

Globalink and MicroTac tie the Knot

More people are buying translation packages these days than you might think.

Globalink has announced its intention to acquire MicroTac, the developer of the popular Language Assistant line of translation packages. The move consolidates Globalink as the largest supplier of translation software in the world at the moment. With a turnover of US\$6.3 million last year, Globalink has proven successful in marketing translation software to the general business and institutional market. The company offers two product lines, Power Translator and Power Translator Professional, both of which broadly target this market. MicroTac's Language Assistant line, which is aimed squarely at the mass consumer market, will complement the Globalink lineup nicely. The recent Windows versions of MicroTac's software have been a great success, with some 65,000 copies sold since their release last fall. In June, MicroTac finally launched its long-awaited Macintosh versions.

Founded in 1988, Globalink went "public" last year, which indicates, as did the initial public offering of InfoSoft earlier this year, that analysts and potential investors are willing to take a serious look at language technology these days. Globalink has not pursued the development of a sophisticated linguistic technology but rather puts its resources into broadening its offerings in terms of product lines, operating platforms and language pairs, and into building up an international marketing presence. The company currently offers English-German, English-French, English-Spanish, and, as of July, English-Chinese. The company offers versions for DOS, Windows, Unix, Macintosh, and OS/2. Moving further down-market, Globalink also plans to introduce shortly a US\$299 palm-top translation unit for English-Spanish and English-French called the Personal Translator.

In June, Globalink also announced a new on-line MT service, called MTS. Armed with a credit card, any Internet user can open an MTS account at Globalink and send texts via email for translation. The company has set up separate email addresses for the six language pairs for which the service is available (no Russian or Chinese yet), and registered users can specify subject-specific dictionaries in the subject line of the message. The text is automatically translated by the Globalink system and returned to the sender within twenty-four hours. The cost of this service is US\$0.05 per word, with a US\$5.00 minimum per message file. For what it's worth, this price is comparable with what Systran charges for its similar on-line service, Systran Express. Whether the concept will take off remains to be seen. One limitation with the Globalink service is the lack of user-dictionaries, meaning users with lots of context-specific terminology may find themselves constantly making the same post-editing changes. If such customers nonetheless acquire a taste for MT this problem might induce them to install a system of their own, meaning at the very least the service could be a useful marketing tool, as Fujitsu discovered when it put Atlas on-line on NiftyServe in Japan several years ago.

For MicroTac, Globalink's international distribution network made it a particularly attractive partner. As Michael Tacosky, the company's founder and director, explains, all the available resources within his company had gone into developing Windows and Macintosh versions of its product line, and the time was right for the 24-strong MicroTac to find a strong partner to help fuel its further growth. In the meanwhile, new channels for the Language Assistants keep popping up. In Spain, the Spanish Assistant, suitably localized for the Iberian Peninsula, is now being bundled with Microsoft Word in a special

promotional action. Tacelosky has high hopes for this pilot undertaking in the fall season. This special edition of Spanish Assistant makes use of a Word API which enables it to appear on the "Tools" menu of the program. If you select a block of text and click "Translate" the text will be passed to Spanish Assistant, translated, and pasted back into your document.

Hoping for such a comfortable symbiosis across lots of applications, Tacelosky is keen to see a industry-wide API for linguistic software such as spellcheckers and translation tools. Not only would this provide a standardized way for users to plug such programs as the Language Assistant into their wordprocessors or other applications, it would cut down on the duplicity of spellcheckers, etc., on most people's systems, something long overdue. The coming year will see Tacelosky developing and promoting this concept in the software world. A similar initiative, Word Services (a suite of Apple Events), was launched in the Macintosh world several years ago, but it failed to take root. In that case, there may not have been sufficient incentive to support this, the major developers having already incorporated spellcheckers, thesauri, etc. in their bloated applications. This time around, by offering alternative multilingual enhancements, such as translation tools, it might be possible to overcome the lack of momentum.

More than any other company, MicroTac has been responsible for bringing non-professional translation tools to the huge consumer market, and the very measure of its success is that the company now has at least five or six competitors for Spanish/English programs — a popular language pair in the US for obvious reasons. Ever watchful, Tacelosky says the company hopes to lower its *street price* from around US\$59 to US\$49. "This seems to be the magic number to be in mall and office supply stores like Babbages and Office Depot," explains Tacelosky, "where there is tremendous competition for shelf space."

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