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Read News Article

Of Universal Translators and Babelfishes



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The last couple of months have brought quite an interest in translation technologies: While statistical machine translation as their data bases grow, academics have released new better understand languages. The roads to Douglas Adams' Universal Translator now seem to have been paved. Alt from computers offering real-time translation in any language announced recently, bringing humanity one step further

Scientists at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Michigan last week debuted a device that translates from Chinese (Mandarin) to English by tracking mouth movements. Interact, the international advanced language and communication technologies, has been working on a host of language- and communication-related technologies, including those that were introduced last week.

After a successful demonstration, Interact program director and Carnegie Mellon University professor Alex Waibel said he foresees a future in which a similar device could be in the throat of individuals who need to communicate regularly across multiple languages.

Using a different device, Alexander Waibel also delivered a lecture simultaneously in English and Spanish by using a microphone.

The technology is rather advanced and could hit the market within a year in a limited number of translators, however, need further development.

The market for machine translations is increasing despite their current unreliability. Many companies increasingly offer one sort of automated translation or another while intelligence agencies are still using backlogs of wire tapes and media tracking data. Also, technologies offering automated translation will find their way into medical therapy for deaf people for instance, reading from their lips or translating sign language. However, the applications of such technologies will not be limited to human language service providers, as the human brain's capability to 'read between the lines' such complex linguistic concepts as sarcasm, analogy or connotations will not be mature in the future, despite science fiction like Star Trek and Douglas Adams' Hitchhiker's Guide.

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