

Bridging Languages with Machines: AI, Translation, and Journalism Practice among Marathi Journalists in Solapur, India

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Abstract

The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in media production is reshaping journalism, particularly in multilingual societies like India where translation is a core professional task. AI tools are now being used in newsrooms to accelerate content creation and support translation across languages. However, most existing research focuses on large, English-language media organizations, leaving regional-language journalism largely unexplored. This study focuses on Marathi journalists in Solapur City, Maharashtra, and examines how they use AI tools in their daily work and how those tools influence journalistic practice. Using a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten journalists working across print, digital, and broadcast media. Thematic analysis of the data reveals that AI tools are widely adopted for speed and efficiency but consistently fail to capture cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and dialectal variety in Marathi. Journalists maintain editorial oversight and do not fully surrender judgment to AI systems. The study concludes that AI can usefully support regional journalism but cannot substitute for human cultural understanding.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, AI-assisted Translation, Journalism Practice, News Translation, Marathi Media, Regional Journalism.*

Introduction

Journalism in regional India has always operated under the pressure of limited resources and high daily output demand. A single reporter covering a cluster of villages must gather, verify, write, and publish information, often within hours. The pressures are not new, but the tools available to manage them are changing rapidly. AI-powered applications such as ChatGPT, Google Translate, and Claude have moved from novelty to everyday utility for a growing segment of the Indian press corps, including journalists working in regional languages whose communicative worlds rarely feature in mainstream technology scholarship.

Marathi, the official language of Maharashtra with over 83 million speakers, has a literary and journalistic tradition stretching back more than a century. Solapur, situated in southeastern Maharashtra at the geographical convergence of three states, presents a particularly complex linguistic environment. Local reporters regularly encounter sources who speak Kannada, Telugu, or Hindi alongside Marathi, making real-time translation a practical daily necessity rather than an occasional task. Scholarly attention to how AI tools are adopted in this specific context remains limited.

Most research on AI in journalism has focused on large English-language newsrooms in North America and Europe, where resources are comparatively ample and the technology has been designed to perform best (Diakopoulos, 2019; Thurman et al., 2017). Regional-language journalism in the Global South occupies a very different terrain, including tighter staffing, less stable digital infrastructure, and stronger audience expectations regarding local cultural fidelity. The dynamics of AI adoption must be examined on their own terms.

Literature Review

AI and Automation in Journalism

Research on automated journalism has grown substantially since the early algorithmic experiments in sports and financial reporting (van Dalen, 2012). Carlson (2015) argued that an automated or robotic reporter is not merely a technical system but a discursive figure through which newsrooms negotiate questions of professional value and legitimacy. Thurman et al. (2017) found that journalists working alongside automated writing tools experienced a complex mixture of relief at reduced workload and discomfort about what the technology implied for their professional standing. These tensions between efficiency and professional identity consistently appear across different national and institutional contexts.

Beckett (2019), surveying journalism organizations across several continents, documented widespread AI experimentation alongside a striking absence of systematic evaluation. Organizations have adopted tools rapidly but have rarely developed clear policies on when, how, or whether to disclose AI involvement to audiences. Diakopoulos (2019) offered the most comprehensive mapping of automation in journalism, distinguishing between simple content templates and sophisticated generative systems, and argued that the ethical stakes differ substantially depending on the position of a given application on that spectrum.

Deuze and Witschge (2018) widened the analytical frame by arguing that journalism should not be understood as a fixed set of practices but as a constantly negotiated activity shaped by technology, institutions, and individual agency. From this perspective, AI adoption is not simply a matter of adding a new tool but rather of reconfiguring what journalism means within a given context. This reconfiguration takes different forms in different settings, and regional-language journalism in India represents a setting that has received very little scholarly attention in this regard.

Regional Journalism, Language, and Cultural Context

Indian regional journalism occupies a space that national and international media scholars have generally undervalued. Regional newspapers serve not only as information providers but also as constitutive elements of local public life, giving form and visibility to communities whose concerns seldom appear in the national media (Kumar, 2010). The regional press in India has historically functioned as a check on both state power and national cultural homogenization, functions that depend directly on the linguistic authenticity of the journalism produced.

