

PUBLISHING MULTILINGUALLY:  
THE UNITED NATIONS, MACHINE TRANSLATION,  
AND GLOBAL EFFORTS TOWARD LINGUISTIC  
DIVERSITY

by

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A P P R O V A L

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## A B S T R A C T

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This report examines the importance of multilingualism in publishing, taking into consideration the reasons for difficulties in translating publications — including historical precedents and such practical constraints as budgeting and staffing — and assessing ways of overcoming these difficulties. Translation and its related considerations are discussed in the context of the New York-based publications unit of the United Nations, which has both a motivation and stated desire to publish multilingually, but due to various obstacles is not always able to do so. Proposed solutions include the effective use of emerging technological tools, in addition to efforts at shifting societal and industry attitudes away from an anglocentric paradigm.

## DEDICATION

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I dedicate this to my family, who have always been a source of strength, encouragement, and love. Without Dad, Mom, Barat, Wes, and Kenton, as well as *minha família brasileira*, the Cunhas, this paper would never have been possible.

I am especially grateful to my sister, Dr. Barat Wolfe, for believing in me and being an incredible role model, friend, advice-giver, and kindred spirit. And to Carlos – thank you for being you, for standing beside me, and for helping me to be a better version of myself.

## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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## T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

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## 1 . I N T R O D U C T I O N

In order for written works to be widely disseminated and fully appreciated by new audiences around the world, they need to be translated from their source language into a variety of other languages. This need for translation presents itself to publishers of educational materials, blog posts, religious texts, novels, poetry, plays, and more. Increased interaction among people around the world, supported in recent years by the advent of social media and online networking, has made multilingualism a more salient publishing consideration than ever before (Rønning and Slaatta 2011). While multilingualism would therefore seem to be an increasingly important component of the publishing process, publishers at all levels have struggled to find the time and means necessary to undertake translations and thereby encourage a multilingual and/or multicultural reading environment. For example, the relevant literature on multilingual publishing suggests that a need for subsidization, in addition to the effort inherent to the translation process, have contributed to a deficiency of multilingual work in a publishing context (Mélitz 2007, O'Brien 2003, Parks 2011). Such difficulties can be observed in every publishing arena and with nearly every organization that wants to reach a multilingual audience. Both small-scale independent publishers focusing on literary translation and large organizations producing institutional publishing (not to mention the myriad publishers at all levels in between) face the same dilemma.

Institutional publishing provides an interesting case in which a given organization aims to reach a large audience — speaking a range of languages — with important information, and therefore faces the issue of translation. One organization that has demonstrated both a need for multilingualism in its published works and, at times, a difficulty in meeting this need, is the United Nations (UN). The UN, which has had a stable and viable publishing program from its establishment in 1945, has an aspiration and stated priority to publish in multiple languages (UN 2011). Unfortunately, the UN is also vulnerable to the challenges that afflict many organizations attempting to provide multilingual options, and often lacks the dedicated funding, personnel, and time required to carry out necessary translations. As a result, many UN publications (including their annually released reference work, the *Yearbook of the United Nations*) are only available in English, despite the United Nations having six official languages overall (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) and two working languages at the Secretariat (English and French) (UN 2012).

Over the course of this paper, the UN is used as a model to support the contention that a more effective and reliable translation method and means of making linguistic diversity a higher priority is needed for publishers around the world, particularly when providing essential information to speakers of various languages and when an emphasis on multilingualism is an inherent organizational principle. On a practical level, modern multilingual publishing can pursue such goals by taking advantage of advances in

technology, including ameliorated systems of machine translation that are reliable enough to reduce human correction time and expense compared to typical human translation, while remaining faithful to the source text and reaching as broad a reading audience as possible. On a more abstract level, however, supporting translation in publishing also requires a shift in attitudes regarding the importance of all languages, and of coping with the ostensible dominance of English in lucrative publishing activities. These practical and abstract considerations are expanded in the sections that follow. Also included is a brief historical overview and other background information, an examination of developments in the translation field and relevant research, and a discussion of what this environment and potential progress means for publishing at the UN and other comparable organizations.

### 1.1 Publishing, Translation, and Anglocentrism

In order to understand the present state of translation and multilingualism in the publishing industry, and to offer some insight into what may happen to them in the future, an exploration of their historical context is important. Just as publishing in general has evolved and expanded over the centuries, so too has the role of translation in the publishing industry.

As the Western world's modern age unfolded through the Renaissance and beyond, it brought about a new focus on knowledge and education, founded largely in the availability of texts translated from Latin into the vernacular

languages of Europe (Henitiuk 2012). Where translators were initially occupied with religious and classical texts, in the post-Renaissance environment demands emerged for popular literature, business documents, educational materials, and news information. This demand inspired a formalization and standardization of translation, with established schools, programs, and professional associations (Henitiuk 2012).

While the basic translation process has remained relatively unchanged over time (taking a text from its source language and producing an approximate equivalent in a target language), there were several periods during which translators favoured a more “artistic” approach instead, particularly during the early Christian era and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Kasperek 1983). Indeed, during such periods (and, sporadically, at other times as well) a translator may have personally felt that a given source text was lacking somehow, and/or that it could be improved upon in the target language (and thus the translator took many liberties with published material). However, from the eighteenth century onward, there has been a general diminution of artistic license assumed on the part of the translator, and the pursuit of true fidelity of the target text to its source text has taken its place. Over time, the primary goal of translation has become to relay information as accurately as possible, staying true to the original text, but in the reader’s desired language (Baker 2005). The prevalence of early translation discrepancies often led to rifts between cultures and peoples, with various interpretations of words or phrases acting as a basis

for religious or cultural belief. (Ready examples of this can be noted in the differing versions of the Christian Bible.) A lack of a close correspondence between original and translated texts also contributed to the bolstering of biases toward one language or another, with a text in one language being subjectively deemed better or more readable than another (Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006).

