

SESSION 5: CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

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An early but stimulating start to the second day of the conference sketched in some background to the creation of term banks: whether software should be off-the-peg or made-to-measure (Alan Negus); hardware in the translation services of the future (John Brook); and, not least, finding the money for your term bank's computer (John Alvey).

Hardware, as Negus said, had come a long way since the early days of term banks, when terminals were few and needed frequent application of the soldering iron. Software, however, had not kept pace and was now more complex and hence harder and dearer to produce or adapt. We were still at the very beginning of a learning curve in the application to term banks, and future problems, yet unforeseen, could be solved more easily if term banks used proprietary information retrieval packages instead of purpose-built software.

A good example of the progress in hardware in recent years was the Xerox 8000 family of electronic office products described by Brook. Its professional workstation replaced much of the office furniture and fittings with an "electronic desktop", and also offered electronic mail in-house and outside. It coped with graphics and most European languages, including Greek, as well as Japanese, mathematical symbols, scientific formulae and various special characters - facilities which were useful not only in word processing, but in online searching. The computer capacity might not, however, be sufficient for a term bank. Incompatibility with other systems, while still a problem (particularly in big organisations in which different departments ordered different equipment), was slowly diminishing.

This system had won a prize for user-friendliness from the computer press the week before, largely because of the "mouse" used to point its cursor. (Other Xerox research had produced a product which it was suggested might be called the Worm, to eat up the Apple personal computer market!) As Alvey said, new developments in software and microcomputers should soon make it easy even for small users to have their own term bank and word processing system. Indeed, a couple of weeks after the conference, VisiCorp announced a much cheaper, micro-based electronic desktop complete with "mouse".

The translating profession, as Negus reminded us, was better placed than most to take advantage of the new technology. For maximum benefit, however, online searching for terminology must be integrated with word processing. According to Alvey, indeed, word processing could be the key to a term bank. A translation department was normally regarded by management as a basic service and must therefore work within a tight budget. It was usually, however, an obvious candidate for word processing, and if a combined word processor and minicomputer could be proved economic, the department would have a "free" computer on which to store its terminology. It is a pleasing prospect, when so many translation services, even large ones, are "barely beyond the artisan stage" in terminology.