

Translation within and between languages

Timo Honkela

Helsinki University of Technology
Neural Networks Research Centre, Espoo, Finland

timo.honkela@hut.fi

Serious efforts to develop systems for machine translation have taken place for more than half a century. Some successful systems that translate texts in limited domains such as weather forecasts have been implemented. However, the more general the domain or style of the text the more difficult it has appeared to reach good quality translation.

In the presentation, I will study some philosophical questions that underlie the difficulty of good quality translation. In order to broaden the typical view on the task, I make a distinction between translation within and translation between languages. As discussions, e.g., on Quine's notion of indeterminacy of translation have shown, the problem of translation does not only hold for translation between different languages but similar problems are encountered when communication between users of same language is considered. The term intralingual translation has been used e.g. by Roman Jakobson. I will consider how intralingual translation relates to translation between languages and to the problem of sameness of meaning. In particular, I will present arguments for considering translation and meaning within the framework of continuous-valued multidimensional representations, probability theory and adaptive systems.