

MT Systems Galore in San Diego

Nearly all the major vendors of MT software were demonstrating their systems in the MT Showcase, which ran concurrently with the Evaluation Workshop in an adjacent hall at the San Diego Princess. Many of them remained for the ATA conference as well, when they were joined by a variety of other exhibitors peddling diverse translation wares.

Systran was there in force with a dial-up link to the faithful IBM 370 mainframe at the American development center in La Jolla, a few miles to the north. According to Marketing Director Alan Portola, fourteen Systran language pairs are currently operational, although not all of them are running in La Jolla. In addition, some thirteen additional pairs are currently under development, including a Japanese-English Unix-based system funded by the CIA.

Good news for Systran is IBM's plan to introduce 370 emulation cards for PS/2 (Microchannel) PCs. This will allow Systran to run its programs on desktop machines instead of its mainframe while it slowly begins to convert the software to run on other operating systems. To drum up trade in these recessionary times, Systran has also been marketing translation services. So as not to compete directly with translation companies, which it regards as potential customers, Systran has been subcontracting post-editing work to them.

Other exhibitors included Logos, which was demonstrating the new Unix versions of its software for Sun sparstations. A new influx of German venture capital means additional German language pairs are in the cards; the company is also consolidating its American operations in New Jersey. Linguistic Systems was at the Showcase as well, showing its pc-Translator line of MT packages. The Texas company says it gives its customers what they want: WordPerfect compatibility and dictionary import facilities.

PAHO

Particularly newsworthy was the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) demonstrating for the first time in public its new PC versions of SPANAM (Spanish-to-English) and ENGSPAN (English-to-Spanish), both recently converted from mainframe PL1 to C. Computational linguist Marjorie Léon, who has been developing the systems at PAHO since 1979, was fearlessly soliciting texts from Showcase visitors to run through her system. The two systems are fully WordPerfect compatible, or more precisely, they are supplied with utilities for converting WordPerfect files to a form the systems can manage without losing any formatting, seemingly a de facto requirement for MT systems these days.

Are SPANAM and ENGSPAN for sale? Not exactly. Rather, they are becoming a kind of shareware for government agencies. Precise distribution conditions are not yet clear, but Léon seems hopeful that the systems will get out and used, one way or another. Many government agencies say MT isn't good enough. They won't even start trying it. Or they're waiting for a system that will do Chinese, Arabic, and all the other languages they need. But they could be learning a lot by using the systems that are available now, she emphasizes. SPANAM and ENGSPAN are well-tested systems, in use for twelve and seven years respectively and good for a combined total volume of at least thirteen million words. They have their limits, yet prove useful for the kind of materials the PAHO circulates: agricultural and medical reports, scientific papers, etc.

Sharp demonstrated not only the English-Japanese version of DUETQt system, which runs on the company's 60830-based Unix laptops, but also its brand-new Japanese-English version. According to Sharp's Minoru Moriguchi, Sharp has also perfected the exceedingly difficult task of Japanese optical character recognition, thereby facilitating the

input of printed Japanese text. According to Moriguchi, Sharp has found around a thousand customers for DUETQt systems in Japan. DUETQt enjoys an informal reputation as the best commercial Japanese MT system of its class.

IBM

During the latter half of the week, IBM representatives gave translators a taste of Translation Manager/2, its new OS/2-based translation support package. According to IBM Deutschland's Edward Lippmann, several MT developers are also considering using TM/2 as a front end for their systems, using the TM/2 programming interface which allows text to be passed to and from TM/2-aware MT systems. Look for TM/2 to be implemented as the post-editing environment for at least one commercial MT system in the near future.

Award for Best-Dressed MT System of the Showcase goes to Intergraph, with its good-looking DP/Translator line of translation systems. The Product-to-Watch is MicroTac's Language-Assistant series. Version five of the US\$99 translation programs boasts a powerful parser which impressed onlookers during a demonstration at MicroTac's suite at the Princess. Conspicuous in their absence at the MT Showcase were Tovna (Israel), Siemens-Nixdorf (Germany), and Globalink (USA), all established suppliers of commercial MT systems.