THE LOGOS LIVING DICTIONARY
- AN UNPRECEDENTED INTERNET RESOURCE

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Regular input from over a thousand Logos translators, along with terms proposed by an average of a thousand World Wide Web visitors per day, must mean that the Logos Dictionary is the fastest growing reference work of its kind. Originally used as the central Logos terminological database, the dictionary with over a million entries was made freely available via the Internet last year. This paper introduces this valuable Internet resource to those who have not yet had the opportunity to investigate this exciting breakthrough in interactive terminology management and discusses its development and underlying philosophy.

Anyone confronted with the hype surrounding the 'Information Superhighway' could be forgiven for holding up their hands in dismay and asking, 'What's all the fuss about?'. The sheer volume of information on offer is daunting enough in itself but, if a novice 'net-surfer' happens to stumble across something like 'Jerry's Awesome Homepage' or 'Hairy Mike's Cybernotes' and is faced with scanned-in photographs of somebody's 1982 Chevrolet or somebody else's brand-new kitchen, he or she could very well give up the Internet for life. The Internet is very democratic, very chaotic and one must exercise extreme caution. Take our profession, for example. An innocent young translator looking for information concerning Asian languages might log onto a search engine, such as Webcrawler, Yahoo or Excite, to look up all references to 'Asian'. Included in the results, along with 'Asian Translations', East Asian Studies and Asian and Pacific Languages, one might also find 'Asian Sweetie of the Week', which would inevitably produce results decidedly more to do with anatomy than linguistics.

Let us pause for a moment and consider the underlying philosophy of creating a web page in the first place. Disregarding the very basic need to 'leave one's mark' (not unlike a graffiti artist 'tagging' a blank wall), the primary motivation generally appears to be self-promotion. Directly or indirectly, something is being sold. This being the case, what is it that makes a visitor return to a site once they have digested the information available therein? Clearly one is not going to read the same old sales pitch over and over again. There must be something more to tempt us back. For a language professional, the very minimum would be a list of cross-referenced links to other useful language-related websites. The ability to consult dictionaries or browse terminology-rich documents would certainly be attractive. One site that has managed to include all these features in its content is the Logos Homepage, maintained by the Italian-based translation company, Logos Srl.

The URL for the Logos site is: *http://www.logos.it/*

The Logos website offers the following:

<u>Useful Links to Other Linguistic Resources</u>

This is a page of links containing more than 130 URL (Universal Resource Locator) addresses that connect to other servers offering linguistic resources, such as glossaries, dictionaries, translator associations and translator training programmes. The list can be sorted by subject, country or language.
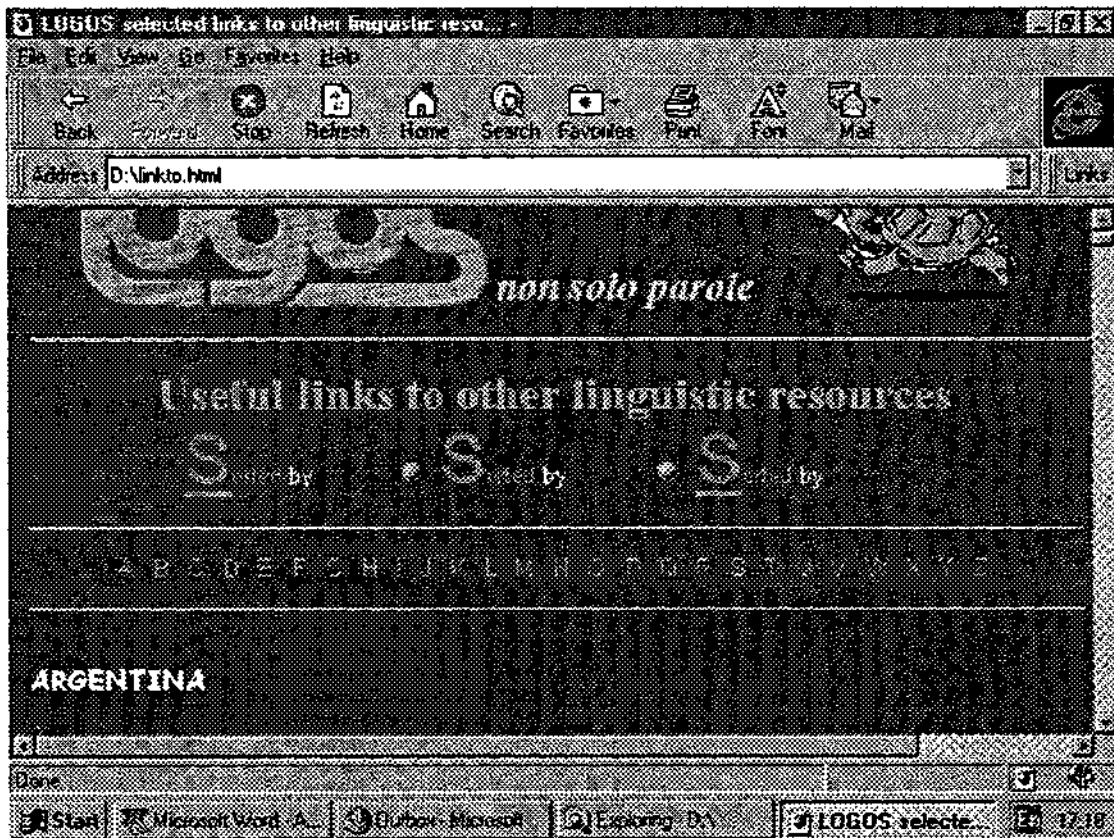

