Keynote speech

Language Technology in Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Response

Scott HOURIN (U.S. Marine Corps Forces, USA)

Abstract
Every year, the U.S. military expends significant amounts of money and manpower providing humanitarian aid and disaster response (HA/DR) assistance to the developing world. While interpreters are usually available for programs such as the Medical Civic Action Program (MEDCAP), there rarely are enough to provide the level of doctor-patient interaction those of us in the developed world have come to expect. This is just one example where machine translation, while not necessarily at a maturity level to supplant an interpreter, could facilitate more efficient and effective employment of a corps of interpreters. The greatest hurdle to development of less common language technologies, however, is economic. There is little to no commercial benefit to developing translation systems for the majority of the languages spoken in the developing world. Add to that the complexity and diversity of these languages and the hurdle becomes monumental. While the military has great interest (and funding) in developing some of these capabilities, it can benefit greatly from the full focus of the linguistic and technical communities to figure out how to best tackle the problem of linguistic diversity.