

Navigating Ideology and Policy: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Translation Practices

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Abstract: This paper investigates the complex dynamics between language policy, ideological influences, and the use of machine translation (MT) tools in the translation of multilingual documents within the European Union (EU). A corpus-based analysis was employed to examine how language policies and ideological preferences shape translation practices, particularly focusing on governmental and marketing materials. The study reveals significant tendencies towards lexical standardization and syntactic homogenization, driven by the efficiency-oriented ideologies embedded within language policies. Furthermore, it highlights the ethical and practical challenges posed by MT, including cultural flattening and the potential undermining of local nuances crucial for effective communication. The interplay between compliance and resistance by human translators under restrictive language policies is also explored, showing how translators navigate between policy constraints and their own professional judgments. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on the impact of technological advances on translation practices, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that respects linguistic diversity while leveraging technological efficiencies.

Keywords: Language Policy, Machine Translation, Ideology, Corpus Analysis, Translation Practices

1. Introduction

The integration of machine translation (MT) tools into the translation processes of multilingual documents, particularly within institutional frameworks such as the European Union (EU), presents a unique intersection of technology, language policy, and ideology. This study aims to dissect the nuances of this intersection, exploring how the imperatives of language policies and the undercurrents of ideological influence manifest in translation outcomes. With the advent of advanced MT technologies, there is an increasing reliance on automated systems to handle the vast linguistic diversity within the EU, raising questions about the impact on linguistic accuracy, cultural integrity, and the preservation of local idiosyncrasies. This paper employs a corpus-based methodology to analyze translated governmental and marketing materials, providing empirical insights into the standardization effects induced by MT tools and the consequent cultural implications. Additionally, it examines the role of human translators as agents of both compliance and resistance within this framework, navigating through the layers of policy and ideology that influence their work. By doing so, the research addresses broader concerns about the ethical responsibilities of translators in the age of digital automation and the strategic importance of maintaining linguistic diversity in the face of

global communication demands [1]. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed discussion on the implications of these factors for translation theory and practice, aiming to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between technology, language, and ideology in contemporary translation environments.

2. Influence of Language Policy

2.1. Selection of Source Texts

The corpus selected for this study encompasses a diverse range of governmental documents, including legal decrees, policy statements, and public communications that have been translated due to legislative or administrative requirements. The influence of language policy on the selection of these source texts is evident in the prioritization of documents that reinforce or disseminate certain political agendas or national narratives. For instance, language policies aimed at promoting national unity might prioritize the translation of texts related to national heritage or significant national events, ensuring wide accessibility across linguistic boundaries within the country. This selection process acts as a pre-translation filter that aligns the available texts with prevailing political ideologies, thereby shaping the scope and nature of the translation task [2]. Such filtering ensures that the translations produced not only convey specific information but also propagate a curated image of the state or its policies. This selective translation process introduces an initial layer of ideological influence, where some narratives are amplified while others are marginalized or completely excluded from the translation agenda, impacting the public discourse accessible in multiple languages.

2.2. Translation Guidelines

Translation guidelines serve as a crucial tool for implementing language policy in the translation of official documents. These guidelines are typically formulated by authoritative bodies overseeing translation practices within governmental or institutional contexts and reflect the ideological and policy-driven imperatives of these entities. For example, guidelines may stipulate the use of specific terminologies or phrases that align with the official stance on controversial issues such as immigration, national security, or cultural integration [3]. By dictating the use of certain lexical choices or syntactic structures, these guidelines ensure that the translated texts not only meet legal and administrative requirements but also adhere to the ideological preferences of the policy makers. The influence of these guidelines extends beyond mere word choice; they shape the portrayal of events, policies, and cultural identities in translated texts, thereby embedding a layer of ideology that guides the reader's understanding and interpretation of the text. The adherence to these guidelines ensures that the translation is not just a linguistic conversion but also an act of ideological conformity, reinforcing specific narratives and viewpoints through the strategic presentation of information [4].

2.3. Compliance and Resistance in Translation

The interaction between compliance and resistance in translation under restrictive language policies presents a dynamic field of study. Translators, while expected to adhere to the official guidelines and language policies, occasionally engage in subtle acts of resistance or negotiation, thereby asserting their autonomy. This is evident in cases where translators choose to employ strategies such as over-specification, under-translation, or strategic ambiguity to either highlight or obscure certain ideological elements of the source text. For example, a translator might choose to explicitly translate culturally specific terms in a way that emphasizes their unique cultural or political significance, rather than adhering to a policy-mandated neutral equivalent that might dilute their meaning [5]. Alternatively, translators might resist by employing passive constructions or vague language to soften

the impact of authoritative statements or controversial policies, thereby mitigating the ideological charge of the original text. Such acts of resistance are not overtly confrontational but are woven subtly into the fabric of the translation, allowing translators to navigate the constraints imposed by language policies while still imprinting their interpretations or critiques of the source content. This nuanced interplay between compliance and resistance highlights the complex role of translators as agents who not only convey but also interpret and shape the reception of translated texts in light of overarching language policies and ideological frameworks [6].

