Look Who's Translating: Impersonations, Chinese Whispers and Fun with Machine Translation on the Internet

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Abstract. This paper presents an overview of websites that parody real online machine translation (MT) services, as their sole purpose is to amuse users by offering fun translations without any practical use beyond their entertainment value. The websites considered here are designed to accept input in standard English, and can be broadly grouped into two main categories: the "impersonation" websites translate into sociolects strongly associated with certain groups of speakers, local dialects or non-standard accents, invented languages like Pig Latin or the alleged speaking style of eccentric celebrities and funny fictional characters; the "Chinese whispers" websites, on the other hand, translate the input from English into one or more target language(s), and then back again into English, with each stage of the process increasing the distortion in both form and meaning between the final resulting output and the original source text. The paper looks at some of the key linguistic and design issues behind the implementation of these fun translation websites, and concludes discussing their impact on the reputation of Internet-based MT tools, considering how they might affect users' trust in real online MT services.

1. Introduction and background

Machine translation (MT) is a serious business with a wide range of useful real-life practical applications. It is, however, quite common for MT to unintentionally become the source of hilarity, particularly when "howlers" produced by MT systems are publicised, often as a result of carefully concocted experiments or tests designed to push the reasonable capabilities of translation technology to the limit and expose some inevitable weaknesses. Some of the most commonly cited examples of such howlers have become classics in spite of being apocryphal (Hutchins, 1995). However, others are certainly genuine and are reported on a fairly regular basis in newspapers, magazines, articles on the Internet, postings of discussion forums, etc.

Ironically, this way of having fun with (or making fun of) machine translation echoes the humorous results of human translations (whether written or oral) of dubious quality that give rise to target-language texts taking on unintended meanings, becoming nonsensical or having ambiguous readings, as can happen when translators and interpreters work into a language with which they are not thoroughly familiar. This paper provides an overview of websites that capitalise on the potential of machine translation and MT-like applications to amuse by offering an end product without any real use beyond its entertainment value. After the introduction, which provides a background to this topic, sections 2 and 3 present a description of the two major categories of these fun translation websites with a list of salient examples, outlining some of the main linguistic and design issues behind their implementation. Finally, section 4 provides a conclusion with some considerations on the impact of these amusing websites on the reputation and trustworthiness of real web-based MT systems that showcase and promote commercial translation software.

1.1. Embarrassment and (unwanted) humour with MT on the Internet

In 2001 the Italian government published on its official website the biographies of cabinet ministers that had been machine translated from Italian into English using freely available web-based MT services. Since no attention had been paid to drafting the source texts in a way that would increase the likelihood of successful MT processing or to post-editing the output, the translated biographies were a mix of unintelligible, nonsensical and hilarious information – suffice it to mention that for example the proper names of ministers and senior civil servants that were homographs of general-language vocabulary were translated literally (more details on this rather embarrassing incident are reported in Gaspari, 2002: 116). The government's official response was that those badly translated texts were merely a test that was meant to remain hidden from external viewers of the website, and in fact the incriminated biographies written in poor English were promptly removed. However, the damage had already been done by then, and the embarrassment of the government went hand in hand with the mockery and attacks of the opposition, which seized on the opportunity to poke fun at the ineptitude of the governing coalition, bizarrely exposed and perhaps epitomised by some of the most shameful phrases and hilarious mistranslations taken from the ministerial biographies.

(Smith, 2001: 38) discusses the "laughable results" produced by free web-based MT services translating from English into other major languages the contents of an official report into the "intimate dealings" of a former US President with a young female intern that was published in 1998, and argues that given the "potent combination of technical and colloquial English" in the source document that would have been a challenge for a capable human translator, "MT applications were quite out of their depth". (Smith, 2001) points out that the unedited raw MT output hastily produced in a number of languages using free online MT software was widely disseminated to satisfy the morbid curiosity of Internet users for the contents of the report, and given the poor quality of the results some people were quick to dismiss MT software as useless. These high-profile incidents – which exemplify a rich repertoire of similar instances, particularly well-publicised in the popular press – beg the question of whether in such circumstances machine translation technology is at fault or, rather, those making use of it without understanding its limitations and being unable to estimate the pitfalls that it might involve. Be that as it may, it seems undeniable that MT output that might be hurriedly branded as a poor-quality or unacceptable translation turns out to possess an entertainment value that people appreciate – and that some might conversely find annoying or embarrassing, if this reflects negatively on their reputation.

