

# Danzin report is out — New assessment of Eurotra

A new assessment report on the European Commission's EUROTRA machine translation program has been published. The assessment is a follow-up to the Pannenberg report of 1987.

The report says that progress has been made, both in linguistic research and in software development, but that it is now evident that the programme would not, at the end of the third phase, "result in the advanced machine translation tool which the Commission had understandably hoped for in the light of its initial promise".

The panel concluded from reports on EUROTRA and "rival products claiming to offer automatic translation" that there was little hope of a 'translating machine' of satisfactory quality coming into being in the near future, particularly for literary or diplomatic texts with subtle shades of meaning and ambiguities.

This leads to the question of whether the programme and its continuation in 1990 and 1991 are simply a waste of money and human resources. The members of the assessment panel firmly believe they are not and that research on the European languages should continue. As regards machine translation, we can hope for a 'scientific definition prototype' in a few years, and, at an even later stage, the development of an operational tool. On the other hand, the monolingual applications and certain specific multilingual applications made possible by research under EUROTRA are much nearer to hand and justify the work already done, which should be continued

The panel felt that work on computational linguistics should continue well beyond 1991, and nothing should be done to dampen the enthusiasm of the research teams.

Since EUROTRA is the only source of stimulation for theoretical and computational linguistics research in certain European lan-

guages and since this research effort would be reduced or come to a complete halt in certain countries if the programme were abandoned, it must be protected, whatever its shortcomings.

The protection of individual languages, which might be thought of as a matter for individual governments, does in fact need action at Community level, the panel agreed. Some of the research into computational linguistics and the development of monolingual and multilingual applications requires considerable resources, but much of which are not specific to any one language, and can therefore be shared. Also experience with EUROTRA has shown that studying the contrast between languages is a good way of obtaining insights into individual languages, which suggested coordination between research, and multilingualism.

The report also considers that the next two years should be devoted to devising and implementing a new structure, since the panel considers that the Commission should limit itself exclusively to work which cannot be done outside.

The way in which EUROTRA is organised and managed is clearly not appropriate for the implementation of a long-term policy aimed at studying each of the nine European languages in depth as source language and promoting the use of monolingual and multilingual applications by industry and other users. For reasons of circumstance, the Commission has not managed to restrict its role to that of awarding contracts. Certain DG XIII officials have also become directly involved in both supervisory and executive work, which means there is a danger of them being answerable only to themselves. Furthermore, the central DG XIII team has been obliged to expand so much that it can no longer be maintained within the Commission.

The panel are suggesting the setting up of a "European Language

Technology Agency" to act on behalf of both the Commission and the governments of the member states. This agency would act as the supervisory body for activities carried out under contract to the Commission.

The proposed Agency would recruit its own staff competent to stimulate intra-European projects in basic research, applied research, applications research, pre-development, dissemination of knowledge, and staff training.

The Agency would be responsible for implementing a dialogue with private industry, for any tasks needing centralisation, and for pre-standardisation studies and background studies. The panel also suggest there might be advantages if the Agency also had the task of monitoring ESPRIT projects dealing specifically with language technologies.

The chairman of the assessment panel was *André Danzin*, and the other members were Professor *Sturé Allen* (a Swedish computational linguistics expert), *Dr Hans Coltof* (acting in a general capacity), *Ms Alice Recoque* (expert on the interface between computer science and linguistics), and *Professor Hartwig Streusloff* (expert in software and computer resources). *Mr Danzin*, *Professor Allen* and *Dr Streusloff* had all served on the Pannenberg panel.