BSO's DLT ANSWERS THE QUESTION:
WHO'S DEAD?

Dutch software house BSO announced the completion of the first phase of its "real-world knowledge"-based DLT Machine Translation project on time and on budget. With funding guaranteed only through the end of 1988, BSO is seeking a partner. Project leader Toon Witkam reported that most of the 6 million guilders ($3.5 million) spent so far went into the Semantic Word Expert System for the Intermediate Language (SWESIL), an AI component designed to deal with translation problems semantics alone could not solve.

At the press party, Machine Translation headboy W.J.Hutchins, author of "Machine Translation Past, Present, Future," presented a simple example of the need for "world knowledge" that went Michael Jackson's "Who's bad?" one better. Hutchins stressed that a computer may be able to translate the sentence "Children drink lemonade" without world knowledge, and that the same goes for the sentence "Cars drink petrol," since in the first case it may have been informed that "drinking" is a type of "consuming," and in the second a form of "excessive consuming." But in the cautionary tale "The children drank petrol. They were taken to a hospital by their teachers. But it was too late. They were dead," unless the machine has access to world knowledge, it will never be able to tell if "they" are the children or the teachers. As Hutchins put it: "Who's dead?"

At the press demonstration, BSO showed that DLT is now capable of translating Controlled-English text into French and resolving enough semantic ambiguities to reduce the interactivity between computer and user to manageable levels.