

Session 3:

Summary of the discussion

Peter Lau, Senior Consultant, CRI Birkerod, enquired whether Rank Xerox encountered any problems with character sets. Mike Scott explained that difficulties with character sets had been largely overcome. The 8-bit architecture of the older systems had proved to be restrictive and these had been replaced at Rank Xerox by systems with a 16-bit architecture having a capacity of 65,000 characters.

In response to Peter Pym's paper, Ian Johns, Chief, Linguistic Services Division, NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency, asked how technical writers at Perkins Engines adhered to the rules governing the use of PACE. Did Perkins Engines have a computer system to edit or control the production of source text?

Peter Pym replied that, although various computer programs were available which might facilitate this task, at present texts were checked manually in the department. The work of the technical writers was checked first of all by a senior writer and then by Peter Pym himself. He said that the translators often sorted out problems regarding the source texts and gave him direct feedback which proved to be extremely useful.

Mike Scott added that the use of restricted language was a highly controlled process at Rank Xerox. It was a matter of terminology and of having the system best suited to meet one's own requirements.

Barbara Wilson, Senior Translator, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, asked Peter Pym whether Perkins Engines had any systematic arrangement for feedback from users of their translated material. Peter Pym replied that there was no such arrangement and that it was invariably difficult to obtain feedback from users.

Mike Scott was asked to comment on how Rank Xerox became involved with computer-aided translation. The success of Rank Xerox in this field was unique, the company's initial interest being in electronic publishing – translation came second. Mike Scott explained that the benefits of desktop publishing and typesetting were considered first of all. The company decided that corrections to foreign language texts should be made by native speakers of those languages. There was likewise a demand for software to be translated and so an integrated network evolved bringing systems and translators together. Rank Xerox's turnover had increased considerably as a result of this investment in technology, but Mike Scott appreciated that not everyone had the same resources available as Rank Xerox.

Peter Pym agreed wholeheartedly with Mike Scott. He explained that it had taken about six months for a similar project to be approved at Perkins Engines. He too appreciated the difficulties faced by the individual translator unable to undertake such a financial commitment. Peter Pym suggested that translators should co-operate locally and invest jointly, although he acknowledged the fact that, if several different languages were involved, this might well prove difficult.

Taking up a comment from the floor that since Rank Xerox had achieved an increase in productivity by applying existing technology, further developments were not really essential, Douglas Arnold, University of Essex and Session Chairman, asked the audience whether it considered the machine translation industry to be a healthy one and whether further technology advances were necessary if companies could achieve a 50 per cent increase in productivity with existing technology. Ulla Magnusson Murray, Magnusson Murray Consultants, Hertfordshire, replied that, although Rank Xerox had been successful and had made a substantial profit using existing technology, the same could not be said for all companies. She felt that there would always be a need to invest in machine translation and to carry out further research.

Peter Pym was asked to comment on the post-editing of texts for publication. What was the proportion of time taken by the machine to translate in relation to that taken by the post-editor? What about pre-editing – was it cost-effective?

In Peter Pym's opinion, pre-editing was worthwhile if several languages were involved – the terminology used in the raw translations would be more consistent, thus keeping editing to a minimum. Drawing on his own experience, he said that machine translation with post-editing by a translator was a much faster process. He explained that Perkins had recently published two workshop manuals in Spanish. The first contained 63,000 words and was completed in nine weeks, from beginning the translation to delivery of the finished manual. The second contained 58,000 words and was available 12 weeks after the English

version. Without machine-aided translation, it would have taken at least 26 weeks to complete such a volume of work. At Perkins Engines, the whole process was accelerated by the use of restricted writing.

There was an added comment from the floor that this would surely take longer as the document for translation had to be written in PACE before being translated into the foreign language. Peter Pym explained that, in order to improve quality, Perkins Engines were rewriting the publications for older engines by adapting the texts which had been written in PACE for newer models, thus benefiting from work which had been carried out previously.

Edward Bennett, Central Electricity Generating Board, commented on the value of investment by freelance translators in machine translation or computer-aided translation. He considered the Xerox and Perkins operations to be highly specific. Whereas Rank Xerox had control over the entire process, from the technical writing stage through to publication, freelance and most staff translators had no control whatsoever over the type of language of their source documents. An investment of this order was therefore not relevant to their needs.

In reply, Mike Scott said that freelancers often worked for one particular company, in which case, consistency was of the essence. He explained that the benefits of technology were not immediately apparent. If several translators were to combine forces, they would make better use of technology. Groups would need to consist of five to six translators in order to be viable. He agreed that, as regards the individual user, machine-aided translation was still a long way off but he believed that the use of CD-ROM would increase productivity in the mean time.

Peter Pym was of the opinion that machine translation was viable for the larger companies like Rank Xerox who were in a position to undertake such a financial commitment. He envisaged that the cost of MT systems would fall, as was observed in the case of the PC, and would one day be within reach of the small company and individual translator.

In conclusion, Pamela Mayorcas, London, stressed that it was mainly a question of text-type or suitability. Machine translation could be viable provided that it was adapted to meet translators' needs and to suit their working environment.

RAPPORTEUR

Melanie Dean, Rhone-Poulenc Ltd, Essex, UK