

Measuring readers' engagement in literary texts: a study comparing human translation to machine assisted translation

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Until now, research has shed some light in the usability of machine translation (MT) in literary texts, showing that MT might help professional literary translators, for example when it comes to productivity (Toral et al. 2018). However, translators' perception is that the "more creative" the literary text, the less useful MT is (Moorkens et al. 2018). But do translators resolve issues in creative texts differently on their own than if they are aided by machines? And, ultimately, does the final user, the reader, prefer the texts created only by humans? Are these latter texts hence more engaging to users?

There are few studies in machine-assisted translation (e.g. Castilho and Guerberof, 2018) that focus on the ultimate user of the translation - the reader - and, to the best of our knowledge, none has dealt to date with literary texts. This research addresses this gap by assessing the impact of MT on reading translated literary texts. We setup a pilot experiment in one language direction (English-to-Catalan) that included a questionnaire to assess narrative engagement (Mangen and Kuiken 2014), using a scale created for this purpose, and another one to gauge the reception of a fiction piece translated in three conditions: from scratch (fully human translation), machine translated, and a post-edited version (machine translation corrected by a translator). Thirty readers completed the questionnaires, 10 readers per modality. We are presenting here the results that compare the three modalities and address the suitability of this methodology for assessing the user experience in the context of literary translations. The objective is ultimately to use this methodology in a larger study to better understand translation creativity in relation to MT and its impact on the reader of translated literary texts in several language combinations.

References

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