



Liam Cronin

Microsoft Local Language Program

Abstract

Microsoft is bridging the 'language divide' for speakers of minority and regional languages. Thanks to the Local Language Program (LLP), people who once were alienated by the standardisation of ICT around a handful of languages can now experience Windows and Office in their preferred language. To date, there are over 45 Language Interface Packs (LIPs) for Windows XP and 34 LIPs for Office. Examples include a version in Basque – considered to be the oldest European language spoken today – and, most recently Pashto, Luxemburgish, Nepali and Kiswahili. This initiative is a long term commitment from Microsoft and it does not end with the release of a product. The next wave of our flagship products (Windows Vista and Office 2007) will have additional language coverage with particular focus on Africa.

The Microsoft Local Language Program (LLP) is far more than an exercise in translation. Microsoft works directly with governments, local officials and language authorities to create glossaries of technology-related terms, each consisting of about 3,500 words such as 'click', 'mouse', 'file' and 'icon'. Once created, these community glossaries are put in the public domain for anyone to use, if they are not for profit.

The Microsoft Local Language Program was designed to provide speakers of lesser-used languages with an entry to information technology in a language that is familiar and which honours their linguistic and cultural traditions. For years, Microsoft has worked with governments and communities around the world to help everyone access technology. To that end, the Local Language Program (LLP) was created to bolster the local IT economy, increase individual productivity, and stimulate activity in local businesses and governments. The Program provides all people with native language interfaces that broaden the avenues to technology, reverse local 'brain drain', and preserve and honour local culture.

1. Goals of the Local Language Program

Some of the primary goals of the Local Language Program are:

1. Accelerating digital inclusion for people traditionally excluded due to the lack of available software in their native language.
2. Preserving local language and culture by using technology to drive a positive impact.
3. Extending the number of languages localised at Microsoft to include both niche languages like the lesser used Inuktitut language, spoken by the Inuit or the Eskimos of Canada, who amount to less than 30,000 speakers, to a widely used language like Bahasa Indonesia, which is spoken by 260 million speakers.

Local and regional governments around the world face great challenges building a strong information technology (IT) industry in today's global economy. Microsoft is committed to providing the tools and technologies required to develop, enhance, and expand local IT economies and enable language groups of all sizes to participate in this growth. The Local Language Program is designed to provide these opportunities to people of all regions, cultures, and languages in close collaboration with regional and local governments and universities.

The LLP addresses several critical goals of national and regional governments:

1. Enabling the use of regional languages in technology to preserve language/culture.
2. Developing a robust local IT economy.
3. Building universal IT solutions for Multilanguage cultures.

2. Three Pillars of the Local Language Program

The Local Language Program is a global initiative consisting of three 'pillars'.

2.1 Language Pillar

The foundation for the Language/Culture Pillar is the Community Glossary. The Community Glossary is a translation of standard IT terminology and is developed through voluntary collaboration between local governments, universities, and other language communities worldwide. Using the Microsoft-provided Web tools, volunteer translators and the sponsoring groups create and standardise the technical terminology glossary for their own language. Standardising the technical terminology is an important first step in developing the IT industry.

Using a volunteer process to build the glossary supports the following goals:

- Building a community and allowing the community to create the IT terminology for its local language
- Helping local groups preserve and promote their languages
- Allowing volunteers to develop their resumes and portfolios

Each new Community Glossary Web project is led by a project moderator – a volunteer with strong linguistic skills who is usually engaged by the local government. Volunteer translators join the project, suggest translations, and add comments to defend their choice of terminology. At the scheduled time, the project moderator reviews all suggestions for each term's translation, selects the most appropriate translation, and locks each term until the glossary is complete. The local glossary project team sets the schedule, use, and distribution of the completed glossary.

2.2 Technology Pillar

The Technology Pillar's focus is realised through the Language Interface Pack (LIP). Designed for regional markets that currently do not have localised versions of Microsoft Windows® and Office, the Local Language Program enables computer users to adapt their software to display many commonly used features in their native language.

