

## **The three faces of Joyce: word processors and other hardware allegedly of use to translators**

*John Hayes*

*Managing Director, Hayes Engineering Services,  
Croxley Green, UK*

You may have been tempted to attend this particular presentation either because of its title or perhaps because of the statement which appeared in one of the handouts preceding the event to the effect that the presenter is an 'erstwhile' chartered engineer. May I state right from the outset that I have neither been defrocked nor struck off the register and that I am still very much an engineer. Indeed, this fact plays an important part in my attitude to our work and the gadgets we may or may not use for it.

You may also recall a paper given on the occasion of 'Translating and the Computer 5' in November 1983 when I said that computers and the like had little to offer to specialist translators who dictated their work, certainly not at the price then charged for such equipment. Since the advent of very much cheaper computers some two years ago, I have climbed down from this position to some extent as we in Hayes Engineering Services – the small translations set-up run by myself, my daughter and 2.5 keyboarders – now own and operate two word processors (with a third to be added shortly) and are also on the point of installing a very sophisticated modem hook-up to one of our more important clients. Due to personal doubts about such equipment, as little as possible has been spent on it. When asked to give this paper, my brief was to present some aspects of inexpensive computerware and peripherals and our purchases fit this request quite well. Moreover, after two years of actually operating our machines we can, I suppose, claim to have some idea of what we are tackling.

When the Amstrad PCW 8256 appeared on the scene some two years ago – undercutting any other competition by a ratio of roughly 4:1 – it seemed the ideal opportunity to become familiar with the advantages and/or disadvantages of word processing without risking what is nowadays called 'serious' money.

Even before that I attended a programming course so as to be a little less computer-illiterate. So, with much doubt and hesitation, we invested in our first WP. It may surprise you to hear that friends and family consider me a gadget man and my reluctance to accept these particular gadgets must therefore have had its reasons. More of that later.

Any more detailed information on the Amstrad WP should perhaps be prefaced by saying that despite its ridiculous price it is by common consent one of the best, if not *the* best machine for multilingual applications. The WP software used by this WP is Locoscript which was written by the same people who wrote the software for the Diamond. Until the Amstrad arrived on the scene, the Diamond was considered the best WP proposition for translating purposes. Our first 'Joyce' – Joyce is the name given to the Amstrad WP by the press – has now been in use for over two years and has never given us the slightest problem. Whenever anything has gone wrong it invariably proved to be the operator's fault and not Joyce's. Maintenance costs have been nil. I am frequently questioned on the allegedly lacking service back-up. The answer to this is that some other WP suppliers charge up to £800 per year for looking after a machine. That amount at present buys almost three complete Amstrad systems, i.e. three computers, three monitors and three printers – so who needs maintenance? If we had a breakdown of, say, a printer, we would simply buy another complete set and this would give us a spare monitor and a spare computer for 'next time'. Joyce, as we see it, can be treated as a throw-away item. We feel sure that this is exactly what it was intended to be.

### **What then of the three faces of Joyce?**

Let us look at her best face first:

- (1) The menu and direct keystroke system controlling Locoscript is exceptionally convenient. Pull-down menus as provided by Locoscript are not commonplace and a great help as memory animators.
- (2) Joyce offers three complete keyboards in Locoscript 2 form, i.e. QWERTY, Greek and Russian as well as an enormous selection of mathematical and other symbols. The latter are particularly important to us as we are much involved in engineering matter frequently demanding mathematical formulae and the like.
- (3) After the quite disastrous first instruction book, the one issued with Locoscript 2 is almost excellent.
- (4) The 'solid' three inch disks, although the pariahs of the computer world, have much to commend them. They are tough, easily handled and stored and far better than floppies. (The latter are of course also on their way out.)
- (5) Joyce can correct, change layouts, do letter size gymnastics, justify, do subscript and superscript and italics, etc., with the best of them.

- (6) Joyce can be a great help with word counting. This has to be watched, however, because what is a word to a reader is not necessarily a word to a computer.
- (7) We have not had the courage to do it yet, but there is really no need to file hard copy. Disks can be filed easily and a year's work could be held in a fair-size drawer instead of some three filing cabinets.
- (8) A great advantage for beginners: with Joyce you can have the system set up and be in actual business after rudimentary instruction within a few hours. We recently put a 'new hand' to work on one of our processors who had never been near a WP. After a little instruction by us she produced saleable copy within three to four hours. May I add, to please the WP lobby, that she has no intention of ever returning to a typewriter, no matter how expensive or sophisticated.

