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How to Augment Language Skills Generative AI and Machine Translation in Language Learning and Translator Training

Edited by Anthony Pym and Yu Hao

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Yi Yang[1] & Bingbing Leng[2]

[1] University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, China

[1] University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, China

E-mail: iamlengbingbing@163.com

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and neural machine translation (NMT) has profoundly reshaped contemporary translation practice and translator education. In response to widespread concerns that automation may erode language competence, How to Augment Language Skills Generative AI and Machine Translation in Language Learning and Translator Training, edited by Anthony Pym and Yu Hao, offers a measured and non-alarmist intervention. Rather than framing AI and machine translation as threats to human expertise, the authors advance an "empowerment paradigm," arguing that when language technologies are integrated into teaching in a reflective and structured manner, they can enhance language proficiency and expand translation competence. Grounded in translation studies and translator training, the volume addresses a central question: how should translation education respond to pervasive automation without undermining professional competence?

The organization of the book follows a curriculum-oriented logic rather than a purely technological one. Chapter 1 introduces generative AI, machine translation, and translation memory systems from a historical perspective, emphasizing the continuity between current AI tools and earlier forms of language automation. By situating contemporary technological developments within the long-term historical evolution of human language practices, the authors challenge prevailing narratives that portray technological change as one of "rupture" or "replacement."

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on needs analysis and competence development. Drawing on translation competence frameworks, graduate employment data, and industry trends, Pym and Yu highlight the diversity of career pathways available to graduates of translation programs. They argue that translator training should not be reduced to a narrow notion of "industry alignment," but should instead integrate adaptability to evolving technological environments with reflective and adaptive professional expertise within industry-oriented education.

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the pedagogical core of the book. The authors outline constructivist teaching principles and present 57 classroom activity designs aimed at cultivating students' critical engagement with language technologies. These activities do not prohibit the use of AI tools; rather, they encourage experimentation, evaluation, and comparison, thereby positioning technology as an object of inquiry rather than a shortcut. Chapters 6 and 7 address assessment practices and classroom discourse, including issues of authorship, fairness, and student anxiety. The concluding chapter adopts a cautiously optimistic stance, emphasizing the importance of fostering students' ethical awareness and the need for continuous curriculum revision.

One of the book's most significant theoretical contributions lies in its systematic articulation of the "empowerment paradigm" within translation studies. Pym and Yu deliberately distance themselves from two dominant narratives: technological determinism, which predicts the inevitable replacement of human translators, and defensive pedagogical approaches that respond to automation primarily through restriction or prohibition. Instead, they conceptualize translation competence as relational, distributed (that is, not located solely in the individual translator but dispersed across human actors, tools, and institutions), and mediated. Translation competence emerges from interactions among human agents, technological tools, institutional norms, and communicative purposes. From this perspective, the pedagogical challenge is not whether students should use generative AI or machine translation, but how they can be trained to understand, evaluate, and control these technologies.

This reconceptualization has important implications for longstanding debates on translator competence. Traditional models often distinguish linguistic, cultural, and technical competences, sometimes treating technology as an auxiliary or instrumental add-on. By contrast, Pym and Yu regard technology as an essential component embedded within contemporary translation practice. In their view, translation competence is not weakened by the mediating role of translation technologies; on the contrary, it is precisely through such technologies that competence is enacted. This position aligns with recent efforts to revisit translator competence models in the context of AI, which argue that technology has become a constitutive dimension of translation expertise rather than an external factor requiring mere regulation or control (Prieto Ramos 2024). From this angle, translation competence must be understood as dynamically reconfigured through human–machine interaction, institutional accountability, and risk management within specific translation projects.

Another notable strength of the book lies in its challenge to the long-standing separation between language learning and translation pedagogy. The authors convincingly demonstrate that the widespread

adoption of machine translation has eroded many of the boundaries that once distinguished these two domains. Language learners increasingly use AI tools for translation-like practices, while translators are more frequently engaged in tasks involving language development, post-editing, and multilingual content adaptation. By foregrounding this convergence, the book questions institutionalized distinctions between language teaching and translation training and encourages educators to reconsider what counts as "translation competence" in technology-saturated environments.

