

AI could make it less necessary to learn foreign languages

人工智能可能使学习外语的必要性降低

That is good news for travellers, bad news for soulful connection

这对旅行者来说是好消息，但是不利于心灵的链接

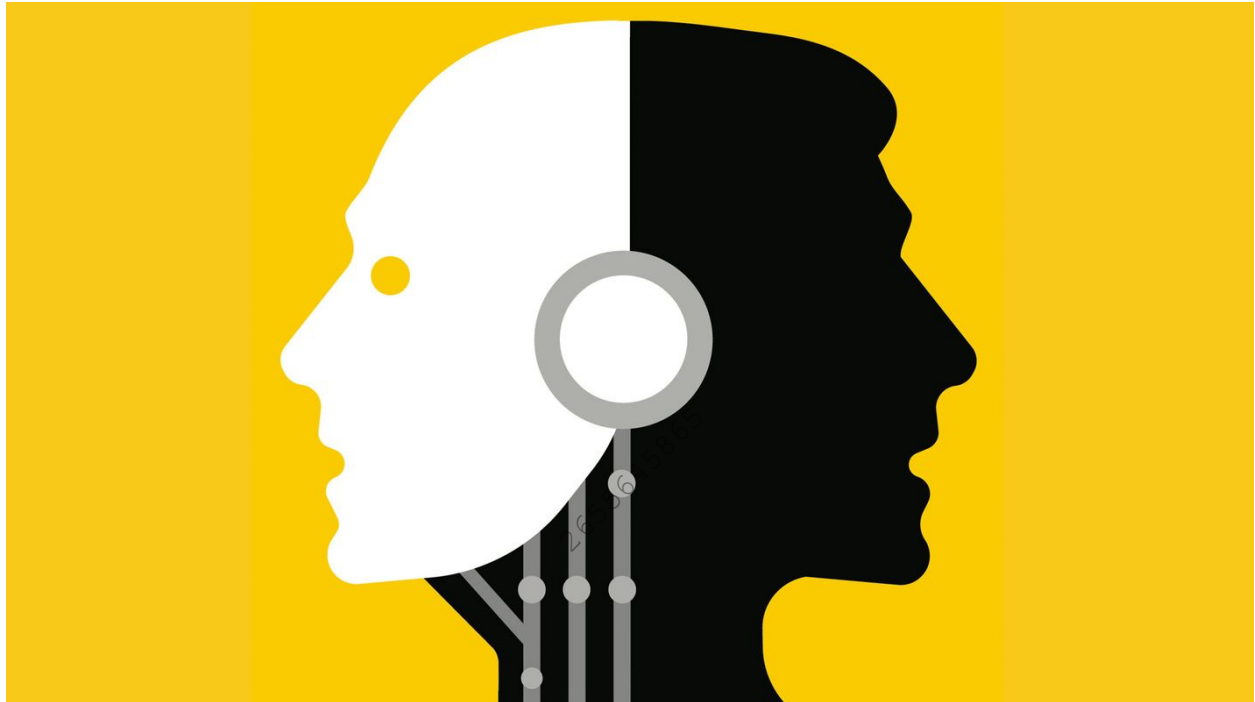


image: nick lowndes

On holiday, many will find themselves in places where they do not speak the language. Once upon a time, they might have carried a phrasebook. The rise of English has made that less necessary. But most people—at least seven of the world's eight billion—still do not speak English. That leaves options like pantomime, a willingness to be surprised by what arrives at dinner—or, increasingly, technology.

pantomime : / pænt mə m / 一种通过手势、表情和动作来传达故事、情感或信息的表演形式

例：he actors used **pantomime** to portray the story, as there was no dialogue in the performance.
(演员们使用哑剧表演来叙述故事，因为这个表演没有对白。)

a willingness to do sth : 愿意做某事的意愿或态度

例：She has a **willingness to help others**, and is always ready to lend a hand.
(她乐于助人，总是愿意伸出援手。)

increasingly : 程度或数量逐渐增加或不断上升

例：With the advancement of technology, people are **increasingly** dependent on smartphones for communication. (随着科技的进步，人们越来越依赖智能手机进行交流。)

More and more people are using simple, free tools, not only to decode text but also to speak. With these apps' conversation mode, you talk into a phone and a spoken translation is heard moments later; the app can also listen for another language and produce a translation in yours.