Now to Joyce's average face:

- (1) The keyboard is very clattery, not just noisy but clattery. This does not affect its efficiency but simply gets on one's nerves.
- (2) The quality of the printer output could be better in all its modes. Although it is much more severely criticised by others, we consider this as part of Joyce's average face simply because we have never so far had any adverse comments by clients about our presentation. Better printer quality is in any event available if so desired simply by hooking up a more sophisticated printer. However, this would prove rather more expensive and thus does not fit into the context of this paper.
- (3) Printer speed in both draft and letter quality mode is only fair. A full DIN A4 page takes approximately one minute to print in draft form or four minutes in near letter quality.
- (4) Scrolling, that is to say, moving through the document is rather slow. Since the arrival of Locoscript 2 it is not as slow as it was but still pretty slow. There are faster-scrolling machines but none is instant.
- (5) The original Locoscript 1 software produced virtually unacceptable upper case umlaut letters and poor 'attached' underlining. Locoscript 2 has improved this to at least average standard.
- (6) Switching the system from single sheet to continuous stationery operation is a rather tedious business. However, our engineering texts are usually fairly lengthy so that we do not use single sheet operation very much. A combined system could be a considerable improvement for some users.
- (7) The memory is fairly small. We have so far found this no inconvenience as we do not run the spell checker and use no additional programs at present. If this is a problem, memory can be enlarged at slight cost.

And so we come to Joyce's rotten face:

- (1) The whole setup looks pretty cheap and nasty. That this does not have

to be has already been proved by Amstrad's latest addition to the range, a new WP which, by the way, comes with a daisywheel printer as standard. (A daisywheel printer produces better quality printing but introduces other problems too complex to discuss here.) This latest edition looks much more up-market.

- (2) The monitor screen is too glossy and the image far from perfect.
- (3) On the cheapest Joyce other printers can only be hooked up with some difficulty.
- (4) If a modem is to be used, an interface has to be added.
- (5) The machine runs on CP/M (control program/microcomputers) which is (a) out of date and (b) not compatible with IBM. A cheap WP running on DOS (disk operating system) and capable of handling Locoscript or a software package working in the same way would be our ideal.
- (6) Joyce is unable to produce the justified double column layouts much beloved by some translation users. There are tricks to overcome this but they are, to say the least, tedious.

So much for Joyce. There are of course many other WPs on the market, all offering different facilities and features but all fundamentally the same in what they can do. A few words on just how useful or otherwise any WP is to a translator will follow later.

I should now like to consider some further gadgets on the market allegedly desirable for translators.

We are actually using none of them simply because of what we at Hayes Engineering Services call 'Kundenabwehr'. Kundenabwehr is an untranslatable German word meaning something like 'defence against, or protection from, customers'. We have practised Kundenabwehr at HES for over 25 years because we do not care to become involved in the kind of work ready availability produces. We employ Kundenabwehr to the point where we do not even have a listed telephone number or an answering machine. We are not overkeen on satisfying demands for the odd three pages in 24 hours, nor yet the notion that we are waiting with bated breath for every little morsel that comes our way. We have, on the contrary, found that customers appreciate the service they are getting all the more when they know that they are not the only pebbles on the beach. On the other hand, when we do provide a service we see to it that it is second to none and that customers get what they want. Our turnover proves that this formula works and works well – in our field and for us. It may not work equally well in all or other situations. Any comments on further gadgetry should be viewed in this light.