Figure 1
Links to other linguistic resources

The Logos Dictionary

A multilingual dictionary with over a million entries. The dictionary currently supports
thirty-one languages. When a word-search is invoked, the query result shows all
matches, ten matches per page. If the user does not agree with the result or would like
to propose an alternative translation, he or she may add a term to be considered for
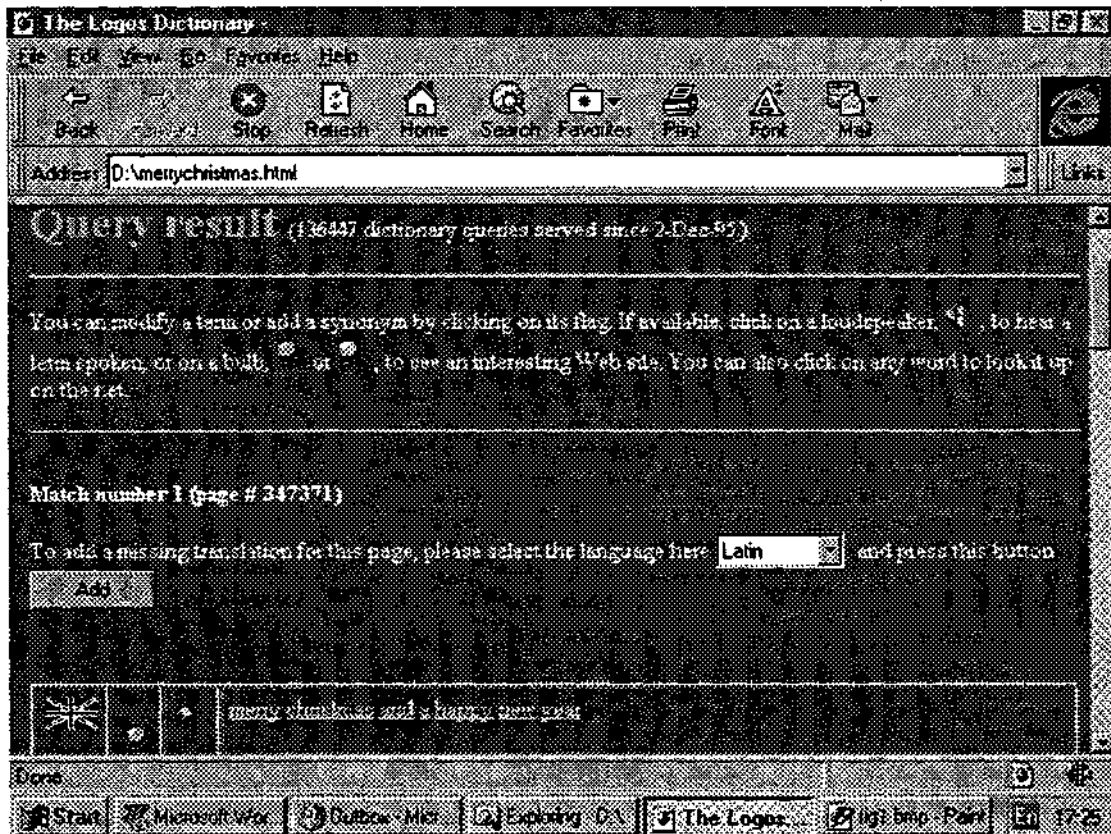inclusion in the dictionary.

