated with Inputlog, which recorded each keystroke, mouse click and deletion made by the experiment participants. Given the homogeneity of the results for this segment, it comes as no

surprise that the keylogging data for this sentence also showed little variety.

DeepL next-gen PE	Keylogging
A: Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten.	<i>No words are looked up. The sentence is not edited.</i>
B: Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten.	<i>No words are looked up. The sentence is not edited.</i>
C: Die spitzen Finger aus Glas hängen herab.	<i>After 7:38 minutes, “nach unten” is replaced with “herab.”</i>

Table 3: Segment 1: observations from keylogging (post-edited versions)

This overview testifies to the fact that two out of three participants in the post-editing group never questioned the machine output for this sentence. Only in version C, the adverb at the end of the sentence (“nach unten”) was replaced with a synonymous expression (“herab”). This marks the first change made to the machine output in version C and is the only one recorded for this sentence.

By contrast, the keylogging data for the more varied human translations of the first sentence in Woolf’s story also show the participants’ more diverse approaches to its translation, as Table 4 indicates.

HT	Keylogging
D: Die gläsernen Finger langen nach unten.	<i>After 12:12 minutes, the beginning of the sentence is written down. The final version of the sentence is produced straight away.</i>
E: Die spitzen Glasfinger hängen von oben herab.	<i>All other sentences are typed first first. After 27:24 minutes, the beginning of the sentence is written down, starting with “Die langen Finger” Then, the noun is replaced with the compound “Glasfinger.” After 32:31 minutes, the adjective “langen” is replaced with “spitzen.”</i>
F: Die Fingerspitzen aus Glas zeigen nach unten.	<i>After 9:46 minutes, the beginning of the sentence is written down, starting with “Die Fingerspitzen” Then, the Duden entry on “Finger” is checked. After 11:03 minutes, this participant continues “... aus Glas zeigen nach unten” and also notes down</i>

	<i>a second version of this sentence: “Die gestreckten Finger aus Glas hängen nach unten.” After 36:57 minutes, the second version is deleted.</i>
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Table 4: Segment 1: observations from keylogging (human translations)

The keylogging data for the human translations of this segment indicate that the underlying translation processes are as different as their outcomes. An examination of the full keylogging data shows that participant D in this group has a tendency to first think through their translation and start writing later than the other participants. At the same time, once they have written down a target language version, they are unlikely to change it. Participant F recurrently notes down different translations of a segment, out of which they subsequently choose their preferred version. Participant E wrote down all other sentences in translation before they rendered the opening sentence into German. Perhaps they wanted to make sense of the overall meaning of the text before providing a German version of the alienating, anthropomorphized description of a chandelier in this segment. The translation process underlying version F of this sentence is particularly multi-layered, showing several replacements. Such complexity frequently characterizes human translation. Post-editing, by contrast, tends to be less analytical and more superficial. While no one from the post-editing group looked up any terms before translating this segment, the keylogging files show that participant F in the human translation group checked a monolingual German dictionary entry on “Finger,” which also points towards human translation being more thorough than post-editing.

2.6.2 Segment Two

The second sentence in Woolf’s prose poem deserves special attention. As before, the original English sentence is followed

by the raw machine output, as well as the post-edited and human-translated German versions produced during the classroom experiment.

All day long the ten fingers of the lustre drop green upon the marble.
(Woolf 1921/2021: 174)

Den ganzen Tag lang fallen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf die Murmel. (DeepL next-gen)

Den ganzen Tag lang fallen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf den Marmor. (DeepL next-gen, PE-A)

Den ganzen Tag lang tropfen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf den Marmor. (DeepL next-gen, PE-B)

Den Tag hindurch fällt Grün von den zehn Fingern des Kronleuchters auf den Marmor. (DeepL next-gen, PE-C)

Den ganzen Tag lang tropft es an den zehn Fingern des Lusters grün auf den Marmor. (Human translation, HT-D)

Den ganzen Tag werfen die zehn glänzenden Finger ein Grün über den Marmor. (Human translation, HT-E)

Den ganzen Tag lang lassen die zehn Finger des Glanzes Grün auf den Marmor tropfen. (Human translation, HT-F)

This sentence was expected to be difficult for both the post-editors and the human translators. As has been mentioned before, “lustre” is used in the comparatively little known sense of “chandelier.” Accordingly, it comes as no major surprise that in the DeepL output the more familiar target term “Glanz” (“brilliance”) is used. Additionally, “marble” is mistranslated as “Murmel,” a colored type of glass ball frequently used in Marbles, a game mainly played by children.

Before the overall tendencies in the post-edited and human-translated versions respectively are outlined, some interesting observations about individual versions will be briefly summarized. In version PE-C, the adjective “green” replaces “fingers” as a verb complement, and both errors are corrected.

In version HT-E, there is a typing mistake in “Marmor,” which is wrongly spelt “Mamor,” probably due to the fact that spell-checking does not work when the keylogging software Input-log is used. In the same version, “lustre” is mistranslated as “glänzend,” which is the adjective form of the noun “Glanz.” In version HT-F, the main verb is changed to “lassen” or “let,” which is a subtle but significant intervention that attributes intentionality to the lustre fingers.

As before, there is less variety in the post-edited target texts compared to the human translations made without machine assistance, but the difference in variety is less pronounced than for segment one. In all final versions, “marble” was correctly rendered as “Marmor.” Thus, none of the post-editors were misled by the inconsistency in the machine output for this term, which features three times in total in the source text. However, the mistranslation of “lustre” as “Glanz” in the machine output was only corrected by participant C in the post-editing group. Furthermore, this error also features in two out of three human translations. A look at the keylogging data for this segment in Table 5 will shed light on the reasons for this error.

DeepL next-gen PE	Keylogging
A: Den ganzen Tag lang fallen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf den Marmor.	<i>After 09:15 minutes, the term “lustre” is looked up in Cambridge (English), which contains no reference to the use of this term in the sense of “chandelier.” After 10:36 minutes, “Murmel” (“glass ball”) is replaced with “Marmor” (“limestone”).</i>
B: Den ganzen Tag lang tropfen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf den Marmor.	<i>After 10:06 minutes, “lustre” is looked up in the bilingual Cambridge English–German dictionary. After 11:56 minutes, this Participant notes down “den Marmor” alongside “die Murmel.” After 17:42 minutes, German translations of “drip” are looked up in Collins. After 30:17 minutes, “die Murmel” is deleted. After 30:55 minutes, “tropfen” replaces “fallen.”</i>

C: Den Tag hindurch fällt Grün von den zehn Fingern des Kronleuchters auf den Marmor.	<i>After 09:29 minutes, this participant looks up “lustre” in Cambridge (English), then in Collins (English). They scroll down to the British English definitions, which include “chandelier.” They google images for “lustre” and “lustre finger.” After 11:00 minutes, they look up “Kronleuchter” in Cambridge (English–German). After 13:08 minutes, images for “lustre” are googled. After 13:53 minutes, this participant looks up “lustre” in Collins (English). After 16:17 minutes, they return to the definition of “lustre” in Collins. At 16:21 minutes, they look up “finger” in Collins (English). After 19:23 minutes, this participant replaces the original sentence with the new version.</i>
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Table 5: Segment 2: observations from keylogging (PE versions)

As can be expected due to a number of translation challenges that occurred in this segment, combined with the wrong DeepL translation output, all participants in the post-editing group looked up terms related to this sentence. Furthermore, neither participant left the machine output unchanged. However, while participant A only corrected the obvious error related to the mistranslation of “marble” as “Murmel,” participant B additionally changed a verb. Participant C, whose translations can be regarded as the most successful overall for this group, dedicated ten minutes to searching terms in bilingual and monolingual dictionaries and looking up images related to these terms. This shows that a thorough post-editing process that leads to a successful translation may take nearly as long as translating without machine assistance. This is particularly the case for texts such as Woolf’s prose poem, the translation of which is challenging, partly because of the occurrence of UCPs, exemplified by the anthropomorphized image of the lustre.

For participants E and F, the keylogging data for the human translations manifest complex, multi-layered research and editing processes preceding the final versions for the second segment (see Table 6).

HT	Keylogging
D: Den ganzen Tag lang tropft es an den zehn Fingern des Lusters grün auf den Marmor.	<i>As before, this participant immediately writes down the final version of this sentence after an extended period without any keylogging activity, starting after 17:49 minutes.</i>
E: Den ganzen Tag werfen die zehn glänzenden Finger ein Grün über den Marmor.	<i>After 7:53 minutes, this participant starts writing down their version of the sentence, beginning with "Den ganzen Tag . . ." Then they look up "lustre" in Cambridge (English), then Collins (English). While in the Collins entry for British English "chandelier" is listed, the American English dictionary entry does not include a reference to "chandelier," and the participant does not scroll down to check the British English entry, as the screen recording for this segment shows. After 9:01 minutes, this participant continues writing: "... werfen die zehn Finger des Scheins Grün über den Marmor." They replace "des Scheins" with "des Glanzes." They change the word category to "scheinenden," replacing the noun with an adjective. After 43:31 minutes, they replace "scheinenden" with "glänzenden."</i>
F: Den ganzen Tag lang lassen die zehn Finger des Glanzes Grün auf den Marmor tropfen.	<i>After 14:20 minutes, this participant starts typing "Den ganzen Tag lang Grün tropft von den Fingern des . . ." They look up "lustre" in Collins (English-German). They write down "Schimmers" and "Glanzes" as translation options. They replace the original verb with a construction with "lassen" ("let") and write "lassen die zehn Finger des Schimmers/Glanzes Grün auf den Marmor." They look up "tropfen" and "perlen" in the assigned monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. After 39:24 minutes, "Schimmer" is deleted and "tropfen/perlen" are added as potential replacements. "Perlen" is subsequently deleted again.</i>

Table 6: Segment 2: observations from keylogging (HT versions)

For two out of three participants in this group, the translation of this segment involved examining dictionary entries and several rounds of revision. Only participant D did not revise this sentence and followed their habit of thinking the translation through in advance and then immediately finalizing it.

2.6.3 Segment Three

A simple three-word sentence, “The green’s out,” ends Woolf’s literary sketch. While the keylogging data for this segment do not yield any interesting insights, a comparison of the final translation outputs for the two groups involved in this experiment shows fundamentally different tendencies. The human translators chose three different target language equivalents for the complement in the original sentence, whereas in the post-editing group only one out of three participants changed the complement used in the machine output, which was based on a very literal translation of the source segment, as the following overview shows.

The green’s out. (Woolf 1921/2021: 174)

Das Grün ist aus. (DeepL next-gen)

Grün ist aus. (DeepL next-gen post-edited, PE-A)

Das Grün ist aus. (DeepL next-gen post-edited, PE-B)

Grün ist vorbei. (DeepL next-gen post-edited, PE-C)

Das Grün ist leer. (Human translation, HT-D)

Das Grün verblasst. (Human translation, HT-E)

Das Grün ist weg. (Human translation, HT-F)

The different target language versions chosen for this simple three-word sentence highlight that literary post-editing, even though it may well increase productivity, especially for simpler source texts than Woolf’s prose poem, will inevitably curtail linguistic diversity in translation. If post-editors find the machine output acceptable, the motivation to choose alternative translations seems to be limited at best. The three human translations, in contrast with the almost identical post-edited versions, are not only superficially different from each other, but they are in fact all based on a fundamentally different understanding of what “out” means in the source text. In this re-

spect, the experiment results echo Mjøsnes (2022: 41), who has criticized automated translation for deceiving its readers, as a painted window on the façade of a house might do. If post-editing becomes a standard workflow in literary translation, there is a real risk that too little attention might be given to understanding a source text, as too much energy might be taken up by producing a synthetic draft, based on a combination of machine output and more or less superficial human interventions.

2.7 Comparison

A comparison of the six target language versions of each segment from Woolf's literary sketch presented in this article shows that the human translations differ substantially from each other. In contrast, the post-edited versions tend to strongly resemble both the machine output and each other. In addition, the human translations are fundamentally hermeneutic, more so than the post-edited automated translations, which frequently reproduce source language structures, thus over-emphasizing the textual surface of the original. Finally, an analysis of how target language version C of the second segment was produced suggests that a thorough post-editing process that leads to high-quality translation output may be as time-consuming as a thorough human translation process. If translation quality is prioritized, the time gains that come with post-editing are therefore insignificant or inexistent for a text like Woolf's "Green."

3 Synthesis and Outlook

Consistent with previous research, this article shows that while literary post-editing may increase productivity for some but not

all source texts, it certainly poses several challenges. First, priming effects may limit translatorial agency and creativity when post-editors are overly influenced by machine output and struggle to make a translation their own (see Kolb 2022: 21). Additionally, post-editing processes may be complicated by a fatigue effect, which is the result of an exhaustion that may stem from working with two drafts instead of one (see Hamm 2024: 16). Finally, post-editors' work is sometimes also constrained by an obstacle effect, meaning that detecting errors in machine output, which resembles human language but operates on fundamentally different principles, can be difficult (see *ibid.*).

Although there is no explicit record in the keylogging data testifying to a fatigue effect, the limited effort made by two out of three participants in the post-editing group to personalize the machine output may well be due to priming combined with fatigue. Furthermore, two out of three post-edited versions of segment two—"Den ganzen Tag lang fallen die zehn Finger des Glanzes grün auf den Marmor." (DeepL next-gen, January 10, 2025)—retain an awkward construction from the DeepL output, which could be a manifestation of Hamm's obstacle effect. Specifically, in the automated translation the verb "drop" is mistranslated as "fallen" ("fall") instead of "tropfen" ("drop") and then wrongly associated with the noun "Finger." This creates an image of green fingers falling down, which is difficult to reconcile with the image in Woolf's original text, where green color drips down from the anthropomorphized chandelier. For this section, the DeepL next-gen translation output, which overemphasizes the textual surface in the original literary sketch and is oblivious to the underlying meaning, was not changed by a majority of the post-editors. A comparison shows that a similarly awkward rendering does not appear in the human translations of the same segment.

