

Session 1 :

Summary of discussion

Rapporteur: John Gardam

The following points were made in discussion at the end of Session 1, 'The aids', after Dr Price's presentation and Malcolm Jones' paper (not included in the present volume) on text transmission.

(1) A questioner asked what guarantee there was that whatever Teletex terminal he bought would be able to transmit and receive messages from any other design in any other country. The speaker stated that British Telecom would register any design of terminal that passed their tests to make sure that it was compatible with any other. So far only one terminal had been approved, and there were many in the queue waiting to be tested. Other countries were adopting the same procedure.

(2) Speakers had mentioned the word WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get), meaning that the display on the screen showed the work formatted exactly as it would appear when printed. A questioner asked how this could be done, bearing in mind that the number of characters on the daisy wheel was limited and could not include all the symbols which would be displayed on the screen. This was inconvenient when, as often happened, it was necessary to print two to four languages at once. A speaker replied that some printers did in fact have twin or extra large daisy wheels, which increased the range available. Other printers which used continuous paper could type all the characters on one daisy wheel first, leaving spaces, and then (after the daisy wheel had been changed for one with different characters) would return to fill in the spaces automatically.

Cheaper printers had a dot matrix which enabled a

much larger range of characters to be printed, but some people might think that the quality was not really good enough for translations. Ink jet and laser printers were more complicated and expensive but could be much more versatile.

IBM was said to have a wider range of characters on daisy wheels than anyone else.

(3) A questioner asked what arrangements would be made for Teletex to transmit pages which had blocks of text and illustrations. The speaker stated that mixed-mode Teletex, as this was called, was under discussion by CCITT at present. The proposals, in a voluminous document, were complicated and required other documents to be altered, and it would be some time before anything was agreed.

Many firms had developed different protocols. Wang and IBM had declared theirs, but not all firms had done so.

(4) A questioner asked to what extent translators were considered at the product design stage as a distinct and important clientele. Further, how were the manufacturers sure that what they had on sale was what translators really needed rather than what manufacturers thought they wanted?

The speakers replied that they had not considered translators' special needs, because these had not been put forward clearly to them by the representatives of the profession. Compared with their other markets translators were not considered to be a high-volume market, nor were their requirements thought to be very different from other market users'. IBM considered itself not only to have the largest translation division, but to be the biggest publisher in the world, because it sold its products worldwide and produced manuals to suit local requirements (in up to thirty countries at once). The company was thus very much aware of the problems of translation. The other companies echoed these remarks. ICL's translation turnover was said to have mushroomed in recent years, reaching some £2 million per year for manuals, etc. alone (i.e. excluding publicity material); hence its introduction of Weidner computer-aided translation, to help with volume and consistency. Lobbying by translators would be welcomed. Wang, on the other hand, relied on Logos to advise them on machine translation.

(5) A member of the audience recalled that when gramophones had been invented many years before, the speed at which these played records was standardised. Was it likely that the word processor industry would develop in this way, so that the contents of any floppy disk could be printed out by any printer over a telephone line many hundred miles away by selecting the correct printer button?

The speakers stressed that the computer business was growing and evolving continuously; no-one could say what would be available in ten years' time, or how much the price of existing equipment might come down over that period. If there was sufficient demand this sort of product would be designed and produced.

(6) A questioner asked if there were a device that could read handwriting. The speakers said that there were devices on which one could write and which would read the text and display this on a screen. There were also devices which read off a screen and spoke; some would read aloud from a word processor memory to a blind audio typist. While these devices were gaining in reliability they were not cheap. There were also several commercial products available that would check signatures.

(7) All three manufacturers present were said to be very interested in small users. ICL personal computer systems cost about £2,000, but prices were dropping fast. The IBM speaker warned of the WYGIWYPF principle: What You Get Is What You Pay For, and cheaper systems were generally less robust and less versatile.

RAPPORTEUR

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