Figure 2
Query result page

The Logos Dictionary Professional

This section of the dictionary functions identically to the General area but accesses terminology of a more technical nature.

Figure 3
The Professional Area

Word Exchange Forum

This is a bulletin board that enables all words not found in the dictionary to be queried via the Internet to all users. So far, there have been more than seven thousand queries on the Forum with a response rate of more than 50%.
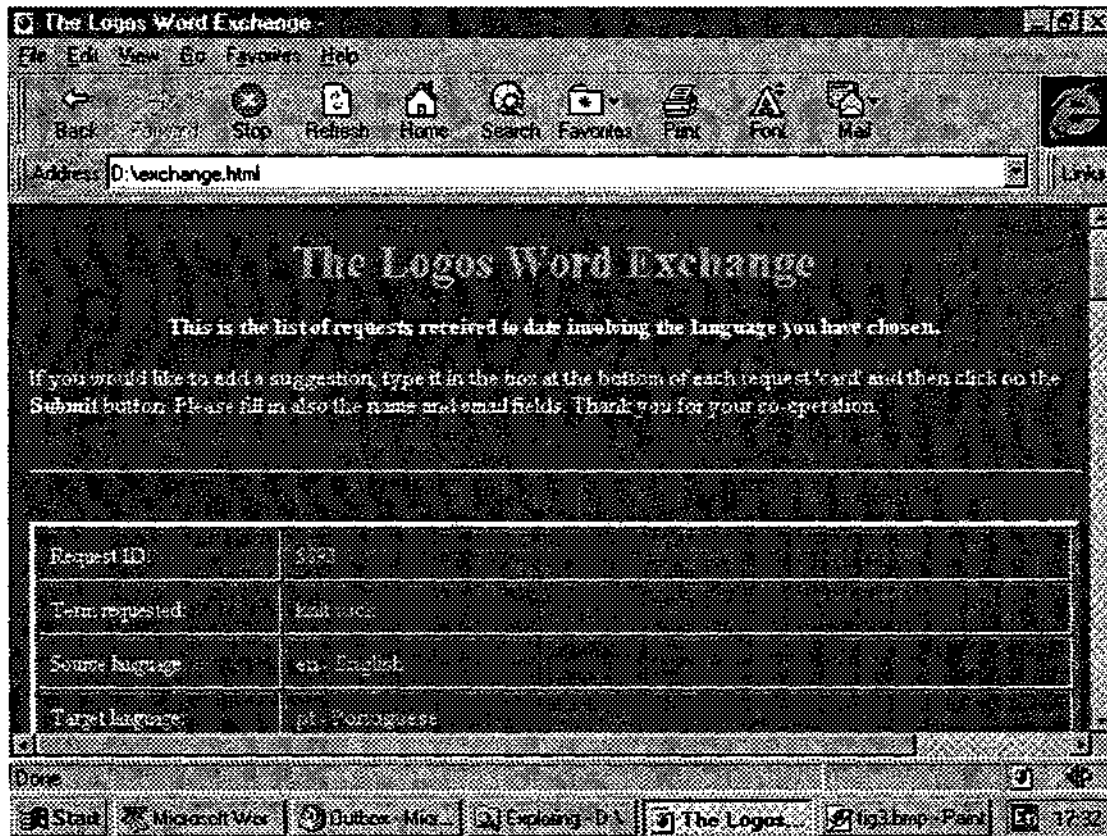

