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# Automated language translation

... a solution to public sector  
communication requirements

by Hannah Grap

The Web has closed the gap between countries and people, allowing users around the world to exchange opinions and information in entirely new ways and in more languages. Nearly 1.5 billion people are now online. What's more, the Web is increasingly used as a communications medium through social media – including social networks, message forums, blogs and email – allowing people to interact and share information around the world, regardless of location.

This growth of content creation and distribution around the world has created an enormous challenge for both government and commercial

organizations that need to communicate and access information in and across multiple languages.

### Enabling government objectives

Government organizations need solutions that enable mission-critical decision making. This typically includes rapid access to all relevant information, and the ability to search and quantify unstructured information from a variety of languages.

For hundreds of years, these organizations have relied on translators for this work to meet intelligence, commerce and diplomacy objectives, but the digital era poses special challenges for translators. The volume of content to be translated is now so massive that it vastly exceeds the limits of the world's human translators, even working at full capacity. To make matters more complicated, digital content appears in a variety of different formats and languages – and it's growing exponentially.

Today, there is a solution to this challenge. Language translation software offers organizations innovative and expanding possibilities. Translation technology has advanced to the point where it can offer a trusted, reliable level of translation quality that conveys meaning quickly and accurately. By dramatically lowering the cost of translation while still delivering translation quality, automated translation software offers a range of opportunities inconceivable just a decade ago.

Language Weaver, one of the leading developers of translation software, commercialized a statistical approach to automated language translation and natural language processing. This breakthrough technology overcomes the weaknesses that have limited commercial success for automated translation in the past and now can enable human communication across languages.



By adding automation to the translation process, government organizations can quickly translate documents, blogs, websites, and focus on supporting language efforts where it is difficult to scale human translator resources. Only relevant documents need to be sent to humans for a more accurate translation and analysis, allowing governments to prioritize and maximize translation resources and gain significant improvements in productivity.

### Deploying automated translation for government

For government organizations, the key objective is to get as much content into one language as quickly as possible so that decision makers have timely access to relevant information from a variety of sources.

Currently, Language Weaver deploys automated language translation solutions in a variety of ways in the government sector. In many of these deployments, the automated language translation software is seamlessly integrated with existing third-party applications to accelerate access to foreign language information. Below are some examples of automated language translation in action:

**Foreign broadcast monitoring:** Users see and hear the original news broadcast in a foreign language and see a transcription of the original broadcast with a translation provided by Language Weaver. Using trusted technology from partners, all of this is done in near real-time (5-30 minute delay from live broadcast).

**Multilingual search:** Users are able to search the web in another language, such as Arabic. The application translates an English query into Arabic, searches the web in Arabic and returns the original Arabic search results, with the English translation. Users can translate each page in the results on-demand using Language Weaver's software. Users retrieve much different and more relevant results than if they were searching only in English.

**Cross-lingual chat:** Users can instant message or "chat" in their native language with foreign language speakers. The application provides a translation for each message sent, allowing human communication across languages.

***Ad-hoc document and website***

**translation:** Users are empowered to translate documents and websites to and from a broad list of languages. This initial translation enables users to escalate critical information for further analysis and interpretation.

**Leveraging automated translation in government**

Automated translation software cost-effectively enables government organizations to translate everything in near real-time so that all

information, regardless of the original language, can be analyzed and escalated as needed.

In today's digital world, content volume is massive and the growth of content is overwhelming. Web-based communications channels are numerous, expanding in number, and in continuous use around the world. Government organizations rely on innovation through advances in automated language translation to stay informed. 

Hannah Grap, director of marketing at Language Weaver (founded in 2002), has addressed audiences in North America and Europe on the value of translating new types of content and providing more focus on multilingual communication. She is in charge of Language Weaver's international marketing initiatives and works with the company's strategic partners. Her background is in marketing and technical communications and she previously worked in the financial services sector. Hannah holds a Master of Science degree in technical communications from the University of Washington.

They also fly in the face of commercial common sense. In buying goods and services, a municipality is simply a consumer. Our entire economic system is based upon the notion of autonomous traders and customers, each carrying on business with a view towards his or her own best interest. Essentially, for everyone else than a supplier to the public sector, a trader, consultant, builder or other supplier of goods and services is entitled to no better treatment from its customers than its market strength allows it to exact. Not so with the supplier to a municipality; staff are instructed not to try to drive the price down, but rather “to encourage competitive bidding; ... to ensure objectivity and integrity in the purchasing process; [and] ... to ensure fairness between bidders.” Only when these steps have been taken, is any thought to be given to the taxpayer.

Nevertheless, one can hardly blame a municipal council that becomes confused as to the direction to take when identifying the duties of municipal staff. If one reads through the hundreds of judicial decisions that have been handed down in recent years with respect to the subject of municipal procurement, it is rare to find a case in which the idea of putting the municipality (or other public authority) first is even mentioned.

On the other hand, it is possible to find quite a bit of case law in which the idea is implicitly

rejected, in order to give precedence to the needs or interests of suppliers. The problem is that a provision such as the one set out above simply reinforces that attitude. By placing so much emphasis on supplier interest in its own purchasing bylaw, the municipality reinforces the approach that the courts have taken. Thus, when litigation arises in relation to some aspect of procurement, any court that looks at the municipality’s own purchasing bylaw will see clear direction given, not only to take supplier interests into account, but (if the ordering of the section is intended to give any direction) to place fairness to suppliers ahead of the interests of taxpayers.

Such over-emphasis on supplier interests entrenches a division of loyalty as a matter of law. Instead of being directed to put the interests of the municipality first, the municipal staff are being directed to make sure that its suppliers are fairly treated.

A house divided, so the *Bible* tells us, cannot stand. Maybe it is time for municipal councils to take a good hard look at their purchasing by-laws to see whether they are diverting staff from best serving the interest of the municipality as a corporate entity. 

**Steve Bauld** spent many years as purchasing manager at the City of Hamilton and served recently as vice president of the Ontario General Contractors Association.

**Kevin McGuinness** is a lawyer with Ontario’s Attorney General.

Together they have collaborated on several books about procurement and leadership, and will have a new edition of the *Municipal Procurement Handbook* released this fall. They are regular contributors to *Summit* magazine.