Intersteno e-news
n. 28 - April, 2008

This newsletter is published under the responsibility of the Board of the International Federation for Information Processing - Intersteno - and sent to all e-mail addresses of persons participating in the work of the members of Intersteno known to the Board. Contributions to the newsletter can be sent using the form on the web site www.intersteno.org. Publication will take place at the discretion of the Board.

In Memoriam Eva Maurer (Hungary)

Tuesday 19th February 2008 was another black day for our INTERSTENO family. At the age of only 56 years our dear colleague and friend Ms. Eva Maurer from Budapest passed away.

I cannot remember any more where and when I met Eva for the first time. I have the feeling that I knew her since the start of my activities in Intersteno. She was always there as a competent, diligent and silent worker for the federation and for other international competitions.

Although the financial costs for participation at an Intersteno congress are high, she always succeeded - especially in later years – in ensuring the participation of a large number of young and successful people from her country.

Fortunately she spoke both German and English, so it was easy to communicate. We talked about the situation in Hungary, about the possibility of organizing a congress or a council meeting in Budapest. A congress would be difficult, but she would be glad to invite representatives to a council meeting to Budapest…

About two years ago Eva disappeared from the Intersteno stage. She preferred to bear her health problems alone and we and her Hungarian colleagues respected this wish. We could only guess what happened. It was not clear to me that she was so seriously ill until we received the message last February that she passed away, which shocked our community.

Besides the typical Hungarian presents that she always generously gave, we will remember Eva – together with Judita – as a real friend, always giving the best of herself, trying to help and understand others in an international context.

To her family we offer our deepest condolences. In our memory Eva will always be with us!

Danny Devriendt

Langtech 2008 - Reporting and Language Translation.

NCRA has long been the national group representing the United States within Intersteno federation. As a result of deepening relationships with a number of the other national groups within Intersteno, this winter I was invited to present a session at the LangTech 2008 conference in Rome.

This is the third such pan-European conference on "speech capture." The conference has a well earned reputation for convening the world's experts in this area. But it struck me that they had been rather too exclusively focused on the technology of speech-to-text, largely ignoring the human element. Intersteno's involvement in the programme gave me the opportunity to deliver an important message to these scientific and thought leaders: the adequacy and utility of any technology has to be judged based on how well the text stream that is produced actually accomplishes the function it is intended to perform. Is the text accurate enough and produced fast enough to be usable in the courtroom, the deposition setting or the captioniong suite? This isn't a question of technology or people. It is a question of the combination of highly skilled people and the right technology. And only the highly skilled, stenographic realtime reporter can ensure the speed and accuracy needed to drive the more sophisticated functions that many courts, governments, and consumers depend upon.

One of the more thought-provoking sessions at the conference, however, had nothing to do with reporting. It was an address by Karl-Johan Lönnroth, Director General for Translation for the European Union.

There has been an exponential growth in both the volume and complexity of the regulatory, legislative and governmental material that must be translated within the EU. At the same time, the number of languages accepted as official languages has exploded, from four in 1958 to nearly 30 today.

Given this increase in demand for translations and declining availability of translation resources (skilled translators and the money to pay for them), the EU has had to ration available resources and increase productivity. For the EU, that has meant implementing software-only translation solutions for high volume applications with low quality requirements and using the more sophisticated people-plus-technology solutions only for the most important functions with the lowest tolerance for error.

At the same time, the service has expanded to include much more than the specific skill of translating words from one language into another. EU translation services have also become involved in meeting the increasingly sophisticated demands for document and record production, work flow management, document management (in multi-media and formats) and Web content management.

This in no way eliminates or reduces the need for skill in basic translation. It expands upon it. EU translators need to understand their role and contribute in a meaningful way to a much more complex, technological endeavour.

The parallels with the world of reporting are obvious. The skill needed to accurately capture the record is absolutely essential, but by itself may be insufficient. Reporters must become an integral part of the larger system within which transcription creation is just a part.

