

## Winger: Still Hanging in there

**New products and alliances keep one of Europe's small but intrepid suppliers of translation software aloft.**

Danish software house Winger, one of the few developers of PC-based machine translation systems in Europe, has released a set of electronic bilingual dictionaries for translators. The DOS-based package, called Book '92, an oblique reference to the company's Winger '92 translation package, is currently available for the language pairs Danish-English, French-English, and English-Spanish. In early 1994, these will be joined by Danish-German and Danish-Russian. The Book '92 dictionaries are based partly on Collins wordstock, which by now must surely be the world's most widely used bilingual electronic reference materials. Not surprisingly, Book '92 dictionaries share the same basic format as Winger '92 dictionaries. Book '92 can be run in memory-resident mode in conjunction with wordprocessing software with the usual hot-key and copy-and-paste functions. The memory resident software currently weighs in at a portly 60 Kb, but Winger technical director Ib Elfving promises to put Book '92 on a diet; a future release of the retrieval software will swap to expanded memory, bringing its appetite for conventional memory down to a more palatable 10 Kb. Book '92 is priced at a very reasonable DKR400 per language pair (less than US\$100.)

Winger has also developed a unique dictionary administration package for Book '92 called SuperBook (DKR1000). SuperBook allows a system administrator to create and maintain up to sixty-four subject-specific user dictionaries across a network. SuperBook offers some interesting features not found in similar packages, such as the ability to log failed searches. Elfving points out that Superbook is an excellent way of collecting data for Winger '92 dictionaries; new Book '92 user entries can be easily merged into Winger '92. One Winger customer, Danish patent attorneys Ploughmann & Vingtoft, uses both Book '92 and Winger '92 in this way; it generates what Elfving describes as a healthy synergy between the end-users of the dictionaries and the MT operator. For Elfving, Book '92 is a way of gently initiating people into the charms of computer-aided translation technology. When they discover the productivity gains which can be achieved with simple dictionary lookup tools, they may be tempted to investigate the more ambitious Winger '92 package.

Winger '92 has been on the market for some five years now, and in addition to the original Danish-English language pairs, Winger also offers Spanish-English in both directions. The latest release of the software includes some useful improvements to the translation system, most notably in the user interface department. Some nice touches can now be found in the post-editing window. Multiple choices for words in the target text (what Elfving calls "homonyms") are separated by a slash, and when you move the cursor to this position, there are function keys for deleting either the first or the second word. F2 reverses two words. F4 copies a word to a buffer (shift-F4 copies an extended selection) and F5 pastes the buffer text at the cursor position. Winger '92 also has multitasking capabilities; while you work in the foreground in interactive mode, the program unobtrusively translates the remaining text in the background.

Other enhancements in the most recent release of Winger '92 include facilities for defining your own style-specific grammars. For those ambitious souls who want to roll up their sleeves and get under the hood, an extended version of Winger '92 is also available, which offers direct access to the MT engine, thereby allowing users to modify and implement new grammars. While Winger does not offer a true translation memory yet, Winger '92 stores source and target text in so-called "projects," with sentences in one-to-one alignment. In its current form, this allows for a rudimentary translation memory function that Elfving says is suitable for updating different versions of documents. In

the future, he plans to implement a wild card function to make the system more flexible.

While this six-strong company has been slogging away for many years on their own, several new collaborative ventures have cropped up recently. A prestigious breakthrough for the company has been a project within the VALUE SME Technology Exchange Award program to develop Danish–German version together with the CST and the IAI (Saarbrücken, Germany). This program is a vast EC technology, transfer program funded to the tune of hundreds of millions of ECUs. It is a unusual collaboration, to say the least. In American terms, it might be comparable to Ed Hovy’s group at the ISI teaming up with Microtac to port Language Assistant to Japanese. Unlikely — but it would make sense. According to Elfving, the CST is responsible for transferring the Eurotra grammar into the Winger grammar programming language SALT. Saarbrücken is preparing the dictionary and the testing procedures, and Winger is responsible for adding “missing” features to SALT. The final product will be jointly owned by the three partners and is expected to be finished by the beginning of 1994.

Another collaborative effort encompasses a Danish-Russian version of Winger ’92. This is being developed in collaboration with Danish wordprocessor giant Dansk System Industri and is being funded by a Danish government grant. The object of the undertaking will be to develop a Danish–Russian office system encompassing a wordprocessor, a communications package, a database, and a translation module. The Danes, like their other Scandinavian neighbors, have been fixing their gaze eastward, and are exploiting their geographical proximity to and cultural affinities with their Baltic neighbors.

Genuine commercial success has nonetheless remained elusive for Winger. Referring to the 250 “active” Winger ’92 users in Denmark, he exclaims, “these companies are pre-early adapters!” However, Globalink, Microtac, Linguistic Systems and other American suppliers of PC-based MT have been enjoying growing sales, both inside and outside the US, and the listing of Winger in the January 1993 BYTE resource guide for MT laid “several hundred” inquiries at Winger’s doorstep. Either the Danes are incorrigibly resistant to machine translation or Winger needs some marketing magic. Elfving maintains Denmark is a difficult market. Many Danes speak fluent English, German, and French, and some, Russian or Italian as well. All are languages taught in elementary school. Elfving adds that both Globalink and Linguistic Products took a stab at the Danish market without luck; both their distributors went broke.

Either way, the company is confident that linguistic software will eventually boom and payoff. Elfving reminds us that Danish is the one European Union language which has never been covered by Systran; he no doubt cherishes a latent hope that one day the Commission will come knocking. In the meantime, managing director Gunnar Aass says the company’s venture capitalists are solidly behind it and have settled in for the long haul.

Winger, 48 Skodsborgvej, Virium, DK,2830 Copenhagen, Denmark; Tel: +45 45 83 11 66, Fax: +45 45 83 02 44