TERMDOK: THE ULTIMATE TRANSLATOR'S TOOL?

Most industry observers agree: CD-ROM has reached that stage of critical mass. In real terms, the volume of titles being published is such that specialized fields like multilingual lexicology and terminology management are now winning serious representation.

Electric Word's Scandinavia correspondent Tim Davies recently trotted Walter's multilingual heavyweight Termdok through its paces. He reports back on this most recent emancipation from the confines of paper, discussing how it might serve today's microprocessor-compatible translator.

Introduced in January 1988 by Sweden's Walters Lexikon and Tekniska Nomenklaturcentralen (TNC), with the aim of providing access to all TNC's material, Walters describes the TERMDOK CD-ROM as "probably the largest PC-accessible multilingual technical termbank available."

The Swedish retrieval program Optosof is used, and you can select an English, French, or Swedish version when you install it. It requires approximately 360 Kb of disk space. The program can be run alone or together with your wp program, the latter enabling you to cut and paste text at cursor location. (TERMDOK is activated online by pressing CTRL—F6.)

Both free and structured searching are supported. In other words, you could search for a word in any context or within a specific context/language/field. Retrieval is effected by search menus, the results being screened in windows. Help texts are available via F1 (in one of three languages). There is also a brief tutorial.

The termbank consists of items classified under main term, synonym, definition, equivalents in other languages, etc. Scandinavian letters are interchangeable: e.g. search for "primær" traces "primär" and vice versa. Other digraphs with grave, acute, circumflex or cedilla are treated as if unaccented (e.g. ide/idé, maçon/macon).
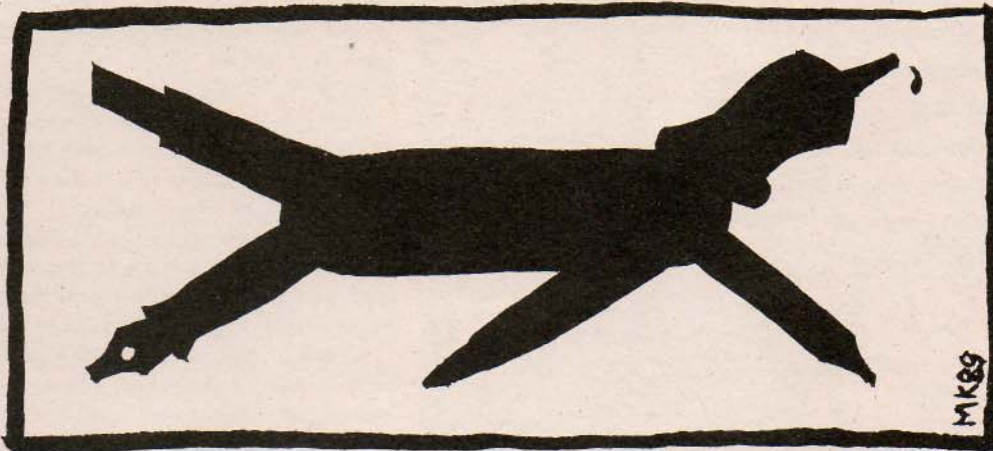
Searching can be done by term, definition, or translation. Having found the info, you can then print it (Print Screen) or transfer it to disk/HD.

Each entry gives the Swedish (main term with grammatical info, abbreviated and related forms, synonyms, references, applications, context) and translations. These vary in number, as equivalents are not given consistently for every term. Reference numbers are also given for relevant documents, plus a classification code.

TERMDOK contains a total of over 225,000 technical terms with definitions, synonyms, related concepts and translations to English, French, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, and Russian. Searches are possible in all languages.

Fields include energy, environment, building, materials and chemistry. In fact, TERMDOK incorporates data from seven termbanks: three Swedish, one Finnish, one Norwegian, one French, and one Canadian. These are:

• TNC's wordlists (glossaries of about 28,000 terms, including many specialist lists such as hydrobiological terms, brewing, petroleum, space, nuclear energy, textiles, forestry, etc. Mainly in Swedish, but with some Norwegian terms).
• TNC's excerpts: 6,000 items from magazines, journals, reports, manuals.
• Swedish Standardization Committee's 17,000 terms with definitions from current Swedish standards since 1986.
• Termbase of RTT (Norwegian Council for Technical Terminology): 25,000 terms from 33 glossaries.
• TEPA, Finland: 9,000 terms from Finnish standards, published by Centralen för Teknisk Terminologi. Some in Finnish, but many with Swedish definitions.
• Termium: 100,000 English-French terms from the Canadian government's official termbank.
• Normaterm - from AFNOR, Association Française de Normalisation: 47,000 French-English terms from this French language termbank.

TERMDOK is a well-designed, thoroughly researched, and systematically presented tool, both for the linguist and for the scientific specialist. Without doubt, it will be most useful for those dealing with Swedish, English and French. Inclusion of the other languages is more haphazard (e.g. Russian terms, in transliterated form, are included only where the Finnish collaborator concerned knew their equivalents).

Retrieval time is rated at a maximum 30 seconds for all databases. (Our search for the English compound "fuel cell" took only three seconds.) Unless you're planning to buy your next computer from NASA, I'd say that was extremely fast, given the volume of data involved.

If, by way of comparison, I search for a term using the Dutch-produced INK online terminology software, TermTracer, a complete search for a word including a commonly occurring root (e.g., "computer")

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will take anything up to 15 seconds, depending on how many terms I have added since acquiring the system.

The system of embedded windows (comparable again to INK's TermTracer) is easy to work with, while the variation in colors (for those no longer using a Flintstone monochrome VDU) makes it easy on the eye. In practice, the windows allow you to explore one step at a time, e.g. trace a term by language, then go on to the definition, then locate the source.

Remember, of course, that unlike a user-modifiable system such as INK's, terms cannot be added to or modified in a CD database. (Some CD systems enable you to bookmark entries, but as far as I know, this is not a feature of TERMDOK.) The value of the system therefore lies in the number of specialist areas included which the translator in question can use. Since the contents of the database are broken down by country of origin and source language rather than field, this might prove difficult to evaluate before you actually buy and start using the system.

Generally, what CD-ware offers over traditional floppy-ware is one hell of a lot of data crammed into very little space (this CD contains approx. 682 Mb or 340,000 compact A4 pages). And it doesn't come

cheap.

Hardware requirements: PC/compatible with a minimum 640 Kb of RAM, harddisk or twin floppy drives, EGA card recommended, plus a CD drive supporting Microsoft CD-ROM extensions.

– Tim Davies