Each new LIP is built using the glossary created by the Community Glossary Project in cooperation with local government, academia, and local linguistic experts.

When complete, the new Language Interface Pack is available as a free download from the Microsoft Download Center and is easily installed on a licenced copy of Windows XP and Office 2003. The Language Interface Pack also may be distributed, in agreement with Microsoft, by participating third parties such as governments, local language authorities, and universities.

2.3 Economy/Community Pillar

The Economy/Community Pillar is based on sparking the local IT industry into building on the momentum achieved during the production of the LIP. This has the effect of enhancing the local economy and community. As LIPs enable local IT industry infrastructure to further develop, opportunities are created to increase the value of an individual LIP, through the development of tools like spelling checkers, translation dictionaries, screen savers, and others to meet the specific demands of a burgeoning local market.

3. Irish Language Program

Microsoft and Foras na Gaeilge (the body responsible for the promotion of the Irish language throughout the whole island of Ireland) undertook the full localisation, development and translation into Irish of over 600,000 terms that are present across both Windows XP and Office 2003. Other partners involved in supporting the work were EGTeo, Dublin City University (DCU), eTeams (an Irish provider of translation services to businesses, governments and private clients) and National University of Ireland (NUI) Maynooth. Both packs are available to download from www.microsoft.com/ireland and www.gaeilge.ie at no charge to users.

The Irish-speaking community supported the work by contributing to the terms used in the Community Glossary, a key foundational reference for the remainder of the work. Under the auspices of the Terminology Committee in Foras na Gaeilge, the Community Glossary initiative afforded the Irish-speaking community the opportunity to make comments or contributions on the use of technical terminology. The Irish LIP is the only LIP programme delivered so far which included such extensive community engagement.

3.1 Benefits for Microsoft

- Created a wonderful opportunity for staff to get involved in a specific project that delivered real value to the local community
- Enabled Microsoft to build valuable links with the Irish-speaking business and academic community nationwide (and abroad)
- Over 3,000 downloads and 4,000 copies of the programme distributed to date
- Microsoft has been nominated for the Aisling Awards for its work and awarded the prize for the company which best promotes the use of the Irish language by the annual Glór na nGael awards

"The Irish language versions of Windows and Office have generated goodwill for Microsoft that far outweighs the cost and complexity of the project," commented Tom Murphy, PR and Community Affairs, Microsoft Ireland. "The project has created a lot of excitement internally and the consistently positive feedback that we receive from Irish speakers, not to mention the awards, have been an unexpected bonus."

Speaking at the launch Mr Joe Macri, Managing Director, Microsoft Ireland added, "At Microsoft, we are committed to helping people and communities realise their potential by increasing access to technology. A group of employees at Sandyford recognised the impact that the availability of Irish products could have on communities around the country and they have driven this project with both personal and professional passion to a very successful conclusion. I am very proud of the work that has been done and am also proud of the fact that the Irish language versions of these products are being launched in 2005 – the year that we are celebrating 20 years investing in Ireland."

3.2 Benefits for the Stakeholders

Four key groups can now access Microsoft Office and Windows bilingually allowing them to work, live and learn in the language of their choice:

- Public Sector – where there is a need to produce bilingual documents and content
- Schools – both Irish-speaking and non-Irish speaking; a CD copy of the Irish LIPs were distributed free of charge to all schools
- The Irish-speaking community
- Irish-speaking businesses

"The project for Foras na Gaeilge typifies the kind of language pioneering work that we see as a core role for our organisation. Through collaboration with industry and academic partners our vision is to drive the demand for use of Irish in a modern context by Irish people living their daily lives," said Seosamh MacDonncha, CEO, Foras na Gaeilge.

