

Introduction

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Human Issues in Translation Technology is a coy title for a book. It seems simultaneously slow to reveal exactly what the book is about and reluctant to commit to any particular methodological approach. Even if we live in an age in which almost anything we write, say, click or swipe (in digital environments, at least) can be harvested by one automated system to be shared immediately with another automated system and humans appear to be temporarily cut out of the loop, humans are surely always present as the originators of content, the ultimate targets of adverts, the users of analytics, the developers of algorithms, the data capitalists who reap the benefits. Translation technologies are no different. They are moulded by and impact upon humans in all sorts of ways, and it would not be difficult to claim that *all* issues in translation technology are ‘human’ issues. Rather than trying to isolate a discrete set of specific questions within translation technology, however, the title of this book is intended to be suggestive of a perspective – one that privileges humans, no matter what their role in the vast area that is associated with translation technologies.

That such a perspective is needed should come as no surprise to those interested in studies of technology: it has been observed, for example, that the history of technology has tended to focus on invention and innovation rather than on how technologies are actually used (Edgerton 2011). A ‘pro-innovation bias’ is also manifest in the sometimes implicit understanding in much of the literature that innovation is self-evidently good (Sveiby *et al.* 2012) – an understanding that can, in turn, lead to an insufficient questioning of the need for and the effects on society of given technologies. Once the focus is switched to use, however, the desires and abilities of – and impacts on – human beings come into play and many ‘older’ technologies appear to be longer-lived than previously assumed (Edgerton 2011).

A pro-innovation bias can also be associated with an overemphasis on the inherent characteristics of new technologies, on their novel functions and technical features, at the expense of any consideration of how those technologies emerge in, fit into or change their sociotechnical environments. These latter, broader, questions have, of course, been tackled in the field known as science and technology studies (STS). Without wishing to oversimplify, scholars in STS generally reject the idea of ‘technoneutrality’ – to use Tehranian’s (1990) term. This is a position held by commentators who believe ‘that technologies in

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