



Book Review: Machine Translation and Translation Theory

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Introduction

In *Machine Translation and Translation Theory* (2025), Omri Asscher, an Associate Professor at Bar-Ilan University, reports a serious gap in contemporary academic discourse: the disconnect between the international use of machine translation (MT) and the rich traditions of human-oriented translation concepts. As AI-mediated communication transforms international understanding on a historical scale, Asscher claims that current theoretical frameworks must be re-evaluated to account for non-human work. The volume presents itself as a "vantage point" for translation researchers and AI researchers, bearing in mind defining where MT aligns with humanistic notions and where it forces an essential reexamination of the discipline's central assumptions.

Summary of the Content

The book is organised into seven chapters that transfer from definitional foundations to the "doing" of translation:

Theoretical Grounding:

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the context of the Machine Translation Era and contest the challenging task of substantial translation when the agent is an algorithm.

Core Dimensions:

The core of the book (Chapters 3–6) studies MT through three categories: esthetics, ethics, and multicultural communication.

Aesthetics:

Argues that the source text in MT evaluation, where fluency frequently succeeds formal communication.

Ethics:

Discovers MT as an independent agent and the implications of its decision-making processes.

Communication:

Analyses how non-human mediation affects personal and international cultural exchange.

Historical and Future Outlook:

The concluding chapter shifts from theory to history, suggesting that MT phenomena have precedents in human translation history and proposing an interdisciplinary bridge between the humanities and AI.

Book Emphasis

The important distinction of Asscher's work is the interdisciplinary obligation of incorporating AI into human knowledge. The book prioritises the sociological and cognitive shifts caused by AI, precisely the blurred boundaries between human and machine production and the black box nature of deep learning algorithms. It emphasises target-orientedness, observing that contemporary MT systems prioritise creating a connection of equivalence and human-like fluency for the end user, often at the expense of traditional source-text authenticity.

Critical Evaluation**Strengths:**

A central strong point is the book's capacity to continue available, highly readable, and precisely referenced, while handling complex philosophical questions. By using translation as a classic case study, Asscher delivers a concrete framework for how other human science disciplines might react to AI. The presence of generative AI tools like ChatGPT together with traditional Neural Machine Translation (NMT) make certain the work is appropriate and related to the current "AI revolution".

Weaknesses:

The author admits that the book's broad bird's-eye view involves important generalisations. For example, it emphasises mainly high-resource written languages, leaving the vast terrain of interpreting studies, spoken translation and low-resource language inequalities for forthcoming investigation. Furthermore, the "opaque" nature of NMT makes it challenging for current theories, mainly cognitive translation studies, to find a perfect fit.

Comparison:

Contrasting to applied manuals that emphasise post-editing techniques, Asscher's work is deeply theoretical. It forms on Anthony Pym's typological logic but moves beyond Pym's era

by challenging frameworks like Skopos theory and Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), contrary to autonomous machines rather than human specialists.

Theoretical or Disciplinary Relevance

This work is extremely relevant as a catalyst for a post-humanist turn in Translation Studies. It tests the long-standing theory that a human translator is the essential theme of all translation theory. By applying humanistic categories like aesthetic judgment or ethical agency to processes, Asscher forces the discipline to choose whether these notions are entirely human or whether they can define the productions of artificial agents. It serves as an essential bridge between the technical applied side of MT and the theoretical human side of the humanities.

Conclusion

Machine Translation and Translation Theory is a suitable intervention that effectively unpacks the troublesome role of AI in the linguistic arts. Omri Asscher offers a clear-eyed assessment of how we must recalibrate our understanding of language, ethics, and philosophy in an age where humans no longer make 99% of translated text. Reading is important for anyone looking to understand the philosophical implications of the tools we now use every day to communicate across boundaries.

References

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