

## **Parallel Session II**

### **Translation Aids: how modern technology is changing translation practice for the small translation unit**

#### **Summary of discussion**

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In her introduction Lanna Castellano pointed out that the real problem in automating a translator's office was the serious risk of falling into the trap of the hi-fi enthusiast who cannot hear the music for the sound: there was no shortage of equipment - quite the contrary - but the intelligent use of everything on offer presented a nice problem of balancing the costs and advantages.

It was suggested that the three main areas of a translator's activity should be considered in chronological order and each phase appraised.

The first phase was that of document input. The session participants were divided approximately equally between 'dictators' and 'keyboarders'; a few continued to use longhand as a primary medium for translation. With one or two notable exceptions the division between dictators and keyboarders appeared to be a function of age: after some occasionally heated discussion it was agreed that the choice between dictation and keyboarding was largely a matter of personal taste and habit. Advocates of dictation pointed out that an experienced translator at a dictation machine closely resembled a conference interpreter, with the eyes (rather than the ears) taking in the source language, and the voice reconstituting the target, frequently at a correspondingly high work-rate. Those who favoured keyboarding on microcomputer or word processor emphasised the cost advantages in typing a job once and for all, with tedious retyping a thing of the past and a quantum improvement in document presentation. Others, who had experienced both dictation and keyboarding, advocated a mixed system of dictating to a secretary who keyboarded the text once and

for all for subsequent amendment by the translator, either directly on screen or on hard copy. In the latter case the amendments were later transferred to screen by the secretary; this was generally the view of commercial translators and translation companies.

A number of speakers referred indirectly to keyboard skills as an accomplishment required of the effective translator. There was a great deal to be said for following a formal word processing course, and one speaker was appalled by the manifest lack of typing skills shown by those demonstrating the systems in the exhibition - usually two-finger typists, and at least one one-finger man.

The transition to the second phase, text editing, went unnoticed since it had already been argued that any distinction between initial input and subsequent editing was artificial; each was, in reality, only another aspect of the other. Powerful and useful text editing functions were indispensable if a word processor or microcomputer was to be of value in translation work. A digression into the relative merits of dedicated word processors and microcomputers centred initially on the unsuitability for language work of the keyboard ranges currently on offer in Britain. Pamela Mayorcas-Cohen described the European Commission's proposal to ISO (International Standards Organization) for a multilingual keyboard, to be an ISO and European Community standard, with a four-level keyboard offering lower case and upper case in the national or international layout of the purchaser's choice, plus special shift and a fourth, super-shift level. On a single keyboard this would allow the display of 342 characters covering 40 Latin-based alphabets, and a range of scientific and technical symbols.

The session leader, knowing that many of those taking part were contemplating acquiring some form of electronic equipment, invited general comments on specific types of systems.

Bill Duffin, who had acquired a system since the last conference, summarised the criteria he had applied when prospecting the market. Individual translators might find that the mix of those criteria varied according to their needs, circumstances, and budget, but they would include printer speed and quality, disk capacity, price, and performance.

Peter Long emphasised that freelancers who wished to keep abreast of their principals must turn to sophisticated equipment; Robert Rooke stressed that simplicity was the essential quality: keystrokes had to be kept to a minimum.

It was generally agreed that for text-editing the ability to use word processors was essential: translators had to be editors as well. A discussion followed on the merits of various types of machine (BBC or Commodore, dedicated

word processors or microcomputers with word processing software). Robert Clark pointed out that non-English audio-typists often produced better work than native speakers. As for the choice of machine, it depended very much on what one wanted to do with it, i.e. the number of words a day, the quality of print needed, and so on. To learn to use a microcomputer with a word processing package effectively took six months - and one had to expect to be less efficient during that time, with the hope of increasing efficiency thereafter. Cost followed a simple rule of thumb: work out what you could afford, add 50 per cent and then some! Another speaker felt that this was putting the cart before the horse: translators should define their needs first and then look for a machine that satisfied them. Unfortunately, machine salesmen were not susceptible to this approach. Pamela Mayorcas-Cohen pointed out that there was a compatibility problem: translators, as part of the information profession, need to convince sceptical manufacturers that they are a major market. It was suggested that a resolution might be drafted for submission to the plenary conference, but this proposal was not implemented. Geoffrey Kingscott felt that market forces were forcing manufacturers towards compatibility and that information users such as librarians and translators should get together.

