The Business of Language

A Kent State forum focuses on commercial applications

BY SUE-ELLEN WRIGHT

The Kent State University Institute for Applied Linguistics (KSU/IAL) recently staged its first conference on the future of the language industry. The conference program consciously addresses the challenges faced by translator-training programs to meet the needs of the burgeoning localization market in the coming century. Held at Kent's state-of-the-art learning technology center, the "Language in Business, Language as Business" program focused on ways to create synergetic cooperation between industry and academia.

Greg Shreve, founder and director of the IAL, characterized the conference as an attempt "to include the major segments of the language industry and get these groups talking to one another. If you look at the subtitle of our conference 'Understanding and Managing the Language Industry,' it is clear that our major goals are to try to understand the language industry, who we are and what we do, and second, to find ways to manage our industry for maximum efficiency and effectiveness." Central themes included:

- Language, Culture, and Product: adapting products for foreign markets; globalization, internationalization, and localization (including translation)
- Language Technology and Language Engineering: machine translation, translation memories, speech technology, multilingual terminological and document databases, multilingualism and the Internet
- Language Management and Quality Assurance: language project management, translation quality assurance
- Language and Information Science: language issues in indexing, classification, search and retrieval

KSU's Françoise Massardier-Kenney noted, "We tried to include managers, academics, translators, educators, trainers from industry, technical writers, and information specialists, as well as students from major translation programs. We wanted to achieve a mix of views in a relatively small, think-tank-like atmosphere where people could really communicate their concerns and indulge in constructive dialogue."

Representatives from major publishers were there (Microsoft, IBM, Diebold, and Lucent Technologies), from tool providers (Logos and Trados), from prominent service providers (LMI, L10NBridge, Translingua, Berlitz, Alpnet, and Harvard Translations), as well as local freelance translators. On the training side, university trainers were well represented, with speakers and participants coming from the KSU/IAL, the Monterey Institute for International Studies (MIIS), as well as universities in Binghamton, Iowa City, Vienna, Surrey, Cologne, and Saarbrücken. Industry trainers were present from Berlitz and Alpnet, along with industry analysts from Equipe Consortium. LISA, the LEIT initiative, and LETRAC (the Institute for Applied Information Sciences in Saarbrücken).

Translation is a Process, Not an Event

LISA's Allison Rowles set the tone for a major facet of the conference by quoting Logos CEO Jens Thomas Lueck, "Translation is a process, not an event"—a concept echoed by LMI's Tracey Feick with "Quality is a journey, not a destination." Whether the discussion was project management, translation, localization, technical writing, or quality assurance, the importance of process and controlling the process dominated the presentations.

Everyone was talking about "process" in the language industry.

Diebold's Corinne Moore described her company's efforts to introduce Controlled English (CE) into the document production stream. "CE is a language system that involves restrictions on lexical items and grammar constructions," Moore explained. "Of course, the goal is to reduce costs, speed up turnaround times, and increase control of the process. CE reduces choices, but it also reduces ambiguity and the chance for error."

Integrated Systems and Return on Investment

On the language-engineering side of the ledger, KSU's Sue Ellen Wright reiterated her earlier (TAMA '98) contention that the industry is clearly moving in the direction of totally integrated systems. Trados's Henri Broekmate underscored this view: "In the future Trados will offer solutions that provide enterprise-wide applications for multilingual information creation and dissemination, integrating logistical and language-engineering applications into a smooth workflow that spans the globe." This position has its counterpart trend in Logos's integrated technology-based translation package, which combines term management, translation

memory (TM), machine translation (MT), and related tools to create a seamless full-service localization environment.

Technological applications are highly touted, but the question arises whether and when the investment involved produces a real pay-off for companies that implement innovative solutions. Logos's Scott Bennett: "Machine translation offers real return on investment—but with a major investment. Machine translation is never plug-and-play. Significant customer support from the vendor is essential to achieve the Return-On-Investment (ROI) potential offered by the system."

