HUMANITARIAN ACADEMY · HUMANITAIRES JOBS

Mini MBA AI and Humanitarian Action: working with Claude and Gemini

Course handout · Week 8 : Translation and communication with communities: speed, quality and accountability

A programme of exactly 3 months (12 weeks, 144 hours) to use the AI assistants Claude (Anthropic) and Gemini (Google) in humanitarian work, in a useful, safe and responsible way: how they work and their limits, writing requests, data protection, ethics and humanitarian principles, reports, proposals, data analysis and MEAL, translation and communication with communities, research and source checking, disinformation and security, productivity and automation, use policy and deployment in an organisation. Corrected exercises, three monthly exams with case studies, and a verifiable diploma from the Humanitarian Academy. Independent programme, with no partnership with Anthropic or Google.

https://humanitairejobs.org/en/academy/mini-mba-ia-claude-gemini/semaine-8/

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Week 8 : Translation and communication with communities: speed, quality and accountability

Objectives

- Use AI to translate and adapt texts, knowing its limits depending on languages and topics.
- Organise a human review proportionate to the risk of each text.
- Produce clear, adapted and tested messages for communities, in line with accountability to affected populations.

Machine translation today

Claude and Gemini translate very well between languages **widely present** on the Internet (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Modern Standard Arabic, and many others) for everyday texts: emails, procedures, reports, terms of reference. They can also adapt the register (formal, simple, technical).

Quality drops markedly:

- for **less-resourced languages**: many national and local languages of Africa, Asia and Latin America, some of them very widely spoken;
- for **dialect varieties** (spoken Arabic dialects, creoles, regional varieties);
- for very **technical** texts (medical, legal) or very **cultural** ones (proverbs, humour, taboo topics);
- for **proper names** and local terms.

The main danger: a fluent translation **looks** correct even when it contains a mistranslation. The more fluent the text, the less we think of checking it.

> Fluency is not proof of accuracy. Any translation intended for affected people is reviewed by a native speaker who knows the context.

Review proportionate to risk

Not all translations require the same level of control. A simple grid:

- **Low risk** (internal understanding, reading a document in a foreign language, informal email between colleagues): translation by AI, quick review by the user.
- **Medium risk** (reports, internal procedures, correspondence with partners or donors): review by a person fluent in both languages.
- **High risk** (health messages, informed consent, information on rights and access to aid, complaints mechanisms, legal documents, security messages): professional translation or in-depth review by a qualified native speaker, and **testing with community members**.

A useful method: **back-translation**. Another person (or another AI conversation, as a complement) translates the text back into the original language; the two are compared to spot differences in meaning. It helps spot mistranslations, but guarantees neither naturalness nor cultural appropriateness.

Glossaries and terminological consistency

Humanitarian terms have precise and sometimes sensitive equivalents: "internally displaced person", "refugee", "asylum seeker", "survivor", "household", "multipurpose cash transfer". Inconsistent translation creates confusion and sometimes legal or protection risks.

- Build a validated bilingual or multilingual **glossary** (starting from existing agency and cluster glossaries where possible).
- Give it to the assistant: "You must use this glossary; if a term is not in it, flag it."
- Place it in a Claude Project or a Gem so that it serves the whole team.
- Update it with feedback from translators and communities.

Example. In Arabic, the translation of "internally displaced person" must remain constant across all documents; in French, "survivante" is preferred to "victime" in programmes to combat gender-based violence, according to the guidelines used by the organisation.

Writing for communities

Communication with communities and accountability to affected populations (Core Humanitarian Standard commitments) require messages that are **understandable, useful and respectful**. AI helps to:

- simplify a technical text into **plain language** (short sentences, common words, one idea per sentence);
- adapt the format: poster, 30-second radio message, voice message, 160-character SMS, script for facilitators;
- propose answers to frequently asked questions ("Who is eligible? When? Where can I complain?").

But only communities can say whether a message is understood and acceptable. Essential steps:

- test the message with a few people of different profiles (women, men, young people, older people, people with disabilities);
- check preferred channels and literacy rates (assessment data, existing language profiles);
- provide non-written formats (audio, images, oral presentation);
- always state how to ask a question or make a complaint.

Interpretation, voice and images

The Claude and Gemini mobile apps offer voice modes, and other tools provide real-time interpretation. They can help in a simple conversation, but:

- for a **protection interview**, a medical consultation, a registration interview or a complaint, a **trained human interpreter** is needed (confidentiality, ethics, nuance);
- the voice and content of the conversation are processed by the provider: the same data rules apply as for text;
- synthetic voices and generated images for community messages must be labelled as such and validated for cultural acceptability.

For community radio, a script prepared with AI, reviewed by native speakers and **recorded by a human voice from the community** generally inspires more trust.

Rumours and false information in communities

During epidemics and crises, rumours spread fast ("vaccines make you sterile", "aid is reserved for one group"). Rumour tracking mechanisms collect this information; AI can help to:

- group reported rumours by theme (from anonymised data);
- prepare factual answers based on official information (Ministry of Health, WHO), in simple language;
- propose adapted formats (radio questions and answers, messages for community relays).

Each answer is validated by the technical specialist (health, protection) and tested. A clumsy answer can reinforce a rumour. Week 10 covers online disinformation and fake content.

Exercise: preparing a multilingual health message

Situation. A cholera outbreak is affecting three camps for displaced people. The official message from the Ministry of Health, in French, is 400 words long. The populations mainly speak two local languages with little presence on the Internet; 40% of adults can read. A colleague proposes to translate the message with AI and post it this evening.

Task. Propose a step-by-step approach, stating what the AI does and what humans do.

Answer. 1) AI helps condense the official message into 5 key messages in simple French (symptoms, oral rehydration solution, where to go, handwashing, safe water), validated by the health manager against the official text. 2) Translation into both languages by qualified native speakers (community health workers, translators); AI can propose a first draft, but quality in these languages is uncertain: high risk, mandatory review. 3) Formats adapted to 60% of adults who cannot read: audio and radio messages recorded by voices from the community, tested explanatory images, sessions with community relays. 4) Quick testing with a few people of varied profiles, correction, then circulation. 5) Mention of the information line number and rumour tracking. Posting a written, unchecked translation "this evening" should be avoided: a mistranslation in a health message can cause harm.

Key takeaways

- Excellent translation between well-resourced languages, much less reliable for less-resourced languages and dialects.
- Fluency does not prove accuracy; review is proportionate to risk.
- Health messages, consent, rights and complaints: review by a qualified native speaker and community testing.
- A validated glossary ensures consistency of sensitive terms.
- Protection interviews and medical consultations: trained human interpreter, no AI.

Quiz

1. A fluent translation produced by AI:
   A. Is necessarily accurate
   B. May contain a mistranslation: fluency does not prove accuracy
   C. Does not need review
   D. Is always of poor quality

2. An informed consent form in a local language carries a risk that is:
   A. Low
   B. Zero
   C. Medium
   D. High: review by a qualified native speaker and testing

3. Back-translation is used to:
   A. Spot differences in meaning
   B. Guarantee the naturalness of the text
   C. Replace community testing
   D. Shorten the text

4. For a protection interview with a survivor, you use:
   A. An assistant's voice mode
   B. A machine translator
   C. A trained human interpreter
   D. Gestures

5. To ensure consistency of sensitive terms in all translations, you:
   A. Let the AI choose
   B. Give the assistant a validated glossary
   C. Avoid technical terms
   D. Translate word for word

Quiz answers : 1. B · 2. D · 3. A · 4. C · 5. B