

## **Session 7: Panel discussion Summary of discussion**

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The final session of the conference took the form of a panel discussion, featuring some of the main speakers and manufacturers' representatives and chaired by Barbara Snell. The questions discussed had been previously submitted in writing and some had been edited by the chairman.

The chairman began by introducing the panel members:

Birgit Rommel, Linda Talhami, Robert Rooke, Peter Wheeler, and Sarah Dunlop (speakers);  
David Ashby (USIT) and Martin Radford (ITL),  
representing the exhibitors.

### QUESTION 1 (Lanna Castellano)

One wonders whether the increasing involvement of machines in the translation process will debase and prostitute our language. Should real translators, the only people who still care deeply about the beauty and richness of their mother language, fight against the dehumanisation of termbanks and machine translation?

Linda Talhami began by saying that she did not think language could be degraded any more than it already had been, with which Birgit Rommel agreed, saying that it was up to translators to keep the language going and make sure that machines did not take it over. Martin Radford put the point rather more strongly, saying that translators should organise themselves into a pressure group to influence the supplier companies. David Ashby also stressed that translators should not leave it to the programmers to take

decisions on language and said that if translators left such decisions to other people, they would have to live with the consequences.

Peter Wheeler ended by saying that, in his opinion, the machine would ape whatever degradation had already been imposed on language by human means, and quoted the example of 'Franglais'. The only difference was that the machine would do it more quickly. Stressing that it was up to translators to make sure that standards were kept up, he said that any translator who was satisfied with a bad machine translation would probably have produced an equally bad human translation.

#### QUESTION 2 (Michael Fulton)

Do desk-top optical character readers (OCR) which will read Roman character sets with diacriticals exist? If not, are they likely to come in the reasonably near future and how will the increased use of OCR change the translation scene?

On behalf of the manufacturers, David Ashby answered that the desk-top OCR machines currently available were not completely satisfactory. There were problems with reading from paper, but the machines were being developed and satisfactory machines would be available in the future.

The general feeling of the panel seemed to be that it was perhaps too early to say exactly how OCR would change the translation scene.

#### QUESTION 3 (Bill Duffin)

How can individuals without access to word processors have access to termbanks? Will there be public user terminals in, for example, university library computer systems? Without relatively quick access, a termbank may not be very useful to anybody working to short deadlines.

Sarah Dunlop said that public libraries have been carrying out online bibliographic searches for some time. Obviously, searching a termbank was rather different - one could not, for example, simply give the librarian a list of terms to look up and expect to get satisfactory answers. Some libraries did allow members of the public to use their equipment but, on the whole, she thought it might be better to find out whether it was possible to use terminals in university libraries.

Robert Rooke pointed out that accessing a termbank need not be prohibitively expensive. All that was necessary was a very basic printing terminal which could be obtained for around £200.

## QUESTION 4 (Anca Schip)

Are translator training requirements being met by any product now available? If not, what requirements still have to be met and are manufacturers planning any products which would meet them?

Birgit Rommel, speaking from the trainer's viewpoint, said that there was no ideal product at present. The main problem was that most training institutions simply did not have the money to buy lots of equipment and try it all out. They therefore had no basis on which to make a comparison. What was needed, she thought, was for the industry to supply the basic type of product described by the user and then, on the basis of the user's experience, for both manufacturer and user to carry out joint research with a view to producing a tailor-made product. She was afraid, however, that this would prove to be something of a pipe-dream.

Martin Radford thought it would be difficult to find one manufacturer who would be willing to specialise in what was essentially a small field. It might be more useful, he thought, to ask an agency to test different machines, which would save going round all the different manufacturers.

David Ashby said that it was quite easy for translators to obtain basic training in using word processors - there were plenty of secretarial courses available - but that for anything more specialised he too would recommend going to a specialist business, i.e. an agency. Birgit Rommel, in reply, thought that it was rather unrealistic to expect to be able to use an agency successfully. She maintained that the only solution was to go direct to the manufacturers.

## QUESTION 5 (Patrick Corness)

There is clearly a great need for more information about available hardware and software for language processing at various levels. Where can or should members of the public expect to find this?

Linda Talhami felt that, even in Canada, public awareness of language processing possibilities was very limited. For translators, Robert Rooke thought that the best method of obtaining information was to go to the computer magazines, of which there were now many on the market, and look for lists of user groups which could provide a useful source of information.

Birgit Rommel proposed that the national translator associations should set up a full committee which could receive and discuss experience of - and complaints about -

various types of equipment and which could provide an advisory service.

