

Parallel Session I Handling Terminology

Summary of discussion

*Patrick Sutton, Maud Fortune and
John Scott*

Barbara Wilson, of the Translation Branch, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, chaired the informal discussion and introduced Kees van der Horst, of the Terminology Department, Commission of the European Communities, Luxembourg. He has been for many years a member of the management team of EURODICAUTOM, a termbank containing 300,000 terms together with the references to amplify their meaning, as well as their equivalents in the languages of the Community.

He described how the Terminology Department has developed three dictionary systems: card files in drawers which occupy three sides of a large room, glossaries, and EURODICAUTOM, the computer database, in which the material of the card files and glossaries is accumulating. He explained that the card file, being purely alphabetical, is less useful than EURODICAUTOM because the computer database provides more and much quicker ways of retrieving translations of a term. EURODICAUTOM is used both by the EC institutions and on the ECHO (European Commission Host Organisation) network to computers which access it. He thought that EURODICAUTOM seemed easier to access than the UMIST termbank, and it had a different database, structure and retrieval procedure.

In response to a question, Sarah Dunlop of ECHO explained how EURODICAUTOM can be accessed. For UK users it is necessary to contact British Telecom, who will issue a password to permit entry to the packet switching service (PSS). They have to sign a contract with ECHO to obtain a handbook and EURODICAUTOM User Manual, after which all they have to do is make a call to the nearest PSS

node and use their password to call up the EURODICAUTOM host computer in Luxembourg. The charge for the password is about £5 per month; additional charges are made for the volume of characters transmitted and the time spent logged-on (about £7 per hour). Access to the database itself is free of charge.

A questioner from the University of the Saar at Saarbrücken asked whether batch processing might be possible on EURODICAUTOM. Kees van der Horst explained that this was impossible for external users (on ECHO) but possible for internal users on EURODICAUTOM.

Ulla Magnusson-Murray (ITT Europe) raised the matter of terms searched for but not found in EURODICAUTOM, and asked whether arrangements could be made with large bodies for the exchange of terminology. She was told that such exchanges were already taking place with AFNOR, IEC and Aerospatiale. Conversely, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands was using EURODICAUTOM as its sole termbank.

Peter Arthern (EEC Council) gave delegates details of the EEC glossary, a new edition of which was at the printers and had been promised for the end of November 1984. It would be available in the UK from Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Mr van der Horst mentioned the acquisition of new terminology for EURODICAUTOM, and pointed out that the political aim of setting up the system, which was to build a large online glossary as quickly as possible, had sometimes been detrimental to the quality of the material included. He said that all data submitted should have a reference to its source and preferably be on magnetic tape, although anything would be accepted (subject codes would be added at EURODICAUTOM).

Mr Meyer Boujedid of the Information Department of Aerospatiale, Suresnes, France, asked whether a print-out or magnetic tape of the EURODICAUTOM database was on sale. The answer was 'No'. Mr Boujedid added in this connection that Aerospatiale had available a four-language glossary on tape or in hard copy, containing some 15,000 terms.

In answer to John Scott, who asked about the size of the database needed to contain the 300,000 English terms with their foreign language equivalents, Kees van der Horst told him that it amounted to 200 Mb for the database and some 400 Kb for the program.

EURODICAUTOM also contains over 90,000 abbreviations in the six official European languages with Spanish and Portuguese now being added. Mr van der Horst spoke about the 'code de fiabilité' (reliability code), which goes from 5 to 0 (5 = good, a standard term; 4 = quite good; 3 = not so

good; others very bad). This system does not work very well where material is gathered from various sources, since the equivalents in the different languages are not always reliable. A device sometimes used is the qualifier 'fiche en cours de préparation' for entries which are known to be imperfect but which are still important enough to warrant inclusion straightaway, as stopgaps.

Sarah Dunlop pointed out that there was an electronic mailbox facility on ECHO for comments on databases for which it is host. Mr van der Horst added that the material on EURODICAUTOM was constantly being revised and improved, with a view to cutting down redundancy, although this was a very long-term undertaking. Ms Dunlop went on to give some figures regarding the use made of ECHO: there are 14,000 users, and about half the total usage per month is by EURODICAUTOM subscribers (industry, government departments and individual translators). No detailed breakdown was possible, since only overall statistics were kept.

Mr Le-Hong of Daimler-Benz, Stuttgart, explained that all car makers use their own terms and many might have different terms for something that in English would be translated by one word; e.g. the French have three different terms for the power transmission of a car. In this connection, Mr van der Horst discussed the subject codes, which can be used to print out a glossary of all the terms listed under a given code. He also raised the matter of synonyms, and made the very valid point that if a query produces several alternative translations of the same word, it is up to the translator to use his or her judgment and select the most appropriate one. EURODICAUTOM was intended to be merely an aid to the translator.

Mr Lefebure (Bank of England) made a plea for greater specialisation in glossaries, given the increasing unreliability of multilingual dictionaries.

Barbara Snell asked whether EURODICAUTOM gave all language equivalents at once, and was told that the user can specify the target language, although for smaller languages it is sometimes useful to have all the equivalents displayed as a means of checking them against one another. A survey among translators at the Commission had revealed that, for them, the termbank was the third-choice option (after the author of the text and an expert in the subject field).

