Web Site Focus:
Wordbot Works Wonders

By James J. Romeo

Language International regularly features Web sites of interest to language professionals. This issue, we focus on Wordbot, a nifty tool that sets a new milestone in language interactivity, and points to the future possibilities of the Web. Readers are encouraged to nominate sites for review.

What Is Wordbot?

Wordbot is a Web site located at:

http://www.cs.washington.edu/homes/kgolden/wordbot.html

It is hosted by the Department of Computer Science & Engineering at the University of Washington, in Seattle. It is accessed through the Home Page of Keith Golden.

A "bot" on the Internet is shorthand for "robot"—it is a computer program that automates tasks for the user. Specifically, Wordbot is a robot assistant for looking up translations, definitions, synonyms, antonyms, references, etc. of words appearing in a document.

How Does It Work?

When you load a Web page through Wordbot, you can click on any word in that page, and look up its meaning in a dictionary. You can choose a dictionary, so the "lookup" can be in English (thereby providing a definition, for example), or in a foreign language (thereby providing a dictionary-style translation for that word). Following links in the document works normally, but by employing some clever technology Wordbot even lets you look up words appearing in links.

Any page on the Web can be viewed within Wordbot. Just enter the URL in the text field at the top of the page, and select the dictionary of your choice (see illustration). You may be wondering which dictionaries you can use. The startling answer is: any dictionary on the Web! It need not be an actual dictionary; it could be a search engine, or any Web application that accepts one-word queries.
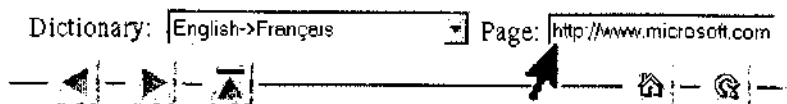
An Interactive Resource

If you are viewing a Web page that uses a language in which you are not fully an expert, you can look up any unfamiliar word just by clicking on it. Even if the lookup takes a while because of a slow network, you can continue reading while you wait for the answer. None of your time is wasted looking up words in a traditional way. Even in languages of your expertise, you may still find Wordbot useful, for looking up technical terms or acronyms, for example.

Wordbot is completely free: anyone can use it, at no charge, for noncommercial purposes.

The Wordbot dictionaries are largely collaborative efforts and "works in progress." As users continue to update and add to the dictionaries, the capabilities of the program will also expand.

Using Wordbot: Step by Step

Step 1 Select the language combination. In this case, we wanted to look up French translations for English terms.

Dictionary: English->Français   Page: http://www.microsoft.com

Step 2 Select the Web site you're interested in exploring. In this case, we picked the Microsoft home page.

Step 3 Highlight the search term (here: "step").

Microsoft is proud to announce ➞ the final release of Internet Explorer 3 0. Find out why Internet Explorer is still a step ahead ➞. Take advantage of incredible free offers ➞ from the Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition and ESPNET SportsZone among others. Is your browser up to the IE Challenge? ➞ Check out what other people are saying ➞ about Internet Explorer.

Step 4 The lookup results appear in a separate frame.

ARTFL Project: French-English Dictionary

Searching for: step

étape = step *[noun-feminine]
l'étape = the step *[noun-feminine]
marche = step *[noun-feminine]
pas = step *[noun-masculine]