Pedagogically, the "machine empowerment paradigm" emphasizes exploratory and reflective learning. The classroom activities designed by the authors require students to scrutinize machine-generated translations, identify recurring errors, and reflect on contextual and pragmatic appropriateness, rather than treating AI as a forbidden translation aid. Such tasks foreground comparison, revision, and argumentation, encouraging learners to view AI-generated output as draft translations subject to professional judgment rather than as final products. This task-oriented approach resonates with recent industry guidelines, such as the Guidelines for the Application of Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Translation Industry (2025) issued by the Translators Association of China, which emphasize that translators should exercise strategic control, quality assurance, and ethical oversight throughout AI-assisted workflows. In areas such as terminological consistency, cultural adaptation, and error correction, generative AI should be regarded not merely as an efficiency tool but as a collaborative partner in human–machine interaction, with responsibility and decision-making authority firmly retained by human translators. When integrated into translator training, this orientation reinforces a shift from product-oriented assessment to process-oriented assessment, aligning with broader trends in translation studies that emphasize cognitive and process-based research.

Furthermore, the authors advocate embedding reflective post-editing practices into classroom instruction, positioning students as critical evaluators of technological products rather than passive consumers. By taking responsibility for assessing the accuracy, appropriateness, and potential risks of AI-generated translations, students strengthen their professional competence and sense of professional ethics. This emphasis on translator responsibility and evaluative judgment echoes contemporary theoretical arguments that link technological competence with ethical awareness and decision-making accountability, rather than treating technology as a neutral or purely instrumental component of professional practice (Ramírez-Polo & Vargas-Sierra, 2023).

At the same time, Pym and Yu persuasively argue that technology does not necessarily lead to the deskilling of translators, while suggesting that new forms of cognitive labor introduced by generative AI may constitute emerging areas of translator expertise. Certain traditional language skills may yield diminishing direct returns, whereas competencies related to the evaluation and management of machine translation outputs are becoming increasingly central. Although the authors acknowledge this shift, the analysis could be further strengthened by a more in-depth discussion of its long-term implications for translator identity and status within the language services industry.

Overall, How to Augment Language Skills Generative AI and Machine Translation in Language Learning and Translator Training is not merely a pedagogical manual but also a valuable reflection on contemporary translation studies. By conceptualizing machine translation as a "mediating artifact" of human translation and a "training ground for translator agency," rather than as a substitute for human translation, Pym and Yu provide a conceptual vocabulary that enables educators and researchers to move beyond polarized debates toward a more nuanced understanding of technology, translation competence, and professional responsibility.

Nevertheless, certain limitations warrant consideration. While the pedagogical recommendations for translation training are well argued, empirical evidence concerning the long-term effects on translator competence development remains limited. Many claims continue to rely on prior research and teaching experience rather than on direct classroom data. In addition, although ethical and political–economic dimensions of AI—such as platform dependency and data governance—are acknowledged, they are not explored in depth. Sustained engagement with these issues would further strengthen the book's conclusions.

In sum, How to Augment Language Skills Generative AI and Machine Translation in Language Learning and Translator Training reframes debates on machine translation through an empowerment paradigm, moving beyond simplistic narratives of technological threat or salvation. By integrating language learning and translation pedagogy and offering detailed classroom practices, Pym and Yu provide educators with concrete tools for addressing AI in the classroom. While the book would benefit from stronger empirical validation and deeper ethical critique, its central argument remains compelling: generative AI does not render translator competence obsolete, but reconfigures the knowledge, skills, and reflective capacities required to sustain it. As such, the volume constitutes an important resource for translation educators and researchers seeking to rethink "competence," "pedagogy," and "professional responsibility" in the age of AI.

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