Above all, these potential problems suggest that human language mediators must develop new skills (see Agnetta/Walter 2025, as well as other articles in the thematic *trans-kom* issue outlined in this introductory text). For this reason, the training of future translators must consider the cognitive effects of machine output from the beginning and determine how and where to address them. While standardized machine output may not be perceived as a disadvantage when translating an instruction manual, for texts with a high level of UCPs such as Woolf's prose poem, this homogenization of translation is likely to entail at least some degree of impoverishment, as the experiment analyzed in this article indicates. In different contexts, a potential reduction in linguistic diversity that may result from automated literary translation is also addressed by Kolb (2025) and Walter (2025b) respectively.

If automation is to be used for literary translation without harming translation quality, new workflows for post-editing creative texts must be developed. For instance, these workflows may include new CAT tools with larger context windows that provide access to both NMT and LLM output as required. In order to maximize translatorial creativity and limit priming (see Hamm 2024: 16; Kolb 2022: 20 and 2023: 55), it would probably be best to make machine output available on demand, rather than automatically (see Brenner/Koponen 2025: 54). If machine output offers several translation options, its potentially unwanted, excessive influence on post-editors might be reduced. However, this advantage would have to be weighed against the likelihood of increasing the fatigue effect that may stem from working with several translation drafts (see Hamm 2024: 16). Ultimately, literary post-editing demands a recalibration of both tools and training to better support creative agency. If approached proactively, as well as with critical awareness, the evolving interplay between human creativity

and machine assistance may facilitate flexible and empowering new practices for translators working at the intersection of art and automation.

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Reading Political Economy at the Level of the Sentence: Automated Translation and the Global South

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Abstract: Automated translation is being touted as revolutionizing inter-lingual communication on a global scale. Models such as Google Translate and DeepL are claimed to show a high accuracy rate in translating between certain languages, often to the extent of surpassing human-level performances. However, automated translation between most of the world's languages, primarily those from the Global South, does not exhibit a consistently high standard accuracy rate. The reason for this disparity is discussed only superficially by the creators of these models. It is either claimed to be the result of the limited online presence of these languages or is written off as a symptom of these languages' inherent complexities. This article attempts to understand the underlying structures that constitute this inequality in the field of automated translation. In light of world-systems analysis, this article argues that the underperformance of automated translation technology in certain languages is a systematic project of subordination of the Global South. It delineates the chain of processes, starting with European colonialism, that led up to the modern-day invention of automated translation, to examine

how this inequality was at the core of global events, although it has always been branded as organic. This article then shows how this new ‘milestone’ of automated translation also becomes a device that operates to propagate the ideologies of the dominant structures of power.

Keywords: Automated translation, Global South, Underdevelopment, AI.

1 Introduction

Translation has become an indispensable part of everyday social interactions in an unprecedented manner since the introduction of automated translation.¹ The new phase of machine translation technology has revolutionized communication in the globalized world, be it one-on-one interactions at an airport in a metropolis, mediated by Google Translate or the ‘See Translation’ option appearing under comments sections on Instagram posts and stories. Advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) in general, and automated translation in particular, have become the center of both academic discourses and everyday conversations alike. However, most of these discussions seem to address automated translation as merely a tool that assists in interlingual communication. Consequently, the structures of power inherent in the automation of translation are mostly left out of the conversation. This is alarming, since translation has historically been used by political entities to maintain their power.

From the oldest translations of texts available to us from ancient Greece and Egypt through the Middle Ages, the colo-

1 I am grateful for my advisor, Dr. Hosam Aboul-Ela, for serving as my first interlocutor and offering insightful feedback on the first draft of this article. I also extend special thanks to my colleagues at the University of Houston—Seth Uzman, Kaitlin Rizzo, and Sara Kaplan-Cunningham—for their thoughtful engagement with the ideas and their generous assistance with copyediting.

nial era, and the neo-colonial period we are in, translation has been predominantly used as a political tool (cf. Álvarez Rodríguez/Vidal 1996, Niranjana 1992, Valdeón/Calafat 2020, Bassnett/Trivedi 2002, Aboul-Ela 2018). Much like the production of translation, the development of machine translation also became a priority of major political powers from its very beginning. The United States' investment of 20 million USD in machine translation and related research in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as similar trends in the United Kingdom, France, Japan, and the Soviet Union, support this claim (cf. Somers 1998: 140). Recent developments in the field of automated translation, therefore, cannot be presumed to be free from these structures of power. This article is an attempt to understand how automated translation functions on a global scale as a tool that reifies the inequalities of the global political economy and the uneven development across multiple spatial scales and social spheres.

2 The State of Automated Translation

Conversations on translation often stumble on the question of its future in a world characterized by a boom in automated translation technology. Are translators going to be out of jobs due to the expansion of automated translation models that use advanced neural networks, translate between languages faster, and translate between languages few human translators work with? The impulse to ask these questions stems from an age-old anxiety that machines and technology are going to replace humans. Even though the professional translation industry is showing a reliance on automated translation, the possibility of a large-scale replacement of humans in the field seems far-fetched. Moreover, each time a new technology is introduced, even in the event of its success, it creates new roles and oppor-

tunities. In this case, for example, some studies show an increase in the demand for translators in the past several years due to the boom in streaming media globally (cf. Deck 2021). This is also true in the case of literary translations due to the growing interest in world literature. As a literary translator, my own response, whenever these questions inevitably come up in question-and-answer sessions and discussions, is that I do not share the anxiety of translation machines replacing me. This is based on two different yet loosely connected reasons.

First, as Thierry Poibeau (2022: 6018) argues, automated translation, despite its claims of “human parity” and “super-human performance,” is not yet capable of carrying out translations independently in any language in a way that satisfies the needs of the readers of the translation. Poibeau maintains that these claims

are reproduced in the media for a general audience without much care, as if [automated translation] was a solved task, at least between some languages, whereas it is clear that performance varies a lot from one domain to the other, or from one type of text to the other. (Poibeau 2022: 6018).

Human supervision is still required in producing any valid automated translation—known as human-in-loop machine translations. Andrew, addressing the efforts to automate subtitle translations in streaming platforms, says: “In some instances, machine learning is currently used to generate a first-draft translation, which is then edited or disregarded by a human subtitler as they see fit” (Deck 2021: n.p.) This may indicate that the translator’s role is evolving with the advent of automated translation, but never becoming insignificant. Despite the claims of automated translation technology being revolutionary, its unreliability prevails, which is a characteristic of contemporary AI technology by and large. Gary Marcus makes a humorous observation about the reality of the current state

of AI while talking about PaLM-SayCan, which uses language models in a robot: “Imagine that you want to put your grandpa in bed, and you want to tell the robot to do that, and three quarters of the time it does that and one quarter time it drops your grandpa” (Marcus 2022: 23’50). So long as the probability of such mishaps is unavoidable, the technology will remain unreliable, deemed to be used in areas of lower stake. The unreliability of these translations is stated as disclaimers on websites that use automated translation (US Navy, Department of State). Additionally, when it comes to literary translations, there is an added expectation of creativity. Automated translation relies on statistical datasets and functions by finding patterns among them, which means it can only reproduce what already exists and can only make predictions based on the prominent patterns available in the dataset (cf. Lewis 2024). According to Guerberof-Arenas and Toral (2022: 184), creativity, understood as something that “involves novelty and acceptability,” is something neural machine translation systems are still not capable of. That is to say that automated translation cannot create something novel while staying within the parameters of the acceptable language use. The authors conclude that human translators produce translations without assistance more creatively, whereas machine translations and post-editing methods fail to reach the standard benchmark (cf. *ibid.*: 25–26).

The second reason comes down to the languages I work with. I have been translating primarily between two languages from the Global South, Arabic and Malayalam; languages that do not follow the same pace of advancement as languages from the Global North when it comes to automated translation. The terminology used for signifying this difference is “low-resource languages” (LSL) and “high-resource languages” (HSL) (Ranathunga et al. 2023: 2). Considering Poibeau’s claim that automated translation between “high-re-

source languages” itself does not meet human standards, it is clear that translations between an HRL and a LRL, or two LLRs, have a long way to go. A study published in 2014—in which the researchers used Google Translate to translate ten most commonly used medical statements from English to 26 languages—shows that the accuracy of translations from English and Western European languages was 74%, whereas for English and African languages it was 45% and for English and Asian languages 46%. In comparison, Swahili had only a 10% accuracy rate, whereas Portuguese had 90% (cf. Patil/Davies 2014). Ten years later, in 2024, western European languages are still at the top of this hierarchy, while Asian and African languages remain at the bottom (cf. Evans 2024). This does not mean the past decade was a stagnant period in the field of automated translation research. The technology claims to have made unprecedented progress by moving from statistical machine translation (SMT) to neural machine translation (NMT) in 2015, and with Google deploying its more advanced version of the neural machine translation model called Google’s neural machine translation (GNMT) in 2016 (cf. Wang et al. 2022). In 2016, Google’s model claimed to reduce the errors by 60% compared to earlier phrase-based machine translation (PBMT) on several language pairs (cf. Wu et al. 2016). However, the pairs that show highest accuracy are Germanic and Romance languages, whereas the only non-European language considered in the research, Chinese, improved to a lesser degree (cf. Wu et al. 2016: 19). What this reveals is that despite the claims of the projected goal of supporting all the languages in the world (cf. WSJ 2024: 08’10), automated translation is still biased against the languages from the Global South, and translation between them is not going to reach the benchmark standard in a foreseeable future.

The problem of inaccuracy is further complicated when automated translation is used in translating texts between two non-English languages, especially from the Global South. With very few exceptions, Google Translate uses English as a pivot language to translate between two non-English languages (cf. WSJ 2024: 04'30; Benjamin 2019: n.p.). To translate a text from Tamil to Malayalam, two closely related languages, for example, Google Translate translates it from Tamil to English first, and then from English to Malayalam. Given the low accuracy rates in translating between English and non-European languages, a two-step translation means doubling the chances of inaccuracies. These inaccuracies are not the result of the inherent 'untranslatability' between these languages, but due to the incapacity of automated translation tools, which rely on English as the universal mediator between them, even when translating between two closely related languages. These machines continue to be widely used, though they do not provide caveats admitting their inefficiency in providing reliable translations. They are trained to instantly give translations of any verbal text fed into their system, between any languages available to them.

3 The Problems of Universal Translatability in Automated Translation

The state of automated translation reiterates one of Emily Apter's twenty theses on translation in *Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (2006): "Everything is translatable" (Apter 2006: xi). Though contradictory to Apter's first thesis, "Nothing is translatable," the claim of universal translatability of "everything into everything else" is a reflection on the state of translation on the Internet (ibid.: xi, 227). The chapter with the same title begins with a statement on how the "explosion of world language usage on the Internet" has transformed

translation theory; “[i]nstead of fixating mournfully on the supposition that nothing is translatable (the original is always and inevitably lost in translation), translation studies increasingly explores the possibility that everything is translatable” (ibid.: 226). Apter then explains how “technological literacy” contributes to this universal translatability by producing a “linguistic marketplace, bringing the languages of the world into colloquy” (ibid.). Apter’s observations on “pan-translatability” include the translation of “data, language, matter, information, [and] aesthetic expression” (ibid.: 240). However, her argument also presents the limitations of such a space, as she rightly identifies how the language on the Internet—which she calls “Netlish”—as “the expressionism of global capitalism,” that reinforces the hegemony of English (ibid.: 228). Despite this, Apter sees possibilities in the entry of non-Western languages into the Internet as this is causing an erosion of the hegemony of English (ibid.: 229). Almost two decades after Apter made this statement, we are bound to see her skepticism of Netlish becoming increasingly prominent. The imperfections of the automated translations still remain a reality, with a major difference of them being masqueraded by superficial fluency. These machines are created in a way that privileges the readability and fluency of the output (cf. Rothwell et al. 2023: 105). In Justin Joque’s words, this system “favors production over quality control” (Joque 2022: 139). That is the reason why they tend to provide translations even to words and phrases that they are unaware of. My experiences of typing gibberish in Malayalam into Google Translate always yielded fluent sentences in English. There is a wide gap emerging between the governing principles related to accuracy and fidelity in human translation compared to automated translation.

Indeed, discussions in translation studies moved away from concerns about *mistranslations* and *bad translations*, as the

proliferation of the discourses around culture and politics in translation changed the understanding of translation. While earlier translation was seen as a direct rendering of words from one language to another, now the prevailing idea is that translation is a context-bound act that gives the translator plenty of choices to choose from. The instability of the source text (cf. Emmerich 2017) or the translation's inability to give back the original (cf. Venuti 2019) were also premises for such an understanding. However, the ideas of 'accuracy' and 'faithfulness' are still indispensable to the process of translation, and they find expression in the theoretical discourses very prominently. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1993: 180) notion of translation as "the most intimate act of reading" and of the necessity of "surrendering to the text" illustrates an extreme case of fidelity in translation. Lawrence Venuti (2019: 8), whose hermeneutic method of translation was instrumental in shifting the discussions away from ideas of "equivalence" and "accuracy," and provided new ways of producing as well as reading translation, cites "semantic correspondence" and "stylistic approximation" as valuable and achievable goals in translation. Additionally, Venuti's (1995: 1) critique of the "regime of fluency" and the subsequent "invisibility" of the translator in English as symptomatic of the "imperialistic and xenophobic" attitudes prevalent in the UK and the US (ibid.: 13) points out that hegemonic power influences the methods of translations. If privileging fluency while maintaining semantic correspondence can itself be problematic in a human translation, the current state of automated translation that disregards standards of accuracy creates a crisis.

Since AI-based models used for automated translation focus on producing translations that sound fluent in the target language, they not only misrepresent ideas but also make the mistakes "difficult to spot" (Rothwell et al. 2023: 105). In other

words, they focus on creating an illusion of accurate translation, rather than creating accurate translations. And if the person using the technology is not fluent in both languages—which is not the case most of the time—such illusions of accuracy lead to a wider acceptability of these technologies. Additionally, the way the performances of translation machines is explained conveniently hides the fact that they follow any ideology. Instead, they are presumed to be innocently reflecting the state of present technology to the best of their abilities, and merely attempting to create the translations based on the statistics and data available to them. An awareness of the underlying principles of the machines—both at the micro-level of producing the translations as well at the macro-level of promoting certain prejudices through them—becomes necessary.