In the context of colonization, ruling authorities used translation as a tool to garner information about colonized peoples and further exert dominance over them. Widespread English colonization shows numerous cases of this usage of translation, including in British-occupied India from the seventeenth to mid-twentieth centuries. As noted by Tejaswini Niranjana (1992), British sovereigns were urged to collect and translate whatever work they could find of the Indian people, and with this information “domesticate the Orient and thereby turn it into a province of European learning” (and at the same time appropriate any useful information to advance science and knowledge in Europe). As English authorities undertook translation from local languages, their efforts took autonomy away from the Indian people by providing an anglicized interpretation of local cultures, which reinforced the view by English translators that members of local cultures were unreliable or incapable interpreters of their own culture (Niranjana 1992). Despite increased attention to cultural sensitivity in the practice of translation throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the potential danger of speaking for a given group and assigning certain qualities to that

group — especially when translating their work into a historically hegemonic language like English — is still very real (Nirañjana 1992, Gentzler 2002).

It is because of such practices that it is important to keep in mind the potential for cultural misrepresentation when translating into English. The anglocentric bias that persists in modern publishing was, in many ways, born out of English colonization. Therefore, the Western world's apparent default to English-language publishing— and hence an anglocentric perspective — is neither a new issue nor one that is unique to the United Nations, and it presents a complex topic for discussion. The foundational default to English-language publishing is arguably rooted in the British colonization that brought with it an assumption of English superiority, which increased throughout the time of the Commercial Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the Industrial Revolution and further waves of colonization (McLennan 2003). As a manifestation of imperialism, many English-language writers have viewed and depicted their national history as a model for the rest of the world. In addition, an anglocentric model of history has been taught in colonized countries, leading to a further spread of its underlying beliefs that deemphasized the work, cultures, and realities of other peoples (Cronin 2006). As English has become more widely spoken, and has developed into a language of money and power, this has also contributed to a dichotomous phenomenon with anglocentrism at its root.

Firstly, much modern writing is only available in English; and secondly, any writing that does get translated is often only mass-market-type material. For example, the English-original *Fifty Shades of Grey* books topped bestseller lists in large non-English markets for most of 2012 (Veja 2012, IBS 2012, Casa del Libro 2012). As a result, the world's multidimensional, multilingual voice is being diminished in an asymmetrical flow of cultural information (Cronin 2006). Many important works are never brought to a global audience, while the publishing markets of non-English-speaking countries are gradually saturated with homogenized or low-quality English-original titles.

English has also come to dominate academic publishing — particularly in the sciences — and many researchers (Café 2005, Durand 2006, Hamel 2007, Rousseau 2005) question both the reasons behind this and what this might mean for fair, unbiased representation in the context of scholarly publication. Charles Durand (2006) argues that the general adoption of English as a “lingua franca” in international scientific publishing is absolutely not the result of the free choice of the majority who comprise the field, but comes instead from “skillful perception management that has effectively distorted the ways in which scientists (and many other people) look at their community and interact with it.” Many international academic journals state outright a policy that submissions come in English only. Rainer Hamel (2007) notes with some irony that his article on the dominance of English in international scientific literature — published by the AILA Review — had

to be written in English, but at one time would have been accepted in any one of four languages (English, French, German, or Russian). When the AILA (which is actually a French acronym for Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquée) was founded in 1964, its members were mostly foreign language and translation experts, and the journal served to promote plurilingualism. Practices have changed considerably for the organization over time and, despite retaining the French acronym, the AILA Review has been an English-only publication since 2003.

Practices that favour English as a publishing language not only present non-English writers with a series of obstacles to publication, but also leave non-English readers without publications representative of their own cultural and linguistic identities, and with an imbalanced or inaccurate written perspective of other cultures. Further, the trend toward English saturation of the global publishing market may represent a reflection of the world's increased focus on sharing popular information, which has undoubtedly been facilitated by the internet. In addition to sharing information, the internet has helped to create global communities and social networks, which bring people of different cultures and different mother tongues together, making translation an inevitable necessity. The concern here lies largely in ensuring that one language with one cultural voice is not alone at the heart of this shared information, particularly where publishing with a global agenda is concerned. In any truly multicultural organization, it is problematic for English to be the often-used "default".

Several studies have examined what seems to be a heavily English-skewed publishing scene in Europe and North America, taking into consideration such factors as the original language of the most popular publications, number of languages into which a given publication is translated, geographic distance between language groups, and overall copies sold (Mélitz 2007, Rønning and Slaatta 2011, Sapiro 2008, Sapiro 2010). These studies have suggested that there is a broad observable trend toward English predominance, particularly with the increasing popularity of American literature.

For example, Gisèle Sapiro (2010) comments on the centrality of languages in publishing, defining “centrality” with the idea that the more central a language is, the more it is translated into other languages, and the smaller the role of literary translation (that is, works in other languages being translated into it) in its book market. With language centrality outlined in this manner, Sapiro provides a long-term data set from publishers undertaking literary translations around the world, and observes that the English language holds a “hyper-central” position, with about half of the world’s available translated books originally written in English. Translations from French, German, and Russian each represent about 10 to 12 percent of this market, these languages thus being “central”. A group of other languages (Italian, Spanish, Polish, Danish, Swedish, and Czech) each account for 1 to 3 percent of the global market, making them “semi-peripheral”, and other languages, with a share of less than 1 percent, are “peripheral”. While

English-speaking countries have a large book publishing market compared to other countries, Sapiro concludes they are not publishing a proportionally higher number of translations, which offers another clear example of the impact anglocentrism has on publishing.

