

Session 4:

Summary of the discussion

Brian McCluskey, Head of the Division responsible for Planning and Coordination in the Translation Directorate of the European Commission in Brussels, was in the Chair for this last session of the Conference which he conducted with his accustomed flair and bonhomie. Unfortunately the first two speakers listed were unable to attend but their papers were most ably presented by colleagues: Professor Abdo speaking for Professor Mahmoud Esma'il Sieny and Hugo Brouckaert for Jean-Marie Timmermans.

Questions from Pamela Mayorcas, Commission of the European Communities, on translator status and from Sue Marshall, Bank of England, on practical cooperation and exchanges reflected interest in the work being done by the Conference of Translation Services of West European States. The report on the status of the translator is available from the current President of the Conference, Jean-Marie Timmermans.

After the tea interval, Peter Behrendt Lau reported on Eurotra and his talk was followed by the closing discussion session, the afternoon speakers being joined on the platform by Erika Hoffmann, John McNaught and Rainer Reisenberger who had given papers earlier in the conference.

Many of the questions were on Eurotra. Machine translation in general is naturally a matter of vital concern to the profession and this particular project is very near home for many of us and so attracts a special degree of interest. The following points emerged:

- Eurotra is publicly funded at present but it is expected that private users will be involved in Eurotra II which is to be marketed. (Question from a speaker from Belgium)

- The agreement to participate in the project extends to all current Members of the Community and covers all nine Community languages. This presents difficult political and administrative problems which it was felt would become acute, if not positively overwhelming, in the event of further enlargement. (Question from a speaker from Belgium)
- Grammatical analysis for the system has been tested on grammars with sixty rules and coverage of 500 lexical items. The software needs to be improved. (Question from a speaker from Rank Xerox)
- The text corpus used as input for the prototype was the Commission paper to the Council on the ESPRIT project. The writing varies in quality but contains no non-grammatical sentences. (Question from Jane Mason, Rank Xerox)
- Texts are now being collected for use in the third phase. These are Community documents representing a much broader corpus and varied subject-matter. It is hoped that the principle of external editing will prove successful. Certain difficult tasks have been set aside and the computational linguists work on more complicated problems while simpler material is used for demonstration purposes. (Question from Veronica Lawson)
- It was suggested that as computers are advancing faster than the linguistic research required by the system it might be possible to operate by listing and then using the computer. However, this is not considered practicable as the linguists have to seek significant generalisations, looking at language as it is, and this involves very large corpora. (Question from Leo Mulders, Court of Justice)
- It is expected that Eurotra will be useful to translators in lexicographical work. A useful way forward would be to establish a common format for the exchange of small local databanks. Work has already started on description and research with a view to constructing termbanks. (Questions from Peter Barber, Able Translations and Pamela Mayorcas, Commission of the European Communities)

There was also some discussion of termbanks and glossaries: Should they be kept small, covering restricted subject-areas, so that terminology could be exchanged using small computers? Should data be strictly structured? How can problems of disambiguation be solved? In this connection, it was pointed out that requirements for normal terminology databases are different from those for MT which are much more extensive. (Question from Pamela Mayorcas, Commission of the European Communities)

The thorny subject of copyright was raised a propos the possibility, or not, of including whole dictionaries, or parts of dictionaries, or even single entries, in termbanks. It was pointed out that all databanks use such information, which can be downloaded onto the translator's own terminal, and that it is in any case permitted to reproduce copyright material for purposes of private study.

A further consideration in this connection is the translators' contribution to termbanks and translators' copyright in their work which is to some extent, though not entirely, covered by their contracts of terms of service. The whole question of copyright presents a very serious legal problem and it was suggested that it might perhaps be considered at next year's conference. (Questions from Peter Barber, Able Translations; Cecilia La Paglia; and Chris Percival, Flambard European)

The Chairman then brought the discussion and the conference to a close. He paid tribute to the organising committee and to the three bodies responsible for the conference: Aslib, the Institute of Translation and Interpreting, and the Aslib Technical Translation Group and conveyed cordial greetings from the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs. Plans for next year's conference are in hand. It will be the tenth in the series and that alone should provide an occasion for special celebration.

RAPPORTEUR

Mrs B.H.E. Wilson, Senior Translator, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, UK.