

# Patent professionals and 'gist' machine translation: a case of situated cognition

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Written in a style often described as 'Patentese', with its jargon, many technical terms, and tendency towards difficult syntax, patents would seem to be a weak candidate for machine translation (MT). Yet patent professionals have been accessing other-language patents via raw, unedited ('gist') MT for roughly a decade. One could even argue that the patent field rivals translation as the professional area that has seen the most widespread and longest use of MT. What explains patent professionals' ability to make use of machine-translated texts that are not always grammatical or stylistically well-formed?

In this presentation, I introduce a qualitative case study that focused on that question. The data consisted of interviews with nine Scandinavian patent professionals from private industry and governmental patent authorities. The study revealed that patent professionals perform their work as part of a large network of artifacts and people, and their task of acquiring an understanding of machine-translated texts is often achieved through interaction with that network. In other words, understanding of gist MT could be described as a 'socio-cognitive' process (Risku et al. 2017), or as situated cognition as described by Muñoz: "Understanding is an activity that crucially depends on the environment – and also on experience – because environmental affordances foster and constrain meaning construal." (2017, 564)

The case study provides new insight into the under-researched area of gist MT reception, while also contributing to our understanding of cognition as it relates to interaction with translated products.

## References

- Risku, Hanna, Regina Rogl, and Jelena Milosevic (2017). Translation Practice in the Field: Current Research on Socio-Cognitive Processes. *Translation Spaces* 6 (1): 3–26.
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