Lanna Castellano turned the discussion towards the third phase, that of document delivery, i.e. getting the document back to the users. In addition to the conventional postal and personal delivery methods there were now facsimile (UK 19000 Group 3) and electronic mail, using the public telephone networks. Robert Rooke argued that with modern packet switching document delivery was cheaper and quicker over the telephone. The problems involved in transferring different languages, with all the complications of different characters, accents etc., could be, and indeed had been, overcome. The advantage of Group 3 facsimile transfer was that one could transfer both pictures and diagrams, although the quality was not good enough for printers' proofs. However, it was satisfactory for transferring typescript for typesetting, unless the printers were unfamiliar with the language, in which case there tended to be lots of printing errors.

Nelida Depiante was involved in an interesting experiment with Shell: as a freelance, she had been provided with a Logica VTS 2200 word processor and was expected to produce camera-ready copy. She found the Logica VTS very user-friendly. So far, however, document transfer was limited: the text for translation was sent to her by post and the diskette containing her translation had still to be delivered back physically.

Robert Rooke pointed out that the Teletex code had to be

sorted out for each new machine; the manufacturers would have to do this, but were unwilling to. British Telecom could be asked to clarify the accessible character sets. A representative of the manufacturers pointed out that they really did not know the size of the market, despite their attendance at these conferences. A speaker from Finland felt that translators from the various countries should list their own requirements, to see which problems were common to all. Bill Medcraft from British Telecom said that the interworking facilities for a Teletex service supporting the standard QWERTY character set would be launched in 1985. British Telecom had already approved three terminal suppliers. The interworking facilities to permit the transmission of extended character sets were still being developed; there were considerable technical difficulties and the solutions were extremely expensive. Manufacturers and British Telecom would need to be convinced of the market for such a service before spending money on installing the necessary facilities.

Because of the cost of terminals, it was likely that the Teletex network would initially only be taken up by large commercial users, with smaller and private (home-use) customers having to wait three to four years before prices had dropped to within their means. Telex terminals currently cost about £2,500-£3,000, while teletex terminals would be in the region of £4,000-£5,000. Terminal suppliers were still concentrating on telex; once this market had been saturated they would increasingly turn their attention to Teletex terminals. Demand forecasts indicated an installed base of 5,000 terminals in 1985/86, reaching 41,000 in 1989/90; this should be compared with the current installed base of telex terminals of 100,000. In reply to a question from Pamela Mayorcas-Cohen as to whether word processors or microcomputers could be linked up to the Teletex service, via the public data service, Bill Medcraft said that the terminal could take the form of either a screen-based terminal or simply a 'black box' which acted as a store-and-forward device. This would eventually be pluggable into the word processor or microcomputer, but it was a highly sophisticated device and would probably be too expensive for home users.

A speaker asked whether word processors were going to be taken over by microcomputers or vice-versa. A general discussion followed, during which a number of points were made: neither word processors nor micros function well over telephone lines; word processors were a form of microcomputer with much more sophisticated text-editing facilities, although some micros offer more possibilities than word processors if they have good word processing packages. The relative merits of editing on paper or on

screen were discussed. Some speakers felt that it was easier to pick up errors on paper than on screen, and that it was impossible to jot down ideas on screen the way one could on paper. However, it was pointed out that some systems offer the possibility of indicating what changes have been made. Geoffrey Kingscott said that it was largely a generation question: many younger translators and those of the next generation would not be afraid of working on screen. In a world of keyboard units everybody should be 'keyboard-literate'. One might argue that editing was only 'paddling in the shallows'. The next generation of translators would have to look at all the possibilities computers could offer.