How to teach machine translation post-editing? Experiences from a post-editing course

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Why should PEMT skills be taught?

- The increasing use of MT and PE workflows leads to a growing need for translators with relevant MT and PE skills.
- Familiarity with translation technology plays an important role in the future employability of translation students.
- PEMT differs from translation in terms of practical and cognitive processes; it likely requires different skills and training.
- Translator training should take these aspects into account.



What PE skills are needed?

- General skills
 - language skills (source and target), text linguistic skills
 - subject area knowledge
 - cultural and intercultural competence
 - documentation and research skills
- Technical skills
 - positive attitude toward technology
 - software skills, ability to learn new tools quickly
 - ability to evaluate tools
 - principles of MT technology
- Specific editing skills
 - typical MT features and errors
 - suprasentential errors
- Strategic skills
 - ability to evaluate data sources
 - ability to follow and adapt to client specifications
 - ability to edit efficiently

(O'Brien 2002; Rico and Torrejón 2012; Austermuehl 2013; Pym 2013)



MT and PEMT in the Finnish context

- The use of MT and PE has not been particularly widespread so far.
 - MT quality: Finnish is known to be difficult for MT systems due to rich morphology.
 - ► MT availability: The small market area means there has been relatively little interest in developing MT systems for Finnish.
- A survey of 238 Finnish translators (Mikhailov 2015) found that they did not consider MT-related skills important.
- Most respondents were only familiar with free online systems; 3 reported using systems other than Google Translate (Mikhailov 2015).
- MT development is being carried out by LSPs and PEMT workflows are used by some translators/LSPs (mainly English to Finnish).

Teaching PE at the University of Helsinki

- A Translation Studies module (intermediate level) focusing on PEMT.
- The goal of the course was to familiarize the students with the theoretical and practical aspects of PEMT.
- The course is offered to students of different language and translation programs (Bachelor/Master level).
- ullet Lectures (7 weeks) + 5 hands-on assignments, final reflective essay.
- 15 students took part in the course, 13 handed in the final essay.
- All students except one were native speakers of Finnish, various L2 backgrounds.



Course description – topics

- Theory and history of MT and PE
- Practical use of MT and PE
- Controlled language and pre-editing for MT
- Post-editing without source text
- Post-editing process research
- Post-editing quality levels and guidelines
- MT quality evaluation and PE effort
- PE competences



Course description – assignments

- Comparison of 2 MT versions (RBMT and SMT) and post-editing
- Pre-editing
 - Followed by customizing the RBMT system dictionary
- Post-editing without source text
- Post-editing to different quality levels
 - Followed by examining own PE time data and edit distance metrics
- MT quality evaluation (fluency/adequacy)

MT systems and other tools used

- Sunda (RBMT, en-fi-en) http://www.sunda.fi/kaantaja.html
- Google Translate http://translate.google.com
- MT@EC
- Appraise https://github.com/cfedermann/Appraise
- Asiya Online http://asiya.lsi.upc.edu/demo/asiya_online.php

Students' reflective essays

- At the end of the course, the students were asked to write a reflective essay (1000–1500 words) reflecting on their own experiences and observations against the theoretical background covered.
- They were also asked to comment on the course content, practical organization and potential improvements.

Questions for the essay

- How did your understanding of the use of MT post-editing and related phenomena develop during the course?
- What benefits and opportunities do you see in the use of MT and PE from the perspective of a translator, an organization requiring translation services, an individual MT user? What about problems or limitations?
- Mow has the field developed and how do you believe it will develop in the future?

Themes identified in the reflective essays

- Expectations and attitudes toward MT
 - Expectations of MT quality were low; only one had a positive attitude toward MT before the course.
- MT quality and trust
 - The students were positively surprised by the MT quality but found it hard to trust the MT.
- PE process and time
 - ▶ Most found it hard to get used to working with a raw translation.
 - ▶ PE speed and the students' views on their own speed varied.
- Adjusting to PE requirements
 - Most found it difficult to adjust to the idea of "good enough" quality.
- Future visions
 - All believed MT and PE will play a large part in future translation work
 MT as a tool rather than threat.
- PE training
 - MT and PE related training for translator students was seen as useful, even essential.

Conclusion and on-going work

- The students gained a basic understanding of MT principles and the use of PE workflows in the translation industry.
- The students' essays show a positive attitude toward MT, but also critical evaluation of the suitability of MT tools and PE workflows to specific situations.
- The students gained more awareness of their own work processes and showed ability to evaluate their own work.
- Technical issues and lack of suitable MT texts for the various language pairs posed some challenges during the course.
- The same course is taught again in fall 2015, with some modifications:
 - ▶ A TM system used for most assignments (Memsource).
 - ▶ A wider selection of language pairs for the assignments.
 - ▶ The order of the course topics and assignments has been changed

Thanks

Thank you for your attention! Questions and comments? maarit.koponen@helsinki.fi

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