An awareness of the disparity between the ideology of automated translation and human translation leads to the necessity of inventing new frameworks to address the crises in translation. The necessity of such frameworks hinges on the fundamental difference between a human translator and a translation machine. An average literary or professional translator who has been engaging in translating between Malayalam to Tamil will possess the same level of competence as a translator translating from Spanish to English. Their awareness of the syntax and diction of the languages they work with will not be considerably different. They will presumably possess an awareness of the cultural and political context in which the translation is taking place and will be capable of producing translations that do not vary considerably in terms of their quality. Even when the number of translations is limited between these languages, they meet a certain standard of accuracy. The translation machines, on the other hand, have constituted a situation where the quality of translation has been predetermined to a certain extent. That is, a text translated from a European language is going to

exhibit greater accuracy compared to a text translated from an African language. Here, the very semantic field created by the new technology is systematically imposing a hierarchy of languages that are involved in the translation process—both the ones that actively participate in translation and the ones left out of the process—and increases the gap between them. To understand the reasons for the aforementioned disparity, we will have to approach the emergence of automated translation with a sharper and more global theoretical lens.

4 The Ideology of the Machines

Considering the financial investment required for developing any of these translation models, it is relevant to consider the motivating economic logic. Translation has been a defining factor in global trade, and multinational companies have relied on localization processes using human translators for several decades (cf. Doherty 2016). Therefore, the development of new machine translation technology cannot be separated from the aspirations of capital. Proposing the method of AI realism to make sense of the current situation, Holly Lewis underscores the necessity of understanding these models as

not just commodities or platforms, but the unfolding outcome of the systemic logic of embedded material social relations. Large language models are created for the purpose of profit maximization and trained on the data that humans have generated, ideologically, as subjects making sense of their lives within capitalist social relations. (Lewis 2024: n.p.)

Joque, in his extensive study of the ideological underpinnings of the AI, argues: “while algorithms and machine learning may change the speed and nature of computation, they are ultimately bound to reproduce extant societal systems of valuation and violence” (Joque 2022: 14). Approaching discussions on auto-

mated translation technologies from the vantage point of them having an ideological backbone rather than them being systems that work based on pure statistics and probabilities enables us to go beyond discussions on the *experiences* of automated translation and examine all corners of this phenomenon.

I emphasize *experiences* here, given the prominent profile of AI in popular culture in recent years and the fantasies projected onto the technology's efficacy. This runs the risk of being generalized as a global experience, whereas these experiences are limited to a minority—considering the primary beneficiaries are English language speakers—when taken at a global scale. The attitude celebrating the development of translation technology reiterates one of the *original* flaws of development theory; the hyper-focus on the most developed and glittery side while ignoring the areas that do not adequately benefit from this development. Additionally, the experiences also conceal the problems of the inner mechanisms of these technologies that do not get enough attention in the mainstream discourses. As Joque (2022: 58) argues, the machine learning systems solidify extant social systems “in ways that are potentially more insidious and harder to resist, presenting their outputs as objective facts.” It is high time we opened conversations not only about the unequal pace at which automated translation is growing across languages but also about the underlying structures that facilitate such unequal development.

World-systems analysis gives a conceptual framework for understanding the impact of this technological development by taking the whole world as its unit of study and focusing on the structural time—particularly Fernand Braudel's idea of “longue durée”—and using a “unidisciplinary approach” in studying this total social system (Wallerstein 2004: 19). The productions—and correspondingly states that own them—are divided primarily into cores and peripheries, where the surplus-

value constantly flow from the peripheries to the core (cf. *ibid.*: 12). Since the automated translation sector is controlled by what Wallerstein calls “quasi-monopolies” (*ibid.*: 28), they constitute a core-like production, which, given the mechanism of these machines, in effect assert the hegemony of the languages and ideology that the producers represent. In fact, information technology is arguably the most prominent core-like production of our time. By virtue of it being a technology that deals with information—that controls, manipulates, censors, and amplifies information—it is proven to be capable of doing the job its proponents want it to do. Examining the growth of automated translation on a world scale and ‘longue durée’ reveals some of the layers of such a process.

5 The Negative Impacts of Contemporary Automated Translation Technology

As explained earlier, the disparity in the quality of translation across languages is not their original condition. An average qualified translator in any pair of languages will be as competent as their counterpart in some other languages. This entails that the underdevelopment of neural machine translation systems that handle the languages from the Global South is also not their original condition, but a result of systematic subordination. Since more languages from the South have been introduced to Google Translate, there is a consensus that languages from the Global South are slowly catching up in the automated translation scene and there will be a time when all these languages will be able to provide equally good translations. However, this is a delusion because this ever-growing disparity in the distribution of resources is a fundamental characteristic of the capitalist system. What we need to reiterate, therefore, is that the sophistication in automated translation between Eu-

ropean languages is not the result of the organic progression of world events. They are the outcome of the systematic ways in which the capitalist economy historically privileged certain languages and helped them dominate, which assured their prominence in the field of translation as well. This is evident in English playing the role of the universal mediator in neural machine translation when it comes to translating between two non-English languages. Here, Google Translate and DeepL must rely on the translatability of English on more than one level to produce a translation. This very process maintains the hegemony of English on the global stage, making the language indispensable. This is comparable to the domination of English on the global translation market as well as in the world literature debate, which also is reflective of the role of English in the global political economy (cf. Mufti 2016).

A common justification for the better performance of automated translation in certain languages compared to others is their wide presence on the internet (cf. Evans 2024, Schoening 2023). As mentioned earlier, researchers of AI categorize languages as low-resource languages (LSL) and high-resource languages (HSL) based on the availability of “linguistic resources, e.g. grammars, POS taggers, corpora” on the internet (Karakanta et al. 2018: 168). While these categories are perhaps useful in understanding the present state of automated translation technology, a proper understanding of what *constitutes* the categories is also imperative, especially since the gap between these languages is massive. A recent study shows more than 55% of all websites globally use English as their primary language, even though English speakers are less than 5% of the global population (cf. Brandom 2023: n.p.). Russian, Spanish, German, French, and Japanese are next in that line, with 22% of the online presence (cf. *ibid.*). As there is a clear pattern emerging upon observing the internet occupancy of these languages, it

will also not be adequate to reduce the reason for this imbalance to ‘online presence,’ or ‘un/availability,’ since they have been determined by political economy: Rather, this could be understood as a way the system conceals the actuality of the events.

The direct relationship between online presence and political economy explains how the Global South has been systematically marginalized in the cyber world. The imbalances are further widened with each step in the development of technology. To give one example, the digitalization of printed texts was a turning point in the history of machine learning since it enabled an unprecedented amount of data to enter the internet. However, objective character recognition (OCR) software is still not fully developed to read many of the languages from the Global South, because this software is trained primarily to read the Roman alphabet. This prevents much of the already existing data in these languages from entering the internet. It goes without saying that this is also tied to the political economy of these languages, and it is preposterous to frame the situation as one concerning ‘unavailability’ without qualifying the situation, which obscures the relationship between the systems that created these hierarchies and the actors that benefit from them. Moreover, the dominance of these languages on the internet becomes a steppingstone for maintaining their hegemony in the long run. Discussions on AI technology often mention that AI models use a massive number of texts and documents available on the internet in machine learning processes. GPT-4 has reportedly been trained on 570 GB of datasets and these statistics are highlighted and celebrated to explain the ‘magic’ of AI (cf. Lammertyn 2024: n.p.). If these machines are trained on data available on the internet, and they produce more data and expand within the internet; that means, automated translation, and AI, by and large, are perpetuating

these imbalances in an unprecedented manner. As Brandom (2023: n.p.) puts it: “we’re already building the same imbalance into technology’s next frontier: artificial intelligence.”

Although online presence corresponds to the performance of automated translation in certain languages, the mere availability of data does not necessarily solve the problem. A data curation process identifies, collects, cleans, and processes data. Though the methods or criteria of this data curation process are either arbitrary or not available to the public, we can infer that this process is a potential tool for reifying the imbalances addressed in this article, especially since each of the steps involved in data curation requires financial investment. In data identification and collection, for example, the criteria can be based on cost-effective processes that will also meet the standard demand and profitability. HRLs get an upper hand in data identification and collection since they are considerably easier to process and more profitable due to the easy availability of data, but also because data curation in an under-resourced language will require specialists in those languages, which means more investment. There is also a projected concern of “clean data” when it comes to building any foundational model, which makes the developers either rely on the clean data sets that are already available or clean the datasets that have been collected (cf. Lewis 2024). Some use “low-paid human annotators” and even AI models to clean data (ibid.: n.p.). Data cleaning, therefore, is a gate-keeping mechanism that is aimed to ensure that the data used in machine learning is accurate. However, the political economy also plays a role in data cleaning, for the reasons mentioned above, and even if the data is available on the internet, it will not become the priority in machine learning given the current state of the field.

The rhetoric of HRLs and LRLs also risks these qualifiers being associated with the merit of these languages. There al-

ready exist discussions about how the complexity of the languages from the Global South is one of the reasons why they are not performing well in automated translation. A blog post on the accuracy of Google Translate considers “unique linguistic complexities less typical for European languages” in addition to the “unavailability” of data as the reason for Google Translate’s failure in translating Asian languages (cf. Schoening 2023: n.p.). Such claims reinforce the colonial attitude of constituting languages that are ‘illegible’ to machines. Certain languages are perceived as too foreign, rare, and exotic, which apparently makes translation between them impossible, especially when discussed in comparison to the success of automated translation in other languages. The reason why translations from French into English are, relatively speaking, easier and more accurate than translations from Telugu is then understood as due to Telugu’s ‘complexity,’ and not due to a translation machine’s incapacity or lack of sophistication. Any iterations of understanding this issue as a result of a lack of investments in developing models that can translate among these ‘complex’ languages is conveniently left out of the discussion. Moreover, given the fact that no languages are inherently complex, since the speakers of these languages learn to use them from childhood, the claim of their complexity should in return challenge the claims of ‘intelligence’ of AI models. What can be inferred here is that the claim of the ‘complexity’ of these languages is a way to not address the political economy of this process. We can go a step further and say the incapacity of automated translation tools in translating certain languages (which, as discussed, is a result of a chain of choices) is itself a method of creating an ‘illegible’ and ‘untranslatable’ other.

6 Conclusion

Translation, by being a concept that has universal application, helps understand systems of relations across the globe. Literary translations, for example, reveal the complex socio-political and cultural relationships between the literary traditions that interact through linguistic transfers. Put another way, the unique relationship between the two traditions that engage in a translation will be reflected in the way this literary exchange takes place, which an analysis of these texts will reveal. This article has been an attempt to apply the same logic to automated translation to understand the underlying structures that determine the process. What it has revealed is a unilateral relationship between English and other languages, in the guise of universal applicability of the technology across languages. Pivoting through English even to translate between closely related languages, with very few exceptions, is itself a symptom of that. The hegemony of English in automated translation systems and its subsequent relationship with other languages reflect the political economy of the world we live in. The current state of technology is made to preserve this hegemony, perpetuate the hierarchy, and increase the imbalances. It makes exaggerated claims, such as the super-human performance of automated translation tools, misleading the users in thinking about their capabilities, whereas it fails to provide *acceptable* translations in the vast majority of languages it claims to translate between. When a discussion on the imbalances across the lines of languages comes up, it is written off as a result of their limited online presence or inherent complexity, without addressing the reasons for this or attempting to execute a plan that will decrease the gap. As a first step in solving this problem, we need to understand the problem for what it is, which this article identifies as its primary goal. The current state of automated

translation is built on the premises of global capitalism, which seeks to perpetuate relationships of inequality. We need automated translation models that acknowledge this and work towards fixing the problems that are outcomes of centuries of systematic subordination.

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Translating Indigeneity: Adivasi Literature in the Age of AI

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Abstract: This article explores the ethical imperatives involved in translating indigenous epistemologies in the era of artificial intelligence (AI). Regardless of the other challenges that AI purportedly presents to a human-centric world order, its inadequacy to mitigate the crisis posed by social inequality cannot be overlooked. The abundant nature of indigenous intelligence coupled with social exclusion and segregation significantly interferes with effective translation of indigeneity with AI-based tools. This article analyzes how enforced peripherality of the Adivasis in Kerala amplifies the risk of misrepresentation and erasure of indigenous knowledges in AI. The first part elaborates on the multiple facets of abundant indigenous knowledge based on select Adivasi texts. The complexities involved in the translation of this abundance by humans are juxtaposed against its homogenized rendering by AI-based tools to describe the ethical problems AI-enhanced translation entails. The banality of stereotyping, which subsumes Adivasi communitarian identity into a monolithic, timeless entity, is analyzed in the second part of this article.

Keywords: Indigeneity, Adivasi literature, Abundance, Translation, AI.

1 Introduction

The use of technology in translation ranges from full machine translation to machine-aided translation. Artificial intelligence (AI) has been used in translation since the second half of the 1960s (cf. Hutchins 2015: 133). The reliability of AI in translation has been a matter of contention ever since, with the majority agreeing on its ineptitude in comparison with human intelligence.

To produce high-quality translation without human intervention, which is the original and ambitious goal of MT research, was soon found to be unrealistic. The goals thus have to be toned down, such as aiming only at rough translation to be post-edited by humans and limiting the content to small sublanguage domains. (Oi Yee 2015: 571)

Even though AI-based translation has come a long way, results are still far from perfect. One of the prime issues associated with the use of AI in this regard concerns the limits of ethical practice. Translation is an artistic endeavour that extends beyond the terrain of the linguistic. It demands a creative and ethical understanding of the emotion and tune of the source and target language and culture. These nuances are often lost to AI, which works strictly on the basis of an already available database. When it comes to the translation of inadequately archived indigenous knowledge systems, programmed intelligence is susceptible to misappropriating them. Such appropriations take the form of refusing authorship to the owner of the knowledge, misquoting or inadequately quoting the interlocutors, providing literal translations of culture-specific words, transliterating words transmitted orally because of insufficient data for them, etc. The obliteration of specificities in translation imprisons the source text within the domain of a timeless past and compounds the issue of marginalization. The source text continues to remain endangered on account of its inap-

propriate translation. The knowledge owners are unacknowledged and rendered invisible.

Ethical practice, usually identified as a major component of translation, takes a back seat in AI-based translation. This article intends to study the complexities involved in the translation of indigenous epistemology with AI in Kerala. The second section of this article elaborates on the abundant Adivasi knowledge as depicted in selected texts published in Kerala over the years. The third section analyzes the biased nature of the AI database which eventuates from an enforced peripherality. The fourth section describes how the AI platform of coded intelligence jeopardizes the translation of indigenous literatures of abundance.

