Balancing Columns of Text and Translation

I would like to typeset translations in parallel with original texts using \TeX. Perhaps there is a \TeX\nician who can solve a formatting problem concerning this type of typesetting.

It should be possible to recalculate the size of blocks taken by each language until both languages end on the same word at the bottom of their block. Suppose that an initial estimate is made such that language A consumes 50% of the page and language B consumes 40% of the page. Ten percent of the page is taken for margins. When language A is at the top of its block, language B has only consumed 90% of its block. By making the column of language A approximately 5% wider and the column of language B 5% narrower, the last word of both languages will more nearly come to the end of the block. Is there an easy macro that will do this in \TeX?  

Johnny Stovall  

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Input-Dependent Macro Redefinition

I would like a way of combining various (non-successive) occurrences of certain types of input as the values of a macro. For example, initially we might define \textbackslash list\#1\{. Then an occurrence of \textbackslash data\{...\} in the input file should redefine \textbackslash list so that \textbackslash list 1 is ..., while \textbackslash list 2, \textbackslash list 3, etc. are empty. Another occurrence of \textbackslash data\{***\} sometime later should redefine \textbackslash list so that \textbackslash list 1 is ..., \textbackslash list 2 is ***, \textbackslash list 3 is empty, etc., etc.

Does anyone know how to do this?  

Michael Spivak  

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Letters  

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Dear TUG Members:

It was mentioned at our last meeting that TUGboat has yet to receive any "letter to the editor" submissions. I would like to help rectify that lack by stating my worries about the effectiveness of TUG. The Steering Committee is extremely reluctant to adopt any formal structure or bylaws. We certainly want to avoid unnecessary regulation and such looseness is fine as long as it does not prevent the committee from functioning. We do want to impose certain constraints—I believe the Steering Committee did decide, for example, that, while each of its members is free to define his own rôle, site coordinators should not discourage relevant telephone calls.

The committee members are very aware that opinions differ and are reluctant to take action that might impose their views on the group as a whole. I fear that this admirable attitude, in conjunction with an informal structure, may result in an ineffective Users Group. As a case in point, Sam Whidden mentioned in May that the Steering Committee had decided against assigning the maintenance and distribution of \TeX to a software house. There was considerable discussion of this point in January. Bob Morris eloquently argued about the dangers to university users of such an approach. I was not aware, however, that Bob had succeeded in convincing the committee as a whole. I had supposed that the finance committee would have prepared alternate proposals before this last meeting, that there would have been more discussion, and that a final decision would have been based on a vote. Certainly we cannot continue to abandon proposals simply because they engender heated discussion.

The same attitude emerged in the schedule for the "Implementors' Workshop". The program for the entire second day of the two-day meeting was left unplanned in order to allow attendees to raise issues of their own interest. With the limited amount of time available, the breadth of the information to be covered, and the number of opinions to be solicited, it might have been better for someone to have taken the responsibility of making the decisions ahead of time. The intent of the meeting was to provide demonstrations of output devices and discussions of \TeX implementations on various architectures. These topics were postponed until the end of an intense conference. While the other material was of unquestionable value, it was of most interest to users who currently have access to \TeX and to individuals considering acquiring \TeX rather than to those who have decided to install \TeX but have not yet succeeded in doing so. It is ironic that Richard Palais pointed out that it has been over a year since a general meeting of all TUG members—surely, had it been so advertised, this meeting could have been one. It is also ironic that Phil Sherrod suggested small workshops hosted by assorted \TeX sites to describe their own installations. Such a suggestion indicates that this meeting did not fulfill its intended purpose.

The May 14th Steering Committee meeting was open to the membership as a whole. The Steering
Committee certainly wants its actions to be visible,
it wants to solicit the opinions of others, and to
encourage new volunteers. However, by the time all
participants in such a large group have voiced their
opinions, it is impossible for decisions to be reached.
We need an effective decision-making process.

The Steering Committee has also proposed raising
individual membership fees and establishing
institutional memberships. This action has been
delayed until TUG determines the services it will
offer in exchange for such funds. A current situation
illustrates both the need for some formal organisation
and the need to raise money. The ANSI X3J6
committee on text processing language standards is
meeting June 22–26. Experienced users of two other
mathematical typesetting systems have been invited
to present the software with which they are familiar.
This ANSI committee has asked that a \TeX user also
participate. Although it is likely I will join X3J6, I
am unable to attend the upcoming meeting. Mike
Spivak has volunteered to substitute for me, but
does not have institutional support for his travel ex-
peneses. The officers of the TUG Steering Committee
strongly feel the Users Group should support this
activity. However, our treasury is empty and it is
not clear who can authorize such expenses.

The cure for this chaos is more work by the
Steering Committee. Sub-committees should meet
(even electronically or by telephone) between general
meetings. Someone must accept the responsibility
of organizer and must be willing to make decisions,
even if they are temporary decisions later vetoed by
vote of the entire membership. I am as guilty as
anyone else of neglecting my Steering Committee
responsibilities except during meetings and the few
days before TUGboat submission deadlines. I, for
one, will attempt to be more active in the coming
months.

Sincerely yours,
Lynne A. Price

Dreamboat

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One refreshing quality of the \TeX user com-
munity, and particularly of the system’s creator, is
that \TeX is viewed, in fact intended, to be the an-
cestor of an evolving family of document formatters
rather than as a static piece of software that will be
used for decades. DREAMBOAT is a feature
of TUGboat where users can describe (in whatever
detail) capabilities they would like to see imple-
mented in some successor system.

A brief “Son of \LaTeX" session was held at Stanford
in May. Extensions of immediate interest include
applications to non-mathematical documents, even
those printed in languages other than English. The
foreign language application requires replacement of
the English-based hyphenation module. For Hebrew
and Arabic, right-to-left formatting would be con-
venient. There is also current interest in interfacing
a general graphics capability with \LaTeX. As described
in the last TUGboat, Vanderbilt University has
modified the Versatec spooler to allow output of plot
files created in a format compatible with their Zeta
pen plotter. They intend to modify \LaTeX so that
plot files can be merged with \LaTeX output. Other
installations are working on graphics extensions.

\TeX’s user interface, particularly the input lan-
guage and error messages, was also discussed, as
an area to be improved in the less immediate fu-
ture. One specific point mentioned was the difficulty
of identifying which spaces and carriage returns
are significant. Macro languages in general were
criticized. The controversial suggestion was made
that future systems be more like programming lan-
guages. Joe Weening, a Stanford student, described
his work on a \TeX derivative called \LaTeX, which is
a hybrid of \TeX and Lisp. In \LaTeX, one can escape
from \TeX into Lisp, to do complex computations or
text manipulations which are difficult or impossible
to do in \TeX.

Other topics included page markup and an inter-
active (“what you see is what you get”) version of
\TeX. There was some discussion of a feature that
enabled users to tell where on a page material was
being placed. David Fuchs pointed out that such
a feature is incompatible with \TeX’s algorithm for
determining page breaks.