

Topic 14

TRANSLATE or INTERPRET?



IMPORTANT FACTS

1. Translation and interpretation are two closely related linguistic disciplines.
2. They are often used interchangeably.
3. There are more differences than similarities between translation and interpretation
4. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has changed the work of translators and interpreters.

Let's have a closer look.

Similarities

Translators and interpreters have training in linguistics and in-depth knowledge of specific languages. To ensure accuracy and avoid misunderstanding, these language professionals take on the role of cultural ambassadors, respecting the traditions, norms, values and beliefs of the languages they work with. The general goals of translators and interpreters are similar: bridge language gaps, overcome language barriers, help people communicate across languages and convert messages from one language to another. However their work is never word-to-word conversion, rather they focus on the *meaning* of the words they work with.

Differences

Translators convert information from one language into another. Working with a wide range of source texts (original documents from which translations are derived), they take time, use resources, such as dictionaries and style guides and then proofread their translations for accuracy and clarity. An example is translating an Italian novel into English. In contrast to translators' text-to-text task, **interpreters** work with spoken or signed language in real time, at presentations, conferences, meetings, and media events. They listen to speech in one language and orally, and/or gesturally convey its meaning into another language. An example is helping two people speak across language barriers in real time at a meeting.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the work of language professionals

While language professionals have some experience with technological tools such as terminology databases, translation memory and machine translation (MT), most agree that the emergence of generative AI has significantly changed the way they work, shifting their role from that of solo language converter to partnering with AI to form a *Human + AI workflow*. Here are four examples:

1. For high-volume, routine tasks such as internal communications or product descriptions, translators post-edit, review and refine language conversion texts prepared by AI.
2. Initial book translations are prepared by specialized AI platforms. Human editors and literary translators are then employed to review and polish the text because AI can miss nuances, idioms, or cultural context.
3. For specialized and high-stake language context, such as technical documentation and medical and legal interpretation, translators partner with AI to enhance and strengthen initial language conversion. With their language expertise and deep understanding of human communication, translators do what Large Language Models cannot manage: they review and refine what AI translates and make judgment calls or subjective choices to ensure that communication across languages preserves not just specific meaning, but also lexical and cultural accuracy, nuanced meanings, accountability and humanity.
4. AI serves as an invaluable assistant for interpreters' pre-conference briefings and also for real-time, on-the-spot language conversion. Specialized tools such as Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) help interpreters focus on context, tone, and delivery and, when necessary, access accurate technical terms, verify numbers and dates, correct context, tone or identify errors that algorithms miss.

References

<https://www.languageline.com/blog/interpretation-vs.-translation-and-how-ai-unmasked-the-humanity-behind-both>

<https://www.translastars.com/blog/ai-shaping-translation-industry>