在度假时，很多人并不会说当地语言。过去，他们可能会携带一本短语手册。然而，英语的普及使得这种需求变得不那么迫切。但是，仍然有大多数人（世界上80 亿人口中至少有七分之六）不会说英语。这就只能选择肢体语言来表达，心甘情愿的接收端上桌的未知的晚餐，或者域来越多的使用技术手段

越来越多的人开始使用简单且免费的工具，不仅用于解码文本，还可以进行语音交流。通过这些应用程序的对话模式，您只需对着手机说话，片刻之后就能听到口语翻译；该应用程序还可以倾听其他语言并将其翻译成您的语言。

You may still get a surprise or two. Google Translate may be the best-known name in machine translation, but it often **blunders**. Take “my wife is **gluten-free**,” the kind of thing you might say at a restaurant abroad. In French or Italian, Google Translate renders this as “my wife is without gluten”—true to the words rather than the meaning. DeepL, a rival, does better, offering various options, most of them along the correct lines.

The best tool may not be a translation app at all. Though not marketed for the purpose, Chatgpt, a **generative ai system** that **churns out prose** according to users' prompts, is **multilingual**. Rather than entering an exact text to translate, users can tell Chatgpt to “write a message in Spanish to a waiter that my wife

gluten：一种蛋白质，存在于小麦、大麦和黑麦等谷物中

例：Many people with celiac disease cannot tolerate **gluten** and must follow a gluten-free diet. (许多患有乳糜泻的人不能耐受麸质，必须遵循无麸质的饮食)

blunder：因粗心、无知或不谨慎而犯下严重的错误，或者指无意中做出尴尬或愚蠢的行动

例：The goalkeeper **blundered** and let the opposing team score an easy goal. (守门员犯了个错误，导致对方轻松地进了一球。)

churn out：大量而迅速地生产或制造
例：The factory **churns out** hundreds of cars every day. (这家工厂每天大量生产数百辆汽车)

prose：表示散文，即不使用诗歌形式的书面或口头表达

例：He wrote a beautiful piece of **prose** about his childhood memories. (他写了一篇关于他童年回忆的美丽散文)

and I would like the tasting menu, but that she is gluten-free, so we would like ^{替代品} **substitutions** for anything that has gluten.” And out pops a perfect paragraph, including the way Spanish-speakers actually say “my wife is gluten-free”: *mi esposa es celiaca*. It is a ^{释义、改述} **paraphrase** rather than a translation, more like having a native-speaking dinner ^{/kəm'pænjən/ 同伴、伴侣} **companion** than an automated interpreter.

您可能仍然会遇到一两个错误。谷歌翻译可能是机器翻译中最知名的名字，但它经常犯错。以“我的妻子不能吃麸质食品”为例，这是您在国外餐厅可能会说的话。在法语或意大利语中，谷歌翻译将其翻译为“我的妻子没有麸质”，更注重文字而非含义。然而，DeepL 作为竞争对手，做得更好，提供了各种选项，其中大部分都翻译的更加准确。

而实际上，最好的辅助工具可能并不是一个翻译软件。尽管 Chatgpt 的定位并不是翻译软件，但它是一个生成式人工智能系统，具备多语言能力，能根据使用者的简单提示给出大篇白话文。用户无需输入要翻译的准确文本，而是可以告 Chatgpt：“用西班牙语转告服务生，告诉他我和我的妻子想要品鉴菜单，但她不能吃麸质食品，所以我们需要替换任何含麸质成分的食物。”随后，Chatgpt 就会蹦出一段恰当的文字描述，其中包含西班牙语使用者说的“我的妻子不能吃麸质食品”：miesposaes celTMaca。这更像是与一位母语为西班牙语的用餐伴侣交谈，而不是一个自动化的口译工具。