1.2. Entertainment and (deliberate) fun with MT on the Internet

Until the mid-1990s usage of machine translation systems was, by and large, limited to individuals who worked in corporate or institutional environments where translation tools were available, or who had purchased licences for personal use. However, this situation has dramatically changed in the last ten years due to the popularity of machine translation services that have become available free of charge on the Internet for a variety of language pairs, which has spurred the usage of MT technology among a vast population of non-expert Internet users, as discussed in (Macklovitch, 2001: 27).

In a report on the usage of Babelfish, the pioneer online MT service based on Systran's core technology that was launched in late 1997, (Yang and Lange, 2003: 201-202) mention that this free MT service is used "as an entertainment tool", for example by getting it to translate poems, jokes and idioms between languages, which represent notoriously tricky tests for MT software. It is fair to say that many users may not have a deep understanding of the challenges involved in translating with computers (cf. Arnold, 2003) and they might make naive assumptions about how machine translation works (cf. Somers, 2005: 127). It seems, however, reasonable to suggest that even a fairly basic knowledge of the source and/or target languages puts lay-users in a position to realise whether the MT processing of idioms or other

challenging language phenomena (e.g. homographs or polysemous words in a sentence) gives rise to funny mistakes which are often accompanied by spectacular communication failures, and accordingly to enjoy the hilarious results that can ensue. In particular, people with a limited bilingual knowledge may be able to identify, albeit intuitively, where the problems in the MT processing lie, and therefore to understand why misinterpretations or mistranslations occur, often with surprisingly funny results.

In summary, the point can be made that although MT software, particularly the services available for free on the web, might produce poor translations, an added bonus of this admittedly low quality is that it tends to provide entertainment at zero cost for well-disposed Internet users. In other words, even though MT software fails in its basic primary objective, which is to provide a good or useful translation into the target language (no matter according to what specific criteria this is defined or measured), an unanticipated side-effect is that there can be a surplus of fun which some users might enjoy.

1.3. MT as we have never known it before

In a very thought-provoking paper questioning some widely-held assumptions about appropriate localisation practice which draws on examples taken from fields as diverse as the advertising, entertainment and travel industries, (Schäler, 2005) shows that today localisation professionals deliberately flout some of the key principles in their trade, by preserving or even inserting some elements of "linguistic and cultural strangeness" in products, websites and promotional material of various kinds (ads for the radio and TV, on the covers and packaging of audio-visual products, home pages of websites promoting well-known brands, etc.). He calls this approach "reverse localisation" and argues that maintaining a certain level of strangeness is perceived as attractive, therefore boosting the chances of success of a product, company or service. He discusses a number of instances in which the appeal of a commercial message results from a corrupted localisation process, where "foreign" elements that do not

conform with the norms and expectations of consumers in the target locale are emphasised, rather than concealed or adapted, as would be needed to give the impression that a product completely suits their needs.

This argument is based on current practice in localisation and hinges on some deliberate linguistic misunderstandings, awkward (mis)translations and hilarious cultural clashes, illustrating the point that a partially failed localisation (if judged according to strictly functional criteria) is compensated for by the appreciation of an appealing sense of "strangeness" that the public in the target locale seems to enjoy and that therefore is worth promoting, in apparent violation of the basic tenets of proper localisation. In a similar vein, but considering free online MT rather than localisation as such, this paper explores fun translation websites that fail to serve any of the utilitarian goals usually associated with MT software (and commonly expected by MT users), but offer free entertainment and fun. The assumption underlying this paper is that such fun translation websites deserve to be looked at as a new phenomenon grown out of the popularity and success of genuine online MT services, paying particular attention to their impact on the reputation of, and users' trust in, real Internet-based MT tools.

