

CIOL AI Voices 2025

Chartered Institute
of Linguists

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As language professionals, we find ourselves at what feels like a crossroads, where artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming our context.

The question of whether we should pause language-related AI development is thought-provoking, but a moratorium would likely be neither practical nor achievable. Realistically,

we need to focus on how to harness AI's potential while addressing its challenges. Firstly, it's crucial to recognise that 'AI' is not a monolithic entity but a diverse set of technologies with varying applications in the lives and work of linguists. From machine translation to speech recognition, many of these tools are used routinely.

As linguists, we have a unique responsibility to shape the development of language-related AI. Our expertise is invaluable. One key area where we can make a significant impact is in addressing AI bias. Large Language Models (LLMs) can perpetuate and amplify societal biases present in their training data. Furthermore, the data used is dominated by English and, as we are well placed to know, LLMs do a much, much poorer job in other languages. We can and should highlight the risks of unsupervised use of LLMs and generative AI, while working to advocate for more inclusive representation of languages.

In the realm of interpreting and translation, the strong sense is that AI's best use is not in replacing human linguists but in augmenting our capabilities. The hope is that by utilising these tools we can focus on higher-order tasks that require real cultural understanding, where humans remain irreplaceable: context, nuance, humour, creativity, sensitivity, artistry.

Ultimately, AI is not a battle to win, or a technology to ban; it is a capability we need to shape. And we are well placed to do so as it is built on what we do best: languages.

John Worne
Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Linguists

We have to embrace AI as a core asset for linguists, but we also need to be clear that the linguist is still the heart (and soul) of the process.

AI has lots to offer to linguists in areas such as translation, transcription, and text generation, but we do need to address the fact that 'Artificial Intelligence' is a somewhat misleading term. In fact, AI is anything but intelligent - it doesn't actually understand the content it's interacting with and bases responses on its training data, so it may hallucinate or misconstrue information to mimic what it has seen before. It definitely can't act as a substitute for human intelligence.

Our expertise helps to steer the development and direction of language technologies. Working directly with software developers, we assess the performance and accuracy of capabilities, place requirements for new tools, and crucially, our perspective helps to shape the policy on how they should be deployed and used. This application of real human intelligence is key to helping our organisation to understand AI's limitations and mitigate its risks, and of course to know where AI shines.

We need to view AI as a toolkit; it takes the skill and expertise of the professional linguist to know how and when to use those tools. You might use Machine Translation (MT) for a quick overview or to help parse a complex sentence. You might ask generative AI to summarise a document or suggest keywords ahead of an interpreting assignment. None of these are the finished product. Only the linguist can use their deep understanding of the context, culture, and customer requirements to make the final decisions.

The emergence of generative AI, like ChatGPT, represents a natural progression from more familiar AI technologies. This familiarity gives linguists a head-start over other fields, who may not be as used to incorporating AI-driven tools into their workflow. We're in a unique position to understand how we can harness and get the most benefit from AI. Likewise, if we develop an understanding of the limitations of these technologies, we can educate our customers.

We have to embrace AI as a core asset for linguists, but we also need to be clear that the linguist is still the heart (and soul) of the process. It certainly won't replace us, so we need to make it work for us!

Expert Linguists GCHQ



The Humanities can help shape the safer integration of AI tools into translation and interpreting workflows. But without safeguards AI risks exacerbating inequalities.



Despite its increasing role in meeting the demand for multilingual and accessible content, 'language AI' lacks understanding of the world, and the social, economic, cultural, political and other factors shaping human language use. It therefore remains unreliable, posing risks to multilingual and inclusive communication.

To achieve human-level quality or at least greater reliability, AI tools need to go beyond identifying patterns and correlations; they must integrate human experience and knowledge of communication. This requires transformations in research and development, including a greater contribution from humanities-led language and translation studies.

Humanities-led research is well placed to shape the integration of AI tools into human translation/interpreting practices. More controversially, perhaps, such research should also pioneer human-centric and inclusive approaches to supplant conventional, risky data-driven methods in developing autonomous language systems (machine translation/interpreting) for situations where language professionals are unavailable or constrained by time and budget. In a highly multilingual society seeking equitable access to information for all, human professionals alone cannot meet all of the demand. Efforts should therefore be made to advance the safe development of high-quality machine translation/interpreting, including for 'low-resource' languages, to bridge global and intra-societal AI divides responsibly. Without

safeguards, we risk perpetuating imperfect language AI, deteriorating the human experience and exacerbating inequalities.

