[*Translating and the computer 11*. Proceedings of a conference … 16-17 November 1989, ed. Catriona Picken (London: Aslib, 1990)]

Session 3: Summary of the discussion

The discussion was opened by Peter Kahl of Aldus, who commented that foreign language versions of software packages were more costly than their English-language equivalents, adding that this was because of the cost of translating into foreign languages software originating in the English-speaking world.

Mr Kahl then went on to ask Mr McKenzie whether the difference between speech and written language had been taken into account in the figures for performance/output given in the Dictaphone presentation, commenting that time was needed in the translation process for thought, speech being inherently less reflective.

Mr McKenzie replied that the figures were for general business correspondence. He conceded that translation was a more complex process, but insisted that as the figures were for correspondence, they were nevertheless accurate.

The next question was from Isabella Moore of Comtec and directed at Howard Petrie. She asked firstly whether software problems arose if a screen was used which was not also made by the computer manufacturer, and secondly, what types of scanners or OCR machines had been used.

Mr Petrie replied that scanners were a complex area, which there was not time to go into in depth. Machines were either optical character recognition devices or image scanners, although some were capable of both, the important component being the software. On the matter of screens, he replied that Apple machines were better integrated than IBM-compatible equipment, stressing that they were different, not necessarily better. The point was that the choice of components was bigger in the IBM world, but integration was poorer.

Hardware and software compatibility was more crucial here.

The next question was from Alison St Clair Baker of Interlingua, who wanted to know about the actual formats needed for transfer to CD. She said that Linguasoft had translated an interactive CD-V project for the BBC, similar to the Domesday Project and run by BBC people involved in that work. Ms Day replied that the problem with the Domesday Book project was that it used a completely new medium, whereas a database transferred to CD was merely another way of using material already present on magnetic tape. Producing an update meant going back to the original material and pressing a new master from it. Ms Day added that the secret of CD's success was that there was a generally accepted standard. At an early stage in the development of CD, the key manufacturers involved met at the High Sierra Hotel in Nevada and agreed on the so-called 'High Sierra standard'. Most of the problems that arose were with interface software.

Mr Desormeaux, Secretary of State's Office, Ottawa, said that the terminology databank produced by his organisation was available on CD, for an annual subscription of £600, and that a network version was to be available in 1991. An interactive version about Canadian history was also planned, for 1992.

Ian Gordon of Peak Translations, Stockport, then asked about the dangers involved in making too extensive use of layout and fonts. Mr Petrie replied that there was indeed a danger here, and that users of DTP systems had to realise that typesetting experts know a lot of things not obvious to the non-expert, such as the need to balance the amount of print on a page with the amount of white space, and about kerning, i.e. the fine adjustment of spaces between letters to produce a better visual effect. The secret was not to be too ambitious. Mr Petrie added that his organisation (European Patent Office) had a separate department devoted to DTP, which had designed forms and a course guide using Pagemaker. He emphasised that it was wrong to try and use all the available fonts. It was worth trying to learn about aspects of typesetting, and a willingness to experiment was also important.

On the same topic, Ms Day commented that she had seen various examples of DTP, some of which were excellent, others horrendous. The best ones had been produced by graphic designers. She also commented that printing was not always fast, taking minutes or even up to half an hour for a page. Mr Petrie commented that this was true, and was a disadvantage of PostScript fonts, which had to be converted into a bit-map and loaded each time. It had to be remembered that the printing speeds claimed for laser printers (typically six to eight pages a minute) were for text only, and possibly for printing the same page more than once.

One delegate asked why, since DTP was intended to enhance text, Mr Petrie had not used it to produce his own overhead transparencies, to which the answer was 'No comment'!

A question was then asked by Gerry Brace, Institut Français du Pétrole, who said that dictionaries on CD-ROM seemed an ideal tool for translators but

wondered whether, if they were produced by different publishers, they could be put on the same disc. Ms Day replied that this had in fact already been done by Harrap in the CD-ROM Multilingual Dictionary Database, which contained five Harrap publications plus others from publishers in West Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and Japan. Harrap had acted as organiser in this project. She added that the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) could act as a pressure group in deciding what should go together on one disc.