Referencing Sapiro's notion of centrality and periphery, Helge Rønning and Tore Slaatta (2011) also comment on the unbalanced presence of English writing among today's bestselling books, noting that it brings a unique set of challenges to modern global publishers. They observe that a global market has been established for a limited set of international bestsellers that spread rapidly and simultaneously over large parts of the world, and therefore major publishers' earnings increasingly are the result of these bestsellers — which are predominantly in English. Over a one-year period between 2008 and 2009, fourteen of the forty bestsellers in Western European countries were originally written in English. (In contrast, the twenty best-selling books in the United States for 2008 and 2009, according to Publishers Weekly (2009), were all originally written in English — and, further, were all written by American authors.) This supports the contention that the search for global bestsellers among international publishers currently favours English books, giving something of an unfair advantage to English writers. Rønning and Slaatta also note that, with very few exceptions, English language markets are notoriously the most difficult to break into for writers with other native languages, and point to strong indicators that translated literature is now in a more difficult position than ever before.

Even books that are exceptionally well translated do not receive the coverage essential to their survival and ultimate success.

Jacques Méliot (2007) corroborates these findings, observing a considerable overall impact on the world's non-English publishing activities, scholarly and otherwise, and noting that for an author, "publishing in English will earn him far more recognition. The result is clear; those who strive to make a mark in their discipline try to publish in English." Beyond this, Méliot notes that non-English authors who stick strictly to their home language are perceived to "have lower ambitions and do less significant work." He underlines that translations do matter and are important in a largely cultural sense, as all enduring creative works are typically translated into many languages and, moreover, translations are essential in reaching a world audience. The overarching need to write in English in order to reach a world audience can negatively affect incentives, and further diminish the pool of talent that Méliot feels is actually capable of contributing to world literature. Méliot indicates that the power the English language exerts in publishing inevitably has a negative impact on global welfare, not only in terms of culture, but also in revenue lost in the non-English publishing industry. By his estimation, those who write in languages other than English may feel discouraged from writing at all (and may not be of interest to publishers), and the potential for financial viability of non-English writing thereby suffers as a function of the small number of works being produced. This offers a tangible representation of the significance of multilingualism in

publishing. It is important to consider the many writers that may be going unpublished and unread only because they work in a non-English language.

As noted earlier and supported by the literature above, there are really two major implications for the global publishing environment that stem from the anglocentric model imposed by large Western markets. First, the undertaking of a meaningful level of translation of non-English works into other languages has suffered. This issue is worthy of further study and is a firm example of the impact of anglocentrism on modern publishing, but what is perhaps more alarming is a second implication — wherein there lies a presumption that publishing in English alone should suffice. This “English-only” approach is pervasive, and can be especially problematic in the context of scholarly and institutional publishing. Indeed, the second point is particularly relevant for global organizations like the UN, as such organizations must provide sufficient language options when publishing for an international readership. For the purposes of this paper, the UN is used as model to explore the need for translation and multilingualism in a publishing context, and thus the issue of English being a default publishing language is addressed more comprehensively, rather than the issue of adequate translation of non-English works. After a brief overview of the UN’s basic structure and publishing activities, the major issues surrounding multilingualism and translation are further articulated.

## 2 . P U B L I S H I N G   A T   T H E   U N I T E D   N A T I O N S

The history of publishing at the United Nations can be traced back to October 24th, 1945, when its founding members signed a Charter, giving the organization its framework. Since then, the Charter of the United Nations has been published in many languages, along with countless other documents, reports, and titles. Today, “UN Publications” is based in New York City and functions as part of the Outreach Division of the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). This department was established in 1946 to promote global awareness and understanding of the work of the United Nations, and continues to work at achieving this awareness through print, internet, television, radio, and other media tools. The Outreach Division fosters dialogue with global communities (such as civil society, the entertainment industry, educators, and students) to encourage support for the ideals and activities of the United Nations, and does so in alliance with partners that include celebrity advocates, libraries, and the media. The Outreach Division also provides informational products and services to facilitate the work of UN Member States, staff, and researchers, and to support internal communications at the United Nations (UN 2012).

UN Publications has produced over 5,300 titles for the organization and its agencies. Its website offers access to a complete current catalogue, with titles in both print and electronic formats (accessible on e-book readers, tablets, and smart phones, and as PDF files). In addition, UN Publications

works with sales agents in more than 60 countries to facilitate worldwide distribution of their titles. Every year, representatives from UN Publications attend trade shows and conferences to promote its main titles and new releases. There are also bookstores at both the UN Headquarters in New York and the UN Office in Geneva. The organization's catalogue continues to grow with the publication of new titles — approximately 500 per year — and the release of recurrent publications (UN 2012).

The editorial department of UN Publications produces titles covering the main activities, driving concerns, and expressed ideals of the United Nations. Its flagship publications include the quarterly magazine *UN Chronicle*, the primer *Basic Facts about the United Nations*, and the annual reference work *Yearbook of the United Nations*. While both *Basic Facts* and the *Yearbook* are commercially viable titles — selling successfully to libraries, educational institutions, and bookstores, and through other avenues — their production, and that of the *UN Chronicle*, is fully budgeted for and assumed by the United Nations. The organization uses these publications, and many others, as internal reference works and also as promotional and informational tools, so their success is not necessarily measured in sales figures, but rather in their utility and overall value in disseminating important information about the United Nations.

## 2.1 Multilingualism at UN Publications and the Yearbook of the United Nations

The Charter of the United Nations (UN 1945) states that one of the purposes of the UN is “to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.” In many ways, UN Publications has performed admirably in adhering to this stated purpose, and has incorporated multilingualism into its work. The *UN Chronicle* has been regularly published in multiple languages, and *Basic Facts* has been translated into several languages as well (though most of the translations of *Basic Facts* have not been undertaken by the United Nations itself). One of their major publications, however, has not yet been able to reach a non-English-reading audience — the *Yearbook*.

