Fujitsu showed the system on a Unix workstation with X-Windows while online to Nikkei Telecom’s news service. News stories were downloaded and translated.

Unfortunately, the brave performance left much to be desired. The system crunched out a lot of funny English and was greeted with guffaws from onlookers, especially those working in the natural language processing field. Among them was Houghton Mifflin’s Mary Ellen Hoke, who commented: “Atlas is one of the blest and one of the worst machine translators ever. The system is rigid.”

Of course, good translation is probably not the point. The act that Atlas was translating financial news is a good indication of its real purpose—providing enough insight into the source text to extract sufficient information to make decisions—even those decisions also include getting a good translation.

Atlas’s eventual aim is to take long technical and scientific texts in Japanese script—Kanji, Katakana, and Hiragana—and translate them into English as well as vice versa. Layout settings will be kept intact in the translation.

Once on the market, Atlas software will cost around US$15,000. “And,” Obst said, “the software will probably be available for the PC soon.”

Fujitsu Deutschland GmbH, Rosenheimer Str. 145, D-8000 München 80, FRG. Tel: (49) 89 4130 10

[Language Technology 13, May-June 1989]