Two MT Systems and Still Hungry...   **Mr Daniel GRASMICK**

The MT Market and SAP

In 1982, SAP had its first experience with Machine Translation. The results were not convincing enough and the project was abandoned.

In 1995, we now have 2 MT Systems in use and are one of the most efficient users of MT. What has changed since 1982? What are we doing that is different to other users?

As part of the English translation department employing 60 full-time translators, we have set up a small dynamic group working with machine translation on a daily basis. 8 people working full-time, 2 part-time and 3 students. The MT group is organized as an independent service group and works in close cooperation with the specialized translators.

Since 1990, we have obtained excellent results with G-E from METAL, which is now fully integrated into the translation workflow.

The texts are always post-edited and each member of the group produces an average of 15 to 20 pages per day. We are able to produce a preliminary version of a 100 page manual within seven man-days including terminology coding and printing.

Without the MT group, our company would not have been able to simultaneously ship in time the German and English version of our software in the last two years.

Since the demand for French is expected to increase greatly, the decision was made last year to test E-F from Logos, and at the beginning of 1995 we decided to buy the language pair which is now in the set-up phase. The initial results are very encouraging.

Using MT for multilingual documentation is still exotic.

Why is this so? The traditional arguments are the effort needed for integration, the huge workload to set up terminology parallel to traditional TDB and poor results if the source documentation is not homogeneous (editor, style, application).

In addition, commercial MT systems are not really suited for mass translation: there is no product with a real client-server solution and with flexible job queue management, and the mass terminology input possibilities are only at a prototype stage. However at least Sietec and Logos are working on solutions.

The main problem is that MT companies have missed the opportunity to work at an early stage in close cooperation with real users. As a result, the products are still difficult to integrate. A vicious circle has been formed. Users are few in number and the developers of MT systems cannot finance themselves with the sales and maintenance fees.

A new appetite

It is a fact that the MT systems have much more in common with one another than the developers think. As the latter have almost no chance of making a profit within the next few years, they should look for other strategies. One way to reduce the amount of superfluous effort would be to work on specific projects - like input standards - together and also with power users.

Each company should also concentrate on specific language pairs instead of developing new language pairs needed by relatively few customers.

Of course, the integration of other techniques like Translation Memory - still not an adult product - will also be a determining factor. These techniques need to be fully integrated, but again must be flexible enough to be used as standalone modules.

At SAP, we plan to combine several products and techniques, and add or develop new features in concert with open vendors.