Gaming the machine: Text-recycling and automatic spinning to minimize plagiarism in medical articles

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the ethical dilemmas encountered and the multiple roles played by a translator while paraphrasing a medical article. The study focuses on the intersectionality of the plagiarism, translation and digital paraphrasers (spinners) and questions the ethics of plagiarism reduction through intra-linguistic text-recycling. It involves a critical textual analysis of the researcher's own translated documents and those produced by another translator in the same specific subdomain. The process puts tremendous pressure on the translator to think like a machine and figure out the way iThenticate detects plagiarism, so that s/he can "play" it and pass detection. The intra-translation process is much more time and labor intensive than the usual work required by cross-linguistic translation, and the translator is often forced to seek alternative digital tools to speed up the process. However, the online spinning tools turn out to produce disappointingly low-quality results. In this case, the translator attempted to "play" the iThenticate algorithm by resorting to various intra-translational syntactic, lexical, morphological and pragmatic devices, which raises some ethical concerns regarding the production and presentation of originality. One emerging major ethical concern was identified as "cutting out" pieces from the original text and delivering a simplified version of it to the end user. This created a dilemma for the translator: Should the translator try to stick to the original text as best as possible and thus risk plagiarism, or move away from it and thus minimize the rate of machine-detected plagiarism but risk losing the original intended meaning? The dynamic interplay between different levels and dimensions of intra-linguistic translation and recycling are exemplified.

Keywords: Automatic spinning, medical texts, paraphrasing, plagiarism detection, text-recycling.