

Machine Translation: For and Against

Machine translation (MT) has made impressive progress in recent years, owing to advances in deep learning and the ever-increasing power of computers. Millions of people consult free online translation services every day, most of the time to grasp the meaning of a text in a 'foreign' language. The translations they obtain from the new neural MT systems are often surprisingly fluent, containing none of the gibberish that used to characterize MT. Does that mean that the long-standing concerns about machine translation have finally been resolved? Not at all! Neural MT systems continue to produce incorrect translations, although the errors are now more subtle and semantically based. Thus, it still takes a qualified translator to determine whether a machine translation is accurate and reliable, not to say stylistically appropriate. So while MT is providing an invaluable service today for gisting or information-gathering purposes, when it comes to texts that are destined for publication or widespread distribution, one cannot do without a bona fide translator. That translator may decide to use an MT system for a first draft, but his or her knowledge and good judgment remain indispensable for the production of a fully acceptable target text.