

IBM's new translation services

IBM is to enter the field of translation services. To find out more about this new development, which has major implications for the translation business, Language International General Editor Geoffrey Kingscott and Software Editor Bob Clark went to Lyngby, north of Copenhagen, to visit the IBM European Language Services (ELS) centre, a focal point for the new activity. ELS will be administering the translation service not only for Europe but also for Latin America.



by
Bob Clark

Heading the new service at ELS is *Thorkild Fougner*, who has the title Translation Operation Support Manager. We also took the opportunity to look at latest developments with IBM's translation memory machine, the Translation Manager/2, meeting its developer, *Flemming Svanholm*, and training officer *Hanne Eriksen*, to learn about improvements since we reviewed an earlier version (see *Language International* 4.1).

There was some delay and confusion about getting to ELS. Based on the experience of previous visits we went to Birkerød, where ELS used to be located, only to find that the major expansion in their responsibilities has meant ELS has had meant a move to larger premises.

Thorkild Fougner explained that for some ten years ELS has been operating as a national language support interface organisation between IBM's own information development laboratories, and the IBM translation centres established in individual countries. There are today 19 such national translation centres in Europe, handling 25 languages, and soon the figure will increase to 25 national translation centres with the addition of new centres in Central and East European countries such as Russia, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic.

ELS also provided the infrastructure for file transmission and communication, developing highly efficient electronic links between the developers, ELS, national language centres, and the suppliers of translation services. In 1992 IBM ELS processed the translation of 110 million words relating to products, with an unquantifiable further large amount of work relating to marketing. The translation turnover was of the order of \$65 million, which, they believe, make them the biggest commercial player in this particular market, far larger than any of the commercial translation bureaux.

Why should we keep all that organisation and experience solely for in-house use? was an obvious question they had to ask themselves. What they feel they can offer a customer — and they are principally targeting American software houses seeking a pan-

European market — is a fixed price turnkey or one-stop solution, which includes all activities ranging from translation to distribution of national language software and publications.

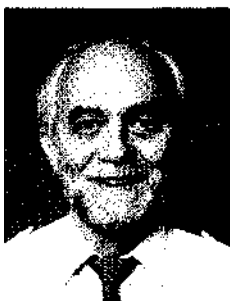
Formally the system is known as the IBM Turnkey National Language Support Solution, and it will be offered through the new IBM company SMC (Software Manufacturing Company).

It involves various elements. One is the selection and evaluation (*Qualification* in IBM-speak) of translation companies (*vendors*). IBM believe that they have built up unmatched experience in selecting and qualifying vendors for their own work. Incidentally, it is a firm IBM belief that translation should almost always be done in the country of the target language; languages are changing so quickly these days that, in their opinion, unsatisfactory results are likely to be obtained when expatriate translators are used.

ELS is in the process of building up a translation inventory file. The contents of the file record the experience gathered by using a vendor for translation up to now of IBM products, plus information defined in an ISO-certified IBM document called *Selection and Qualification of Vendors*. In addition to general vendor information such as ownership, location, contacts, the Inventory File enables IBM to select the best vendor candidates for a specific customer project. Technical skills involving translation technology, domain specific knowledge, knowledge about hardware and software platforms under which an application is running, and capacity, are of course important selection criteria. So too is quality, and IBM carefully vet the vendor's own quality procedures.

Cost is a major factor in this sector. It is the intention of ELS to define a standard cost structure, with competitive pricing based on the fact that the vendor is responsible only for the translation; marketing, customer relations, project management and file handling are all looked after by IBM.

All material belonging to a particular project, such as files for translation, the translation dictionary, and the translation memory (created on the IBM Translation Tool or IBM Translation Manager), will be stored in what IBM call an NLS Folder. This concept makes the customer as well as ELS "translation vendor independent" when a new release of a product has to be prepared. The IBM Translation Tool or the IBM licensed product Translation Manager/2 becomes the vehicle for the NLS Folder concept. The contents of the Folder are owned by the customer and managed by IBM.



Thorkild Fougner



Flemming Svanholm

A second element is the *use* of IBM translation tools, particularly the IBM Translation Manager/2. IBM would expect, as a pre-requisite, its vendors to have this state of the art equipment.

A third element is file *management*. ELS receives the source files from the customer's development department, checks whether all files are present, that the files are in the correct format, creates translation instructions and performs a word count. ELS performs the file management in both directions, both on the source files received from the customer and on the translated files received back from the vendor.

Another element is *terminology management*, using appropriate software tools, and where appropriate IBM's own terminology lists.

A fifth element is known as *education*. Under this heading ELS includes translation workshops for vendors, covering all items necessary to fulfil the assignment, such as expected quality level, schedule and costs. IBM has considerable experience from its own in-house work on how proper planning can reduce cost without compromising quality or delivery date. For example, where there is considerable repetition, the proper application of document handling and translation technology can ensure the same material is not painstakingly translated afresh each time. IBM claim that in some cases the savings can be as high as 50%.

IBM are principally interested in long-term relationships, and this is shown in their policy on communication links. Communication links are established with both customers and vendors, enabling fast transfer of source files, translated files, terminology and translation memory files. A trouble tracking report system called Hotline, together with electronic mail, enables all the parties to communicate efficiently and solve problems quickly.

IBM also offer the service of its Software and Publications Centre for support in manufacturing, assembly and packaging, distribution and export.

Translation Manager/2 latest

The Translation Manager/2 is apparently selling well, and the system will now work on ten more languages. It is available through local IBM marketing departments. The database store has now been made available on-line.

A recent enhancement to the Translation Manager/2 is Initial Translation Memory (ITM). Prior to the release of this feature, translation memory could only be created by processing a translation with Translation Manager/2. As each segment of source text is translated, it is linked to the corresponding segment of target text and stored in the translation memory database.

With ITM it is possible to apply an algorithm to source and target text, in electronic form, which will produce a translation memory file without having to go through the actual processing using Translation Manager/2. The benefit is obvious. Any bilingual text in a format supported by Translation Manager/2 can be used for TBE (translation by example). At the moment 19 source languages, including Greek, are supported. Current target languages are those supported by the OS/2 operating system, including Japanese, Chinese and Korean. IBM's Scientific Centre in Cairo is working on a right-to-left system to support Arabic and Hebrew scripts.

As if to augment their brave-new-world approach to translation, ELS is currently working on integrating IBM's own Logic-based Machine Translation (LMT) system with Translation Manager/2. Flemming Svanholm has been very impressed with the performance of LMT; the source analysis is particularly well developed. "We can see in this opportunities for ELS to provide services related to machine translation", he said. IBM are always looking at ways of reducing costs in translation, and experiments, in collaboration with Carnegie-Mellon University, are also being carried out on the use of controlled language, and its integration into machine translation.