A Novel Approach to Localization

Super Linguist: yet another new software localization tool.

In the bad old days, software companies used to hard-code prompts and menus is English, everyone's "favorite" language. Then, the call went out for the *internationalization* of software, namely making it possible to adapt packages to reflect local needs. Among other things, this implies separating the language of the interface from the underlying functionality of the program. Now, a new package called Super Linguist takes an notable different approach to software localization. Rather than making a program responsible for generating the appropriately localized text strings, Super Linguist intercepts screen output in the original language and translates it on the fly. *Translates* might a bit misleading; the program in fact substitutes one literal string for another with no linguistic interference.

The developer of the package, KT International, suggests the system offers the following advantages:

§ Software packages can be launched in non-English-language markets at nearly the same time English-language versions are introduced.

§ Applications can be viewed both in the original or source language. This could be useful in multilingual environments. Moreover, on client/server networks, Super Linguist can translate an application on a client workstation while the source runs on the server.

§ Super Linguist removes the restriction that an application must be presented in the same language as the operating system. Whereas a Japanese or Chinese Windows application normally requires the Japanese or Chinese version of Windows to run, Super Linguist allows applications in either of those languages to run under the English edition of Windows.

KT International carefully points out that Super Linguist is not an MT system and cannot be used for on-the-fly translations of help files. It also stresses that Super Linguist can only handle screen output, not keyboard input. Multibyte languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean require a separate input engine. According to Henwell Chou, the president of Ultrasoft (KT international's parent company), Super Linguist can be used with any program running under Windows, provided the dictionary has been appropriately updated.

While Super Linguist sounds ideal, it may not completely cure localization headaches. While changing the language of an interface with the flip of a switch sounds great, you would also want to the behavior of the underlying program to change accordingly. With your menus in Danish, you might, for example, also want your hot-key assignments and sort order suitably configured or the appropriate hyphenation and spellchecking modules activated. At the moment, such things are not under the direct control of Super Linguist. Nonetheless, KT International has taken an innovative approach to one of the major bottlenecks in software publishing today: localization. As software prices continue to tumble, publishers are scrambling for ways to cut costs. It wouldn't surprise us in the least to see Super Linguist, or a system like it, become an integral part of software distribution. Maybe Microsoft will one day incorporate such a system directly in Windows.

A Super Linguist license includes the Super Linguist engine and a customized dictionary which KT International compiles for each application. The engine, which can be embedded in the

application or activated externally, supports multiple dictionaries. For customers wishing to compile and maintain their own dictionaries, KT also offers the Super Linguist Manager, a dictionary editor. KT International also offers translation services for help files and manuals. Prices: Super Linguist Engine, US$9000 per application; additional Application Dictionaries, US$2000 plus US$1 per entry word. Super Linguist Manager, US$5000.

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