Mercury/Termex

Dictionary look-up for translators

ermex (called Mercury in the US) is a RAM-resident software package that runs on any MS DOS based personal computer. It enables a translator or writer to compile glossaries for translation or general reference. The building of glossaries or data files can be done as a separate job or while working on a document with a word processor. Termex data files can be consulted during word processing (WordPerfect, MultiMate, VolksWriter 3, XYWrite III, Word Wand, Palantir 3, WorldWriter, and others). The bottom half of the screen is used to display the entry that was looked up, and the required information in the target area of the entry can be moved ("pasted") into the word processing document.

Installation and startup

The package shipped to us confronted us with some confusion as to whether the software was copy-protected or not. According to the manual, it was not copy-protected. The program could be easily installed and run without problems — until you tried to access one of the sample glossaries supplied with the package. This resulted in an error message.

Going over the documentation, it became clear that the small box supplied with the European package was, in fact, a copy protection unit (called "HardRoxx") that had to be installed before you could work with the program. Unfortunately, no instructions were included on how to install this nasty little device. By consulting the European distributors, InfoARBED in Luxembourg, we discovered that HardRoxx had to be installed between the parallel printer port and the printer cable, and that the printer at the end of the cable had to be

switched on. Once we did this, the program functioned normally. Future shipments of the product will hopefully contain full instructions on how to install HardRoxx — or better yet, do away with it altogether.

Building glossaries

Termex works best in a translation environment. The translator can build a glossary in two ways: either by starting a translation straightaway, then adding useful terminological information as he or she proceeds; or by creating the glossary before starting the actual translation. There is a separate utility, GBUILD, to set up glossaries from scratch.

The entry procedure is as follows: The first line always contains the primary key field, for instance a source term. Maximum length of this field is 50 characters. All following lines (with a limit of 900 characters) will then contain target terms, and optionally any information a translator might want to add to this entry — an explanation, context information, translation into several languages, etc.

Each information element in the target area has to be preceded by a field identifier. In translation glossaries, you would use numbers, e.g. {1}, {1a}, {2} for the actual target terms, and abbreviations like {def}, {ctxt}, {subj} for other information. Any string following a field identifier can be used for pasting into a document during translation or writing.

A rather annoying weakness in the program is that you cannot copy an entry, or create a template for one particular entry format. For example, when you are building a general data file for bibliographic data, you might create an entry format as follows:

```
*.author
{title}
{publ}
{place}
{year}
{vols}
{isbn}
{languages}
{subject}
```

For each new entry you add, these field names have to be typed in.

B R O T H E R   M E L B Y

f you asked Alan Melby what he was, what he actually did in his life, he'd probably tell you it depended on the time of the day.

In the morning, you'd find he was a professor at Brigham Young University, teaching at the mecca of computational linguistics in the United States. In the middle of the day, he might be consulting, as he did for BSO when he on elsewhere in this issue) through its first test. In the late afternoon, he'd be software developer and co-owner of LinguaTech, the company that markets Mercury/Termex.

At dinner time, he'd be devoted husband and father to six children. After dinner, he'd be a scoutmaster, showing his scouts how to signal with flags — they are spelling out L-T in our honor. In between, he'd be sitting on the Computers and Translation Committee of the American Translation Association or writing one of his many articles, perhaps a follow-up to his seminal paper on the translator work station.

His scouts call him Brother Melby. He has a good laugh, the kind that lets you know he's enjoying the hell out of life. Being a good Mormon, he wouldn't put it exactly that way.

Cross references and look-up

While building a glossary or data file, you can give an entry a cross reference field. For example, the acronym "RAM" can be given a direct cross reference to the full entry "random access memory." When looking up "RAM," you can "chain" to the full entry using a function key, or access the full entry automatically. The chaining option can be set to automatic or manual.

The look-up function is activated by pressing Alt-L. If no glossaries are open, you are prompted to enter a glossary name. There is no facility to display a list of available glossaries. To look up a term, you can enter the full term, or just the first few characters. If found, the term appears on the screen with the target information. Pasting a target field into the current word processing document is a matter of entering the field name and pressing Return, after which the look-up screen disappears again. The required target information is now in the paste buffer, and can be retrieved by pressing Alt-P. The paste buffer can contain only one field at a time.

Finding an entry by searching for a target field is not really possible with Termex. It can only be made possible by manually entering all important target terms separately as primary key fields, with a chainable cross reference to the corresponding source term. Future releases are planned to include reverse look-up as a standard automatic feature.

Editing and updating entries; conversion

Updating a Termex entry is rather cumbersome because the available cursor control functions are far too limited. Moving the cursor by word, to end or beginning of line, delete word, delete line, insert hard return to create a blank-line are all basic cursor operations that are not available.

A separate Termex program, GCON-VERT, can convert data files from the standard access format to ASCII format (called "exchange" format), or to "background" format. Files in ASCII format can also be converted back to access format. A data file in ASCII format can usually be read into a word processor, edited, printed etc.

GCONVERT also allows you to select entries on one particular field to create a subset of entries that all have that field in common. For instance, if you are using subject labels in a translation glossary, you could select all entries where the field {subj} is "telecommunications," or "legal" etc.

Once a file has been converted to background format, it is protected against updating and cannot be converted back to access format. The idea is to have more general, definitive and non-updatable glossaries opened in the background, with a working glossary opened in the foreground, can be updated and modified. However, during look-up, with two glossaries opened, you can still consult only one glossary, i.e. the one in access format. To consult the background glossary, you must close the access glossary first.

Conversion to background format reduces the size of an access file by about 40%.

Conclusion

In spite of its limitations, Termex is a program that works. It is well-behaved, does not crash nor does it cause other memory resident programs to crash. A major objection is the HardRoxx copy protection device, it makes it impossible to use the program without having a printer connected to the computer you are working on.

The manual does not say anything about managing larger glossaries or data files of 20,000 entries and more. These files will take up several Megabytes of disk space and can only be used on a hard disk system. Nothing is said about the possibility of using Termex in a local network.

The release of a number of industry specific glossaries was announced at the end of last year, but there has been no news about them since. Termex is available in Europe for Dfl 795, and in the US (called Mercury) for US$ 250. Additional glossaries will sell for an extra Dfl 300.00.<<
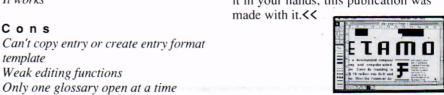

Pros
It works

Cons
Can't copy entry or create entry format template
Weak editing functions
Only one glossary open at a time

ReadySetGo!

We were going to run a full review of Letraset's ReadySetGo! version 3.0 (written by Manhattan Graphics), but we ran out of space.

So instead, a thumbnail: it has all the normal desktop publishing features, plus three real winners:

One, a word processor with search and replace to edit documents after they've been laid out; a pipeline tool, to connect text boxes in different columns or even different pages; and the ability to re-form around graphics, allowing you to draw a circle in the middle of a page and have the text automatically flow around it—then move that circle up and to the right, and have the text immediately re-flowed.

Shortcoming: no half-points of lead.

Worst problem: don't make the mistake of clicking the pipeline tool over text that's already been pipelined.

Best recommendation: you're holding it in your hands; this publication was made with it.<<