#### QUESTION 6 (Claude Fleurent)

Should the machine translation equipment manufacturers and providers of services fund training and research in the use of their equipment?

Peter Wheeler said he would expect manufacturers to provide training as part of the package. Martin Radford pointed out that any manufacturer of machine translation equipment automatically spent a tremendous amount on research. The direction in which such research was directed would depend on the feedback received from users. Once again, it was up to the translators themselves to make sure that any such research was relevant to their needs.

Sarah Dunlop said that, as far as EURODICAUTOM was concerned (admittedly not a machine translation system), a free training programme was offered, with courses taking place throughout Europe.

Peter Wheeler pointed out that the level of training required often varied considerably, the most basic being one user's need to be told that, having updated his dictionary on floppy disk, he could not then punch two holes in it and file it in a ring binder. Robert Rooke echoed this point, saying that he ran a sort of 24-hour help-line, and was often asked such basic questions as how to send a telex, despite the fact that the instructions were clearly set out in the manual.

#### QUESTION 7 (Peter Arthern)

What are the advantages and disadvantages of including subject codes in terms in a terminology database?

Sarah Dunlop, speaking about EURODICAUTOM, said that with a database of that size, some means of limiting the search was necessary, since many terms - she used 'transmission' as an example - occurred in a wide range of fields. Subject codes provided one means of limiting the search.

#### QUESTION 8 (Rainer Reisenberger)

In the field of machine publishing or 'documentation production', what are the constituents in an electronic chain of equipment, avoiding any re-keying? How will the use of 'high tech' affect publishing as we know it?

The question referred to the technical facilities for using existing word processing equipment as an input station for final photosetting without re-keying, and the possibility of a range of options, including OCR and MT, being used as part of the production process.

Robert Rooke thought that, although the type of situation envisaged by the questioner was still 'many miles away', it would eventually reduce the cost of printing considerably.

David Ashby mentioned laser printing as a useful new development. A desk-top laser printer could be bought for between £5,000 and £10,000, while a free-standing, high-speed model would cost about £15,000. Martin Radford agreed that laser printers were extremely useful, and also stressed the need for more links between basic word processors and micros and the typesetting end of the process.

From a somewhat different angle, Birgit Rommel looked forward to the possibilities provided by faster printing of making translators' work easier. It would be possible to obtain more up-to-date terminology more cheaply, because no dictionary would ever have to be thirty years out of date. Taking up this point, Sarah Dunlop was quick to add that EURODICAUTOM was in fact updated once a month.

#### QUESTION 9 (Paavo Anttila)

Is there a 'post-editor's syndrome', perhaps taking the form of frustration and/or the acceptance of sub-standard language?

Peter Wheeler referred here to a remark he had made earlier in the session, i.e. that anyone, translator or post-editor, who was satisfied with a poor machine translation, would probably have produced an equally poor human translation. The rest of the panel evidently felt that this remark summed up their collective feelings on the subject.

#### QUESTION 10 (Anne Naphine)

Should the skills of translating and interpreting be taught together?

Birgit Rommel took the traditional view that the two skills were different and required different personalities: the introverted translator, concerned with the written and, to some extent, permanent word, compared with the extroverted interpreter, concerned with the instant reaction. As far as basic language skills were concerned, obviously there was scope for both to be trained together but after that, she felt, they should follow separate programmes.

## QUESTION 11 (Barbara Snell)

Are translators born or made?

Linda Talhami was the only member of the panel who felt that translators were made, not born, particularly now that automation had made the making process easier. She herself, she said, would never have remained working as a translator if it had not been for automation.

The rest of the panel came down mostly on the side of the born translator. Robert Rooke felt that some translators were born out of necessity. Peter Wheeler felt that all translators were born, and that the ability to look at words and the way in which they were used in language was definitely innate. Sarah Dunlop also felt that translators were born and that no machine could replace the human element. David Ashby thought that they must be born, otherwise where would one find them? Martin Radford said that he believed that they were born at present, but that in the future it would become easier to make them.

Birgit Rommel, however, felt that translators had to be both born and made. At Zürich, she said, people were selected for training strictly on the basis of their command of both their mother tongue and the foreign language. At that stage, their ability to transfer from one to the other was not tested. Only if their 'born' abilities were satisfactory were they then accepted for 'making' i.e. training as translators. Even then, she admitted, not everyone selected became a successful translator.

## QUESTION 12 (Barbara Snell)

Is large-scale investment in MT justified if it results in unemployed translators?

None of the members of the panel believed that translators would become unemployed as a result of machine translation, to the great relief of everyone present, and on that reassuring note the chairman closed the session.