Much has been made of the fact that the WP can be hooked into an electronic mail system and can also be operated much like a teleprinter. Whether or not this is useful to a translator depends on how hungry he/she is and how get-at-able he/she wants to be. However, the teleprinter is more or less doomed and will without doubt be displaced completely and quite soon by the facsimile printer

(fax for short). Although Kundenabwehr has so far precluded an investment in one of these machines, we cannot say that we have not been tempted. At present we feel reluctant to go ahead – even ignoring the fact that this machine would make us far too easy to reach – because prices are tumbling and efficiency is improving. An in-house fax machine is certainly not essential to us, since access to fax facilities, as and when needed, is not difficult to come by. However, the main reason for not buying into this field is that the results produced by various fax machines tried vary from excellent to quite poor. As with all computerised equipment there is also a time factor. Whenever we have attempted to send a fax or to receive one there have been hiccups. Moreover, when the copy eventually arrives on the desk it may not be all legible. By the time a message has been transmitted to the sender to the effect that a repeat page or pages is/are needed, the person responsible has disappeared, thus causing further delay. This is all acceptable in the hands of a secretary, but not in the hands of a freelance translator who should use his or her time translating.

Desktop publishing is another area where the computer has much to offer to certain users. As I know very little about this subject, I don't feel qualified to comment on it and in any event it will be covered in detail by another speaker. However, I cannot quite see where freelance translators fit into this picture. Are they now expected not only to translate and keyboard (preferably subliminally) but at the same time to provide complete complex graphic layouts?

This is perhaps the point where a few personal observations on the computer landscape in general might be allowed. As mentioned earlier, despite our investment in WPs, small though it may be, my views have not fundamentally changed. It is as ever my personal opinion that dictating is faster than keyboarding although this is disputed by a few claiming to stroke keys dealing with one idea whilst their brain works on the next. These, what I call 'subliminal', typists must be made of very stern stuff indeed. Moreover, I have never been a typist and have no intention of becoming one at this late stage. Let's face it, keyboarding, as distinct from pounding a typewriter, has become respectable because it involves an activity related to high tech, and high tech is 'in'. However, we must never forget that today's high tech is tomorrow's white elephant. I venture to predict that terminals are likely to vanish from senior executives' desks just about as fast as they arrived. That is not to say that these toys do not have their uses and it would be dishonest to suggest that we propose to do without them in the future. It is just that computers, word processors, modems, fax machines, desktop publishing, even teleprinters and typewriters have little or nothing to do with translating. Translating is converting text from one language to another. That, and that alone.

It has been suggested that keyboarding on a WP must be faster than dictating and audio-typing because WP keyboarding is akin to copy-typing and copy-typing is faster than audio-typing. After asking several experienced typists which they consider faster the answer was equally divided, with the typists who 'thought they could spell' in favour of audio-typing. Only a controlled

experiment could ever establish the real truth of the matter but it is quite impossible to create the conditions for this. If two competitors were to be set up, one with a WP, the other with a dictation machine and typist, the winner may simply be the faster or better translator or may have been given an easier text. Such a contest would not be fair to either participant. So it is left to the translator to decide which method to use. Only a comparison of the number of words translated over, say, a year would provide any evidence. Unfortunately, even that evidence would only be accurate if the number of hours worked by the participants in the comparison during that year as well as their speed and efficiency in translating are absolutely identical.

Needless to say, it will be clear by now that whereas the computer in the WP form has much to offer to keyboarders, translators dictating their work could no doubt manage to continue without it although this would mean foregoing some of the convenience it offers to the keyboard operator, as well as other advantages.

There is, however, one area where the computer has something tangible to offer to those needing translations – as distinct from those making them – and that is in machine translation. Here the computer really belongs and plays a direct and essential part in translating. Just how well it does this has been and is now the subject of many other papers. However, if machine translation had reached the level of perfection sometimes claimed, translators would have been out of business long ago. As it is, the specialist translators, or for that matter the efficient non-specialists – in other words, the translators with skill, speed and accuracy – seem to be surviving as yet.

Another sphere in which computers are said to play a useful part both for translation users and makers is that of wordbanks or electronic dictionaries. These are of course only as good as the contributors and compilers and must therefore include many of the same pitfalls as special dictionaries. Every translator who has ever used any of these knows that they vary from excellent to dangerous and useless. Wordbanks probably suffer similarly. To a specialist translator sticking to his or her subject such aids are at best expensive memory joggers. To non-specialists they could be very useful providing translators have access to many and the time to implement such access.

In virtually every other area the computer impinges on translating no more than on any other office function and translating is not an activity that comes under the heading of routine office work. The creation of pretty images, tidy layouts and the like should not be the translator's responsibility. He or she is far too expensive for that. He or she is a wordsmith and the other activities should be left to those trained for them. Of course, any hungry translations business could become, or might have to be, involved in round-the-clock availability or in producing multi-language finished printouts and the like but that is another ball game. It calls for high investment and much staff. One wonders to what extent such staff actually combines the translating with, say, the desktop publishing function and if to any extent whether it would not be more efficient to separate the two.

