

- Neil:** Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English: the programme in which we talk about a story in the news and learn some vocabulary while we're doing it. I'm Neil and joining me today is Jen. Hi there, Jen.
- Jen:** Hi Neil.
- Neil:** Now, this sounds like every struggling language student's dream...
- Jen:** A piece of technology which could put an end to hours and hours of study...
- Neil:** It sounds like something from science fiction...
- Jen:** A machine which allows you to speak any language in the world... instantly!
- Neil:** OK, well not quite, but we are talking about an **app** – a piece of software common on **smartphones** - developed in Japan. This app allows you to have conversations with another person speaking in a different language translated **in real time** – in other words, instantly.
- Jen:** This could put us out of a job, Neil! Now come on, it must be time for a language-related quiz.
- Neil:** Yes, that's exactly what we'll do now. I want to know, how many languages are there in the world? Is it:
- a) about 100
  - b) about 1,000
  - c) about 6,000
- Jen:** Well, I think there are a lot but maybe not 6,000, so I'll go for b) about 1,000.
- Neil:** OK, well we will find out, as ever, at the end of the programme. Back now to our app.
- Jen:** This, of course, isn't the only instant translation technology in the world.
- Neil:** No, Google have something similar, though it's less advanced than this Japanese app. Listen to the first part of a report from the BBC's correspondent, Richard Taylor. How does the Google technology work?

**BBC correspondent Richard Taylor:**

*You simply talk into your smartphone. That's then sent to the server from Google, which does real-time voice recognition and then machine translation on it and then that data is sent back to your phone either as a script or, if you pay a little bit extra in terms of data charges, as a voice file.*

**Neil:** He says when you talk into your smartphone, it's sent to the **server** – a central computer which other computers get their information from.

**Jen:** The server does real-time translation and then sends back a text or voice file.

**Neil:** So you read the translation or, if you pay a little bit more, listen to a translation sent as an audio recording.

**Jen:** Amazing stuff!

**Neil:** Indeed, but this new app in Japan, developed by the company NTT Docomo, goes even further.

**Jen:** That's right. With this technology, you can have an actual conversation with someone on the other side of the world, speaking a different language to the one which is coming out of your mouth!

**Neil:** Incredible! Now listen to the second part of the report from the BBC's Richard Taylor.

**BBC correspondent Richard Taylor:**

*But they've actually taken the concept and applied it to normal phone calls. So, you're making a phone call to somebody from Japan in Japanese, on the other side of the world, for example in Britain. It will take that Japanese voice, do the real-time machine translation on the server, couple of seconds later it would bring it back down to you in English. Or at least that's the idea.*

**Neil:** So, the difference is that this app allows people to speak to foreigners in real time – with a slight pause while the real-time translation takes place.

**Jen:** So, which languages does it convert?

**Neil:** At the moment, Japanese to English, Mandarin and Korean. But more are to follow.

**Jen:** I suppose the big question is "How accurate is the translation?"

**Neil:** Yes, that is the big question. The BBC's Richard Taylor tried it out with the help of a Japanese translator. What did he ask and how good does the translator think the app is?

**BBC correspondent Richard Taylor:**

*Reporter: Hello, how are you? Are there any good restaurants around here?*

*Smartphone: [Japanese reply]*

*Reporter: How well did that do as a translation, first of all?*

*Japanese translator: Well, it's understandable but it's not perfect.*

**Neil:** The reporter asked if there is a good restaurant nearby.

**Jen:** And the Japanese translator says the app was understandable but not perfect.

**Neil:** Is this technology going to sweep the world, I wonder?

**Jen:** Well, there are some other companies **hot on the heels** of the Japanese company NTT Docomo. For example, France's Alcatel-Lucent is developing a rival product which will operate on landlines.

**Neil:** And Microsoft is working on something it's calling the Translating Telephone. Now the question I want to ask you Jen is, "Do you think this will put an end to language learning forever?"

**Jen:** Well, I hope not. I think these types of technologies are always helpful but nothing will ever replace learning a language. I know I'm biased but speaking a foreign language is one of life's great pleasures!

**Neil:** And I agree with you but, of course, I would because it's my job.

**Jen:** Before we go, Neil, aren't you going give the answer to the quiz?

**Neil:** OK, yes. I wanted to know how many languages there are in the world. Is it:

- a) about 100
- b) about 1,000
- c) about 6,000

**Jen:** And I said b) about 1,000.

**Neil:** And you are wrong. I know you speak about 1,000 languages, Jen, but the answer is about 6,000.

**Jen:** Wow!

**Neil:** Now, time for a recap of some of the words we heard in today's programme.

**Jen:** They are: **app, smartphone, in real time, server, hot on the heels.**

**Neil:** Join us again soon for more 6 Minute English from [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com).

**Jen:** And don't forget to find us on Facebook and Twitter.

**Neil:** Bye for now.

**Jen:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>app</b>	software common on mobile phones
<b>smartphone</b>	a mobile phone which is also a small computer
<b>in real time</b>	instantly
<b>server</b>	a central computer which other computers get their information from
<b>hot on the heels</b>	very soon after something

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