Travel has long been a motivator for study—unless people start to feel ai tools offer a good-enough service. Some are concerned that apps are turning language acquisition into a ^{/ˈdwɪndlɪŋ/ 减少} **dwindling** pursuit. ^{/ˈpɑːlɪglɑːt/ 通晓 (或使用) 多种语言的 博学的} **Douglas Hofstadter**, a **polyglot** and **polymath** writer, has argued that something ^{影响深刻的} **profound** will ^{消失} **vanish** when people talk through machines. He describes giving a ^{中断} **halting**, difficult

dwindling : 逐渐减少或缩小，通常指数量、规模或力量的逐渐减少

例：The **dwindling** water supply in the region is a cause for concern. (该地区日益减少的水供应令人担忧)

language acquisition : 指人类学习和掌握语言的过程

例：Language acquisition becomes more challenging as we get older. (随着年龄的增长，语言习得变得更具挑战性)

polyglot : 能够流利地使用多种语言的人
例：She is a **polyglot** who can speak six different languages fluently. (她是一个能够流利地说六种不同语言的多语种人士)

polymath : 具有多种才能和专长的博学者

例：Marie Curie is known as a **polymath** for her contributions to physics, chemistry, and pioneering research on radioactivity. (玛丽·居里以其在物理学、化学以及对放射性的开创性研究所作出的贡献而被誉为博学者)

speech in Mandarin, which required a lot of work but offered a sense of ^{成就} accomplishment at the end. Who would ^{吹嘘} boast of taking a helicopter to the top of ^{珠穆朗玛峰} Mount Everest?

Others are less worried. Most people do not move abroad or have the kind of ^{持续的} sustained contact with a foreign culture that requires them to put in the work to become fluent. Nor do most people learn languages for the purpose of ^{使人性化} humanising themselves or training their brains. On their holiday, they just want a beer and the ^{/spə'geti/意大利式细面条} spaghetti carbonara without incident (and sometimes without gluten).

旅行一直以来都是学习的动力，但如果人们开始觉得人工智能工具提供的服务已经足够好了，那么情况可能会发生变化。有人担心翻译软件正在使语言学习变得越来越不重要。道格拉斯·霍夫斯塔德精通多种语言，是一名博学的作家，他认为对着人们通过机器进行交流，语言里面一种深刻的东西也在消失。他描述说，磕磕巴巴的用普通话完成一段演讲需要大量的准备工作，尽管过程困难重重，但最终带来了一种成就感。毕竟，谁会吹嘘自己乘坐直升机登上珠穆朗玛峰呢？然而，其他人对此并不太担心。大多数人并不会移居国外，也不会长期接触外国文化，因此不需要付出大量努力来掌握流利的语言。而且，大多数人学习语言并非为了提高文化素养或者锻炼大脑。他们只是想要在度假期间顺顺利利地、轻松地享受一杯啤酒和意大利炭烤培根意面（有时还要无麸质）

As ai translation becomes an even more popular labour-saving tool, people will split into two groups. There will be those who want to stretch their minds, ^{使沉浸} immerse themselves in other cultures or force their thinking into new ^{路径} pathways. This lot will still take on language study, often aided by technology. Others

boast : 夸耀、自吹自擂或吹嘘

例：She boasted of her accomplishments in the competition. (她吹嘘自己在比赛中的成就)

put in the work : 付出努力、投入工作或尽力去完成某项任务或达到某个目标
例：If you want to excel in your career, you need to put in the work and go the extra mile. (如果你想在职业生涯中出类拔萃，你需要付出努力，做更多的努力)

humanize : humanising是humanize的现在分词形式，使人性化、赋予人性、使更具人性

例：The film humanises the main character by showing his vulnerabilities and struggles. (这部电影通过展示主角的脆弱和奋斗，使他更具人性化)

stretch minds : 拓展思维，挑战思维

能力

例：Reading challenging books can stretch our minds and broaden our perspectives. (阅读具有挑战性的书籍可以拓展我们的思维并拓宽我们的视野)

thinking into new pathways : 意指思维进入新的路径或方向。这种思维方式通常指的是超越传统、常规思维模式，去探索新的观点、创造性的解决方案或未曾考虑的可能性

will look at learning a new language with a mix of ^{欣赏}admiration and ^{迷惑、困惑}puzzlement, as they might with ^{极限运动}extreme endurance sports: “Good for you, if that’s your thing, but a bit painful for my taste.”

