

How to Augment Language Skills: Generative AI and Machine Translation in Language Learning and Translator Training. By Anthony Pym, and Yu Hao. Routledge, 2025. 218 pages. ISBN 9781032614953.

“Technologies: enslavement or empowerment for translators?”(169) Anthony Pym and Yu Hao’s *How to Augment Language Skills* is a delightful and empowering read for translation educators, extending its scope to language teachers as well. It argues convincingly that there should be more synergy between translation and language teaching since translator training programs produce as many language teachers as translators. The book is commendable for its empirically sound argument for tech-optimism, drawing on perspectives from trainers, students, graduates, and the industry. While advocating for technology, it also provides a pedagogical framework for developing critical engagement with technology, highlighting the indispensable role of human translators and the need for training reforms to prepare students for an ever-changing job market.

The book is structured into eight chapters, a preface, and a glossary. The initial chapters establish a groundwork for teaching technologies through a needs analysis of various stakeholders. Chapters 4 to 6 delve into pedagogical specifics with numerous sample teaching and assessment activities, while Chapter 7 is a Q&A addressing common student concerns. The final chapter offers predictions for the future. A helpful glossary clarifies terms like “start text” (the authors argue that “source text” also includes paratexts like the translation brief and term bases), and the examples and scenarios, drawn from English-Spanish and English-Chinese, benefit from the authors’ backgrounds, with the Chinese perspective being a welcome addition with China emerging as a leader in educational technology.

A significant contribution is the argument for the indispensable role of the human translator. The authors assert that “in times of technological uncertainty, clients need the authoritative voice of a human who can assure them that a translation is valid” (168–169). This reviewer supports the authors’ campaign for large language model (LLMs) to add disclaimers advising consultation with a human for high-stakes translation problems. It is puzzling, therefore, that the authors appear critical of the *Ordre des traducteurs terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec* (OTTIAQ) statement that “it still takes a qualified translator to determine

whether a machine translation is accurate and reliable” (59). Considering that the use of automated translation quality assessment in high-stakes settings remains limited (131–136), this statement seems reasonable outside of low-stakes settings. As the authors themselves note, humans are needed to step in when machines fail, to manage client relations, and to “triage translations for different technologies” (103).

Regarding employment, the authors argue that the language industry has grown despite decades of technology; the human slice of communication may be narrower, but the pie has become much larger (150). They outline three ways to future-proof translation skills: using technologies creatively (transcreation), doing what technologies cannot (building client trust), and working with technologies like post-editing (168–169). The book cites the 2023 European Language Industry Survey (ELIS), which identified post-editing, audiovisual localization, and other creative translation as growth areas (ELIS 2023, 4). However, the subsequent 2024 ELIS report, which the 2024/2025 book did not cite, noted that audiovisual localization suffered from the 2023 Hollywood strike (ELIS 2024, 4). This volatility underscores the need for caution, though one should not draw dire conclusions from a single year’s decline.

To prepare students for this uncertain market, the book rightly calls for a reflection on training models. It highlights the evolution of the European Masters in Translation (EMT) competency model, which in 2022 emphasizes AI literacy, ethics, data security, and lifelong learning over the 2017 focus on interpersonal skills. The authors’ research confirms a “one-third rule”: a third of graduates work as translators, a third in other language services, and a third in other fields. While all graduates value core skills like second language (L2) proficiency, communication, intercultural skills, and critical thinking, only translators value technology-specific skills. This finding supports the authors’ curricular model, which places traditional translation and language skills at the center, with advanced technologies as electives.

Chapters 4 to 7 offer excellent pedagogical ideas to empower students. One insightful module in Chapter 4 guides students to explore the limits of automation, practice prompt writing, and use AI to support creativity. The book rightly notes that “the one thing that all translation technologies do is generate alternatives” (153–154), which can support human creativity. With seventy-one distinct learning activities, Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive toolkit for teaching translation technologies.

The later chapters provide a useful peer assessment form and thoughtful answers to common student questions, reminding us to encourage ethical as well as existential inquiries about technology.

There are several issues that could have been developed further. First, while teaching critical technology use for translation into first language (L1) is sound, especially at the beginning, students also need to develop critical skills for L2 translation, a direction where LLMs could be particularly empowering, “smoothing out some of the traditional asymmetric dynamics in the learning space” (97). Second, while the book notes the value of pre-editing, it could more critically discuss how this can alter meaning. An example on pages 88 and 89 shows pre-editing that avoids gender pronoun errors but also omits personal pronouns, changing the speaker-listener relationship—a semantic shift that warrants discussion in this spoken context.

ST1 (original): And **I’m** honored to meet **you**, the future leaders of Greater Britain and the world.