Figure 4
The Word Exchange Forum

Credits List

A list of people who have contributed new words to the dictionary, sorted by country.
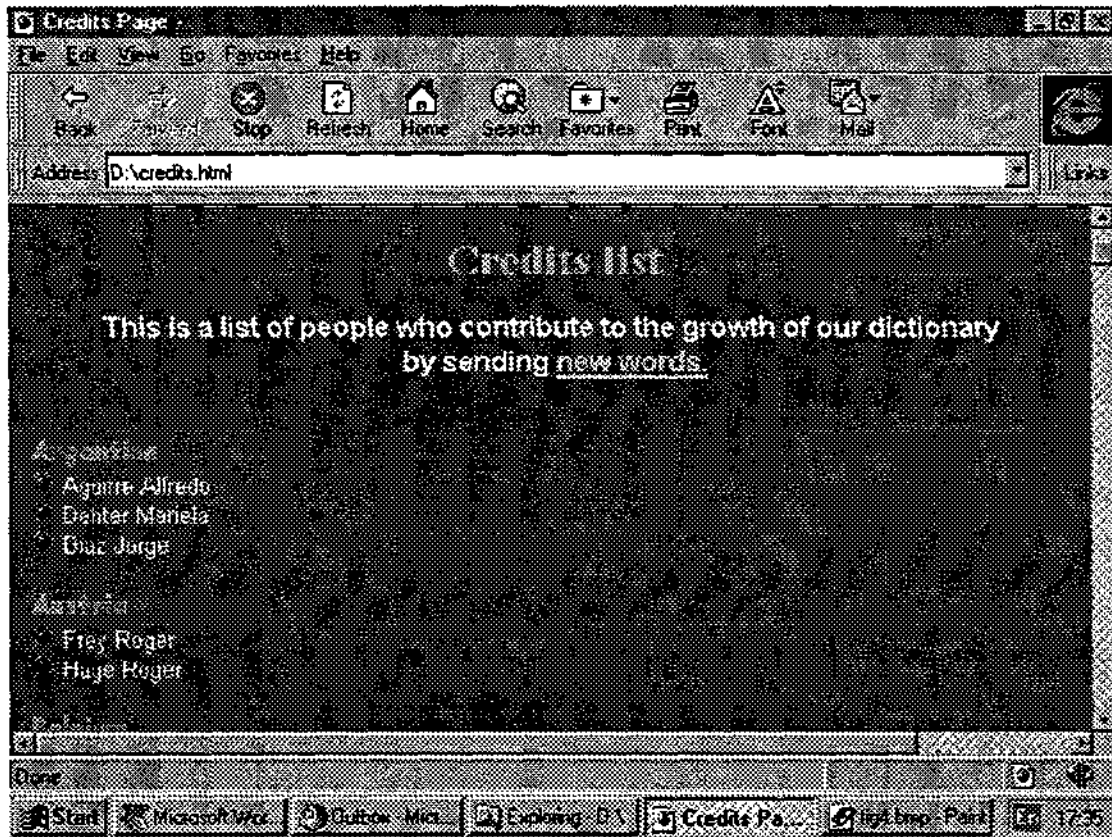

