MITSUKI KUCHITA AKA

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SERVICE

MANGA TRANSLATION

THE AI

POWERED MANGA TRANSLATION SERVICE SHARING BELOVED TITLES WITH THE WORLD

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Japanese manga, such as Demon Slayer, One Piece, Slam Dunk, and Dragon Ball, have a huge following around the world. Although manga are now translated into various languages, an endless amount of pirated translations is still being produced. Among the many reasons, two motivations are the time lag between translating and releasing the latest titles and the limited variety of titles existing in translation. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if translations of a wide range of the latest titles were available immediately and anywhere in the world? Mantra Inc., a startup founded in 2020 by AI-research graduates from the University of Tokyo, is taking on the challenge of realizing such a future. Using innovative AI technology, the firm has developed a translation system known as Mantra Engine, which not only pursues highly accurate, natural-sounding and nuanced machine translations—a feat considered difficult with manga—but has also succeeded in halving the time conventionally required for the process. “This system has already been adopted by more than 10 companies in Japan and overseas, where it supports the translation of 40,000 to 50,000 pages (equivalent to about 250 titles) a month,” says ISHIWATARI Shonosuke, Mantra’s co-founder and CEO. Ishiwatari, who came up with the idea of Mantra Engine in 2018, had been pursuing his doctorate at the University of Tokyo, researching how computers process the language used in everyday life. He chose to focus on manga translations for the medium’s unique characteristics—a diverse range of fonts, distinctive forms of speech dependent on individual characters’ personalities and emotions, and multiple speech bubbles in a single panel—that make machine translation especially complicated. Ishiwatari says, “It was an area that promised technological challenges.”

Together with HINAMI Ryota, the company’s CTO, who was also conducting research on image recognition technology in the same doctoral program, he developed a dedicated engine that enabled AI to learn from massive amounts of data, focusing on the idea of Mantra Engine in

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