Mark Golden

The reporter's session at Langtech Conference, was organized by Intersteno with the support of Accademia Aliprandi, and in addition to Mark Golden, Mr. Fausto Ramondelli of the Italian Senate and Mr. Thierry Spriet of the University of Avignone (France) contributed speeches. You can view their presentations and read the texts at www.intersteno.org – IPRS – Langtech2008.

On the website of Langtech 2008 (www.langtech.it – Technical programme) you will find presentations, speeches and videos of almost all speakers at this event.

The following reports are, in my opinion, specifically important for Intersteno. I suggest that you also look at their presentations (in pdf format).

Renato De Mori – Using frames in spoken language understanding

Herve Bourlard and Steve Renals - Recognition and Understanding of Meetings - Overview of the European AMI and AMIDA projects

Nicoletta Calzolari - New European Infrastructural and Networking Initiatives

Khalid Choukri - Language technology evaluation in Europe - Key achievements and the need for an infrastructure

Josep Bonet - Machine translation in the European Commission

Christian F. Hempelmann, Victor Raskin - Semantic Search: Content vs. Formalism

Enrico Motta - Language Technologies and the Semantic Web: An Essential Relationship.

Herve Bourlard and Steve Renals- Recognition and Understanding of Meetings (Overview of the European AMI and AMIDA projects)

Gian Paolo Trivulzio

CONGRESS IN BEIJING AUGUST 2009

As decided during the Board meeting in Sprimont on January this year, Danny Devriendt, Georgette Sante and Gian Paolo Trivulzio will be in Beijing from 7th to 10th of June, to meet the Chinese committee in in order to plan and coordinate the activities for the next Congress.

A tentative plan of this event is available at www.intersteno.org - Beijing 2009. Additional updated information will be released with the May issue of this newsletter.

OneLaptop per Child - A dream turned into reality.

In 2005, Professor Nicholas Negroponte's idea of distributing $100 laptops to poor children captured the world's imagination. Today, Negroponte's One Laptop Per Child foundation of Cambridge has begun distributing hundreds of thousands of its laptops around the world.

As at March 2009, **500.000 Laptops have been committed, 250.000 have been manufactured** and half of those have arrived in Uruguay, Peru, Mexico, Ghana,Nepal, Afghanistan, Cambodia.

Nicholas Negroponte strongly believes in the advancement of children's education in impoverished nations through computers.

On 8th March 2009, he entered into an agreement with the *Comune* of Florence (Italy) to support his newest program **Give one Get One.** In the twinning system wealthier European cities will twin with underdeveloped cities from the South of the world. Florence will provide 10,000 laptops to three African cities.

The way the programme works is that **for any laptop bought by a Florentine student for 220 Euro, another laptop will be sent to an African child.** The laptops will be supplied to students as well as schools, paediatric hospitals, and libraries**.**

The laptop gives learners opportunities they have not had before. Tools such as a Web browser, rich media player, and e-book reader bring into reach domains of knowledge that are otherwise difficult or impossible for children to access.

The laptop has a user interface that graphically embraces the spirit of the network. It is all about community and collaboration—working and playing together to learn, create and communicate.

There are three ways to connect to the Internet:

- wireless access point (WiFi hotspot);
- "School Server" mesh network; or
- "simple" mesh network, which lets students collaborate directly with other XOs.

At the web site of this project **(http://www.laptop.org/)** you can find additional info in several languages. For a quick reference we reproduce here the main features of this special laptop which is named XO.

GENERAL HARDWARE

Design factor was a priority from the start: the laptop could not be big, heavy, fragile, ugly, dangerous, or dull. XO is about the size of a textbook and lighter than a lunchbox. Thanks to its flexible design and "transformer" hinge, the laptop easily assumes any of several configurations: standard laptop use, e-book reading, and gaming.

The laptop has rounded edges. The integrated handle is kid-sized, as is the sealed, rubber-membrane keyboard. The novel, dual-mode, extra-wide touchpad supports pointing, as well as drawing and writing.