Figure 5
The Credits List

The Wordtheque

Logos are currently indexing not just the 200 thousand translations that they have
accumulated over the past seven years, but also five thousand works of classical
literature that will make up part of this public multilingual electronic library. This
library is growing at the rate of 500 thousand words per week and actually contains
more than nineteen million words (in all the languages). The idea is very simple: if the
word is not in the dictionary, it may be queried in the Wordtheque to see if it exists in
one of the indexed documents. The result will not only give the context, but also
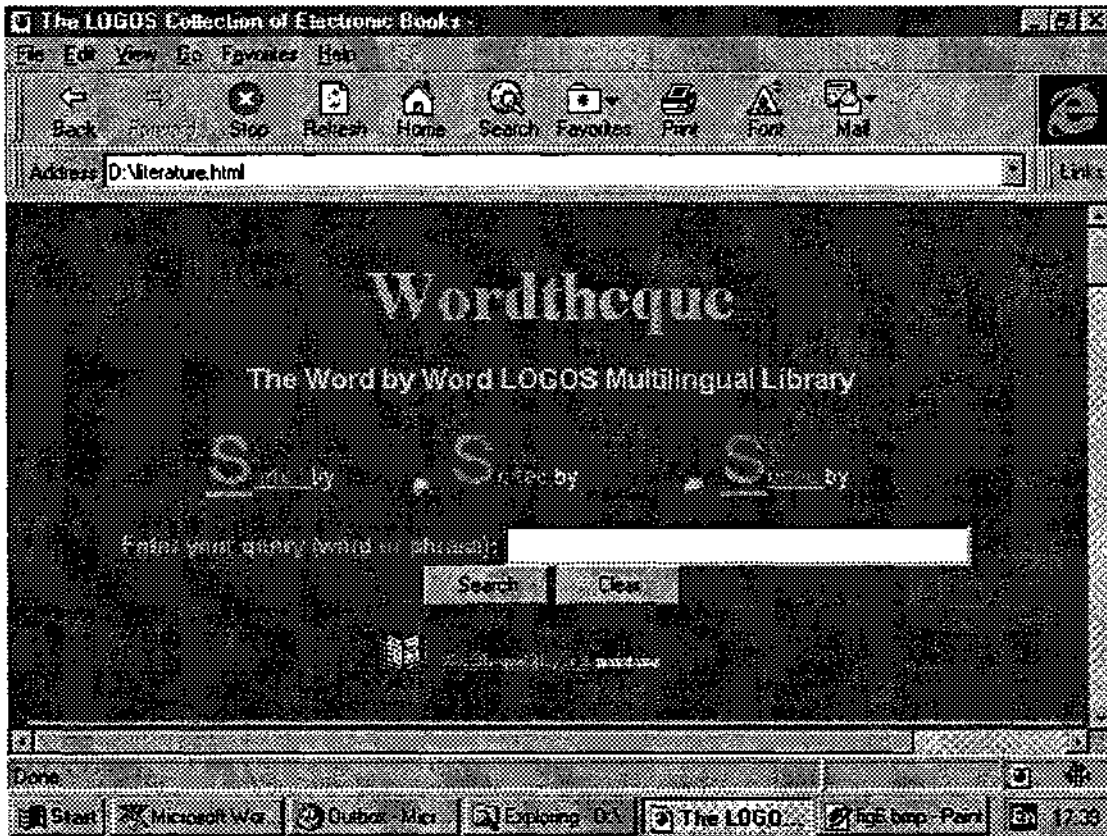domain, client and the author of the document.

Figure 6
The Wordtheque

The History

It might be interesting for us to trace the development of the Logos Dictionary since it fundamentally mirrors what is happening in translation companies the world over. Prior to 1989, terminology management at Logos was fairly ad hoc. Apart from the odd box of file cards and paper-based dictionaries, the primary storage media existed between the ears of the more experienced translators. As long as the office was small, a less experienced translator slightly raising his or her voice to ask a senior translator the meaning of a term did not cause too much disruption. However, as the number of in-house translators grew, the din caused by this terminology exchange became unbearable and it was decided to create a central electronic termbank. The first version was based on Clipper and was restricted to ten language fields. Initially, the translators were reluctant to use the dictionary because it contained so few terms and they felt that it cost them valuable production time to physically add new terms along with definitions, domain and customer details. They soon realised that they actually saved time once the dictionary grew to a respectable size. It had been decided early on that the dictionary would be multilingual so that, if a term was not available in one language, the translator might be assisted by the translations of that term in other languages. The rapidly increasing range of languages soon underlined the inadequacy of the first version of the dictionary. Far more language fields were needed and it could not cope with character sets of the more exotic languages, such as Chinese, Russian, Greek, Laotian, etc.. A new Oracle-based version was created that enabled the current range of thirty-one languages to be managed. By the end of 1995, the number of Logos in-house and freelance translators using the dictionary grew to over a thousand, with four full-time terminologists validating new entries. It was around this time that Logos president, Rodrigo Vergara, announced the fact that the Logos Dictionary was freely available on the Internet. With more than twenty thousand consultations a month, the dictionary is currently growing by approximately one thousand words per day.

The Future

One of the main problems with the Logos Dictionary is its popularity. These days, it is not uncommon to enter a query and end up with a message stating that the server is unavailable. This problem should be resolved when the new server is installed, which will contain eight microprocessors, resulting in processing speeds four times greater than currently available. There is also a plan to increase the number of languages from thirty-one to a hundred. By 1997, Logos hope to have over one hundred million words included in the Wordtheque, ten thousand illustrations and five million words in the Logos Dictionary, and be able to handle fifty thousand consultations per month. We can only hope that the Logos Dictionary is only the first of many such on-line dictionaries. The question is, will they be free of charge?