

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE WORKSHOP ON POST-EDITING

Mr Evans, in the chair, began by outlining the various topics which he considered should be discussed at the workshop; rapid v. full post-editing; working methods: on screen or on paper; the question of whether Systran or the post-editor is to be considered the translator; and restrictions which the translator might place on the customer's use of edited machine translation.

Mr Stippberger (CEC German translation) began by saying that he would make no distinction between a rapid post-edit and a full post-edit and was supported by Mr Rolling. It was generally felt that a good translation was one which got the message across, and that whatever kind of post-edit was required to achieve this should be done.

Ms Jacquemet (ECAT) was of the opinion that the kind of post-editing required depended very much on the client's demands. Some required a more polished final text.

Mr Bostad (USAF) made the point that it was best to define the audience and adapt one's standards to each client individually.

Speakers' opinions seemed to be divided equally on the question of working methods. The general feeling was that mistakes were more perceptible on paper than on screen. However, it was thought that word processors offered technical possibilities which facilitated the task of the post-editor. There were more advantages for those revising in English because in French the revision of one word sometimes entailed the revision of all the words having a grammatical relationship with it, thereby making the process somewhat longer.

Mr Spoden (CEC French translation) stated that most of the French translators at the Commission preferred to work on paper, leaving the text to be retyped subsequently, or dictated. There was a general reluctance on their part to type themselves.

Mr Lavorel (CEC Systran development team) made the point that translators in the private sector were almost always required to type and would therefore adapt more readily to the use of word processors.

As far as speed was concerned, all of these different methods represented a significant time-saving in relation to human translation.

The question of who was best suited to post-editing yielded some interesting opinions. Commission representatives thought that the best translators and revisers made the best post-editors. Ms Lawson (independent consultant) maintained that skill in one's mother tongue was an important pre-requisite to good post-editing. It was generally felt that non-native speakers should not be allowed to do post-editing if high standards were required.

Ms Akazawa felt that if transfer of information, and not style, were the criterion, then this was permissible. In Japan, they had non-natives revising English. It was common practice outside the Commission to use subject specialists, not translators, to do post-editing. There was a reluctance among translators who had been with companies for a long time to turn to post-editing.

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Mr Pigott stated that translators were an important part of the process at the Commission, providing a wealth of very useful feedback to the development team. Mr Evans agreed that it was mainly the post-editors, not the end-users, who supplied this feedback. Ms Majorcas-Cohen (CEC translation) stated that translators often felt they had an ethical responsibility towards their customers and consequently, would not be in favour of anything which led to a lowering of standards. Mr Rolling was sympathetic to this point of view.

Mr Trabulsi's (Gachot S.A.) suggestion that translations should be made available directly to the end-users was not greeted with much enthusiasm, as it was felt that to bypass the translator/post-editor completely would lead to such a lowering of standards, especially as it was generally agreed that end-users were less stringent in their demands than the translators.

Mr Rolling made the point that the attitude of deciding beforehand which texts were suitable for machine translation, which was very prevalent, was not a healthy one. He felt that all sorts of texts should be translated first and then judged. Mr Paez stated that experience had shown this to be a valid starting point. Mr Pigott gave the example of texts translated for the Statistical Office. Initial results were disappointing, but after much development work, the texts were now as well suited to Systran as any others.

Mr Müller (CEC German translation) said that some texts presented particular difficulties for machine translation as they were not very well written. He raised the question of possible pre-editing in an attempt to improve the quality of the raw translation. Many speakers agreed that this was a good idea. Mr Severini (Informalux) explained that badly written texts, especially those with bad punctuation, had negative consequences for the final result and he agreed that some sort of limited pre-editing would be desirable. Mr Paez warned of the dangers of too long a pre-editing process which would detract from the advantage of machine translation. Mr Spoden (CEC French translation) made the point that many requesters would raise objections to anybody tampering with their texts, although it was felt in the French division that some form of pre-editing was important.

Users outside the Commission had already introduced some form of pre-editing, such as automatic identification of NFWs, the SPELLCHECK programme, and MCE. Mr Pigott quoted the example of working methods at Xerox, where technical authors were given specific instructions on the drafting of texts. All of this had cut down the time spent on post-editing, a factor which also had to be taken into account.

In his summing up Mr Evans made four main points: 1) a handbook of practical hints for post-editors would be useful; 2) rules should be set out for the end-user; 3) Systran teams should have closer contact with end-users; 4) steps should be taken to solve text problems so as to ensure that the MT was as good as mechanically possible.