

SESSION 7: CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

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Without a growing market, the available term bank facilities will remain limited, but advances in computer technology and the demand for fast access to terminology together will provide the basis for growth of the market for stored data of this kind.

The market has already been in existence for some years, but its growth is subject to the commercial principles of cost efficiency, to producers for investment in the production of hardware and software, and to consumers for expenditure on these products. At a time of deep recession and high interest rates, the principle is particularly applicable.

Put simply, there must be an adequate market for the producer, and the consumer or user of the product must be convinced of the worth to himself of what he is buying, measured against his own experience of existing manual systems. To a degree, these factors are mutually dependent, this dependence is reflected conventionally and on certain important assumptions in falling unit costs and therefore prices, as demand, the market and production expand.

The functional efficiency of computer hardware has long been an established fact and it is improving all the time, while software is still in a state of development in many respects, but the potential is enormous.

I would like to introduce a personal note at this point... as a practising translator, I have spent many hours delving into dictionaries and reference books. In this activity, as distinct from exploiting other reference sources, I have had to use such wit and guile as I possess in order to find the correct equivalent terms in the target language. I say "wit and guile" because, until fairly recently, foreign-language dictionaries in book form have been far from efficient tools for the translator. Although their imperfections have made linguistic problem-solving by research and exploration a challenging and pleasurable intellectual activity for an inquiring mind which finds interest in most things, the manual method would seem to be inefficient in time and cost. Nevertheless, I am tempted to suggest - heretically, I fancy - that this is not yet wholly proven for all situations and all translators.

At this late stage of the conference I think it has emerged clearly, from explicit statements or less explicit references to tight budgets, that during an economic recession, cost efficiency is a crucial factor, both on the supply side and for demand, in the development of the market, particularly for terminological data banks.

What we have heard in this session on the production of the Glossary of European Accounting Charts certainly points to the continuing value, to the translator, of carefully-compiled sources in printed-book form - although the necessity to update terminology, emphasised by the speaker, leaves one in no doubt about the role of the computer here, too.

The information provided on the LEXIS system underscores the speed and economy of computerisation within specialised fields.

Speaking as a translator, it would grieve me to think that we translators are standing in the way of progress, if only as a relatively small (but important) group of potential users, in not making full use of the new aids. A point to remember, however, is that translators generally are working on a low budget, and will tend not to incur heavy expenditure on new equipment when the supply of work is reduced in the slack market and computerisation could reduce the supply further - at least in the short run.

As a first step, it appears that the initiative must come from potential users to make their individual and collective needs known to the producers of hardware and software - and at this Conference several speakers on the supply side have already called for response from potential users.

The professional bodies of translators are planning meetings to this end and more will certainly be heard from them in this regard, following the Conference.