The *Yearbook of the United Nations*, produced annually since 1946, is a substantial volume of work, typically totalling over 1,500 pages in a seven-inch by ten-inch hardcover casing (and now available in electronic formats as well). With comprehensive coverage of the United Nations’ activities for a given year, the *Yearbook* is the most authoritative reference work available on the actions and concerns of the organization, and provides the texts of all major General Assembly, Security Council, and Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions for the year it covers. Given the quantity and depth of information the *Yearbook* offers, there is usually a lag of three

or four years between the year described and the year that it is published. The most recent *Yearbook*, Volume 62, covers 2008 and was published in September 2012. The book is divided into five primary parts: Political and Security Questions; Human Rights Issues; Economic and Social Questions; Legal Questions; and Institutional, Administrative and Budgetary Questions. These are further subdivided as appropriate, for example by region or by agency. Chapters present summaries of relevant UN activities, major reports, Secretariat activities, and more. All resolutions, decisions, and other significant activities of the United Nations — and on a selective basis, those of subsidiary bodies — are either reproduced or summarized in the applicable chapters.

The *Yearbook* was produced in both English and French in one of its early editions; however, given the time lapse that already exists between the year covered and year published — in addition to the expense involved — for the English edition alone, it has proven impractical, and has not been a priority, to produce further translations internally. The offices of the editorial department for the *Yearbook* are in fact teeming with the constant stream of supporting English-language UN documents that constitute its subject matter, and from a purely physical standpoint it seems unfathomable to introduce multilingual versions into the mix. Because the documents (covering the daily happenings — meetings, conferences, reports, statements, actions — from all UN centres around the world) never stop being produced, work at the *Yearbook* never stops; all documents that come in are in a constant flux

of organization and filing so that the writers and editors can later access them for the given *Yearbook* volume on which they are working.

An evaluation of the *Yearbook* was recently conducted, with feedback solicited from United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) around the world regarding its value and usefulness, and taking suggestions for its possible improvement (UN Publications and Editorial 2012). Overall, respondents were highly satisfied with the *Yearbook*; “accuracy of information” received the highest positive rating with 88 percent of respondents noting they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the provided information. A large number of respondents —74 percent — were satisfied with the design and 73 percent were satisfied with the availability of the *Yearbook*. Of the various aspects, “promotion of the *Yearbook* to staff” received the lowest positive satisfaction rating, with 50 percent. UNICs placed a high value on print copies of the *Yearbook*, and print was the format used most often by the majority of respondents (75 percent). Of those, 67 percent also responded that an online version was either “easily accessible” or “accessible”. Twenty-three percent used the online version, while only two percent used the e-book version.

The responding UNICs offered a number of suggestions to potentially improve the *Yearbook*, including ideas regarding restructuring and promotion of the book. Some respondents also felt that the *Yearbook* should be published in a more timely fashion (closer to the year covered), although

doing so might deny readers the long-term perspective currently provided. Finally, many respondents indicated that they would like to see the *Yearbook* published in other official UN languages in addition to English (UN Publications and Editorial 2012).

It is lamentable that it has been unfeasible to produce the *Yearbook* in more than one language, especially given the United Nations' overall emphasis on multilingualism (including yearly reports by the Secretary-General on the topic) and assertion of parity among all UN languages (with speakers and representatives of Member States permitted and encouraged to use the official language of their choice). In addition, the actions and events described in the *Yearbook* take place all over the world and reflect a global, pan-cultural perspective (UN 2012). In fact, much of the documentation that constitutes the bulk of the *Yearbook's* material originates in a language other than English: speakers' and writers' original words have been translated into each of the six UN languages by the United Nations' Translations Services, with official documents then issued in these, and the English versions sent to the *Yearbook* offices.

The feasibility of publishing in other languages besides English has increased with the advent of electronic word processing. Prior to the many advances made in this area, it likely was nearly impossible to handle the print versions of all of these documents in six different languages in one publishing office, as the paper copies occupy considerable physical space.

But because there are now computer files for this information, most of which is publicly available through the UN Online Document System (ODS) — in addition to the many advances made in translation technology — there may be a window of opportunity to allow Yearbook readers to access it in their chosen language. After explaining technological advancements and current research related to these advancements, specific prospective solutions for UN Publications will be discussed.

### 3 . M A C H I N E T R A N S L A T I O N

Machine translation shows some promise in publishing materials in a reader's desired language. The difficulties inherent to translation, such as those experienced by UN Publications and noted above (including costliness and time consumption), have prompted innovation in finding a better (that is, faster, cheaper, and easier) way of getting the work done. Loosely defined, machine translation is a process through which a computer program analyzes a source text and then automatically produces a target text of the same material in a second language (Goutte et al. 2009). This process does involve some degree of human effort, primarily in programming, creating databases, and in post-translation correcting and editing. In building a comprehensive terminological database, and then ensuring adequate pre- and post-editing, a machine translator should be able to produce accurate results, especially if the machine translation system is integrated with a translation memory tool and/or other information management system (Wu 2005).

Machine translation has been in practical development since the 1950s, with a joint Georgetown University-IBM venture called the "Georgetown experiment" (Hutchins 2004). Conducted in 1954, the Georgetown experiment involved automatic translation of sixty Russian sentences into English. Overall, the experiment was considered a success and ushered in an era of funding for computational linguistics and machine translation

research, though this excitement would prove to be short-lived, mainly due to the experiment's limited scope. It employed only 250 vocabulary items and six grammar rules, and thus despite the researchers' enthusiastic claims that machine translation would soon be a solved problem, real advancements came much more slowly — and machine translation is still a work in progress today (Hutchins 2004). Machine translation is in fact a constantly evolving process, one that has yet to overcome its fundamental flaws, likely due in large part to the constantly evolving nature of language itself (with new words and idioms added regularly), and the infinite possible combinations of words. It has improved tremendously, however, to the point that one can understand the essence of a text from even a basic (and relatively inexpensive and accessible) machine translation tool. If publishers are to reach a point of true accuracy and readability in machine-translated text, it is important to better understand, nurture, and improve upon the best translation technologies and methodologies in development.

