

# Translators move into the electronic age

IN 1983, wherever two or more translators gather together, the talk almost invariably turns sooner or later to electronic aids.

In the *Translator's Handbook*, reviewed on page 24, Lanna Castellano lists clients' preferences for presentation in 1972 and 1982.

In 1972, she recalls, the order of preference ran: 1, golfball typewriters; 2, manual typewriters; 3, manuscript.

In 1982 the preference is: 1, word processors; 2, golfball typewriters; 3, manual typewriters – manuscript no longer being acceptable.

During the 1970s, starting with a trickle and then turning into a flood,

translators forsook their old battered portable typewriters which had often rendered useful service since their college days and spent their hard earned cash on electric machines, usually of the golf-ball type.

The same thing is happening with word processors. For four or five years there has been talk of them, and they began to be acquired by the larger translation companies and a handful of the more adventurous freelances. But the mass of translators hung back, partly because of the cost, and partly because they were bewildered by the rapid changes that were taking place in the technology.

But this year, 1983, freelances are realising that they are going to have to make some movement, if they are not going to be overtaken by events, and their colleagues who are also to some extent their competitors.

Ogden Nash put it succinctly some years ago:

*"Shake oh shake the ketchup bottle,  
None will come, and then a lot'll".*

Probably not more than two dozen or so full-time freelances in the UK have equipped themselves so far with WP facilities, but it is known that many more are contemplating taking the plunge.

And, of course, as soon as their customers begin to give preference to WP output, many more will feel compelled to follow suit.

The dilemma is which equipment to purchase. CPT is one word processor manufacturer which chalked up early successes in selling equipment to some of the larger UK translation companies, and at least one freelance translator, of French mother tongue, has acquired a CPT in order to latch into their systems.

But there are leading translation companies who have bought other makes, and of course industrial firms buying translations on the freelance market have a wide variety of equipment.

As yet there seems to be no major use of modem communication between word processors and computers which would otherwise be incompatible.

While the larger translation companies do have modems, the use made of them seems to be limited, and input from translators is fed into their WP systems by OCR scanners rather than by any direct communication.

While large industrial firms placing translation work with freelances may have modems, they are usually in a different department from the one which needs the work, and the equipment is inaccessible to the latter.

The translators who are thinking of upgrading their equipment are, in general, holding off their decision for a number of different reasons.

One is that the summer of 1983 has been a lean period for many of them and they are waiting to see whether work is going to pick up.

Another, very common reason is that they are waiting to see what their colleagues do.

A third reason is that many are still digesting the wealth of information that has come before translators this year, such as that given at the Translators' Guild forum in July, or Lanna Castellano's article, already mentioned, in the *Translator's Handbook*.

The latest in the series of Aslib conferences, which over the past four years have done much to educate the language professions in the possibilities of the electronic age, will be held in November, and should provide new insights into the question particularly during the session devoted to users' experiences.

It is hoped that the Technological Aids Committee of the Translators' Guild can become a reference point for information and experience, and a body which can put translators' special requirements to the manufacturers.

Finally, *Language Monthly* will, in the new year, be publishing a special feature on word processors, microcomputers and typewriters, from the specific points of view of translators and university language departments.

