

## **Low-End Translation Tools: Catching On?**

Are computer-aided translation tools inching their way towards the mass-market? There are a number of signs they are. Shareware is always a handy barometer of grass-root interest; you can find shareware translation programs floating around on BBSs these days, including one, predictably called Babel, developed by Pascal programming hobbyists in Holland, and another, called MemCat, written by Bernhard Keck, an engineer at IBM Germany. In December, a Spanish company called TeleSoft and an American company called TranSoft jointly uploaded a trial version of a Windows-based translation memory package called Deja Vu to CompuServe's foreign language forum (FLEFO). For those not wishing to download the package ( $\pm$  thirty minutes at 9600 bps), the two companies will mail it on floppy for US\$10.

While Microsoft Windows may be many things to many people, irrefutably it has opened a floodgate of computer-aided writing and translation tools. By relaxing the memory constraints imposed by DOS and providing more sophisticated ways for programs to interact, the developers of wordprocessing add-ons can write far more ambitious programs which users are still able to use in conjunction with their familiar software packages. While simple termbase packages did not need Windows to become a success, other kinds of packages, such as the translation memory programs now arriving on the market, stand to gain enormously by this development. Stuttgart developer Trados is busy porting its Translator's Workbench to Windows, while newcomer STAR (Basel, Switzerland) recently introduced a Windows version of its Transit translation package. While marketing linguistic software remains a challenge, Windows has removed at least a couple basic obstacles.

Meanwhile, two of the market leaders in PC-based translation software, Globalink and Microtac, are releasing versions of their respective translation products for "the computer for the rest of us," the Macintosh. It is something of a milestone, because for years the developers of linguistic software applications studiously avoided the Mac like the plague. For more than ten years, there have been terminology packages for the PC, but to our knowledge no company has ever marketed a commercial termbase for the Mac. Ironical? Yes, because from day one the Mac was designed with multilingual computing in mind.

One can only guess the reasons for this situation, but it may be partly do with the fact that translators usually work on behalf of third parties and file compatibility is essential (it is an MS-DOS world out there). Moreover, translators are by nature text-oriented and may not have been drawn that quickly to graphical user interfaces. Moreover, until recently, Macs were very expensive in Europe, the obvious market for such software, and hence remained primarily the province of graphic designers and other well-heeled professionals.

However, the world is now awash with cheap Macs, and there seems to be a broad enough base for support for such packages. Microtac just finished porting its Language Assistants to Windows and designed it with easy portability to the Mac. The decision to launch Mac versions was, says director Mike Tancelosky, "the cumulative effect of several hundred phone calls from Mac fanatics who wanted Mac software." Tancelosky adds that he is looking forward to a "competitor-less market."

Whether Globalink will prove to be a competitor to Microtac remains to be seen, but the Virginia company has in any case opted for a different price class with its new line of Power Translators software packages. Whereas quite recently the company was offering its packages for the modest sum of US\$299, potential Globalink users will now have to dig considerably deeper in to their pockets, with the new US\$1,195 base price, although it is not entirely clear what the differences are.

At Comdex, Globalink executive vice president William Gregory was eager to extol the virtues of his company's software to a reporter from Newsbytes. "English is an idiosyncratic language, and this makes it possible for mistakes to occur that cannot be spotted by conventional software. Our packages look for these potential problems and idiomatically translate the text," he explained. In his dispatch, the Newsbytes reporter went on to note that "Globalink's software translates documents on a sentence-by-sentence basis, rather than word-by-word. Despite this, the company is honest enough to admit that its idiomatic translation routines are only effective ninety percent of the time." That we should be so lucky.