

6. Viewing Translated Results

Machine translated results may contain broken sentences, words composed of phonemic spelling, unintelligible words, etc. Occasionally the results may even contain Chinese characters or other strange symbols. In this chapter let's look at some issues we will face when viewing machine-translated text. These problems may originate from source texts, software settings, limits of the translator programs, nature of the languages, or some combinations from the above. You will learn how to identify, resolve or avoid such problems.

Reading English text translated from Chinese by a machine can be quite different from reading text from human writers. A lot of common grammatical rules no longer apply in these translated sentences. We are going to look at some practical examples of machine translation and compare them to human translation.

6.1 Partially Translated Sentences

Sometimes, Chinese characters or box symbols may be mixed with English words in the translated outputs. When you see partially translated sentences like these, you should check the source language selection of the translation software. It is likely that the setting for the simplified or traditional Chinese has not been made correctly. What happens is that the software is expecting characters from simplified Chinese but is getting characters from traditional Chinese, or vice versa. Since many characters are identical in both sets, the software is still able to translate common characters and words. When seeing characters that are not in the correct set, it renders the non-recognized characters to the output directly. Instead of yielding the Chinese characters, some programs may also put out box symbols, as shown in Figure 6.1.

Some translators, like those from Google and SYSTRAN, are capable of automatically identifying characters from different sets. For others, be careful in specifying the source language. I do hope that software design can be improved to at least give a warning in situations like these. For now, you just have to pay attention to this pitfall.

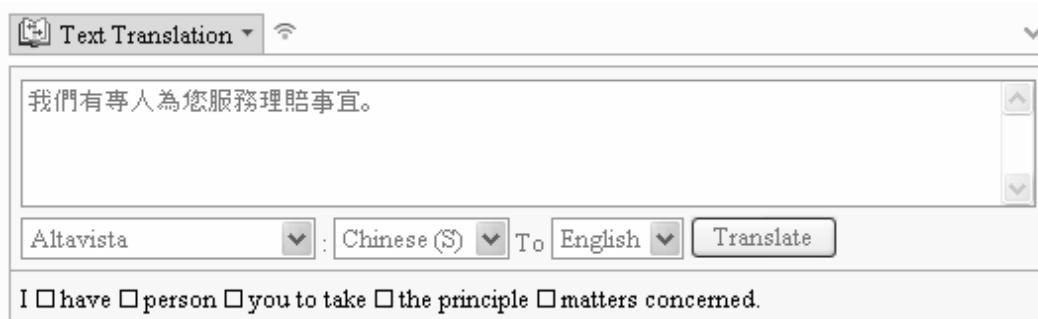


Figure 6.1 Box symbols in the translated text

6.2 Reading Machinglish

With the current technologies, we should probably not expect machine-translated results to be anything close to the writing from a human. Once in a while, the software may give you good translations, but usually, be prepared to read some funny sentences. You can probably say the root cause of this is the linguistic differences between the two languages. What actually happens is that the translation program has failed to properly construct the output sentence using the grammatical rules, or even worse, unable to properly analyze the source text.

Sometimes it seems like the program had just substituted words and concatenated them together. There are also times when the software had decided to spice up a word with something that should not be there, like an extra “the.” It may also decide to use the infinitive form of a verb when it should use the real verb. Often the program may use literally translated Chinese words that are not suitable in English. For example, in Chinese texts, people do not “play” baseball or soccer, but they “hit” baseball and “kick” soccer. When those words are translated directly, they may appear funny.

I like to think of the machine translated results from Chinese words as not real English, but something called “Machinglish,” which stands for “**M**achine & **C**hinese style **E**nglish.” Let us look at a few examples to see some differences between English and Machinglish:

1. A verb in Machinglish may not be the correct verb of that sentence. An infinitive (or adjective) form may be the actual verb in the sentence. A sentence may have none or multiple verbs.

经常进行体能活动有益身心。

Exercising regularly benefits body and soul. (The proper translation)

Regular physical activity wholesome.

Carries on the physical ability activity beneficial body and mind frequently.

盖房子最要紧是把基础打好。

Laying a good foundation is the most important thing when building a house.

(The proper translation)

Builds the house most to be important is hits the foundation.

为了争取好成绩请大家多加努力。

Please put in extra effort to strive for good results. (The proper translation)

In order to strive for the result to ask everybody to add diligently.

For fighting for the good result to invite everyone to more work hard.

2. The order of the words in Machinglish may be different from normal English usage.

这场球赛他表现得比上回好多了。

He performed much better than last time in this game. (The proper translation)

The match his performance much better than on the back.

This sports match he displayed other day compares was much better.

今天天气很冷。

It is very cold today. (The proper translation)

Today the weather very is cold.

Today, cold weather.

商务部数据显示肉类价格两个月以来首次下跌。

Data from the Commerce department show that the price of meat has fallen for the first time in two months. (The proper translation)

The department of commercial affairs data display meats price two months have fallen for the first time.

3. For each Chinese word there may be multiple choices of English words to use for translation. The software may not pick the proper word to use.

愈来愈多人开始每天运动。

More and more people start to exercise everyday. (The proper translation)

More and more people start to make the movement every day.