

Online free translation services

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Introduction

The paper will examine the concept of "online translation services". Many translation companies, portals and Internet sites offer online translation services. These are divided into the following two categories:

- 1. Online purchase of translation services**
- 2. Online free machine translation**

Online purchase of translation services means ordering a translation online by uploading documents, choosing the language pairs, specifying the deadline and paying by credit card. The translation is done by professional translators and is sent back to the buyer when ready.

Online machine translation is MT software integrated by the translation portal. It is most of the times free and real time. The buyer can either translate a document, a website or an email.

Although the first case facilitates business by speeding the translation process (easy, quick, online), the second is useful for text gisting, email translation, web page translation or search translation.

Information about online translation portals presented in this paper

This paper presents case studies of four major translation companies and portals offering free online machine translation. Portals and companies presented are:

www.babelfish.com
www.FreeTranslation.com
www.translations.com
www.worldlingo.com.

www.babelfish.com

The most famous online free machine translation portal used in Altavista research engine. It uses Systran's technology.

The babelfish corporation has been acquired by IO-TEK, a Canadian translation and localisation company in July 2002. At the tune of this writing, it is not known what technology the new company will use.

Languages

English to German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Korean, Chinese

German to English and French

French to English and German

Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese to English

FreeTranslation.com

FreeTranslation.com was launched by Transparent Language in June 1999.

The backbone of the website is the Enterprise Translation Server, which uses the TranscendRT machine-translation engine. In February 2001, SDL International acquired TranscendRT and all related products and web services from Transparent Language.

Languages

www.FreeTranslation.com supports the following bi-directional language pairs: English/French, English/German, English/Italian, English/Portuguese, and English/Spanish.

www.translations.com

A translation company, provider of enterprise translation solutions. It offers free online machine translation.

Languages

English to French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian and potentially, all language pairs in between these languages.

www.worldlingo.com

Except for traditional translation and localisation services since 1998, they offer online machine translation of websites and documents, real time email translation and browser translation service. They also offer instant and free machine translation of websites and texts. Microsoft offers worldlingo's translation services on its website.

They use a variety of technology supporting Windows and Linux depending on the requirements

Languages

English to German, French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Korean and Portuguese and potentially, all language pairs in between these languages

Case studies

Input text (source language text)

FreeTranslation.com is an easy-to-use site for rapid translations where you can get the "gist" of foreign language text and web pages.

Output text (target language text)

Babelfish.com

FreeTranslation.com est un emplacement facile à utiliser pour des traductions rapides où vous pouvez obtenir l'"gist" des pages des textes et d'enchaînement de langue étrangère.

FreeTranslation.com

Le FreeTranslation com est un site facile d'utilise pour les traductions rapides où vous pouvez recevoir le "gist" de pages de texte de langue et toile étranger.

Translations.com

FreeTranslation. COM est un emplacement facile utiliser pour des traductions rapides o vous pouvez obtenir l'"gist" des pages des textes et d'enchanement de langue trangre.

Worldlingo.com

FreeTranslation. COM est un emplacement facile à utiliser pour des traductions rapides où vous pouvez obtenir l'"gist" des pages des textes et d'enchaînement de langue étrangère.

Input text (source language text)

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Bush are meeting at Camp David this afternoon to discuss Iraq. Meanwhile, White House aides said Bush will use a speech to the U.N. next week to give Saddam Hussein an ultimatum: Allow weapons inspections, or face the consequences.

Output text (target language text)

Babelfish.com

Le premier ministre britannique Tony Blair et Président Bush se réunissent au camp David cet après-midi pour discuter l'Irak. En attendant, le buisson par aides Maison Blanche emploiera un discours à l'U.N. la semaine prochaine pour donner à Saddam Hussein un ultimatum: Permettez les inspections d'armes, ou faites face aux conséquences.

FreeTranslation.com

Le Buisson britannique de Blair de Tony de Premier Ministre et Président rencontre à David de Camp cet après-midi pour discuter Iraq. Pendant ce temps, les assistants de Maison blanche Buisson dit utilisera un discours à l'U.N. la semaine prochaine pour donner Hussein à Saddam un ultimatum: Permettre des inspections aux armes, ou accepte les conséquences.

Translations.com

Le premier ministre britannique Tony Blair et Prsident Bush se runissent au camp David cet aprs-midi pour discuter l'Irak. En attendant, le buisson par aides Maison Blanche emploiera un discours au U. N. la semaine prochaine pour donner Saddam Hussein un ultimatum: Permettez les inspections d'armes, ou faites face aux consquences.

Worldlingo.com

Le premier ministre britannique Tony Blair et Président Bush se réunissent au camp David cet après-midi pour discuter l'Irak. En attendant, le buisson par aides Maison Blanche emploiera un discours au U. N. la semaine prochaine pour donner à Saddam Hussein un ultimatum: Permettez les inspections d'armes, ou faites face aux conséquences.

Information about the input text (source language text)

Both texts chosen are taken from the Internet. As I had to be objective for the purpose of this paper, I did not create text for translation myself.

