

Summary of the Open Discussion
on Sessions 3, 4 and 5

Chaired by Juan Sager

Mrs Lutterkort, head of translation at the EPO, commented that she was surprised at the relatively small number of translators at the conference. It was explained that in fact a fairly large number of translators from the Commission in Luxembourg had been present at most of the sessions but that, unfortunately, only very few indeed had attended from the Commission in Brussels and from the other EC Institutions.

In answer to a question from Mr Lomax (Mendez) regarding the use of any approach resembling MCE (Xerox's Multilingual Customized English) for German as a source language in the MT environment, Dr Habermann explained that Nixdorf Computers had indeed introduced fairly rigorous pre-editing of this type in connection with Logos German-English translation.

More than one speaker was interested in the extent to which specific subject fields had been covered in machine translation. Mrs Lawson cited the Engspan and Spanam projects of the Pan American Health Organization in Washington, D.C., as systems covering the field of medicine while Mr Pigott pointed out that the Commission's English-French system contained a certain amount of medical terminology owing to coverage of related fields such as food science and environmental protection. As for tropical agriculture, some terminology existed in all the Commission's systems but would require expansion.

An enthusiastic discussion then continued on the pros and cons of topical glossary coding in Systran, based largely on a number of views put forward in Mrs Guazzo's paper on dictionary coordination. Mr Bostad confirmed that topical glossaries had been widely and successfully used in the Russian-English system at the USAF. Mr Pigott, on the other hand, was in favour of reducing topical glossary coding to a minimum but supported its use for cases where constantly occurring terms such as réacteur required quite different translations depending on subject field (engine in aeronautics, reactor in the nuclear field). He warned against "client-specific" topical glossaries which were often a result of the subjective views of individual translators. The Commission's strategy was to develop the basic system to provide high quality standards for the largest possible number of users.

Mrs Gordon (NATO) wondered to what extent it would be possible, for example, to have the word area translated as zone rather than secteur in NATO texts. Mr Pigott outlined various ways in which this could be achieved: by semi-automatic post-editing using, for example, the global replace or glossary functions of a text processing system; by enhancing the dictionary with string expressions and semantico-syntactic contextual entries and, as a last resort, by topical glossary default coding. He explained however that in practice various different translations of area would usually be required in a given subject area, depending on context.

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Mr Sereda mentioned that General Motors had found it extremely useful to differentiate between automotive terminology and railroad terminology using topical glossaries. Truck assembly, for example, required quite different translations in these two fields.

Mrs Akasawa suggested that perhaps the best solution to providing access to field-specific or customer-specific terminology would be to develop large general purpose dictionaries backed by smaller customer-specific dictionaries.

Commenting on the slashed-entry approach used fairly extensively by the USAF for translations into English, Mr Lavorel (CEC Systran development) explained that post-editing of slashed equivalents would be much more difficult to manage for a highly inflected language like French as it would also be necessary to adapt qualifiers such as articles, adjectives and participles to the gender of the noun equivalent finally selected.

Mr Redalie (AITC) felt that one of the main problems in introducing machine translation was simply that most translators, particularly in the UN agencies, were quite unaware of what was now available. He hoped that the conference would help rectify this situation as he believed sufficient progress had now been made for much wider application of Systran as an aid in translation.

Mrs Braun (CEC Systran development) reminded those present that in fact translators were taking a very active part in the development of Systran at the Commission. The increasingly high standards of raw MT quality had resulted mainly from their involvement.