Recent debate around rapid advances in generative AI has increased awareness of the risks inherent in the methods currently underpinning its development. A fresh approach is needed – one that sees the development and use of such technologies as part of a comprehensive solution for communication in a multilingual and inclusive society, that embraces the potential benefits of language AI while minimising its risks.

The guiding question must be how language AI can be developed and used safely, both as a tool assisting language professionals and as an autonomous tool, to create multilingual and accessible content serving users of language services with diverse linguistic, sensory and cognitive abilities. Ethical principles are key: human-centric development, inclusiveness, fairness, complementarity to the work of language professionals, transparency and accountability.

If such a shift can be achieved, language AI can have positive impacts on society and the economy by enhancing communication and accessibility, and promoting inclusive participation in digital society. A shift in direction and implementation of ethical principles will also foster genuine innovation in language AI, creating new market opportunities for many stakeholders.

Prof Sabine Braun
University of Surrey Centre for Translation Studies
and Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI

...what is clear to me in the high-stakes situations in which I work – most notably, international peace and security and nuclear safety – is there is simply no substitute for the oversight and human judgement of a professional linguist.



Having worked for many years on high-stakes translation and interpreting assignments linked to international peace processes and nuclear safety protocols, I am naturally concerned about AI missing crucial cultural and contextual nuances that could lead to potentially dangerous misunderstandings.

While machine translation might be able to handle routine documents, I worry about AI reliability in crisis situations. It goes without saying that a mistranslated statement during tense peace negotiations could have unintended and damaging consequences for the peace process as a whole. Furthermore, as someone who has translated human rights testimonies, I question if AI can capture the emotional weight and cultural sensitivity needed to translate trauma narratives, especially in less well-resourced languages than English and French.

The cost-cutting appeal of AI translation might lead organisations to reduce human translator roles, potentially compromising the quality and accuracy of vital communications in humanitarian crises or more acute emergencies, which are indispensable for both the political and humanitarian response.

Of course, AI can help with initial translation drafts allowing translators more scope to focus on the more nuanced aspects of language and

quality assurance. AI can also speed things up, which is essential in humanitarian emergency situations, by ensuring a faster initial response, with human translators then refining critical communications. Machine translation tools can help maintain consistency across large volumes of documents produced by the UN and other humanitarian, sustainable development or climate action actors. The same goes for translation memories, which can help standardise terminology relating to international agreements and nuclear safety protocols, thereby reducing the risks of misinterpretation or human error.

There is also potential for AI to help bridge language gaps in remote areas where trained interpreters are scarce, supporting better understanding of what is happening on the ground as well as access to humanitarian assistance. But given current performance in less-resourced languages, this will require massive investment by governments and the international development community.

What is clear is that in the high-stakes situations in which I work – most notably, international peace and security and nuclear safety – there is simply no substitute for the oversight and human judgement of a professional linguist.

Bokani Hart

French/English Translator & Interpreter, Chartered Linguist, specialised in Nuclear Safety, International Peace & Security, Humanitarian Action, Human Rights and Sustainable Development

Our core language skills and cultural understanding are our superpowers as professional linguists, and I don't see that changing.



As a seasoned translator and language service provider, I've witnessed numerous technological shifts in our industry. But there can be no doubt that the rise of AI presents major challenges as well as opportunities for us.

Our industry is fragmented, and this makes it difficult for individual linguists and small companies to access and consolidate

knowledge about AI. We also face complex business and translation decisions: Which AI tools should we adopt? Should we integrate them into our existing CAT (Computer-aided Translation) tools or use them separately? Is it worth investing in paid-for versions? If yes, which ones. These choices are often made with limited information with a pervasive sense of time, market and competitor pressure building all the time.

Training, support and advice are crucial. In the ideal world we would all get comprehensive instruction to effectively use AI tools, but identifying trustworthy sources is challenging and different people inevitably have different needs and start from different places. And then there is the question of how transparent we need to be with clients about our AI use. Should we disclose AI use openly, or consider it just another tool in our toolbox, with the end product which we quality assure as professional translators the thing which matters most?

Despite these challenges, I see tremendous opportunities. The volume of content requiring translation is set to increase dramatically. As expert

linguists, we can carve out roles where we add the most value, making our work more engaging and less focused on mundane tasks.

I anticipate new jobs emerging that will require our core language skills combined with high levels of cultural understanding. This is why I'm passionate about children learning languages in school, particularly in the UK where we face significant challenges in language education. Our core language skills and cultural understanding are our superpowers as professional linguists, and I don't see that changing.

