GLTaC

Lives depend on our translations.

Machine Translation: What Can It Do for You?

Introduction

Perhaps you've had experience with machine translation (MT) before, or used a free site like Google Translate. Maybe you are like most people who hear the words "machine translation" and immediately start laughing.

If so, then your competitors are getting the last laugh as MT allows them to do more research of foreign language documents faster and cheaper, which gives them a competitive edge in the development cycle.

Business Challenge

How do you know which documents are important and which ones you can safely ignore if those documents are in a language you cannot read? You could send it out for translation by a colleague who knows that language, but is that a good use of their time? Sending it to a professional translator is another option, but that might take weeks and cost thousands of dollars — all for a document that may not be important to your research.

Solution

Many of the top companies in the world use MT on a daily basis to save time and money. How can some find value in something others scoff at? That is a matter of perception and knowing how to use MT properly. Most people view MT as an outward process, taking something in their native language and translating it so someone else can read it or publish it. If you fall into that category, then in many cases, MT is not the tool you need.

However, when you are looking at a foreign text document and want to understand what it contains, and you never intend to publish the resulting translation, then MT may be the best tool you can use.

Why? Because you simply cannot find a faster means to cost-effectively bring a document from one language to another than by MT. You use your knowledge of the subject matter to smooth out any rough spots when reading to understand the "gist" of the document. You can always pursue a higher level of quality when necessary, but you gain a competitive

edge by moving faster on information than your competition.

Scenarios

Maybe you are evaluating marketing materials to understand how to sell your product in a new overseas market? MT is a great way to see how a wide variety of literature is already working where you want to go.

You have a meeting in two hours that you cannot delay and you just received the presentation last night—in Japanese! Using MT you can follow along in English. The most common use for MT is in the arena of patent translations. The volume of intellectual property filed in languages other than English is growing exponentially. South Korea is aggressively pursuing a strategy of becoming the number two patent filer in the world. Abstracts are commonly available in English, but in many cases the abstract is not enough.

When your patent search returns five or ten foreign patent references, you need a cost-effective way to determine which are critical and which can be safely ignored. MT allows you to at least gain an understanding of what is in the document, and from there you can de cide if you need a better quality translation, or if there is no value in taking that document further.

Ideally, you may want the entire document done by Human Translation (HT), but that is expensive and time-consuming, especially for a document you may find has no relevance to your invention. Instead, doing just the patent claims, or claims and examples by HT and the remainder by MT would be more cost-effective and faster. That way you apply the precision of a human translator only where it provides the most benefit.

Technical articles are another type of document that benefit from MT. In the digital age, even older scientific journals are being converted to PDF images and placed online. How can you work with a PDF image that has no text? We use professional Optical Character Reading (OCR), combined with the skills of our editors, to get the job done.

Machine Translation: What Can It Do for You?

Summary

There are many ways MT can enhance your translation capability, and they differ by each department's needs. The key point to remember is with the growing volume of information available in languages other than English, if you are not at least getting a rough idea of what those documents contain, you are not as competitive nor well-informed as your competition.

If MT quality is not good enough there is an additional level of translation quality between MT and HT called Machine Aided Translation (MAT.) See our other

Comments, questions, and suggestions are welcome and appreciated. Reach us at info@gltac.com.