

A Moving Target

Eurolang is a decidedly different creature than it was three years ago.

Eurolang and MT developer Logos have launched an aggressively priced Logos-Optimizer bundle in which the Logos MT engine is integrated with the Optimizer translator's workstation. The Eurolang-Logos combination is yet one more sign of the ongoing convergence of low, and high, end translation technologies, or, to put it another way, the gradual integration of machine translation and machine-aided translation. For Eurolang, the arrangement relieves pressure on it to deliver, as originally planned, its own MT system, which it had based on two existing MT systems, Metal and Ariane. Instead, it can offer the mature, well-tuned Logos engine for those customers who demand MT, allowing Eurolang to focus its resources on end-user tools and translation management facilities, for which there is clearly a much larger potential market. Logos, meanwhile, achieves a much-needed path to users' desktops with Optimizer. While the company has been making progress in front-end tools with its recently released Windows client package, it cannot yet compete with the high degree of desktop integration and the extensive translation management facilities offered by Optimizer. Eurolang's close relationship with Logos by no means precludes its long-time development partner Sietec or any other MT vendor. However, Eurolang and Logos have found in each other kindred spirits; they are both modest-size organizations in which the entrepreneurial spirit flourishes and decision-making is fast and flexible. Although the Logos lexicons and the Eurolang terminology and translation databases will not be integrated, Eurolang plans to offer a means of synchronizing these entities in the near future.

While software engineering remains the primary focus of Eurolang, the company is also entering the translation and localization services market, here too in collaboration with other companies. In August, Eurolang announced an alliance with Mendez Translation, a large translation company based in Brussels. By joining forces, the two companies hope to develop large-scale translation services; Eurolang will contribute its software technology, while Mendez will contribute project management skills and its extensive contacts in the translation business.

Translation services and software development are two vastly different kinds of activities but there is nonetheless a certain logic to the strategy. For one, the two are closely intertwined in the software localization arena, where software companies themselves are some of the largest and most demanding customers for translation services in the world. For another, many large companies are faced with huge translation requirements which, translation not considered a core activity, they would prefer to outsource, provided a satisfactory supplier can be found. Yet a third reason is that internal use of the software in a production environment is a highly effective way for the system's developers to obtain direct feedback from users. Finally, it is also a valuable way to collect linguistic data for improving the productivity of the system, thereby making Eurolang a more competitive translation service supplier, although intellectual property considerations may preclude leveraging the value of such data across multiple customers.

The alliances with Logos and Mendez signify an increasing realism within Eurolang as the organization readied to shed its three-year EUREKA cocoon at the end of 1994 to continue on in life as a full-blown commercial butterfly. That the company may yet survive this metamorphosis is largely due to Eurolang's ambitious and visionary founder, Bernard Seite, who seemingly single-handedly transformed Eurolang from an unwieldy

EUREKA consortium into a market-oriented commercial outfit, permanently changing the translation landscape in the process.

Looking back over the past three years, Seite, now a consultant with the company, acknowledges that the consortium partly underestimated the huge challenge of developing commercial linguistic software. Explaining the direction the company took, Seite says, "previous big NLP projects ran aground because they woefully underestimated the software engineering costs of building commercial systems. Eurolang could not afford to make that mistake as well and had to modify its aims accordingly." He points out that, by and large, large-scale linguistic products are still not economically feasible. Seite is keen to point out how much Eurolang has been able to accomplish in a comparatively short time: only one year elapsed between the announcement of product concept in March 1992 and its public unveiling at the beginning of 1994. Eurolang, however, is not yet home free; it appears that it will take at least another year to iron all the wrinkles out of the software.

"Optimizer is the first successful integration of machine translation and machine-aided human translation," Seite claims. He believes that time will show that ALPS and Eurolang were the two big breakthroughs in translation technology. If indeed, as he believes, Eurolang's competitors are adopting the very same strategy, Seite may very well be right. In the meanwhile, Seite will shortly be moving on to fresh challenges in new and different arenas. In the meanwhile, Eurolang urgently needs to get working software out the door, with or without the patronage of Microsoft, and find paying customers for it.

Price: Logos-Optimizer package is priced at US7999 per workstation with aggressive volume discounts.

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