

## INTRODUCTION

Barbara Snell

People say they don't read introductions, they consider them unnecessary - a discouraging thought as I sit down to write an introduction to these conference proceedings. However, by the same token - as the first session of the conference was introduced by the chairman of the session was there any need for an introduction to the conference? On balance it was felt the answer was, 'Yes'. At 9.30 in the morning a little preliminary patter can provide encouragement for some two hundred individuals from twenty different countries to become a receptive audience. Similarly, although the proceedings speak for themselves, they have been contributed by thirty-five very different people (including the rapporteurs) and maybe a short preface will help to form them into a cohesive whole. For those who read introductions but did not attend the conference (participants may skip the next paragraph) it seems appropriate to repeat the comments I made at the time. It also spares me from having to think up something new!

I was proud to be able to say that 'Term banks for Tomorrow's World' was the first conference on term banks to be held in Britain. The English, perhaps more than most people, take language and the way it is used for granted. We are surprised and upset when we are misunderstood. Our first reaction tends to be that something is wrong with the perception of our audience, because our meanings are so clear to us. When speaking and writing informally we do not usually stop to wonder whether the words we are using mean the same to others as they do to us, we just assume they do. If we are asked to explain ourselves and clarify our concepts we often find this difficult. On a personal level people tend to feel confused, inadequate and threatened if asked to define their terms. On a business level one might reach for a dictionary, glossary or text book to verify or substantiate the use of a term. We would be looking for confirmation in black and white that the words we use are widely accepted and ought to mean to others what they mean to us. Suppose they don't, who should arbitrate on meaning? And once we have agreed our terms how can we make them available to the rest of the world? For, as I wrote four years ago in the introduction to the first conference in the series *Translating and the Computer*, "What use is a term if no one else knows it?"

Returning to who should arbitrate on meaning: A question I have asked myself more than once when reading the papers in these Proceedings, is 'How much should an editor edit?' What speakers write in proceedings is not what they say from the rostrum - except in rare cases when a text is read verbatim without so much as an aside. The constraints of conference time frequently meant that 30 minutes of meaty thoughts had to be condensed into a ten minute extract. But quite apart from this, when addressing an audience, we do not always say what we mean to in our presentation, when writing we have a better chance to do so. What then is the function of the editor?

Some of the papers have been spared my pen almost entirely, others have suffered maybe more than their writers would have wished. To those authors I can only apologise and say, had they been here, or had I been there, we could have discussed my doubts, but Washington and Tokyo are far away and I had to interpret the texts to the best of my ability. When I had a problem I asked myself, what does the writer mean? I am after all a translator, my job is to grasp meanings and a translator should not handle what he cannot understand. If something was not clear to me I had to decide whether other readers would follow where I could not. I trust that where I have changed words I have not grievously misinterpreted any of the speakers' thoughts. I can only echo the sentiments of the actors in the Hartmann translation of the epilogue to the Oberrufer Nativity Play: 'If in ought we have offended, blame not our will but our lack of wit.'