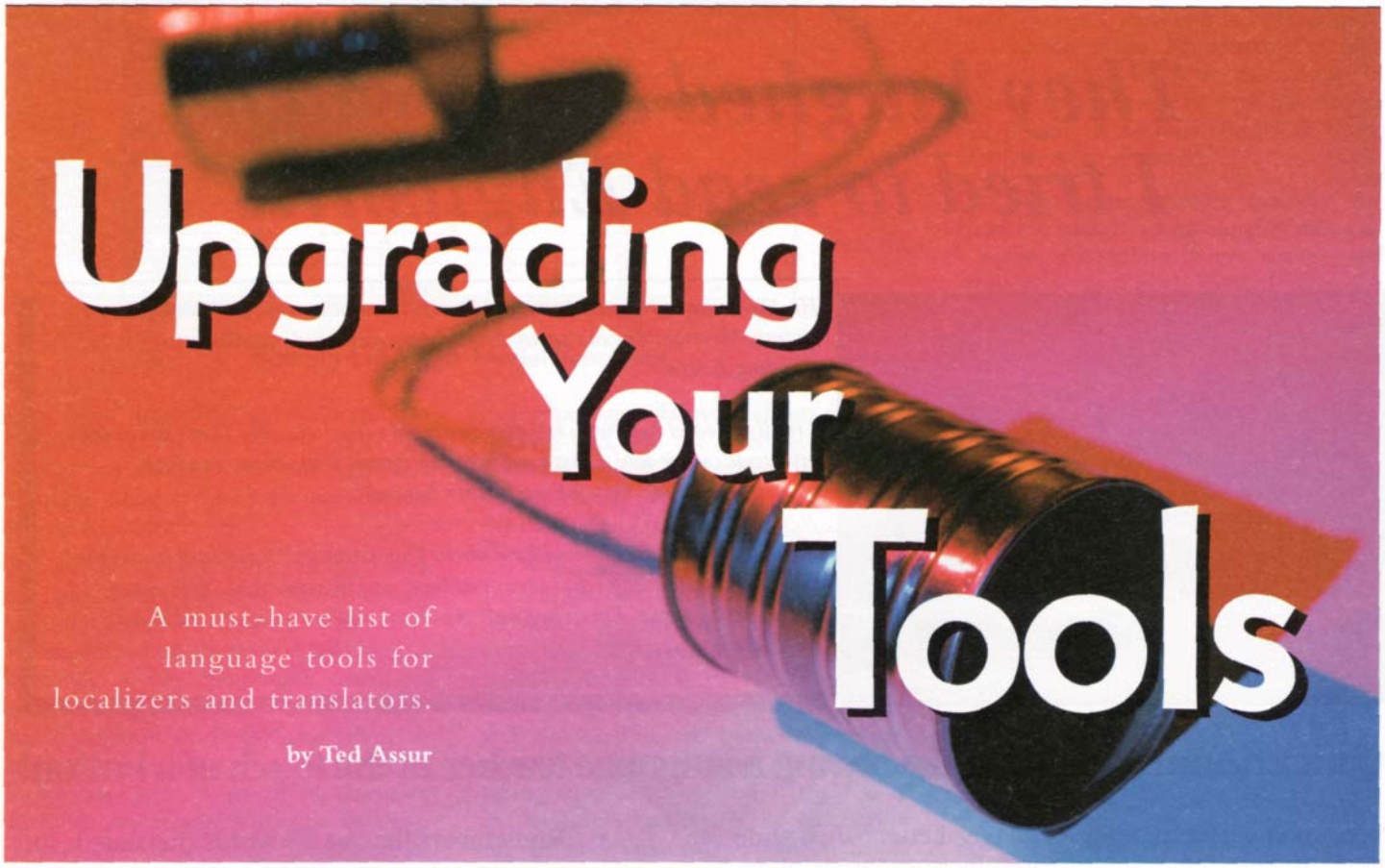

Upgrading Your Tools

A must-have list of language tools for localizers and translators.

by Ted Assur

There are those among us who take our car to the mechanic, and there are those who prefer to do our own work. I'm one of the latter. Although I'm not an expert when it comes to auto mechanics, I know that tools fall into four categories: those I need, those which are nice to have around, those that I've used once and swear will never use again, and finally those I have never heard of.

