

Technology serving the translator

AITI, Associazione Italiana per Interpreti e Traduttori, and the Scuola Superiore per Interpreti e Traduttori, who collaborated in setting up this conference (Milan, October 9-10), chose as their theme, Technology Serving the Translator - the Workstation of the Year 2000.

**Report by
Bob Clark**

This conference is not one that figures prominently on the calendars of the international "conference cruisers", but there were over two hundred in attendance from all over Italy and eight other European countries. So what is special about this particular conference? A conference is a bit like a dinner party, success or failure not only hinges on the quality of the food and the organisational skills of the host or hostess but also on the ability to assemble a variegated and yet complementary group of people. Care must also be taken to avoid a formal, stuffy atmosphere. Professor Gabriella Mauriello, President of the Lombardy Section of the AITI, scored ten out of ten on all points and, if she is not careful, she may find people insisting that this conference becomes more than occasional.

The conference consisted of five plenary sessions over two days. The session categories were Terminology, Communications Systems and Terminology Databases, Machine Translation and Computer Assisted Translation, Printed and Audiovisual Aids and The Integrated Workstation. Working languages were Italian, French and English and all conference interpreting was done by students of the SSIT. Illustrating why the University of the Saar, Saarbrücken is a world leader in providing future technical translators with essential training in the field of information and language processing, *Felix Mayer* and *Karl-Heinz Freigang* delivered papers which examined the University's approach to theoretical and practical issues such as, the ability to recognise and solve problems of linguistic ambiguity in both human and machine translation, linguistically based typologies of mistakes made by human and machine translation, machine translation as a "rival" in the translation industry, evaluation of possible areas of application and limitations of machine translation systems, hands-on experience with MT and MAT systems including post-editing procedures, and the structure and maintenance of terminology databases. *Matthias Heyn*, of the University of Stuttgart, dealt with the complexities of terminology database structure and exchange formats and discussed the reasons why relational databases were unsuitable for terminological use. Employing the Trados product, MultiTerm for Windows, he demonstrated why

both dynamic fields and dynamic keys were essential for a successful terminological application. *Ariella Germinario*, a member of both the ITI and AITI, discussed communications systems from a translator's perspective and called for the establishment of a dedicated AITI Bulletin Board Service. (Similar sounds can be heard in ATA and ITI circles.) My own modest contribution to the proceedings consisted of an overview of current language technology that lingered on the translation memory-based applications recently released on the market. I stressed the importance of translators not only coming to terms with new technologies but also realising the fact that translation buyers are beginning to expect prospective suppliers to be equipped with state-of-the-art translation tools. *Bruno de Bessé*, Head of the School of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Geneva, took a brave stance, given the technological theme of the conference, and reminded us that, although it was obviously valuable for translation students to become conversant with terminology databases, the main emphasis should be placed on the actual content of these databases. Effective terminology building requires skills in cognitive science, linguistics, communication and documentation. The question he put forward was "Should a training institution be responsible for teaching the student everything about language technology or should the acquisition of such knowledge be the responsibility of the student?" He agreed that students should be in a position to be critical of new technologies and be able to evaluate a given system, but it was expecting a bit much for institutions to go beyond that level. *Gerhard Budin*, Secretary General of INFOTERM, Vienna, concentrated on the methodological impact of the use of new technologies in the translation process. He felt that translators could make much more use of the wealth of information offered in publicly accessible databases and discussed a new Terminology Interchange Format that has been developed which makes direct user-to-user data interchange viable.

Professor *Gustav Winkler*, of the Fachhochschule, Flensburg, brought the house down with what he refers to as his "bag of tricks". He showed us how he uses his Rube Goldberg/Heath Robinson-like gadgets to give his technical translation students a visual and tactile experience of technical concepts. *Joan Day*, of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, listed the advantages of CD-ROM reference material over printed equivalents and surveyed available material. She pointed out that pricing had not yet settled down and that content value and frequency of updat-

ing were the main factors affecting cost. *Rosa Auricchio*, from Microsoft, gave an historical overview of the word processor and showed how improvements to Microsoft Word had been the direct result of customer feedback. *Luigi Muzzi*, member of AITI, gave an overview of word processing packages from the translator's perspective and expressed his indignation over the fact that localised Italian versions tended to be more expensive than the English versions. *Carol Peters*, of the Istituto di Elaborazione dell'Informazione CNR, Pisa, reported on the development of a workstation constructed around two main components: an integrated mono/bilingual lexical database system and a bilingual, English/Italian text management system for the automatic construction and interrogation of bilingual text archives. The translator can query either of two sets of parallel text and, for any form or co-occurrences of forms found in the set of texts for one language, retrieve parallel contrastive contexts from the other. It will also be possible for the user to create his or her own personalised

bilingual corpus. The workstation is PC-based and runs on MS-DOS. *Khai Le-Hong*, Head of Corporate Language Services of Mercedes-Benz AG, delivered the final paper of the conference and gave us a very informative overview of their in-house translator's workbench system, INTERFASS. In his closing remarks Professor *Italo Girardi*, Principal of SSIT, said, "Five or six years ago we were talking about computer assisted translation as a thing of the future and now we have it!" *Gabriella Mauriello* added that "We should all follow the Saarbrücken model, the world is changing and the computer has changed our lives. Technology is here to embrace or reject. It is time to rise to the challenge of technology." Comments that I heard from other people who attended the conference were similar. *Helge Niska*, of the University of Stockholm said, "I wasn't too sure how useful the conference would be. It was the programme that attracted me and I can say that the speakers truly reflected the current state of the issues discussed."