I view AI as a powerful "copilot," enhancing our capabilities without replacing our expertise. While the market challenges are significant, by continually adapting and learning, we can harness AI to enhance our work. The key is finding the right balance, leveraging AI for routine tasks while focusing our effort on the areas where our unique human insights and cultural and linguistic 'superpowers' add the most value.

Mark Robison

CIOL Council member and Managing Director of Alexika

When it comes to AI we need to embrace a learning mindset which brings to the fore our natural curiosity as linguists – not fear and denial.



When talking about AI, we must define first, what we really mean by it. There are so many models, not all of them are designed for translation or even text generation. AI has so many different applications in life across a variety of industries. Is it GenAI, ChatGPT specifically, DeepL, or something else? The definition needs to form the basis of any conversation.

Once we have defined what we mean by AI, we can investigate each scenario, based on experience and studies rather than on hearsay. Most individuals know Google Translate, but they really do not know DeepL, or anything about the plethora of translation tech available to linguists. And that gives us power. We still have the industry insight which is something we cannot afford to lose. Our knowledge is valuable and saleable.

As a Chartered Linguist and experienced translator, I've observed that one of the biggest challenges we face with AI is a perception issue. Many see Google Translate, DeepL, and Chat GPT and assume we have now solved intercultural communication – but anyone who speaks more than one language or doesn't speak English can see how far we are from this.

We can also learn from other industries. I, for example, had to become a social media content creator to discover there is an app that automatically creates Greek subtitles for my English audio videos, fast and accurately. Yes, it still requires some editing, and users have to pay for a license and privacy settings. But it is there. We cannot deny the tech developments. At the same time, we need to keep reminding ourselves that for the translation industry, this is not a new thing. We always have been technology-affected since the era of MT and TMs.

Yes, clients do ask for MTPE, but they know the content is not of great quality. On the opposite end of the requests spectrum, there are clients who strictly prohibit any MT or AI use. So we are finding ourselves amid all these requests. We are in the middle of the developments, and we remain the human expert. And that will not be replaced.

We, the linguists, are the true experts in this field, not the tech evangelists. We understand the context, nuance and cultural differences which underpin intercultural understanding. All of that said, in 2025 a skilled linguist has to thoroughly understand AI technology, even if they don't use it daily. Not least if we want to be well positioned to explain its capabilities and limitations to others.

We know that content generation will only continue to grow, creating more work for translators. The critical factor is whether clients care about quality. For high-stakes content, like legal documents, human expertise remains invaluable. But also, more and more there is an appreciation that the marketing cost of 'translation fails' can be really high too – appearing remote, even ridiculous, is something that few brands can afford.

Translators bring unique value beyond just converting text between languages. We offer flair, imagination, reliability, trustworthiness, and can serve as a kind of geopolitical and cultural "punch bag" – highlighting reputation and cultural risk that clients can't see via AI alone. This is why we need to be confident in our skills and charge for the value we offer.

Vasiliki Prestidge

CIOL Council member and Director Greek to Me Translations

I believe the challenge lies in shaping AI development to align with ethical standards and human values, not halting advancement.



Along with my colleagues on the Interpreting SAFE Task Force and the Coalition for Sign Language Equity in Technology, I believe the challenge lies in shaping AI development to align with ethical standards and human values, not halting advancement. Our mission is to establish industry-wide guidance for the accountable adoption of AI in interpreting, facilitating dialogue among developers, vendors, buyers, practitioners and end-users.

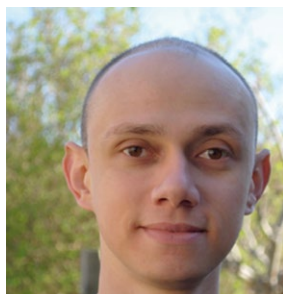
Our advocacy extends beyond interpreters and the profession to explicitly support the primary communicators who depend on our expertise to overcome multilingual barriers. This underscores the vital importance of deaf participation as both providers and recipients of these technologies, as well as similar participation from indigenous peoples and other communities where AI should enhance rather than diminish their ability to communicate the full nuance, richness, and cultural context of their languages.

Language barriers cannot be magically overcome by a single technology; the world needs to adopt a more nuanced understanding of human communication. Ongoing and widespread public and client education will be a crucial part of this work. To safeguard human expertise in interpreting, SAFE-AI advocates for robust ethical legislation framing AI development and how it is used for interpreting. This includes identifying where AI can enhance language services and where human intervention is essential.

