

# Don't trade human translators for AI

## The TA calls for industry solidarity

The Translators Association (TA) is deeply troubled by the recent announcement of [Audible's plans](#) to offer publishers 'end-to-end' AI technology to narrate and translate audiobooks. This further setback for human translators comes on the back of recent reports that publishers including [Taylor & Francis](#) and the leading Dutch publisher [Veen Bosch & Keuning](#) have turned to AI to translate books into English.

Ian Giles, Chair of the TA, reacts to the unwelcome news: -

*“Audible’s approach is a shortcut that disrespects both the endeavours of the original author and the experience and skills that translators undeniably bring to the process.*

*Audible suggests that authors may opt to have their AI generated works reviewed by humans – the recognition of the need to engage a human translator or narrator to adjust the output is also recognition that Audible’s proposed approach is fundamentally flawed.”*

For decades, the TA has been championing the rights and voices of translators who have themselves been fierce advocates of bibliodiversity. However, whilst we welcome initiatives which provide readers with greater access to a wider range of books in a variety of formats and languages, technology must never replace skilled literary translators.

As explained by the European Council of Literary Translators' Associations: -

*“Machines do not translate, they merely generate textual material; books are written by human authors and should be translated by human translators. Imagination, understanding and creativity are intrinsically human and should not be left out of any literary text.”*

Authors, rightly, don't let AI write their books and readers wouldn't want them to, and translation is no different. To effectively convey an author's voice requires skill, professionalism, literacy and emotional sensitivity which cannot be replicated by 'pattern-spotting' machines.

Human translators have long played an instrumental role in introducing an author to new audiences, allowing their books to transcend geographical frontiers and to connect different cultures. Following the high-profile TA-led campaign [#TranslatorsOnTheCover](#),

many publishers now recognize translators' invaluable contributions by featuring translators' names on book covers.

The time has now come for translators, authors, publishers and readers to respond to the existential threat that the emergence of AI-generated translation poses to human translators. In brief, AI translation:

- Does a disservice to the hard work and creativity of authors – AI translations flatten texts, remove style and reduce works to common denominators, while frequently displaying translation and grammatical errors.
- Diminishes the reader's experience of works as a consequence.
- Poses a real threat to the livelihood of translators – the responses received to the Society of Authors' 2024 survey evidence that over 35% translators are already losing commissioned work and income because of AI.
- Concentrates profit in the hands of a few large tech companies.
- Uses technology that has typically been 'trained' using authors' and translators' copyright-protected works without permission, recognition, or remuneration.
- Places a significant additional burden on the environment through the unnecessary use of natural resources.

Crime novelist Ruth Ware shares her experiences of working with translators:-

*“As someone lucky enough to be published in more than forty languages, only a couple of which I actually speak, I'm acutely aware of how important a great translator is, and endlessly grateful for their commitment to our shared endeavour. As writers we trust them to evoke our voice, convey our jokes and puns, preserve our reveals when language might give them away (try concealing the gender of a first person narrator in French, for example) and generally get what we were aiming for across to an audience who may have very different cultural and linguistic assumptions. The conversations I've had with my translators about how best to convey quirky idioms and phrasing have been some of the most interesting I've had about language, and have taught me so much. The bottom line - every author's book is their baby - and babies were meant to be raised by human beings”.*

The TA calls on the whole industry to stand in solidarity with translators. Authors are asked to:

- oppose the use of AI in the production of or translation of their own works;
- demand the use of human translators when negotiating the sale of translation rights or instruct their agent to do so; and

- champion the voices and works of all human creative professionals, including translators.

The UK's publishing industry thrives on its incredible pool of talented creators – it is essential that this human creativity is protected, nurtured and bolstered. The only way that writers' creativity can be truly appreciated by readers in translation is when it has been translated by another skilled creator – a human translator. The erosion of the translation profession must be stopped now, and it is essential that we all come together in this important fight.

To quote Frank Wynne, "*adequate is a poor substitute for human.*"