2 Adivasi Epistemologies and Cultures of Abundance

Adivasi literature embodies tribal life in its plurality. It is published both in Malayalam, the official language of the state, and other tribal languages. Some of these writings have also been translated into English. Narayan, credited to be the first Adivasi author to have published a novel in Malayalam, had to battle with feelings of self-doubt as an author and the relevance of what he had written before deciding to give it out for publication. By the time the novel was finally published in 1998 it had been almost a decade since the first submission of the manuscript. Bigotry disguised as neglect and oblivion delayed its publication by several years. A novel written by a tribal (from the Mala Araya community) contradicted the image of a tribal woven by accomplished authors as a primitive being bereft of

any aspirations. Amidst the *savarna*¹ world and its predicaments, which predominated mainstream literature in Kerala, a novel about tribal life presented itself as an anomaly. This racist apathy towards the myriad expressions of life has however undergone a remarkable transformation from the 2000s onwards, at least in the domain of literature. The burgeoning field of Adivasi literature has compelled the readers habituated to reading the aesthetics of privilege to navigate into broader realms of experience.

Adivasi literature has certainly broadened the literary terrain of Malayalam through its diction, style, and mode of narration in disparate ways. Yet, the implications of these publications to the social mobility of Adivasi communities are debatable. The publishing industry's intrigue for the memories, nostalgias, and desires of the *savarna* world, the midland-dwelling middle class in Kerala, has witnessed a shift towards memories and experiences of displacement and aspirations of the coastal and forest eco-systems. While mainstream literature romanticized the primitive life of the Adivasi in the forest, writers from these communities reverse the gaze by projecting the repository nature of their habitat. The evolving nature of this space is central to Adivasi writings. The resonances of this unfolding landscape of abundance will be discussed in the context of the publication of a collection of ten poetry books written in Adivasi languages titled *Kaviyapothakanira* [*Collection of Poetry Books*] in October 2023.

Kaviyapothakanira was published as part of a research project under the Kairali Research Awards, funded by the Kerala

1 The term refers to the privileged minority who are entrusted with the power of subjugation and domination by the Brahminical caste system in India.

Higher Education Council.² This collection of ten poetry books is the latest addition to a tradition of poetry writing by Adivasi writers. This compilation of poems reflect contemporary concerns of dignity, land ownership, belonging, and self-assertion among the Adivasi communities, because of which I have quoted extensively from them. These ten anthologies featured ten poets from different Adivasi communities in Kerala. Many of the poems in these collections are translated from rent Adivasi languages to Malayalam by the respective authors. Some other poems are transliterated in the Malayalam language with a glossary to aid comprehension. These writings reverse the logic of the midland writers of Malayalam who perceive the Adivasis as a primitive community, living at the mercy of the forest, its rage and its wilderness. Lijina Kadumeni, in her poem “Kaadiranghiyon Kaadu Thedi” (“The One who Left the Forest, Seeks it”) translated from her mother tongue into Malayalam by the author herself, describes how, for instance, the forest never abandoned the tribals even as they were refused jobs and food during the Covid lockdown.

The forest received her son heartily
The one who left home, shifted home
and then returned
The outbursts and rage at home subsided
The wife and kids became merry
They looked at the forest thankfully. (Kadumeni 2023: 23)³

Greeshma Kannothe likewise writes about the forest lore in the poem “Prakasham” (“Light”):

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- 2 The fellowship was instituted by the Kerala State government for outstanding research contributions in various disciplines. The fellowship was awarded to Dr. Santhosh Manicheri in 2020, who was the general editor of the poetry collection.
 - 3 All translations, if not otherwise stated, are mine.

Once hometown stories were over
Grandma told us stories of the forest
Stories as gutsy as the forest
To the heart of Kudagu mountains looking for choral
Of ancestors who migrated to the forest
where elephants grazed
even during monsoon downpours
Journeys not to loot the forest
but to save their lives. (Kannothe 2023: 36)

Siju C. Meena is emphatic about the midlander's endless hatred and prejudice towards the Adivasis. In his Malayalam translation of his own poem "Ningalude Pusthakam" ("Your Book"), he writes:

Won't go away even after scraping
Won't go away even after sweeping it up
Like dog shit
This contempt that you have for us. (Meena 2023: 24)

There are poems which contest normative gender stereotypes. In his poem "The Girl who doesn't Menstruate," Prakash Chenthalam writes:

It was a she
In the me born as a man
She, all over my body. I am the girl
who will not menstruate
even when I am old enough to
I am tired of living in this male body
I want to die
as the she in me. (Chenthalam 2023: 103)

The writers featured here embody a keen sense of politicized consciousness that resonates in their aesthetic, though unromanticized use of language. Prakash Chenthalam says in his poem "You Know Me" (2023: 59) that Adivasis will be recognized only through their language. These writings display a liberated awareness of language, identity, nature, and modernity. They articulate the modernity implicit in their living and the

habitat that makes them so. As these writings suggest, the primitiveness of Adivasis is a societal attribute, rather than a personal or communitarian debilitation. Their narratives resonate the dynamicity of Adivasi consciousness, the translation of which poses challenges at the realm of language and vocabulary.

The dilemmas, negotiations and decisions involved in the translation of one of the earliest autobiographical writings into English provide an instance in this regard. Highlighting the importance of ethical translation, C. K. Janu, social activist and leader of Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha,⁴ published her autobiography *Janu: C.K. Januvinde Jeevithakatha (Janu: The Life Story of C.K. Janu)* in Malayalam in 2003. The autobiography was transcribed and written by Bhaskaran based on conversations with Janu because of her lack of proficiency in using the Malayalam language. In the 2nd edition of the book, which came out within three months of its first edition, Bhaskaran tells the readers that “the language here is built up with very few words [...] dispersed and alienated on account of the intrusions of the dominant public into the life of the Adivasis” (Janu 2003: 7). The Malayalam version of C. K. Janu’s autobiography was later translated into English by Ravi Shanker and published in 2004 as *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu*. Certain concerns raised in the translator’s note are of importance with regard to the problem of authenticity and ethicality discussed here.

In the Translator’s note to C. K. Janu’s *Mother Forest*, the translator dwells on the concerns he had to encounter while translating a tribal language, which had few precedents in the Malayalam literature published at the time. The text he was

4 This was a social organization that had been in agitation since 2001 for the redistribution of land to the landless tribal people in Kerala.

meant to translate was a transcription of Janu's interview written in her own language. The pertinence of this strategy, which the interviewer, Bhaskaran, insisted on, eventuated from the ethical need for an uncompromising insistence for authenticity while translating an indigenous language. The effort taken on the part of the human translator to prevent misrepresentation of indigenous articulation is of particular significance here. To quote from the translator

Bhaskaran had insisted that the entire interview be recorded on tape and not just jotted down. It was only when the first Malayalam article came out in *Bhashaposhini* (the book itself came out only a year later) that I understood his method. He had written the piece in her language, as if she were speaking it. As a translator, this was a challenge for me. (N. Ravi Shanker 2004: 4)

Another problem the translator mentions concerns the difference in the meaning of certain words in Malayalam and the Adiya language that Janu spoke. Janu describes herself or her society in the first person as *nammal* ("we"). The translator had to settle for using either "I" or "we," as the context demanded.

This is the one compromise I had to make with great reluctance, perhaps sacrificing accuracy for clarity. I wanted to retain the flavor of Janu's intonation and the sing-song nature of her speech in the translation. Verbs are pronounced with greater emphasis than nouns in Janu's language. I reworked the draft and used the simplest language possible, keeping the flow of the language close to the Malayalam that rolled off Janu's tongue. The upper cases in the first chapter, in a sea of lower cases, are used to indicate the stresses in Janu's spoken language. The first chapter was treated differently from the second, because I felt that it was closer to Janu's inner world, while the second was more polemical and belonged to the outer world. (N. Ravi Shanker 2004: 6)

After giving a detailed exposition of the difficulties of translating the Adiya language via Malayalam into English, Ravi Shanker adds that the completion of the final draft of the translation took fifteen drafts in total.

These passages from the translator's note are cited in elaboration to stress the particularity of a tribal language as well as the laborious editing work that needed to be undertaken to retain the nuances of the spoken words. The translator's insistence on clarity over accuracy when he translates into English points to the inadequately circulated and represented Adiya language that persuades the translator to understate accuracy. The emphasis given to capturing "the flavor" (N. Ravi Shanker 2004: 6) of intonation used, "the sing-song nature" (ibid.) of speech, the stress used on various occasions, etc., while translating reflects the subtle differences and particularities that mark the distinctiveness of the language used in the autobiography in Malayalam. The innumerable drafts required for grasping these nuances of language allude to the ethical responsibility exhibited by the translator in translating a text written in a language different from the mainstream language of Kerala. This refusal to compromise on the tune and abundance of language through the adoption of word-by-word, literal translation and experimenting with unconventional usages of language and linguistic structures in an attempt to document the particularity is key to the English rendering of the autobiography. The lines

when young all of us children would go the ridges of the fields to pick chappa. or to the little stream to catch fish. or else to lure out the crabs hiding in the slush of the fields. or to graze the jenmi's cattle. or to roam aimlessly in the woods. or to pluck wild fruits like karappayam mothangappayam or kanjippayam (N. Ravi Shanker 2004: 2)

exemplify how rules of grammar and sentence structure are flouted. The prioritization of indigenous abundance and the ethical interventions to convey it in translation distinguish human intelligence from translations that could be generated with AI-based tools. An AI search for "karappayam," "mothangappayam," or "kanjippayam," for instance provides misleading

information of these fruits.⁵ The inadequate AI databases for Adivasi epistemologies compromise their translations with AI-based tools significantly. The tonal significances of indigenous forms of resilience and indigenous outlooks towards life elude programmed verbal databases underlying AI models.

3 Racist Ethnography and the Biased Database

According to Pasquinelli (2023: 2), AI is constituted by “the intelligence of labor and social relations.” He defines AI as an endeavor

to capture the knowledge expressed through individual and collective behaviours and encode it into algorithmic models to automate the most diverse tasks: from image recognition and object manipulation to language translation and decision-making. (Pasquinelli 2023: 2)

The process between the capturing and encoding of knowledge is, however, crucial to a marginalized community. Societal bias is passed over to the domain of AI during this juncture. Even as their programming enables AI-based tools to make choices through evaluative processes that could be non-discriminatory, the databases which determine their choices may not be necessarily encompassing. Even as the concept of AI challenges the position of humans as the most intelligent of living species and questions human-centric epistemologies, social inequalities increase the risk that AI poses to the knowledge systems produced by segregated and ostracized communities. Jason E. Lewis reflects on how AI has to resonate the indigenous perception of the world which diverges from dominant ways of comprehension.

5 *Karappayam*, for instance, is described as a South Indian dish. Made with lamb or goat intestines.

If we are to keep AI from becoming yet another tool for imposing an impoverished understanding of the good life upon us all, we must look to ontologies and epistemologies that grow from different roots than those concepts of being and knowledge frameworks out of which the current mainstream vision of AI develops. (Lewis 2023: 210).

Lewis describes such a technology as one that would enable abundance. The production of such ontologies is however, overridden by racist biases and stigmas.

Towards the end of 2023, the South Indian state of Kerala organized a one-week cultural festival in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram. The fest titled “Keraleeyam” was meant to showcase the cultural and industrial strongholds of the state while also seeking to envision a new Kerala that would embody the aspirations of the new world. Films were screened, literature was discussed, debates were held, and exhibition stalls were set up as part of the fest. One of these pavilions was named “Adiman Living Museum,” with an objective of portraying authentic Adivasi life in Kerala. The specific platform displayed representatives of five communities, in particular Kaani, Mannan, Paliyar, Mavilar, and Uralis, in traditional attires standing in front of an artificially assembled habitat consisting of huts and worship sites. The participants of the installation were transported from tribal communities all over Kerala and hired for daily wages to perform authentic Adivasi⁶ identity. The pay would also cover the on-demand performances of specific art forms by the dressed up Adivasis.

6 Adivasis are the composite indigenous population in the Indian sub-continent, who are constitutionally classified and protected as the Scheduled Tribes on account of their ethnic specificities and social backwardness. Many of the languages spoken by Adivasi communities do not have a script, are transmitted orally, and are hence only just percolating into the mainstream or print literary culture.

The stall intended “to express the unique life of tribal people” (cf. John 2023: n.p.)⁷ drew wide-spread criticism for its racist undertones and inhumane degradation of indigenous communities as primitive and timeless. The Adiman Living Museum was equated with the concept of a ‘human zoo,’ a colonial-era practice of displaying indigenous people (cf. John 2023: n.p.). Indigeneity is stripped off its present and converted into a museum piece. The enforced nature of peripherality is obscured by projecting it as an essential and timeless attribute of the Adivasis. The ensuing monolithic image of the regressive, forest-dwelling Adivasi assumes an authenticity which takes over and subsumes the communitarian Adivasi being. This stalled Adivasi becomes the embodiment of authentic indigeneity in Kerala and prevails over the Adivasi everyday and their communitarian identity. The representation of Adivasis draws on a database that can be described as exceedingly racist. The museumized Adivasi is drawn from their stereotypes disseminated through mainstream literature from as early as the 1960s:

Then, unexpectedly, a primitively clad man appears before you from another part of the forest. A soiled mundu, that reaches only up to his knees, is draped around the waist. A bow and arrow in his hand. On the right shoulder there is a bound cloth bundle. A tuft of hair on the head. We might feel relieved that we could spot a human being. But, he is frightened at seeing someone coming from the countryside. Are our spotless white mundu and other outfits frightening him! He will try to move away. Otherwise he'll turn around and walk away. Who is this person, who lives with wild animals and fears humans? He is one of the sons of this forest. He is a Kurichyan. (Panoor 1963/1980: 47)

This account of an encounter with a Kurichyan appears in a book titled *The Africa of Kerala*, written by a tribal welfare officer

7 It was also said that the tribespeople were forced to stay in the huts for seven days but were paid only Rs 1000 per day, which is nothing but social exploitation (cf. John 2023: n.p.).

named K. Panoor, and first published in 1963. It is one of the earliest books in Kerala profiling the various Adivasi communities living in the state. Clearly, the ethnographic enumeration of the Adivasi male body here is colored by a racist gaze that marks him as the other⁸ of the progressive and developed male city dweller. He is described as primitive and comfortable in the company of wild animals. Humans frighten him. The “spotless white mundu” or “other outfits” (Panoor 1963/1980: 47) that are significantly different from his own soiled mundu that reaches only up to his knees, are threatening to him. This male who displays fear at the sight of humans and the human-made and runs towards the forest is epitomized as the authentic Adivasi in Kerala.

