

Contribution from Daniel Pimienta, OBDILCI, January 2025, to [Imagining the Digital Future Center](#) at Elon University for its next survey on **how the evolving relationship between humans and artificial intelligence tools might influence the essence of being human.**

I will focus my contribution on the specific subject of linguistic diversity and examine the predictable outcomes of AI's influence on linguistic diversity, by 2035, both on the Internet and beyond.

As a pioneer in this field, OBDILCI has conducted numerous experiments since 1992, exploring the use of automatic translation to **support mutual inter-comprehension**. These efforts have evolved over time, including projects such as discussion lists for civil society during the World Summit on the Information Society. Most of these services were limited to major languages (English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese). However, the last experiment in 2012, called **Goodle**, integrated in Moodle an automatic link to Google Translate, which then supported around 50 languages. More details about these early experiments can be found at <https://obdilci.org/projects/other/pre-his/>.

These early experiments focused on aiding inter-comprehension rather than achieving translation. Within this framework, today's advancements in AI represent a tremendous leap forward. Tasks that were once costly and difficult to implement are now accessible and inexpensive, offering significant productivity gains:

- Generating initial **translations of documents without losing formatting** is an exceptional aid, reducing the time required for translation by up to 80%.
- **Creating multilingual versions of websites**, with embedded automatic translation during content creation, offers substantial productivity boosts. While human intervention is still needed, the process has become far more efficient.
- **Organizing videos on platforms like YouTube**, where viewers can easily set **subtitles in their preferred language** (among the 249 supported by Google Translate), opens the outreach. Although translations are very approximate, this capability is fast enough to deal with the speed of speech and greatly aids inter-comprehension. Furthermore, it opens the door to extending services from translation to interpretation.
- **Integrating automatic interpretation into platforms like Zoom** provides another layer of inter-comprehension, even if it falls short of real-time professional interpretation.
- **Expanding these capabilities to face-to-face conferences** with devices that enable participants to choose their preferred language represents a breakthrough for accessibility and inclusivity.

This is a genuine revolution that will transform international meetings, potentially diminishing the dominance of English as a lingua franca and therefore removing the unfair disadvantages for those with limited or no proficiency in English (a language understood by less than 20% of humanity).

By 2035, we can expect further refinements and widespread adoption of these tools, leading to a paradigm shift in linguistic diversity. This includes extending these services to more languages and improving the quality of translations for less commonly spoken languages, which could be today below threshold of usability as some studies have suggested (<https://www.teachyoubackwards.com/>).

In the same vein as AI advancements in other fields, automatic translation will not replace skilled professionals. Instead, it will serve as a valuable tool to enhance their productivity. However, it may significantly challenge mediocre practitioners and compete effectively with non-professionals.

AI-assisted translation and interpretation will not eliminate the need for highly competent interpreters and translators. Instead, it will provide extraordinary, low-cost, and easy to use support for mutual inter-comprehension. Once quality thresholds improve across all languages, the reach of these tools will expand further.

The metaphorical "Babel-AI Tower" may not reach the heavens, but it is bringing people closer together by bridging language barriers. In professional settings, AI acts as a spectacular tool; however, as its use becomes routine, the initial sense of magic may diminish. Consequently, the distinction between artificial and human intelligence may blur, highlighting that the term "artificial intelligence" might be a misnomer.

Many misconceptions stem from the inappropriate use of the word "intelligence" in AI. A more accurate term, such as "**augmented intelligence**," offers two advantages:

1. It retains the familiar "AI" abbreviation.
2. It acknowledges that true intelligence resides in the human mind, positioning AI tools as amplifiers and aids to human cognition.

Other alternatives include "automatic reasoning" or "cognitive computing."

As with any technology, there are risks associated with misuse or unintentional biases. Ethical considerations must evolve alongside technological advancements. In the context of language translation, it is crucial to distinguish between full translation and aids to inter-comprehension to prevent misunderstandings—a challenge again rooted in wrong terminology.

This text has been revised in English and clarity by ChatGPT (nothing more, nothing less).