

FUJITSU MT



ILLUSTRATION BY MAX KISMAN

"The image data is edited the personal computer and has been printed." This piece of fractured English is a translation of a short Japanese news story – and ample evidence of Atlas's less-than-perfect command of the English language.

Atlas is a machine translation system developed by Japan's biggest computer maker Fujitsu. And despite apparent mild bouts of aphasia,

it will be presented at Munich's MT summit in August this year – with an additional language pair: Japanese and German.

According to the company's Brigitte Obster, who demonstrated the system at Hannover's Cebit computer extravaganza in March, Atlas is still "not quite ready" and won't be before next year. Fujitsu has now been developing Atlas for some ten years.

Fujitsu showed the system on a Unix workstation with X-Windows while online to Nikkei Telecom's news service. News stories were downloaded and translated.

Unfortunately, the brave performance left much to be desired. The system crunched out a lot of funny English and was greeted with guffaws from onlookers, especially those working in the natural language processing field. Among them was Houghton Mifflin's Mary Ellen Hoke, who commented: "Atlas is one of the oldest and one of the worst machine translators ever. The system is rigid."

Of course, good translations probably not the point. The fact that Atlas was translating financial news is a good indication of its real purpose – providing enough insight into the source text to extract sufficient information to make decisions – even *those* decisions also include getting a good translation.

Atlas's eventual aim is to make long technical and scientific texts in Japanese script – Kanji, Katakana, and Hiragana – and translate them into English as well as vice versa. Layout settings will be kept intact in the translation.

Once on the market, Atlas software will cost around US\$15,000. "And," Obster added, "the software will probably be available for the PC soon."

Fujitsu Deutschland GmbH, Rosenheimer Str. 145, 8000 München 80, FRG. Tel: (+49) 89 41 30 10