

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION (Session 5)

Rapporteuse:

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Delegates were principally concerned at the lack of compatibility between input, terminals, and data storage media (disks and diskettes). Communication between wordprocessors from the same stable could be highly problematic. It was felt that, as small users, translators and translation agencies did not have enough economic clout to insist that their special needs be catered for. They needed to combine forces in order to get their views across to manufacturers.

The problems of incompatibility and transmission difficulties were acknowledged by the big manufacturers who were, nevertheless, somewhat handicapped in providing suitable solutions. Some comfort could be gained from the knowledge that small users were not alone in being bewildered by the range and variety of equipment available, and hampered by problems of equipment interconnection and communication. These arose from three main sources:

- firstly, the national PTTs were responsible for providing the telecommunications network. The present network was based on voice (analog signal) transmission lines which were unsuitable for transmission of data (digital signals). However, dedicated lines for the transmission of data services were gradually being installed which would improve inter-machine communications as well as access to data networks;
- secondly, equipment incompatibility and non-standard initialising systems derived partly from the current state-of-the-art of character conversion codes. Machines could only talk to one another if they recognised the same codes, but there were currently three "standards" in use.* Whilst most big computers and systems used one of the three and could convert between codes, many wordprocessors especially those at the lower end of the price scale, did not offer this facility. It was unlikely that the big manufacturers would change their use of a particular standard, so that improved inter-conversion systems would need to be developed;
- a third factor was that, as yet, no international standard had been agreed for character sets. ISO had been grappling with the problem for some years but no satisfactory solution was in sight.

The only practical advice that could be given to the small user was to start simply, and seek advice from others with experience of both equipment and suppliers.

There was a lack of consensus as to whether translators did or did not require terminology in areas outside their special field. Some took the view that since one knew one's own terms and had no need of others, access to sophisticated and expensive term banks would serve little purpose. Others were of the view that term banks would be particularly helpful for the odd terms outside one's normal field which tended, inevitably, to creep into the most specialised texts. Access to a single and central terminology store would be especially useful for translators unfamiliar with the available printed sources.

It was generally agreed that a universal, all-embracing terminology data bank was both unrealistic and impractical. The real need was for small, specialised term banks for individual users or groups of users, with large back-up files for general terms and terms outside the user's particular speciality. This would represent a translation in computer terms of the linguist's bookshelf which generally contained a large number of small, highly-specialised dictionaries and glossaries, and a smaller number of large, general dictionaries.

It was also suggested that term bank producers and users should be able to isolate appropriate sections of a bank, either to use as a self-contained collection (e.g. subject-related glossaries) or to build on in order to satisfy a particular requirement (e.g. a long-term or team project). [This was standard practice amongst users of bibliographic data bases who purchase sections of a data base to run on their own information systems and amplify if necessary (Rapporteuse)].

Delegates openly admitted that translators seek the quickest and easiest source of information, and even neglect the services of terminologists who are employed to help them. Thus, it seemed likely that term banks and their contents would not be accepted as a viable and valid tool until each translator could have his own terminal, on his own desk.

Turning to the organisation of data within a term bank, delegates learnt that no satisfactory solution had been found for producing a common subject-coding scheme. All the large term banks had evolved their own subject codes and schemes. These were designed for a specific category of user and hence were not compatible with or transferable to other terminology collections. The World Bank had followed this anarchic tendency although it had tried to remain within the UN family and devise a scheme which would be compatible with the other UN agencies.

There was also concern at the duplication of effort, nationally and internationally as regards both the development of computerised terminology stores and work on special subject glossaries. The technical problems of access to an existing bank, combined with the context-specific nature of many banks, tended to encourage firms and organisations with the necessary means to start up their own bank. Two developments were awaited: improved compatibility and standardisation of date-entry formats for terminological records and software compatibility to facilitate the exchange of data between banks.

The recurring theme was "We have the technology - but we don't know how to use it". Essentially users, in this case translators and terminologists, should decide what they expected of systems and establish clear guidelines for the collection, preparation and retrieval of terminological data. The user community needed to identify itself and define its requirements before it could be more aggressive in conveying its needs to equipment manufacturers and to those bodies who were in a position to mount term bank projects.