

Aslib "Translating and the Computer 8"

by Muriel Vasconcellos

This year's Aslib eighth meeting on Translating and the Computer lived up splendidly to its theme, "A Profession on the Move". Everywhere -- in the papers presented, the exhibits, the buzz of conversation at coffee breaks among the 300-odd participants -- one sensed the momentum of a profession that has joined the technological mainstream.

One of the subjects of great interest was the computerization of terminology, with two papers on recent advances in this field. Patrick Chaffy, from the University of Oslo, told about his use of an Olivetti M24 to compile a glossary of Norwegian terms in the field of administration. Peter Arthern announced and described a new database developed at the Council of the European Communities in Brussels.

Preparation of the translator interface was examined from various perspectives. A report on the current use of technology in translation practice set the stage for this portion of the program. David Smith of Digital Equipment Corporation presented highlights from a profession-wide survey conducted in Europe by DEC in conjunction with Language Monthly magazine. Complimentary copies of the published report were made available to the participants and may be obtained from DEC (David Smith & Dave Tyldesley, "Translation Practices Report", available from International Engineering, Digital Equipment Corporation, P.O. Box 121, Reading RG2 0TU, England). Jean Datta, of UNIDO in Vienna, suggested a five-year schedule for introducing automation in a large language service. She views the language service as a subsystem which needs to relate more directly with other systems of the organization. My own paper, on mechanical, linguistic and pragmatic strategies for post-editing MT output, encouraged the use of functional criteria in approaching the task. In a second paper, Peter Arthern proposed a scheme for assessing the quality of revision. In fact, revision and its relationship to postediting, was a topic of energetic discussion throughout the conference.

Developments in the field of machine translation over the past year -- technical advances, market expansion, and political forces at work -- were summarized by Loll Rolling of the EEC. Christian Boitet reported on the current status of MT systems developed under the GETA project at the University of Grenoble (a total of seven language pairs), while Karl-Heinz Freigang told about work being done in the University of Saarbrücken's "SUSY" project, where a number language pairs have also been developed. Most interesting was a report by Peter Whitelock of ICL/Alvey on the many commercial systems now available for computer-aided translation between English and Japanese. Whitelock pointed out that the volume of translation in Japan is larger than in the rest of the world combined.

The program allowed ample time for lively discussion following presentation of the papers. During the many breaks, tea was served in the exhibit area so that it was possible to attend demonstrations or talk with vendors of language software. The exhibits

included not only terminology databases and MT systems but also packages for electronic desktop publishing in a multiplicity of languages.

Judging from this conference, one could say that the translation profession is not only on the move, it is now forging ahead in the fast lane.