This is largely an ^{/ˈæŋɡləfoʊn/ 以英语为母语的人}Anglophone problem, since native English-speakers miss out on the benefits of language-learning most ^{/əˈkjuːtli/ 剧烈地、尖锐地}acutely. In many countries, including Britain and America, schools’ and universities’ foreign-language departments have been closing. (The British government recently devoted a modest fund to trying to get more ^{学生}secondary-school pupils to study foreign languages.) In the rest of the rich world, there is one ^{欣欣向荣的}thriving language that people still study: English. And in poorer countries, many people are multilingual as a matter of course; Africans and Indians learn languages because they are surrounded by them.

anglophone : 指的是以英语为母语或主要使用英语的人。这个词通常用来形容那些以英语为媒介进行交流、阅读、写作和思考的人

例：The conference attracted many prominent Anglophone scholars from around the world. (这次会议吸引了来自世界各地的许多著名的以英语为母语的学者)

secondary school : 是指学生完成初等教育后所进入的学校阶段，通常涵盖中学、高中、或者综合中学

例：I attended a secondary school in my hometown before going to university. (我在我的家乡上了一所中学，然后去了大学)

pupil : 指的是学生，尤其是指小学或中学的学生。这个词常用于英式英语中，而在美式英语中，更常用的词是student

例：The pupils at this school are very well-behaved and motivated to learn. (这所学校的学生非常守纪律，积极主动地学习)

随着人工智能翻译越来越成为一种受欢迎的省时工具，人们将分为两个群体。一方面，有些人希望拓展思维，沉浸于其他文化，或通过学习语言来开拓新的思维路径。这些人仍会选择学习语言，通常借助技术的帮助。另一方面，有些人对学习一门新语言充满了欣赏和困惑，就像对待极限耐力运动一样：“如果这是你的兴趣，那太棒了，但对我来说有点痛苦。”

这主要是一个英语使用者面临的问题，因为以英语为母语的人最为明显地错过了语言学习的好处。在许多国家，包括英国和美国，学校和大学的外语系部门已经关闭。（英国政府最近投入了一笔适度的资金，试图让更多中学生学习外语。）而在其他发达国家，人们仍然积极学习一种语言：英语。而在较贫穷的国家，许多人自然而然地会掌握多种语言，因为他们身处的环境中存在多种语言。

But a focus on the learner alone misses the fundamentally social nature of language. It is a bit like analysing the benefits of close relationships to heart-health but ^{忽视} overlooking the inherent value of those bonds themselves. When you try to ask directions in broken Japanese or mangle a joke in halting German, you are making direct contact with someone. And when you speak a language well enough to tell a story with perfect timing or put ^{敏锐的、灵活的} subtle ^{媒介} shading on an argument, that connection is more profound still. The best relationships do not require an intermediary. ■

然而，仅仅关注学习者本身会忽视语言的根本社交性质。这有点像分析亲密关系对心脏健康的好处，但却忽略了这些纽带本身的内在价值。当你试着用蹩脚的日语问路或者用支吾的德语说笑话时，你直接与他人进行了接触。当你能够流利地讲述故事并恰到好处地表达论点时，这种联系更加深刻。最好的关系不需要借助中介

Read more from Johnson, our columnist on language:

[In northern Europe, a backlash against English is under way](#) (Aug 4th)

[AI is making it possible to clone voices](#) (Jul 20th)

[Talking about AI in human terms is natural—but wrong](#) (Jun 22nd)

For more on the latest books, films, tv shows, albums and controversies, sign up to [Plot Twist](#), our weekly subscriber-only newsletter

inherent : 指某物内在的、固有的特性或特点，与其本质或基本属性相关，不依赖外界因素或条件

例：The ability to communicate effectively is **inherent** in human beings. (有效沟通的能力是人类固有的)

mangle a joke : 弄砸一个笑话或将一个笑话讲得不好笑、不流畅或不准确

例：He **mangled** the joke by forgetting the punchline. (他忘记了笑话的点睛之笔，把笑话讲砸了)

halting : 犹豫的、吞吞吐吐的或不流畅的

例：She gave a **halting** speech, pausing frequently and stumbling over her words. (她讲了一个吞吞吐吐的演讲，频繁停顿并且说话结结巴巴)

perfect timing : 完美的时机或恰到好处的时机

例：The comedian's punchline came at the **perfect timing**, making the audience burst into laughter. (这个喜剧演员的妙语正好在恰当的时机出现，让观众大笑不止)