In the preface to the book, K. Panoor proudly declares how his efforts in the forest had paid off and how his book had served as a database for the writers of future generations to write on Adivasis. He says:

Before this was published in book form, several parts of it were serialized in *Mathrubhumi* weekly. I received a lot of letters from different parts of Kerala and outside [...] there were college students determined to carry out research. There were people who found an easy way to get their PhD degree [...]. Meanwhile, a famous novelist from Tamil Nadu, Srimati Rajam Krishnan, translated these articles and started publishing them in the Tamil Digest Monthly. Our S.K. Pottekkad and M.T. Vasudevan Nair expressed their desire to write novels on Adivasis. (Panoor 1963/1980: 6)

The book goes beyond the conceits of an author to record the unrecorded and qualifies as a database with far-fetching consequences to the tribes profiled in it. It served as a primary source for research and literature, as the author himself testifies. The image of the Adivasi conceptualized by Panoor assumes an au-

8 For further details on the idea of the ‘other,’ see Spivak’s *In Other Worlds* (2006).

thenticity that surpasses the Adivasis of everyday life and replaces the latter on occasions. The banality of enforced peripherality interferes with the ways in which indigenous epistemologies are archived and translated. What is significant here is that regardless of the burgeoning field of Adivasi literature authored by writers from the communities in Kerala, it is the stereotypical image of the primitive and timeless Adivasi that gets reproduced even in a state-sponsored cultural fest. The choice of racist information over decolonial history is reflective of the deeply entrenched inequality in society that forbids acknowledging the equality of races. The unequal distribution of power in the society in turn also jeopardizes ethical practice in AI and reinstates an archive that is inclined towards xenophobic perception.

4 When Cultural Abundance Meets Coded Intelligence

Considering that AI works through information that is processed through algorithms, data that is available in a digitized form is fundamental to its output. Furthermore, the information has to be accurate and historically correct for it to be used ethically. This presupposes an egalitarian society where capital is equally distributed among the various communities. Alternatively, the prevalence of an unequal society posits multiple hurdles for the ethical representation of underprivileged communities through AI. The inadequate and misconstrued repositories of data pertaining to the history, culture, and literature of peripheral lives run the risk of further appropriation and erasure. The inclusion of parameters that enforce an ethical dissemination of knowledge systems assumes prime significance. The chasm between the two worlds as embodied by the Adivasi writers and the state machineries manifests the complexi-

ties pertaining to misrepresentation of Adivasi life by AI and flags up how the absence of sufficient laws regarding the same would lead to further alienation and displacement of Adivasi communities. The possible concerns of copyright infringement, stereotyping, and flagrant bulldozing of indigeneity in the AI-based translation of Adivasi literature would eventuate a reinforcement of stigma and racist alienation of the tribal everyday.

The divergent conceptualization of signification that is rooted in communitarian identity and specific understanding of temporality embodies the multi-layered experience of presence in indigenous communities. This is at variance with a perspective tinted by a culture of knowledge grounded in “Cartesian duality, monotheistic eschatology, and computational reductionism” (Lewis 2023: 216). Noelani Arista (2023: 218) describes how the indigenous concept of future relies on a great extent to the past. This implies a making of meaning that is contextually produced through interactions with inter- and intra-generational societies (ibid.: 222), as well as with contemporary manifestations of knowledge. The extent to which AI, which is “trained to code but not to know” (ibid.: 224), can appropriately decipher the abundance of this signification would be crucial in determining its potential for emancipation. The cultural abundance accumulated through a perception of the universe that traverses beyond established notions of knowledge production and which manifests in the rich particularity of indigenous cultures is compromised by artificially construed intelligence in most cases. For example, if you use ChatGPT to write about Wiradjuri culture, it could source documents that contain false, offensive, and/or secret/sacred cultural knowledge. Fitch et al. (2024) describe how, on two different occasions, ChatGPT provided two conflicting descriptions of the language word for “Moieties” when asked to

explain Wiradjuri Kinship structures. The AI model delivered the information in an authoritative way without being able to verify its sourced material.

The regional disparities that shape the cultural practices of Adivasi communities embody the complexities involved in enumerating the societies exclusively on the basis of their names. “Mavila,” for instance, is a tribal community in the Northern district of the South Indian state of Kerala. The community was enlisted as “Scheduled Tribe”⁹ only in 2003, before which they were classified as a ‘Scheduled Caste’ community. There are multiple etymological definitions attributed to the name “Mavila.” They are described as people who live on the *mala* (“mountain”). According to H. A. Stuart, the name refers to a community that collects and sells the medicinal plant called *Maavilan* (as quoted in Karipath 2005: 15). M. Venkitesh describes them in connection with the practice of taming elephants. Herman Gundert maintains that the original term was Malavelan, which later on became Mavilan (cf. *ibid.*: 13–28). The Mavila community is predominantly domiciled in the two neighboring districts in the northernmost part of Kerala: Kannur and Kasaragod. However, the community is constituted differently in each of these districts with respect to rituals and other practices.

The differently fashioned communities in the two districts of north Malanar have their own forms of ritualistic practices, which are further premised on the cultural formations of these

9 Communities in India which suffer from extreme social, educational, and economic backwardness are notified as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Constitution of India.

regions. The *Theyyam*¹⁰ festival in Deviyottu kavu¹¹ (or Theeyottu kavu) in Aalapadambu panchayat in Kannur district¹² is particularly significant in this regard. All the *Theyyam* kolams ritualistically worshipped in this kavu are not accessible to people from other communities on specific days. This is quite unlike the *Theyyam* ritual, which is usually renowned for its inclusivity and allows devotees to pray to the human-turned-deity irrespective of their caste, gender and religious identity. The kavu does not have a sanctum sanctorum or idols which may be worshipped. On the contrary, the rituals are organized around a stub of teak wood decorated with brass bells. The reserved nature of this ritualistic practice of the Mavilars in Kannur district is quite different from the public performative aspect of another ritualistic practice of the same community in Kasaragod, which is called *Mangalamkali*.¹³ A Meta AI search for Mavilar community gives information about the two ritu-

10 *Theyyam* is a ritualistic practice of worship based in north Malabar where persons from certain lower caste and tribal communities are temporarily transformed into oracles. Elements of art and performance impart the trans-real ambiance of devotion with dramatic impact that becomes pivotal to the *Theyyam*'s actualization. In these moments of being god, the performer turned deity is venerated and worshipped by devotees irrespective of their caste, gender, and religion. *Theyyam* however, does not free the *kolakaran* (or the one who transforms into the oracle) from caste discrimination once s/he is out of her *kolam* (the transformed body).

11 Kavu refers to a grove that is considered sacred.

12 Panchayats are local government bodies responsible for managing the affairs of a region within a state.

13 *Mangalamkali* is a folk art form prevailing in north Kerala districts of Kannur and Kasaragod. The dance is staged around a post erected under a marquee. The performers, about thirty of them, would include men and women. Rhythmic songs and steps make it attractive. The lyrics are a mix of Tulu and Malayalam (cf. Natyasutra n.d.).

alistic practices of the Mavila community, Theyyam and *Mangalamkali*, but at the same time does not provide the particularities of these performances in the two districts. The regional variations that occur in these practices are lost to AI.

My interlocutor from the Kasaragod district in north Malabar, who is a veteran singer of Mangalamkali songs, shared his concerns regarding the preservation of these songs on account of the language used. The lines are composed in Tulu, a Dravidian language which has a non-standardized script. The assistance of traditional scholars who know the inflections and the meaning of the vocabulary used in these lines is imperative when translating these songs into Malayalam. However, the skepticism regarding the acknowledgement of the interpreters poses a major hindrance to the collation and publication of these songs. The reluctance to attribute authorship to the traditional authors of an indigenous community who are the custodians and practitioners of a minority language is rampant in print culture. Books like *Folklore Nigandu* [*Folklore Dictionary*] (cf. Namboothiri 1989), which enlisted words from different languages, did not do justice to the Mavila language, according to the interlocutor.¹⁴ He talked about how he had collected Mangalamkali songs with difficulty from various performers and yet was not confident enough to publish them in Malayalam because of the laborious task it involved of typing the dialectical variations of the script-less Tulu and rendering them into Malayalam. Also, he was anxious about not being acknowledged as the author of the work once the book would be completed.

The possible negation of traditional authorship is a concern that prevails in print culture and aggravates with the prominence of AI. Even with the distant possibility of an eth-

14 Interview with Mr Kannan, held on 12.06.2022.

ically constituted database on Adivasi literatures and knowledges, the absence of legal parameters to check plagiarism or copyright infringement would lead to a negation of authorship to the rightful owners, further exacerbating neo-colonial forms of appropriating knowledges. The blatant disregard of particularities would eventuate half-truths and misleading information that would impede the production and circulation of decolonial knowledge.

5 Conclusions

The experimental use of AI for the development of indigenous languages is not an isolated practice. Neither is its relevance for the propagation and contemporizing of peripheral languages irrelevant. For instance, Fitch et al. (2024) explain how traditional owners in the Kakadu National Park use AI to manage the habitat in a way that makes it friendly to the magpie geese populations spread across a large area: “Traditional owners work with rangers and researchers in conservation management and assist in programming AI with ICIP that is specific to geographic knowledge of Country that helps manage para grass” (Fitch et al. 2024: n.p.). The appropriate integration and acknowledgement of the indigenous knowledge-owners cannot be overlooked when prompting an ethical use of AI. Countries like New Zealand have used AI to revitalize Te Reo Maori, the language of the Maori indigenous community (cf. ITU News 2022). However, it was preceded by years of deliberations with the stakeholders as part of ensuring ethicality. “We spent many years interviewing our elderly about every river, plant, beach. Anything they would want to talk about” (ibid.: n.p.). The shift to AI was preceded by the building of an extensive audio-visual archive of Maori words, phrases, and idioms. However, the absence of such deliberations in the case

of the Adivasi indigenous knowledge systems in Kerala is a considerable challenge that stands in the way of creating an authentic database as well as its further use. The skepticism expressed by my interlocutor to share his knowledge regarding *Mangalamkali* is reflexive of the apathy prevalent in the making of such a database.

Social inclusion and participation of indigenous communities in creating AI databases qualify as pre-conditions to ensure autonomy and prevent copyright infringement in a machine-driven creative industry. As far as the production of a decolonial archive of Adivasis is concerned, digitization for databases will have to take into consideration the heterogeneity of Adivasi languages and the regional disparity of cultural practices added to a deeply segregated social structure that encourages bulldozing of diversities than its flourishing. Such an authentic digitization is central to ethical translation of Adivasi indigenous knowledge systems using AI tools.

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Review Articles | Rezensionsartikel



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Im Niemandsland KI-generierter Übersetzungen

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Rezensionsartikel zu: MjÖLSNES, Ettore (2022): *Der stumme Text. Eine Kritik der maschinellen Übersetzung*. Küssnacht: Digiboo. ISBN: 978-3-03906-030-6. 76 S.

Es ist die Geschichte des US-amerikanischen Erfolgsfilms *Terminator 2* (1991, Regie: James Cameron), die Ettore Mjölsnes' „Kritik der maschinellen Übersetzung“ mit dem Haupttitel „Der stumme Text“ (2022) als Aufhängung dient: Mangelnde Vorsicht auf Menschenseite gegenüber den Gefahren der künstlichen Intelligenz führen zu einer maschinengelenkten Zukunft, in der Menschen systematisch von der KI Skynet unterdrückt werden und ihnen letztlich der Untergang droht. Hoffnung gibt den rebellierenden Menschen im Jahr 2029 lediglich der Held John Connor, dessen sich die KI dadurch zu entledigen sucht, dass sie einen Terminator in die Vergangenheit schickt, um diesen zu töten. Der Widerstandsbewegung gelingt es durch einen Coup – sie entsendet ihrerseits einen ei-

genen Terminator (den T-800, dargestellt von Arnold Schwarzenegger), der den Jungen beschützen soll –, diese Mordmission zu vereiteln. Die Dynamik des Films beruht auf der altbewährten Spannung zwischen Gut und Böse. In diesem Fall besteht der Clou darin, dass ein und dieselbe KI-Technologie gute und böse Erscheinungsformen (Skynet) zeitigt und damit endgültige Lösungen zu(un)gunsten ihres Einsatzes und ihrer Weiterentwicklung von vornherein in der Schwebe hält. Auf der einen Seite stehen, wie Mjølunes hervorhebt, die Potenziale eines von allem Ballast menschlicher Mangelhaftigkeit befreiten Androiden, der als Ersatzvater durchaus seine Qualitäten hat, auf der anderen der wahr gewordene Albtraum einer totalitär gegen die Menschheit vorgehenden Maschinerie. Die Wahl dieses Films, in dem die technologiebestimmte Zukunft als existenzbedrohende Dystopie gezeichnet wird, unterstreicht die am Schluss des hier interessierenden Buches noch einmal formulierte Einladung des Autors, „die Tragweite des Paradigmenwechsels, der hier im Gang ist, nicht zu unterschätzen“ (S. 65).