1.4. Overview of fun translation websites

This paper does not consider websites that contain lists or reports of MT howlers, or web-pages that discuss how to get funny results out of MT systems, but only looks at online services, i.e. websites with an interface requiring users to provide some sort of input which is then manipulated and returned in a different form, so as to reproduce a machine translation process. Furthermore, due to space limitations, this overview focuses exclusively on websites that are designed to process input written in standard English, and does not claim to cover all existing services, but only aims to provide some salient examples to illustrate typical websites offering fun translations – certainly many more of them exist, and it would be impossible to provide an accurate and comprehensive listing here.

The websites considered here can be broadly divided into two major categories, which are

presented and discussed separately in the two following sections in the interest of clarity: the "impersonation" websites are covered in section 2, whilst section 3 is devoted to the "Chinese whispers" websites. Some examples of the main kinds of spoof machine translation websites belonging to these two categories are described, discussing some of the key linguistic and design issues related to their implementation.

2. "Impersonation" websites

The "impersonation" websites provide fun translations by modifying input written in standard English into output in non-standard and idiosyncratic varieties of English or invented languages. Section 2.1 looks in particular at the websites providing output whose form tends to reproduce in writing sociolects strongly associated with certain groups of speakers, local dialects or accents typical of certain sections of the community as well as invented languages. Section 2.2 focuses more specifically on mock MT services covering the language pair English-Pig Latin, which is particularly popular. Finally, section 2.3 contains some examples of websites that convert standard written English into the alleged speaking style of celebrities or funny fictional characters, whilst 2.4 concludes with some remarks on some of the key linguistic issues of the implementation of these impersonation websites.

2.1. Translations into sociolects, local dialects, accents or invented languages

This section devoted to "impersonation" websites focuses on nine examples of spoof online machine translation services supporting between 1 and 16 "target languages", revealing the breadth of their coverage and the creativity of their developers. Table 1 in the Appendix shows more detailed information, including the URLs of these services, whether they accept input in the form of plain text and/or entire web-pages, as well as the number and names of the translation options offered. Most of the "target languages" are self-explanatory, but additional information provided by the websites themselves is supplied between square brackets in the table to explain the most obscure names.

There is some overlap for certain non-standard varieties that are supported by more than one fun translation website with exactly the same name (e.g. "Redneck" and "Jive" are found four times each) or with similar ones (e.g. "Valley Girl" and "Valspeak", "Cockney London/Rhyming Slang" and "Cockney"). In addition, some invented languages are defined by means of different labels, although they essentially refer to very similar manipulations of the input at the surface spelling level. This is the case, for instance, for "Lame HAcKer", "simple hax0r", "Ultra Leet", "L33T-SP34K" and "hAck3r", all of which cause the substitution of the spelling of the input in standard English to create strings of symbols (including digits and special characters as well as letters) that are more or less unintelligible to the untrained eye, and that mirror the cryptic spelling that is typical of some Internet users, especially hackers. This idiosyncratic form of writing is usually called "Leet", "Leetspeek" or "1337", and since the spelling variations giving rise to it do not follow a set convention, it can be characterised by more or less complex levels of adaptation with an impact on the difficulty in decoding the underlying message[1]. This range of different "flavours" is reflected by the options offered in the websites covered in this section.

A number of tests revealed that some of the translation options enabling users to convert input from standard English into sociolects, local dialects, non-standard accents or invented languages offered by some of these impersonation websites mimicking MT are exactly identical. In fact, some of the software powering these fun translation services is based on the same or very similar code, and as a result the output they provide for the same input may be identical or only display minor differences. Also, some of these parody MT websites are clearly related, as they show identical sets of instructions and information for the users. Although these similarities are significant in some cases, they are not pointed out and discussed in detail here for reasons of space.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the listing provided in Table 1 in the Appendix is somewhat simplified, as for example the

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[1] A version of Google's interface is available in this "language": http://www.google.com/intl/xx-hacker/.

translation websites offering Pig Latin as a target language should be mentioned in the specific section 2.2, whilst those with "target languages" relating to the speaking styles of celebrities or funny fictional characters (e.g. Elmer Fudd[2], Swedish Chef, Ali G, Jar-Jar Binks, Mr. T, Smurfs, Sylvester The Cat, etc.) should more precisely form part of section 2.3. However, for the sake of clarity and to avoid repetition these websites are kept with the rest of the spoof MT services covered in this section because the majority of the "target languages" offered as options by them relate to idiolects, stereotyped dialects, local accents or invented languages, therefore this feature took priority in grouping them and dividing them into the categories presented here.