Speaking at the launch the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Mr Éamon Ó Cuív TD, said, "Under the Official Languages Act we made a commitment to ensure better availability and higher standards of public services through Irish. This initiative will aid that endeavour immeasurably making it easier for our public servants to work through Irish. I must also commend the partners for their vision and commitment to a programme which will empower the educational sector, businesses and the IT community alike to communicate through our national language. This development coming so soon after the recognition of Irish as an official EU language is a very welcome development."

Mr Seosamh MacDonncha, Chief Executive, Foras na Gaeilge said, "Foras na Gaeilge continues to focus on harnessing opportunities through technology to create new tools for the Irish Language by working with major partners such as Microsoft. Foras na Gaeilge acknowledges Microsoft's commitment to Ireland which has been profoundly underscored by this project. This project also demonstrates, in a very tangible way, Microsoft as a strong corporate citizen in Ireland – both North and South. The project for Foras na Gaeilge typifies the kind of language pioneering work that we see as a core role for our organisation. Through collaboration with industry and academic partners our vision is to drive the demand for use of Irish in a modern context by Irish people living their daily lives".

Figures 1 and 2 are screen shots from Windows and Office in Irish to demonstrate what has been achieved.



Figure 1: Windows Start menu 'as Gaeilge' ('in Irish')

4. Worldwide Language Program

There are numerous opportunities for Microsoft to use the LLP in tandem with other Microsoft citizenship efforts, such as Unlimited Potential and Partners in Learning. Through Unlimited Potential, Microsoft provides technical skills training to underprivileged individuals and communities. The Partners in Learning programme aims to empower schools to increase student learning, through teacher development and leadership.

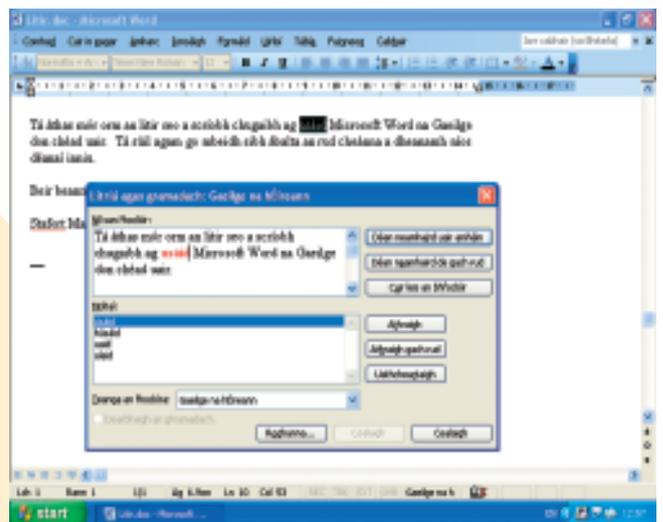


Figure 2: Microsoft Word 'as Gaeilge': Note the Gaeilge (Irish) spell checker and all menus and text 'as Gaeilge' ('in Irish')

5. Customer Feedback

What follows is a sample of the customer testimony received as Microsoft brings the Local Language Program to countries throughout the world:

5.1 Bahasa Melayu

"The availability of Windows in Bahasa Melayu – the most widely used language in Malaysia and in many other parts of Southeast Asia – will accelerate IT literacy among the Malay-speaking community and help to bridge the digital divide. Having a Bahasa Melayu interface will empower many more of our people, allowing them to become comfortable with and productive in using technology," said **Dato' Hj. A. Aziz Deraman, Director General, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Malaysia.**

5.2 Kiswahili

"Localisation into Kiswahili has the following benefits: For the first time, Kiswahili speakers will be able to learn how to use a computer in their own language. In Tanzania, where Kiswahili is the medium of instruction at the Primary School level, localization is even more important. From now on, computer classes may be introduced in primary schools without any problem. In addition, localisation benefits the language by adding to its lexical stock words that were not there before, thus adding a completely new semantic domain, that of information technology. Cheers!" **Kulikoyela Kahigi, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Kiswahili, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.**

