

GeekSpeak

Jost Zetzsche



A Cautionary Tale

Linguee just released a completely overhauled version of its—well, I’ve always had a hard time describing what it is exactly.¹ Corpus tool? Search engine? Dictionary?

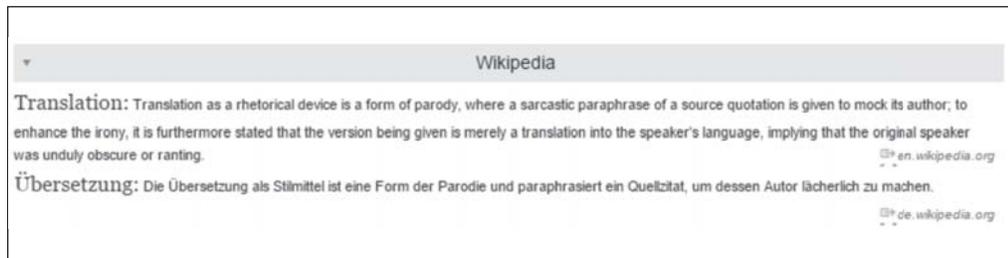
Finally, in its latest incarnation, it’s clear just what it wants to be: a dictionary. According to Gereon Frahling, Linguee’s chief executive officer, it’s not just *a* dictionary, but it’s going to be *the* online dictionary.

If you’ve used Linguee in the past and found it as helpful as I have, you’ll see immediately what is different. (In fact, you might have discovered this long before reading this if you use it day-in-day-out).

If you search for single terms in one of the supported languages,² you won’t see primarily the previous results from its enormous corpus of online material. Instead, you’ll see results from its dictionary (including synonyms and usage examples) at the top of the page. Previously, those entries were shown as well, but less prominently and with lesser quality.

In the past few months during an ongoing campaign, Linguee has devoted a team of more than 300 professional translators to edit these dictionary entries manually. While they take the statistical data from the corpus search into consideration when performing their edits, they still go through each entry individually. (Some language combinations, in particular English↔German and English↔French, have been shown more love than others so far.)

If the term for which you are looking also has some entries in Wikipedia, you’ll next be shown links to those articles, including the first sentence of those Wikipedia entries. This is a good thing because in the



case of homonyms, the first choice may not always be the most appropriate. For example, the entry on Wikipedia for “translation” appears above.

Only below the Wikipedia entries will you find the corpus entries (“external sources”) to which you are accustomed. If you search for more complex phrases that have no corresponding dictionary or Wikipedia entries, the corpus entries will be placed first.

Along with those design changes, there is also helpful AutoComplete and AutoCorrect functionality that shows you translation suggestions as you type the term into the Linguee search field.

It’s all pretty cool and slick, but—and you’ve very likely come to this same conclusion on your own—none of those features is directed at the professional translator. In fact, it’s

probably safe to say that Linguee has just become a little less helpful for the pro. Now, this does not mean that it’s not helpful, but it’s clear that professional translators are no longer a priority and are not being shown the love we all felt so gushy about when we first started using Linguee.

Some time ago, I reported in my newsletter³ about Linguee’s attempt to reach out to the professional community by offering a f-a-n-t-a-s-t-i-c tool that searched through its corpus *and* took into account all of the context of whatever you searched for right from your translation environment tool, thereby producing vastly superior results. We (the professional translation community) effectively rejected that offer because of its price (something like €5 a month), so it was a natural for Linguee to move on and focus on a general audience. While that audience also won’t pay

Information and Contacts

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 is the co-author of *Found in Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives and Transforms the World*, a perfect source for replenishing your arsenal of information on how human translation and machine translation each play important parts in the broader world of translation. Contact: jzetzsche@internationalwriters.com.

directly, the millions of eyeballs on its ads will. Interesting story, huh?

I can't think of a better example of why it's important for us to think and act like business owners. If only a relatively small percentage of the hundreds of thousands of translators worldwide had acted like businesses, we would all have access to a better tool today!

I (still) love Linguee, and I'm thankful to its team and its many external editors (who, by the way, are being paid for their work). I will most likely use it as much as I did before—even if it takes a scroll or

two more to get where I want to be. But I'm most thankful for the great cautionary story it provides. ■

Notes

1. Linguee, www.linguee.com.
2. Linguee English>German Dictionary, tinyurl.com/lingueeLangs.
3. "And This Is Where the Sharing Stops," *The Translator's Tool Box* (Issue 13-11-229), tinyurl.com/lingueeToolbox.

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the folks for whom many of us don't interpret much at all, such as bailiffs, courtroom clerks, or medical unit secretaries. They have the systems knowhow we may lack, and we're often at their mercy to point us in the right direction for a myriad of reasons. The relationships we build with them are based on social niceties or interactions that have little to do with our interpreting skills. In reality, though, we are also working for them because in order to move their calendar, keep their patient wait times in check, and complete their work, they rely on our being prompt and focused on our work obligations.

These simplistic categories serve to hint at how these very different systems—e.g., legal, known for being

cold and adversarial, and medical for being warm and helpful—are really more alike than different for a staff interpreter. All of the roles played in the medical and legal systems are inter-related, and we ultimately become part of something bigger than ourselves.

Although we are perfectly capable and comfortable keeping things at a cordial distance when we work in environments unfamiliar to us, once we start experiencing situations with the same people repeatedly, something really worthwhile begins to grow. Whether at the end of the day or the end of my career, I hope my head will be pleased with a job well done, but I'm sure my heart will burst with good memories of my work family who served the public alongside me every day. ■

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