

FIT Europe - Proposed Position Statement on the "Multilingual Digital Single Market"

EUROPE'S DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET MUST BE MULTILINGUAL!

The above is the title of an open letter to the European Commission published on 20 March 2015. The central advocacy of this open letter is that the European Commission should undertake immediately concerted action to ensure the implementation of digital language tools for all EU languages, whatever their economic weight.

The signatory stakeholders believe that "such technology solutions ... will provide all European citizens, businesses and public institutions access to high-quality machine translation and additional sophisticated language solutions for businesses, consumers and cross-border public services".

The open letter was sent by and on behalf of the "community of European industry and researchers" that pursue the development of a strategic agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market.

THE VIEWPOINT OF FIT EUROPE

It is clear that the digital R&D industry is after EU funds to ensure its financial viability and promote these products. A lot of effort was invested into this field leading to the development of widely available computer aided translation (CAT) tools and machine translation systems.

FIT Europe believes that improving and upgrading these tools, to the benefit of the general public and professionals alike, is commendable, because it promotes multilingualism, thus reinforcing European citizenship.

Nonetheless, even though FIT Europe welcomes the development of such tools, it wishes to remind the difference between tools aiding the work of translators and systems generating end translations automatically. CAT tools are indeed an invaluable aid to the work of trained and competent professional translators, used to ensure quality translations while improving performance. On the other hand, Google Translate-type machine translation, no matter the level of a system's sophistication, will never be able to translate correctly the various nuances of human language. Therefore, the potential of these machine translation systems is limited and should be intended for simple factual or technical texts.

Let us not forget that:

Translators need to understand what they are translating, whereas machines don't.

Translators need to know the subject matter and context of the source text, whereas machines don't.

Translators have the flexibility to resort to other resources for help with text elements that evade them, whereas machines don't.

Translators are able to render the variations, shades and tones, i.e. the very soul of the source text, whereas machines don't.

Translators pledge their good standing and reputation on the soundness and quality of their work, whereas machines don't.

Translators pledge their good standing and reputation on ensuring confidentiality, whereas machines don't.

This is even more pronounced when it comes to interpreting oral messages which, in essence, carry nuances, imperfections, emotions, intercultural variants, as well as important non-verbal information communicated through the interlocutors' posture, gestures, facial expressions, etc.

Considering the increasingly regulated and competitive environment which places more emphasis on price than quality, in the midst of a languishing economy, FIT Europe fears that the widespread use of machine translation would impair the quality of communication within the EU, thus ultimately leading to the impoverishment of cultural diversity, contrary to the claims of the open letter.

FIT Europe calls the European Commission to initiate a strategic process focused on upgrading the translation and interpretation professions, not simply because of their high added value and contribution to EU economy, but also because these professions guarantee a multilingual communication true to the richness of European diversity.

The Board

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