ST2 (pre-edited): **It is an honor** to meet **the young people who will lead Greater Britain and the world.**

Another issue is the unclear meaning of “teaching with or beyond translation technologies.” The section debates whether to teach “from-scratch” translation or focus solely on post-editing from the start. The authors advise teaching technologies early, but this does not preclude teaching both methods simultaneously. Given that the authors’ graduates value foundational translation skills, abandoning from-scratch translation seems premature without more pedagogical evidence. Using the authors’ own metaphor: can a student who cannot calculate without a calculator acquire advanced mathematical skills?

Furthermore, the book’s argument for the pedagogical value of translation in language learning, a practice long abandoned, could be strengthened with more robust empirical evidence. A few references are provided belatedly (85), but the central argument feels underdeveloped. Regarding the synergy between translation and language teaching, this reviewer can point to a more tangible example of a successful crossover: Mira Kim’s (2023) Personalised English Language Enhancement (PELE) courses at The University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney. What began as language enhancement for translators has become a popular

general education course offered multiple times a year. It now teaches all students self-directed English enhancement alongside transferable skills such as critical thinking, lifelong learning, and digital literacy using automated self-assessment tools (Li and Kim 2024).

Several specific claims in the book warrant closer scrutiny. The assertion that GenAI can “perform most of the linguistic magic that concordancers do” (63) is challenged by recent corpus linguistics research questioning AI’s reliability and transparency in discourse analysis (see Curry et al. 2024; Bednarek and Taboada 2025). Additionally, on the topic of translation certification/accreditation—which has become even more valuable for endorsing quality in an era of automation—the book’s critique of the revision task in the Australian NAATI certification exam also requires further discussion. Speaking as a NAATI Examiner, and thus with a healthy dose of potential bias, this reviewer would argue that the exam’s use of metalanguage (eight error categories) fosters valuable critical thinking and that candidates are penalized not for stylistic preferences but only for under-correction or introducing new errors (NAATI 2025). An issue is also raised with a Chinese translation example from the NAATI revision, where the suggested revision of the translation of “Charles Darwin” into “*Daerwen* 達爾文” (Darwin) seems unnecessary, as the translation provided is already the most recognizable. The reviewer also debates the authors’ claim that the principle of recycling language contradicts the idea of context (4), arguing that even recycled segments from a translation memory carry significant context (e.g., the word “transversal,” which the authors use in “transversal skills,” may be used more in a medical context, as suggested by examples from the British National Corpus), making exact/fuzzy matches valuable precisely because they imply a similar context. Finally, a minor point concerns the ambiguous suggestion that we should not expect professionals to be good teachers (72); many trainers are industry professionals, and teaching ability ultimately hinges on teacher training and experience, rather than a PhD degree.

Despite these points of debate, this book is a must-read for translator trainers seeking to creatively incorporate technology into their curriculum. Accessible and often humorous, it is a lighthearted read that provides the motivation and confidence to navigate the existential threats we face and, perhaps, to launch a course on post-editing AI translation.

Long Li

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Hong Kong, China

longli@cuhk.edu.hk

References

- Bednarek, Monika, and Maite Taboada (2025). "Attitude in Reported and Non-reported News: A Critique of Sentiment Analysis in Corpus Pragmatics." *Corpus Pragmatics*: 1–23.
- Curry, Niall, Paul Baker, and Gavin Brookes (2024). "Generative AI for Corpus Approaches to Discourse Studies: A Critical Evaluation of ChatGPT." *Applied Corpus Linguistics* 4 (1): 100082.
- ELIS Research (ELIS) (2023). "European Language Industry Survey 2023: Trends, Expectations and Concerns of the European Language Industry." European Language Industry Survey. <https://elis-survey.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ELIS-2023-report.pdf>. Accessed 27 October 2025.
- ELIS Research (ELSI) (2024). "European Language Industry Survey 2024: Trends, Expectations and Concerns of the European Language Industry." European Language Industry Survey, September 2024. <https://fit-europe-rc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/ELIS-2024-report.pdf>. Accessed 18 October 2025.
- Kim, Mira (2023). "A Personalised Autonomous Model to Resolve a Prolonged Dilemma in International Students' English Language Needs in Higher Education." *Higher Education Research & Development* 42 (3): 603–618.
- Li, Long, and Mira Kim (2024). "It is Like a Friend to Me: Critical Usage of Automated Feedback Systems by Self-regulating English Learners in Higher Education." *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* 40 (1): 1–18.
- NAATI (2025). "Task A: Translation of a Non-Specialised Text, Certified Translator Assessment Rubric," February 2024. https://www.naati.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NAATI-Certified-Translator-Rubrics_2024_Website.pdf. Accessed 18 October 2024.