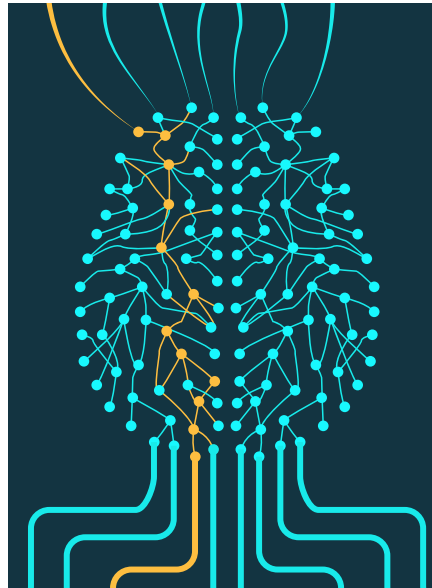


Our Extremely Diverse (Translation) World

I've known Kirti Vashee for many years, and you also likely know him from his *eMpTy Pages* blog,¹ where he writes about the translation world, especially machine translation (MT), and generously gives space to other experts to publish their views. His interest in MT is not a coincidence as he has worked for a number of MT providers, including the statistical MT pioneers Language Weaver and Asia Online (today: Omniscien) and, lately, SDL. Therefore, I was really surprised to hear Kirti say the following a few weeks ago during a panel he chaired on MT as part of the MultiLingual Summer Series: "We in the technology space make the mistake to see 'human translators' as a monolithic group. They are not—they have widely varying abilities."²

As in virtually any discussion on MT, that panel also discussed how MT will impact translators. Very often we hear a similar refrain from MT experts regarding this: "Translators are important and will continue to play a crucial role as post-editors of machine translation." But what Kirti said was clearly different. And then, almost as a continuation of that comment, he wrote a blog post entitled "The Premium Translation Market: Hiding In Plain Sight," where he thoughtfully explores the "premium market" versus the "bulk market" and "value-added market" and ponders the continuum that exists between them.³ I encourage you to read his post if you haven't already. As one might expect, it caused quite a social media stir. Since I was on vacation when it first posted, I read it after my return and have been thinking a lot about it.

There are some minor things that Kirti says (or where he quotes others) that I don't agree with—mostly concerning a too-strict definition of what a "premium translator" can or cannot do. But I really like other concepts, especially the



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continuum of the market, meaning that there are many variations between the polar ends of bulk and premium, and it might often be impossible to actually classify any given activity within that continuum.

As I thought some more about it, however, and tried to place myself and my work as a translator into the linearity of that continuum model, I realized that this paradigm doesn't necessarily work. Here's what I think. The translation world is much more varied than you or I or really anyone knows (and Kirti gives some really great illustrations of that). This also means that there is not necessarily a linear continuum. Instead, it's sort of three-dimensional. (I imagine there's a term for such a concept, but I'm not familiar with it.)

One of the reasons for this third dimension is the role of expertise in things other than "just" various levels of subject matter expertise and a comprehensive understanding of the industry in which you work. For example, this dimension might include skills in data management and the technical savvy to use that well-managed data for a given client.

Consider my favorite client, for example. Due to this client's workflow, translation work is charged by the word, which is often not the most ideal scenario. I charge about twice the rate quoted in Kirti's post for the "value-added market" (I've been the go-to German translator for this particular end-client for more than 15 years), but in reality I'm typically able to bill a multiple of that. Why? Because my translation memory management is better than my client's. (And my client is completely aware of this and has no issue with it.)

I know this is not a one-off case. With any client for whom I've worked for more than a year or two, the quality of my translation memory and the termbase I've maintained for that client and the ones that are provided by the client should be identical. But they always start to diverge, with mine being much more valuable and complete and—increasingly—profitable. I'm certain that any experienced translator in a similar situation will be able to verify that.

Now, according to the guidelines that Kirti's post suggests, I don't work for the "premium market." For instance, I don't meet with C-level executives of my client, I don't do this particular client/subject matter full time, and—probably most importantly—the kinds of materials I translate are not really those that, according to Kirti's post, fall under the rubric of "premium" materials. But

This column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals.

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Monterey, CA



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in the 3-D continuum model, I both provide a premium product and am being paid a premium price.

I'm not telling you this to highlight my own work or value as a translator. Instead, I would like to point out one thing (maybe one-and-a-half things). We operate in an extremely diverse (translation) world, and none of us has seen it in its entirety. I think this is fantastic and something to celebrate. This means that anyone who suggests that our world is going through inescapable technological or other changes might very well be speaking the truth from their particular perspective, but that perspective might be completely opposite to yours or mine. Clearly, we need to be aware of what's happening with the market, with technology, and especially with processes driven by artificial intelligence, and we need to understand them at least conceptually. And then we need to make educated decisions about how and whether to integrate them into our processes—or not.

The other “half” that I would like to conclude from all of this is that

translation memory management pays off! It always does. As an individual translator, you cannot leave it up to your long-standing clients to maintain the translation memory by themselves. They might very well do that, but you'll be better at it, and you'll benefit greatly. ◉

NOTES

1. You can find the *eMpTy Pages* blog at <http://kv-emptypages.blogspot.com>.
2. Multilingual Summer Series Live: “Let's Talk about Machine Translation,” <https://bit.ly/Multilingual-Vashee>.
3. Vashee, Kirti. “The Premium Translation Market: Hiding In Plain Sight,” *eMpTy Pages* (August 20, 2020), <http://bit.ly/Vashee-premium-market>.



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