

Translating and the computer 5

"TOOLS for the Trade" at the London Press Centre next month will be the fifth in the highly successful series of November conferences organised by Aslib and the Translators' Guild.

The events cover all applications of machines to translation. A key factor in their success seems to be their emphasis on practical experience. Theory – whether of researcher or salesman – is avoided as far as possible, being adequately represented elsewhere.

Prominence in the "literature" is not, in fact, necessarily a major criterion in the selection of speakers. Indeed, another key principle is to introduce some of the many translation aids which, though actually used, are neglected in the literature.

In this area, as in some others, many of the most useful systems are absent from the literature, whereas some of those best known in writing do not produce useful output. (Survival demands that commercial people conceal discoveries, but that academic researchers, for the sake of science, funds and their own promotion, reveal them).

Aslib proceedings are therefore published with discussion reports where possible and also lists of participants.

The series arose out of the 1977 congress of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs in Montreal. The editor, as the technical translator on the Translators' Guild delegation, took her quinquennial look at computers there and, to her surprise, found them relevant at last.

Since the Guild could not then arrange a seminar, Barbara Snell took the idea to Aslib. The North-Holland Publishing Company gave a grant, the information and computer people took an interest and what had been conceived for perhaps 30 British translators snowballed into something multi-disciplinary and international.

That first *Translating and the Computer* in 1978 set the pattern of attendance for the series, which typically attracts some 200 people from 18 or 20 countries. About half tend to be translators, the rest from information

science and computers, management, the universities and publishing.

While that general introduction covered both machine translation proper (or automatic translation) and machine aids for human translation, the next three conferences concentrated on particular applications: "Machine Aids for Translators" (1980), "Practical Experience of Machine Translation" (1981) and finally terminology ("Term Banks for Tomorrow's World", 1982).

The proceedings have been published alternately by North-Holland and Aslib.

On November 10-11 the formula changes to two separate days of updates: "More Machine Aids for Translators" on the Thursday, "More Practical Experience of Machine Translation" on the Friday, with the exhibition continuing throughout and the usual optional dinner on the first evening.

As in 1981, a grant from the Commission of the European Communities has enabled Aslib to invite essential foreign speakers while keeping the conference fee within the reach of the "working translator".

The first morning ("The Aids", chaired by Barbara Snell) offers an overview, a manufacturers' forum (IBM, Wang, ICL) and closer looks at electronic communication.

After lunch come "The Users", four translators describing their experience. Peter Barber of Able Translations, speaking on electronic handling of work in a translation company, is followed by three freelancers: Robert Clark on word-processing, Geoff Samuelsson-Brown on

glossaries on a WP and – the sceptic in the ointment! – John Hayes on how to produce a large high-quality output the old-fashioned way.

Formal proceedings for the afternoon, chaired by Geoff Kingscott of *Language Monthly*, end with a panel discussion. The exhibition and demonstrations then continue until the conference dinner at 7pm.

The machine translation day starts with "More Practical Translation Systems", chaired by Professor Juan Sager and offering three MT systems new to these conferences and represented little, if at all, in the MT literature.

A brief introduction by Ian Pigott will mention recent developments in practical MT and also offer background and references for newcomers to the series.

This is followed by brief presentations of the ALPS interactive system from Provo, then the Georgetown-based SPANAM system developed by the Pan American Health Organisation for Spanish-English, and finally the LOGOS German-English system which is sold as an option on a wordprocessor.

After coffee, a major paper from – at last – an end user of translations: Peter Walker looks at MT in the context of the European Commission. Short talks follow on alternative sources of MT for those who do not want their own system – the Weidner Service Centre in Chicago, and bureau services which MT customers run in order to share the cost.

Finally, "The Editors' Experience", the session of short papers and panel discussion by translator/editors that was so revealing in 1981. Then, the subject was full postediting to normal translation standards. This time the actual papers are on other types of editing: pre-editing for the TITUS system of the Institut Textile de France, interactive editing with ALPS and the rapid (cursory) post-editing of Systran for information purposes only.

The last panel discussion, on making the system fit the need, will be for all the speakers, plus Gail Hankins on Weidner and LOGOS user Klaus Tschira.

This profile would be incomplete without mention of another change this year – the retirement last month of Elizabeth Lowry-Corry, the professional organiser for all five conferences. Her experience and skill will be much missed by the programme committee.

More details of this November's conference will be found on Page 22. **VL**