

MT SUMMIT V

Luxembourg, July 10-13 1995

Last July more than 360 people streamed out of the searing Luxembourg summer into the welcome air conditioning of the Hemicycle of the European Parliament to attend the fifth bi-annual Summit Conference on Machine Translation (MT), organised by the International Association for Machine Translation (IAMT) with the support of the European Commission.

**report by
Robert Clark**

As one would expect, the attendance list read like a who's who in Machine Translation. Absolutely everyone who is anyone in the MT world turned up and it was a rare opportunity for mere mortals interested in MT developments, like myself, to rub shoulders with those making it all happen. Anyone not attending out of fear of being bored to death by long-winded, theoretical papers will be very sorry they missed it. The Trends, Methodologies and Issues in Machine Translation (TMI) Conference was held in Leuven, Belgium the week before, providing a platform for theoretical issues, leaving the more practical and, for some of us, more understandable papers for MT Summit V. As *Maghi King*, IAMT President, stated in her welcome address, "The MT Summits aim to assess the state of the art in technology, to

bring us up to date on what is happening in the industrial world, to examine what the future might hold and to stimulate research, development and the use of MT and Machine Aided Translation (MAT)". *Prof Yorick Wilks*, Chairman of the Programme Committee, expressed his hope that this MT Summit would serve more as a showcase of concerns than a conference in the traditional sense and, in the opening session, *Dr. Eduard Brackeniens*, Director General, EC Translation Service, clearly voiced his own concern: "How do we avoid being drowned by 'Europaper'"? The implications of multilingualism at the EC Translation Service are obvious and he had seen the number of languages that his service must cope with increase from four to fifteen. Faced with a potential increase to forty languages by the year 2000, and accepting the fact that Europe cannot exist without recognising cultural and linguistic identities, how can his service avoid being surrounded by tons of paper to be translated? One approach would be to resolve as many issues as possible at a local level, thereby reducing the volume of documentation ultimately passing through the translation service. Al-

though this approach would almost certainly reduce the volume of translation, an overwhelming amount would still remain. Translation procedures must be streamlined. All available tools must be integrated into a workbench-style environment and MT should be an important element of this approach. The remaining sessions of the conference were divided into four sections: MT Past; MT Present: Methods and Systems; MT Present: Implementation, environment, applications; MT Future. The following list of session titles will give some idea of the wide range of content: *The Lessons of the Past for Today's MT; Big Systems Development; European Commission Developments* Now: *Resources for MT; Working with Small MT*

Systems; Surveys of the MT World and Products by Area; Implementation, environment, applications; The Economics of Current MT Systems for the Office; Integration of MT into Business Infrastructures and Processes; The Future of MT Research and Development; The Evaluation of MT; MT and Speech; MT, Networks and Information Retrieval; How to Persuade Your Bosses to Continue MT Research and Development. No matter how carefully planned a conference may be, common threads from individual papers link up to form a kind of sub-agenda that may not necessarily be reflected in the programme. Certain themes seem to leave a greater impression than others and one of these was the rapidly changing nature of the MT market. As *Dr Winfield Scott Bennett* said, "We old-timers in the MT business are faced with the Good news/Bad news scenario: the good news is that we have a market for MT; the bad news is that it's different from what we thought it was". *Dr Hubert Lehmann*, IBM Deutschland, classified MT users by profession: a) home users, e.g. pupils, students, learners of foreign languages, foreigners, technology freaks; b) secretaries, clerks; c) executives; d) professionals: technicians, engineers, scientists, researchers, lawyers, architects, consultants, auditors, teachers, etc.; e) professional translators. Lehmann continues, "Experience has shown that only a part of translations are carried out by professional translators. Due to time and cost considerations, many translations are done by professionals of various kinds who would profit considerably from MT and translation tools. It is our assumption that this will actually be the key market for promoting MT. Professional translators are expected to follow as soon as they realise the potential for increased productivity and experience pressure from their customers". *Dr John Hutchins*, of

the University of East Anglia, pointed out that "In the past, the purchasers of MT systems were generally large companies with the resources to evaluate systems for their own particular circumstances and requirements. What is now required are standards and performance indicators which can readily be understood by potential purchasers". One of the most significant factors responsible for this sudden increase of the potential user-base of MT systems is the recent availability of what were traditionally

regarded as 'big' systems on Personal Computers. Virtually overnight, the increase in power and decrease in cost of PCs has made it possible to run, not only the smaller, less sophisticated MT packages, but also those systems that previously

required mainframe or workstation platforms. *Dr Muriel Vasconcellos*, President, AMTA : "Because so many more modalities are now available, it can be said that in 1995 the hallmark of MT usage is diversity. ..While it had long been expected that companies with transfer-based mainframe and workstation systems would be porting their products to the desktop, most pundits doubted that the new products would have all the same capabilities or that they would be affordable to the mass market. To give an idea of how wrong they were, the 1991 Ovum Report predicted that by the year 2000 the average MT system would be selling for US\$150,000. As it turned out, the most expensive of the new heavy-duty PC systems is priced at only US\$1,495. In other words, they are selling for less than 1% of the predicted cost". Another factor that could potentially cause the MT user-base to increase dramatically is the use of the on-line translation services provided by CompuServe. As *Dr Mary Flanagan*, of CompuServe, said: "CompuServe has recently begun integration of MT in some of its on-line services. Translations of messages are provided between English and French, German, Spanish. In its first month of operation, more than 900,000 words were translated on the World Community forum alone. CompuServe will also introduce an e-mail translation service next week. This service will provide low cost document translation at two quality levels, and will support major word-processing formats. Unedited MT output will be returned within minutes; most edited jobs within 24 hours at low cost to the user". Not only was the question "Who uses MT?" discussed, but also "How do they use it?" Several speakers offered very similar categorisations. *Prof. Christian Boitet*, of GETA, France said that developers must consider designing systems to

"So what does the future of MT look like? Well, it runs on a PC and it costs less than five hundred dollars..." - Colin Brace



*Dr. Margaret King,
president IAMT*



*Dr. Winfield Scott
Bennet, Logos*

be appropriate to the type of usage required by a customer. Prof Boitet broke down MT usage in the following manner: 'MT for the Watcher' aims at readers wanting to gain access to information written in a foreign language who are prepared to accept less than perfect translations rather than nothing at all; 'MT for the Revisor' aims at producing 'raw' translations automatically, with a quality comparable to that of first drafts produced by humans; 'MT for the translator' aims at helping human translators do their job by providing on-line dictionaries, thesauri, translation memories, etc.; 'MT for the Author' aims at (possibly monolingual) authors wanting to have their texts translated into one or several languages by either writing under full control of the system or by helping the system to disambiguate the text so that satisfactory translations can be obtained with no re-

vision. Another popular theme was the plea for developers to stop paying lip service to the idea of sharing linguistic resources and actually start doing it. Attending the conference sessions increased my awareness of the current state of MT enormously and the exhibition area offered us the opportunity to obtain the latest information on all major MT and CAT systems. Closer scrutiny of the list of participants would reveal that, once you took away the hundred or so delegates from Luxembourg and the luminaries delivering papers, there were not all that many 'casual' observers in attendance. Now that it has been established that it's not only the translation fraternity that might use MT, but, in fact, everyone else as well, it might be a good idea to inform them of the fact. They may want to attend the next MT Summit in San Diego in 1997!