2.2. The language pair English-Pig Latin

One particularly popular language pair among the "impersonation" websites involves English and Pig Latin. First of all, it should be noted that five of the nine spoof MT services covered in the previous section offer "Pig Latin" as one of the "target languages" in combination with standard English (see Table 1 in the Appendix), but this section focuses in particular on mock MT services that are designed to support exclusively this language pair. Pig Latin is an invented language used mostly by native speakers of English, which is particularly popular with young children as a form of playful communication and with adults when they want to disguise the messages they exchange[3].

Although Pig Latin is not a real natural language, its structure is heavily based on the vocabulary and morphology of standard English, which is manipulated according to a set of superficial rearrangement rules. Since Pig Latin has a fairly large community of users, it is perhaps not too surprising that it features so prominently in the languages supported by online services that offer fun translations. The following four URLs represent websites that enable users to translate texts from standard English into Pig Latin, and they all accept only passages of plain text as input:

http://www.girltech.com/pages/gameCafe/ pigLatin.cfm, http://daryld.com/pig-latin.php, http://www.onlineconversion.com/pig_latin.htm, http://www.snowcrest.net/donnelly/piglatin.html.

The following website maintained by Bell Labs Innovation deserves to be mentioned separately because it offers a much more sophisticated MT-like system, which incorporates a text-to-speech synthesis demo: http://www.bell-labs.com/project/tts/ piglatin.html. This service accepts a passage of plain text in standard English typed in or copied and pasted by the user as input, then renders the output in spoken Pig Latin. Through a very simple and straightforward interface the user can select three key parameters for the synthesised voice, namely gender/pitch (big man, woman or child), speed (fast, normal or slow) and the format of the audio file with the spoken output (.aiff, .wav or .au), as well as one of five different vowel sounds for the final syllable (i.e. -ay, -ee, -eye, -oh or -oo).

Since Pig Latin is not a properly formalised natural language but an invented one that is mainly used in playful communication events, it is based on a number of variable conventions that people can apply with a certain flexibility depending on their preferences and predispositions. One of the main features that can be changed by those who express themselves in Pig Latin is the suffix that is added to the end of words, which essentially correspond to the vocabulary of English. Although the most common and typical choice for this suffix is arguably "-ay", others are possible too, hence the option in this text-to-speech MT demo service to select a variety of vowel sounds for the last syllable in order to transform words of standard English into the vocabulary used for Pig Latin.

Finally, a service that supports the same language pair but in the opposite direction, attempting to translate passages of plain text supplied by the user from Pig Latin into standard English, is available at the following website: http://piglatin.bavetta.com. For a number of reasons that are germane to the structure of Pig Latin, some of which have been briefly summarised above, the "translation" process in this particular direction is not a straightforward one, in that a number of

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[2] A version of Google's interface is available in this "language": http://www.google.com/intl/xx-elmer/.
[3] A version of Google's interface is available in this "language": http://www.google.com/intl/xx-piglatin/.

variables that can be manipulated may have a negative impact on the smooth processing of the input. As an illustration of this point, the web-page where users should enter the input to be translated gives the following advice: "This page does not yet translate the dialect of pig latin with "-"s (ie, test should be written esttay not est-tay). English to PigLatin is not a one to one translation, so more than one word may have the same pig latin translation. For example, both witch and itch translate to itchway. This makes the inverse translation less than perfect, but it works surprisingly well".

2.3. Translations into the speaking style of celebrities or funny fictional characters

This section concludes the overview of "impersonation" websites by looking at the pseudo-MT services that manipulate input provided by users in written standard English turning it into the alleged speaking style of eccentric celebrities or funny fictional characters. For the purposes of illustration and in the interest of brevity, only four examples in this area are mentioned with their respective MT-like services: two are related to eccentric celebrities (i.e. Ali G and Snoop Dogg), and the other two to funny fictional characters (namely the Swedish Chef[4] and The Smurfs).

