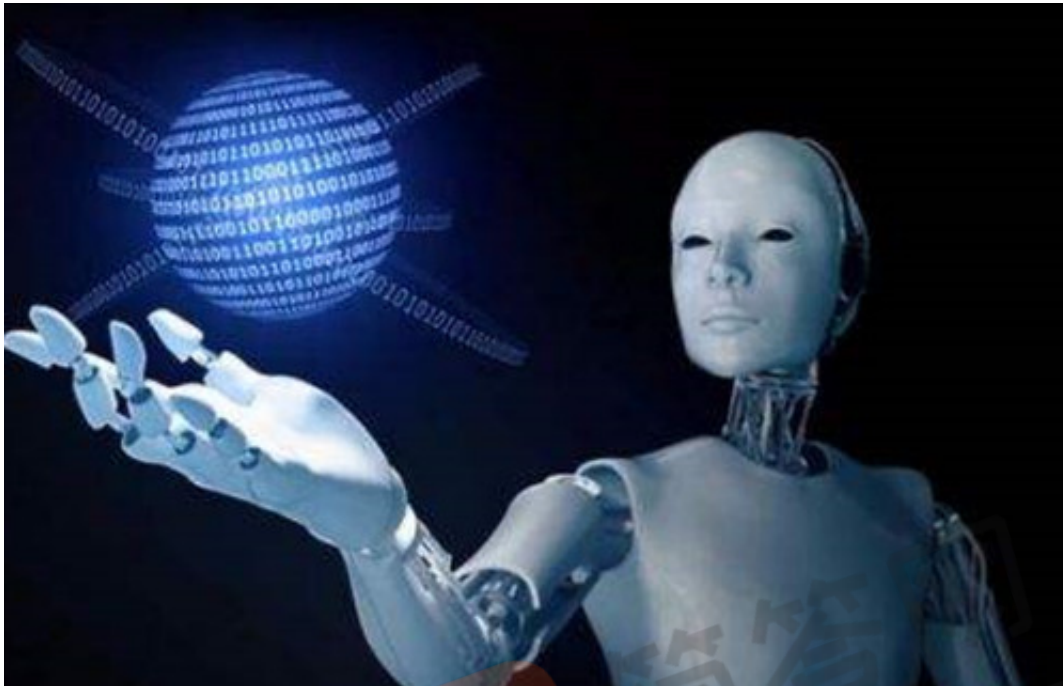


《Can AI replace English education?人工智能能取代英语教育吗?》



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Considerable advances have been made in machine translation that utilizes artificial intelligence, to the point that it now provides the average English skill level of a university graduate.

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How much might machines be able to achieve in the future? For what purpose, and to what extent, should the Japanese develop their English skills?

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We asked an American translator who teaches English at a university and the president of a machine translation company about these issues.

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Tom Gally / Professor at the University of Tokyo

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Until now, machine translation has been used in place of a dictionary when reading and writing English, but it hasn't been usable to comprehend or compose larger texts.

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Machine translation using AI made its first appearance in autumn last year, and from my point of view as a translator, it's not uncommon for English compositions produced by such machine translation to be better than those produced by unaided Japanese students.

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However, it also has weak points. It can't check for mistranslations, mistakes or languages it doesn't understand.

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The accuracy of AI translation is high for relatively formal texts, but it can't be used for things like more casual texts, conversational text within novels, and song lyrics. Further, it does not translate with a firm grasp of the meaning of the text that it is translating.

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For example, translations such as "I was born in 2001, and my younger sister was born in 2000" can occur.

????"????2001????????2000?"????????

As can be seen from mistranslation examples such as this, the ability to discriminate correctly when translating such things as words with multiple meanings in context is not fully developed yet. However, as machine translation continues to improve, I think it is just a matter of time before such problems are solved.

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Why do we currently teach English to all Japanese children? I think there are two answers to that.

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The first reason is to build character: English for general education.

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By gaining an understanding of overseas politics, economics, society and culture, and drawing comparisons with Japan, they can come to understand Japan better. Similarly, they can understand the Japanese language more deeply by comparing it with English.

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Using a language requires gaining an understanding of something, and the act of practicing English itself plays a role in intellectual training. These reasons apply not only to English, but could equally apply to other languages such as Chinese, Korean, Spanish or Arabic.

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The second reason is that English is useful. It has practical uses, and allows global communication.

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There are a wide variety of business uses for English, and it can also be used to communicate with foreigners visiting Japan. It further allows people to gather information from overseas reports. Ever since the Meiji period the original and main aim of Japanese people learning English has been to learn about overseas technologies.

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Another reason is to enable them to communicate with foreigners about themselves or Japan. Yet another reason is for entrance exams, and for English proficiency and TOEIC exams and qualifications.

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