



GeekSpeak

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The F-Word Again

I am well aware that I

recently rhapsodized rather romantically about codepages, Unicode, and fonts, but please bear with me just once more: I promise that this time I will actually have some useful information for you.

As language professionals—and particularly as project managers—we need to have the ability to work in a large variety of languages. Long gone are the days when “a large variety of languages” meant those natively spoken in Europe. To work adequately in the languages of the world, we need to have fonts on our system that can display the languages not covered by the fonts that come preinstalled on our computers.

So how does one do that?

First, there is the panic strategy. Here is how this plan of action works. You receive a translation in, say, Inuktitut, and all you see is empty squares or other odd-looking placeholders. You panic, Google something like “Inuktitut font,” download a couple of fonts, install them, restart your computer so that they are properly loaded, and then find out that they are actually not Unicode fonts. You search Google again, this time for “Inuktitut Unicode font.” You install these, restart your computer, and you can finally see the text.

This is the strategy I would recommend!

Just kidding.

Obviously, you want to be prepared to work with languages beyond Latin, Cyrillic, Arabic, Hebrew, Thai, Indic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean scripts, all of which are “covered” by the preinstalled fonts on your Mac or Windows computers.

You could also install a lot of Unicode fonts that cover all eventual possibilities. Sites like www.wazu.jp have remarkable collections of

Unicode fonts for all kinds of languages and scripts that you could download to ready your system. This might be a fine way of going about it, but it is also one that will slow down your system quite a bit—the more fonts, the slower the computer.

By the way, a “Unicode font” is a font that uses the code points for the characters of the script according to the Unicode convention. A non-Unicode font merely replaces code points of “ordinary” fonts, so you do actually see characters when you open the text without the font—just not the ones you were hoping to see. So as a little side note: always, always remind your translators in less common languages to work with Unicode fonts!

Now back to our strategy session. To equip your computer with the fonts you will need at some point—without panicking or having the computer run at a snail’s pace—you will need to get yourself some fonts that cover a huge variety of scripts.

You should probably start with Code2000, which is arguably the most important font that a multilingual project manager should have on his or her system. This is the most comprehensive Unicode font, with more than 60,000 glyphs and an impressive array of languages. I do not want to bore you with endless lists of languages and scripts that you have never seen or heard of (and I can almost guarantee you that there are many among those that Code2000 covers), but let’s just say that if you ever wanted to display Klingon alongside Inuktitut and Amharic, Code2000 is for you.

Another font you should download is called Everson Mono. It covers fewer scripts than Code2000—including Armenian, Canadian Syllabics, Cherokee, Cyrillic, Georgian, Greek, Hebrew, Latin,

The GeekSpeak column has two goals: to inform the community about technological advances and at the same time encourage the use and appreciation of technology among translation professionals. Jost also publishes a free technical newsletter for translators (www.internationalwriters.com/toolkit).

Ogham, and Runic—but some of these are not covered by Code2000.

And finally, you should also look at Doulos SIL. This font does not cover as broad a range of languages, but it includes virtually every feasible character needed for almost any Roman- or Cyrillic-based writing system, many of which are not included by the fonts above.

If you round out your existing assembly of fonts with these newfound friends, I can (almost) promise that you will never have to scratch your head again at odd-looking squares or other placeholders where you should be seeing text. Whether you actually understand what you are seeing, however, exceeds the terms of this warranty.

Code2000

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/code2000>

Everson Mono

www.evertype.com/emono

DoulosSIL

scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site_id=nrsi&id=DoulosSILfont

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