The first text I chose, was taken from FreeTranslation.com site (first line on the page). Although the phrase is simple in content, it contains various formatting, syntactic and grammatical aspects I wanted to test (.com, easy-to-use, "gist", web).

The second text is a short article from CNN's website, dated 7th of September. The article talks about the negotiations between Tony Blair and George Bush in regards with Saddam Hussein. This text is more complex and contains various syntactic, grammatical and lexical aspects for a machine translation engine testing (proper names, reported speech, imperative form).

The language of both source texts is English.

Both texts do not have any grammatical or spelling mistakes. Punctuation is correct and the sentences are clear.

Information about the output text (target language text)

I translated the source text into French, therefore, the target language of my choice is French. I translated both texts by inputting the English text into the box and choosing from the drop-down menu the language of my preference.

Results

This report is based on my experience of testing the free online machine translations services, therefore, it can be a representative but in no way scientific analysis.

Formatting

Although the formatting of the source texts is quite simple, "mistakes" in formatting appear in the translated text.

- Full stop disappears between FreeTranslation and com (the famous dotcom) [FreeTranslation.com]
- Spaces occur between FreeTranslation and com [Translations.com and Worldlingo.com]
- com appears in uppercase - COM [Translations.com and Worldlingo.com]
- an apostrophe appears after the article "l" and the "'". [Translations.com, Babelfish.com and Worldlingo.com].
- unjustified spaces after full stop [Babelfish.com and Worldlingo.com]
- accented vowels disappear completely [Translations.com]

In most cases, however, commas, full stops and semi colons are correctly entered in the translated text.

Semantics

Breaking down semantic units is a problem for all four online machine translations engines.

In particular units or phrases of "adjective+noun+noun" in English [foreign language text and web pages] present a permanent problem.

The unit "the gist of foreign language text and web pages" is translated in a completely different order by FreeTranslation.com where the adjective goes at the end of the sentence, the nouns are following each other and the preposition "de" is in between them. The output is the equivalent in French of **"text pages of language and web foreigner"**.

The other three, BabelFish, Translations.com and Worldlingo.com opt for the equivalent of: **text pages and web of foreign language.**

None of the four portals succeeds to identify 100% the meaning and structure of this unit.

Syntax

The output of all online machine translations services tested for the scope of this paper present inconsistencies with regard to syntax.

Units of "adjective+preposition+verb" [easy-to-use] present problems in French where in FreeTranslation.com the verb is not recognised as such and becomes a noun [utilise] and Translations.com does not put any preposition at all [facile utiliser]. However, Babelfish and Worldlingo both translate the unit correctly [facile à utiliser]

Things become more complicated in reported speech cases. The unit "White House aides said Bush will use...] is incorrectly translated in all four engines. The machine translation engine does not recognise the reported speech, therefore the French unit is incomprehensible. FreeTranslation.com gives the best results - not without "mistakes"- by following the source text:

[les assistants de Maison blanche Buisson dit utilisera un...]. A mistake occurs in the future tense verb that does not agree with the object [les assistants] but with [Buisson], so it is in singular form. The results are not reasonable in the other three portals where there is the phrase [le buisson par aides Maison Blanche emploiera].

Other "mistakes":

- the article [le] appears before FreeTranslation.com [FreeTranslation.com]
- The accented vowels are missing from all words in Translations.com text [prsidnt, aprs etc]
- l' apostrophe before a word starting from a consonant [l' "gist"]
- the noun gender is not always recognised for the correct use of articles [a l' U.N, au U.N]
- infinitive instead of imperative form [permettre des inspections]
- verb forms are not always correctly identified (singular/plural) [accepte, rencontre]

However, tenses are correctly translated (present and future).

Lexical

Proper names

Tony Blair, Bush, Saddam Hussein, White House, Iraq, Camp David are recognised as such by all online machine translation systems with the exception of FreeTranslation.com. In this case:

Camp David becomes David de Camp
Tony Blair becomes Blair de Tony
Saddam Hussein becomes Hussein a Saddam
Bush becomes Buisson (!)

White House is not entirely recognised as a proper name - "White" is in lower case [blanche]

However, when reported speech occurs, the proper name Bush becomes [buisson] in all four engines.

Dictionaries

By and large, dictionary entries are reliable. However, new terms as "web" and "gist" are not recognised by the systems. The word "gist" remains gist in the French text and "web" is translated as [enchaînement] with the exception of FreeTranslation.com that states the word [toile].

The term "site" is translated incorrectly as [emplacement] by three portals. FreeTranslation.com gives the correct term of [site].

U.N. is not translated in French [ONU] but remains in English.

Conclusion

All portals do not offer more than the say, which is the "gist" of phrases, texts and documents. FreeTranslation.com and Translations.com present the highest number of "problems". BabelFish.com together with WorldLingo.com are more reliable. As already known, in the case of simple constructed sentences with a subject, object, and a verb, machine translation portals produce acceptable in terminology and syntax results. However, in the case of more complex syntactical constructions, machine translation portals can become incomprehensible.

Notes

This research has been completed between the 6th - 22nd of September, 2002.

To receive information about the portals, I emailed them all. Only WorldLingo.com and FreeTranslation.com wrote back to me and gave me information stated in the beginning of this paper.

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