In den neun Kapiteln des für translationshermeneutische Anliegen einschlägigen Büchleins bezieht Mjølunes, seines Zeichens Philologe, Philosoph und Fachübersetzer (S. 73), Stellung zu den zeitgenössischen Entwicklungen im Bereich der neuronalen maschinellen Übersetzung (NMÜ). Die von ihm angestellten Beobachtungen sind heute nach wie vor gültig, obwohl sie die erst nach Veröffentlichung des Werks lancierten großen generativen Modelle und die in neuem Ausmaß ersichtlich werdenden Konsequenzen des Einsatzes von KI in der Übersetzungsbranche nicht explizit berücksichtigen, in vielerlei Hinsicht jedoch vorwegnehmen. So heißt es z. B.:

Die Begeisterung ist verständlich und erklärt wahrscheinlich nicht nur den Erfolg bei den *Users*, den diese Technologie in kürzester Zeit für sich verbuchen konnte, sondern auch, dass der bevorstehende endgültige

tige Durchbruch der Technologie, trotz der zum Teil offenkundigen Macken, die sie noch kennzeichnen, grossmehrheitlich als eine unbestrittene Tatsache angesehen wird. Es ist nur eine Frage der Zeit. (S. 10)

Oder:

Würde man die Programmierer beauftragen, die neuronalen Netzwerke und die angewandten Algorithmen weiterzuentwickeln, sowie die Software mit einer noch grösseren Anzahl Korpora zu füttern, wären sie (vorausgesetzt, sie bekämen die dazu nötigen finanziellen Mittel) zweifelsohne in der Lage, die Leistungen der maschinellen Übersetzung zu verbessern, bis eines Tages vielleicht kein einziger syntaktischer, semantischer oder stilistischer Fehler das Gesamtbild trüben würde. Hätten wir aber dann tatsächlich den perfekten Übersetzer erschaffen – *the perfect translator*? (S. 12)

Wenn Mjøsnes' Ausführungen einer Rekontextualisierung bedürfen, dann also im Hinblick auf die im Vergleich zu der um das Jahr 2016 herum eingeführten NMÜ noch einmal erhöhten Leistungsfähigkeit der KI-Systeme, die zum gleichen Zwecke eingesetzten generativen und – anders, als der Autor dies behauptet (S. 12) – in vielen praktischen Szenarien vielleicht sogar den Turingtest bestehen könnten. Mjøsnes Ahnung findet sich jedenfalls mit den aktuellen Tendenzen bestätigt.

Kapitel 1, „Der Glanz der Maschine“ (S. 7–14), beinhaltet den Problemaufriss, anhand dessen die Argumentation entwickelt wird, die Mjøsnes' Kritik der maschinellen Übersetzung stützt: Von den vor allem für Kunden und Arbeitgeber im Vordergrund stehenden Vorteilen des Einsatzes von KI, mit dem die vermeintlich lästigen Begleiterscheinungen menschlicher Übersetzungsarbeit (hohe Kosten, hohes Zeitaufkommen, Rückfragen etc.) ausgemerzt werden können, gelangt der Autor über die immer noch bestehende Fehleranfälligkeit der maschinellen Ausgabe zu der Frage der Vergleichbarkeit des translatorischen Outputs von Mensch und Maschine. Mjøsnes zeigt damit, dass Diskussionen um die maschinelle *Überset-*

zung undenkbar sind, wenn sie nicht vor der Folie dessen diskutiert werden, was das *Humanübersetzen* ausmacht (S. 12). In diesem neuen, veränderten und zugleich sich zurückbesinnenden Blick auf das Humanübersetzen besteht ja gerade die translationshermeneutische Relevanz des Themas, dem in diesem *YTH*-Heft Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt wird. Die hier vorgenommenen Kursivierungen kommen nicht von ungefähr: Ausgehend von Mjølunes' intuitiver Wortwahl, lässt sich nämlich festhalten: Die maschinelle Ausgabe kann gegenwärtig wohl nicht anders denn als Produkt (nämlich als *Übersetzung*) einer Blackbox¹ konzipiert werden, während – aller Sackgassen der kognitiven oder hermeneutischen Translationsprozessforschung bei der Erhellung dessen, „[w]as in den Köpfen von Übersetzern vorgeht“ (Krings 1986), zum Trotz – das *Humanübersetzen* als Performance (vgl. Bermann 2014, Agnetta/Cercel 2021, Cercel et al. 2022, O'Keeffe et al. 2023) auch in seiner prozeduralen Dimension nachvollzogen werden will (s. u., Kap. 4). Das erste Kapitel seiner Abhandlung beschließt Mjølunes mit der Beobachtung, dass es bei dem Diskurs um die technologischen Entwicklungen nicht nur um die von den Schöpfern und Ausbeutern von KI verfolgten Ambitionen gehen kann, sondern dass unser aller Verantwortung darin besteht, ein besonderes Augenmerk auf die gesellschaftlich relevanten Folgen dieses Technologieeinsatzes zu richten (S. 13f.).

1 Der Begriff der ‚Blackbox‘ wird im Diskurs zur maschinellen Übersetzung (u. a. mithilfe generativer KI), aber auch darüber hinaus, verwendet, um zu beschreiben, dass die hinter der Ausgabe wirksam werdende Technologie in ihrer Funktionsweise sogar für deren Urheber oft intransparent ist. Dies hängt mit der Komplexität von Deep-Learning-Netzwerken und Foundational Models – das sind *large language models* (LLMs) und multimodal erweiterte LLMs (mLLMs) –, mit dem selbständigen Training anhand riesiger Datensätze und der mangelnden Nachvollziehbarkeit der wahrscheinlichkeitsbasierten Ausgabemechanismen sowie zustande kommender Halluzinationen zusammen.

Da KI ‚gekommen ist, um zu bleiben‘ – wie es oft heißt –, übersetzt sich dieses Anliegen konkret in der Erschaffung nachhaltiger Szenarien, in denen die Interessen, Ängste, aber durchaus auch die Euphorie aller gesellschaftlichen Akteure im Umgang mit künstlicher Intelligenz gleichermaßen ihren Platz finden.

Ausgehend von den biblischen Geschichten des Turmbaus zu Babel sowie des Pfingstwunders erörtert Mjølunes in Kapitel 2, „Die Mehrsprachigkeit als Grundmerkmal des Menschen“ (S. 15–18), die unterschiedlichen Bewertungen, welche die eigene Muttersprache, die Mehrsprachigkeit mancher Individuen und Gesellschaften² sowie die Tätigkeit des Übersetzers gegenwärtig erfahren. Indem er innersprachliche Verständigungsbarrieren thematisiert, damit das Phänomen der Multilingualität bereits innerhalb einer Sprach- oder Lebensgemeinschaft verortet und indem er eine allgegenwärtige Notwendigkeit zu übersetzen postuliert – „Wir sind also selbst innerhalb derselben Sprache dauernd am Übersetzen“ (S. 17) – greift er Überlegungen auf, die George Steiner in seiner ebenfalls einschlägig benannten Monographie *After Babel* (1975/2014) so geistreich ausgeführt hat. Im Folgenden wird klar, dass das Aufkommen und die Weiterentwicklung der neuronalen maschinellen – und wir dürfen hinzufügen: LLM-gestützten – Übersetzung unverkennbar zu einer Bewährungsprobe für solche Einstellungen gegenüber Sprache, Mehrsprachigkeit und Übersetzen avancieren.

Wie oben beschrieben, ist die Charakterisierung der ‚Übersetzungsmaschine‘ nicht anders zu bewerkstelligen als im Vergleich mit der Humantranslation. Dementsprechend geht

2 Für den Schweizer Autor haben, wie auch Kapitel 9 deutlich macht, Einstellungen zur Mehrsprachigkeit naturgemäß einen besonderen Stellenwert.

Mjølunes in Kapitel 3, „Die Tätigkeit des Übersetzens“ (S. 19–26), in kondensierender Weise und einen Fokus auf das literarische Übersetzen setzend, auf größtenteils bekannte Topoi der übersetzungsbezogenen Reflexion ein: auf die Diskussionen rund um die Unübersetzbarkeit von Literatur, die durch die Praxis widerlegt werden; auf die unterschiedlichen Methoden des Übersetzens, die aufgrund unabdingbarer Verluste allesamt defizitär daherkommen; auf die Notwendigkeit, den kulturellen und historischen Kontext von Ausgangs- und Zieltext zu berücksichtigen (vgl. S. 21–23). Wichtig für die Annäherung an automatisch übersetzte Texte ist Mjølunes’ Insistieren auf die Gebundenheit der Übersetzung als Deutung eines Ausgangstextes von dem historisch und kulturell situierten Übersetzer, von seinen psycho-physischen Dispositionen und Kompetenzen sowie von dem Netzwerk – aus Auftraggeber(n), Originalautor, Fachleuten, Lektoren, Setzern etc. – in dem die Übersetzung entsteht: „Die Übersetzung spiegelt somit nicht nur den Ursprungstext, sondern auch das gesamte Umfeld, aus dem sie entstanden ist, wie die Monade das Universum, der Logos die Wahrheit oder ein See die vorüberziehenden Wolken“ (S. 25). Es sind diese Wechselwirkungen, die für die Humanübersetzung nicht nur kennzeichnend, sondern auch von vitaler Bedeutung sind.

Hierauf pocht Mjølunes in Kapitel 4 seiner Abhandlung, „Der übersetzte Text spiegelt seine Voraussetzungen“ (S. 27–36). Die Wichtigkeit der prozeduralen Dimension des Humanübersetzens, die in Kapitel 1 (s. o.) noch implizit geblieben war, wird hier nun augenfällig hervorgehoben:

Die hermeneutischen, sprachlichen, kulturellen Wirkungen der Übersetzung gehen aber, wie wir festgestellt haben, gerade nicht lediglich aus ihrem „Endprodukt“ hervor, also daraus, wie der übersetzte Text am Ende aussieht, sondern entstehen zu einem grossen Teil kraft der Vorgänge, die dem Endprodukt vorausgegangen sind. Diese Vorgänge sind die gleichen, die die Wirkung des Primärtextes begründen.

Wird sie von Menschen ausgeführt, ist die Textarbeit, also auch die Übersetzung, nur das sichtbare Ergebnis eines langen Prozesses, der sich aus den beiden genannten Ebenen, den praktischen Interaktionen einerseits [sc. oben von mir als ‚Netzwerk‘ bezeichnet, M. A.] und den geistigen Interaktionen [sc., der Deutung durch den Übersetzer, M. A.] andererseits, speist. (S. 28)

Zahlreich sind die Bedingtheiten des Originalautors und ebenso zahlreich die des Übersetzers, die, in welcher Form auch immer, Niederschlag im Zieltext finden. An dieser Stelle prägt Mjølunes das Bild der Übersetzung als einer gewissermaßen aus der Vogelperspektive betrachteten Stadt oder Siedlung, die ihre Existenz, Form und Infrastruktur überhaupt erst ihrem „Hinterland“ (S. 28) verdankt. Ebenso schreibt sich ein aus Menschenhand stammender Text, z. B. die Übersetzung, der Logik seines hermeneutischen Hintergrunds ein. (Auf die metaphorische Ähnlichkeit zum Gadamer'schen Konzept des Verstehenshorizonts sei hier lediglich hingewiesen.) Manifest wird dieser Hintergrund auch auf der Textoberfläche, d. h. in seiner stilistischen Geformtheit auf allen möglichen Ebenen: Wortwahl, Syntax, Metaphorik, Rhythmik etc. Dagegen ist die Textproduktion in digitalen Umgebungen, darunter auch die durch Wahrscheinlichkeit und Zufall geprägte maschinelle Textgenerierung, häufig eine schwache Nachahmung und z. T. abenteuerliche Kombination unterschiedlichster Stilelemente (vgl. S. 29), die nicht anders kann, als beim Rezipienten Befremden auszulösen. Der Maschine fehle, so Mjølunes, die „gestalterische Intention“ (S. 30) bzw. eine auf die Textentstehung gerichtete Reflexionsgabe. Führte man die vom Autor gewählte Metapher weiter, so könnte in Bezug auf maschinell generierte Texte von einem ‚Niemandsland‘ die Rede sein – und zwar nicht nur, weil man sich in ihnen, Mjølunes zufolge, wie verloren vorkommt, sondern auch weil es sich hierbei um ein teilweise noch unerschlossenes, teilweise chaotisches Gebiet

handelt, für den gegenwärtig niemand Verantwortung übernehmen zu wollen scheint.

In Kapitel 5, „Der maschinelle Text als *trompe-l'œil*“ (S. 37–43), wird die automatische Textausgabe als ferner Abglanz menschlicher Textproduktion betrachtet und, auf den Beobachtungen des Kulturphilosophen Max Picard aufbauend, als alles nivellierendes „Wortgeräusch“ bezeichnet: „Das Wortgeräusch stellt sich vor die Menschen und verstellt ihnen die Sicht auf die Welt, weil es nicht aus dem Menschen hervorgeht, sondern schon vor ihm da ist“ (S. 37). Maschinelle Systeme können dem Autor zufolge nicht selbständig situationsflexibel und ethisch auf Reize reagieren, weil sie kein ‚Selbst‘, kein Bewusstsein besitzen. Vielmehr führten sie ihre Operationen nach streng determinierten Algorithmen aus, die keine Auswege kennen. Durch das, was man das ‚maschinelle Lernen‘ bzw. ‚Training‘ nennt, habe man diese Algorithmen zwar stetig verfeinert, und zwar so sehr, dass die maschinell erzeugte Ausgabe den Anschein eines analogen menschlichen Produkts hat. Ähnlich wie das aus der Ferne als echt anmutende *Trompe-l'œil* auf Gebäudefassaden vermag eine automatisch erzeugte Übersetzung den Rezipienten über die Materialität bzw. die Bedingungen seines Entstehens hinwegzutäuschen. Bei näherem Hinsehen jedoch kann die Illusion nicht aufrechterhalten werden; sie wird von bestimmten Textmerkmalen verraten. Die Grenzen dieser metaphorischen Gleichsetzung steckt Mjølunes selbst ab, wenn er darauf hinweist, dass die gegenwärtigen technologischen Tendenzen Ansichten verbreiten, die traditionell als abwegig empfunden würde:

Ein Hausbesitzer, der in seinem Haus ein zusätzliches Fenster braucht, käme nie auf die Idee, einen Dekorateur damit zu beauftragen, ein Fenster auf die Aussenfassade zu *malen*. Die Technologien der maschinellen Übersetzung oder, um genauer zu sein, ihre Verkäufer geben aber genau das vor, nämlich, dass sie das reale Erzeugnis ersetzen können. (S. 42; Hervorh. im Original)

Damit ist die maschinelle Übersetzung als Blendwerk beschrieben, mit dem letztlich etwas als das ‚verkauft‘ werden kann und wird, was es nicht ist. Das Ausmaß der sozialen und ethisch-moralischen Konsequenzen dieser Kulturtechnik hängen hierbei davon ab, an welchem Ende des Spektrums sich das jeweilige Täuschungsmanöver einordnen lässt: an dem der womöglich allzu überschwänglichen Werbemaßnahme oder dem des schweren Betrugs.

