Among the many interesting issues dealt with at the 44th Intersteno Congress, some, in my opinion, represent the sign that this meeting has been a real turning point for reporting activity.

First of all, we see a rapid merging of different technologies which so far have been conceived as one against another. Nowadays shorthand machine and speech recognition are considered simply as tools of an intellectual activity (reporting) at the disposal of the professional (reporter), who may choose to use that which is more fit for his/her own need/skill/preferences or for the environment where he/she is working.

From the technical point of view, we understand that a further step toward the global digitalization has pushed producers to move all assisted transcription programs to the computer, so ensuring the maximum of flexibility: thus, shorthand machines need no longer include "inside" memories, or batteries or transcription programs.

The international competitions held in Rome (about 300 concurrents from all over the world) have demonstrated once again how important are human abilities and skills for the success and effectiveness of any technology. One of the best examples that we could consider in this sense is the first speech recognition competition, which took place in Rome, where Italian and American voice reporters obtained results fully compatible with those of hand and machine shorthand writers. The voice technology has reached nowadays its highest maturity level: today (much more than yesterday) those programs can be effectively used in reporting activity, as in courts or parliaments. Many professionals are adopting in their activity this new technology, and, along with increasing practicing, the quality of the response is bettering even more.

In Italy some important institutions are taking advantage of the speech recognition technology. Italian parliamentary reporters, in addition to the traditional stenographic techniques, are largely using also speech recognition software for transcribing audio files (House of Deputies) or machine shorthand notes (Senate). In this last example (Senate), speech recognition has been used since four years ago also for editing the summary report. The same technology is being used also in other local and regional assemblies.

Following the results obtained by the long-aged experience of Italian reporters (Senate is following IBM Via Voice from the earliest releases in 1995), other countries are evaluating how useful and effective using speech recognition software can be for reporting activities, especially from the point of view of training young reporters. This is the case of Germany, Spain, Holland, and England, only to cite a few.

Many enhancements are still to come. The practice tells us that graphic languages (those which are pronounced as they are written, such as Italian and Spanish) produce better responses compared with others (French, English), but further improvements are expected along with the growth of processors and RAM memory power.

Particularly interesting are some studies which are proceeding in Italy on the Automatic Treatment of Language (TAL), aimed to enable computers to recognize not words, but sentences, thanks to the help of so-called "artificial intelligence," which is no more than the capability of a computer to understand the logic of using certain words in a specific language. The research for enhancing an automatic comprehension of the spoken and written language, which is crucial for the automatic treatment of artistic and cultural wealth in our country, can be very useful for supporting the statistic engine of shorthand and speech recognition programs and represents, in my opinion, the new frontier for a faster and more accurate response.

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