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Editorial

With the rise of the Web, language barriers have been broken more successfully than before with the help of machine translation. Developments in statistical machine translation have made the tantalising possibility of instant, free translation visible and imaginable to all. Franz Josef Och, Chief Research Scientist at Google, thus proudly stated in Google's official blog in April 2012 that there are "200 million monthly active users on translate.google.com" and that "In a given day we [at Google's] translate roughly as much text as you'd find in 1 million books."[1]

In spite of the many inadequacies and absurdities of translation systems still inherent in machine translation, these achievements should not be disregarded. Translation tools are transforming the ways in which we communicate, live and work. They are here to stay: constantly evolving, they are an integral part of both non translators and translators' lives, rather than a threat to human translators.

This is why it is just as vital to explore how automatic translation is impacting translators' lives and working methods than it is to explore the quantitative and qualitative progress of translation automated systems. Surprisingly perhaps, in a 2011 survey, only 6% of European employers rated knowledge of machine translation systems as essential when recruiting young translators, while 37% did not require these competences.[2] Similarly, a 2011 poll states that 42.9% of translators considered machine translation as a foe,[3] and in a 2010 poll, only 12.7% of translators taking part considered that CAT Tools, including machine translation allowed them to improve their productivity by 20 to 30% while 25.7% did not know and 22.1% did not have or use CAT Tools.[4]

Louise Brunette and Laurie Gerber explore both these contradictions in a cutting edge issue on current translation practices, surveyed in their introduction. Two interviews relating to translation and technology are offered in parallel to these articles: Sylvain Caschelin will discuss new development in live subtitling while Roslyn Bottoni evokes the challenges of being an editor for the European Commission. As ever, we hope the issue will be informative and look forward to hearing your views.

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NOTES

[1] Franz Josef Och (2012). "Breaking Down the Language barriers - six Years In." April 26. http://googleblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/breaking-down-language-barriersix-years.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+blogspot/MKuf+(Official+Google+Blog)#!/2012/04/breaking-down-language-barriersix-years.html (consulted 20.10.2012).
[2] Results of the 2011 survey conducted by the Optimale project available at http://www.translator-training.eu/optimale/attachments/article/40/Public%20part_report_2010_OPTIMALE%204018-001-001.pdf (consulted 20.10.2012).
[3] http://www.proz.com/polls/archived?poll_id_link=10300 (consulted 20.10.2012).
[4] The poll results can be viewed at http://www.proz.com/polls/9235 (consulted 20.10.2012).