



**donkey work????????????**

CATs are even used as part of modern language degree courses these days. So how good are they?

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One of the most popular new tools is the so-called translation earpiece. Usually paired with a smartphone app, they pick up spoken foreign languages and translate them for the user.

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"It has taken decades of research to create a framework of algorithms designed to recognise patterns in the same way as the human brain - a neural network," says Andrew Ochoa, chief executive of US start-up Waverly Labs, which produces translation earpieces.

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"Combining that with speech recognition technology has allowed us to make a huge leap forward in terms of accuracy."

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There's no doubt that CAT tools have taken some of the hard grind out of text translations like instruction manuals or questionnaires, says Milan-based Paola Grassi, a professional translator for Wordbank, a global marketing and translation agency.

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"Survey contents are among the most repetitive ones and a good CAT tool can hugely speed up the process," she says.

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For meetings and conferences, wearable translators like Waverly's are undoubtedly popular. But even this new generation tech, which combines speech recognition neural networks and internet-based translation engines, has limitations.

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Users must wait at least a few seconds for a phrase to be translated, or more if the internet connection is poor.

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And computers still lack the subtlety of human communication.

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"Translation technology is undoubtedly a useful tool for certain content such as manuals," says Zoey Cooper, brand and content director at Wordbank.

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"But if you want to create a relationship with the reader, you need a human translator to make it sound natural and capture the sentiment, which often involves restructuring a sentence completely."

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"I believe CAT tools hinder creativity," says Antonio Navarro Gosálvez, an English-to-Spanish translator based in Alicante, Spain.

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"If the tool shows you a partial translation match, I find it's actually harder to discard part of the sentence and rebuild it than to just create something from scratch."

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**from scratch??????**

Mr Ochoa thinks this problem could be resolved within the next 10 years.

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"When it comes to expressing emotion and intonation, we need sentiment analysis, which is not there yet but may well be in ten years time," he says.

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Foreign language skills are still in demand in the labour market.

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In the UK about 15% of the jobs posted on recruitment website Reed ask for a foreign language.

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New research from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages shows 75% of manufacturing companies need employees with diverse language skills.

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Yet languages have fallen out of favour in UK schools.

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Recent BBC analysis revealed drops of up to 50% in foreign language learning in secondary schools since 2013.

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The UK's Department for Education is taking measures to halt the decline.

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"We are committed to ensuring more pupils are studying languages, which is why it is now compulsory in the national curriculum for all children between Years 3 and 9," it said.

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For Ms Cooper at least, speaking a foreign tongue remains a precious skill.

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"There are still lots of opportunities for language graduates, both in specialist translation and global marketing," she said.

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And even if you don't use your language professionally, it has other benefits.

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"How can you get to know a country and embrace the culture if you don't speak the language?" says Ms Cooper.

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"Even with the voice-activated apps available, you will still miss out."

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