Tánaiste opens SLIG '97

SLIG '97 (SLIG = Software Localisation Interest Group) was a packed conference with people from all over the localisation business listening with great interest to a series of presentations from the industry's major players. The conference took place over two days (October 16 and 17) at the O'Reilly Hall in University College Dublin.

Mary Harney, Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Reinhard Schäler

Workshops on translation technology and localisation, cultural and technical issues in multilingual Web design, and localisation skills requirements were held on October 16. An exhibition and localisation fair was free for all attending, with publishers and manufacturers showing their goods, highlighting their achievements and shopping for jobseekers. Training organisations from the private and public sectors showed their courses, and other exhibitors gave news of start-ups and national and pan-European developments.

The main one-day event, a day of lectures on Localisation and the Internet Revolution, included key speakers from the central areas of importance in the industry.

The conference was officially launched by the Tánaiste (=deputy prime minister) and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mary Harney. Welcoming the Minister, SLIG chairperson Reinhard Schäler said that what is happening this year will shape the future of localisation more than any previous events.

Minister Harney said: "The software industry now employs around 15,000 people, some 5,000 of which are in the localisation sector. Altogether, localised software products are estimated to account for Irish exports of some £2 billion annually, and it is estimated that up to 60% of all PC packaged software is manufactured or localised in Ireland."

She pointed out that the development of a nation's software industry is significant in the contribution it can make to other sectors, and promised that the Government would provide additional resources to address the issue of skills.

The Minister forecast that the growth of the Internet would mean a prosperous future for the software localisation industry as a multilingual society and electronic commerce blend to change our way of life - but said she was heartened that the industry is so acutely aware of the impact Internet competition might have on the Irish industry.

SLIG's Best Thesis Award, sponsored by Symantec Ireland, went to Lotus's Pat O'Sullivan for his UCD MSc thesis *A Software Test Reduction System for Use in Localisation Environments*, with commendations for Brian Ó Cinnéide of DCU for his undergraduate thesis, *A Spell Checker for Scottish Gaelic*, and Thierry Fontenelle of Université de Liège for his PhD thesis, *Turning a Bilingual Dictionary into a Lexical-Semantic Database*.

Ian Dunlop, a director of Lotus Europe Product Development with responsibility for localisation and internationalisation of products such as Lotus Notes, Lotus Domino, cc:Mail, Organizer and Weblicator, chaired the opening session, on tools and standards.

John Bosak of Sun Microsystems, chairman of the W3C XML working group and a member of the W3C HTML co-ordination group (www.w3.org/XML), gave a rapid-fire and extremely interesting presentation, explaining the advantages of XML for speed, accessibility and wide-ranging use. XML is not a language, but a metalanguage, he emphasised, pointing out that it will make it possible to encode data itself, so that a click of the mouse can change a graph to a pie chart, and it will even be possible to have Chinese ideographs as hypertext links.

Berlitz International software services manager David Murphy talked about the kind of tools it is possible to use for webpage localisation, explaining Berlitz's strategy when the company decided to work on the Web. This complex presentation even generously gave the mathematical formulae which Berlitz found

for working out the cost and size of a project.

Coffee-breaks and lunch gave a chance for industry people to meet each other, and networking was very visible, with business cards being exchanged all around the room as people found ways to use each other's expertise. The delegates were obviously pleased at the tough and hard-edge nature of the presentations, commenting that this was not another golden syrup management meeting, but a seminar that addressed the real issues at a realistic level.

Michael Campion, chief executive of International Translation and Publishing (Europe), chaired a session on applications and strategies. Keynote speaker Tony Burke, director of Web localisation strategy in Microsoft WPG Ireland, talked about Microsoft's approach to formulating an Internet localisation strategy. In Internet Explorer 4.0, the slogan "The Web the Way You Want It - Worldwide!" signals the move away from technology to a Web that is centred on the public, said Mr Burke. He said the most interesting challenge is not new technologies - but the philosophical change that moves content development to every user.

John Norton, project manager of Oracle's World-Wide Translation Group, talked about Oracle's strategy in localising Java products. Another hard-hitting technical presentation, this saw notebooks out and pencils flying as the industry professionals followed Mr Norton's account of the externalising of locale-dependent resources, the tools used to translate and update files and the process for building localised versions of products.

Apple's European localisation manager, Tom Connolly, gave another meaty technical talk, showing the Apple strategy in using localisation tools - designing for localisability, testing that design, translating in-country, centralising and automating when it makes sense, re-architecture of software and re-engineering of processes and development tools. He gave an enticing peek at the plan for Rhapsody (the next Apple OS) with a description of how its Help system will be based on NeXT OpenStep on a Unix kernel, with virtual Java.

Reinhard Schäler, SLIG's chairperson, spoke of the rapid development of SLIG and the Localisation Resources Centre. He advertised the LRC's services to the localisation industry: research and development, evaluation, of localisation tools; localisation tools library; education and training; consultancy; industry-watch (journals, seminars, direct contacts etc); and regular publications such as the *Localisation Industry Atlas*.

Plans for next year, he said, include developing joint SLIG/LRC membership, holding six general meetings, setting up special interest groups on tools, technology, training etc, and of course SLIG '98.

The third session of the day, on Localisation and Web Publishing, was chaired by Jennifer Condon of Forbairt, head of the National Software Directorate (the software industry in Ireland now has 500 companies, 80% of them Irish-owned, making over £3 billion, most of this coming from exports; 12,000 people work in the industry, which is growing at a rate of 11% a year.)

Pat Fehin, a principal human factors engineer of Digital Equipment International, talked about usability issues in localisation and the Web. With the number of people using the World Wide Web quadrupling every year, the Web's very flexibility is creating usability problems - amplified by the growing cultural dissonance between users. Mr Fehin talked about how localisers can test their design's effectiveness for the new international audiences that will be accessing that design on the Web.

Paul McBride, business unit manager in L10NBRIDGE Technologies (a management buyout last year of Stream International's language solutions business), talked about localising for global publishing solutions. He tracked the localisation of the Java Developer's Kit by L10NBRIDGE for Sun Microsystems. Another detailed and enjoyably technical short presentation, this was a useful layout of a typical job for the professional audience.

Ending on a light-hearted note - yet with plenty of food for thought too - Wendy Hamilton, VP Strategy and Northern European Operations, asked whether the localisation industry in Ireland was a sacred cow, and brought an appreciative audience through a series of images from Mart & Market to Best of Breed, while giving a clear and at times devastatingly accurate view of the opportunities and problems faced by the industry. ■