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Language and Content

AI Translation: Facts vs. Fiction

Publish faster, in more languages, with less risk. Discover how to make AI work where it truly matters with this practical guide.

AI translation in 2026: a reality check

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The truth about AI speed and risk

In translation and localization, speed is easy to sell — and dangerous to oversimplify. **Publishing faster in more languages** is now table stakes. What's harder, and far more critical is maintaining accuracy, brand voice, and regulatory control as AI enters the workflow.

When velocity becomes the only KPI, organizations expose themselves to compliance risks, inconsistent messaging, and translations that look right but fail in context.

Your data is leaking.

1 in 5 companies were hacked last year because of 'Shadow AI'.



"If it's free, you aren't the customer. Your sensitive data is the product."
Petra Angeli, Head of Global Solutions

Free AI is the most expensive mistake you'll make.

40% of companies cite unmanaged AI as their top inefficiency.



"Scaling fast is easy. Scaling securely is where leaders fail. This is how 'free' tools lead to €20M fines."
Stephane Cinguino, CTO

AI makes you faster. Humans make you relevant.

90% of the time, AI engines fail with figurative language.



"Use AI for acceleration, not automation. Keep humans in the loop to protect quality and trust."
Bertrand Gstalder, CEO

AI can replace human translators.

Fiction

Reality Check

AI makes translators faster, not redundant.

The narrative that AI is “as good as humans” is a lie. Most AI models are “cheating” — they have already seen the test answers during their training, making them look far more capable in a lab than they are in your boardroom.

30 points: How much AI translation scores are “inflated” because machines are memorizing answers rather than understanding language.

(Google & Boston University 2025 Research)

AI is usually fluent, but often unreliable. According to our 2025 [AI translation pilot results](#), it creates critical risks in the only areas that actually matter for your bottom line:

44%

of critical errors occur in **Terminology**, including mistranslated product names and legal wording.

38%

of critical errors occur in **Accuracy**, where AI distorts meaning or omits vital details.

What It Means For You

Speed without soul is just a fast mistake. AI writes the draft, but humans create the impact.

Generative AI is free and easily scalable.

Fiction

Reality Check

Free AI is the most expensive kind.

Tools like ChatGPT or open DeepL version may look “free,” but scaling them securely costs real money.

Enterprises pay for what matters:

- Clean, high-quality data
- Compliance and governance
- Secure hosting and integrations

40%

of companies cite unmanaged AI adoption as their top inefficiency.

(Slator's 2025 Buyer Survey)

50%

Organizations with integrated AI strategies report up to a 50% higher ROI than those that implement AI tools in isolation.

(McKinsey Global Survey on AI)

What It Means For You

Invest in structured, governed AI. It pays off in ROI, with no surprises.

AI makes language partners obsolete.

Fiction

Reality Check

Technology can translate, but it can't advise.

AI delivers speed and scale, but real value comes from strategy.

Organizations now need partners who help them use AI responsibly, measure ROI, and keep brand and linguistic consistency across markets.

37%

of buyers now **expect their partners to act as AI advisors**

— offering strategic insight, governance, and seamless integration rather than just delivery. (*Slator's 2025 Localization Buyer Report*)

It's not about replacing Language Service Providers (LSPs) but about elevating the relationship from vendor to enabler of multilingual, AI-driven growth.

What It Means For You

Choose partners who go beyond technology, combining language expertise and governance to turn every multilingual investment into real impact.

Generic AI models are safe and secure.

Fiction

Reality Check

No, your data is not safe, and you lose ownership the moment you type. Public open tools like ChatGPT or DeepL aren't built for enterprise security. Once you enter sensitive or client data, you risk losing ownership and control over how it's stored or reused.

The biggest threat is actually internal: employees using unapproved, public AI tools to process and translate sensitive content.

1/5

One in five companies got hacked due to unauthorized "shadow AI", which means employees using AI tools without the company's official knowledge or approval. *(IBM 'Cost of a Data Breach Report', 2025)*

60%

of organizations will face business interruptions from unsecured AI use by 2026. *(according to Gartner)*

Yes, safe solutions exist. Responsible AI platforms, including dedicated AI translation solutions, are designed with GDPR compliance, ISO-certified workflows, and EU AI Act safeguards that keep your data protected and auditable.

What It Means For You

Choose AI solutions built for enterprise security. Ones that [protect your data](#), [respect privacy laws](#), and [give you full control](#) over how your content is processed and stored.

Standard regulations do apply to AI translation.

Fact

Reality Check

Yes, AI must follow the same rules as everything else. Regulations like GDPR and data-residency requirements apply fully to any content that includes personal or sensitive information.

To stay compliant, your provider must guarantee:

- Data Residency: Control over where data is stored and processed.
- PII Protection: Encryption, audit trails, and secure deletion of personal data.
- Future-Readiness: Alignment with the upcoming EU AI Act, which will add new transparency and risk-management standards from 2026 onward.

