



By email

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Donna Achimov

Chief Executive Officer
Translation Bureau
Public Works and Government Services Canada
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Dear Ms. Achimov,

This spring, the Translation Bureau announced its plans to make a machine translation tool available to all federal public service employees. Numerous members of the TR group (translators, interpreters and terminologists employed by the Translation Bureau) expressed concerns about this project at their Annual General Meeting (AGM) and in a flurry of communications with their union representatives. Given the legitimate and pressing nature of these concerns, the Executive Committee of Local 900 of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE) is urging the Translation Bureau's senior management and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) to look into them closely.

Specifically, TRs are worried that making available to all federal public servants a machine translation tool sanctioned by the Translation Bureau will:

- sully the reputation of the Translation Bureau: despite any and all warnings given to users of this tool, poor-quality translations produced with a Translation Bureau tool and therefore bearing the Translation Bureau's "seal of approval" could find their way into publication;
- constitute, through tacit approval of a tool producing only approximate translations, the Translation Bureau's abdication of its leadership role in defending language and setting language quality standards in Canada;
- lower the quality of internal federal government communications – translated using this tool and circulated without revision – to such a degree as to trample the language rights of official language minority public servants; and

- threaten the survival of the Translation Bureau and of the translation profession itself, since a machine translation tool proposed by the Translation Bureau could lead people to believe that translations produced by computer programs are acceptable despite their mediocre quality, result in a decline in the demand for professional translation services, and ultimately lead to hundreds of job losses.

Before this plan is allowed to proceed, the Translation Bureau must take every necessary step to guard against these very real risks. Members of the TR group are not opposed to technological advancements. If anything, the reverse is true: they will gladly embrace new tools that are effective and produce reliable results. Because of their strong sense of professionalism and due diligence, TRs are hesitant to endorse the Bureau's machine translation project, particularly in light of its dubious merits in terms of respect for the integrity of Canada's official languages and the worrisome threat of its potentially game-changing impact on the translation profession.

A formal analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of this project for the Bureau, the federal public service and the Canadian public should be carried out and disseminated to ensure that the chosen path is really the wisest way to go.

We hope to engage in further discussions with you on this matter.

With our kind regards,



Emmanuelle Tremblay
National president

c.c. Graham Fraser