On a similar note, Christine Goulding of Byk Gulden reiterated the need for translators to get together and tell the manufacturers what they actually needed and wanted.

Charles Lucas from the EC Commission commented that he personally thought that although CD was a valuable tool, it was nevertheless a retrograde step, since it was at present a read-only medium. He suggested waiting until discs were writable, then translators could make their own dictionary compilations. Howard Petrie replied that this could in fact already be done. Toshiba had produced a machine capable of handling CDs and WORMs in the same drive; dictionaries could then be copied onto WORMs and duplicated for colleagues.

Theo van der Ster, TechText, Netherlands said that his organisation had its own database on WORM, and wanted to know how the retrieval process differed from the one used with CD.

Ms Day replied that search software needed to be added, which would be an adapted form of something that already existed; for example, the British Books in Print CD used a development of online software. She also commented that in future WORM media were likely to be sold blank but incorporating search software.

Howard Petrie added that WORMs had their limitations, the main one of which was at present price: in the United States, WORM equipment cost $3,000 to $6,000, the cartridges more than $100 each. An additional drawback was the lack of compatibility between equipment from different manufacturers. Erasable drives cost $5,000 to $6,000 each, with cartridges costing over $200 each.

A delegate wanted to know how potential users of CD-ROM could find out what was available. Ms Day said that there were two useful publications: *CD-ROM directory*, published by Task Force Pro Libra (annual, £39.50) and *CD-ROMs in print*, published by Meckler (annual, £22.50). Information was also available from the CD-ROM Forum of the UK Online User Group, which was putting together a CD-ROM starter pack, containing basic information about the medium, and which would be ready in December 1989. It was available only to members of the user group, although membership cost only £12 per annum.

Howard Petrie added that there was a useful book on desktop publishing: *Design for DTP*, by J. Miles, published by Gordon Fraser in 1987 (£9.95).

Moving on, Gerry Brace had a comment for Mr McKenzie, which was that nowadays most translators were competent typists, and that problems arose with the dictation of translations, as the resultant typescript needed editing, and typists could mishear or misunderstand what had been dictated. Mr McKenzie said this was true, but added that dictation could be a useful tool, and particularly helpful for communication on the move. He did concede, however, that certain types of work are better handled by other means.

Val Butterfield of Staefa Control System Limited then asked Mr McKenzie to give some indication of the claims made for speech recognition systems. Mr McKenzie replied that there was a system in use that had a vocabulary of 5,000 words, which was used in radiology, i.e. in an area with a closely circumscribed range of usage. The vocabulary had first had to be dictated onto the system. He added that a speech recognition system could work either on a word-by-word basis or be activated by trigger words. He went on to say that technology was bringing us ever closer to Barbara Wilson's ideal of producing translations while reclining on a couch, and suggested that in another 10 years that dream might come true.

Howard Petrie commented that at this year's Hanover Fair he had seen an IBM PC system capable of recognising 20,000 German words. It had been demonstrated by a man sitting in a closed room (to screen out extraneous noise), and words came up on the screen as he spoke. Work was even more advanced in the United States.

RAPPORTEUR

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P.S. Romke Soldaat of Microsoft made two comments on issues raised during Session 3:

1. On the usability of A4 screens for non-DTP applications:
   - All software running under Microsoft Windows will run on *any* graphic screen, regardless of the size (A4-A3, etc.)
   - WordPerfect's line width and the number of lines on the screen are adjustable to the size of A4 and A3 screens.
   - Most suppliers of graphic screens can supply screendrivers for popular software, e.g. MS-Word, WordPerfect, etc.
2. On the limitations of MS-DOS:
   - Old versions could not address more than 32 megabytes disk memory. But the new version of MS-DOS (version 4.01) can access *giga*bytes of disk memory, including CD-ROMs.