Professional Human Translators in the Age of Artificial Intelligence
with Eduardo Berinstein (FCCI, ATA-Certified translator at ebtranslations.com)

Summary by Sue Kronenfeld

Eduardo Berinstein is both a translator (English > Spanish) and an interpreter who brings his 35 years of professional experience to consider both what artificial intelligence (AI) can offer translators and interpreters, and the unique gifts that human language experts bring to this important work.

Eduardo began by considering the etymology and connotations of several key terms. First, he juxtaposed "human" and "artificial." "Human" refers to our status as natural, mortal beings, with both a literal heartbeat and emotional and ethical components. The word "artificial" means "human-made," but also connotes falseness, and even inferiority. One hallmark of humans, *homo sapiens*, is our ability to communicate through speech, which may have existed for up to 100,000 years.

The human mind is always observing, and even is active while we sleep, trying to make sense of our experience. The mind is intuitive, not only seizing the literal meaning of a word or a circumstance, but appreciating its context. It is also sensitive to how our use of language impacts human beings.

This concept is partly captured by the etymology of "intelligence," which is derived from the Latin *inter* (between) and *legere* (to read or to choose). Language professionals must interpret text/speech for its most important meaning–reading between the lines, we might say. Every act of translation (whether spoken or written) is also a matter of interpretation. Psychologists have long been identifying varying types of natural "intelligence"–linguistic, logical, emotional, interpersonal, etc. These differing kinds of human intelligence make us sensitive enough to produce the language products necessary to a given context and purpose.

Translating from one language into another is more than word-for-word substitution. The word "translation" has many dictionary synonyms, but never means "to make an exact copy of information." Human language professionals do much more than substitute words; they also interpret culture, ethnic identity, differing worldviews, core beliefs, etc. The etymology of "interpreter" is Latin *interpres* ("intermediary negotiator"), from *inter* (between) and *pretium*, the word from which we derive "price" and "precious." Translation and interpretation are creative processes, not merely mechanical. Our word choice will affect our language product, for good or ill, with human consequences. This is a higher level of sophistication than machines deliver.

To understand better why this is so, look at how human minds communicate through speech. One person has an idea, a *percept* that they have observed through their senses and wish to impart to another. They produce sounds (speech) that the other person interprets. The second person does not receive the *exact*

same idea that the first wishes to communicate, but it is close enough for understanding. These are the creative acts of producing speech, and then interpreting that speech, converting it back into a percept. When the first two people do not share a common language, a similar process is used, but with another layer added by an interpreter. Essentially, this is an extension of the human mechanism of communicating through speech.

Finally, what does it mean to be language "professionals"? For one thing, we need to hold ourselves to an industry standard. Ours are occupations that have existed for quite some time without being formalized. We lag behind medicine, law and other professions in peer-reviewed fora and publications, etc. To catch up, we need more conferences, more exchanges, more review of materials about the profession. We should be curious about developments in translation and interpreting, including how technology can serve us. Eduardo himself reads many online professional user groups on translation and interpreting, and highly recommends Jost Zetsche's Toolbox digest (now replaced by Slator Tool Box). He also attends road shows and webinars for machine translation (MT) software.

Translators nowadays must also be highly competent at using machine translation tools. We must apply our professional ethics and judgment to every job and situation in a way that machines cannot. Machine translation tools can be very powerful, but because of the humane qualities that we humans bring to our work, it is important that AI tools be wielded by qualified people in a responsible way.

Some final distillations from Eduardo:
1. Translation is a quintessentially *human* activity, and part of our human nature.
2. Don't oppose or ignore technological tools; they can be quite powerful and useful when wielded by ethical professionals.
3. Your human mind is your strongest superpower.

Recommended bibliography

"The Role of Message Analysis," by William Isham. Published in *Proceedings of the 1985 Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Convention*, ed. Marina L. McIntire. Silver Spring, Maryland: RID Publications, 1986. Available for free download.

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Teoría general de la mediación interlingüe,
     by Sergio Viaggio, ISBN 978-8479087838

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     by Daniel Gile, ISBN 978902728808

A Guide to Machine Translation for Today's Professional Translator,
     by Michael Farrell, ISBN: 9798375879758