With the volume of documentation the UN processes in multiple languages every day, the organization has, by necessity, developed its own translation technology, including the United Nations Multilingual Terminology Database (UNTERM). UNTERM takes common words, phrases, and departmental names used at the UN, and translates them into each of the six official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish). With over 85,000 entries in each of these languages, UNTERM is freely available online and serves to assist employees — and the interested

public — in using accurate terminology (UNTERM 2012). The UN also has a dedicated Translation Services section, working in the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. Translation Services uses many modern technological tools in its work, including UNTERM, document repositories with full-text search capabilities, bitext alignment tools (which automatically align original and translated versions of the same text), translation memory managers, and voice-recognition software (UN 2012). As they are continuously occupied with the demands of translating official documents (such as transcripts from meetings of the Security Council, General Assembly, and other councils), however, Translation Services generally does not produce translations for UN Publications — and thus the United Nations’ various publications (including the Yearbook of the United Nations) still do not benefit from their sophisticated translation facilities. The publications unit turns instead to contracted translators, allows outside publishers to produce foreign editions, or simply defaults to publishing in English only. The latest research with readily available technology offers some hope, however, that this does not have to continue to be the case.

### 3.1 Emerging Developments

Statistical machine translation (SMT) is generally considered to be at the forefront of machine translation methods, largely because of its processing speed. Two other methods are example-based machine translation (EBMT)

and compositional machine translation (CMT) (Wu 2005). SMT automatically draws on bodies of existing parallel data: a text in a source language is paired with its translation in a target language and then stored (Wu 2005). A resulting translation system can thereby be quickly “bootstrapped” for new language pairs, without the need for the arduous and time-consuming manual production of a linguistic system (Wu 2005, Kirchhoff et al. 2011). It may be important to note that SMT does have its flaws, as it can be something of a gamble to rely upon what is presumed to be an existing equivalent in the target language, rather than taking the traditional dictionary and grammar route. As a result, text translated through SMT can often include blatant and nonsensical (and ungrammatical) errors. However, as language databases and worldwide networks continue to grow, these errors should become fewer and farther between (Kirchhoff et al. 2011).

As a test of SMT, Kirchhoff and colleagues (2011) explored the feasibility of using freely available machine translation technology to translate health promotion publications. English-language health promotion materials were gathered from public health websites, and Spanish versions were then created using Google Translate (which is based on an SMT platform). The translations were rated for adequacy and fluency, then analyzed for errors and manually corrected by a human post-editor, and then compared to exclusively manual translations. The study revealed that the Google machine translation plus post-editing took anywhere from 15 to 53 minutes per document, compared to an average of two to seven days for the standard,

manual translation process. Comparison of the machine-assisted and human translations of documents by reviewers, who were blind to which translation was machine based, and which done by humans alone, revealed overall equivalency between the two methods. An analysis of translation errors indicated that the most important errors were found in word sense. For example, in a document outlining the importance of pest control, when translating the word “board” within the phrase “glue board” from English to Spanish, the machine translator erroneously chose the Spanish word signifying “a governing body” rather than the word signifying “a wooden plank”. Such errors were reportedly easily remedied during the editing process. The researchers concluded that machine translation plus post-editing could actually be an effective method of producing multilingual informational materials, with equivalent quality but lower cost and higher speed than manual translations.

Google Translate was also evaluated in a recent study (Zuo 2010), specifically using UN documents. The study examined user perspectives on the performance of Google Translate in translating various UN documents. The researchers noted that, while UN Translation Services had been using other computer-assisted translation methods for several years, Chinese translators at the United Nations recently tried using Google Translate with the hope that it might be an easy, versatile, and labour-saving tool. A variety of UN documents were chosen to evaluate the performance of Google translation from English to Chinese. The sampled UN documents included three

resolutions, two letters, two provisional agendas, one plenary verbatim, one report, one note by the Secretariat, and one budget. The resulting translations were deemed mostly successful, which researchers attributed to Google Translate's powerful infrastructure and expansive translation database. It was noted that conversion between the two languages took only an instant, even for comparatively lengthy pieces of writing, and further that Google Translate produced accurate terminology more frequently than other translation tools (such as MS Bing). Apparently Google's Chinese wasn't fully intelligible, however, especially at the sentence level, primarily because of problems with word order and sentence parsing. There were also some technical problems, such as adding or omitting words and erroneous rendering of numbers. Nevertheless, researchers concluded that Google Translate offered translators a viable option to generate rough drafts with the benefit of saving time and the inconvenience of typing, though they hypothesized that there was a possibility that the challenges of post-editing might offset the time saved.

#### 4. TRANSLATION WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION: SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGY AND CHANGING ATTITUDES

Other major publishers and organizations around the world are developing and using new machine translation programs for their online and print publications. One of the most significant of these — and perhaps best serving as a model for UN Publications — is the European Union (EU). One of their major undertakings in supporting multilingualism is the MOLTO (Multilingual Online Translation) project, coordinated by the University of Gothenburg and funded by the EU. MOLTO’s goal is to develop a set of tools for translating texts between multiple languages in real time, with high quality. To ensure that this high quality is in fact achieved, MOLTO uses a hybrid Grammatical Framework (GF)-SMT approach, which allows it to address translation “noise”, such as words with no equivalent in other languages, spelling errors, and proper nouns with defined affixes (España-Bonet et al. 2011). Languages are stored as separate modules, and based on these modules MOLTO has been building prototypes with the aim of covering a majority of the EU’s official languages. As it stands, they have produced work in 15 languages, including 12 official EU languages (MOLTO 2012).

