Birmingham Community Health Information Translation Project

Using online translation tools effectively and ethically

Aston University
BIRMINGHAM UK

Aims and Objectives

This presentation will explain how online translation tools work and how volunteer translators can make the most of them to translate important public health messages.

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1. What are online translation tools?
2. The quality of online translation
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What Are Online Translation Tools?

Most people are familiar with online translation technology, such as Google Translate and Microsoft Translate.

This type of technology works by analysing data from previously translated texts to produce an automatic translation from one language into another.

The language being translated *from* is known as the source language, and the language being translated *into* is called the target language.

source language text → → target language text

The Quality of Online Translation

The quality of translations produced by online translation tools can vary depending on the source and target languages and on the subject matter.

Because errors can be made, it is very important for a subject like health messages that someone with knowledge of both languages checks and corrects a translation before it is shared with community members. This checking and correcting process is known as post-editing.

Post-editing Skills I

A post-editor needs to be able to understand the source language very well and they need to be able to write accurately in the target language. They also need to be able to use a computer.

Post-editing Skills II

They also need to be aware of the sort of mistakes that the online translation tool might make and be able to spot the errors in a translation.
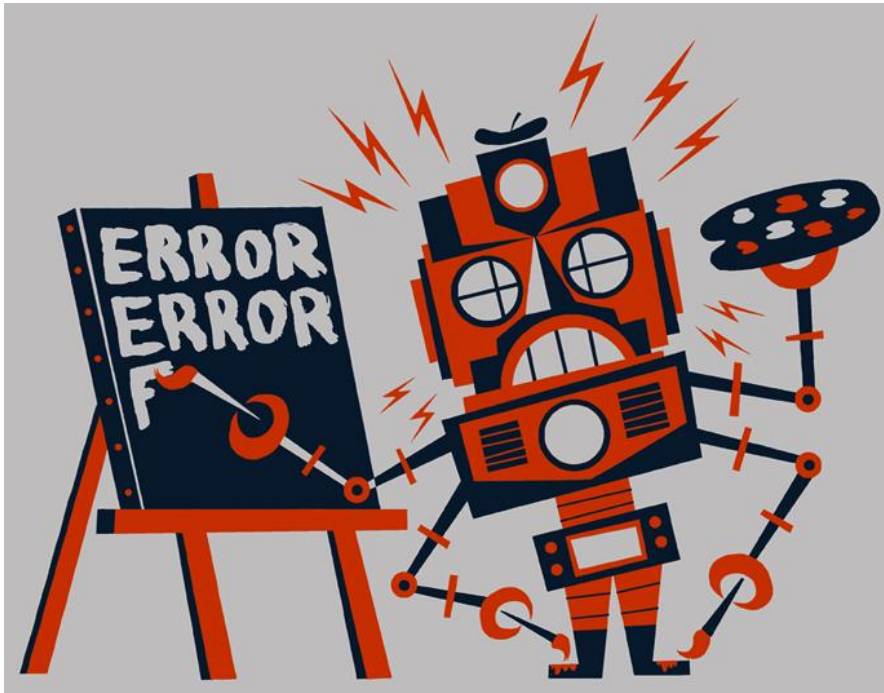
There could be errors in grammar and punctuation, that are not too important for understanding the message. But with a topic like health, there could also be some specialised words or phrases that the online translation tool cannot recognise and therefore cannot translate accurately.

Ethical Considerations

A translator should always assess the ethical implications of their work, for the sender of the original message, the receiver of the translation, and the translator themselves.

Questions to ask are:

- Does the translation actually help the community?

- Is there a risk that using online translation could cause harm to the community or put their health at risk?

We can't foresee all possible scenarios but post-editors need to be especially cautious about such things as medications, misinformation about vaccination or support services.

As a responsible translator, you will be aware of the limitations of using online translation tools and be accountable for your decision to use them.

Summary

- Google Translate and Microsoft Translate are examples of free online translation tools.
- The quality of translations produced by these online translation tools can vary.
- For any kind of specialised subject, the translation will need to be checked and corrected by a human being. This is called post-editing.
- Post-editors need to know both languages well and also know how to look for mistakes.
- Anyone using online translation tools to distribute critical information, must consider the ethical implications of their actions.