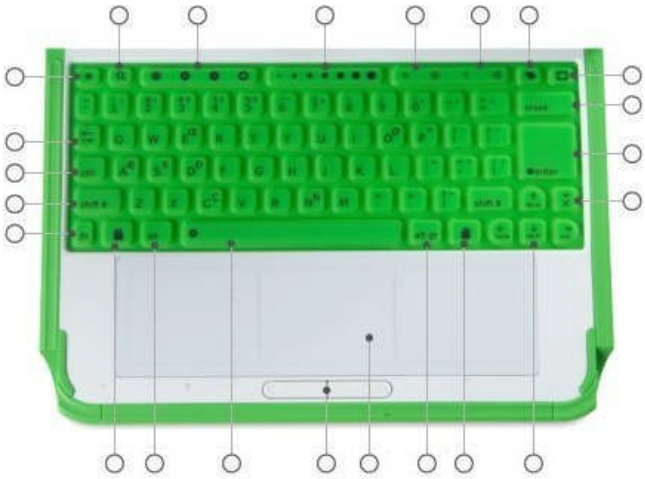
XO is fully compliant with the European Union's RoHS Directive. It contains no hazardous materials. Its LiFePO4 or NiMH batteries contain no toxic heavy metals, plus it features enhanced battery management for an extended recharge-cycle lifetime. It will also tolerate alternate power-charging sources, such as car batteries.

In addition — for use at home and where power is not available — the XO can be solar or foot powered. It will come with at least two of three options: a crank, a pedal, or a pull-cord. It is also possible that children could have a second battery for group charging at school while they are using their laptop in class.

Experience shows that laptop components most likely to fail are the hard drive and internal connectors. Therefore, XO has no hard drive to crash and only two internal cables. For added robustness, the machine's plastic walls are 2mm thick, as opposed to the standard 1.3mm. Its mesh network antennas, which far outperform the typical laptop, double as external covers for the USB ports, which are protected internally as well. The display is also cushioned by internal "bumpers."

The estimated product lifetime is at least five years. To help ensure such durability, the machines are being subjected to factory testing to destruction, as well as in situ field testing by children.

The keyboard and touchpad



The keyboard and touchpad—which are dust and water resistant—have some special keys for additional functionality. The keyboard is localized for each country to the primary languages of that country.

SOFTWARE

Components from Red Hat's Fedora Core 6 version of the Linux operating system.

Five programming environments on the laptop: (1) **Python**, from which user interface and activity models are built; (2) **Javascript** for browser-based scripting; (3) **Csound**, a programmable music and audio environment; (4) **Squeak**, a version of Smalltalk embedded into a media-rich authoring environment; and (5) **Logo**. Some support for Java and Flash is also provided.

Applications will include a **web browser** built on Xulrunner, the run-time environment used by the Firefox browser; a simple document viewer based upon Evince; the **AbiWord wordprocessor**, an **RSS reader**, **an email client, chat client, VOIP client; a journal; a multimedia authoring** and playback environment; a **music composition toolkit, graphics**

toolkits, games, a shell, and a debugger.

THE ITALIAN WAY OF COURT REPORTING

Part 2 (and last)

Part I of this report was released in e-news 27. If you have not kept it, you can access it at www.intersteno.org - enews - e-news in pdf format.

The most important impact on court reporting in Italy was the installation of a centralized server which can be accessed via the Internet by all involved entities (Courts – reporting companies – Ministries etc.) With this centralized server (portal) a full management of the entire work flow is done.

This new approach began on 16th December 2006, with the signing of an agreement between the Ministry and the Consortium which won the bid. This consortium was involved within a very short period (17th December was the deadline) for the installation of software modules and new procedures impacting all parts of this process: courts and their secretarial offices (named Cancelleria = Chancellery in Italian), firms and professional reporters providing a service to the Court – ITC administration – education and support as well as general accounting administration.