ILE's Clove Lynch takes the discussion of ROI a step further: "Tool use in localization is on the rise and projected to keep rising. However, at least one study has shown that while translation tools are expected to produce better quality deliverables, they do not always reduce production costs for suppliers or their clients. This discrepancy must be reconciled, or at least quantified." Lynch reviewed analytical and testing procedures designed to support a system of process control metrics aimed at quantifying ROI values associated with different tools and procedures.

Education and Training

The future of the industry will be in the hands of the next generation of internationalizers and localizers, young people who may not even know the meaning of these terms today. In fact, the variety of usage associated with the terms *globalization* (G11N), *internationalization* (I18N), and *localization* (L10N) has inspired the LISA Education Initiative Taskforce (LEIT) to define the terms for use within their work, although the group is fully aware that the range of concepts covered by the terms is broad and varies from one organization or environment to another.

The language industry isn't even clear on the definition of such key concepts as "globalization," "internationalization," and "localization."

Set in motion in March of this year as part of the LISA 2000 project, LEIT is a consortium of European and American schools training translators and computational linguists (Brigham Young and Kent State Universities, the University of Geneva, the Monterey Institute of International Studies, the Cologne University of Applied Sciences, and the University College of Dublin Localisation Resources Centre). The initial mandate of LEIT has been to survey academic and non-academic programs that offer courseware and training for internationalizers and localizers and to query market players to determine their needs with respect to major job profiles. The results of these surveys are available in the form of user-friendly matrices online at: www.ttt.org/leit. Interested parties are urged to participate in LEIT's ongoing efforts to monitor the training needs of the industry by filling in the questionnaires available at that site. LISA-related materials can also be accessed directly from the LISA Web site at www.lisa.unige.ch/.

Not only do the trainers need constant feedback and guidance from the commercial sector, they also need the support of software vendors to provide the tools required to train the next generation of localization specialists. Reflecting on the

inability of educational institutions to pay for these tools. Monterey's Chris Langewis declares, "We have to convince software vendors of the benefits of providing training programs with the tools they need to prepare students. To have these 'savvy' translators exposed to their products is of great value to the software producer, hence they have an incentive to supply goods under favorable conditions. Otherwise academic programs can't afford to do the job."

A similar conference will take place next year in September at Monterey in the guise of a LISA forum, at which time the intention is to offer a "train the trainers" workshop designed to help bring more skilled trainers on board. In the meantime, on the American scene, Monterey will continue to teach project-management and localization workshops. Kent will launch its courses in project-management and localization in the fall of 1999, drawing heavily on collaboration with industry partners to ensure the validity of approaches taken to solve real-world problems. For further information check http://appling.kent.edu/resources.htm.

Defining Our Terms

Globalization: All activities having to do with the adaptation of a product to the commercial and legal conditions prevailing in a regional market.

Internationalization: The engineering of a product (traditionally software) to enable efficient adaptation of the product to local requirements.

Localization: The adaptation of a product to a target language and culture (locale).

Wish List

Conference participants were asked where they saw the industry heading. Below, a few of their responses.

If you were writing a list for the year 2000 and beyond, what would you wish for the language industry?

A clear definition of who we are, what we do, and why we are needed.
Currently we are ill-defined, misunderstood, and under-appreciated. **Winfield Scott Bennett, Logos Corporation**

Localization shouldn't be a separate translation discipline; the basic principles should be covered in all areas of translation training. **Bert Esselink, Alpnet**

Mainly, the creation and expansion of training programs and schools.
Enlightenment in the executive sector and creation of funding sources for training.
A brand-name awareness that turns the language industry into a "sexy" industry. **Ulrike Irmler, Microsoft**

What do you see as the most significant change or trend now under way in the language industry?

Document-management solutions for integrated authoring/localization.
This harmonizes the until-now disparate factions in global software/product development. **Clove Lynch, ILE**

The rapid rise of groups like LISA and SLIG within the industry that are creating their own list of needs and ways to meet those needs (i.e., tools, personnel, etc.). **Jane Morgan, Morgan Consulting & Training/Monterey Institute of International Studies**

As the range of services diversifies, the range of required employee skill-sets also diversifies—creating new job categories, new work relationships, and new professional identities. **Greg Shreve, Kent State University**