

Bilingual software program development in Saudia

A bilingual software educational program in Arabic and English has been developed by a local computer firm to teach Saudi students a wide range of subjects from mathematics, geography, English, Arabic grammar, religion, Arabic history, physics to Arabic calligraphy, appreciation of music and arts and improvement of memory.

Eight of these educational programs have already been introduced during the last two weeks while 16 more will be on the market by April.

The introduction of these programs, claimed to be the first of its kind in the Middle East, marks a successful breakthrough in the efforts to Arabize the home computer and produce Arabic application software.

Hamid Al-Sharekh, president of Al-Alamiah, told Arab News that these programs have been developed under a joint venture with Microsoft of the United States, a leading design and software house, which has designed specifications for a standard home computer. What enhances the usefulness of the Microsoft system is its compatibility which allows it to be used on a large variety of computers, he added.

Giving the background to the new venture Al-Sharekh said his firm started operations two years ago with the objective to Arabize a well-branded home computer and produce bilingual software programs. Arabization was jointly conducted first with Atari, then with Texas Instruments and was abandoned later because of financial troubles of those companies.

Atari suffered great losses from its video game operation and Texas Instruments from its home computer which forced TI to withdraw from this market."

These developments, Al-Sharekh said, forced his company to change its strategy. Instead of the hardware manufacturers, it began contacting the software houses for development of the programs.

The effort finally resulted in an agreement with Microsoft which in 1983 had sold its MSX (Microsoft Exchange) system to more than 15 Japanese electronic manufacturers who accepted the system as it offered, for the first time, standardization of the software system, compatibility and cost-effectiveness.

He said at least ten manufacturers already have their MSX products in the market.

In October '83, Al-Alamiah Software, a division of Al-Alamiah Electronics, contacted Microsoft to Arabize their system and an agreement was signed on Feb. 26, 1984.

The agreement stipulates that Al-Alamiah Software and Microsoft Japan (ASCII) will develop jointly the Arabic version of MSX according to technical specifications set up by Al-Alamiah Software," Al-Sharekh said, adding that the Arabized MSX version will be named MSX/Sakht.

The agreement also includes

Microsoft Japan. Fees and royalties will be equally shared.

In a parallel development, said Al-Sharekh, Al-Alamiah Electronics entered into a joint venture with Yamaha and Hitachi to produce MSX/Sakht based home computers and ROM cartridges for application software.

Hardware configuration as well as the built in software features according to Al-Alamiah's requirement.

Typical of these questions in the program a trip to Makkah were: What was the age of the Prophet when his mother died? (5, 10 or 12 years) What was Muhammad doing before he became the Prophet? At what age did Muhammad become the Prophet?

If the viewer answers these and many other questions correctly, the plane lands at the airport.

This signals the start of the

The program also displays the calendar of any month either Islamic or Gregorian when the month and the year are entered and can calculate up to a period of 9,500 years, backward or forward.

Color graphics, text editing and word processing capabilities are also possible on the which has a 32 K memory expandable to 64 K.

Al-Sharekh said that to overcome the problem of non-



The software has been developed by Al-Alamiah in Kuwait and packaged in Japan.

The programs cater to primary, intermediate and secondary schools and cover such subjects as Arabic grammar, Arabic morphology, electricity, world geography, human body, Arabic calligraphy, Arabic art, Islamic religion etc. An Arabic disk operating system and Arabic printer and various peripherals have also been Arabized.

Giving a demonstration of the system Al-Sharekh took this correspondent on a journey to Makkah via video.

He inserted the cassette into the computer which was plugged into the TV set.

As the system is switched on, an aircraft appears on the TV screen (to which Al-Sharekh is pointing on the left of the TV screen in the picture) followed by a quiz program which the viewer has to answer.

pilgrimage from Makkah (where the rituals beginning with tawaf, sa'i etc. are shown) and takes one through the rituals at Mina, Arafat, Muzdalifah and back to Mina en route to the final tawaf at Makkah.

However, if any of the questions is answered incorrectly, the plane gradually disappears from the screen.

In the event the viewer has access to the program by pressing the appropriate buttons.

This audiovisual presentation by the computer designed to initiate the intending pilgrim into the ramifications of the Haj ceremony.

Apart from these video games, other capabilities of the Yamaha AX-100 computer developed by Al-Alamiah include a calendar version program that allows instant conversion between the Gregorian and Islamic calendars.

availability of commonly used/ documented Arabic dictionary, his firm is producing specific Arabic software products.

To this end he said Al-Alamiah will carry out applied research in Arab countries, Japan and the United States in the field of computational linguistics, synthesized speech, data compression, enhancement of Arabic script video display specifically to cater to the Arabic language requirements.

To carry out these operations, he said, his firm has set up a subsidiary in Tokyo, Al-Alamiah Japan Ltd. (AJL) headed by M. Hosene, an expert in home electronics. Experts from Britain and Arab countries have also been pooled, he added.