Summary of discussion

Pamela Mayorcas- Cohen

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Commending the speaker on a truly remarkable job in bringing together such a large amount of information, the Chairman suggested that the conference proceedings would be eagerly sought after by those wishing to scrutinise the machine translation scene in the West. In addition to providing a comprehensive overview of a highly-fragmented industry, Mr Wheeler's commentary was all the more revealing as a result of his own work in the field.

The audience was invited to put questions or to add the 'Yes, but ...' comments invited by the speaker; however, delegates were enjoined not to make marketing presentations since the conference provided neither the time nor the place for free publicity spots by the various MT suppliers.

MT AND ABSTRACTING

Some further clarification was requested on the Russian-English version of Systran used by the US Air Force for abstracting Russian texts; in particular, whether the machine produced a translated abstract or a full translation of the source text for subsequent abstracting by human translators. It was confirmed that the latter procedure, using English mother-tongue abstractors, had been successfully used in the past. The current project was experimenting with automatic abstracting of the source text, followed by automatic translation of the abstract. It was

understood that further development work was still needed.

MT AND TERMINOLOGY

Clarification was requested by another delegate on the use of German-English Systran by the Festo Corporation for the translation of technical terminology. This was viewed as a rather expensive way of conducting terminology searches, and a waste of the machine's resources. The speaker confirmed that the system was being used in this way and agreed with the delegate's comment, but explained that this was being regarded as an intermediate stage, prior to the production of usable machine-translated texts. The pre-liminary stage served to ensure the standardisation of technical terms used by staff translators, by incorporation of these terms in the MT dictionary.

THE ALPS SYSTEM

A representative of ALPS, commending the speaker on an excellent review, sought to add some clarification on the relationship between the original Brigham Young University (BYU) system ITS and the two commercial systems ALPS and Weidner: he stressed that there was no stable connection between ALPS and Weidner, although one former member of the BYU staff had gone to Weidner for a short time. He also provided some clarification on the work of MCC (Microelectronics and Computer Corporation) on natural language processing. This was being carried out in the context of the US Fifth Generation Computer Project and its 'Natural Language Processing Section' and was not at present concerned with machine translation.

   (A communication from MCC received by the speaker after the conference confirmed this information.)

DISTRIBUTION OF MT OUTPUT

In reply to an enquiry as to how the estimated half-million pages of text translated by machine were distributed amongst existing operational systems, the speaker replied that no details of the workload breakdown appeared to be available.

EUROTRA

Commenting on the plans for Eurotra, the European Communities' advanced multilingual machine translation

project, a delegate wondered whether the system was intended to be a commercial one, in which case would it represent competition for existing systems? In view of the revised deadlines for the project, which meant that even a demonstration prototype would not be available for some time, the speaker felt that the suppliers of existing systems were unlikely to see it as a threat. In any event, the special characteristics of Eurotra, in particular the many-to-many definition,(1) would seem to preclude its entering the commercial market or representing direct competition to commercial systems.

TERMINOLOGY BANKS

A representative of Saarbrücken University offered some further information on Susanna, the terminology selection programme used in conjunction with the MT system, Susy. Susanna was not being developed as an independent and additional terminology facility in competition with existing terminology databanks; its purpose was to define a methodology for accessing terms in existing banks such as Lexis (Bundessprachenamt) and Team (Siemens).

MT SUPPLIERS

Referring to the apparent hesitation on the part of MT manufacturers to respond promptly to requests for information, delegates were told by one of the parallel session leaders that some additional information on the SMART system would be available in the session on MT.

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMING-UP

Drawing the question time to a close, the Chairman commented on the lively and frank exchange of views and opinions prompted by Mr Wheeler's paper. Summing up the discussion and session, and referring to the photographic mix-up commented on at the start of the paper, the Chairman noted that the speaker's energetic and entertaining delivery had ensured that European Community staff (or rather, former European Community staff) could no longer be dismissed as faceless bureaucrats.

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1. Translation between a number of source and target languages, as opposed to existing commercial systems which provide translation between single language pairs.