Session 4:

Summary of the discussion

There was time for only one question to Professor Knowles. Geoffrey Kingscott, commenting that like everyone else he was still reeling with the complexity of the information that had been put before the conference, said he could only seize on one of the latter points, that of the disambiguation model. He suggested this went back to Margaret Masterman's call for investigating what the human translator actually did, and that the disambiguation model quoted was too textually bound. When sorting out disambiguation and making their sense selection, technical translators were not generally rejecting a lot of different text possibilities, but were often, for example, visualising a technical process; they were not thinking in text terms at all. Had any psychological research been done on the translator model, he asked: he had the impression that we had hardly started on this, and perhaps, as Margaret Masterman always said, we were starting from the wrong end.

   Professor Knowles said he was very much in sympathy with what had been said; a lot more research was needed into the process of human translation. Translators could be viewed as suitable guinea pigs for expert systems research. He speculated that if – and stressed that 'if' – such research could be conducted speedily, then it might bring forward some remarkable hypotheses as to what options actually exist with equal speed. As someone who had done a lot of technical translation himself over the years, he added, he knew that it was always an advantage to be able to bypass any cognitive process. Many technical terms were actually icons, and could be manipulated as such. This again showed the lack of appreciation of what was involved in human translation, and took us back

to Margaret Masterman's original point, that she wanted emulation not simulation; others might accept less, and would be satisfied with good simulation rather than correct emulation.

Mike Scott asked Dr Luyken about work on speech synthesis in the television field. Dr Luyken replied that it was possible such work was going on, but none to his knowledge. He was aware of some research on compressing or somehow lengthening film sequences in order that they match the time required for the dubbed version.

Tony Hartley commented from the chair that he had noticed that Dr Luyken used the phrase 'language conversion' rather than 'translation', and wondered whether he considered the terms synonymous, or whether this was a conscious act; did Dr Luyken, he asked, see translation and language conversion as different things or was he putting stress on the fact that translation is a changing activity?

Dr Luyken replied that at the beginning, the Media Institute had used the term 'language conversion' as they felt this best matched the activity they were trying to describe. The preferred term was now 'language transfer' – he apologised for the inconsistency in terminology which perhaps indicated how the field was changing.

Pamela Mayorcas thanked Professor Wilks for responding so ably to the wishes of the conference planning committee in making an eloquent and public tribute to Margaret Masterman.

Picking up on the previous question, she asked Professor Wilks to comment on Margaret Masterman's urgent injunction that translators should tell researchers 'how they did it', if machine translation systems were to make any kind of contribution to the translation task. She asked this question in particular, she said, in view of what had seemed to her a rather shocking statement made by Maggie King at one of the early TC conferences, with regard to the Eurotra Project, to the effect that for Eurotra to work, its dictionary would need to contain not only words, not only phrases, but whole sentences and even paragraphs; this seemed to be ducking the question of machine translation completely, making MT merely a sophisticated word processing exercise. Did this mean Margaret Masterman's injunction continued to be disregarded in MT research?

Professor Wilks said Margaret had said different things at various times; we must not expect her to be consistent, since prophets were not consistent. What Margaret had said to translators, he went on, was sincere but was not, on the face of it, consistent with others of her views. He had shown, he said, just a flash of the substantial, theoretical Margaret, using extraordinary theoretical structures to do mechanical translation, which was 'completely out of whack' with the Margaret just referred to.

It was true that she had been anxious to understand how translators function. Margaret Masterman had had, of course, as many in the

audience would know, an enormous sensitivity to language. So it was difficult to actually bring the two things together. If one stepped back from the theoretical obsessions of people in natural language processing, or at least those areas which he, Professor Wilks, knew, and looked back at what Margaret was interested in – although he had pointed out the relevance of a few theoretical hooks and name-dropping things to hang on, such as situation semantics and dictionary work – there were two major topics in which Margaret was not at all interested and about which she never said anything, except the kind of quote just given. She was not interested in pragmatics, in the sense of speaker-related matters, and how speakers get across their goals to each other, and she had no knowledge of, and was not interested in, text theory. Professor Wilks added that he actually shared her lack of interest! But these two things were currently hot topics in the field. To defend her, however, it could be said, that if you expressed a need for a model of translation, then that is as good as saying that you must have a model of pragmatic communication. But nothing she ever did in the theoretical field explored that.

In reply to a supplementary question from Pamela Mayorcas, on why MT researchers did not just give up, and concentrate on useful tools to assist the translator, Professor Wilks said he was sure that if he could only touch the right brain cell he could no doubt produce a reference to some work in AI or closely-related areas of psychology where people had done considerable work on the psychology of translation and how real translators do it. However, although the field had no doubt been studied, to his knowledge, it had not flowed over into MT. However, bad as much current MT was, not incorporating much of these insights from semantics and nothing of pragmatics and text theory or how things work, one had to accept, regrettable as it might be, that systems were selling and that MT was doing a reasonable job for a class of users who were prepared to accept it as it is.

In answer to a question from Brigitte Linshoft-Stiller on the job profile of those who worked in the media, Dr Luyken said that he had tried to summarise the qualities required, which combined those of the translator and the journalist. In the case of sub-titling, the requirement was to reduce text into short sub-titles, out of another language: in the case of lip-synch dubbing, the ability to transfer dialogue from a source language into a target language, with an emphasis on plot-orientated, contextual as opposed to literal, translation. The requirement in the news field was for people who could work in a multilingual environment and who could improve on simultaneous translation from one or several languages into a target language.

It is an expanding field, he said, where considerable translation expertise and journalistic expertise are required and somehow have to be brought together. Experiments in satellite television had shown that the

traditional translator's training and education was not sufficient for work in the broadcasting field, but at the same time the traditional broadcasting education for journalists was not sufficient to enable them to work in a multilingual European or world-wide environment.

Closing the conference, Tony Hartley commented on just how well-pitched the presentations had been, and on the professionalism of the presenters. What had also been revealed was the variety of backgrounds of those concerned: business, financial, information, linguistic, translation, user and system design, who now appreciated the need to come together to fill the gaps in their knowledge and understanding and to share their expertise.

RAPPORTEUR

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