When it comes to Web and software localization, I find myself in the same situation. Regardless of your client, your employer, or your project: success in the localization industry depends strongly on the tools you use and how you use them.

When talking about tools, there is no "silver bullet," but there is a silver toolbox. What tools you keep in yours and your ability to find new ways of using them can often make the difference between whether or not your localization team spends its weekend in the office.

If I were working remotely from a lush Caribbean island I would want to make sure I had the following items with me.

Text Editor

The foundation of your toolbox must include a well-rounded text editor. The more code formats it will support the better, as you shouldn't need different editors for Unix, DOS, Mac, ANSI, ASCII, double- or single-byte. Not only useful for direct editing of HTML, source code, or what have you, text editors are essential in identifying unknown file types by identifying file headers. My personal favorite is ES-Computing's EditPlus. If you're looking for the most bells, whistles, and bang for the buck this one will do it all and more. With pre- and user-defined code highlighting, a seamless browser preview window, flexible MDI (multiple document interface), spell checking, auto line-numbering, and many more customizable features, I highly recommend this application.

EditPlus, www.editplus.com, shareware: US$20

The "Help-to-Source" application in Blue Sky Software's RoboHelp Office will take a compiled help system and decompile it into source files.

Microsoft Office

As the reign of the evil empire continues, we must submit to the inevitable fact that Bill's minions do have a captive audience. Depending on your clients' needs, you should have Word, Excel, and Access 97. With three "service packs" (bug fixes) under their belt, the Office suite can be a powerful weapon on the localization front, and it should be compatible with everything you handle.

Although not in the original release, Word 6.0/95 and standard RTF formats are now part of the Word file palette, not to mention it is probably the standard among your translators. It should also be included in your tool set, as it is an integral part of the Trados package. Excel is quite useful, if not critical, in handling string tables and bug reports. Your clients may use Access if they're handling string tables in multiple

languages, otherwise it should be avoided for localization efforts, as it is just too big.

Microsoft Office, www.microsoft.com/office, US$399

Development Environment

Chances are these days, your client's software-development environment is Microsoft Visual C++. But which version: 4.2? 97? 6.0? If you have older versions of these compilers (or Borland's for that matter) hold on to them! It's likely that they won't be on the market when you need them—unlike the consumer market, most programmers don't always jump to purchase the newest version of their favorite development environment. Although I could claim this is usually for reasons of prohibitive cost, the most likely reason is a nasty absence of backward compatibility. Make sure that you know exactly which version of the environment is being used to rebuild, especially if you're handling the recompiling of the application.

Any visual development environment will have a GUI editing tool. Critical for resizing (unless you're using other localization tools, or are a wizard in determining how many pixels to increase an object by in your text editor), these are often the most important reasons to get your hands on the correct version of the resource editor.

Microsoft Visual C++, msdn.microsoft.com/visualc, US$479

Specialized Localization Tool

These come in various qualities and usability. The most promising tool to date in the quest for a localization "silver bullet" is Corel's Catalyst, which appears to be crawling out of the wings at a turtle's pace. Selecting a tool like Catalyst strongly depends on the software you're currently using. Look for a tool that includes project-management modules, easy extraction/insertion of strings, and resizing features. Catalyst stands out from the pack in its user-definable text-parsing engine, however it chokes on many executables, and won't even touch any 16-bit applications. Personally I keep at least five different such tools around: you need all the ammunition you can get!

Corel Catalyst, www.corel.ie, starting at US$399

Text Filtering Tool

Often I have the simple job of merely translating a few HTML pages or RC files. Depending on your particular process (and the specific job), you may handle translation of these in different ways. If you're not in the business of extracting and reinserting translated text, then you should have some way of determining which text should be translated. Whether it's for the benefit of your translator—or merely to get an accurate word count—a filtering tool should be in your toolbox. Several are available if you dig deep enough into the Web. The most promising is ITP's Filter Pack. Not without its problems, Filter Pack is currently the most convenient tool for prepping HTML files. Trados has been directly involved with several, but has currently settled on (or settled for) the ITP version. The ITP version quickly handles many HTML files (and other tagged formats). Unfortunately it does some things it really shouldn't (e.g., converting HTML codes [, etc.] to actual characters). If you're a purist, you will have to reverse all the conversions you don't want once you're done using Filter Pack.

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Other filters are also available from Trados for standard SGML.

