

## STOP PRESS: MUNICH MT SUMMIT

This year's Machine Translation Summit, held in Munich (16-18 August), was a rare and fine event. It also presented Electric Word with a golden opportunity to catch up on the latest in this small and singular world. Herewith the straight inside poop, from our correspondents, contacts and don't-quote-me-but informants.

Of the commercial products on demonstration in Munich, Siemens' METAL was the best received.

METAL German-to-English is currently installed at 15 commercial sites. Other language pairs are in the pipeline: English-to-German and Dutch-to-French are scheduled for 1990, to be followed by French-to-Dutch and German-to-Spanish.

METAL's advantages – aside from its undoubtedly sophisticated parsing – lie on the terminology side. It has access to Siemens' mammoth inhouse set of technical termbanks, TEAM, all of which adhere to the MATER information exchange standard proposed by Infoterm, the Vienna-based terminology standardization body (See this issue's Views and Abuse). Any database that adheres to MATER can of course be loaded into METAL.

MT superguru Makoto Nagao presented the Japanese MT report just published by Tokyo's MITI (the "JAL-PAC" report; see "Japan Lays ALPAC to Rest," EW#14), a copy of which was given to each delegate. Interesting tidbits: Japan's current translation volume amounts to between 18 and 23 billion pages per year (where one page equals 400 Japanese characters or 125 English words), and the market is worth a tidy 800 billion yen (US\$5.63 billion) per year.

The European Commission's Loll Rolling, a member of the CEC team charged with implementing MT in the EC, came across as a true believer *sans pareil*: "Only now have we really started using Systran: a total of 2,000 pages were translated with it in all of '87; but 20,000 in the first half of '89."

The Pan-American Health Organization's Muriel Vascencellos announced that her organization was integrating its ENGSPAN (English-to-Spanish) system with databases in order to make public health data available in Latin America as a public service

and truly to the wall. Understandably, since he's head of Eurotra, the EC's own MT project. With 81 language pairs, Eurotra is highly ambitious, but its demonstrable results have been consistently disappointing ("Big on R and low

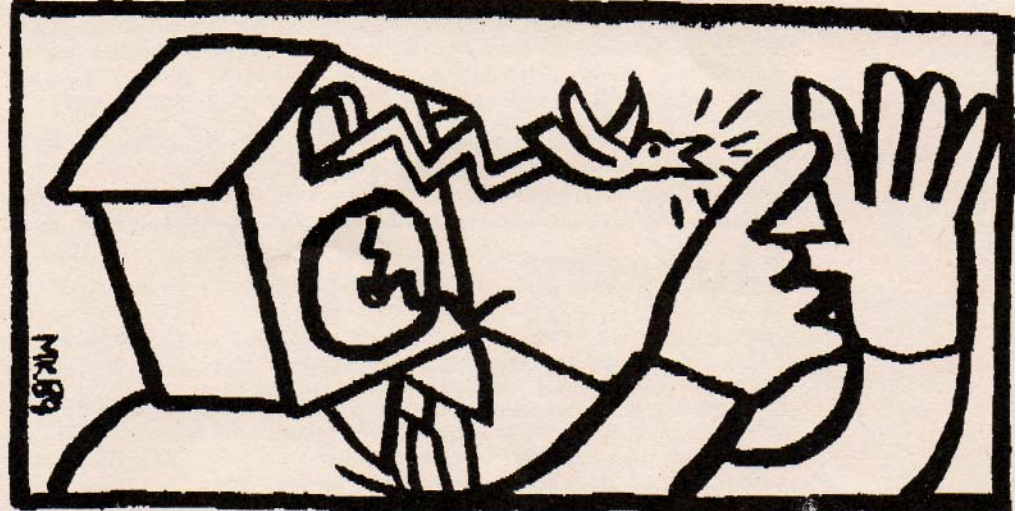


Illustration by Max Kisman

on D" is a commonly hurled epithet).

Perschke was faced with sharp criticism from the floor, in particular from an enraged representative of Siemens' METAL's Dutch section, who subjected Perschke to a tongue-lashing unusual for such a sedate gathering. Eurotra had a monopoly on government funding, she jibed, with pathetic results to show for it. And, what was more, she went on, Eurotra's participants in the 12 member-states held so many international get-togethers that it was known in the business as "Eurotravel."

Israeli MT system Tovna attracted much attention at the Summit, not least thanks to its presentation, which attempted to explain in detail the stages that text undergoes in the Tovna MT process. The whisper is that Tovna is about to take over Logos' lucrative translation contract with Lexi-tech (Mon-

ton, New Brunswick, Canada). Meanwhile, Logos is rumored to have landed a deal with Boeing ("From now on it's Aeroflot for me," quipped one observer).

Grenoble University's Christian Boitet introduced his Personal Machine Translation project: MT based on a PC network, with dialog-box-based pre-editing for the lay user. This, Boitet believes, is the way forward.

In the final wrap-up session, MT's resident iconoclast Martin Kay (Xerox-PARC) made a plea for less emphasis on machine translation at present and more

on the use of translation tools such as multilingual wordprocessing, bilingual databases ("bitext") and computer-based terminology management – in other words, what some folks call the Translator's Workstation.

A general point often made at the Summit was one about dictionary building and standardized entry formatting – or the lack of it. Most systems' dictionaries are incompatible – not just in their syntactic and semantic information formats, but even in their lexical ones.

The necessity of adhering to a standard format such as MATER was advocated by several delegates.

The next MT Summit will be held in 1991 at Carnegie-Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA), where it is intended that an international association for machine translation be formed.

### EC ONLINE

With 1992 just around the corner and a lot of business people beginning to fear the penalties of ignorance, the arrival of Infotrade, an online European Community database was only a question of time.

The Brussels- (where else?)-based maker offers updated information regarding such diverse subjects as company law, competition, intellectual property, trade, taxation, and banking. Interested parties should call