Machine Translation to be Featured in San Diego

by Muriel Vasconcellos, Chairman, ATA Machine Translation Committee

Machine translation, the technology that translators either love to hate or hesitate to love, will be the subject of five different "happenings" at the San Diego site of the 33rd Annual ATA Conference this coming November:

MT Evaluations Workshop--November 2-3 (9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.);

MT Showcase--November 2-4 (Mon/Tues, 10:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m., Wed, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.);

Joint ATA/AMTA Seminar: "Machine Translation for Translators"-- November 4 (9:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m.);

Special Report: "Study of Machine Translation on PCs"--November 5 (1:45-2:30 p.m.);

Panel : "MT in Practice Applications"-- November 6 (1:45 - 5:00 p.m.).

The two-day MT Evaluation Workshop, the first-ever event to be organized by the International Association for Machine Translation (IAMT) and the Association for Machine Translation in the Americas (AMTA), will give MT-doers and MT-watchers, especially translators, a chance to examine and critique the various methods that are being used to take the measure of the many facets of MT. Participants will be coming from all corners of the world.

The issue of MT evaluation is being thrust into the limelight by a series of recent developments--at one extreme, the emergence of fresh new approaches in sophisticated university laboratories, and at the other, the appearance of a spate of lower-priced packages that run on PCs, some of them the subject of extravagant advertising by their vendors. How to separate the wheat from the chaff? The oranges from the apples from the kiwis? Are they to be eaten for breakfast, lunch, or dinner? The Workshop will look at a list of various criteria for the comparison of these widely different translation tools, and it plans to come up with a matrix--in the style of *PC Magazine*--that will enable would-be users to fill in their own smiles and frowns, depending on their particular needs. The registration fees are modest. More information can be obtained from the AMTA Program Committee, fax 202/667-8808.

Running in tandem with the Workshop will be the MT Showcase, an AMTA-sponsored fair of MT exhibits, live demos, and theater-style briefings. Both commercial and laboratory systems will be represented, and the show will break from tradition by opening its doors to the general public for an admission fee of $5.00. It will be open later than usual so that more people will be able to attend.

These events are to be followed by a day-long seminar, "Machine Translation for Translators," sponsored jointly by AMTA and ATA, on Wednesday, November 4. The program will begin with overviews presented by consultant Veronica Lawson and Systran veteran Joann Ryan, of current system offerings and practical settings in which MT is being used by translators. Next on the agenda will be a review, by consultant Christine Miller, of PC packages currently on the market with an outline of criteria for their evaluation. The survey and criteria are the fruit of an ATA-sponsored study. In the afternoon there will be a lively off-the-record session, "The MT Users Speak," in which the users of a variety of MT systems will field questions, share the strategies they have developed, and air their deepest concerns. Registration details are included in the packet recently sent to ATA members and can also be obtained from ATA headquarters.

Finally, the program of the 33rd ATA Conference itself includes two exciting sessions on MT. On Thursday, November 5, there will be a presentation by Christine Miller of her study of MT products available for PCs and criteria specifically for the evaluation of these packages. In addition, a three-hour panel, "Machine Translations in Practical Applications," on the afternoon of Friday, November 6, will feature former presentations by six MT users reporting on a variety of applications in an impressive number of languages.