€20M

Non-compliance is costly: GDPR fines can reach **€20 million or 4% of global revenue**, and the EU AI Act will push those penalties even higher.

What It Means For You

Work only with AI partners who are fully compliant, offering certified workflows, data-residency guarantees, and a transparent framework for responsible AI use.

AI can be used for regulated content.

Fiction

Reality Check

Even in high-stakes sectors, AI works, but only under expert control. AI can accelerate workflows in legal, medical, and financial fields, but accuracy is everything. A single mistranslation can mean liability, compliance breaches, or patient risk, which is why human oversight and tiered workflows are essential.

AI adoption is growing fast, even in regulated industries:

66%

in on year, AI usage among physicians nearly doubled from 38% to 66%
(AMA Augmented Intelligence Research, February 2025)

74%

of legal professionals expect to use AI-driven tools within the next 12 months
(Secretariat & ACEDS global survey, 2025)

What It Means For You

Use AI where it adds value, but keep humans in the loop to ensure every piece of regulated content meets the highest standards of accuracy, safety, and accountability.

AI output is ready to use.

Fiction

Reality Check

Fast doesn't mean finished. AI can draft content in seconds, but raw output isn't ready for the real world. It still needs review to ensure accuracy, tone, and brand alignment.

75% of enterprises report 'Brand Drift' and factual errors as their primary barrier to full AI automation.

(Gartner/Industry Trends 2025/26)

Left unchecked, AI output introduces serious quality risks:

- Hallucinations: Invented facts or false sources.
- Bias: Distorted tone or gender/cultural bias baked into training data.
- Context Failure: AI reads words, not situations, it often misinterprets jargon, tone, or intent.

AI leads organizations to a flood of doubts: What is true, and what is not. The real problem is not about believing in technology; it's about trust.



Petra Angeli

Head of Global Solutions,
Acolad

90% AI engines misread idioms and figurative language up to 90% of the time — proving speed still needs supervision. *(A study by Appen)*

What It Means For You

Use AI for acceleration, not automation. Keep humans in the loop to protect quality, brand voice, and trust in every market.

Anyone can teach AI.

Fiction

Reality Check

Teaching AI requires governance, not guesswork.

AI learns from what it's fed. Without clean data, active management, and structured feedback, you don't get smarter output, you get noise. Even the most advanced Large Language Models (LLMs) can't "read the room". They still struggle with deep, domain-specific, or long-form context.

True AI success depends on consistent human oversight:

- Active management to adapt engines to your terminology and brand style.
- Structured feedback to review, validate, and retrain models continuously.
- Terminology management, the biggest non-technical driver of quality, improving accuracy by 10%+ for specialized content.

Without these checks, accuracy fades — a phenomenon known as model decay (*CSA Research*).

What It Means For You

Work only with AI partners who are fully compliant, offering certified workflows, data-residency guarantees, and a transparent framework for responsible AI use.

Approximately

80%

of AI project failures

are attributed to issues with data readiness, confirming that the lack of clean data and governance makes the entire investment a wasted guess. (*MIT study*)

Custom MT is worth the effort.

Fact

Reality Check

Tailored AI delivers measurable returns. Generic AI models handle everyday language well, but when accuracy, terminology, or brand tone matter, custom-trained engines win every time. By learning from your company's own data, they deliver translation that fits your field and your voice.

15%  25%

custom NMT engines achieve 15% to 25% **higher domain-specific quality scores** than state-of-the-art generic models, cutting post-editing time and lowering total project cost.

(Research from Sator and CSA)

What It Means For You

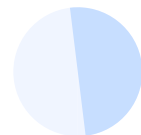
Invest in AI that learns your language: your industry terms, your tone, your rules. The payoff: better quality, faster turnaround, and lower long-term costs.

AI accelerates multilingual content rollout.

Fact

Reality Check

AI automation lets you publish more content, across multiple regions and channels, faster. It turns global expansion into a scalable, cost-efficient process, multiplying output without multiplying headcount.



49%

over half of companies using Generative AI report significant cost savings and

see measurable efficiency gains across business units.

(according to McKinsey's 2025 Global AI Survey)

What It Means For You

Use AI to scale your global voice, expanding reach, cutting turnaround times, and freeing your teams to focus on higher-value creative work.

AI is changing how translation is priced.

Fact

Reality Check

From per-word to per-value. The traditional per-word model no longer fits today's AI-driven workflows. Pricing is shifting toward value-based partnerships, reflecting quality level, volume, and access to technology and expertise.

AI enables **value-based pricing** centered on volume, quality level (MT vs. human-in-the-loop), and subscription access to technology and specialized expertise.

65%

of LSPs are adopting technology-driven pricing structures based on quality tiers rather than word counts.

