Chapter 96

Towards a Participative Platform for Cultural Texts Translators

Aurélien Bénel
ICD/Tech-CICO Lab UTT, France

Philippe Lacour
ENS, France & Marc Bloch Center, Germany

ABSTRACT

Although machine translation and translation memories are frequently used in business, they are inadequate to translate a text from a culture to another one. When faced with philosophy, literature or ancient texts, professional translators have to cope with the fact that the most important things to 'translate' are often in the style, in details, or even unwritten.

We advocate for changing the user interfaces and use patterns of a few computer-assisted translation techniques so that they could fit the interpretative tradition of cultural sciences. In particular, we will focus on what could foster intertextuality and enable the confrontation of different points of view on the same opus (several translators in several languages).

Provided as a participative Web platform, our software is designed as a collaboration and debate place for scholars around the world working on the same opus, author, time or genre. At the end of the chapter, this design is confronted with the observation of a face-to-face working session.

INTRODUCTION

To scholars in social sciences or humanities, the so-called 'Web 2.0' (O'Reilly, 2005) means both new possibilities of cooperation and very surprising incarnations of rather familiar theoretical ideas. Indeed, it embodies – though in a very 'pop

culture' way – some key aspects of *hermeneutics*, the theory and methods of interpretation (Lacour, 2010; Bénel & Lejeune, 2009).

In these disciplines, translation has a singular status. Even if their discourses might include 'formal moments', the areas of human knowledge related to *culture* (as opposed to *nature*) are intrinsically bounded to the properties and

possibilities of natural languages (Passeron, 2006). This assumption entails quite important consequences. In particular, these disciplines' key concepts are formulated in idioms characterized by their irreducible diversity. Translation difficulties arise when semantic fields do not exactly match in different languages. For instance 'citizenship' can mean either *citoyenneté* or *nationalité*. An accurate translation tries to preserve most of these existing ambiguities without adding any[1]. However, no translation can be perfect, and it is usually necessary to compare different translations to reveal all the original possible meanings.

Translation takes such a part in the interpretative tradition of *cultural sciences* embodied by 'Web 2.0' that one should be surprised that cultural texts platforms provide *either* interpretative translation features (e.g. *Perseus digital library*[2]) *or* participation features (e.g. *Wikisource*[3]). In our process to integrate both kind of features, we will first highlight several translation theory principles[4] and how they match (or not) typical *computer-assisted translation* tools. Then we will present the mockups of our platform together with their design rationale. To finish with, we will confront this design (based on translation theory) with a practical example as observed during a face-to-face working session.

BACKGROUND

Although computer-aided translation tools are widely used in business, they are carefully avoided in cultural sciences. In fact both machine translation and translation memories implicitly embed very questionable hypotheses concerning language.

From Machine Translation to Human Translation

Machine translation (see Figure 1) embeds a language theory in which translating could be reduced to applying a set of rules from a source language to a target language. First, this would require that a form could be replaced by another while preserving the meaning. On the contrary, both language theory and practice show that form-to-form translation (e.g. 'London' to 'Londres') is rare at any level (term to sentence). For example, when a translator cannot express a connotation in a translated form, she can move it on a neighbour form. Second, this would require the existence of language rules. For current theories, rules exist for genre but not for a whole language. In other words, they are not universal rules, but practical norms in use (Rastier, 2007). This last objection

Figure 1. Machine translation of a poem (screenshot)

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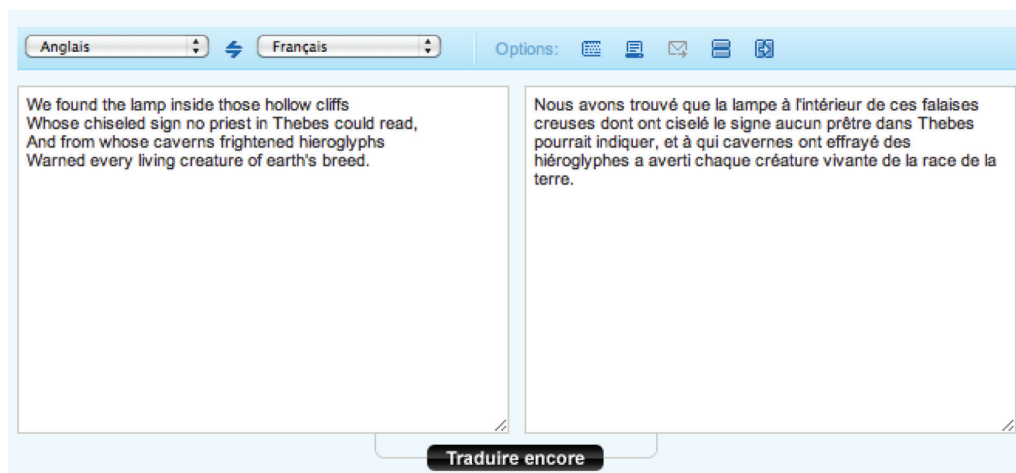
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