3. Role of Ideology

3.1. Ideological Manipulation in Translation

The manipulation of translations to support dominant ideological positions is a prevalent issue in the translation of political and media texts. This form of ideological influence often involves the alteration of semantic content to better serve the interests of a particular political party or governmental stance. For example, in the translation of a political speech, phrases that might seem controversial or divisive in the source language could be moderated or omitted entirely in the target language version to foster a more unifying or benign image of the speaker or the policy being discussed [7]. Additionally, translations can be skewed by the deliberate emphasis or de-emphasis of certain topics, such as economic policies or human rights issues, depending on the ideological stance of the translators or those who commission the translations. Such strategies ensure that the narrative delivered to the target language audience supports a specific ideological framework, thus not only translating but also transforming the original message to fit local political landscapes. This manipulation can be particularly influential in shaping public opinion or international perceptions, where the subtle nuances of translation choices can significantly alter the understanding and reception of key political messages or events [8].

3.2. Ideological Resistance and Subversion

In the realm of translation, ideological resistance and subversion manifest as deliberate departures from source texts, where translators inject personal or alternative ideological viewpoints into their translations. This resistance is often carried out through strategic linguistic choices, such as the use of connotations, register, and cultural references that diverge from those in the original text. An example of this can be seen in the translation of literary works where the translator might choose to highlight themes of oppression or resistance that resonate more profoundly with the target culture's historical or social context, even if those themes are more subdued in the original text. Translators might also employ irony or satire to subtly challenge or critique the source text's ideology, thereby providing the target audience with a nuanced interpretation that may question or undermine the original message [9]. These acts of resistance are typically subtle and nuanced, requiring a deep understanding of both the source and target cultures, as well as a boldness to deviate from the expected path of fidelity to the source text. Such translations act as a form of cultural mediation, where the translator's own ideological stance becomes a crucial factor in the intercultural transfer of ideas.

3.3. The Impact of Ideology on Linguistic Accuracy

The linguistic and semantic accuracy of translation is significantly affected by ideological pressure, which creates tension between fidelity to the original text and adherence to ideological expectations. This conflict often manifests itself in the choice of words or phrases that carry a particular meaning or cultural burden. For example, the translation of key political terms such as "freedom," "justice," or "democracy" can vary greatly depending on the ideological leanings of the translator or the policies

of the translation agency. This variation can cause the translation result to either amplify or suppress certain aspects of the source text, which can lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the original information. In addition, the pressure to conform to a particular ideological framework can lead translators to introduce biases, whether exaggerating or downplaying particular points, which damages the fidelity of the translation. These changes could have a profound impact in sensitive contexts, especially in diplomatic communications, international news reporting, or legal document translation, where accuracy and neutrality are highly required. The influence of ideology on translation thus poses an ethical challenge, and translators must find a delicate balance between accurate linguistic expression and ideological compliance [10]. Further, the influence of ideology may also change the way the recipient of a text perceives the information, which may lead to the intensification of cultural misunderstanding or conflict. When dealing with expressions with strong cultural overtones, translators need to be particularly careful to prevent the original meaning from being distorted or distorted. For example, when translating content dealing with gender or race issues, ideological differences in different cultural contexts are particularly pronounced, which requires the translator not only to be proficient in the language, but also to have a deep understanding and sensitive insight into the relevant cultural and social context. In addition, the application of modern technologies, such as machine translation and artificial intelligence, also faces challenges in dealing with language accuracy and semantic fidelity. While these technologies improve the efficiency of translation, they may not fully account for cultural and ideological complexities without proper human supervision and adjustment. Therefore, high-quality translation requires not only the precise use of language, but also a deep understanding of the cultural and political context behind the text.

4. Impact of Technological Advances on Translation Practices

4.1. Integration of Machine Translation Tools

The incorporation of machine translation (MT) tools in the European Union's (EU) translation process epitomizes the double-edged sword of technological advancement in linguistics. While MT substantially enhances the efficiency and scope of text processing, enabling the EU to address its extensive multilingual translation demands, it introduces significant challenges that reflect broader ideological and policy-related implications. These challenges primarily arise from the inherent limitations of MT algorithms, which tend to prioritize computational efficiency over linguistic subtlety.

In-depth corpus analysis of EU documents translated through MT reveals a pronounced trend towards lexical standardization. This phenomenon occurs as MT systems often rely on the most commonly used equivalents in target languages, disregarding less frequent, though contextually more appropriate, terms [11]. Such standardization can inadvertently lead to the erosion of localized expressions and terminologies that are crucial for the cultural and regional authenticity of the translation. For instance, legal documents pertaining to regional laws or local customs may lose their nuanced meaning when translated terms are overly generalized. Moreover, MT systems are designed to optimize grammatical accuracy but often at the expense of syntactic diversity. The corpus data indicate a noticeable preference for certain syntactic structures, such as simpler, more direct sentence constructions. This tendency aligns with dominant language patterns, thus potentially marginalizing minority languages or dialects that employ more complex or less conventional syntactic forms [12]. This syntactic homogenization not only affects the readability and relatability of the translated texts for speakers of regional languages but also reflects an implicit ideological bias towards more globally dominant linguistic structures. The technological drive for uniformity, encapsulated in the EU's reliance on MT, also raises significant questions about the balance between communication efficiency and linguistic diversity. While the speed and cost-effectiveness of MT are advantageous for managing

the EU's vast translation needs, they come at the potential cost of diminishing the linguistic richness and diversity of Europe's cultural heritage. Such standardization, driven by the ideology of efficiency, may streamline operations but does not adequately account for the dynamic and diverse linguistic landscapes of the EU.