Two websites enable users to convert input from English into the bizarre speaking style of comedy character Ali G: http://www.mackers.com/alig (accepting only plain text) and http://www.webdez.net/alig (accepting only entire web-pages). The website http://www.asksnoop.com, on the other hand, turns the content of entire web-pages from English into the parlance of the famous American rapper Snoop Dogg.

As far as funny fictional characters are concerned, popular television series, children's programmes and cartoons have inspired a variety of spoof machine translation services on the Internet. The following are three examples of "impersonation" MT websites that aim to reproduce the peculiar pronunciation strongly influenced by a thick Swedish accent of the

Chef made famous by the Muppet Show: http://www.tuco.de/home/jschef.htm and http://www.almac.co.uk/chef/chef/ask_chef.html (both of them accept input only in plain text), and http://www.tiffman.com/bork.cgi (accepting both plain text and entire web-pages as input). The website hosted at http://websmurfer.devnull.net, on the other hand, modifies web-pages originally written in English by adding elements of the idiosyncratic language used by the blue characters of the popular cartoon series The Smurfs.

2.4. Key linguistic issues of impersonation websites

Some interesting similarities can be identified in the design and implementation of the MT-like services reviewed in section 2.1 (those offering translations into sociolects, local dialects, accents or invented languages) and 2.3 (those providing translations into the speaking style of celebrities or funny fictional characters), as far as the handling of common linguistic issues is concerned. As a matter of fact, all these impersonation websites are faced with the same challenge of rendering in writing the quirks and salient features of spoken language that is typical of local accents and of the way in which celebrities or fictional characters speak. In other words, these parody online MT services have to reproduce in writing non-standard oral pronunciation, and this is invariably achieved by manipulating and rearranging the spelling of standard written English in unconventional ways whose aim is to mirror the most peculiar phonemes and idiosyncratic inflections that are required to identify the speaker or community of speakers that is, in effect, being imitated.

As a result, there is an interesting crossover between the spoken and written modes of the language, whereby resources of a written text (e.g. the spelling) are manipulated and exploited to emphasise and enhance the idiosyncratic feel of a particular spoken variety, accent or dialect. In addition, this loose written phonetic rendition is accompanied by the frequent insertion into the output at random intervals of stock phrases, clichés, exclamations, interjections, etc. that occur in the spoken variation that the service is trying to reproduce and impersonate, making it appear more realistic and credible.

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[4] A version of Google's interface is available in this "language": http://www.google.com/intl/xx-bork/.

3. "Chinese whispers" websites

This section focuses on the "Chinese whispers" websites. These are designed to translate text from standard English into one or more target language(s), and then back again into English, with each stage of the process contributing to increase the distortion in both form and meaning between the final resulting output and the original source text. A major difference with the "impersonation" websites covered in the previous section is that the implementation of these "Chinese whispers" websites actually requires to incorporate as embedded components real and existing online machine translation services. These provide the underlying modules needed for the various steps in the whole circular process involving translations into a number of "transit" languages before eventually returning to English, i.e. the same language of the initial input.

In what follows two different kinds of "Chinese whispers" websites are considered: section 3.1 first discusses the notion of "round-trip translation" and then focuses on websites that use this technique to manipulate the input, whilst section 3.2 is devoted to "long-haul translation" websites, which represent a rather more ambitious and sophisticated implementation of a similar concept.

3.1. Round-trip translation (RTT) websites

The so-called "round-trip translation" (or RTT, also referred to as "back-and-forth translation") is a technique often used, especially in the popular press, to intuitively evaluate the quality of the output provided by machine translation software, without however relying on solid theoretical or empirical foundations. In a very interesting paper, (Somers, 2005) argues that RTT is not in fact as useful as some lay-users of MT on the web may think, and proves this by means of two separate experiments which show that the two steps involved in RTT, namely the "forward translation" (FT) and the "back translation" (BT), actually conceal from the users the reasons why the MT processing is successful or, conversely, fails.

