Translator Tutorial

1. Choose one of the following sentences to record, or have visitors make up sentences for each other. Make them fairly short.
   a. We are pleased to inform you that you have been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.
   b. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.
   c. Term begins on 1 September. We await your owl by no later than 31 July.
   d. Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.
   e. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.
   f. We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.
   g. To secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.
   h. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.
   i. Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.
   j. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States.
2. Tell the visitor that their job is to write down the sentence that is being said, either by you or by another visitor. Their transcriptions will then be compared to the computer's.
3. Open up http://talktyper.com/ and press the green microphone button to start recording. You may need to "Allow" the website access to your microphone.
4. Speak clearly or conversationally. The transcription service should have a harder time with conversational speech.
5. The website will stop recording automatically.
6. Compare the visitor's transcription with the computer's. Which one was closer? (probably the human's)
7. Now go to go to http://www.translationparty.com/. This is a site that translates back and forth between English and Japanese until the translation stops changing.
8. Copy one of the sentences above (or allow the visitor to use one of their own) into the form there, then click "Find Equilibrium". The program will translate back and forth between English and Japanese until it finds a stable translation, which will appear at the bottom of the page.

Why is this important? The idea of a universal translator has always been interesting to people. Consider anything from the Towel of Babel to the Babel fish (or other universal translators in sci fi movies). Still, it can be very challenging to translate – either translating from speech to text, or from language to language. Many people around UMD study the best ways to teach computers to work with

language. However, no computer-based service can as yet compete with humans in the abilities we have at figuring out what other people are saying and translating seamlessly from language to language.

Notes. This activity was not very successful. It's hard to get a consistent signal or Internet connection when doing outreach activities, and, although these are fun illustrations of how problematic computer translation can be, it doesn't really show off anything that people don't know already.