

**GET 'EM YOUNG:  
MT NEEDS  
FRESH HORMONES**

*"Computer Translation of  
Natural Language," W.  
Goshawke, I.D.K. Kelly, J.D.  
Wigg (Sigma/Halsted, 1987).  
275 pp. Price: US\$26.85*

Machine translation came of  
age when Manchester Univer-  
sity lent it the respectability of

a subject fit for a master's degree. And it has grown to maturity as universities worldwide have incorporated MT courses into their language departments. The time would therefore now seem ripe for MT to court the young and restless – particularly among those contemplating university entrance. Goshawke and Co. are hoping this booklet will get the Commodore 64 set hooked.

Walter Goshawke is the man who gave the world that deliciously intimate-sounding acronym SLUNT – Spoken Language Universal Numeric Translation – an interlingual MT design in which both lexical and syntactic elements (parts of speech, tense, etc.) are coded as numbers. In SLUNT, the intermediate representation of a sentence is a long number string (segmented into “words” of 10 decimal digits, at least two of which are needed per orthographic word).

The idea of a numeric interlingua has a certain pedigree, but has remained a minority approach, scantily documented in the annals of MT. Goshawke's detailed descrip-

tion presents the idea graphically, with 150 pages of descriptions, rules, examples in both compound and simple sentences, and specimen dictionary entries. All the same, he admits, far from being a ready-to-run system, it's still only a “groundwork for experimentation.”

Goshawke and Co. are pinning their hopes for the future of MT, and its numeric brand in particular, on international hobbyist networks – especially the kids. And it's true that numeric MT at least offers teenagers a platform on which they can set up systems in BASIC with their foreign penpals, without first having to take a course in general linguistics or rent a VAX.

The book includes extensive program documentation in BASIC, a very complete index, an excellent bibliography, and – last but not least – an entertaining as well as informative 70-page introduction to machine translation by Ian Kelly.

– Tony Whitecomb