MOLTO technology eventually will be released as open-source libraries (accompanied by multiple web-based demonstrations), which can then be adapted to standard translation tools and web pages and thereby fit into

standard workflows. It differs from other web-based machine translators in that, while others are designed for the consumers of information, MOLTO will primarily serve the producers of information — which is an important development for publishers. The MOLTO team is focused on a quality standard that will allow for automatic translations of information, without the possibility that the original message will be impaired in any way. This is an increasing priority for the EU, as a multinational body (comprising 27 countries) with 23 official languages and a population of more than 500 million people, all of whom should have equal access to written information (EU 2012). While MOLTO is still a work in progress and an expensive undertaking, it shows promise for multilingual publishing in an openly accessible format, and could prove to be a viable tool for UN Publications. MOLTO has already been evaluated by researchers with regard to its success in translating patents (España-Bonet et al. 2011), and shows promise in achieving true accuracy with such documents, though further improvements and subsequent research are still necessary.

While MOLTO shows potential to be a major accomplishment as a technological development, it also serves as a model for progress in prioritizing multilingualism. In making such an investment, the EU is expressing that it values linguistic diversity and is committed to serving all its peoples, regardless of their language. In fact, MOLTO is just one component of the EU's support for translation under the umbrella of their Culture Programme for 2007–2013. The Culture Programme has a budget of €400 million for

“projects and initiatives to celebrate Europe’s cultural diversity and enhance our shared cultural heritage through the development of cross-border co-operation between cultural operators and institutions.” In doing so, the Culture Programme hopes to achieve three main objectives: to promote the cross-border mobility of people working in the cultural sector, to encourage the trans-national circulation of cultural and artistic output, and to foster intercultural dialogue (EU Culture Programme 2012). The development of such programs, with dedicated funding and clearly stated objectives, is where a nascent shift in attitudes may be found. Rather than allowing one language to serve as the status quo simply because it seems a cheaper or more convenient way of doing things, publishers can create a “new normal”: a world of writing where readers of all linguistic identities can see accurate reflections of themselves and the people in a multitude of other global cultures.

## 5. SOLUTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS: INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND A PARADIGM SHIFT

While it would still be a considerable undertaking to translate the full narrative of the *Yearbook of the United Nations* every year (perhaps prohibitively so, at least until tools like MOLTO are ready for full, open integration into the publishing industry), the publication could be adapted to more clearly reflect the language diversity endorsed in the Charter of the United Nations. The multilingual documents referenced within the *Yearbook* are readily and rapidly retrievable online, which its potential readers may not realize. Almost without exception, every official public UN document, in every official language, has an online permalink. Every document also has a jump page of sorts, listing its document identification number (which is always noted in the *Yearbook*) and displaying a clickable button for each language in which it is available. As it stands, this function exists primarily for online research and referencing purposes, largely within the organization itself. It would be a relatively simple process to link to these pages within electronic versions of the *Yearbook*; by selecting the already-noted document numbers in the text and hyperlinking these to their jump pages, readers would be provided with the opportunity to click a button and read the relevant information in any of the six languages with which they are most comfortable (see appendix for an example). While this does not represent full translation of the *Yearbook* in its entirety, it does furnish the book with a multilingual component and an opportunity to actively engage the reader in using the

language of their choice, doing so in a fairly simple and easily adopted fashion.

Looking further to technological innovation for possible solutions, the study by Kirchhoff et al. (2011) makes a favourable case for encouraging the use of machine translation, particularly in publishing information that should be freely available to all people regardless of their mother tongue. In this instance, Spanish-speaking Americans were largely underserved in accessing health information, which is a problem (one that is likely very prevalent in many minority language communities) that could be resolved expediently. A combined machine translation (for this study, SMT as used in Google Translate) and post-editing approach appears to be an effective means of doing so. Zuo's study (2011) is promising for UN Publications in particular, as it specifically addresses the documents and terminology used every day in writing the *Yearbook*, and it also brings to light some of Google Translate's virtues and shortcomings as a machine translator. It would seem that Google Translate may achieve greater fidelity between some source and target languages than others; in being aware of this issue and budgeting more post-editing time for some languages, it could indeed prove to facilitate the translation process.

A common caveat in machine translation research is that human post-editing continues to be a key factor in the process, and it may always be. Automated post-editing does exist, but is yet another component of

machine translation that is still in development and at an earlier stage of sophistication. A 2008 study by Doyon et al. compared various automatic post-editors to post-edits performed by humans, and concluded that while machine translation could indeed produce usable results when followed by human post-editing (as supported by the findings from Kirchhoff et al. and Zuo), machine post-editing did not improve translations to any significant degree. It would seem therefore that, at least for the foreseeable future, human post-editing will continue to be necessary. Relying exclusively on unedited machine translation (and, apparently, machine-edited machine translation) ignores the context-embedded nature of language, and so it still takes a human translator-editor to understand and fully convey the intended message of the original text. However, even fully human-generated translations are liable to contain errors, and all published material surely requires some form of editing before being distributed to a reading audience. This translation editing could, in theory, be incorporated into the standard editorial process. Retaining editors with a solid understanding of more than one language is perhaps a reasonable means — certainly for an organization like the United Nations — of achieving high-quality, timely translations of any number of publications.

