Session 5: Summary of the discussion

The first question was put by Barbara Snell to Mike Garrido. She said that during his talk he had said nothing about hardware; did this indicate a move away from software tied to a particular type of hardware?

Mr Garrido replied that this was in fact the case, and that in so doing, Rank Xerox was following the market trend, which was for state-of-the-art products which did not tie customers to a particular supplier's hardware. His company had already embraced OS/2 and UNIX, and would branch out into other architectures in the next few years.

The next question from the floor was addressed to Kent Taylor; the questioner wanted to know which MT system AT & T used. The reply was Logos. Mr Taylor admitted that it was not all things to all people, but it was suitable for large documents where the effort devoted to pre-editing and preparation was time well invested.

John Kearey of Shell in The Hague then asked Peter Kahl two questions, firstly whether a translation of the test piece might have been made by the same translator for two different translation companies, and secondly whether the translator who did the test piece was also the one used for the actual translation work done by a company. The reply to the first question was that there had been no duplication of this type; as to the second, Mr Kahl said that negotiations about the provision of translations had been held with the companies concerned; it was then left to them how they allocated work to individual translators. There was thus no guarantee that the translator who did the test piece and the one used for the actual commissioned translation would be the same person.

Steve Rawcliffe of ORE in the Netherlands then asked Barry Wilson

how long it had taken to implement the GEPRO translation management system; we were told that the system had been built up in several stages, starting with the English Division and its 50 translators, where it had been introduced over 2-3 months. Full-scale implementation of the system had taken about 1½ man-years, equivalent to between 9 months and 1 year of physical time.

The next person to take the floor had a comment to make, rather than a question to ask, which was to suggest topics for discussion at future conferences. The first of these was the talkwriter, the exciting new development mentioned by a speaker in an earlier session. It was suggested that the talkwriter could be used by a simultaneous interpreter as a highly efficient means of producing finished translations. Other topics proposed were the possibility of machine interpreting, and ad hoc aids for interpreters, such as terminology aids in the interpreters' booths, and systems for the instant transmission of discussion documents to the booths, in other words, various forms of innovative conferencing technology.

Mike Garrido commented on this outpouring of ideas by saying that there were developments in progress involving speech and direct document input, with a rough translation in between, but he had no idea when they might bear fruit.

Kent Taylor added that work was being done at UMIST under the direction of Professor Tsujii, involving simultaneous vocal interpretation over the telephone. He emphasized that this was a very ambitious project which relied on emerging technologies such as speech recognition and speech synthesis, which were very computer-intensive and dependent on nanotechnology.

Commenting on the suggestion about aids for interpreters, Barry Wilson said that the European Parliament was working on a project to provide MEPs with a terminal on their desks which would display amendments to legislation as they were tabled, and provide immediate translations. It would be combined with the existing electronic voting system, but was very much a longer-term undertaking.

Moving on, Jan Carter of NATO wanted to know whether in-house translators used machine translation systems voluntarily. Kent Taylor replied that there was some initial resistance; after about 3-4 months of working with MT output, it was found that 2 out of 12 translators were unable to adapt, whereas the others liked MT.

Mike Garrido said that Rank Xerox had been using MT for 8 years now, and could not do without it, so great was the volume of work handled. He was unable to say anything about the translators' attitude to the system, however.

Kirsty Buxbom, also of Rank Xerox, commented from the floor that the Systran system was used for translating service material, whereas Alps was used for processing customer material. She added that translators wanted

to use the interactive system, and that their general attitude to MT was favourable.

The final question was from Mr Ebrahim of the Cranfield Institute of Technology, who asked Mike Garrido for clarification on the matter of character sets, commenting that with a 16-bit system it was possible to access more than 7,000 characters. Mr Garrido replied that it was a question of address space, and that the figure was in fact more than 70,000 characters. If more were required, the Rank Xerox system was capable of moving up to 24-bit operation, which would make it possible to access several million characters. At present, more than 35,000 characters had been defined, giving the system the capability of presenting output in 100 languages.

RAPPORTEUR

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