Marathi journalism carries considerable weight in this regard. The language has complex morphology, a rich inventory of dialectal variation across regions, and idiomatic resources that do

not translate neatly into or out of other languages. These features create particular demands for any translation technology attempting to serve Marathi journalism in India. Singer (2003) observed that the professional ideology of journalism is closely tied to the specific linguistic and cultural community a journalist serves, and that technological change tends to create friction precisely at the points where community-specific knowledge matters most.

AI Translation: Promise and Limitation

Machine translation has improved markedly since the introduction of neural architectures; however, significant gaps remain for lower-resource languages and their dialectal varieties. Large language models are predominantly trained on data from high-resource languages and formal, standardized registers of those languages. For Marathi, whose presence in digital corpora skews toward urban, educated speech, the result is a system that handles official documents and standard journalistic prose with reasonable competence but struggles with local idioms, politically charged terminology, and dialect variation (Holton and Belair-Gagnon, 2018).

Lewis and Westlund (2015) proposed an actor-network framework for understanding how technological systems participate in journalism alongside human actors. From this perspective, AI translation tools are not neutral conduits but active shapers of what is communicated and how. Deuze (2005) argued that journalism's professional ideology rests on commitments to public service, autonomy, and truth-telling; AI tools that alter the linguistic texture of stories without journalists' awareness potentially undermine all three. Tunez-Lopez et al. (2019) found that journalists using automated tools experienced a narrowing of perceived editorial discretion, even when formal control remained in human hands, a pattern likely to recur wherever AI adoption lacks accompanying deliberation about professional norms.

Pavlik (2000) noted that technology adoption in journalism has historically carried the implicit burden of disclosure: audiences need to know not just what they are being told but how that information was produced. AI-assisted translation raises this burden in specific ways, particularly when the technology introduces errors or flattens the cultural texture of the source material. This concern is especially pressing in regional-language journalism, where the relationship between language, community, and credibility is particularly strong.

Research Questions

Despite the growing body of scholarship on AI in journalism, very little work has examined AI-assisted translation in regional-language newsrooms, particularly in the Indian context where language, community identity, and journalistic practice are closely intertwined. Three research questions guided the inquiry:

RQ1: How do Marathi journalists in Solapur use AI tools in their everyday workflow, particularly for news translation and content production?

RQ2: What challenges do Marathi journalists face in maintaining linguistic accuracy, cultural context, and community-specific meaning when using AI tools for translation?

RQ3: How does the use of AI tools influence journalistic credibility, editorial decision-making, professional identity, and the institutional norms of Marathi journalism?

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design based on interpretivist assumptions. The aim was to understand how journalists make sense of AI tools in the context of their professional practice, a question that does not lend itself to survey measurement but can be pursued through sustained and open-ended conversation. Qualitative interviewing allows participants to describe their experiences in their own terms and surface the reasoning behind their choices, which is essential for understanding a practice as contextually embedded as journalism (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten Marathi journalists in Solapur. The interview schedule covered eight thematic areas: professional background and workflow; translation practices before and after the availability of AI tools; patterns of AI adoption and tool preference; trust and verification practices; linguistic and cultural challenges; institutional context; impact on professional identity; and future orientations. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to represent variations in media type, years of experience, and degree of AI use, from enthusiastic adopters to principled non-users.

Operational Definition of Journalist

For the purposes of this study, the term journalist refers to any individual employed in a professional, remunerated capacity to gather, verify, produce, and disseminate news content for a defined public audience through an established media organization. This definition encompasses three categories represented in the sample. Print journalists are reporters working for Marathi-language daily and rural newspapers covering beats such as agriculture, courts, administration, and welfare schemes; their work involves field reporting, document review, and producing written news stories for a reading public. Broadcast journalists are correspondents working for Marathi-language television channels, responsible for scripting news bulletins, time-pressured summarization, and real-time translation in multilingual field settings. Digital journalists are reporters and editors working for Marathi-language online news portals, producing high-volume written content under continuous deadline pressure, with daily demands for rapid translation of English-language government communications and social media posts. All three categories share a core professional obligation to accuracy, verification, and accountability to the Marathi-speaking communities they serve.

