Google to update translation app for phones

January 12 2015, by Nancy Owano

Quentin Hardy of *The New York Times* said it well: The tech industry is trying "to topple the Tower of Babel." He said that 80 to 90 percent of the web is in just 10 languages. Google, for one, has made it known that it is working toward this goal, and will soon announce updates to its translation app for phones.

A Google Translate app will soon translate speech in real-time, according to a number of reports this week discussing Hardy's article. They say it will build on Google's Translate feature, where you can get a written translation of languages and in some cases spoken translations. In the update, said Hardy, "the app will automatically recognize if someone

is speaking a popular language and automatically turn it into written text." Jon Fingas in *Engadget* said, "Converting unfamiliar speech to text in Google Translate is currently an awkward affair: you have to start a recording and wait until a moment after you're done to find out what the other person said." In the coming app there will be no delays. Fingas said the translation app from Google will turn speech into text on the fly.

Hardy wrote that "Google says its Translate app has been installed more than 100 million times on Android phones, most of which could receive the upgrade." There are 500 million active users of Translate every month across all platforms," said Macduff Hughes, the engineering director of Google Translate, in *The New York Times*.

Translate provides written translation of languages and spoken translations of several popular languages. The update closes the Babel gap more: the app will recognize if someone speaks a popular language and will turn it into written text automatically. In sum, said Fingas, Google Translate is about to get smarter. Ian Paul in *PCWorld* further wrote what users may expect: "The impact on you at home: Google's new spoken feature for Translate won't work with all the languages in its database, but a select number of 'popular' languages."

While tech giants like Google are doing their best to ease the Babel chasm, people around the world are doing their best to deal with what the tech giants provide. Some people do not exactly give the translation attempts an A+. One user complained that as a foreign language translation he got "Cute axis sip your night."

Tyler Lee of *Ubergizmo* said Google Translate isn't exactly the most accurate, as is the case with most translation services. "Sometimes the translation is spot on for simple words and sentences, but try getting a bit more complex and suddenly you are getting sentences that make no sense."

Numerous comments from users trying out Google's translation offerings reveal experiences that when translating whole sentences, it did not seem to understand intent. Said one frustrated user in a comment: It is easier to take the original document and translate it from scratch; "trying to correct a Google translated document will drive you mad." Another user found that translated words were at times out of order. Google Translate is a free translation tool, which uses computer programs to translate between languages. Google recognizes imperfections. "This means that not all translations will be perfect, and accuracy can vary across languages."

Nonetheless, Google appears determined to keep chipping away at the challenges of language barriers. Hardy reported another Google language translation service in the works: Google will announce a service where users just hold their phone up to a foreign street sign and get an automatic translation on the screen; you will just snap the image of the street sign and the app will translate it for you.

  More information: bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01 … iver-on-its-promise/

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