Der Beginn von Kapitel 6, „Die Maschine als Hilfsmittel“ (S. 44–47), mutet fast schon apologetisch an, wenn Mjølunes die vordergründig edlen Hintergedanken anführt, die der Entwicklung und dem Einsatz automatischer Übersetzungen auf den ersten Blick alle Legitimation verleihen: Schließlich seien NMÜ-Systeme lediglich als (transitorisches) Instrument aufzufassen, als Werkzeug zur Demokratisierung sprachlich gesteuerter Ressourcen. Die kostengünstige und zeitsparende Maßnahme einer automatischen (Vor-)Übersetzung ermögliche eine rasche Aneignung fremdsprachlicher Texte. Für Übersetzer bedeute dies letztlich eine Herabsetzung der zu investierenden eigenen Ressourcen – seien diese finanzieller, zeitlicher oder kognitiver Natur. Die wohlklingenden Argumentationen für den weitreichenden Einsatz von KI-Systemen (zur maschinellen) Übersetzung sind verführerisch, halten jedoch auch Fallstricke bereit, vor denen nicht einmal altehrwürdige Institutionen wie die EU, die sich zum Schutz und zur Förderung kultureller und damit auch sprachlicher Vielfalt verpflichtet haben, gefeit sind.

Solche Beobachtungen verleiten den Autor dazu, die unlauteren Versprechen des Post-Editing (dt. ‚Nachbearbeitung‘), einer gegenwärtig immer mehr in den Fokus von Kunden und Auftraggebern rückenden Neben- oder gar Ersatzdienstleistung, als „Mythos“ zu entlarven (Kapitel 7: „Der Mythos des Post-Editing“, S. 48–55). Zunächst geht Mjølunes

auf den Fall ein, in dem Übersetzer und Lektor eines zu publizierenden Textes menschliche Akteure sind und bei der textbezogenen Arbeit eine dialogische Beziehung des gegenseitigen Respekts für den hermeneutischen Hintergrund des jeweils anderen Handelnden unterhalten. Dabei gilt: „Das Lektorieren ist nicht weniger eine hermeneutische Tätigkeit als das Übersetzen“ (S. 48f.); schließlich muss der Lektor den Ausgangstext, zumindest aber die vom Übersetzer vorgenommenen Operationen *in toto* nachvollziehen und bewerten können, im Falle von Unklarheiten und Fehlern nachhaken und dabei den Stil des Übersetzers stets anerkennen. In einem hierauf aufbauenden Schritt befindet er, dass dieser Dialog beim Post-Editing von Texten, die durch NMÜ-basierte Systeme erstellt wurden³, durch eine Fließbandlogik ersetzt sei, die zur Verketzung abgeschlossener Prozesse ohne Möglichkeit zur hermeneutischen Interaktion führe (vgl. S. 50). Es entsteht ein Text ohne ‚Hinterland‘, ohne Bedingtheiten, ohne dass ein Bewusstsein die Textproduktion in stetiger Rückkopplung mit den eigenen Erfahrungen und Wissensbeständen geleitet hätte. Es entsteht ein Text, der ‚nichts zu sagen‘ hat:

So wie die Übersetzung, die von der Maschine geliefert wird, das Ergebnis einer Einwegtätigkeit ist, so ist auch das Post-Editing einer solchen Übersetzung eine Einwegtätigkeit. Trotz des Wortschwall, den sie produziert, trotz der beliebig langen Übersetzungen, die sie ausspuckt, trotz der unendlichen Kombinatorik ihrer Algorithmen, hat die Software ihrem Post-Editor (ihrem Leser) bezeichnenderweise überhaupt *nichts* zu sagen. Die Software produziert einen vollkommen stummen Text. (S. 52)

3 Die explizite Nennung dieser Technologie ist insofern wichtig, als bei LLM-generierten Übersetzungen durch die Möglichkeiten eines Interagierens mit dem Chat-Bot der erwähnte Dialog bis zu einem gewissen Maße imitiert werden kann.

Mjølunes beklagt mit diesem Befund nichts Geringeres als den Verlust der menschlichen Kommunikationsfähigkeit, sollten sich KI-generierte Texte in der Branche und darüber hinaus durchsetzen können. Diesen apodiktisch formulierten Zeilen kann mit dem Einwand begegnet werden, dass KI-generierte Texte (wie Übersetzungen) durch das Zutun des Post-Editors durchaus an Tiefe gewinnen und Ausdruck eines senderseitigen Stils werden können. Das Niemandsland der automatisch generierten Texte kann urbar gemacht bzw. befriedet werden. Denn sowohl beim Übersetzen als auch beim Post-Editing vermag es der menschliche Akteur, die Qualität des Translats zu gewährleisten – allerdings vorausgesetzt, man wendet die Regeln eines *full post-editing* und nicht die der in Kundenkreisen ob der Schonung finanzieller Ressourcen wohl beliebteren Option des *light post-editing* an (zur Unterscheidung vgl. Nitzke/Hansen-Schirra 2021). Die von Mjølunes nicht explizit gestellte, gleichwohl im Raum stehende Frage ist nun, ob eine vollständige und gewissenhafte Nachbearbeitung der maschinell erstellten Vorübersetzung – d. h. der Anspruch, diesem Textentwurf eine Stimme zu verleihen – tatsächlich mit den erwünschten finanziellen, zeitlichen und kognitiven Ressourceneinsparungen rechnen kann, welche der Arbeitsmarkt und teilweise auch die Forschung aktuell in Aussicht stellen. Jedenfalls haben diese Überlegungen, wie Mjølunes selbst andeutet, allerdings nicht weiter ausführt, auch für die Didaktik des Übersetzens (und Dolmetschens) ihre Konsequenzen (vgl. hierzu Agnetta/Walter 2025). Das Kapitel wird mit dem nochmaligen Verweis darauf beschlossen, dass Übersetzen und Lektoratsarbeit zwei eng miteinander verquickte hermeneutische Tätigkeiten darstellen, bei denen ein persönliches Wachstum der Akteure in unabdingbarer Weise vom Lernen an und mit dem Anderen abhängt.

In Kapitel 8, „Der stumme Text“ (S. 56–59), möchte Mjølunes betont wissen, dass es ihm nicht um eine generelle Ablehnung (neuer) kommunikations- und übersetzungsunterstützender Technologien geht. Schließlich seien CAT-Tools wie Translation-Memory-Systeme, Online-Wörterbücher etc. wunderbare Hilfsmittel, um der sprachlichen Ressourcen Herr zu werden, von denen die Humanübersetzung nur profitieren könne.⁴ Die automatisierte Textproduktion habe ihren Ursprung jedoch nicht im Menschen und ersetze somit „den komplexen Sinngebungsprozess der Sprache vollständig durch ihre binäre Logik“ (S. 59). Dieses „mechanische Verfahren“ (ebd.) führe, wie oben bereits angedeutet, zu kompilierten Texten ohne Stimme und ohne Seele. Dies sei ein „grundlegende[r] Defekt“ (ebd.), über den hinwegzuschauen es der Einzelperson genauso wie ganzen Gesellschaften schwerfallen sollte.

Um den bisherigen Beobachtungen Anschaulichkeit zu verleihen, bringt der Autor in Kapitel 9 „Ein Beispiel aus der Praxis“ (S. 60–66) an, das im mehrsprachigen Setting der Schweiz verortet ist. Hier führt die historisch gut belegte und gesetzmäßig abgesicherte gleichberechtigte Förderung der drei Amtssprachen Deutsch, Französisch und Italienisch zum Anspruch, die gesamte inländische institutionelle Kommunikation auf Texten in diesen Sprachen aufzubauen, denen allesamt ‚Originalcharakter‘ zukommt. Die Übersetzung ist in diesem besonderen politischen Raum also keine nachträgliche, sondern eine die Kommunikation überhaupt erst gewährleistende Maßnahme. Die hiermit einhergehende Verantwortung ist nicht zu unterschätzen. Bei einer solchen Ausgangslage, die im Übrigen nicht nur die Schweiz, sondern auch den gesamten

4 Dass sich die Kritik der Übersetzer in der Regel auch nicht auf solche die Arbeit erleichternden Technologien richtet, zeigt Agnetta (2025) in einer Untersuchung zur AVÜ-Branche.

europäischen Kontinent charakterisiert, würde sich eine branchenübergreifende Implementierung der maschinellen Übersetzung, wenn sie denn keine oder nur eine leichte Nachbearbeitung erfährt, fatal auf die eigene Sprachpolitik auswirken. Mjølunes spricht von einer „gefährlichen Erosion der Idee der Gleichwertigkeit der Sprachen, welche nicht nur in einem mehrsprachigen Staat wie der Schweiz einer der Pfeiler des sozialen Friedens und des wirtschaftlichen Wohlstands ist“ (S. 63). Die vom Autor vorgeschlagene Lösung, die zugleich das Minimum einer Anstrengung auf dem Weg zu einer nachhaltigen KI-Politik markiert, ist die Eröffnung einschlägiger öffentlicher Debatten. In diesen müsse das Bewusstsein dafür im Zentrum stehen, dass eine im hohen Maße über maschinengenerierte Ausgaben bedingte Kommunikationskultur Gefahr läuft, die dialogische Basis eines hermeneutischen Miteinanders auszuhebeln:

Die Übersetzung kann nur dann als Werkzeug der Interpretation, der Erkenntnis und des Ausdrucks dienen, wenn sie in ihrer ganzen Tiefe, ihrer ganzen Dauer und ihrer ganzen „Last“ – in ihrem dialogischen Charakter – erfasst, anerkannt und angewendet wird. Es gibt in diesem Bereich keine Abkürzungen. Es gibt viele Hilfsmittel: Wegweiser, Karten, Orientierungspunkte, Ausrüstungen. Aber keine Abkürzungen, wie sie die Vision der Übersetzung als ein technisches Problem, das durch eine technische Massnahme überwunden werden kann, darstellt. (S. 65)

Ein knapper Anmerkungsapparat (S. 67–70), der u. a. die Quellen der Untersuchung preisgibt, beschließt Mjølunes' Büchlein. Die wenigen und nicht aufdringlichen Verweise auf die sicher auch schon 2022 boomende Sekundärliteratur sowie die – manchmal jedoch etwas forcierte – bildliche Schreibart des Autors machen das Büchlein *Der stumme Text* zur zugänglichen Einführung in die sozialen und ethischen Dimensionen der Automatisierung des Übersetzens. Wenn auch größtenteils im Duktus des Essayistischen und Anekdotischen verfasst,

hält Mjøsnes' Abhandlung dennoch der wissenschaftlichen Erforschung der aktuellen technologischen Tendenzen und deren Auswirkungen auf die Urheber und Rezipienten von Übersetzungen philosophisch untermauerte Anhaltspunkte bereit, die weiter zu diskutieren es sich sicherlich lohnt. Seine Überlegungen sind mit den gebührenden Anpassungen auch auf eine Zeit anzuwenden, die von generativen KI-Systemen im Sprach-, Bild- und Musikbereich geprägt ist. In den vielen gegenwärtigen Streifzügen von Forschern und Praktikern durch das Niemandsland KI-generierter Übersetzungen erweist sich die wertschätzende Neubewertung der Humanübersetzung als vielleicht einziger vertrauenswürdiger Wegweiser.

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Reviews | Rezensionen



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Rezension zu: HAMM, Claudia [Hrsg.] (2024): *Automatensprache* (= *Akzente* 3/2023 und 1/2024). München: Hanser. 192 S. ISBN: 978-3-910732-40-7.

Das nachfolgend vorgestellte *Akzente*-Doppelheft versammelt neben wissenschaftlichen Beiträgen auch (auto-)biographische, essayistische und literarische Texte aus aller Welt, denen eine Eigenschaft gemein ist: Sie bringen eine kritische Haltung zur künstlichen Intelligenz (fortan KI) zum Ausdruck. Die wichtigsten Kritikpunkte betreffen unrealistische Erwartungen an eine vermeintlich menschengleiche oder gar überlegene ‚Superintelligenz‘ sowie bislang ungelöste ethische und rechtliche Probleme im Zusammenhang mit dem Einsatz von KI. Unter anderem thematisieren die von Claudia Hamm gesammelten Beiträge die oft mangelhafte Qualität KI-generierter Bilder oder Texte sowie die dadurch drohenden Einkommensverluste bei kreativ Tätigen, offene Fragen zum geistigen Eigentum, welches beim Training von KI-Systemen anfangs kaum berücksichtigt wurde, oder auch die menschenunwürdigen Umstände, unter welchen schlecht bezahlte Arbeitskräfte in Kenia und anderenorts KI-Trainingsdaten ‚reinigen‘. Hinsichtlich der Form und des Stils sind die Beiträge in *Automatensprache* sehr

divers, was auch als implizite Reaktion gegen die Tendenz zur Nivellierung in KI-generierter Sprache verstanden werden kann.

In der salopp mit „Darum geht’s“ betitelten Einleitung bringt Hamm ein wesentliches Problem im Zusammenhang mit der automatisierten Textausgabe großer Sprachmodelle wie ChatGPT auf den Punkt: „Sehen wir die Technik als Spiegel unserer selbst, dann fragt sich, warum wir uns derzeit mit Sprache auf Knopfdruck ersetzen und unsere Hirne und Zungen damit stillstellen wollen sollten“ (S. 1). Es mag zwar zu erwarten sein – wie es der Komparatist Martin Sexl (2023) in einem Gespräch mit dem Autor Fabian Navarro formuliert hat – dass das Bergsteigen künftig nicht großteils oder gänzlich eigens dafür konzipierten Robotern überlassen wird, auch wenn diese beim Bergsport vielleicht schneller oder ausdauernder wären als viele Menschen. Warum jedoch scheint es dann nicht ebenso selbstverständlich, dass Sprache und Sprachmittlung weiterhin fest in menschlicher Hand bleiben sollen, auch wenn deren Automatisierung möglich ist? Schließlich entspringt sprachlicher Austausch dem ureigenen Bedürfnis der Menschheit nach Verständnis, Dokumentation und Reflexion des eigenen Daseins, wie etwa die Forschung zu den Anfängen der schriftlichen Kommunikation zeigt (vgl. Walter 2025).

