

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION (Sessions 1 & 2)

Rapporteuse:

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The bulk of the discussion following the first two sessions centred on the methodologies used for establishing standard and special interest glossaries and vocabularies and the optimum methods for disseminating and assessing them.

In view of the high cost involved in publishing multilingual editions of glossaries such as the very useful welding glossaries, it was suggested that translators would favour the production of bilingual and multi-lingual editions on microfiches. Microfiches could be produced quite cheaply* and provide compact storage; furthermore, updated versions could be sent to subscribers at regular intervals. The International Institute of Welding was examining a number of alternatives to hard copy publication and microfiche was one of the options; however, no final decision had been taken. Despite their advantages, there was still user resistance to microfiches, while the issuing and filing of updates required additional effort on the part of both publisher and subscriber.

It was suggested that since welding was essentially a craft activity its terminology would have tended to be rather parochial, with significant regional variations, and that there would be considerable difficulties in establishing a consolidated international vocabulary. In fact, it was the growing importance of welding as an industrial process, for such varied products as atomic reactors and household gadgets, which had prompted the IIW to create a multilingual terminology for use by the international community. While regional variations did persist and usage could vary, as between American and British English, or French, Swiss and Belgian French, national standards bodies were endeavouring to 'iron out' disparities at national level and encourage the use of a more homogeneous vocabulary.

* Note (Rapporteuse): Cheap to reproduce, once the initial investment in microfiche production equipment has been made.

Great interest was shown in the work being carried out in Israel for creating new terms. Delegates were referred to the Encyclopaedia Judaica for a detailed description of the history and development of modern Hebrew, and for the principles of Hebrew lexicology. The Academy of the Hebrew Language operated a system similar to that of BSI with regard to standardisation of terminology. The Academy did not initiate work on new dictionaries and word lists but responded to requests from the press, from industry and from academics. These professionals were the first non-native speakers of Hebrew and were inevitably influenced by their mother tongue when faced with the need to create new Hebrew words in their sphere of activity. This could result in the creation of a number of synonymous calques within a single industry or university department.

On receiving a request or enquiry, the Academy would consult the appropriate subject expert. Where no preferred Hebrew term existed, a committee of authors and linguists would solicit suggestions. These would be circulated amongst the subject experts and submitted to a grammar committee. A full plenary session of the Academy, comprising authors, linguists and translators (23 in all) would then be called to approve or reject the term. If no consensus were reached, the matter would be referred back to the original committee which would repeat the consultation process. Once approved, a term would be published in the Academy's official gazette. Only government departments were legally obliged to use the term. Terms became part of the language if they found general acceptance amongst the general public and the Academy eagerly sought public reaction and comment. It was explained that Arabic neologisms were generally unacceptable under the rules of modern Hebrew lexicology, even though both languages shared the three-consonant root structure and similar word-building patterns. There was little control in the Arabic countries over the entry of foreign words into the language. Furthermore, Arabic itself was not a uniform language but varied from Baghdad to Damascus to Cairo.

Doubt was expressed as to the usefulness of glossaries and terminology standards as currently conceived by their compilers and publishers. Dictionaries based on standard vocabularies tended to leave out words which were in common use and were too narrow in their scope. The United Nations was cited as an example of a multilingual environment where many delegates were non-native speakers of the official language who tended to use a varied and non-standard vocabulary. It was suggested that more standards organisations should adopt the practice of including lists of non-recommended terms (*termes déconseillés*), which would be marked as such.

While it was true that multilingual vocabulary lists were not generally held in high esteem by translators, they could be helpful in identifying the source of calques devised by non-native speakers of a language. The general feeling was that publishers and compilers of standard vocabularies and special word lists should pay more attention to the expectations translators had of such tools.

The perennial chestnut was raised of the need for some formal body to control the use of English, in the form of an Academy for the Advancement of English. Such an Academy would protect and refine the language and lay down proscribed and prescribed forms. Translators with their long history and experience in the use of language should play a

leading role in such a body. A straw poll of conference delegates showed that there was little support for such a body. The panel considered that the notion though an ideal one was not feasible, for a variety of reasons. English, like Arabic, existed in several different forms all over the world and an Academy would have to permit the legitimate 'big' variants from North America and Australia as well as the large number of pidgin languages based on English.

Technical vocabulary tended to suffer wherever officialdom tried to interfere. French was cited as an example of a language where engineers and technicians used one common, well-known word while government officials used long and little-known circumlocutions. Thus parallel vocabularies tended to emerge. The problem was particularly acute on international committees where technical experts and official government representatives would use two words for the same thing.

Lastly, it was suggested that speakers and users of English were simply not susceptible to formal controls.

In spite of the conference title "Translating and the Computer", or rather because of it, it was considered surprising that the first three papers in Session 1 had scarcely mentioned computers, either in relation to the production of glossaries and dictionaries* or as regards translators' access to them. The implication seemed to be that conventional printed copy continued to offer the best access to terminology even where this was held on a term bank and that access via the computer terminal was cumbersome and expensive. It was pointed out that computer-stored terminology provided the raw material from which reasonably-priced tailor-made printed requirements could be produced.

Dr Yannai would shortly be provided with a desk-top terminal. At present he searches a dictionary but as 5,000 terms are added every six months it will be difficult to search printout until computer techniques have improved. One suggestion put forward to explain why computers were not yet universally used for glossary circulation and production was that this was still a problem of scale. Given the cost of the initial installation, conventional production and publication methods continue to be cost-effective for relatively small and highly-specialised glossaries.

The time would shortly be arriving when computers would offer the only viable means for storing, controlling and updating the explosion of technical vocabulary in all fields and in all languages. It was true that retrieval interrogation techniques for term banks needed to be improved.** Concern was also expressed at the apparent duplication of effort at national and international levels both as regards the creation of technical vocabularies and the development of term banks. If users could not find a product to satisfy their immediate needs they would tend to provide their own solution.** On the whole the panel felt that as data banks and networks became more commonplace and offered cheaper tariffs, the trend would be away from the wealth of printed dictionaries to computer stored terminology.

* Note: (Rapporteuse): the IIW, IEC and ice glossaries

** This theme was taken up again in the discussion following Session 5.

Turning from words to pictures, a delegate expressed concern at the lack of international standards for graphical symbols and schematics. What, if anything, were the international and technical bodies doing about this? There were few comprehensive reference works and look-up facilities were primitive. ("How do you know what to look up when you don't know what you are looking for!" was the blunt but pragmatic cry).

Delegates were informed that the IIW was preparing a table of internationally-accepted symbols for the operation of welding equipment. This was currently before ISO and the rate of progress was very slow. The IEC had the largest collection in the world of symbols for use in circuit diagrams and for use on equipment such as a symbol for 'press', and a series of international symbols for use in railway stations, airports and traffic signs is being developed. However, it was felt that symbols would always be ambiguous and that the international community should decide to use one natural language and adopt selected terms from that language. It was agreed that access to published lists of graphics and symbols was difficult: in the United Kingdom, BSI was one of the best sources of information.

Later in the discussion, delegates returned to the very long lead times required for terms to emerge from the various committees and subcommittees and, with reference to the Israeli example, whether translators and writers were represented. Experts could be called on to distil current usage but the results of their deliberations needed to be exposed to public comment if terms were to find general acceptance. Delegates were advised that their help and cooperation was actively sought and that they should contact the appropriate standards body or technical umbrella organisation if they felt they had expertise in a specific subject area.