As for RC files, Trados Translator's Workbench (TW) provides a Word macro that is available with the demo version of the Translator's Workbench product. After using either of these methods, word counts can be quickly determined with the TW demo version's "Analysis" function.

ITP Filter Pack, www.trados.com, free
Trados Translator's Workbench, www.trados.com, demo

Graphics Software

My toolbox would be incomplete without a graphics tool that is simple to use, yet powerful. You need a tool that can not only do quick and easy screen caps (screen captures), but also enables you to perform image doctoring when necessary. That's right: we do have to fake those photos sometimes. Here's a tip: If you have to insert translated text into the screen cap, run MS Excel simultaneously with your graphics software. Color your cell and text in Excel to match the colors you need in your photo. Set your font and size to the correct system font you are using. Copy the cell (not the text in the cell) with the foreign text, then paste it into an image in your graphics software. It's pasted as a graphic rather than text, and your Excel has done most of the work for you. You can easily doctor your image with the translated text.

My graphics software of choice? Jasc's Paint Shop Pro v5 provides the most bang for the buck. Its crystal-clear interface, powerful manipulation tools, and ultra-reasonable price should make this one of your primary tools. By the time you read this, version 6 should be released. I doubt it will have new features that will directly effect the localization industry, but you'll be able to draw great caricatures of your old boss.

Paint Shop Pro, www.jasc.com, US$99

Segmented Hyper-Graphic (SHG) Editor

"The WinHelp file that SHG'd me!" frequently referred to as "hotspot graphics," these deadly little files can be the bane of an otherwise simple WinHelp localization project. You don't have to stoop down to using Microsoft's archaic SHED applications. In his recently published book, Bert Esselink has recommended an excellent product that has an easy-to-use SHG editor. Help Scribble's SHG editor looks as if it were designed for localization in mind. Merely open an existing SHG file, load in your localized BMP screen capture, and adjust the hotspots as necessary, and *voilà*: localized SHG files.

Help Scribble, www.jgsoft.com US$79

WinHelp Authoring Tools

Although the localization process very rarely involves authoring, there are tools available which are very useful in the industry. Blue Sky Software's RoboHelp Office contains an incredibly useful tool that may otherwise be overlooked. The "Help-to-Source" application will take a compiled help system, and decompile it into source files. Although I use this most often in evaluating help files when the source files are unavailable, it also could be used to localize a help system when the source files are not provided. Although the decompiled source files are not as friendly as the original source files, it gives you full access to the inner workings of a help system. The RoboHelp suite also includes many other tools that can be useful, entirely depending on your needs and the needs of your client.

RoboHelp Office, www.blue-sky.com, US$899

Web Site Procurement

In a previous article, I mentioned the merits of being able to download a Web site to your local machine by merely accessing the Web site over the Internet.

Useful for quoting and for confirming that you have the correct files, there are several tools out there that serve this function. Although probably not the best, I currently use SFS SiteEater. Depending on your needs, you should probably search through the products listed, and determine which is best for you. A Web search for "Website downloader" will result in many freeware and shareware products as well.

SiteEater, www.siteforum.com, US$49
Website Downloader, www.sausage.com, US$20
Offline Explorer, www.metaproducts.com, US$30

QA Software

Gone are the days of manually proofing WinHelp, HTML, and user interfaces (UIs). Although automated QA tools do not completely replace the need for manual QA, they do drastically cut down on QA time, energy, and headaches. TranslationCraft appears to be the emerging leader in localization QA tools.

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HelpQA and HtmlQA will not only help in the initial evaluation of your projects, but will also detect any changes to HTML or WinHelp tags and codes that have occurred during the localization process. Running the software on your client's source files will often report errors or problems in the source files, thereby assisting in determining ownership of bugs or QA problems.

With its recent acquisition of ToolProof, TranslationCraft has now rounded out its set of useful and unique tools that are a must in your localization toolbox. ToolProof will verify resizing of UI objects during runtime, and simultaneously create a UI bug report that will allow the QA engineer to go back through and fix interface problems. Overlapping controls and clipped text are clearly visible, as ToolProof will highlight each interface object with user-definable colored boxes.

ToolProof, HelpQA, HtmlQA, www.tcraft.com, US$420

I'm sure I've overlooked a few, but I could do just about any job with what I have. If you use or publish a tool that you feel is a "must-have," by all means write to *Language International*. We're always looking for new tools to share with the rest of the world.

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