

Microcomputer technology has matured rapidly in the past decade. Micro-based ma-

MACTRANSLATOR

chine translation, however, still remains on the shelf. Standalone MT software is either too expensive or too crude to be cost-effective for most applications. Nevertheless, one high-tech idea that has caught many a multilingual imagination is the translator's workstation, an automated environment that, short of actually translating, at least provides all the tools for accelerating what the human translator still does best. MICHEL THIBODEAU of the Canadian Department of the Secretary of State's huge Translation Bureau in Montreal, has been testing his own workstation in a real production environment for six months. He talked about it to LT's Canadian correspondent CLAUDE BEDARD and explained why he chose the Apple Macintosh as his core hardware tool.

How did you discover the Mac in the first place?

MT Back in 1979, I cut my teeth on the micros then available – the Adam, Commodore, and the Apple – ranging from 48Kb to 64Kb. Of course, they lacked power and were definitely not adapted to French, the language I translate into. I skipped the first Macs. I found them too expensive, and I wanted cursor keys as well as more RAM. So when the one-megabyte MacPlus came out, I jumped at it.

I got more for my money than I'd expected. I'd always wanted to be able to display and print all the accented characters in French, including accented capitals, as well as scientific symbols. Before buying the Mac, I'd tried a lot of so-called "French-adapted" IBM compatibles. But with them, even when I got accents onscreen, I was never sure I'd get them on paper. I didn't want to buy a micro and then have to reconfigure it in order to get the characters I wanted. And I didn't want to mess around with printed circuit boards and peripherals that might present compatibility problems. On top of all this, I wasn't prepared to put up with such abstruse languages as MS-DOS, PRO-DOS or APPLE DOS any more.

The first, most fundamental, tool is wordprocessing, isn't it? Which one is your choice?

MT I've tried quite a few – MacWrite, WriteNow, MindWrite, and FullWrite Professional. I now alternate MS Word 3.0.2 with WordPerfect 1.0 for the Mac, depending on the kind of document. For example, WordPerfect lets you work much more easily in parallel columns onscreen.

At first, I used an Apple ImageWriter dot matrix printer, and I had to draw accented capitals with Fontastic. Then, in order to get them the natural way, that is by hitting the accent (dead) key and the shifted letter key, I went on to configure the keyboard with MacKeymeleon.

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Now I use a LaserWriter NT laser printer. I tried an NEC SilentWriter 890, but it had a few drawbacks. For example, no smoothing of bitmap graphics, and no possibility of printing on envelopes. Besides, it's less well integrated with the Mac. In my opinion, a laser printer is a must for a translator's workstation. It enables you

to offer the client a professional-looking, directly usable, document – not to mention camera-ready typeset material. Also, it's silent and can easily be used by several workstations. Laser printers should become the standard within a few years as their price goes down.

What are the essentials of the translator's workstation?

MT First, it's got to incorporate all the software that are useful for the translator's various tasks. This takes a lot of shopping around, especially if you want the best. Second, these software packages often have to be tailored to the translator's specific needs. You can often do this on the Mac, but you do have to sit down and do your homework. And third, all these tools have to be available in a multitasking environment, so that you can invoke one without having to leave another. This inevitably means installing an extra Mb of RAM on the Mac, and using Multifinder – which I'll talk about later.

Tell us about your keyboard. It looks like an IBM.

MT That's the extended keyboard. I use the Datadesk Mac-101 with my Mac Plus. For the SE or Mac II, I recommend the Apple extended keyboard with function keys. It's very convenient when you want to fire a macro with one finger rather than a shift-option-command-character combination. Now I have it fully configured with dozens of macros – several of which, incidentally, enable me to let go of the mouse. The mouse is fine, but more tiresome than a single keystroke when you have one available.

A TRANSLATOR WORKSTATION ON A MAC!

Your workstation's second staple would have to be a lexical database, I guess.

MT

Right. I've tried Fourth Dimension, Double Helix, Reflex, Omnis, MS File, and more. I now use FileMaker Plus 4.0, which incidentally has multistation capability. It fulfills all my basic expectations.

First, it can handle huge files — up to 32 Mb. That's about 250,000 entries. I've tested it by consolidating all the existing lexicons I use — most of them on Wang — into a 3.5 Mb file, 24,000 entries. The response delay ranges from a split-second to a dozen seconds, depending on the complexity of the query.

Second, FileMaker is remarkably well-suited to what I call "fuzzy terminological search," which consists of scanning related entries if the term you're looking for is not found verbatim in the database. With FileMaker, you can specify one or several words, complete or incomplete, in the given order or not, in one or several fields. For example, if you search for *lock pin*, you may get *locking pintle*, *locking pin*, *hinge pin*, *locking screw*, *feeder lock plunger pin*, or *breech lock pin*.

If a search like this retrieves many entries, I switch to a display where every entry is abridged to the English source term and the French equivalent and spread out on a single line. This way, fifteen entries can be displayed simultaneously. Great for browsing. To display all the information in one particular entry, I just have to click on its line.

Third, the basic configuration of the entries can be modified anytime if your need changes. As for the size of the fields, is 32Kb enough for you? And if you're a stickler for Gutenberg technology, the files can be printed out in the form of professional-looking dictionaries.

Now this is all very nice, but I wanted to be able to make queries "on the fly," as I type my translation.