Lay-users of MT, particularly those taking advantage of free online services, usually resort to RTT for two main purposes: (i) to compare which MT system gives the best translation for the same input, assuming quite naively that MT software that returns exactly the same passage in the original source language after the RTT process gives the ideal quality; and (ii) to assess the machine-translatability of a given text, again thinking that if the product of the BT turns out to be the same as the original input, then the result of the FT must be a successful translation into the target language. The experiments reported in (Somers, 2005) are based on a range of different texts and involve five different free online MT services (i.e. Babelfish, Freetranslation, Systran, ProMT and Worldlingo), proving that although non-experts in MT might see some value in it, the RTT technique is not helpful in these two scenarios.

Although (Somers, 2005) convincingly shows that round-trip translation is a flawed technique to estimate the quality of the output provided by MT software or to assess the machine-translatability of a text, it certainly is a simple and effective way to have fun with machine translation, as is testified in the information regarding the usage of Babelfish given in (Yang and Lange, 2003: 202). The website http://www.momorgan.com/translator provides a good example of this form of MT-based entertainment: it is designed to translate entire web-pages from English into one of six available languages chosen by the user (i.e. German, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese or Dutch), and then back again into English. The user is required to enter the URL of the web-page they want translated (the translation of plain text is not possible), and then they can view it at the end of the round-trip translation, i.e. re-translated back into English after going via the chosen "pivot" language. This website claims to use FreeTranslation (a well-known online MT service available free of charge at www.freetranslation.com) to power this round-trip translation process.

3.2. Long-haul translation (LHT) websites

A more challenging implementation of the concept behind the "Chinese whispers" websites is represented by the long-haul translation (or LHT) websites, where more than two languages

are involved in the multiple steps forming the circular translation process. Whilst LHT is as useless as RTT for any serious purpose, it stretches the limits of MT to the extreme, thus making serious mistranslations with potentially hilarious consequences more likely, at the risk of being totally nonsensical and therefore pointless. The two websites considered in this section provide LHT services, where users need to supply input written in English which is then translated into a number of target languages in sequence before being eventually translated back into English. This makes it possible for the user to enjoy the modifications that have occurred during the whole process.

The first website is called, perhaps aptly, "Poetry in Translation" and offers a 4-step translation process involving 3 languages before the output is returned to the user: http://douweosinga.com/projects/ poetryintranslation. This service is powered by Google's popular free online machine translation facility (available at http://www.google.com/language_tools) and involves the following sequence: the original input is translated from English into German, then from German into French, from French into German, and then finally from German back again into English.

The second website is called, again with some reason, "Lost in Translation", and is implemented using MT software provided by the leading free web-based translation tool Babelfish (available at http://babelfish.altavista.com). This "Chinese whispers" website can be accessed at http://www.tashian.com/multibabel and it involves 5 languages in combination with English, so that 10 consecutive stages are needed to complete a whole long-haul translation cycle: the passage originally provided by the user in English is always retranslated back into English after each step before moving on to a new language, in effect stringing together a series of recursive round-trip translation loops. So an input text written in English supplied by the user goes through the following series of sequential translations: French, English, German, English, Italian, English, Portuguese, English, Spanish, and finally English.

When the whole process has been completed, a web-page is generated showing to the user all the versions of the passage in question in each of the 10 steps, i.e. all the subsequent multilingual transformations involved along the way. An additional feature that is available on this website is the option to include extra languages in the long-haul translation, presumably to make the whole process even more challenging: if the users wish to do so, they can tick a box to include Chinese and Japanese at the beginning of the sequence of translation steps mentioned above, so that the number of translations involved rises to a whopping total of 14.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Parody of real online MT services

The new phenomenon of fun translation websites seems to be largely due to the popularity of genuine online machine translation services. Impersonation websites mimic the design of well-established MT tools by offering unlikely target languages that emphasise the features of idiosyncratic (mostly spoken) non-standard language varieties. This seems to be a form of entertainment that relies on the users' inclination to appreciate linguistic diversity and enjoy the possibility to use the Internet in order to reproduce online some of the typical features of language use that usually have strong associations with the speech of certain social groups or peculiar individuals. Chinese whispers websites put a different spin on machine translation, in that they exploit the widespread notion of round-trip and combined translations: pushing to the extreme the use of real MT tools, these services capitalise on their potential to provide hilarious mistranslations that have a proven amusement value.