The general consensus from researchers with regard to multilingual publishing is that investment is the key to its survival and sustained success. Actual investment is unfortunately the exception rather than the rule. In the United States, for example, there is typically little subsidization available to

publishers undertaking literary translations, though American publishers lament that subsidies (from any source) seem to be the only way to afford to do them (Sapiro 2010, O'Brien 2003). This need for subsidies that don't materialize undoubtedly has devastating consequences for the success of any prospective translated work. Reiterating some of the findings by Mélitz as well as Rønning and Slaatta, John O'Brien (2003) contends that the main issue is that American literature makes money in other markets, while foreign literature rarely makes money in America. If overcoming this imbalance is to become a priority, he suggests that, rather than placing the onus on American publishers, foreign publishers (or the governments of the countries in which they are based) that want their books translated and published in America subsidize the cost of producing those books. O'Brien describes this subsidization as the "obvious" solution to the problem, and proposes that France, for example, could designate as little as one million US dollars annually for literary translations — which would cover translation costs and other related expenses. By O'Brien's estimate, this investment would result in at least forty works — perhaps as many as sixty — of French literature being translated. If, by extension, this investment was also offered by Germany, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, and Russia, that would amount to 400 translations per year. With this level of support (which would also enable effective marketing and outreach), the issue of lack of interest would also diminish; O'Brien infers that a readership of five to ten thousand people per book would be plausible — resulting

in a total potential reading audience of two to four million for translated works each year. This is not only a step toward addressing the relative scarcity of world literature being more available, but also a different way of thinking about relationships between countries, publishers, and language groups in general.

While O'Brien's suggestions take much of the responsibility for literary translation away from American publishers, and say little about the cultural importance of publishing translations (let alone the anglocentric implications behind his statement), he makes what may well be a realistic — and more eagerly adopted — suggestion for its survival in the US. If the issues of cost and manpower were removed (or at least reduced), American publishers would have significantly fewer obstacles preventing their publication of translated work.

Canada provides a rather different publishing model for examination in terms of translations. While its publishing market is much smaller than its US counterpart, and its non-English market a fraction of that, multilingualism seems to be a greater consideration (largely due to the country's two official national languages, and additional official languages at the provincial/territorial level) and is encouraged through government grants and awards (Canada Council for the Arts 2012). The Canadian government formally acknowledges that it must support the needs of the nation's various language communities; while Canada's French-language publishing scene

is largely restricted to Quebec, and the bulk of Canadian publishing houses primarily work in English, there are also small literary communities in other languages, including the nation's aboriginal languages, Chinese, Polish, Spanish, and others (Literary Translators' Association of Canada 2012). It is important that this literature is not left unread or unappreciated by a segment of the population simply because its members use one language rather than another; a language barrier should not make a publication any less worthy of consideration. The official status of national bilingualism in Canada accounts for much of the reasoning behind government subsidy for literary translation, which in Canada is administered through the Canada Council for the Arts. While it is difficult to find publishers devoted solely to literary translation, many Canadian publishers (including Coach House, Guernica, House of Anansi, and others) do produce translations and receive grants through the Canada Council for this every year (Canada Council for the Arts 2012).

While this model of subsidization cannot necessarily be used to further the translation agenda at UN Publications specifically, the underlying theme of prioritization — and the adoption of a changed attitude surrounding language — can be. The United Nations regularly evaluates and reports on the state of multilingualism within its major bodies, which would indicate that it is an acknowledged priority and is worthy of investment. A staggering 160 languages are spoken by staff members at the UN Secretariat, which the organization describes as essential in helping to promote international

understanding, dialogue, unity, and mutual tolerance in a diverse environment (UN General Assembly 2012). The UN can build upon many of the positive steps it has already taken toward language parity, and encourage its publishing activities to fully reflect its stated views on multilingualism.

## 6 . C O N C L U S I O N S

If people around the world are going to unite in sharing information and appreciating written works, they should be able to do so on common ground — which certainly applies to the fundamental message of the United Nations. One way to create this common ground in publishing is to offer as many language options as possible. Online ventures such as MOLTO and the document linking suggested for UN Publications, in addition to the many advances being made in machine translation, offer examples of where multilingual publishing may be headed and where it can thrive in the future. In using technology to make translation a less cumbersome step in the publishing process, a greater number of written works can be made much more readily available to larger and more diverse audience. This in turn makes a statement about the value of languages — and, indeed, the value of the people who speak them. As noted in the Secretary-General’s recent report (2012) on multilingualism at the United Nations:

“Promoting multilingualism is, moreover, closely linked to respecting cultural diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue. Efforts to promote multilingualism are vital for fostering diversity and plurality within the United Nations. The Secretariat continues to make every effort to make content available in all six official languages in a timely manner while ensuring quality interpretation and translation. These measures are taken with a view to enabling the Organization to provide the best possible support to

Member States, particularly in their deliberative bodies, and to project the work and values of the United Nations to the largest audience.”

In supporting translations through actions and attitudes, language is transcended in the name of sharing knowledge and beauty — which is at the heart of publishing as a whole. As the world continues to be increasingly interconnected, there is room for an increased appreciation of and focus on multilingual publishing. The issues facing minority language communities in countries like the United States and Canada can only be exacerbated by a dearth of information in their respective languages; investing in multilingual publications expresses that these communities are valued, that their issues are important, and that publishers — big and small — want to share a dialogue with them. With a shift in priorities and a willing adoption of available tools, Western publishing may well emerge from its long history of anglocentric influence to blossom in a more linguistically diverse and representative environment.

*Author note: As this report was being completed, the Yearbook of the United Nations added a multilingual component to their publication, offering a condensed, simplified version of the most recent Yearbook in each of the official languages of the UN, free of charge, on its website.*

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## A P P E N D I X

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The hyperlinking function suggested as a means of incorporating a multi-lingual aspect into the *Yearbook of the United Nations* (see page 29) is a relatively simple process. Below is a sample page from the electronic version of the 2007 *Yearbook of the United Nations*, taken from its chapter on health, food, and nutrition. Note that a hyperlink has been inserted (using Adobe Acrobat's "Link" tool) where an official UN document is referenced:

## Health, food and nutrition

In 2007, the United Nations continued to promote human health and food security, coordinate food aid and support research in nutrition.

