

Preface

The previous conference in this series (AMTA 2002) took up the theme “From Research to Real Users”, and sought to explore why recent research on data-driven machine translation didn’t seem to be moving to the marketplace. As it turned out, the first commercial products of the data-driven research movement were just over the horizon, and in the intervening two years they have begun to appear in the marketplace. At the same time, rule-based machine translation systems are introducing data-driven techniques into the mix in their products.

Machine translation as a software application has a 50-year history. There are an increasing number of exciting deployments of MT, many of which will be exhibited and discussed at the conference. But the scale of commercial use has never approached the estimates of the latent demand. In light of this, we reversed the question from AMTA 2002, to look at the next step in the path to commercial success for MT. We took user needs as our theme, and explored how or whether market requirements are feeding into research programs. The transition of research discoveries to practical use involves technical questions that are not as sexy as those that have driven the research community and research funding. Important product issues such as system customizability, computing resource requirements, and usability and fitness for particular tasks need to engage the creative energies of all parts of our community, especially research, as we move machine translation from a niche application to a more pervasive language conversion process. These topics were addressed at the conference through the papers contained in these proceedings, and even more specifically through several invited presentations and panels. The commercial translation community weighed in through the invited presentations of Ken Rother, CIO of Bowne Global Solutions, and Jaap van der Meer, a founding partner at Cross Language. Bowne Global Solutions is the largest of the world’s “Big 3” translation services companies. Cross Language is one of a handful of new consulting and services companies formed to help customers select, customize and deploy machine translation. The US Government was represented by Kathy Debolt, Chief of the Army’s Language Technology Office. Panel discussions included a forward-looking dialog between current students of translation and computational linguistics. Human translators as well as current users of machine translation also discussed working with machine translation.

2004 marked 10 years since the first AMTA conference, held in Columbia, Maryland in October 1994. With our sixth biennial conference, we returned to the Washington area. The timing and location of AMTA 2004 were very special to the history of machine translation. The conference was held at Georgetown University, the site of seminal operational experiments in machine translation, beginning in 1954. To mark the 50th anniversary of the realization of automated translation, we included a panel of five of the pioneers from Georgetown (Tony Brown, Christine Montgomery, Peter Toma, Muriel Vasconcellos, and Michael Zarechnak), as well as an overview of the beginnings of MT by John Hutchins.

How are people using MT today? Lots of innovative applications are emerging. A new event at this conference was a half-day Research and Deployment Showcase. The showcase gave attendees an opportunity to see operational systems that incorporate machine translation together with other hardware and software tools to accomplish real-world tasks. The research portion of the showcase offered a preview of the next generation of machine translation in operational prototype systems developed by research groups.

One of the founding goals of AMTA was to bring together users, researchers and developers in an ongoing dialog that gives members of each of these communities a chance to hear and respond to each others' concerns and interests. AMTA 2004 made a special effort to bring users and researchers together with the goal of inspiring and motivating each.

Acknowledgements may seem like obligatory filler to readers removed by space and time from the original event, but no organizer can reflect on the process without a deep sense of gratitude to the team that did most of the real work. AMTA 2004 was informed and realized by the inspirations and volunteer efforts of:

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Additional information about the AMTA, its mission, activities and publications, can be obtained from the association website: www.amtaweb.org, and from AMTA Focalpoint Priscilla Rasmussen, 3 Landmark Center, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301, USA; phone: +1-570-476-8006; fax: +1-570-476-0860; focalpoint@amtaweb.org

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