

2.5. Difficulties Facing Traditional Approaches in MT

MT is considered one of the most important applications in NLP. Unfortunately, it is a tough predicament. The important question remains: Why is MT difficult? Arnold (2003) answers this question by attributing the difficulties to two factors: the first is on the nature of the translation while the second part pertains to the ability of the computers. He believes that translation is not only difficult for computers, but is also difficult for humans.

Arnold (2003:119) believes that “[T]ranslating is a many-faceted skill that goes well beyond mere competence in two languages”. In particular, the task of the translator is to take a text in one language SL and produce a text in another language TL which is in some sense equivalent. In addition to the slippery notion of ‘equivalence’ which is difficult to pin down, and can vary greatly depending on the kind of text involved, this is not the sole objective of the translator whose work should be clear, unambiguous, interesting, persuasive, elegant, poetic, gripping, etc., depending on the text being translated. While this could be achievable, it is somehow unfair, especially when such process is to be automated. One should not neglect the fact that translation is a creative task where translators are expected to act as cultural mediators who convey to the readers of the TL what may be obvious to the readers of the SL. The previous facts about the process of translation amount up to the arduous task of the translator and machine alike.

Computers, on the other hand, are just devices that follow rule, albeit with considerable speed and precision. Rule following can rarely produce a creative work especially the kind of creativity required for the process of translation. Arnold (2003:121) summarizes the limitations of computers in the field of MT, namely the inability of computers to: