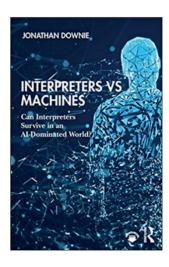Jonathan Downie, **Interpreters Vs Machines: Can Interpreters Survive in an AI-Dominated World?**
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With the rapid technological advances in recent years and massive resources devoted to machine interpreting by technology giants such as Google, the interpreting profession is facing like never before a challenge that threatens its very existence. This has raised widespread concern regarding the profession's status and interpreters' jobs in the future. In *Interpreters Vs Machines: Can Interpreters Survive in an AI-Dominated World?*, author Jonathan Downie responds to these concerns by systematically examining several possibilities for the future of interpreting, and discussing strategies that may secure human dominance in the future of interpreting, in view of seemingly powerful machine interpreting that has recently gained momentum.

The book is organized into five levels, with each one building on the last, just like a computer game, divided into 14 chapters altogether. Level 1 comprises the first three chapters that introduce basic concepts and understandings of interpreting and how humans and computers do interpreting, respectively. Chapter 1 starts the discussion by trying to sketch what interpreting is. Two basic models of interpreting are presented: the traditional conduit model in which "the interpreter had little more intrinsic value than a pipe or an electric cable" (p. 6) and the new triadic model in which the interpreter is "as much a part of the event as the speaker and audience" (p. 12). Both the flaws and benefits of the two models are considered against their effects on how interpreting would be perceived by the public. On this basis, chapter 2 explores the question of how humans interpret. By reviewing experimental research on interpreter cognition and observational research on interpreter's behavior in real-life events, the author suggests that interpreting needs to be understood as both a sophisticated cognitive process and a social practice occurring within a particular context. The author also gives special emphasis to the point that interpreting is a human process. Chapter 3 moves on to examine machine interpreting by describing it as a basically three-stage process: decoding spoken language into text by a voice recognition engine that is to be processed by a Machine Translation (MT) engine, before the translated text is sent to a speech synthesizer. In particular, MT, compared as being the brains of machine interpreting, is detailed here by introducing the three approaches to MT (i.e., the oldest Rules-Based MT, the statistical MT, and the latest Neural Machine Translation), with their strengths and weaknesses discussed. The author argues that the greatest challenge facing machine interpreting "is not understanding language itself but connecting it to context" (p. 49).

Level 2, covering the next two chapters, examines how people have come to believe that computers are on the verge of pushing human interpreters out of their jobs. Chapter 4 reviews how interpreters have done interpreting public relations (PR) and presented their work to the world. The author argues that, while the conduit-model of interpreting and the predominant view of interpreter invisibility have won interpreting

trust and reputation, they have also led to the popular belief that machines are taking over humans in interpreting. In comparison, chapter 5 offers an account of the marketing and PR in the speech translation industry that promote various machine interpreting devices and apps. Based on an analysis of real advertising materials, the chapter plots the main claims and benefits promoted by speech translation companies, which, according to the author, are "misleading but superficially convincing" (p. 68).

The author suggests that, facing the powerful yet hardly believable messages advertised by speech translation makers, limited and faulty interpreting PR has given rise to much fear about the future of interpreting. Therefore, Level 3 of the book explores what interpreting may look like in the future, the possibilities of which are respectively presented from chapters 6 to 9. Chapter 6 predicts a future where human interpreting is just a stopgap before fully computerized interpreting could take over. Yet, the author argues that something will be missing even in perfectly accurate speech translation because machines will only be able to pass information but not emotions. Chapter 7 imagines a world where human interpreters could resort to legal protection of their profession, which, however, as the author contends, may result in interpreters losing control of their work and rates. Chapter 8 probes into another possibility where human interpreters could secure their jobs by finding niches where machines can't work at all. Yet, this may become "increasingly frustrating" (p. 87). Chapter 9 presents the most encouraging future for interpreters, where human interpreting can be the gold standard by "taking interpreting seriously." That is, interpreters should become experts to apply their knowledge to help clients get the best results instead of merely providing interpreting services.

Level 4 moves on to discuss strategies that would ensure interpreting a promising future with human interpreting being the gold standard. Chapter 10 concentrates on interpreting PR (i.e., how to convince the public and potential clients of the value of interpreting and to raise the reputation of the interpreting profession). Specifically, the author draws on lessons and experiences learned from events industry PR to illustrate how interpreting PR can be improved. He argues that PR is essentially "reputation management," which requires associations and interpreters to work together to better represent the profession. If PR is directed to the public in general, marketing goes a step further in showing one specific audience how interpreting can make a difference to them, which is the topic of chapter 11. Taking his own experience as an example, the author illustrates the necessity of marketing for interpreting and how effective marketing may help interpreters win more clients. The marketing approaches mentioned include attending events and finding out clients' needs, networking, and figuring out how clients want to be contacted, among other strategies. Apart from PR and marketing, chapter 12 further argues that interpreters need to "deliver more than words" if they want to survive in the age of speech translation. This means that human interpreters have to do jobs that machines can't do, such as becoming consultant interpreters, giving not only accuracy but emotion, clarity, and beauty in interpreting, as well as client care. Since excellent interpreting involves more than language skills, the author suggests that interpreters need to keep developing their techniques and increasing their knowledge. Thus, chapter 13 calls for all interpreters to take supervision and coaching to build resilience and to keep their skills sharp.

Level 5, or chapter 14, concludes the whole book by summarizing that human interpreting shall prevail over machines if the above-mentioned measures are followed. Moreover, the author also proposes

that, instead of being viewed as an enemy, technologies should be used to humans' advantage and to help them deliver better quality.

This book is of value to researchers and practitioners engaged in interpreting, translation, public relations, and the AI (artificial intelligence) industry, with a special focus on language processing. On the one hand, it represents one of the few contributions from a practitioner's point of view to evaluate the status quo and the future of interpreting as a profession amid the growing trend of technological advances in speech translation. Specifically, it gives an in-depth analysis of and responds to the popular concerns among professional interpreters that machines may replace humans in interpreting by detailing the strengths and weaknesses of machine interpreting. On the other hand, the book also gives a critical reflection on some of the long-standing beliefs and assumptions underlying interpreting, such as accuracy, invisibility, and the conduit-model, which seem to have impaired the public's perception of interpreting and put the profession at risk. In this sense, by prompting people to rethink these key notions in interpreting, the book has important implications for research and practice in both interpreting and public relations.

Despite the insights provided, some of the assertions made by the book are still open to discussion, given all the possibilities that technological progress may bring. For instance, while the author suggests that strategies may be taken to ensure that human interpreters will not be outdated by machines in the future, this is not a sure thing for every context where interpreting is needed. Admittedly, machines have not yet been maximally improved to make human interpreters redundant at present. Nevertheless, recent advances in technologies show that machines have the promise of substituting human interpreters at least on some occasions in the near future, such as those with highly specialized and routinized communication forms (e.g., Fiederer & O'Brien, 2009; House, 2018). Therefore, further empirical studies should be carried out to give more definite answers to these questions.

References

Fiederer, R., & O'Brien, S. (2009). Quality and machine translation: A realistic objective? *Journal of Specialized Translation*, (11), 52–74.

House, J. (2018). *Translation: The basics*. New York, NY: Routledge.