

Pre-legislative public consultation on Bilingual Services

Evidence from the Language Technologies Unit

The Language Technologies Unit (part of Canolfan Bedwyr, Bangor University) – comments on the National Assembly for Wales draft bilingual services scheme

1. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this document. This is a written response following our oral evidence to the consultation in Colwyn Bay on 26 September 2011. The Commissioner and his staff were invited to visit the Unit to see some of our language resources for themselves in the near future.

2. The Language Technologies Unit undertakes work on the standardisation of Welsh terminology, the production of spellcheck and grammar checking resources, as well as research and training in speech and language resources, including translation technology.

3. The Unit is fully agrees with the principle of bilingualism in the Assembly's operations. We have three brief comments to help achieve this in practice. They relate to:

- The ability of translation technology to cut up to 75% of the translation costs of such a service;
- The importance of drafting documents in Welsh first and translating them into English second, rather than everything being written in English first. The Assembly should set a goal that between 21% and 50% of material begins its journey in Welsh;
- The potential contribution of the Assembly's internal bilingual provision to the Welsh economy and to develop a major translation technology industry.

3.1 Translation technology in cutting costs

This is detailed in our report *Improved translation tools for the Translation Industry in Wales: an Investigation* (2009)¹. We now have an alpha version of an English>Welsh machine translation programme,

¹ <http://www.catcymru.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/PDFGwell%20offer%20technoleg%20cyfieithu%20ar%20gyfer%20y%20Diwydiant%20Cyfieithu%20yng%20Nghymru.pdf>

which is providing encouraging results. Also, the Translation Unit at Bangor University has started using a translation memory and workflow system that was developed internally by us and that provides a specific translation environment for the Welsh language. We have just submitted a collaborative research application in conjunction with 4 Welsh companies under the A4B programme, to develop this programme further. The development of this technology to create machine translation tailored to different subject areas would produce machine translation and other resources of a much higher quality than the existing public machine translation programmes.

We recommend the following:

- Using high-quality machine translation technology for rough translation from Welsh to English so that non-Welsh-speaking staff and Welsh learners understand the content Welsh of text quickly, saving time and money;
- Incorporating the technology into translation memory programmes to provide an initial translation that can be further refined by a human translator to produce polished Welsh text;
- Saving further time and money by introducing pre-editing processes (similar to the one recently developed by the Unit for Techscribe²) to improve the quality of machine translation.

3.2 The production of documents in Welsh first

There are two reasons for recommending that a certain percentage of Assembly documents begin their journey in Welsh. First, having so many documents in the public domain that are translations of English is detrimental to the innate characteristics of the Welsh language. It is inevitable that the original language casts a shadow on the translation and when one language is large and powerful, and the other is weak and a minority language, this imbalance is a means of weakening the minority language further. This issue is not only a linguistic issue—it affects the self-esteem and self-image of Welsh speakers.

The second reason relates to saving money and time. A rough translation from English to Welsh is not acceptable because it will further weaken the status of the language, and it is not needed in order for the reader to understand the rough context, as Welsh speakers usually speak English. On the other hand, imperfect translations into English are acceptable under certain circumstances, and are a way for the reader to understand the message quickly when they do not speak the original language. A policy of writing original text in Welsh and using machine translation for rough translations into English could make significant savings in terms of human translation,

² <http://www.techscribe.co.uk/techw/asd-simplified-technical-english.htm>

and will maintain the standard of written Welsh at the same time.

3.3 The contribution to the Welsh economy

While large multinational companies such as Google and Microsoft provide some support for the Welsh language, they are not going to invest considerable sums of money on developing resources for languages that do not have much commercial value. There is a market for SMEs in Wales, however, to provide software and language resources to support bilingualism. The Assembly and European Union's A4B programme sponsored the SALT (Speech and Language Technologies) Cymru project to promote research in this area in Wales³ and one of the key messages is that bilingualism should be considered not as a financial burden but as an opportunity for universities and industry to build expertise and entrepreneurship in the field, which will lead to economic progress and enable Wales to take advantage of the multilingual and international market, as well as the home market. It is, therefore, important that the Assembly considers the contribution to the Welsh economy in procuring Welsh language software and resources.

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³ <http://www.saltcymru.org/wordpress/>