A Rationale for Using UNL as an Interlingua and More in Various Domains

Christian Boitet

GETA, CLIPS, IMAG
385, Av. de la Bibliothèque, BP 53
F-38041 Grenoble cedex 9, France
Christian.Boitet@imag.fr

Abstract. The UNL *language* of semantic graphs may be called as a "semantico-linguistic" interlingua. As a successor of the technically and commercially successful ATLAS-II and PIVOT interlinguas, its potential to support various kinds of text MT is certain, even if some improvements would be welcome, as always. It is also a strong candidate to be used in spoken dialogue translation systems when the utterances to be handled are not only task-oriented and of limited variety, but become more free and truly spontaneous. Finally, although it is not a true representation language such as KRL and its frame-based and logic-based successors, and although its associated "knowledge base" is not a true ontology, but rather a kind of immense thesaurus of (interlingual) sets of word senses, it seems particularly well suited to the processing of multilingual information in natural language (information retrieval, abstracting, gisting, etc.).The UNL *format* of multilingual documents aligned at the level of utterances is currenly embedded in html (call it UNL-html), and used by various tools such as the UNL viewer. By using a simple transformation, one obtains the UNL-xml format, and profit from all tools currently developed around XML. In this context, UNL may find another application in the localization of multilingual textual resources of software packages (messages, menu items, help files, and examples of use in multilingual dictionaries.)

1   Introduction

UNL is the name of a project, of a meaning representation language, and of a format for "perfectly aligned" multilingual documents. There is some hefty controversy about the use of the UNL language as an "interlingua", be it for translation or for other applications such as cross-lingual information retrieval. On the other hand, there is almost no discussion on the UNL format, in its current form, embedded in HTML, or some directly derivable form, embedded in XML.

We argue that the UNL language is indeed a good interlingua for automated translation, ranging from fully automatic MT to interactive MT of several kinds through, we believe, spoken translation of non task-oriented dialogues. It is also more than that, due to the associated "knowledge base", and has a great potential in textual information processing applications.