**The Impact of Technology in Translation**

The impact of technology in translation is evident not only in the way translators work, but also in the communication process and final product.

by Mónica Cabral • Updated on 25 January, 2020

Over the last century, technology has evolved tremendously. Nowadays, almost everything relies on technology, and every field of knowledge is affected by the ongoing progress of new technologies, including the translation industry.

In short, the impact of technology in translation is not only visible in the optimization of the translation process through the use of CAT tools or machine translation, but also in other aspects, such as the relation translator-client, the quality of the translation and the time it takes to be produced.

**TRANSLATION BEFORE THE DIGITAL ERA**

Before computers were a thing, the translation process was much harder and slower. Translators had to do everything manually, flip through hundreds of pages of dictionaries, glossaries, grammars and encyclopedias. Then, the first computers appeared, and with them came basic word processing programs and, later on, the Internet and search engines.

At the time, this seemed like the peak of technology. Translators’ work became a little simpler, because they no longer had to handwrite everything, and they could use the Internet to search for all the information needed to support the process.

Fast forward to the present, the impact of technology in translation is even bigger.

**THE RELATION TRANSLATOR-CLIENT**

One of the biggest changes has to do with the relation between the translator and the client. It is evident that the Internet brought down the barrier of physical distance. Nowadays, it is possible to communicate with people from all around the world. Consequently, translators have the advantage of being able to work for clients worldwide. However, this can hurt a key element in the translator-client relation: **trust**.

When you need someone to handle a project of yours, you can’t simply ask a stranger to do it. Even though the Internet allows faster exchanges, there still needs to exist a direct contact between the two parties. Furthermore, translation is an area where word of mouth still plays a huge role when it comes to spreading your work.

**WHAT ABOUT TIME AND QUALITY?**

The impact of technology in translation over the years also reflects on the notion of time and place. Information can be shared and received without having to leave the house, with a simple click. The speed of information flow is unbelievable, and exchanges can be done almost instantly. Therefore, it is also expected that all the knowledge and information produced can be received and processed with the same speed. This imposes a challenge for translators, as clients require that they deliver works faster.

In addition to that, this fast flow of information also means that the information becomes more ephemeral, it is in constant change. This obligates the translator to work faster, in order to keep up with these changes. This fear of keeping the content relevant and meeting clients’ tight deadlines can affect the quality of the translation. This is because the translator will be more concerned about the final product, rather than the translation process itself.

Moreover, the translation market is much bigger than it was, and it isn’t planning on stop growing. Consequently, the need for translation services has increased due to the [crescent globalization and need to be present in worldwide markets](https://www.alumiarelisio.com/blog/importance-of-translation/), and there aren’t enough human resources that are able to keep up with this growth. So, in order to fulfill these needs, there were developed some solutions, such as machine translation and CAT Tools. However, they serve different purposes, and their mechanisms and results are very different.

**MACHINE TRANSLATION: IS IT ENOUGH?**

One of the biggest innovations regarding the impact of technology in translation is machine translation. Machine translation is the translation of a text by a computer, with no human involvement. It is an automated process, where the computer uses large quantities of data, such as parallel texts and advanced grammatical/semantic analysis techniques to translate the text. There are a lot of machine translation services, but the most popular one is, of course, Google Translate.

Currently, machine translation **is only viable in some specific contexts**, mainly within the highly specialized ones that present technical, repetitive and unambiguous terminology. Consequently, this can result in translations that do not sound as natural as if the translator were to have full control over the language being translated.

Despite not being the best, machine translation can be useful to understand and translate small sentences, when you are learning a new language, to briefly understand the main ideas of a text or when you are visiting a foreign country.

**CAT TOOLS: A TRANSLATOR'S BEST FRIEND**

Differently from machine translation, the purpose of CAT tools (Computer-Assisted Translation tools) is to assist and simplify the translator’s work, by speeding up the process and helping them manage their translation projects.

Most CAT tools rely on translation memories, but they can also have other features, such as termbases. A translation memory allows the translator to store previous translations and segments, which can later be reused when translating other texts belonging to the same field of expertise.

This can be extremely helpful and enhance the translator’s workflow but, at the same time, **may sacrifice quality for time**. When using translation memories, the text is dissected into small segments, which can later be “recycled”. Therefore, the text is no longer seen as a whole. The translator bases their work in sentences and segments, which can harm the quality of the translation, as it may not sound as natural as it should.

**ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TECHNOLOGY IN TRANSLATION**

Nowadays, it is almost impossible to be a translator and not use some sort of technology. Whether it is online dictionaries, word processors, search engines or [translation software](https://www.alumiarelisio.com/blog/everything-about-translation-software/), everyone needs it. In translation, specifically, there are numerous advantages regarding the use of technological tools.

The most evident one is that CAT tools spare the translator from the repetitive, and sometimes boring, work. These save time and increase their productivity, since they allow them to focus on more creative tasks, or even increase their income, because they are able to do more jobs in less time. Furthermore, these tools assure the consistency and accuracy of terminology throughout the translation.

Technology also allows translators to work from anywhere in the world, and have clients worldwide, which was impossible before the digital era.

Moving over to the disadvantages, besides the one already mentioned regarding the loss of quality, the costs associated with the development and the purchase of these technologies can be extremely high, mainly for freelance translators when compared to big companies or agencies.

**THE FUTURE OF TRANSLATION**

The impact of technology in translation is undeniable. Technology is here to stay, and we must accept it and make the most out of it. When it comes to translation, **humans will always be needed**, in order to assure the accuracy and quality of the final translation. However, taken into consideration that the market is getting bigger and the number of translators doesn’t comply with its demand, I think we can all agree that some of these technologies can only be beneficial.

That being said, we have to be careful in the way we use them, because, even though they are extremely useful and only make our work easier, we can’t trust them 100%. Technology is, in fact, tremendously intelligent. However, when it comes to translation, it isn’t simply about words. It is about culture, feeling, emotion, and, no matter how advanced technology is, I still haven’t seen a computer with a heart.

Like everything healthy in life, there needs to exist balance. We can’t reject technology completely, because we truly need it. Nowadays, clients want their translation at the speed of sound and, when used in a smart way, these technologies can be useful. On the other hand, clients also want a good and natural-sounding translation, and that’s what we are here for.

**CONCLUDING**

We’ve come a long way when it comes to technology. Now, we are able to be more productive and efficient than ever. Translators are able to work from home, have clients from everywhere in the world, and, in addition to that, have a countless number of tools to aid us.

It is true that many people believe that, in the future, translation will be completely automated, and human translators will be useless. However, in my opinion, that will never be a reality. Translation is a science and an art at the same time. It isn’t a matter of exchanging words from a language to another. It is a matter of crossing borders, understanding emotions and cultures and spreading them all over the world. And no computer can do that, nor now nor never.

Source: https://www.alumiarelisio.com/blog/impact-technology-translation/