At the end of the year, about 33.2 million people were living with HIV/AIDS and an estimated 2.5 million became infected with the virus. Deaths due to AIDS-related illnesses were estimated at 2.1 million. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) observed that, despite the scaling up of antiretroviral treatment, AIDS remained a leading cause of mortality worldwide and the primary cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa. UNAIDS, as coordinator of AIDS activities in the UN system, involved an increasing number of actors in the response to the epidemic, including civil society, the private sector, treatment activists and Governments. In December, the General Assembly decided to convene, in June 2008, a high-level meeting to review progress achieved in realizing the targets set in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

WHO reported to the Assembly that despite significant political and financial commitments to control malaria, more than 500 million people suffered from the acute form of the disease every year, resulting in an annual toll of 1 million deaths. In a December resolution, the Assembly welcomed a decision by the World Health Assembly to commemorate Malaria Day on 25 April and urged Member States and the international community to enhance the quality of malaria-related activities. Also in December, the Assembly designated 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day, to be observed annually beginning in 2008. In other health-related action, the Assembly called for efforts to end obstetric fatalities ([resolution 62/138](#)) (see p. 1169).

In April, the United Nations Road Safety Commission organized the first UN Global Road Safety Week, which focused on young road users and to raise awareness about the societal impact on road traffic injuries. As part of the observation of that event, the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety provided over 400 youngsters from 100 countries with the opportunity to share experiences and create a global network of young road safety advocates.

In 2007, the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed 5.3 million metric tons of food aid, assisting a total of 86.1 million hungry people in 80 countries. The aid was provided through development projects,

emergency operations and protracted relief and recovery operations.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continued to implement the Plan of Action adopted at the 1996 World Food Summit and the Declaration of the 2002 World Food Summit, which called on the international community to fulfil the pledge to halve the number of undernourished people by 2015.

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### Health

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#### AIDS prevention and control

##### Implementation of Declaration of Commitment

The General Assembly, at its resumed sixty-first session (21–22 May) (A/61/PV.98–100), discussed the implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, adopted at the twenty-sixth special session of the Assembly by resolution S-26/2 (YUN 2001, p. 1124), and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, adopted at the Assembly's 2006 high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS by resolution 60/262 (YUN 2006, p. 1411).

Addressing the Assembly, the Secretary-General stated that, in the course of a quarter of a century, HIV had infected 65 million people and killed 25 million. In 2007, almost 40 million people were living with HIV, more than half of them women. Every day, some 8,000 people died of AIDS-related illnesses and another 12,000 became infected with HIV (A/61/PV.98).

**Report of Secretary-General.** In response to Gen-

<http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=a>

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eral Assembly and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. The Political Declaration, which set out the requirements for moving countries towards the goal of universal access to HIV prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010, strengthened the commitments made by Governments in the Declaration, which was entitled "Global Crisis—Global Action".

The report noted that, during the year since the adoption of the Political Declaration, important groundwork had been laid for a longer-term effort to

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الأمم المتحدة

الجمعية العامة



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الدورة الثانية والستون  
جلسة ٦٦ (أ) من جدول الأعمال

قرار اتخذته الجمعية العامة  
[بناء على تقرير اللجنة الثالثة (A/62/437)]

١٣٨/٦٢ - دعم الجهود الرامية إلى القضاء على ناسور الولادة  
بن الجمعية العامة

إذ تؤكد من جديد إعلان ومنهاج عمل بيجين<sup>(١)</sup> ونتائج الدورة الاستثنائية الثالثة  
والعشرين للجمعية العامة المعنونة "المرحلة عام ٢٠٠٠: السنوات بين الخمسين والتمهيد والسلام  
في القرن الحادي والعشرين"<sup>(٢)</sup> والإعلان المتعمد في الدورة الخامسة والأربعين للجنة  
وضع المرحلة<sup>(٣)</sup>،

وإذ تؤكد من جديد أيضا الالتزامات الدولية في ميدان التنمية الاجتماعية وتحسين  
السنوات بين الخمسين والتمهيد بالمرحلة التي تم تمهيد لها في المؤتمر العالمي لحقوق الإنسان  
والمؤتمر الدولي للسكان والتنمية ومؤتمر القمة العالمي للتنمية الاجتماعية والمؤتمر العالمي  
لشامخة العمرة والتمهيد العمري وكرامة الأناث وما يتصل بذلك من تمهيد  
وكذلك الالتزامات التي تم تمهيد لها في إعلان الأمم المتحدة للألفية<sup>(٤)</sup> ومؤتمر القمة العالمي  
لعام ٢٠٠٠<sup>(٥)</sup>،

(١) تقرير المؤتمر العالمي الرابع المشتمل على بيان بيجين، ١٩٩٤-١٩٩٥، نيويورك، ١٩٩٥، مسطورته الأمم  
المتحدة، رقم البيع A/56.74/13، الفصل الأول، القرار ١، الفقرات الأول والثاني.

(٢) القرار ٥٤/٢٣٣، المرفق والقرار ٥٤/٢٣٣، المرفق.

(٣) النظر: الوثائق الرسمية للجمعية العامة، المجلس الاقتصادي والاجتماعي، ٢٠٠٥، لتسهيل رقم ٧ والمصوب  
(E/2005/27) و (Cm.1)، الفصل الأول، الفقرة ١٤، النظر أيضا المقرر المجلس الاقتصادي والاجتماعي  
٢٣٤/٢٠٠٥.

(٤) النظر القرار ٢٠٠٥.

(٥) النظر القرار ١٦٠.

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