We recently published best practice guidance to determine when AI technologies can safely expand multilingual access and when the risks outweigh the benefits (see <https://safeaitf.org/guidance/>). Our goal is to provide actionable insights for a broad diversity of stakeholders, including policymakers, developers, educators, practitioners, buyers and vendors, so they can integrate AI interpreting as an effective and ethical option.

Katharine Allen
SAFE-AI

Rather than declaring AI a panacea or denouncing it as a threat to civilisation, we need to support language and public service professionals as they navigate difficult communicative settings that call for nuanced ethical judgements.



As part of a research project, I've been collecting accounts from public service professionals on how they use machine or AI translation in communication. Although most public sectors in the UK have some level of access to professional language services, AI translation is used in many contexts without any assistance from language professionals. Social workers use it in safeguarding investigations. Police officers use

it to de-escalate crises on the frontline. Emergency doctors use it in A&E. Some of these uses are alarming. In several of them, mistranslations could cost lives.

But many uses of AI are in fact addressing existing gaps. Whether it be in booking appointments, giving directions around a hospital, or providing information about visiting times, many of the low-risk interactions that take place in public service settings are not currently supported by professional linguists. They might never be.

Nevertheless, seemingly innocuous uses of AI can easily stray into riskier territory. The difference between high- and low-risk communication is not always clear-cut. Persistent financial pressures can also drive budget holders to look for cheap ways of solving complex problems. The hype around AI can cloud judgements and make inflated claims about the technology more believable.

I've been researching the effects of machine translation on society since before the days of large language models. Two things are important to remember in this debate. The first is the value of nuance. Extremes are often limited in the face of complexity. AI is risky as well as extremely helpful, and both things can be true. The second important thing to remember is that this is ultimately a debate about humans. Some of the most striking stories I've heard in my research are not about specific tools or how good or bad AI is, but rather about the social value of diversity and multilingualism.

Mitigating the risks of AI will therefore involve devising human solutions to human problems. Raising professional standards and highlighting the need for AI literacy are two important starting points. Rather than declaring AI a panacea or denouncing it as a threat to civilisation, we need to support language and public service professionals as they navigate difficult communicative settings that call for nuanced ethical judgements.

Dr Lucas Nunes Vieira
Associate Professor in Translation Studies, Head of Subject for Translation, University of Bristol

Unsupervised public service use of AI-based translation is unacceptably risky



The Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL) partnered with the University of Bristol on the Uses of AI Translation in UK Public Service Contexts. This groundbreaking research, authored by Dr Lucas Nunes Vieira of the University of Bristol, examined a previously unstudied aspect of our public services: the use of machine translation tools by frontline workers.

The findings were both informative and concerning. They revealed significant use of AI-powered translation tools, including Google Translate and ChatGPT, in healthcare, legal, emergency, and police services - a practice that has largely gone unnoticed and unregulated.

Of particular concern was the lack of institutional awareness and acknowledgement of this practice and the absence of appropriate policy frameworks to protect the public and public service workers themselves. This institutional silence means frontline workers are navigating complex linguistic situations with public service users and the public in ad hoc ways without guidance or support.

We must also address the potential for AI to create a false sense of linguistic competence. The language industry's complexities are already poorly understood by the general public and by frontline workers, and the advent of seemingly capable AI translation tools risks further obscuring the vital importance of human linguistic expertise.

The risks of getting translation wrong in public service contexts, through mistranslation, cultural insensitivity, or loss of nuance are simply too high to not use appropriately qualified language professionals. Also of significant concern is the potential for AI to perpetuate or even amplify biases present in its 'training data', leading to systemic discrimination in translated content.

If facts are misrepresented or key messages are mangled, public services quite simply fail the publics they serve. It is clear that the current situation of unacknowledged and unmanaged use of AI for translation in public services cannot continue.

Dom Hebblethwaite
Head of Membership & Ventures Chartered Institute of Linguists

AI is new but the advent of new tools is age-old, as is our human story of adaptation to change. This familiar evolution reveals another very human trait – to look for the shortest route to our objective. So our job as linguists – and communicators – is to advocate for quality and simply to do it better.



As someone who bridges the corporate and language worlds, I see Generative AI as a highly significant development, but also one we should view with realism in relation to professional language services – it's time to move beyond the hype now.

Experience with several professional bodies has taught me that adapting to technological change requires a balanced, clear-eyed approach. Language professionals will want to position themselves as skilled arbiters of both human and artificial intelligence, particularly in cases where cultural nuance, context, and creativity are salient. The human dimension – and the sheer variety of cultures to be navigated – is something I came to appreciate more than ever before through my personal encounters while running across Europe for charity. And this cultural variety requires linguists to have a depth of understanding and apply judgement in tone, register and word use that AI can complement but may well struggle to replicate with the finesse and subtlety of nuance required.

