As we move into an AI world, university training in translation is more important than ever

If all the words of every text in all the languages of the world were contained in a black box, it would be impossible to process or interpret the data without the expertise of translators. Sceptical? If you think that machine translation will replace human translators, you are wrong. Despite the rise of generative AI, translation as a profession is here to stay. The same is true for university programs in translation. But as machine and AI translation becomes more prevalent, we must ask ourselves what more translation programs can offer.

The answer is simple: universities must continue to train experts able to interact with AI and machine systems so as to prevent them from producing dangerously believable or even misleading translations. Experts who develop first-class language competency as well as new skills in data science, content evaluation and ethical reflexivity. Why? Because entrusting AI with all language tasks would mean taking tremendous risks in areas such as anchoring bias, data confidentiality and quality assurance. That's why, when training the next generation of translators, universities must recognize that translation now covers a broad range of practices that combine the older disciplines with newer ones: technical writing, revision, terminology and terminotics, multilingual content creation, translation technologies, adaptation, transcreation, corpus-based translation, natural language processing, parallel corpus management, etc.

Simply put, in order to train translation systems, the first task is to train future tech-savvy translators to use their brains wisely and acquire top-notch critical thinking skills. The robust contributions of university-trained translators are essential to keep algorithms in check and augment the machine. Even the most powerful systems need human expertise. University classrooms must continue to be incubators for multitalented translators so that every word of every language can hit its target with elegance and precision. The world of multilingual communication is so complex and languages have so many subtleties that translators will always have a role to play.

Canadian Association of Schools of Translation (CAST)