

## A “Wicked” New Translation Technology Has Taken the World by Storm, but is it All For Good?

Over the last six months, new corporate communications and translation technology VOX POP has taken global industries by storm, the diplomatic sector being no exception.

The VOX POP software, sometimes likened to a browser extension, is installed, by users, directly on to their personal mobile and desktop devices. Users can then choose to give the software access to popular apps including WhatsApp, Zoom, and even pre-installed “phone” apps. This allows the software’s AI translation technology to provide written or audio translations into a selected language in real-time. In addition to this, VOX POP also offers its own app (available for a small one-time fee) that provides a platform for both secure messaging and the translation of in-person conversations, speeches, and the like.



The Brazilian embassy at Tokyo became the first diplomatic mission to utilise VOX POP organisation wide in April this year.

At first glance, VOX POP appears to be the breakthrough in international communications that many have long awaited. Through a unique method of encryption as well as an integrated AI translation technology, the largely free service offers both officials and members of the public a secure system for communication that stands uninhibited by language, location, or finances. As of 10<sup>th</sup> November, VOX POP services are already being employed by roughly 4700 embassies and 132 governments across the world.

Yet, a number of dissenting voices have arisen warning of the dangers posed by such swift adoption of what some critics have dubbed “the shiny new toy of diplomats”. Virtually nothing is known about Imperium, VOX POP’s parent company which, despite being registered in 2021, has already amassed a market share of over 30%. A number of experts have found themselves asking whether these cryptic origins are really indicative of the “total security” the emerging technology promises, and, by extension, if it should be chosen over other pre-existing services for the communication of often highly sensitive information; “Why does the international community feel the need to surrender the professionalism and nuance of human interpreters to this mysterious entity?” demanded Dr Dale Lloyd, lecturer in political science at Yale University, in his recent Economist article.



Banana bread sparked fruitful discussions at ICAT 2024.

Additionally, the unprecedented AI used to provide real time audio translations to phone calls has been under development for less than a year itself, bringing its accuracy into question.

The ICAT (International Cake And Tea) conference, held this year on 15<sup>th</sup> November in Melbourne, Australia, will be the first UN event to employ VOX POP technology in place of human interpreters. The ICAT conference is widely noted for its role in establishing and strengthening international relations, an event that has, historically, been known to both make and break countless alliances. So, as the weekend approaches, the world turns its attention down under, eager to see if VOX POP will prove to be a success in the sector that is arguably most in need of wisdom within communication.

### Points to Consider:

- What parameters should exist surrounding the adoption of AI by the UN?
- How else could the issue of inaccessible communication and translation be solved and what could the consequences of this be?
- What problems could VOX POP pose at the ICAT conference? How could the fallout of these be forestalled?