

Mariposa is in the common room with Henry, John, Caroline Appleby, Caroline Ruralby, Peter.

“Do you remember the discussion that we had when I used the example that the sentence ‘It is frosty.’ is not encoded?” asks Mariposa.

Some of the others each say ‘Yes’.

“Well you know how one can make a cake from basic ingredients, or buy a ready baked cake, but you can also get cake mixes, well, I am wondering if as well as translation and localizable sentences if we could also have some sort of ‘mixes’ so that one could have something like ‘The weather is’ and then one follows it with an adjective of one’s choice expressed as an Esperanto word preceded by an exclamation mark to which it follows without a space. So if ‘The weather is’ were encoded as 106 then the way to express ‘The weather is frosty would be like this.”

Mariposa gets a pen and paper and writes.

!106 !frosta

“That is an interesting idea”, opines Henry.

“The zero as the second digit indicates a sentence that needs a parameter”, adds Mariposa.

“Would the specification state what type of parameter is need for a particular sentence - for example, adjective or adverb or whatever?”, asks John.

“Quite probably,” says Mariposa, “to keep it as straightforward as possible - but I ask your opinions please.”

“An existing system would pass the ‘!frosta’ through as a literal - so a graceful fallback” adds Caroline Appleby.

“Specifying the parameter as an adjective or an adverb could be straightforward, but for a noun or a verb it could possibly be more complicated”, opines John.

“We could look into that,” adds Henry, “but I do like the basic idea.”

“I suppose that a cascading menu input system could prompt for the type of parameter needed”, adds Caroline Appleby.

A pause.

Henry speaks. “The final digit of the code number could indicate the parameter type, no matter the length of the code number.

“If it is a ‘9’ then that could use the previous digit too so as to allow a larger number of types - but then the code number would need to be more than three digits, probably five digits at least.”

“The thing is, as I understand it,” says Caroline, “is that in some inflected languages the case of the noun used with a particular preposition is a feature of that language, so the

notes for the human translators setting up the system for a particular language would need to specify the preposition.”

“Well, that could be included”, says John.

Caroline Appleby adds “Could there sometimes be two parameters with the first one being a preposition, then the partial sentence need not force the use of a particular preposition?”

“That could make decoding more complicated”, says John.

A pause.

Henry speaks. “So, even with just a fixed preposition there would need to be an automated way to specify the preposition. I would be against changing the format of the sentence.dat file, so for partial sentences with a preposition we might need a second file to consult. ... I suppose it could be done, ... theoretically possible ... but would it mean the whole system losing its basic simplicity?”

“Another issue, possibly a greater issue, is that the whole system would lose its quality of provenance of every localization being traceable back to a human translator.”

John is telling Edith about Mariposa’s idea.

“So,” says Edith, “at present we do not know if this is some major breakthrough or, basically, just like a piece of recreational mathematics.”

“I suppose so”, says John.

“Also, I share Henry’s concerns about quality of provenance of localization - for example, although Mariposa’s suggested example is fine, suppose that some people start sending things like ‘The weather is pineapple.’, it could reflect badly on the whole system. Implementing the whole idea could also be a big problem administratively”, adds Edith.

“How so?”

“Mariposa is not an employee here ... that in itself is not the main problem though, the problem is that she is employed by another organization, a commercial organization. If the idea were internal I would consider going for early publication so that if it is a breakthrough then nobody else could try to patent it if they had the same idea - though maybe the quality of provenance issue would make me hesitate. But it is Mariposa who thought of it, ... if we publish it then we would need her permission and I am not going to ask her as that could put her in a difficult position - her bosses at Enormous Telephones might say she should have told them of her idea and not told us. They are paying her salary and hotel costs.”

“So what to do?”

“Well, it is difficult to know what to do. For the moment do nothing. Don’t mention my concerns to Mariposa ... nor to the others.”

“What if they start working away at it?”

“Well just let them. Please keep me informed. Hopefully the issue will solve itself in some way.”

“What if Mariposa tells her bosses?”

“Well we should neither encourage her to do that nor discourage her from doing that. If she does and they try to patent the idea then we would need to decide what, if anything, to do then. But I am not a lawyer, I don't know if it would be patentable or whether a patent would be granted. It is an awkward situation all round.”

“Are you against the idea?” asks John.

“Well, I don't like to think of myself as being someone who resists progress, so not against the idea as such - look, let whoever is interested get on with looking at the idea, but a few constraints - try to persuade them not to use the centre zero code suggestion that Mariposa made, it would mean codes mixed in with the localizable sentences that we have at present and cause confusion, suggest to them using exclamation mark nine nine three and three extra digits, but not zero zero zero that gives them nine hundred and ninety-nine codes for them to use for experiments and try to emphasise that they are not to describe them using any term with the word 'localizable' in it, certainly not 'localizable phrases' ask them to use 'augmentable phrases' please say that that is my specific request please.”

“Right.”

“And try to make sure that they do not spend too much time on it as there is other work to do, but allow them some time every day if they want it, but if they lose interest, just let it drift away, I would rather not have to decide what to do as it is Mariposa's idea and she is employed by another organization and it could be awkward all round.”