Participants Profile

Table 1 Participant Profiles

Participant	Media Type	Experience	AI Tools Used
Interviewee 1	Print	14 years	None
Interviewee 2	Broadcast TV	7 years	ChatGPT, Google Translate, Claude AI
Interviewee 3	Digital portal	5 years	ChatGPT, Google Translate
Interviewee 4	Print daily	8 years	Google Translate, ChatGPT
Interviewee 5	Broadcast TV	10 years	ChatGPT, Google Translate
Interviewee 6	Digital portal	3 years	ChatGPT, Bing AI

Interviewee 7	Print daily	12 years	Google Translate
Interviewee 8	Digital portal	6 years	ChatGPT, Google Translate
Interviewee 9	Broadcast TV	15 years	Google Translate, ChatGPT
Interviewee 10	Print daily	7 years	ChatGPT, Google Translate

Interviews were conducted in Marathi according to each participant's preference and lasted between forty and seventy-five minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with written informed consent and were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Participant names and organizational affiliations were removed from the transcripts at the transcription stage to protect confidentiality.

Thematic Analysis and Coding Framework

Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). A structured coding framework with nine primary domains guided the analysis: (1) professional context of journalism, covering work ecology and the multilingual language environment; (2) translation practices, distinguishing pre-AI manual methods from current workflows; (3) AI awareness and adoption, including discovery pathways and tool preferences; (4) perceptions of AI translation, capturing perceived benefits and verification behaviour; (5) challenges and limitations, covering linguistic gaps, dialect issues, and credibility risks; (6) institutional context, addressing the presence or absence of organizational guidelines and formal training; (7) impact on journalistic practice, including workflow transformation and skill dynamics; (8) future imaginaries, exploring AI's assistive versus replacement role; and (9) reflexive insights, capturing participants' own assessments of convenience and desired improvements.

Findings

Theme 1: Professional Context and the Multilingual Pressures of Solapur Journalism

The ten journalists in this study occupied varied professional worlds, but several features of their working environment cut across media types and experience levels. All participants described some degree of multilingual pressure in their daily work. Solapur's location at the tri-state boundary of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh means that source populations regularly speak Kannada or Telugu rather than Marathi, and that press materials from government and corporate entities arrive in a mixture of English, Hindi, and Marathi.

Interviewee 1, who has spent fourteen years as a rural correspondent covering about ten to fifteen villages in Pandharpur Taluka, described the physical and relational demands of rural journalism in ways that highlighted how far removed his practice was from any digital mediation:

"Agriculture news cannot be written sitting in one place; you have to visit every farmer's field. Sometimes, if there are no roads, you have to walk through the mud. That is how rural journalism is."

For Interviewee 1, the primary information challenge was presence: getting to events, collecting reactions, and understanding local contexts through direct experience. In his coverage area, press notes arrived in Marathi, and conversations occurred in Marathi dialects

he knew through long familiarity. Translation had not been a pressing professional concern. Interviewee 2, a broadcast correspondent covering three television channels from Solapur, operated in a different manner. Working across the tri-state border area, he encountered Kannada-speaking communities regularly and found that language gaps created immediate reporting obstacles:

"Although I am a Marathi speaker, the people there often speak Kannada. To understand their dialogue, I use Google Translate or Claude AI."

The other eight participants described similar variations shaped by their beat and medium. Interviewee 3 ran a digital news portal and dealt with government documents in English on a daily basis. Interviewee 4, a print journalist covering courts and administration, found that press releases from Central government departments arrived exclusively in English. Interviewee 5 at a regional television channel regularly handled political speeches delivered in Hindi that required Marathi scripting within an hour. Interviewees 8 and 10 described their translation demands as daily and non-negotiable given the nature of their beats.