I recap shortly herewith the work flow as it is now:

1 – The Cancelleria of each court prepares a monthly planning of the trials and inserts this plan via Internet into a specific database of the central server (portal) of the organisation. The judge, according to the specific nature of each trial, indicates whether stenotype reporting or transcript is required. Reports done with stenotype must be **'delivered' the** following day, while transcriptions of digital audio recording are delivered within 3 days.

2 – This plan of activity is automatically sent to the relevant firm or professional to which the reporting for the court has been assigned.

3 – The firms (or the professional) plan the resources needed according to the technology to be used and according to the required service in order that the report is prepared within the period mentioned in point 1.

4 – When the report is completed, it is **'delivered'** by uploading the document into a specific area of the portal. The clerk of the court or the judge himself can connect to the portal and read or print the report.

As can be easily understood by the description above, many activities are involved in managing this process and many specific aspects must be strictly observed in order to get the expected results in due time.

Just as an example: relating to point 1, changes can occur and must be immediately disseminated and managed. This differs from the previous arrangements when a telephone call would be made to the reporting company. Moreover, some contingency may occur in which a direct connection from the court to the reporting company takes place. Even so, all information must also be entered on the server (by the court chancellery) so that the report can be accepted later on.

A few courts are not yet equipped with Internet connection, so the planning is sent via fax to a central office, which enters the relevant info on to the server.

Each courtroom, as explained in the first part of this article, is equipped with digital audio recording, entirely manufactured in Italy according to the specifications supplied by the Ministry.

In short there are 7 recording channels, to each of them a microphone is connected and specifically used by one of the relevant parties attending the trial (judge, prosecutor, defendant, defender (2 channels), witness and one as a reserve for special needs).

Recording cannot be started if the basic information such as the unique number of the trial, is not entered.

During recording it is possible to listen to a previous part of the recording without interrupting the recording process. Markers can be entered for a quick reference during the transcription process, as well as additional information which could help in preparing or checking the report.

The person attending the recording and related activities such as checking the quality of the recording and the proper use of the microphones by the relevant parties, is on duty on behalf of the reporting company. At the end of each trial, a CD Rom is burned which is used both for transcription. Another is kept in the court for archival purposes.

Usually if a stenotypist attends the trial, she/he takes also care of the digital recording.

The technologies used for preparing reports are stenotype and transcription with keyboard. In the courtroom at the moment no speech recordist is on duty. A few persons are using speech recognition for transcribing digital sound recordings.

In order to have reports with consistent layout and to have the assurance that all relevant information for retrieving the document is correctly inserted, a software named '**Felixmedia**' must be used by all reporters during the production of the final report.

This software is mainly based on a traditional word processor, integrated with digital player features which permit the checking of steno notes or transcription from the CD Rom. A foot pedal can be connected.

When the reporter finishes the report for a specific trial, she/he can immediately upload the document on the portal. The document is also automatically saved in .pdf format, and in this last format it is the official report.

From that point the authorized persons can read it anywhere from a computer connected to Internet.

Video recorders are installed in the main courtrooms (**200 out of a total of 1700**), parallel to audio recording. Even if video recording is being used, the reports must be done using stenotype or keyboarding. During recent years audio conferencing has been used for remote examinations in order to avoid the transfer of people from jails to the courts.

According to the information I have, it seems to be an unique integrated system of court reporting, and I will be glad to have information on similar procedures, which could be released in the next issues of our newsletter.

After one year of activity it will soon be possible to make a judgment of the merits, or disadvantages, of this new way of reporting.

In 2007 the total number of pages produced (each standard page contains 1500 characters) was over 5.5 million. About 40% of the pages were produced with stenotype, the remaining quantity with transcription.

The quality of this production is evaluated within several parameters (such as delivery time,

accuracy of the written text etc.). Such evaluation confirms that the quality is mainly the same as the material produced prior to the introduction of this new system. This can be considered a positive factor since the huge changes in the working method (which involved a large number of people all over Italy) could have brought about a negative impact on quality.