All the fun translation services reviewed in this paper are accessible free of charge and without any form of registration on the part of the users, which suggests that they are not directly linked to online revenue-making activities. The designers and developers behind them show a great deal of creativity and cunning inspiration, introducing to the Internet forms of humour that jestingly question and undermine long-held assumptions about translation as a serious activity with exclusively utilitarian ends,

and in particular of MT technology as a provider of products serving practical purposes. Although the real-life applications of MT (on the Internet as well as in the off-line environment) will long continue to be vital to support communication needs, it looks like a purely entertainment-oriented mode of use is emerging online, which is catered for by inventive programmers and designers who do not have any direct relationship with the MT industry.

4.2. Issues of users' trust and impact on the reputation of real online MT systems

The novelty of such MT-related entertainment tools on the Internet makes it hard to assess their actual impact and to gauge the influence that they might have on users' perception of the reputation and usefulness of real online MT systems. The diversity of spoof MT services presented in this paper suggests that this is a dynamic area that is expanding thanks to the spontaneous efforts of a number of like-minded developers. Utilising MT or MT-like services as part of bizarre and amusing online applications designed for entertainment purposes raises issues as to the impact on real MT technology and on genuine web-based MT systems. Whilst for the time being fun translation websites are unlikely to pose a serious threat to the reputation of, and users' trust in, well-established online MT tools, it remains to be seen how they will affect the perception of machine translation technology among Internet users in the longer term.

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Appendix

URL of fun translation website	Number of "languages", web-pages and/or text	"Target languages" supported [information in square brackets is taken from the websites concerned to explain obscure names]
http://www.wordplays.com/ fcgi-bin/translate.pl	16, accepts only web-pages	Redneck, Chef, Cockney, Jive, Austro [Austrian (Ahhhhnold)], Brooklyn, Drawl, Dubya [George Dubya Bush], Fudd, Funetak [Thick Asian accent], Jethro [Jethro from The Beverly Hillbillies], Kraut [German accent], Pansy [Effeminate male], Pirate, Postmodern, Valspeak
http://www.elibs.com/e/ funkatize	16, accepts only plain text	Valley Girl, Jar-Jar Binks, Swedish Chef, Texas Drawl, Jive, German-ish, Elmer Fudd, Smurf, Cockney (London Slang), Lame HAcKer, Redneck, Pig Latin, International, B1FF, Mr. T, Secret Decoder Ring
http://www.degraeve.com/ translator.php	14, accepts both web-pages and plain text	None [use for debugging], Yoda, ROT13 [The simple Caesar-cypher encryption that replaces each English letter with the one 13 places forward or back along the alphabet], All your base are belong to us, Boston accent, Canadian, simple hax0r, Ebonics, Valley Girl, Binary [messy], Jeff K [if you don't understand, don't ask], Ultra Leet, Martian, Pig Latin, Smurf
http://www.thevoicesofmany .com	11, accepts both web-pages and plain text	Binary, Buccaneer (pirate), Elmer Fudd, L33T-SP34K, Morse Code, Pig Latin, ROT13, Scrambler, SMS Txt, Sylvester The Cat, Up a tree
http://www.whoohoo.co.uk	9, accepts only plain text	Ali G, Cockney Rhyming Slang, Irish, Scouse, Yorkshire Chicken Run, Brummie, Geordie, Scottie, Jolly Well Spoken
http://www.rinkworks.com/ dialect	8, accepts both web-pages and plain text	Redneck, Jive, Cockney, Elmer Fudd, Swedish Chef, Moron, Pig Latin, Hacker
http://www.psyclops.com/ translator	7, accepts only web-pages	Pimp, skinhead, hAck3r, Smurf, Ozzie, Cockney Rhyming Slang, Redneck
http://www.cs.utexas.edu/ users/jbc/home/chef.html	4, accepts only plain text	Swedish Chef, Jive, Valley Girl, Pig Latin, All of 'em! [enables the user to view the output in all the 4 target dialects simultaneously]
http://www.80s.com/ Entertainment/ValleyURL	1, accepts only web-pages	Valspeak

Table 1. Summary of "impersonation" websites translating into sociolects, local dialects, accents or invented languages (covered in section 2.1)