Having worked for many years in technology-driven sectors – notably robotics and power engineering – and other environments which have embraced workplace technology, I've seen how the adoption of technology can enhance human expertise and bring benefits to the world

of work and indeed to wider society – while also recognising the attendant limitations and the risks of over-reliance.

For translators and interpreters and indeed other language professionals, AI presents both opportunity and challenge that each requires careful navigation. I've seen at first-hand how well Generative AI can handle certain routine tasks and provide useful initial drafts, but I believe that its undoubted power cannot compensate for the vital oversight and expertise that professional linguists bring to their work. A long career in corporate communications has convinced me that while technology can often facilitate and greatly speed up processes, the essential human elements of cultural sensitivity, contextual understanding, and professional judgement remain central to quality outcomes.

Looking ahead, it may be realistic to foresee a future of pragmatic co-creation. Just as my own work across diverse sectors has generally benefited from being both locally rooted and internationally minded, language professionals who can adeptly manage the micro and macro will be best able to integrate AI tools for appropriate tasks, while applying their uniquely human qualities of cultural understanding, contextual awareness and professional judgement.

Steve Doswell
Chair of Council, Chartered Institute of Linguists

CIOL Council's concerns in 2025 regarding AI's use in translation, interpreting and language services

1. Machines being left to their own devices

If AI is seen to or seems to produce good (enough) quality content, companies, public services and national governments may be tempted to cut corners and take risks in more widespread and unmonitored use.

2. Data runs out of control

Society, organisations and individuals need to be alert to the data we 'give away' when we input it into translation tools and generative AI. We need to be more alert to where data goes, what use is made of it and who profits from it.

3. AI gives a whole new meaning to 'fatal errors'

The errors that translation tools and AI make are more common in less well-resourced languages. Over time errors may also become harder and harder to spot (especially in English) as AI improves. This includes mistakes with numbers, names, terms and who is the subject and who is the object - which are crucial in legal, health, public service and contractual contexts. This makes it all the more important that AI isn't used without human oversight in high stakes interpreting or translating - and this needs government, public services and regulatory attention.

4. The hype undermines the understanding of the added value an expert human linguist brings to the process

How languages and the language industry works is already poorly understood in the wider world. The impact of AI risks persuading even the most sophisticated people and organisations, that algorithms can reliably do things which they can't.

5. An even deeper 'digital divide' for less well-resourced languages

Given the overwhelming advantages English has in the amount of digital content and the focus of commercial digital players, there is a major risk that English and the biggest 'world languages' will dominate others in an AI-led languages paradigm.

CIOL Council's 2025 reflections on AI in translation and language services

1. We can't stop AI technology but there are aspects of it we should continue to challenge

Embracing AI technologies is inevitable and unavoidable, and they can make linguists' work more efficient; but we do need to continue to highlight and confront the downsides.

2. New models will mean new opportunities

As AI technologies become ubiquitous, they will also become more accessible, both lowering the costs of using them and enabling new business models for individual translators and for translation companies; there should be opportunities for all, so existing linguists need not be losers.

3. In the future much more content will be translated

The vast majority of content produced worldwide is not translated. New technology will enable much more content to be translated globally, with commensurate opportunities for linguists who can ensure it is fit for purpose.

4. The human is – and will continue to be – essential

The skills of linguists in translating true meaning, assuring quality and post-editing, interpretation of nuance and cross-cultural navigation will become all the more important and valuable as AI-based translation tools become more and more ubiquitous.

5. The most skilled linguists will be the most in demand

As it becomes increasingly hard to distinguish machine from human translation – at least at the superficial level and in the most highly resourced languages – creative and skilled linguists will be all the more valuable, as they will make the final difference to the end product.



About CIOL

The Chartered Institute of Linguists is the UK's Royal Charter professional body for people who use high level language skills in their work, setting the standards for linguists worldwide.

Membership offers professional recognition, and our range of membership grades leads to Chartership; recognised worldwide as the gold standard for practitioners, whatever their profession, and publicly understood as a trusted mark of quality and competence.

CIOL Qualifications delivers UK-regulated professional language qualifications, such as the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting, the Certificate in Translation and the Diploma in Translation, recognised by government departments, agencies, businesses and universities.

For more information on membership and qualifications, visit [ciol.org.uk](https://www.ciol.org.uk)

Contact

CIOL | Chartered Institute of Linguists
e: info@ciol.org.uk