Noch vor der weltweiten Verbreitung großer Sprachmodelle wie ChatGPT hat Ettore Mjøsnes (2022: 65) im Hinblick auf neuronale maschinelle Übersetzungssysteme wie DeepL – deren Anwendungsbereiche im Vergleich zu dem, was mit großen Sprachmodellen machbar ist, sehr eingeschränkt sind – eine ähnliche Grundsatzfrage gestellt wie die oben zitierte von Hamm. Mjøsnes weist darauf hin, dass die maschinelle Ausgabe probabilistischer Systeme wie DeepL den Sinn sprachlicher Aussagen in einem Ausgangstext nicht erfassen könne, auch wenn maschinell generierte Zieltexte auf den ers-

ten Blick Humanübersetzungen glichen, sodass „Sinn, wenn überhaupt, erst durch einen zweiten, der mechanischen Umwandlung nachfolgenden Schritt“ entstehe (ebd.: 65). Möglicherweise empfinden Menschen ein Post-Editing maschinell angefertigter Übersetzungen vor allem deshalb häufig als mühsam, weil die Schwächen und Fehler in der maschinellen Ausgabe sich von den Problemen, die in Humanübersetzungen auftreten, grundlegend unterscheiden. Dieses Phänomen bezeichnet Hamm in „Das Blaue vom grünen Himmel“ als „*Obstacle*- oder Hinderniseffekt“ (S. 18). Dieser macht neben dem „*Priming*- oder Vorprägungseffekt“ bzw. der oft unwillkürlichen Beeinflussung durch die KI-generierte Vorlage und dem „*Fatigue*- oder Ermüdungseffekt“ durch die zusätzliche kognitive Last, welche die Arbeit mit einem Ausgangstext und einer maschinell genierten Übersetzung mit sich bringt (ibid.), Sprachdienstleister:innen der Gegenwart mitunter das Leben schwer.

Im Folgenden werden die abgesehen von der Einleitung insgesamt neunzehn Publikationsbeiträge kurz skizziert. Dabei wird weitgehend chronologisch vorgegangen, wobei die Anordnung der Texte in Einzelfällen den thematischen Schwerpunkten dieser Rezension entsprechend leicht abgeändert wird. In „Dramolett mit zwei Faunen“ von Monika Rinck möchte Faun 2 über eine Podiumsveranstaltung zu den „Risiken und Chancen von Intelligenz für Kunst und Kultur“ (S. 4) sprechen, während Faun 1 in erster Linie daran interessiert ist, sich mit Faun 2 zum Essen zu verabreden. Die bewusste und konsequente Aussparung des Adjektivs ‚künstliche‘ vor ‚Intelligenz‘ in diesem Beitrag führt derzeit häufig geführte Diskussionen über die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen von KI *ad absurdum*. Ein Prosabeitrag, ebenso von Rinck, mit dem Titel „Hallo, hallo, wessen Traum ist das?“, kann als Kommentar zum Dramolett gelesen werden. Dieser dystopische Text reflektiert

die Möglichkeit, neben Schreibenden auch Lesende durch KI-Systeme zu ersetzen, und endet mit einem emotionalen Bewusstseinsstrom zum Schreiben als Prozess, der Menschen dazu bewegen solle, sich mit ihren Emotionen auseinanderzusetzen.

Hamms satirischer und zeitkritischer Beitrag „Das Blaue vom grünen Himmel“ geht neben den Unterschieden zwischen menschlicher und KI-generierter Sprache auch der existenziellen Bedrohung auf den Grund, welcher Kreativschaffende sich wegen der künftig möglichen oder bereits faktisch umgesetzten Automatisierung vieler ihrer Tätigkeiten ausgesetzt sehen. Sam Altmans Idee, dass man Menschen, deren Tätigkeiten demnächst KI-Systeme ausführen sollen, ein bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen zur Verfügung stellen könnte, betrachtet Hamm als entwürdigend und entmündigend (S. 19). In „Du bist kein Papagei“, einem von Andreas Jandl aus dem Englischen übersetzten Text, porträtiert Elizabeth Weil die Linguistin Emily M. Bender, die seit der Veröffentlichung von ChatGPT vor einer drohenden Dehumanisierung durch KI warnt.

Einige Texte in diesem *Akzente*-Doppelheft schöpfen zur kritischen Betrachtung von KI aus der näheren oder fernerer Vergangenheit. In „Das Menschenbild der künstlichen Intelligenz“ macht Bernhard Pörksen ein Gespräch mit Joseph Weizenbaum über KI aus dem Jahr 1998 zugänglich. Der 1988 emeritierte MIT-Professor wurde als Erfinder von ELIZA bekannt, einem Computerprogramm, das schon vor Jahrzehnten psychotherapeutische Gespräche überzeugend simulieren konnte. Mit ihm gemeinsam reflektierte Pörksen Jahrzehnte vor der Veröffentlichung von ChatGPT über Möglichkeiten einer konstruktiven Mensch-Maschine-Kollaboration. Emmanuel Carrère geht mit seiner Kurzbiografie des 1954 verstorbenen Alan Turing, die Claudia Hamm ins Deutsche übersetzt

hat, noch weiter zurück in der Vergangenheit. Der Turing-Test, ein 1950 entwickeltes Gedankenexperiment um festzustellen, ob Maschinen menschenähnliche Intelligenz an den Tag legen können, ist in aller Munde, seit große Sprachmodelle wie ChatGPT diesen Test in mehrfacher Hinsicht bestanden haben. Carrère jedoch widmet sich in seinem Beitrag vor allem dem persönlichen Leben Turings, der nicht nur als „Pionier der Künstlichen Intelligenz“ (S. 100) in die Geschichte einging, sondern auch als einer der wichtigsten Codeknacker im Zweiten Weltkrieg – bevor er sich in den 1950ern das Leben nahm.

In „Der spontane Nichtraum der Sprache als nicht automatisierbare Göttlichkeit“, einem Prosa-Beitrag, der mit einem in freier Versform verfassten Gedichtfragment endet, verweist Christian Uetz auf die Grenzen von KI-generierter Sprache. Isabel Fargo Cole bringt in ihrem Essay „Die falsche Maria. Die Ikonografie der KI“ eine ähnlich kritische Haltung zu KI-generierten Bildern zum Ausdruck. Die Schriftstellerin Annie Le Brun schließlich betrachtet in „Das Unbezahlbare“ mit Schrecken ein „Zuviel an Wirklichkeit“, das sich gegenwärtig neben den Müllhalden des materiellen Konsums auch in den digitalen Räumen sozialer Netzwerke manifestiere (S. 102–104). Im Anschluss an Le Bruns Beitrag, der von Dagmar Kraus und Claudia Hamm ins Deutsche übertragen wurde, findet sich in *Automatensprache* ein solches Beispiel für ein „Zuviel an Wirklichkeit“ in Form von zwei DeepL-Übersetzungen (in den Sprachkombinationen Deutsch-Englisch-Deutsch und Deutsch-Französisch-Deutsch) von Goethes „Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh“. Diese KI-Übersetzungen führen vor Augen, dass DeepL zwar den Inhalt von Goethes Text auch nach solchen interlingualen Transfers einigermaßen wiedergeben kann, nicht aber die Form, die einen wesentlichen Bestandteil des ursprünglichen Gedichts darstellt.

„Imperiale Maschinen und Menschliche Übersetzung“ von Annette Hug spricht sich wortgewaltig gegen die Hege-
 monie großer Sprachen und gegen die sprachliche Nivellierung
 aus, welche mit der Automatisierung von Übersetzungspro-
 zessen einhergeht. Der Text endet mit einem Appell für
 menschliche Sprache, denn, so Hug, „sie stellt sich quer zu den
 maschinellen Kanälen mit ihren immergleichen Zentren“
 (S. 112). In einem besonders scharfen Ton schreibt Nina
 George über „[g]eistiges Eigentum und zusammengeklaut
 Textkotze“, wie sie KI-generierte Texte verachtend bezeich-
 net. Georges Text endet mit der Schreckensvision einer „Au-
 tomatenreligion“. Da heißt es: „Generative Textinformatik, die
 vorzensiert stets nur Bestehendes remixt und nichts Neues
 schafft, manifestiert den denkerischen Stillstand, das Verab-
 schieden von der Freiheit des eigenen Worts“ (S. 124).

Ähnlich bedrohlich wie George und anhand eines kon-
 kreten Beispiels stellt auch Mophat Okinyi, ein ehemaliger
 „Datenreiniger“ (S. 127) aus Kenia, die gesellschaftlichen Aus-
 wirkungen von KI dar. Zunächst erhielt Okinyi, dessen Beitrag
 von Sophie Zeitz ins Deutsche übersetzt wurde, für seine Tä-
 tigkeit deutlich weniger Geld, als ihm anfangs zugesagt wurde
 (S. 127). Vor allem aber erwies sich die Klassifikation von Da-
 ten, die unter anderem sexuellen Missbrauch an Kindern dar-
 stellten, für ihn bald als gesundheits- und beziehungs-schädi-
 gend. Dies führte dazu, dass Okinyi an einer posttraumati-
 schen Belastungsstörung erkrankte und schließlich von seiner
 schwangeren Frau verlassen wurde (S. 129). Okinyi, der u. a.
 2024 im *Time Magazine* als eine der 100 einflussreichsten Per-
 sonen im Bereich KI Anerkennung fand (vgl. Perrigo 2024),
 setzt sich inzwischen international sehr erfolgreich für die
 Rechte anderer Moderator:innen von Online-Inhalten ein.

Anette Selg stellt in „Aus dem Klassenzimmer: F*ck KI!“
 am Beispiel der Einsilbigkeit KI-generierter Hausaufgaben

mögliche negative Konsequenzen großer Sprachmodelle für den Schulunterricht dar. Anschließend geht Michael Seemann in seinem Beitrag „KI ist ein Coup“ den möglichen Gefahren generativer KI für demokratische Systeme nach, wie in deutlich größerem Umfang und aus diachronischer Perspektive auch Yuval Noah Harari in seinem 2024 veröffentlichten Buch *Nexus*. Unter anderem kommt Harari zum Schluss, dass KI-Modelle nicht so sehr „artificial“ beziehungsweise „künstlich“, als vielmehr „alien“ oder „fremdartig“ seien (Harari 2024: 200 *et passim*). Während Seemann die Macht von Online-Plattformen ebenso wie Harari äußerst kritisch betrachtet (S. 144–148), sieht er aber auch Positives in der gesellschaftlichen Transformation durch KI. Unter anderem schreibt Seemann KI-Systemen „eine kompetenznivellierende Wirkung“ zu, so dass weniger kompetente Arbeitskräfte von ihrer Verwendung durchaus nachhaltig profitieren könnten (S. 140). Ähnlich wie Harari kritisiert auch Peter G. Kirchschräger in „Für eine menschenwürdige und nachhaltige Zukunft“ die Bezeichnung „Künstliche Intelligenz“ als irreführend und würde sie gern durch die nicht zur Anthropomorphisierung verleitende Alternative „Datenbasierte Systeme“ ersetzen (S. 156). Vor allem appelliert Kirchschräger für eine humanzentrierte Technologieentwicklung, für die in der Translationswissenschaft beispielsweise auch Miguel Jiménez-Crespo (2025) einsteht.

In einem Interview mit Claudia Hamm, das Henning Bochert ins Deutsche übersetzt hat, bezeichnet der Kognitionswissenschaftler und KI-Experte Gary Marcus große Sprachmodelle als „[ü]berbewertet“ (S. 152), wie es im Titel des Beitrags heißt. Dennoch – oder vielleicht sogar, weil man aufgrund der oberflächlichen Ähnlichkeit von KI-generierter Sprache zur Menschensprache erstere überschätzt – forderte Marcus 2023 in einem offenen Brief gemeinsam mit anderen

Expert:innen, dass man die Entwicklung von KI-Systemen für ein halbes Jahr aussetzen möge (S. 152).

Am Ende des KI-kritischen *Akzente*-Doppelhefts finden sich Auszüge aus fünf Manifesten verschiedener Berufsverbände beziehungsweise Interessensgruppen, von *A*DS Autorinnen und Autoren der Schweiz* über *Algorithmwatch* und das *European Writers' Council* bis hin zum *VDÜ Verband deutschsprachiger Übersetzer/innen literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Werke*, die allesamt zur Vorsicht bei der Entwicklung und Verwendung von KI-Systemen mahnen. Eine Liste mit Lektüreempfehlungen von Hamm (S. 180–188) schließt die Publikation ab.

Dieses *Akzente*-Doppelheft wirft zentrale Fragen zur Qualität KI-generierter Texte auf und verweist auf immer noch weitgehend ungelöste ethische und rechtliche Probleme, die mit dem Fortschritt von KI einhergehen. Die formale und stilistische Diversität der Texte in *Automatensprache* kann als Appell für menschliche Individualität gedeutet werden und ist vor allem angesichts der sich immer weiterverbreitenden, einheitlichen KI-Sprache überaus erfrischend. Als potenzielle Schwäche dieser Publikation könnte die Tatsache angesehen werden, dass die Beiträge Menschen und Maschinen einander vor allem entgegenstellen, anstatt in größerem Maße auch ein konstruktives Miteinander als Möglichkeit anzudenken. Die Frage möglicher Synergien zwischen Menschen und Maschinen behandeln allerdings zahlreiche andere Publikationen (siehe du Sautoy 2019; Moorkens et al. 2025; Rothwell et al. 2024; Walter/Agnetta 2025 etc.). Die von Hamm gesammelten Texte bringen vor allem den Ärger und Frust vieler Kreativschaffender zum Ausdruck, die im technologischen Fortschritt der letzten Jahre eine Bedrohung ihrer Existenz sehen, und zwar durchaus mit gutem Grund. So wird deutlich, dass diese Stimmen nicht nur als kulturpessimistische Abwehrhaltung zu verstehen sind, sondern als notwendige Mahnung, die gesellschaftlichen, öko-

nomischen, ethischen und rechtlichen Implikationen der KI-Entwicklung nicht zu übergehen. Gerade darin liegt die zentrale Bedeutung dieses *Akzente*-Doppelhefts: Es eröffnet einen kritischen Resonanzraum, in dem berechtigte Sorgen artikuliert werden können – und zwar ohne jedes Wort auf die Waagschale zu legen, und vor allem ohne KI-bedingte Nivelierung des Gesagten.

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