4.2. Standardization vs. Localization

The dichotomy between standardization and localization in translation, intensified by the rise of machine translation (MT) tools such as Google Translate, presents significant challenges and opportunities in the field of global communication. These tools have indeed democratized language access, allowing individuals and small enterprises to project their messages across linguistic barriers with minimal cost and effort. However, the trade-off often manifests in the form of linguistic and cultural standardization that may not serve the localized needs of diverse global markets.

A detailed corpus analysis of marketing materials translated using MT tools demonstrates a systematic displacement of local cultural elements in favor of a more homogenized global norm. This phenomenon, often described as the 'flattening' effect, involves the substitution of local idioms, currency units, and culturally specific references with more universally recognized or 'neutral' equivalents. For example, in promotional materials, references to a local festival might be translated into a generic "annual celebration," losing the unique cultural significance that could resonate more deeply with local consumers. This flattening effect extends beyond simple lexical substitutions to more structural aspects of language. MT algorithms, designed primarily for general use, tend to favor direct, straightforward sentence constructions. This preference can undermine the rhetorical styles typical to certain cultures which may use more indirect or embellished expressions, particularly effective in marketing contexts. The corpus analysis reveals that MT-translated texts often lack the persuasive and emotive quality inherent in the original language, which is crucial for effective marketing. Furthermore, quantitative data from the corpus study illustrate the prevalence of metric standardization, where local units of measurement are automatically converted to more widely used international systems, such as replacing miles with kilometers or local currency with US dollars or euros. While this might aid comprehension for a global audience, it can alienate local users and reduce the perceived relevance of the product or service to its intended market. Such changes, although minor in isolation, collectively contribute to a dilution of the local flavor that might be a key selling point for certain products or markets. These findings suggest a need for a more nuanced approach to MT in marketing translations. Advanced NLP techniques could be employed to develop more sophisticated MT systems capable of identifying and preserving cultural elements that enhance the local appeal of translated texts. These systems would benefit from integrating adaptive algorithms capable of learning from user feedback to better accommodate cultural nuances. Additionally, there is a crucial role for human translators in the loop, particularly in quality assurance stages, to ensure that translations maintain the cultural and emotional impact required for effective market penetration.

4.3. Ethical Considerations and Translator Agency

The rise of MT has not only technological but also ethical implications for the field of translation. As MT becomes more prevalent, the role of human translators appears to be diminishing, at least in the eyes of the broader market, leading to concerns about job security and the undervaluation of human expertise. Furthermore, MT's algorithms, while powerful, do not possess the ability to make ethical judgments or understand cultural sensitivities. For instance, in translating medical documents, MT might accurately translate terms and conditions, but it could fail to convey the emotional and ethical nuances crucial in informed consent documents. These documents require a deep understanding of cultural attitudes toward health care, privacy, and authority, which MT cannot fully grasp. A corpus

analysis of informed consent forms translated via MT shows a lack of personalized engagement and an overly formal tone, which could be misinterpreted or seen as insincere by patients from different cultural backgrounds. This raises significant ethical concerns about the fidelity and integrity of critical health communications. The role of the human translator, therefore, is not just as a language converter but as a cultural and ethical mediator, ensuring that translations are not only linguistically accurate but also culturally appropriate and ethically sound. This redefined role emphasizes the importance of human oversight in translation, advocating for a model where technology aids rather than replaces the human element, ensuring both efficiency and ethical responsibility are maintained.

5. Conclusion

The findings from this study underscore the profound influence of language policies and ideological shifts on translation practices within the EU, mediated through the use of machine translation tools. The drive towards efficiency and uniformity, while beneficial for administrative coherence and cost management, often comes at the expense of linguistic richness and cultural relevance. This research highlights the critical need for balancing technological advancements in translation with the preservation of linguistic diversity and cultural integrity. It advocates for enhanced MT systems that are capable of accommodating regional nuances and for policies that recognize the value of these nuances in effective communication. Additionally, the role of human translators emerges as indispensable, particularly in their capacity to mediate between policy dictates and ethical considerations, ensuring that translations do not merely convey information but also respect and reflect the cultural contexts of the target audience. Going forward, the translation community must navigate these challenges by fostering a dialogue between technology developers, policy makers, and translation professionals to ensure that the benefits of technological advancements are realized without compromising the fundamental values of diverse linguistic and cultural expression.

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