

TRANSNATIONAL DIGITAL GOVERNMENT
(TDG)
TECHNICAL PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS MEETING

University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida
February 21 – 2003

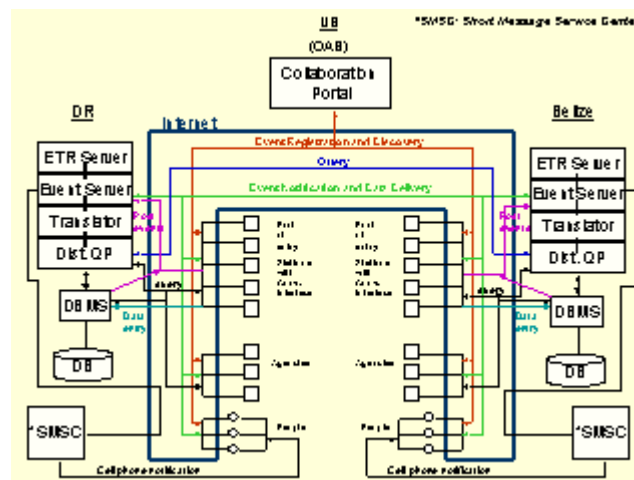
BELIZE REPORT

Written by
Charles McSweeney

Introduction

This meeting was held in Larsen Hall (UF) and was chaired by Dr. Jose Fortes Principal Investigator in the Transnational Digital Government Research Project. All the technical participants were in attendance. Five students who are presently working with various investigators in the project, also participated in the meeting. Belize was represented by **Charles McSweeney**, Lecturer at the University of Belize and Chairman of the National Observatory on Drugs. The Dominican Republic was represented by **Jose Luis Ventura**, Professor at the Pontificia Universidad Catolica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM).

Dr. Fortes began the meeting by welcoming participants and expressing his gratitude that all the participants could be present as it is difficult to get everyone assembled for a meeting. Self-introductions followed and the meeting proper began with a brief overview of the system that is being created (diagram shown below). Individual investigators then gave presentations of the work they have been doing so far.



Dr. Stanley Su

Dr. Su and his students have developed a first prototype of the database using the information he has received from the Dominican Republic and Belize. The initial query form shows fields that represent an amalgamation of fields identified on the immigration forms supplied to Dr. Su. On the query form a user can choose the country whose information is to be queried and a customized listing of data fields. The form allows for a number of fields to be chosen and the criteria for choice to be narrowed down so that the information solicited can be refined as much as the user wishes.

A separate component of the system allows for subscribers (eg. immigration officers) to be notified of suspicious individuals (travelers on the department's watch-list), attempting to pass through border points. This component records the traveler's information if the traveler is allowed to pass through the border point.

A vibrant discussion ensued about the functionality of the query possibilities of the form presented and the data that the form uses. Clarifications were sought as to whom was being notified by the event triggers and the underlying functionality of the query criteria being used. A suggestion was made that information be collected on the traveler regardless of the decision made after a trigger notification (record of suspicion) is received.

The work accomplished so far on the database is quite encouraging.

Dr. Su requested some clarification on the information that was submitted by Belize as to the number of questions presented by the immigration office and the method of storage. Belize uses two separate forms to collect information for arrivals and departures. This suggests that Belize might wish to accommodate information on arrival and departure in two separate tables. The Dominican Republic only uses one form to collect information on arrival and departure and as a result only one table is being formed for data collection. It was agreed between Dr. Su and Mr. McSweeney that the data collection for Belize be done in one table for both arrival and departure with a few fields added. It was also agreed that some of the information that is being collected on the Belize form are not pertinent to the immigration process. Those questions deal with tourism interests. The database will house a separate table linked via the unique passport number to record this information.

Dr. Wayne Ward

Dr Ward presented on the work being done on the speech component of the system. The software demonstrated takes an individual through an entire procedure to make an airline reservation and allows for verbal interaction between the user and the system until what results is an arrangement favorable to the user. Animations were also demonstrated using a children's book reading and comprehension session. The system being built will allow for data to be passed to the database and a query to be generated based on the dialogue between the user and the machine.

Dr. Ward asked that the delegates from Belize and the Dominican Republic supply him with sample questions that might be asked by immigration officers while attempting to validate information supplied by the traveler on the official forms. This along with information provided as comments on the forms will be used to give the dialogue team a bed of test “data” to use in their preparation of speech component.

Dr. Jaime Carbonell

This presentation focused on the level of accuracy that is possible with language translation. Dr. Carbonell explained the process that is used in achieving the best possible translation when moving from one language to another. He also indicated the possible problems and challenges that are faced in identifying a close to exact translation when there is no knowledge base for the terminology encountered in the text to be translated. A demonstration was provided using text from documents that used “formal” language constructions. A Spanish-to-English translation was compared with an English-to-Spanish translation. The results were quite interesting. It drove home the need for a strong dictionary of terms and phrases (connected tot his project) that can be used as a base for translation. It is obvious that the test countries (Belize and Dominican Republic) will have to play a key role in the development of this dictionary.

Dr. Carbonell also indicated his interest in seeing the list of questions that Belize and the Dominican Republic will be sending to the speech team so his team can work on translation.

Dr. Don Townsley

Time did not permit for a full presentation form the Networking team but Dr. Townsley did indicate that he proposed a distributed system and that progress was being made in that direction.

Overall

The major reason for Dr. Townsley not being able to present (and not needing to) was because this meeting was full of questions and dialogue. This, in my mind, was a mark of success in itself. Much of the information was supplied as people asked questions of each other and made suggestions as to improvements that can be made. While the representatives from outside the US did not make formal presentations, they were actively involved in the discussions and were invited to ask as many questions as were needed to make understanding the project as clear as possible.

Another very important change was the addition of Dr. Annie Anton to the tea of researchers. Dr. Anton is a Computer Scientist who has done a lot of work with the social effects of Computer Science. Her addition to the team will help in addressing concerns as to the manner in which this research will be implemented and the

considerations the team needs to make as we propose new and/or modified approaches current practices.

At the end of the meeting sessions, Dr. Fortes took the time to show participants the machinery that had been installed at the University of Florida as a result of the project. Needless to say it is impressive.

Our day ended with a very delightful meal and social at the Fortes' beautiful home in Gainesville.

Follow-Up

The following has been requested of the delegates from Belize and the Dominican Republic:

1. a sample of questions that immigration officials might use to validate the information provided on the official forms
2. a sample of commentary that officials might record on individuals they interview as they pass through border points
3. a list of policies used in determining treatment of travelers from different countries (eg Guatemalans as opposed to Mexicans, Puerto Ricans as opposed to Haitians)
4. a sensitization of local bodies to the progress that has been made and the desire of the research team to get their feedback as soon as the first prototype is installed
5. the establishment of a calendar of events for the local arm of the project
6. a plan for the next meeting to be held in Belize (one delegate is in favor of San Pedro, Ambergris Caye)

Submitted by

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February 25, 2003

Copies to

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Mrs. Gennoveva Marin, Chief Forensic Analyst – GOB

Mrs. Diana Noble, Forensic Analyst - GOB

Miss Sharon Sanchez, Chief Pharmacist – GOB

Mrs. Sharon Frazer, Magistrate - GOB

Mr. Gareth Murillo, Senior Immigration Officer – GOB

Mr. Peter Parchue, Director, Immigration and Nationality Department – GOB

Ms. Melanie Quigley, Foreign Affairs Officer - GOB

Dr. Jose Fortes, Principal Investigator - TDG Project

Mr. Jose Luis Ventura, Professor - PUCMM