Themes 2 and 3: Translation Practices and Patterns of AI Adoption

The sample revealed a genuine range of adoption patterns. Interviewee 1 had not used any AI tool at the time of the interview and expressed principled skepticism about their utility in rural settings:

"In rural areas, if we are doing a story about a specific field or farmer, we have to mention their names ourselves. AI will not include these. Because of that, AI does not seem to be very useful in rural areas."

This position was not technophobia but a coherent professional judgment. He acknowledged the theoretical speed advantage of AI while maintaining that the specific knowledge required for rural agricultural journalism, including knowing particular fields, families, and local political histories, was not something any system could supply. He also noted that incorrect words in rural Marathi could trigger disputes within communities living in close social proximity.

Before AI tools became common, participants who now use them described managing translation manually through dictionaries, trusted colleagues with bilingual competence, and their own language skills. Interviewee 4 noted that senior colleagues once kept printed Marathi-English administrative dictionaries and that a legally trained colleague served as the shared resource for legal phrasing. Interviewee 9 described building up a personal vocabulary of standard translations for government terminology over years of covering Central government releases. Interviewee 2, by contrast, had taken a paid ChatGPT subscription after encountering the tool through social media and found it genuinely useful for specific tasks. He described using AI with a structured journalistic prompt during a flood news assignment:

"If I give AI the command using the 5W1H format common in journalism, it can correct grammatical errors that often occur during rushed typing."

Among the other participants, adoption followed different functional logics. Interviewee 3 used ChatGPT primarily for converting English bureaucratic text into readable Marathi drafts, describing it as "a first draft machine, it gives me the shape of the sentence and I give it the life." Interviewee 4 used Google Translate for initial passes of court documents before extensive editing. Interviewee 5 used AI primarily to summarize long political speeches into usable broadcast scripts: "A leader gives a speech for an hour. I need a sixty-second script ready before the next bulletin. That compression is where AI has become genuinely useful for me." Interviewee 6, the youngest participant, used AI most freely, treating it as a standard part of the toolkit from the start of her career. Interviewee 7 used AI selectively for headline prompting, Interviewee 8 for translating English government social media posts, Interviewee 9 for Hindi-to-Marathi conversions of Central government press releases, and Interviewee 10 for comprehension of English scheme documents before writing her own Marathi drafts from scratch.

Themes 4 and 5: Perceptions of AI and Linguistic Limitations

Across participants who had used AI tools, a consistent pattern emerged: the technology performed adequately on formal, standard-register content but struggled with the culturally specific, dialectally local, and politically charged. Interviewee 2 identified a structural manifestation of this limitation:

"AI cannot capture some words in rural Marathi. Local contexts or cultural meanings are often missed, and AI sometimes provides data based on its own logic, leading to inconsistencies."

He further noted that AI could not understand the emotional register of a news story: "AI cannot understand the sensitivity or intensity of a news story." This observation is significant for broadcast journalism, where tonal precision matters as much as factual accuracy.

Interviewee 4 described a near-miss involving a government circular regarding agricultural loan waivers. The AI translation rendered a legally specific phrase as a general colloquial expression, nearly resulting in a published story that misrepresented the scheme's eligibility. "I caught it because I had covered the scheme from the beginning and knew the terminology. A younger reporter without that background might not have noticed." Interviewee 5 raised the problem of political register, noting that specific Marathi terms carry factional and historical connotations in the Solapur political context that AI translation flattened into generic equivalents.

Interviewee 9, with fifteen years in broadcast journalism, offered the most pointed observation about how the AI Marathi sounded to local audiences: "The AI Marathi is clean, but it is not ours. Viewers notice when the language feels imported." Interviewees 3 and 8 both pointed to the treatment of rural dialects as a structural limitation, noting that standard Marathi as represented in AI training data does not capture the vocabulary and speech patterns of older rural sources. As Interviewee 3 put it: "When I quote a farmer, I want the reader to hear a farmer, not a newsreader. AI makes everyone sound like a newsreader."

