

CAT

OUT OF THE BAG

"Computer-Aided Translation: An Industry Survey," Martin J. Ingall (Coolidge Hall, 5th Floor, 1737 Cambridge Street, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA, 60 pages, 1987). Price: US\$125

By Tony Whitecomb

This report was written under the direction of Professor John Kao of Harvard Business School, and – at least originally – prepared on behalf of MELC (the Middle East Language Corporation), producer of a new system being developed by Dr. Wilson Bishai and claimed to be sophisticated enough to cope with the grammar and style of newspapers.

The survey, which subsumes MT under CAT, is best in its coverage of US activities, especially in describing the rise of ALPS (the fall came after the report was written).

Views on CAT's commercial viability were gathered by interviewing American businesspeople. Their conclusion: no CAT system is cost effective yet, and no CAT company ever made a real profit.

Whereas US corporations seem to have little need for MT, substantial expectation from the intelligence community (CIA, NSA, FBIS) is expressed. The translation volumes of these agencies are secret, and Ingall modestly refrained from risking an educated guess.

Unfortunately, Ingall's report is weak on coverage of Japanese or European activities. Much of the material is cursory and – certainly for regular LT readers – obsolete. The claim that this is "the most comprehensive, indepth survey . . . including key information on Japanese CAT ventures" is patently absurd. Translation from or into Arabic does receive some attention, but little technical detail, such as dictionary size, is given.

If your boss can't afford a couple of weeks on the beach to work his way through Hutchins, then Ingall's neatly typed pages will give him a lucid and business-like intro to CAT for a rainy afternoon.

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