

PANEL: Machine Translation for Social Impact

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PANELISTS:

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THEME AND BACKGROUND:

The advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought in a sea change in those sections of the society where it has already penetrated. While access to computers & communication are major barriers in penetration of ICT at the grass-root level in underdeveloped nations and in economically weaker sections of the society in developing countries, 'language' constitutes an added major barrier where available ICT linguistic support is negligible or is inadequate.

As the information on the internet and other networks is predominantly in English, MT becomes a much needed tool for facilitating ICT penetration. However, this has also brought in a lot of change in society. Inadvertently, people are getting more and more exposed to English speaking people's culture. This has resulted in a sort of cultural invasion. Also, MT tools with the present state of art do not yield perfect translation. This has resulted in usage of languages that are not only ungrammatical but also a mixture where there cannot be any standardization. On the other hand, MT has provided language learning opportunities and opened up new avenues for employment and globalization. In a multi-lingual country, MT is likely to promote effective means of communication between government and different sections of the society leading to peace and prosperity. MT is also playing a role in promoting international understanding, tourism, trade, exchange of ethnic values etc.

The proposed panel aims to sensitize the MT community to some of these issues, to examine the potential for both positive and negative impacts of MT, and to discuss its adequacy in addressing some new applications. The following are representative questions to be addressed by the panel, but panelists are welcome to add their own questions or provide twists on the suggested ones.

* Is MT becoming a tool for creating better understanding among nations of the world or is it becoming a facilitator political, economic, and cultural invasion?

* Should MT in multi-lingual countries and economic communities be market driven and aimed at increasing trade relations, or should it be considered a necessity and promoted by the government and the United Nations for peace and prosperity?

* Is MT a necessity for social justice in a multi-ethnic society?

* Is MT becoming a tool for learning languages or is it becoming a tool for learning English more than other languages? Is MT providing better job opportunities for non-English speaking people or to English speaking people?

* Has MT contributed significantly to language mixing phenomenon (for example, the creation of a new language for e-mail and SMS) and is MT community ready to cater to these needs?