A Report on MT from the ATA

The American Translator's Association (ATA) has released a survey of commercially available MT systems for PCs and workstations. The report was compiled for the ATA by L. Christine Miller, a consultant based in Washington, DC, who specializes in MT and has done dictionary work for several MT vendors as an independent subcontractor. Miller's report does not evaluate specific systems but rather provides ATA members and other interesting parties with a general overview of what is currently available for low-end systems.

Miller is optimistic about MT, commenting, "for many applications, MT has proved to be cost- effective and time-saving. The most satisfied end-users that I know are skilled in updating the dictionaries. That seems to be crucial in making the systems work. After the initial customization of your software, the accuracy improves dramatically." Miller believes a shakeout is due to take place in the commercial MT arena, as PC packages, which are getting better all the time, begin encroaching on the turf currently held by the more expensive workstation packages.

Asked which PC-based MT products she felt are the ones to watch, Miller observes, "in the US, marketing is often the best indicator of which products will be around in the coming years. A good marketing strategy which results in healthy sales and profits will assure money for further development. Right now, only MicroTac's US$99 Language Assistant has a wide general acceptance and sales of over 150,000 units. It's also the only product that can be purchased from local software stores." Miller points out that the Language Assistant Series (Spanish, French, Italian, German), which began life as simple verb conjugators, have the advantage that they have grown with their users. With version 5, the MicroTac software, she believes, is getting close to the linguistic capabilities of the more expensive Globalink GTS-Professional. "GTS has been the one to beat in the 'low' end of MT."

"Linguistic Products," Miller comments, "may not be as concerned with parsing as the others; however, do not discount the Texas company's practical approach to translation. Their system has some time-saving features that make them viable. Note that neither Linguistic Products nor MicroTac have outside investors or debt. They both started small and have grown slowly and steadily."

Meanwhile, the competition is not standing still. "At least three new PC-based products have become commercially available in the US since the ATA report was completed. Systran is also contemplating a PC version of its translation software," says Miller.

Price: ATA members US$7.50, non-members US$25 ATA, 1735 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 903, Arlington, va 22202-3413; usa Tel +1 703 412 1500

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