Just picture this scene: you are running a multilingual translating company available in all languages at all times to all comers and able to provide output in any form including finished printed catalogues, instruction books, etc. Imagine the number of people involved in such an operation and the skills they would have to be able to provide. This is precisely the reason why at the end of the day all translation suppliers, no matter how large, work with outside help. Under these circumstances freelancers – if called upon to keyboard or even desktop publish ‘at home’ – would need several WPs to be compatible with the systems run by their various employers, not to mention desktop publishing facilities. Or should one take it that the translation businesses will provide all their outside helpers with the necessary equipment? Perhaps so. At our very primitive level, we at Hayes Engineering Services indeed provide our keyboarders with all the machinery they need.

During the computer course I attended I soon learned that hardware and software not only had to be bought but also implemented. This takes time, time, time. Everything in connection with these machines seems to take time. I have spoken to many an executive on the subject of setting up a timesaving and ‘paperless’ office. (We’re all using more and more paper!) And what do these high-powered businessmen have to say on the subject? ‘We’re running a better (whatever that means) office but we’re saving neither time nor personnel.’ This is exactly our experience. My daughter Debbie and I taught ourselves the hard way using the dreadful Amstrad instruction book of that time and after about two months had mastered word processing. The WP is of course a compulsive toy. Once hooked, it is difficult to leave it alone. We all love the wonderful things we can do on our Joyce but unfortunately that does not make her a better tool. Anyone who has ever used a word processor knows that it is the greatest time waster ever invented. There is always another new trick to be learned and tried out – at the expense of time, of course. Correcting, while totally unrestricted and convenient, is slow. Printing-out for correction purposes is essential as we have found it virtually impossible to detect all errors ‘on screen’. The freedom the WP provides encourages mistakes as they ‘don’t matter’. This takes more time. Even dividing up the continuous pages and tearing off the tractor feed side strips is a time-consuming business and time is all a translator has to sell. But the worst aspect from the point of view of wasted time is the fact that one so readily succumbs to a disease I call perfectionitis. It is so very easy to improve text that one could go on and on. I am reminded of a character in Camus’ *La Peste*, a man who feels himself an author destined to write the definitive novel. In Camus’ book this author never gets past the opening sentence of his novel and he re-writes this sentence umpteen times right through Camus’ masterpiece. The WP creates the same temptation. There is not a document, nay, even a sentence written that cannot be improved upon in some way. The secret is knowing when to stop.

After all this, suffice it to say that we would not be without our word processors. Despite all my adverse comments they are of course here to stay and

typewriters will disappear quite rapidly. We have a whole string of electronic typewriters which are hardly ever used for anything now. We'll put up with the fact that it apparently takes us longer now to put a job to bed. It probably only seems that way.

Naturally, this paper was produced on the WP and keyboarded by myself. In a situation where maximum flexibility is essential, such as when writing original copy – a situation quite different from translating where the outline structure of the document has previously been fixed by the source language author – word processing is absolutely ideal.

I look forward with much interest and anticipation to what the future holds as far as computers affect translators, but can't help remembering the lines in a recent play about Alan Turing, the mathematician who cracked the Enigma code and was instrumental in building one of the first computers. Andrew Hodges, the author of the play, puts the following words into Turing's mouth in a speech given in or around 1950:

'... I feel sure that by the year 2000 it will be considered perfectly correct to speak of an intelligent machine, or to say that a computer is thinking. Of course, not everyone agrees with this view; far from it. Some people say that thinking is a function of man's immortal soul and since a machine has no soul it cannot think. Surely this is blasphemous. Who are we to deny the possibility that God may wish to grant a soul to a machine? Then there is the what I call the "Heads in the sand" objection. "The consequences of a machine thinking are too dreadful to contemplate", people say. "Such a thing could never happen." This point of view is usually expressed by intellectuals. They have most to lose. . . .'

Should the prophecy here implied ever come true, that is to say, should computers ever learn to think like man, I sincerely trust that I shan't be around at that time.