

## Introduction

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It occurs to me that for some of the participants in the 'Translating and the Computer' series of conferences, the chief benefit they derive is from catching up with the very latest news of MT and MAT projects and systems; for others the main attraction is the opportunity to hear, and in discussion to question, people who are actually using these systems and to discover how they function in the context of ordinary everyday work. But for most, I suspect, it is a combination of these features which attracts a constant attendance at these conferences from far and wide.

When I glanced over the notes I took at the conference itself, and read the reports of the discussions at the end of each session, I was struck by the way that the discussion tended to focus on one particular aspect, and that this was almost always of a practical nature. In the first session, for instance, the questioners homed in on Peter Arthern's bold attempt to grasp the nettle of evaluating revision. In the second session, the realities of terminology handling were at the forefront. After Session 3, the feasibility and value of text input controls were highlighted, and during the last discussion session, the questioning concentrated on the post-editing of machine translation. Was it really possible to do it both quickly and effectively and make it into an interesting job at the same time?

Thinking this over, I concluded — possibly wrongly, and I would be delighted to hear the views of others — that the papers which concerned themselves with theory, such as the absorbing accounts of the GETA and SUSY systems or the ASCII codes, cannot be digested immediately, unlike the more down-to-earth contributions. It may even be that many conference participants do not derive the full benefit from these theoretical papers until they have the chance to study them at leisure in the *Proceedings*. Questions at the discussion sessions, therefore, seem to relate to the more

human scale of how things are done on a day-to-day basis in this organisation or that department.

When I scanned the complete range of the contributions to *Translating and the Computer 8*, it was abundantly clear to me that the computer in its various manifestations is now an everyday reality for the majority of translators (a very different picture from *Translating and the Computer 1!*), and that machine translation in particular is neither a panacea nor a juggernaut but something that a growing number of professional translators use every day, and regard as a translation tool like many others. As Loll Rolling put it, MT is here to stay, and as Juan Sager reminded us, MT has now reached the stage where it warrants the writing of a history (*Machine Translation: Past, Present, Future*, by W.J. Hutchins, published 1986 by Ellis Horwood in their *Computers and Their Applications* series, distributed by John Wiley & Son, Baffins Lane, Chichester, PO19 1UD, UK, hardback, 382 pages, £39.95).

Those translators for whom machine or machine-assisted translation is not yet part of everyday life, are clearly keen to know more. Tony Hartley and David Smith provided evidence that translators no longer sit in back rooms, cut off from the outside world. The respondents to their surveys were aware that they should (and could) learn more about the latest developments and how they might make use of them.

The value of restricting one's field of vision to an achievable goal was demonstrated by Paul Burton's paper on the basics of information retrieval for the individual translator, and by Patrick Chaffey with his ADNOM project which does valuable work in establishing and standardising foreign language equivalents for all kinds of Norwegian and Scandinavian official names.

Finally, I should just like to mention how gratifying it was for me to hear Peter Whitelock in his paper give us the hoped-for update on the Interpreting Telephony project, which I mentioned in my introduction to the *Proceedings of Translating and the Computer 7*. (The project itself does not seem likely to come to fruition for a good few years, but we can live in hope.)

As always, it has been a pleasure to contribute to the planning of this conference, and to take part in it. In conclusion, I should like to express my thanks to my fellow-members of the planning committee, the Aslib and CBI conference organising staff, to Guyonne Proudlock for her discussion reports, and to all the conference participants, both speakers and delegates. I look forward to meeting you again at the next Conference.