5.3 Māori

"The Māori LIP will provide opportunities for Māori language users to work in a total immersion cyber environment. The initiative completes the final step in creating a new cutting edge domain for the growth of Māori language in the public, tertiary and private sectors. It will enable literary and language scholars to work within a single language paradigm producing a new genre of students and teachers who think and write creatively in Māori. This will have enormous benefits for linguistics in Aotearoa and add value for all New Zealanders who will be able to support,

utilise and access successful language initiatives online. This will establish a new environment and a new wave of language users which in turn will add further momentum to the indigenous knowledge wave which is building in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Microsoft New Zealand has addressed a significant need in Māori language regeneration by establishing the Māori language as the world's forty-second language to have Microsoft windows and office translated. In some ways Microsoft have given the language much more status than it has previously enjoyed in New Zealand and for this we are extremely grateful to Microsoft for their support." **Haami Te Taura Whiri te Reo Māori, chief executive of Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori.**

5.4 Welsh

"To summarise, the feedback has been phenomenal, fantastic and great. More please! It's the best project I've ever worked on, and the enquiries are still coming in, seven months and more after launch!" **Jeremy Evas, Leader of the Research and Grants Unit of the Welsh Language Board.**

6. Summary

Microsoft recognises that local and regional governments are facing many challenges as they work to build strong local IT economies. The Local Language Program

Table 1 details a comprehensive list of languages covered for Windows and Office

| Language | Windows XP LIP | Office 2003 LIP | Office 2003 Full |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Afrikaans | X | X | |
| Albanian | X | X | |
| Armenian | X | | |
| Azeri | X | | |
| Basque | X | X | |
| Bengali | X | | |
| Bosnian Cyrillic | X | X | |
| Bosnian Latin | X | X | |
| Bulgarian | X | | X |
| Catalan | X | X | |
| Croatian | X | | X |
| Estonian | X | | X |
| Filipino | X | | |
| Galician | X | X | |
| Georgian | X | | |
| Gujarati | X | X | |
| Hindi | X | X | |
| Icelandic | X | X | |
| Indonesian | X | X | |
| Inuktitut | X | X | |
| Irish | X | X | |
| isiZulu | X | X | |
| Kannada | X | X | |
| Kazakh | X | X | |
| Kiswahili | X | X | |
| Konkani | X | X | |
| Latvian | X | | X |
| Lithuanian | X | | X |

demonstrates the company's commitment to providing the software products and tools necessary for success in economic growth and language preservation. With the Microsoft Local Language Program, PC users around the world can bridge the digital and language divide, thereby helping them to reach out to new markets, create customised local solutions, stimulate the development of their local IT economy, and preserve and honour their culture. You can learn more about the Local Language Program by contacting your local Microsoft Sales office or by visiting www.microsoft.com/industry/government/locallanguage.mspx.

A list of Microsoft Sales offices is available at www.microsoft.com/worldwide.

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| Language | Windows XP LIP | Office 2003 LIP | Office 2003 Full |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Luxemburgish | X | X | |
| Macedonian | X | X | |
| Malay | X | X | |
| Malayalam | X | | |
| Maltese | X | | |
| Maori | X | X | |
| Mapudungun | X | | |
| Marathi | X | X | |
| Nepali | X | X | |
| Nynorsk | X | X | |
| Pashto | X | X | |
| Persian | X | X | |
| Punjabi | X | X | |
| Quechua | X | X | |
| Romanian | X | | X |
| Romansh | | X | |
| Serbian Cyrillic | X | | X |
| Serbian Latin | X | | X |
| Setswana | X | | |
| Slovak (on CZ) | X | | |
| Slovak | X | | X |
| Slovenian | X | | X |
| Tamil | X | X | |
| Tatar | X | | |
| Telugu | X | X | |
| Thai | X | | X |
| Ukrainian | X | | X |
| Vietnamese | X | X | |
| Welsh | X | X | |