

MULTILINGUAL BREAKTHROUGH

Malaysian French teamwork achieves a first in word-processing.

DESKTOP PUBLISHING may be the revolutionary tool for in-house publishing to date, but as the saying goes 'you ain't seen nothing yet.' In the computing environment, almost anything is possible. And just when some people thought that the software revolution has passed them by, WinText Jawi springs a surprise, quite a pleasant one too.

WinText Jawi is a product of a joint-venture effort among a research unit at Universiti Sains Malaysia, better known by its acronym PTMK (*Projek Terjemahan Melalui Komputer*), a few researchers from *d'Etudes pour la Traduction Automatique* (GETA) in Universite Joseph Fourier in Grenoble, France and WinSoft, and Apple certified software developer.

The brainchild of academicians from Malaysian and France, WinText Jawi is a modification of its original version - the WinText 2.6 word processing software - hailed as 'the most universal wordware.' WinText 2.6 allows the user to mix different languages within the same document. Words are automatically hyphenated according to the rules of 15 European languages, even though manual hyphenation is also possible. WinText 2.6 handles most European languages, and also non-Roman script languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Russian and Chinese.

If there is a word processor for Arabic, there is technology to develop a word processor in Jawi. The reason: Arabic and Jawi are very closely linked. And according to Roslan Shamsuddin, general manager, Uniphone Sdn Bhd, Apple Division, WinText Jawi is a software that addresses a need that at one time, most people thought was not possible. Researchers from GETA and PTMK have been working on the software for about 12 years, and Roslan is more than proud, to say the least. Says the Uniphone general manager, 'It's good to see something that has been started in the university environment translated into a viable commercial product.'

And the interest level for WinText Jawi has been more than encouraging. As Hamid Karim, Uniphone's district sales manager (government/higher education) puts it, 'We are getting a lot of enquiries from a lot of people. We've been receiving three to four calls a day since the launch (June 17) for WinText Jawi.' As a test marketing exercise, Hamid says Winsoft and the French Embassy have given Uniphone 100 copies of the WinText Jawi software to be distributed free of charge to relevant persons and organisations in Malaysia.

To date, copies of the WinText software have been given to the National Library and RTM (Radio/Televisyen Malaysia). Other copies will be distributed accordingly. Uniphone is currently awaiting confirmation from WinSoft on the retail price of the WinText Jawi software. Roslan says that the cost will be approximately 2,000 rgt, but he says that it is still subject to change.

In Malaysia, Roslan cites the government, religious communities and religious schools as possible markets for the software. He says that the WinText Jawi is a product for a very specialised market. However, he concedes that no prior market research was conducted when the WinText Jawi software was conceived. 'We're not sure of how well accepted it is in the market

or how well it's going to sell. But for us, that's not the point. We saw a need for a Jawi software in certain sectors of the country, and we have provided for that need. The people who need Jawi, will always need Jawi, regardless We hope it will lead to further developments, (technology-wise).'

On the international front, Roslan says WinText Jawi will also sell in countries like Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore (to a certain extent), and southern Thailand. The Middle Eastern countries are also possible markets, but according to Hamid, the ability to do word processing in Jawi is not the key feature in the WinText software. 'It's WinText's multilingual operating system.' In the WinText Jawi software package, users are also able to do word processing in Bahasa Malaysia, a feature made possible by a collaboration with Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka (DBP). The operating commands are in Bahasa Malaysia, and the software guide is also in Bahasa Malaysia!

Even with no definite markets to focus on yet, Roslan is not at all worried. Says he, 'We won't make world sales records in selling WinText Jawi, but it will sell and if nothing else, it will make a lot of people happy.'

And while WinText Jawi gropes to identify its market niches in Malaysia and also regionally, plans are already underway to develop a bilingual electronic dictionary in Bahasa Malaysia and French. This bilingual tool will be used to aid users engaged in translation work from French to Bahasa Malaysia and vice versa.

Whether or not the WinText Jawi software will sell like hot cakes remains to be seen. But for now, the Apple technology in word processing has added another feather to its cap. Just how far the creators of WinText Jawi will go to further develop the software is still unknown, but it is definitely a launching pad for greater things to come.