The Value of Multilingual Understanding*

by Luca De Biase**

The great goals of post-pandemic humanity, from health to climate, from peace to social inclusion, transcend the interests of each, and are pursued only together with the interests of others: in fact, they are united by the need to arrive at a form of global understanding.

It can probably be argued that this is not particularly new. But the contemporary condition makes understanding, not to say cooperation, fundamentally necessary. For structural reasons. Research and education are integral parts of this contemporary dynamic.

What is it all about? In the age of knowledge, value is focused on the intangible: research, design, image, organization, the meaning of products. Digital infrastructure is essential for knowledge management, which precisely summarizes economic value. In turn, value is defined when the demander recognizes it in the offeror's proposal: thus it occurs in the dimension of communication. Unlike price, value is not only monetary, it is also cultural.

Hence, the dimension of essential exchange is transformed: it is not so much about the quantitative setting of prices and exchanged quantities of material goods, which takes place in the marketplace, but rather about the dialogue between humans who express and recognize the value of the knowledge embedded in products and services. In short, the knowledge economy works if those who offer and those who demand communicate and understand the value of the knowledge embedded in products and services. In a global context, these communications are international and cross-cultural and therefore must cross linguistic and cultural boundaries-which means that the services of the translation and localization industry are strategic. If this is true, the topic of mutual understanding between people and populations should move up the list of priorities for companies and buyers.

So what are the risks and opportunities that can be

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recognized in a scenario like this?

Busy in the daily business of developing their companies, entrepreneurs, managers of public and private enterprises, servants of the state and leaders of educational institutions may be tempted to postpone engagement in international communication activities. But innovation in the world of translation and localization may convince them to focus on the topic. If the transmission of a text from one language to another is becoming easier for major languages thanks to machine translation, the added value of taking into account different cultural contexts is all to be explored and becomes the task of important business activities. Not only marketing, at the downstream end of production, but also planning and design, at the upstream end: because products and services in themselves communicate. All platform activities, for example, are actually the product and communication of the firm combined. And the structure of platforms often adds to the form of institutions that provide a valuable service to society. Right from the design stage, the service must think about being accessible to generate mutual understanding among those collaborating in the development of social value forms.

There was a time when industrial economics might have been thought to be concerned first with the processes by which goods were produced and then with doing the advertising necessary to make them known in order to sell them. Today, communication-that is, the sharing of knowledge necessary to express and recognize value-is an integral part of the design of the product and the entire company that produces it. And the same goes for educational institutions, research centers, civic associations and so on.

Some might argue that international understanding is only effectively achieved through the development of a lingua franca, or a global tool of expression. But whatever language is chosen to bridge cultures, it actually imposes on communication the cultural structures of the country in which that language originated. Multilingualism enhances the depth of cultures that have developed their own languages over time: by adapting to another culture's modes of expression, people cannot draw on their own culture but must limit themselves to their knowledge of another's culture.

Cultural diversity is a form of wealth. As long as it does not become divisive.

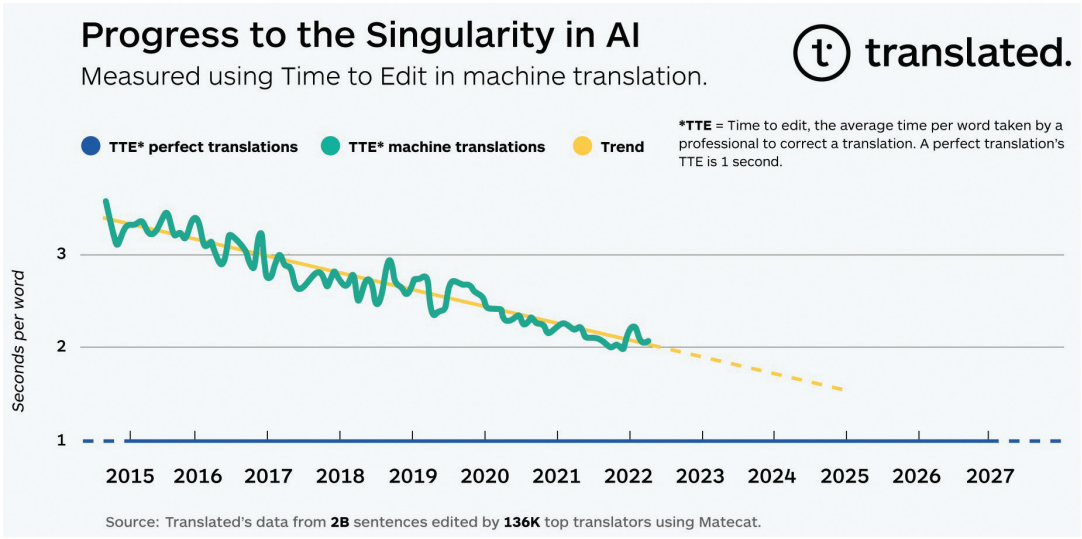

Fig. 1.

5. Conclusion: How Close We Are to Breaking Language Barriers

If progress in machine translation quality continues with the current trend, in about six years the best-performing professional translators will spend the same time correcting a translation produced by machine translation as they do correcting one completed by their peers. The exact date when we will reach the singularity in translation could vary somewhat, but the trend is clear. We are therefore close to being able to provide real-time, universal, accessible translation tools that will break the language barriers, allowing us to improve clients' health outcomes, lowering the risk of death.

From a research point of view, the evidence Translated has provided about the progress in MT quality is quite possibly the most compelling evidence of success at scale seen in both the MT and AI communities in general. Indeed, many AI researchers think that solving the language translation problem is equivalent to producing artificial general intelligence (AGI). Translated's discovery has thus quantified, for the first time in history, the speed at which we are approaching the singularity in artificial intelligence – the hypothetical future point in time at which artificial intelligence transcends human intelligence.

Notes

1. https://blogs.ec.europa.eu/emt/covid-19-how-has-it-affected-the-world-of-translation/.

2. DuPont Q. (2018), *The Cryptological Origins of Machine Translation: From al-Kindi to Weaver*, «Amodern», Issue 8, Translation-Machination.

3. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-first-public-demonstration-of-machine-%3A-the-%2C-7-Hutchins/ad014a7b7a3142e6f17eedddf4218489b56ab18e.

4. https://modernmt.com. More information on the project at https://slator.com/business-academia-join-forces-launch-next-gen-machine-translation/.

5. EU Horizon 2020 Innovation Action (2015-2017).

6. MateCat, acronym of Machine Translation Enhanced Computer Assisted Translation, is a 3-year research project (11/2011 – 10/2014) funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration.

7. https://matecat.com.

8. https://translated.com/t-rank.

9. https://openai.com/blog/ai-and-efficiency/.

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