The big investments (in hardware, software and education) made by the consortium and by the reporting firms in setting up the whole integrated process for producing reports, are negatively impacting the profitability of these businesses. We have to recall that at present in Italy, as well as other countries, the economic situation is not so good and the devaluation of money is constantly increasing. This could be a critical factor in the near future. There is a risk that not all firms will be able to operate profitably, with a related impact on the labour force. This critical factor is also strictly connected with the cheap price paid by the Ministry for this activity, which must be surely reconsidered within short time.

Gian Paolo Trivulzio

Additional information (in Italian) can be seen at the following links:
Consorzio Astrea - http://www.consorzioastrea.it/consorzio.htm
Fenir (the federation of the Italian reporting companies) - http://www.fenir.it/

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www.intersteno.ru

A new web site in Russian and English has been prepared and is now published by our colleagues in Moscow. It is very good and contains a lot of information and links dealing with Intersteno and its activities. We send warm congratulations to GZOS and the other participants of this project, and an invitation to everybody to go to visit it.

What's new

The information herewith is based upon reliable information gathered from various sources, but it is not intended to be regarded as advertising of products, services or producers.

Training through webinars! For years, the only way to receive training was in a live environments which required lots of added expense for those being trained (flights, hotel, rental cars, etc) on top of paying for training fees. But now, there is a more convenient and less costly way to learn: **Webinars** (web + seminars). These webinars contain PowerPoint presentations, video, audience Q&A, polling, instant messaging (IM) between presenters and attendees.

Bettye Keyes, who is well known to the attendees of Intersteno Congress in Prague, is now offering this opportunity for English-speakers with her Realtime University. You can see it at http://www.bettyekeyes.com/ibootcamp/.

The **TTS (Text to speech technology)** reads a text and speaks it with a perfect intonation.

Loquendo
VOCAL TECHNOLOGY AND SERVICES

Loquendo, leading speech technology provider worldwide, released in March 2008 an upgraded version of Annika, Loquendo's female Swedish voice. Annika will be joined by a male Swedish voice in the summer, followed by the release of the Finnish and Danish languages towards the end of 2008.

Currently available languages include: U.S. and U.K. English, Swedish, German, Dutch, French, American Spanish, Mexican, Chilean and Argentinian Spanish, Castilian, Catalan, Valencian, Galician, Brazilian, Portuguese, Italian, Esperanto, Greek, Mandarin Chinese, Turkish, Canadian French and Polish in both male and female voices.

You can test and have fun with this technology visiting
www.http://www.loquendo.com/en/demos/demo_tts.htm

Flyscribe

The dream of **automatic transcription of a speech** is now becoming reality.

This reality was demonstrated for the Italian language during Loquendo 2008

The transcription service provided by **Pervoice** (an Italian company based in Trento) is a Web 2.0 application which allows any kind of user to obtain a transcribed text from an audio file. The technology is based on the speech engine developed by FBK/IRST of Trento (Ing. **Gianni Lazzari** also well known for his presentations during our Congresses). This engine is independent of the speaker and is able to handle continuous as well as spontaneous speech. Transcriptions are offered near-real time, and this transcription is, of course, a draft, as will be understood by stenographers, stenotypists and speech writers who take down a speech. This service is at the moment available only for the Italian language, but tests are undergoing also for English. Additional information at www.flyscribe.it

This new way of producing reports does not overlook the human abilities needed for having a final, readable report. I share the opinion of Mark Golden at the end of his report on Langtech 2008 when he said: *Reporters must become an integral part of the larger system within which transcription creation is just a part. (gpt)*

"Note taking is a skill".

This involves understanding of what you are doing. Effective note taking takes practice, which involves effort.

