

The Hungarian Touch

One of the keys to WordPerfect's meteoric rise in the 1980s and early 1990s was its aggressive localization strategy in many small but significant markets in Europe and elsewhere. In 1990, for example, WordPerfect introduced a Hungarian version of WordPerfect 5.1. Not only was it the first wordprocessing package on the market in Hungary with a Hungarian interface, it also included a Hungarian spellchecker, making it a genuine breakthrough at the time.

Like virtually all mainstream commercial software developers in North America, WordPerfect turned to a local company, Budapest-based Morphologic, for the prerequisite linguistic software components. In the intervening years, Morphologic has built up an impressive portfolio of OEM customers for a range of linguistic products, include spellcheckers, hyphenators, and morphology analyzers for Hungarian, a monolingual dictionary and a thesaurus for Hungarian, and multilingual (Hungarian, German, and English) translation dictionaries.

As Gábor Prószéky, Morphologic's technical manager, explains, spellchecking a highly inflected language like Hungarian is futile without linguistic analysis, in particular morphological reduction, and that makes it a far more difficult task to write a spellchecker for Hungarian than for English. This is something that American software producers did not initially realize, and Prószéky acknowledges the difficulties the Americans had adapting their software for the Hungarian market. These days, however, virtually all software houses have adopted strategies for making their programs easily adaptable to different languages, and this provides a welcome livelihood for companies like Morphologic. Morphologic in turn has exploited its expertise in the highly agglutative Hungarian language to tackle other languages, such as Polish and Turkish. Prószéky says a grammar checker for Hungarian is also under development.