Interviewee 6 noted that the AI could not render community voices accurately: "AI cannot render those voices accurately. And when I quote them in standard AI Marathi, something is lost. The reader does not hear who that person is." Interviewee 7 found that AI produced Marathi that was "grammatically correct but editorially dead. There was no sense of where the story was going or why the reader should care." Interviewee 10, covering welfare schemes for women, described an error involving two distinct administrative categories in a nutrition scheme for pregnant women that AI rendered identically, with potentially serious consequences for readers trying to determine eligibility.

Theme 4 continued: Trust, Verification, and Editorial Control

No participant who used AI tools described unconditional trust. Verification practices varied in their thoroughness but were universal in their presence. Interviewee 2 described post-editing as essential, distinguishing between structural help where AI was useful and substantive judgment where it was not:

"Manual correction is extremely necessary. AI cannot understand the sensitivity or intensity of a news story."

Interviewee 1, who had not used AI, expressed a version of the same concern from the outside: "Even if AI gives information, we have to verify if it is correct or if any sentence is wrong." For him, the verification burden was a sufficient reason to avoid the tool altogether; if the output still requires as much scrutiny as the original report, the time saving is illusory. Interviewee 10 described a graduated trust framework that several participants echoed: reliable for dates, amounts, and official names; not to be trusted on anything involving the emotional or social dimension of a story. "AI produces what I call the bones of a story. Making it useful for actual people requires something more than bones."

Interviewee 7 always cross-checked AI-generated Marathi against his own understanding of the language before publishing. Interviewee 6, despite heavier use, described having learned to catch characteristic errors through accumulated experience, including mistranslated conjunctions, flattened honorifics, and idioms rendered meaningless by literal translation: "Once you know what to look for, it becomes faster to catch." Interviewee 8 framed a broader institutional concern: "I think for management the question is still framed as how do we produce more content rather than how do we produce better content. Those are different questions and AI answers one of them."

Themes 6, 7, 8, and 9: Institutional Context, Professional Identity, and Future Orientations

The institutional context in which these journalists worked provided almost no formal guidance on the use of AI. Interviewee 2 described their organization's stance as neutral. Interviewee 4 noted that editors were aware of tool use but had issued no limits: "I think the institution has simply not caught up with how much the technology has changed in the last two years." Interviewee 5 described organizational expectations as purely output-focused: "Whatever helps you produce content faster is acceptable, as long as the content is accurate. The burden of accuracy is entirely on us." Most other participants described similar policy vacuums.

Training was rare across the sample. Interviewee 2 had attended one workshop on AI and journalism, which he described as genuinely useful. No other participant reported formal training. Most described self-teaching through trial and error, peer knowledge sharing, and online video tutorials. Interviewee 6 noted the absence of Marathi-language instructional content on AI journalism: "There is almost nothing in Marathi about using AI specifically for Marathi journalism. Someone should be creating that content."

Regarding professional identity, Interviewee 2 raised the possibility of skill erosion directly: "I would also say that AI can make you lazy." Interviewee 9 worried about younger colleagues: "When younger colleagues use AI from the beginning, they skip that formation. That process built knowledge. It built a relationship between the journalist and the language." Interviewee 7 worried that AI would standardize the language of print journalism across competing outlets, eroding the distinctive regional character that gives a local newspaper its relationship with the community.

Regarding future imaginaries, participants did not fear outright replacement but were alert to a quieter risk: that AI would gradually narrow what journalists felt capable of doing without technological assistance. Interviewee 3 anticipated that the tools would become more common but insisted the cultural work had to remain human: "Right now they are built for English first and everything else as an afterthought. Until that changes, I will keep using it for the basic work and doing the cultural work myself." Interviewee 1 offered the starkest articulation of a view that professional journalism does not depend on any particular technology to remain viable: "Journalism does not stop just because you do not use AI."

Discussion

The picture that emerges from these ten interviews is neither a story of smooth technological adoption nor of principled resistance to it. These journalists make practical decisions under time pressure with imperfect tools, trying to balance genuine efficiency gains against genuine risks to the quality and credibility of their work. The findings speak directly to each of the three research questions.