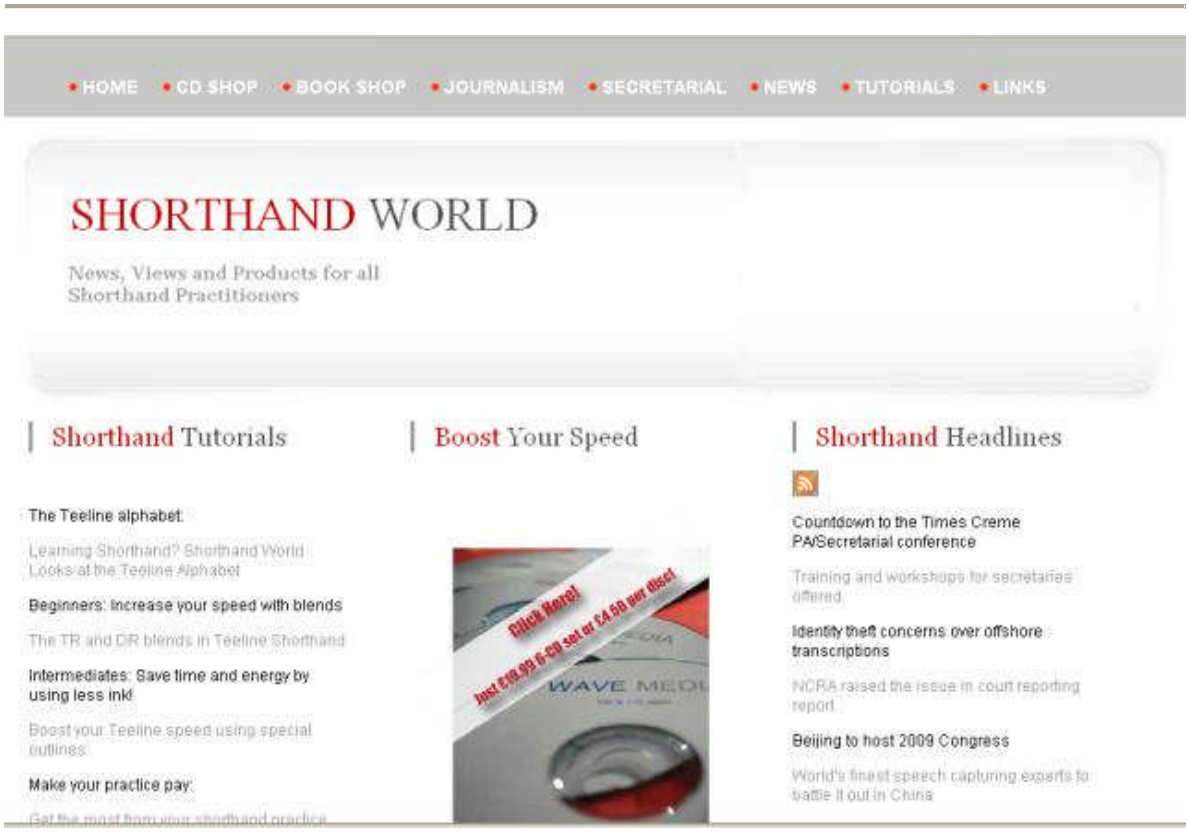
Note taking is difficult because:

1. *Spoken language is more complex than written language;*
2. *Speaker's meaning is not immediately apparent;*
3. *Immediate feedback seldom occurs;*
4. *Spoken language is quick and does not 'exist' for long (this makes analysis difficult).*

Effective note taking requires active listening on the part of the note taker.. In order to be able to provide a written record for review the listener must condense and rephrase in a way which aids understanding.

Note taking is about listening, filtering and instant analysis - but mainly about listening. Some people find it extraordinarily difficult to split their attention between a discussion and taking notes.

A lot of Intersteno people will agree with the above mentioned sentences. They are taken from the presentation of courses offered by the Notuleercentrum of Nederland. The courses aim to teach how to take notes (in Dutch and English) with various tools: shorthand, keyboarding, mind mapping and for different working environements (secretarial, professionals). These courses take place in several cities throughout the year. Visit www.notuleren.nl for additional info.



We invite you to visit this very interesting website - www.http://www.shorthandworld.co.uk - full of tips, training support and news about shorthand. The Congress in Beijing is also announced. A link to youtube about the Intersteno Congress in Prague in 1959 is also provided.

Many thanks to Peter Walker for the revision of these texts.
