

# How Microsoft extended speech translation coverage for Skype Translator with Appen's linguistics services

## Microsoft + Appen



### The Situation

Skype Translator, an application developed by Microsoft, illustrates how technology can bridge geographic and language boundaries to help create a better understanding across business and society. It enables speech translation functionality by allowing speakers of two different languages to talk to each other in real-time over the Skype network. The platform relies on deep neural networks and Microsoft Translator's Statistical Machine Translation (SMT).

The technology allows users, previously barred by a language barrier, to instantly communicate with one another – acting like an interpreter, providing real-time translations during Skype calls.

**“Appen and Microsoft’s engagement is defined by longevity and historical knowledge across both parties.”**

For more than 17 years, Appen has provided access to linguists, language experts, and project managers to the Microsoft Research Machine Translation Group. From the platform's onset, Appen has supported all 60+ languages available on Microsoft Translator.

Microsoft asked Appen for assistance from linguists and a range of native speakers for a new phase of Skype Translator's development life cycle. The aim was to extend language coverage for Skype Translator plus other Microsoft translation

### Benefits



Faster data collection



Expanded language data



Easy scaling of translation product to cover new languages

## The Solution

The Microsoft team chose Appen to assist on this project due to a positive and long-term track record of engagement, including timely deliveries on past projects, agility, and flexibility around project requirements, as well as a proven reputation for high-quality work. Underscoring these factors is a sense of continuity: Appen and Microsoft's engagement is defined by longevity and historical knowledge across both parties.

Appen arranged and provided both an onsite and offsite group of linguists and translators to assist the Microsoft client team. This work involved speech data collection in several languages to help build Microsoft's speech-to-speech corpus for Skype Translator, regular testing and identification of bugs in the ASR (acoustic speech recognition) system and translation engines, as well as continuous linguistic support for bug fixes.

## The Outcome

As a result of this project, Microsoft was able to move quickly through the next phase of Skype Translator's product development cycle, testing, and launch. Additionally, with the ongoing support program delivered by Appen, Microsoft continues to extend Skype Translator's capabilities and expand its language coverage.

Following this engagement, Skype Translator is now available for translations to and from ten spoken languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish (in addition to the platform's 60+ instant messaging languages).

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## Key Success Factors

Thanks to Appen's team of consultants working remotely all over the world, Skype Translator's connectivity and usability was tested by users in multiple countries on almost every continent, in more than a dozen languages. This global testing was a key element for such an inherently international platform.

Furthermore, Appen's consultants helped to showcase Skype Translator by participating in internal, customer and demos with journalists from several countries, assisting media with the testing of Skype Translator first-hand, and ensuring they had the best possible first experience with the product.

Lastly, the speech data Appen managed for the Skype Translator platform has since been leveraged and applied to Microsoft's newest offering, Presentation Translator, which allows users to offer live, subtitled presentations straight from PowerPoint in any of the 60 supported text languages. Such a long, positive, and close relationship over the years has truly made Appen and Microsoft partners, invested in each other's success.

## About Microsoft

Microsoft enables digital transformation for the era of an intelligent cloud and an intelligent edge. Its mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.

## About Appen

Appen has more than 20 years of experience in data annotation, collection, evaluation and transcription and a track record for successfully enhancing image, speech, text and video data for use in machine learning and artificial intelligence. With deep expertise in more than 180 languages and dialects, Appen works in more than 130 countries, and has access to a global crowd of over 1,000,000 skilled contractors.