(Slator's 2025 Industry Report)

68%

of high-performing organizations now rely on external vendors, as the growing complexity of deployment leads companies to buy integrated platforms rather than build their own

(Deloitte, 2024)

What It Means For You

Think beyond price per word. Partner with providers who connect technology, expertise, and measurable outcomes, turning translation into a true value-driven investment.



AI is a force for global inclusion.

Fact

Reality Check

AI is transforming accessibility by making content instantly available to audiences who were once left out. From live interpreting to real-time captions, its helping people understand, participate, and connect, no matter their language or ability.

AI powers key accessibility features:

- Live communication: Real-time interpreting for meetings and events.
- Compliance: Automated captioning and dubbing supporting WCAG, ADA, and EAA standards.
- Universal understanding: Content readable by anyone, anywhere, in any language.

20%

of enterprises already use AI-powered tools for multilingual meetings, webinars, and conferences, showing real progress towards accessible, global communication (CSA Research, 2025).

What It Means For You

Adopt AI tools that make your content accessible to everyone, improving inclusivity, reach, and compliance while opening new markets.

AI voices can replace human voices.

Fiction

Reality Check

AI delivers scale and speed but not soul. AI voice technology has come a long way and can be efficient for routine communication like elearning, product videos or even multilingual customer support. But when emotion, tone, or authenticity matter – live events, storytelling, or brand campaigns – human voices still lead.

75%

of consumers say they feel a “loss of emotional connection” in high-stakes content localized solely by synthetic AI voices
(Digital Production Hub, 2024)

The sweet spot? **Blending both.** Use AI for reach and consistency, and humans for impact and empathy.

What It Means For You

Let AI handle the scalable, everyday voice work and keep human talent for the moments that need to inspire or persuade.

AI generates creative content.

Fact

Reality Check

Generative AI is a great co-pilot. It kills the “blank page” problem, drafts faster than any team, and helps you explore more ideas in less time. But humans deliver the creative edge. Generative AI can produce excellent first drafts for marketing copy, product descriptions, and ad variants, serving as a powerful co-pilot.

41%

less time on first drafts is spent by marketers using generative AI tools, which frees up resources for higher-level strategic review. (*HubSpot Survey, 2025*).

The outcome? Faster time-to-market without sacrificing brand safety or cultural relevance.

What It Means For You

Use AI to accelerate creation, but rely on people to elevate ideas, blending speed with storytelling that truly resonates.

Quantity, not quality, drives AI performance.

Fiction

Reality Check

Better data builds smarter AI. Just dumping all your data into AI won't do the work. The value of your AI output is determined by the quality, not volume, of your data input, making the AI data pipeline the central bottleneck.

Messy or inconsistent inputs lead to poor, unreliable output. High-quality, bias-free data is what separates a powerful AI model from an unpredictable one.

75%

of the effort goes into preparing the data and reducing the bias.

*Agustín Da Fieno
Delucchi, Microsoft's
Director of Globalization
AI & Data Science*

15%

Organizations that fail to implement a robust data cleansing and enrichment program see translation quality drop by up to 15%

AI is a powerful accelerator for international growth, helping companies to scale faster without adding resources at the same pace. But true success comes from pairing automation with human expertise to ensure quality, cultural fit, and brand integrity in every market.



Stephane Cinguino
CTO, Acolad

What It Means For You

Invest in data quality before data quantity. Clean, consistent linguistic assets are the foundation for reliable, high-performing AI translation.

Time for an AI Reset

You've seen the 15 facts, and how easy it is to fall into the "speed trap", risking €20M in fines and a 90% failure rate in brand nuance. Now, let's press 'reset'.

**In 2026, speed is a commodity.
Trust is the currency.**

The AI gold rush is over. The era of AI accountability has begun. Speed is no longer a competitive advantage; it's the baseline. Your only real moat is how you manage the risk.



Bertrand Gstalder
CEO, Acolad

Your 2026 AI Localization Strategy Checklist



Champion the Hybrid Model:

Stop treating AI as a replacement. Use machines for volume but keep humans for the high-stakes content that actually drives your revenue.



Prioritize Governance:

Non-compliance is a reputation killer. Only use ISO-certified and GDPR-compliant workflows to shield your data.



Demand Custom Quality

Generic models produce generic results. Train your AI on your specific brand voice and terminology to ensure your ROI isn't lost in translation.



Mandate Human Oversight

Raw output is a liability. Every piece of content must be validated by human expertise to eliminate hallucinations and bias.



Invest in Integrated Solution

Scale requires frictionless workflows. Choose platforms that plug directly into your existing CMS to turn speed into a scalable asset.

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Ready to Move from AI Fiction to Reality?

Get a personalized roadmap to scale your
AI localization strategy in 2026.

[Talk to an Expert](#)