Linda Talhami (Teleglobe, Canada) said that in Montreal they had very close relations with the authors of their texts (Mr van der Horst added that at the EEC Commission they could often be contacted by telephone or some other means). She said that for translations from French into English the database was used as a last resort, whereas for translations from English into French it was the second-choice option

(after the author).

Anne Napthine (Shell) said it was sometimes useful to have small glossaries to send out to freelance translators with jobs. Mr van der Horst said that there was a glossary program within EURODICAUTOM which was not always satisfactory, since subject codes are sometimes added by non-experts or the computer, but which worked well for collections on specific subjects.

Mr Lefebure of the Bank of England said it was sometimes difficult to get hold of a tame expert in a large organisation, and that his own glossaries did not give a quality rating, although some entries carried a caveat label to indicate their subjective value and that they had not been verified.

Mr van der Horst remarked that such a glossary would still be of use to people outside the Bank of England, and that once again it was up to the translator to decide which terms were worth using.

Mr Scott of the Translators' Guild asked whether the Commission paid for glossaries, and was told that it had done in the past, and that anyone with good terminology could at least try to sell it. Mr van der Horst went on to say that EURODICAUTOM was to some extent based on existing dictionaries (e.g. Elsevier's Dictionary of brewing, the Dictionnaire du vin, and Urban & Schwarzenberg's Reallexikon der Medizin), and that some dictionaries contained in EURODICAUTOM did not exist anywhere else. When asked whether the compilers of dictionaries incorporated in EURODICAUTOM were paid royalties, Mr van der Horst said that the only payment deemed necessary was for the right to put the dictionary into the system in the first place.

At this point Barbara Snell suggested that a record should be kept of terms which users searched for on EURODICAUTOM but could not find, as a way of expanding the database and bringing it more into line with the customers' actual needs.

Helga Liebgott of Ruhrgas, Essen, described her specialist glossaries of the gas, oil and other industries, which could be made available to those who needed them. Ruhrgas had bought software from EURODICAUTOM.

Sian Jones (Department of Trade and Industry - DTI) gave details of a small-arms glossary prepared at DTI for a conference, and which the DTI hoped to be able to sell. Terms were culled from jobs done, stored on a word processor and then printed out as a three-language, one-to-one glossary (French/German/English). They had used the translation from French into German made by the Bundessprachenamt. The glossary was to some extent based on feedback from experts in the small-arms industry. There were plans for further glossaries on metrology, packaging,

telecommunications and radio regulation.

Another comment was that with small units compiling glossaries in isolation, it was difficult to know just what was in existence. Mr van der Horst said that was the great advantage of having a centralised system. The matter of common subject fields and formats, raised by Barbara Snell, was no problem, since more or less anything could be converted for use in EURODICAUTOM.

On the subject of standardisation, Lisa Price of UMIST said that they could provide a common format, and would welcome any comments on it. She also said that they could be conducting a survey early in 1985 to find out which output modes people preferred.

Dr John Henderson (Bradford University) said it was often hard to find the time to do terminology work. He also spoke of the problem of people compiling glossaries in isolation, quoting as an example an ex-student of his who had produced a glossary on stand-by generator sets for nuclear power plants, which was available at Bradford University Library and on inter-library loan - provided people knew it was there in the first place. Dr Henderson also said that Bradford was contemplating setting up a new postgraduate course called 'Translation Informatics', which would aim to teach translators how to make the best use of word processors and computers.

John Scott said that in tackling all subjects EURODICAUTOM had set itself an impossible task. Mr van der Horst replied that as regards the quality of the system's output, the translator remained the ultimate arbiter of what best suited his or her needs.

Patrick Sutton (Department of Health and Social Security) came to the defence of the, in his opinion, much-maligned 'shoebox' of record cards, because on the system he was using to compile his social security glossaries (French-English, German-English, ultimately for publication), using the glossary stored in the memory was a cumbersome process that involved leaving the work-file currently in use, and then re-accessing it once a search had been completed. It was far easier and quicker to go straight to the original card index. Dr Henderson suggested that a split-screen arrangement was probably the answer.

Barbara Snell, discussing the appearance of the 75 possible translations of a single word that might be brought up on the screen by EURODICAUTOM, thought that this was no worse than looking up the term in a printed dictionary. Kees van der Horst explained that the EURODICAUTOM computer had an excellent search procedure, programmed to provide a display order of matches in such a way that the next display always contains less, or at most the same amount of, but never more information (as far as this can

be assessed by a computer) than the previous one. The huge advantage of a computer termbank is that it can find an answer in a library of dictionaries within seconds, even if the answer comes from a source you would never think of. EURODICAUTOM could thus find an electrical term buried in a medical glossary.

Patrick Chaffey (University of Oslo) spoke about his experience of the ADNOM system for establishing officially accepted translations for names of Norwegian institutions and Norwegian administrative terms such as job titles and social and legal terminology. The work was carried out in co-operation with the translation division of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the English Department of the University of Oslo, the University of Surrey and the Norwegian termbank in Bergen. The problem was to standardise such terms in English describing Norwegian conditions, using words that carried no British cultural connotations. Information on this work was available from Oslo University.