

## Machine vs human: translation procedures

Stella Linn

### Abstract

For a recipe from my French cookbook, DeepL translated *Il faut un avocat bien mûr* (You need a ripe avocado) into *It takes a mature lawyer*. There are countless anecdotes about similar machine translation (MT) mistakes, due to causes such as polysemy or misinterpretation of the context. As MT continues to improve though, errors will become increasingly rare and the machine, especially neural machine translation (NMT), may even surpass human translators (HT) in some respects. This is most likely in the case of translation choices that are limited to the micro level such as words, collocations, and short sentences, where no significant cross-cultural competences are required. However, one little-explored linguistic area where we might expect humans to outperform MT as yet concerns the way in which they deal with common structure differences. Native speakers of a given source language may indeed have a marked preference for one construction, while in the target language another structure is dominant to refer to a similar situation, such as active vs passive form, or nominal vs verbal phrases. To overcome these differences, skilled translators are able to apply a variety of standard translation procedures, as documented by translation scholars such as Vinay & Darbelnet 1958/1995 (for the language pair French-English), Vázquez-Ayora 1977 (for Spanish-English), Delisle, Lee-Jahnke & Cormier 1999, Claes 2018, and Linn 2019. Thus, translators smoothly convert Spanish nominal constructions into verbal clauses in German, get rid of an excess of English personifications by using Dutch prepositions, or split long French sentences containing multiple participles that a Danish readership would consider unreadable. To what extent does MT succeed in applying these interventions? Using examples from established translation manuals, I will compare MT and HT output when it comes to frequent translation procedures. More insight into this could contribute to both improving MT performance and increasing translators' awareness of their added value.

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