In relation to RQ1, the study confirms that AI tools have entered the everyday workflows of most Marathi journalists in Solapur, but adoption is selective and task-specific rather than wholesale. Journalists use AI for bounded translation tasks, structured summarization, grammar correction, and headline prompting. Interviewee 2's use of AI to bridge a real-time language gap between a Marathi journalist and Kannada-speaking flood victims illustrates the technology at its most useful. Without AI assistance in that situation, the report would either not have included those voices or would have required a delay that broke the story's newsworthiness. The AI did not replace the journalist's judgment about which questions to ask or how to frame the testimony; it removed a linguistic barrier that would otherwise have been insurmountable in the field. This type of concrete, time-bound problem is what AI translation can solve reasonably well (Beckett, 2019).

In relation to RQ2, the limitations described by the participants map onto the structural features of how large language models are built. These systems learn from text, and the Marathi text available in digital corpora is neither extensive nor diverse (Holton and Belair-Gagnon, 2018). The result is a technology that has absorbed standard, urban, formal Marathi while encountering relatively little of the vernacular speech that characterizes agricultural communities in rural Maharashtra or the border-dialect mixing that defines everyday communication in parts of the southern Solapur district.

Interviewee 3's observation that AI makes everyone sound like a newsreader captures this structural bias precisely and aligns with Singer's (2003) argument that journalists' custodial responsibility toward their audiences is expressed most clearly in linguistic choices.

In relation to RQ3, the absence of institutional guidance is consistent with Beckett's (2019) global findings but takes on particular significance in a regional-language context. Without newsroom policies, individual journalists develop their own norms through experience and self-reflection. The verification practices described by Interviewees 7, 8, and 10 demonstrate that individual norm-building is already underway. Interviewee 10's near-publication of eligibility criteria that would have misled vulnerable women about a government nutrition scheme illustrates what is at stake when those norms are not yet fully developed. Deuze (2005) identified public service as a foundational pillar of journalism's professional ideology; errors that harm the people a publication exists to serve are not merely factual mistakes but breaches of professional purpose.

Interviewee 9's concern about professional formation in a generation that has grown up with AI tools deserves serious consideration. Research on professional socialization in journalism has shown that tacit knowledge developed through slow and effortful practice is not easily transmitted through other means (Deuze and Witschge, 2018). If a generation of regional journalists learns to produce translations by outsourcing the hard interpretive work to AI, the long-term consequences for the linguistic quality and cultural depth of regional media may be substantial, even if individual stories appear adequate on the surface.

This study also points to a question the literature has not fully engaged with: the relationship between AI adoption and the material conditions of regional journalism in the Global South. Participants adopted AI not because they had abundant resources for experimentation but because content demand vastly exceeded human capacity. Understanding AI adoption in regional journalism requires attention to these structural conditions alongside the technology itself.

Conclusion

This study set out to understand how Marathi journalists in Solapur use AI tools for translation and content production and what that use reveals about linguistic accuracy, professional autonomy, and editorial responsibility. The findings point to a profession actively negotiating these questions rather than resolving them. AI tools are present in most newsrooms represented in this study. They save time on structured tasks such as summarizing speeches, rendering English bureaucratic texts into working Marathi drafts, and bridging immediate language gaps in multilingual reporting situations. These are real contributions to journalists working with fewer resources than their national counterparts and under comparable deadline pressures. This technology is not a gimmick; it addresses genuine professional problems.

The limitations are equally real and are felt most acutely in the areas where regional journalism carries its distinctive value: the linguistic textures of local speech, the cultural weight of community-specific terminology, and the emotional precision required by human interest and social issue reporting. Every journalist in this study who used AI tools described maintaining human oversight because they had learned through experience that the tools could not be trusted on the culturally specific. The study reveals that ethical and professional frameworks for AI-assisted journalism in regional-language contexts remain underdeveloped. Individual journalists are building

their own norms, but institutional structures including newsroom policies, professional guidelines, and journalism school curricula have not kept pace with practice. Future research should track how those structures develop and whether comparable patterns appear across other regional-language journalism contexts in India.

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