

The integration of machine aids into the translation process: an introduction

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Nineteen eighty-six is the twentieth anniversary of the Alpac report which supported research into automated translation aids, but delayed research into fully automated machine translation (MT).

Nineteen eighty-six is also the tenth anniversary of the EC Commission's first direct experiments with machine translation which provided a focus and support for computational approaches to the design of translation aids in Europe. It was a beginning to some, a revival or a revitalisation of slowly moving work to others, according to one's age, memory or point of view. The chief engineer of this activity which is most strongly, but not exclusively, represented by the EUROTRA project, which despite its detractors is doing well, was Loll Rolling who is chairing the last session of this conference.

Nineteen eight-six is finally the year of a handsomely produced edition of the first serious history of machine translation. We must again be grateful to John Hutchins who in some 300 pages surveys about 60 initiatives over the last 30 years in the design of MT systems.

This session's papers show how profoundly translation has been affected in all its aspects — practical as well as theoretical — by these momentous events and their consequences. The very existence of translation machines and machine aids to translation has forced us to undertake a systematic differentiation of text types to be translated, of translation techniques — be they human or computational — and of the end products of these new and diverse systems.

By deciding what is and what is not a suitable text for one or the other machine aid, we are faced with the necessity of undertaking a translation-oriented text-type analysis which will oblige us to rethink many theoretical positions in pragmatics and linguistics.

By accepting that there are alternative techniques of machine assistance, we are also forced to re-assess the human processes involved in translation — how else can we achieve an optimal interaction between translator and machine?

By realising that the end user of translations accepts a diversified end-product, which may be purely machine-produced or variously assisted, we can derive pragmatic criteria for evaluating translations in terms of the requested or intended effect, which in turn will permit us to define a set of specifications for a variety of end products.

From a solid background of translation practice, the first two speakers provide us with an assessment of the new translation reality in their respective fields of application.

After the break we hear how two universities engaged in the training of translators view automation and how their awareness of automation is reflected in new patterns of training and new co-ordinating tasks.

The scope for new research is wide: Jean Datta and David Smith reflect on the working reality; Karl-Heinz Freigang speaks of the design of computational tools; Patrick Chaffey emphasises the importance of the integration of tool and task in the provision of the common ground of reference in terminology. This is the unity of what might at the surface appear to be a rather heterogeneous session.

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