Artificial Intelligence Bringing Bible Translations to Other 90% of Languages

In a groundbreaking endeavor, a team of specialists in California is utilizing artificial intelligence to translate the Bible into languages that currently lack a written version of God's Word.

The Greek Room project team, led by Ulf Hermjakob and Joel Mathew from the University of Southern California's Information Sciences Institute (ISI), aims to develop tools to enhance the efficiency of Bible translation.

Collaborating with Wycliffe Bible Translators, the project acknowledges the lengthy and painstaking process of Bible translation, which can extend beyond a decade. Out of the 7,100 languages worldwide, only around 700 possess a complete Bible, while over 6,000 languages lack a comprehensive version.

Hermjakob emphasized the significance of focusing on low-resource languages often overlooked by major translation initiatives. While Google Translate covers approximately 133 languages, the Greek Room project targets those that fall outside the top 500.

Mathew, driven by a passion to see the Bible translated into all languages, believes software technology can enhance and expedite the translation process. His aim is to leverage technology to support and improve translation efforts, making the Bible accessible to different linguistic communities.

Though certain aspects of translation are straightforward, others require human intervention due to their subjective nature. Mathew shared an example highlighting the challenge of conveying the meaning of a passage when cultural nuances and context differ.

"There is a community living in the mountains, and they live in huts without doors, so there's no concept of a door in their culture," Matthew said. "In the Bible, there is a verse that says, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock.' The question is, how do you translate that for people so that it is meaningful to them?

"We try to then explain it as not specifically knocking at the door, but instead describe a scene where someone is standing at the entrance of your house and asking to be invited to come in," Mathew told Relevant magazine.

By adapting translations to local cultures, the team endeavors to create meaningful interpretations for the intended audience. To aid translators, the Greek Room project provides a platform for in-depth discussions and analysis of such challenging language values. The team seeks to ensure that translations resonate with local cultures, enabling accurate comprehension of biblical texts.

Wycliffe utilizes a word-aligner tool, comparing translated Scripture with the original language source, to identify inconsistencies and offer suggestions for improved clarity. The goal is to enhance people's understanding of the Bible's message.

Looking ahead, Hermjakob and Mathew envision making the Greek Room an open-source platform accessible to translators worldwide. By sharing their data and code, they aim to empower translators with advanced tools and foster collaboration in the pursuit of accurate Bible translations.

Observers within the Christian ministry community recognize the transformative potential of AI. While missionaries are irreplaceable, the vast applications of AI have created new opportunities in language-related ministry work. The ability to overcome language barriers and interact effectively will usher in significant shifts in church planting, discipleship and various ministry activities.

As AI continues to evolve, its impact on Bible translation and cross-cultural ministry is expected to be substantial, paving the way for innovative approaches and global collaboration.

With technology as a valuable ally, the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) becomes more attainable, as the Good News reaches people in their heart languages. 🔥

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