There's no way in this day and age that I'd be prepared to submit myself to exiting from my wordprocessing document, then loading my database, making the query, writing down the information on a piece of paper, exiting from the database, and re-entering my WP document!

This is where multitasking comes into its own. I now use MultiFinder — which I prefer to Switcher — as a multitasking operating system. This allows me to keep both the wordprocessor and the database open at the same time, so that I can switch instantly from one to the other. Now, multitasking demands a harddisk and really need a second Mb of RAM. It is possible to run the MS Word/FileMaker/Switcher trio on the standard Mac Plus. But if you want to feel at ease — using WordPerfect and/or MultiFinder — 2 Mb is what you need. It will soon become the standard anyway, as the software becomes more and more sophisticated and RAM-hungry.

I also wanted to automate some of the manual operations around the query by using macros. After trying 101 Keys, Tempo and Touch'n'Go, I discovered QuicKeys. To give you an example of the results, one keystroke brings me inside the database and sets up the query mode. I type and launch the query. If a suitable equivalent is found, a single keystroke copies it, brings me back inside my wordprocessing document, and pastes it where my cursor was left. Now that's what you call automation.

The latest version of the Mac operating system, System 6.0, offers macro capability, so that separate software such as QuicKeys is no longer necessary for most purposes. Anyway, macros are a very important means of customizing your workstation to your specific needs. I use a lot of them.

With PC compatibles, all of a sudden simple things become complicated, and previously unknown trade-offs become the rule. You have to beg the machine instead of just asking. It's like

What other translator's workstation desiderata are there? Is the software available for the Mac?

MT

More than a lot of people think. As far as wordprocessing and desktop editing go, the Mac has proved itself a truly complete workshop. You can have multiple windows open simultaneously, work in parallel columns, hyphenate automatically, use a glossary, count words, build macros, create indexes and tables of contents, sort alphabetically and numerically, integrate text and graphics — and the whole thing is totally WYSIWYG. On top of that, thanks to its bitmapped design, the Mac can easily display and print all sorts of foreign characters — including Greek, Russian, and Arabic. Great for translators! And for building intricate algebraic formulae, I use a desk accessory called MacΣqn, which does the job.

On the computer-aided writing front, both MS Word and WordPerfect have both French and English spellcheckers. A neat little desk accessory called Le Conjugueur gives you all the possible forms of all French verbs. Style checkers are available in English — I've tried MacProof from ALP Systems — but not in French. Nor are they for PCs, so far as I know.

The only thing you still can't do on a Mac, I must admit, is interface with Termium (the Canadian government's 900,000-record termbank — ed.) on CD-ROM, because the software used is only IBM-compatible. I'm sure, though, that Hypercard could be tailored for use with the Termium CD-ROM. In the meantime, I can access Termium on telecoms. I use a 2400 baud modem with Microphone software — again since trying several others.

One useful feature in a translator-revisor environment is being able to keep a record of revisions. FullWrite Professional and WordPerfect both have such a feature, and you can get about the same results with MS Word using the "hidden text" option. Whatever the revisor decides to change or delete can be put

in the hidden mode and viewed by the translator – but not by the client.

For corpus analysis, I recently found a piece of freeware called Texas 0.1, a hypercard stack offering an alphabetic listing of the words used in a text, along with a frequency count. This is great for anyone doing computer-assisted translation or terminological exploration. Speaking of hypercard, I think it has a big future for designing translator-specific utilities – especially since the translation market is too small to warrant dedicated products from software firms.

Did you tell the Translation Bureau about all this? This seems to be the kind of workstation they'd be looking for.

MT Did I ever! But what I mostly saw was the back of their heads, because they're looking straight in the opposite direction – IBM, that is. Maybe because of this Termium-on-CD-ROM compatibility problem, or because the MIS people are so involved with mainframes that they don't recognize a really good micro unless it stands up and kicks them in the butt.

What about converting files to and from various wordprocessors? And isn't there a danger in turning your back on the IBM-compatible standard?

MT Fortunately, dedicated word processors such as Microm and the Xerox are slowly disappearing, as micros take over the wordprocessing market. In the meantime, conversion facilities – Keyword and Palantir are the best known – are available if you need them. This leaves you with two main standards, IBM and Apple, between which a lot of bridges have been built in recent years.

First, there is the physical transfer from one machine to another. Options include modem transmission, direct connection, the TOPS network, an MS-DOS disk drive on a Mac, or alternatively a Mac diskdrive on a PC. Second, you may want to convert the formatting contents with Apple File Exchange or MacLink Plus under TOPS or in conjunction with a DaynaFile disk drive. This is even easier between MS Word and WordPerfect, where the conversion is built into the save function. Finally, if you're the masochistic type, you can even turn your Mac Plus or SE into a PC-XT with a PerfecteK emulator board, or your Mac II into a PC-AT with a MAC-286 board.

But haven't your experiences stirred some noise among your more immediate superiors?

MT The kind of noise that something disturbing does when it falls onto deaf ears. Look, I've used my workstation at work for six months, offering demonstrations to various people. But almost no-one of any authority has responded. They're probably afraid of waking up good ol' Status Quo. Recently we received a batch of PC compatibles for the translators – including myself – to work on. Just describing the trouble everyone had with the setup, the printers, the special characters, the training, etc., would require a whole separate interview. With PC compatibles, all of a sudden simple things become complicated, and previously unknown trade-offs become the rule. You have to beg the machine instead of just asking. It's like going back ten years.

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