

Session 5:

Summary of discussion

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The final session, 'More varieties of editing', concluded with questions put to a panel consisting of the day's speakers and Gail Hankins (WCC). The following points were made.

(1) Asked for the number of French and foreign authors who adapted to the TITUS format, Mr Streiff reported use of TITUS at three centres (the Institut Textile de France itself, Gerdat and, for evaluation purposes, France's National Scientific Research Centre), and said that authors had to adapt to the format when writing for the TITUS system.

(2) The panel were asked about the impact of machine translation developments on the training of translators and interpreters. Muriel Vasconcellos' course at Georgetown University took the new developments into account; the old emphasis on the use of dictation, with keyboarding regarded as unprofessional, had given way to the view that future translators had to be familiar with the keyboard. ALPS had had summer intern programmes at the University of Missouri and at Monterey. Most translation schools with courses on MT emphasised the research activity in this field rather than practical training, and catered more for people going into MT development. At the European Commission an attempt had been made to devise a useful training programme, but there were difficulties because each translator took to MT in his or her own way. SAP gave general training on the use of tools, and two of the translators had had two weeks' training on Logos.

(3) When might MT systems, instead of being machine-specific, run on microcomputers under one of the common operating systems? The Weidner system was said to be available on IBM (MS/DOS) and ICL micros, and there was a definite trend in that direction. The ALPS system, being highly input/output oriented, was not at the point of being fully system-transportable. However, all the systems described could communicate through the telephone networks.

(4) On this subject of machines of different types 'talking' to each other, it was stated that most machines on the market, from personal to mainframe computers, had protocols for communication via a telephone and a modem. Problems arose with accented letters and diacritical signs and with format characters. There were companies which would convert between one manufacturer's diskette and that of another. Magnetic tape was another possibility. The UK company Formscan could convert between IBM, Wang, CPT, Wordplex and some other machines.

(5) It was now a year since the Term Banks for Tomorrow's World conference, and while a number of MT systems were now available, their dictionaries were not. When and in what form would the panel make their dictionaries available to the ordinary translator to consult? It was stated that it should be possible to come to an arrangement on the ITT and Weidner dictionaries. There were of course differences between MT dictionaries, other glossaries and term banks; one term bank, Eurodicautom, could be accessed with most microcomputers through the Euronet-DIANE network, and the European Communities Glossary (prepared by electronic means) was sold in book shops in hard copy form.

(6) The panel was asked whether pre-editing had been abandoned, perhaps as too time-consuming or impracticable. It was pointed out that pre-editing was very time-consuming, but might be worthwhile, e.g. for texts to be translated into three or more languages, texts which were themselves poor translations from exotic languages, etc. It was an advantage if a company (ITT, the Xerox Corporation) could persuade its authors to write clear text and structures, which could be translated easily. SAP would like its translators to revise the original text when that was produced. At Xerox documents which needed to be translated into several languages were machine translated in only one language pair at first, so that difficulties in the source text could be spotted and removed. Many systems required 'corrected' or 'normalised' texts. The Smart system, for example, included an automatic pre-editor which identified English sentences likely to cause translation problems, such as long sentences.

Input for the TITUS system had to conform to strictly defined grammatical structures. Professor Wilson Bishai's English-to-Arabic translation system at Harvard University could pre-edit source text to conform to twenty sentence types; translation into Arabic was then quick and apparently needed minimal post-editing. Pre-editing, however, might be an unnecessary luxury, and it would not remove the need for post-editing. At the Pan American Health Organization, where the source text had to be machine-readable, pre-editing would slow things down, and they preferred to catch the problems at the post-editing stage.

(7) What would be the best word processing equipment for use with machine translation, and would personal computers take over from word processors once their editing facilities had improved? Weidner software could be run on their own equipment or on certain microcomputers. Features to look for, Mr Tenney said, might be the ability to access all the characters needed in a multilingual text, split-screen editing, scrolling together or separately, integrated dictionary lookup and other functions, including a higher level of translation aids. Also desirable, Mr Hawes noted, was 'someone within a thousand miles to fix it'.

(8) On the subject of whether the service bureaus would sell raw (unedited) machine translation to clients, it was stated that ITT and Weidner would do so if asked, but would always emphasise the inadequacies of such translations. There were many users such as research engineers who just wanted a quick look at a text, for information only. Weidner also sold time.

(9) The panel was asked whether the strong presence at the conference from the United States indicated a change in the American scene, and whether, despite memories of the ALPAC Report of 1966 which almost ended US government support of MT, fresh funding might now be forthcoming. The door, it was stated, was no longer closed. The Pan American Health Organization had received one of the first recent grants; and some government agencies were purchasing packages instead of developing their own.

(10) The session ended with a tribute to Elizabeth Lowry-Corry, who was now retiring from Aslib after organising all five of the Translating and the Computer conferences to date.

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