

EXPECTATIONS FOR MT

Panel contribution by
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Many evaluation reports have shown that MT works and that it is quicker and cheaper, and almost as good as human translation. Why then doesn't it sell? Why does MT cover less than 2% of the world translation market, now estimated at 200 million pages per year? And would even these 200 million pages justify the huge investments that are now being made? The answer to these questions is that the real translation workload is at least one order of magnitude higher than the sales volume, which only reflects the cash flow between client companies and translation bureaux manned with literary translators. It does not cover the huge amount of translation work that is performed within the companies.

Just like human translation, MT does not have to sell in order to be used. A number of companies and institutions are already successfully putting to use MT systems developed in-house and tailored to their own specific needs, and this trend is certainly accelerating, partly because the working capacity of trained translators worldover is limited. Human skills will increasingly be used for post-editing, where linguistic or literary knowledge is of much less importance than the mastery of specialized terminology.

MT will rapidly cover an increasing share of the global market, even if it does not show immediately in the official statistics. But MT is only one of many activities that are essential for the future development of our countries' economies and that rely heavily on the mastery of language by computers and telecommunications.

Mastery of language will require intensive efforts on the level of terminology and lexicography and on the side of linguistic modeling and software development, including new hardware approaches and new programming languages for non-numerical applications.

The EC Commission is aware of the need to invest heavily in this field, continuing the work started under the Eurotra programme.

Its activities will probably cover the development of terminological and lexicographical depositories, thus pooling resources for all types of applications involving one or several European languages.

The Commission will also promote the utilization of resources resulting from this action by industry, considered not just as a producer, but as the main user of the new products and services.

While most of the development efforts over the past decades have been concerned with morpho-syntactic analysis of texts of growing complexity, the efforts of the future will be centred more on semantic features at various levels.

This will require the development of large knowledge bases for general use. In the short term, smaller specialized knowledge bases will emerge for use in specific MT applications, which will lead the way to the identification of the best conceptual approaches for the larger bases of the future. Finally, learning systems, based on the interaction of representative corpuses and efficient parsers, will help to make the improvement and maintenance of MT systems a less costly undertaking.