

Cranfield Conference Preview

"Processing from words to language" is the subtitle of an international conference from February 13 to 15 on the "Methodology and Techniques of Machine Translation".

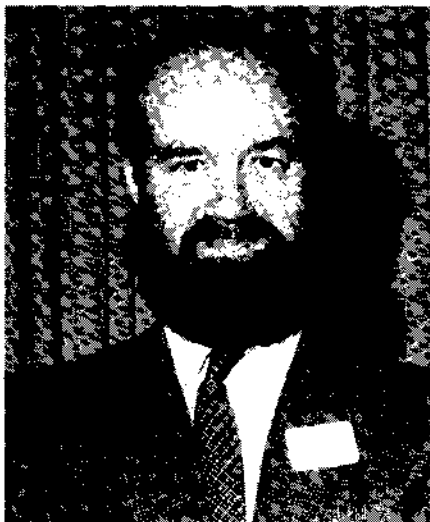
The setting is 50 miles north of London at Cranfield Institute of Technology, home of eight famous conferences on mechanised information transfer - and even of the term "information retrieval" in its modern sense.

The organisers for Cranfield are essentially the committee of the Natural Language Translation specialist group of the British Computer Society, with the help of Professor Frank Knowles of Aston University who heads the MT section of the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing.

In computers, translation is normally something done to computer languages, whereas what linguists call machine translation or automatic translation is termed natural language translation. Linguists who blink might note that "machine translation" itself may perplex in engineering circles.

Since a call for papers was sent out (to university departments of mathematics and linguistics), the event looks more like traditional MT gatherings than the "Translating and the Computer" conferences held by Aslib and the Translators' Guild, which are based on invited papers on practice rather than research. However, the committee have also invited representatives of practical MT (from the Far East and North America as well as Europe), and a number of suppliers will demonstrate their systems.

Dr. Peter Toma (La Jolla), the rarely heard inventor of Systran, will be the opening speaker. Prof. Benoît Thouin



(Ottawa), a popular and cogent speaker at Aslib's Practical Experience of Machine Translation in 1981, will cover management problems. Prof. Liu (Beijing) will talk on English-Chinese MT on a microcomputer, and Prof. Loh (Hong Kong) on a new dictionary structure. Prof. Nagao, head of Japanese MT research, and Prof. Nakamura speak on Kyoto University's GRADE software for grammar.

Marjorie León is expected from the Pan American Health Organisation (Washington D.C.), whose SPANAM system was introduced by Muriel Vasconcellos at Aslib's "Tools for the Trade" in November. Those who heard Ian Pigott's up-to-the minute survey there of developments in world MT will look forward to his paper on the difficulty of creating MT logic able to cope with natural language. Peter

Wheeler, his colleague at the European Commission in Luxembourg, will explain how their Systran systems have improved over the years.

Other foreign speakers include two from Provo, Utah (Mamdouh Ibrahim of Weidner and Alan Melby of Brigham Young University), Elliott Macklovitch of the Canadian government's translation service, and Peter Nwoye O. Mbaeyi (Tübingen) on the language of memory.

Margaret Masterman (Cambridge) has chosen "The burden of proof in machine translation". There are also papers by researchers working out the specifications for the Eurotra projects, such as Dieter Maas (Saarbrücken), Rod Johnson (UMIST) and Doug Arnold (Essex).

Speakers from UK higher education include W. J. Hutchins (East Anglia), Professors F. J. Smith (Queen's, Belfast), F. E. Knowles (Aston) and E. Edmonds (Leicester Polytechnic), B. Farrington (director of the language laboratory at Aberdeen) and R. G. Garside (Lancaster). Jiri Jelinek (Centre for Japanese Studies, Sheffield) and John Hawgood (Durham) will speak on automatic dictionaries.

More information is available from the main organiser, Douglas Clarke, at Cranfield (see page 2).