Introducing Jeff Allen

Jeff Allen, one of the world's key figures at the interface between language and documentation, will now be writing an opinion column in each issue of *International Journal for Language and Documentation*.

Jeff Allen began his career as a professor and translator of French and English. After obtaining master's and doctoral degrees in linguistics obtained at the University of Lyons 2, he went on to hold teaching positions in linguistics, French and English at the Société Internationale de Linguistique, the University of Lyons 2, the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce in Lyons, Indiana University, and Portland State University.

He ventured into the world of language engineering and technologies by taking a position in early 1995 as trainer of Controlled Language technical writing and translation systems at Caterpillar Inc.

This was followed by a position as research linguist and translation laboratory supervisor at the Center for Machine Translation of Carnegie Mellon University in 1997 and 1998. There he worked on rapid development and rapid deployment speech-to-speech translation systems for English, French, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Croatian, Korean and Arabic.

Since the end of 1998, he has been involved in the identification, collection, validation and distribution of speech and text databases as Technical Director at the European Language Resources Association and its distribution agency, in Paris. He is also currently executive committee chairperson for the Controlled Language Applications Workshop (CLAW) 2000, and is an active member of the MT certification special interest group of the International Association for Machine Translation.

He has written extensively (50 articles, papers, and theses as well as television and radio shows) on the topics of translation, controlled language, technical writing, machine translation, translation memory, MT post-editing, speech recognition and synthesis, language pedagogy, bilingualism, and intercultural communication.

Controlled Language
- *Changing faces*

by Jeff Allen

In starting this first of a series of column articles on issues pertaining to language and documentation, I must confess that the accompanying picture is slightly obsolete. How might that be? Well, I decided a few weeks ago to start growing a beard as one of those "winter" things. Even though the photo may represent Jeff Allen, the appearance has changed enough to make those people who do not know me well look twice when we meet a second time.

In reflecting on the current column article, it dawned on me that sometimes language technologies are sometimes analogous to me choosing to have a beard or not: the name stays the same, but the appearance can change over time. Let us look at an example of how changes have occurred with respect to CLs.

One of my current efforts is to revisit the topic of "Controlled Language" and redefine this term with respect to evolutionary developments that have come about over the past ten years. An attendee of the *Multilingual Documentation for the Automotive Industry* TOPTEC Symposium (http://www.praetorius.com/new/toptec1.html) stated that CL is an obsolete way of thinking and is a thing of the past. I simply had to strongly disagree with the fellow because what CL was ten years ago is not necessarily the same image that it has painted for itself since then. Some of the earlier work on CL, with an initial implementation in industrial contexts in the 1970s and 1980s, was focused on restricted vocabularies and a limited number of writing principles.

This is not to say that CL has completely changed since that time, but it has, in a way, grown a beard, or more likely coloured its hair. CL no longer simply aims at improving the quality and comprehension of documentation in a single language for it to be easier to read for native and non-native speakers in a context of globalisation; this seems to be only one of its many facial traits, or hair styles.

In the past, many companies treated translation as what I call an "after-thought" process. The objective was to get the documentation out to press and to the client as soon as possible. Later, if and when a

translation was necessary, usually when enough people were injured, or killed, from accidents resulting from unclear and ambiguous language, then it was important to reconsider the information transfer and communication processes. Several single-language CL initiatives (e.g., Caterpillar Fundamental English, Xerox's Multinational Customized English, and AECMA Simplified English) were created during the period mentioned above. The first one passed away long ago, the second still has remnant traces popping up here and there, but the third is well and alive. Yet, even with the successful implementation of AECMA SE across the aerospace industry, a sister initiative called GIFAS Rationalised French also started up in the mid-1980s. This indicates that a single language might not be sufficient for the entire world.

In addition, with the creation of the European Union in the early 1990s, and the fact that Canada is an officially bilingual country, many corporations in the USA were presented with a very difficult problem in around 1990: they would no longer be able to ship their products to foreign countries without having the user, operation and service documentation in the language of the receiving country. This began impeding exports for companies with significant portions of their sales overseas, many up to 50%. In one case, at least one shipload of vehicles was blocked at an export dock for several months. This loss of time and money thus waking up many companies. In order to compete in the global market, it has been necessary for such companies to quickly and efficiently set up "multilingual" documentation processes.

In this way, the previous "after-thought" translation process received a face-lift and was significantly modified into what I call the "destined for translation" mode. In this new environment, it can no longer be just a technical writing department that produces a single language that in some cases serves as a source language for translation jobs that are farmed out to translation agencies. In the current context, even if the translation process is entirely conducted by external vendors (e.g. General Motors), or if a significant part of the translation process is done in-house (e.g. Caterpillar), many of the companies are restructuring in order to form Publications departments that take care of both the authoring and translation processes. The new buzz words are "multilingual documentation management", "information management", and "knowledge management".

Development work, not just research ideas, is being conducted and implemented on information and language ontologies as a complement to the integration of controlled language and various translation technologies within these multilingual documentation environments. I will not repeat here the details of many successful CL implementations that are discussed in an article appearing in the upcoming issue of *Language International*.

All of these economically important factors have led to a new generation of CLs in which one starts with a reduced, yet expandable, technical terminology database. Also, the former small number of basic writing rules are often extended to cover specific phrase and sentence level structures for an optimal analysis with various types of translation software and systems. The *21st conference of Translating and the Computer* held in London on November 10-11, 1999 (http://www.aslib.co.uk/conferences/tc21.html) was the occasion to hear a number of excellent presentations on these developments.

Despite the evolution of CL over the past decade due to new issues of CL development, integration, and implementation within different types of industrial and corporate contexts, we have seen that the face has somewhat changed whereas the name has not. This is one of the issues that I continue to study and hope to have more future opportunities to discuss in more detail.

On a final note, we should probably keep my photo as-is since the beard will probably not stick around for the entire year. I just hope the appearance of CL does end up changing as often as I decide to grow or shave off a beard.

For the upcoming column article, I tentatively plan to discuss how spelling reform and language standardisation are impacting the development of language engineering systems for document production needs. ■