GeekSpeak | Jost Zetzsche

jzetzsche@internationalwriters.com

Digital Natives

I have been carrying the term pair "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" around with me for a few weeks, and I finally realized why they have made such an impression on me. Here is how *Wikipedia* defines these terms:

"A digital native is a person who has grown up with digital technology, such as computers, the Internet, mobile phones, and MP3. A digital immigrant is an individual who grew up without digital technology and adopted it later. A digital native might refer to their new 'camera'; a digital immigrant might refer to their new 'digital camera.'"

(Were I a digital native, I would probably have referred to this quote only by a hyperlink or by saying "the dictionary," rather than "*Wikipedia*.")

Many—if not most—of us are digital immigrants. After all, the reason I write about technology is to "interpret" technology and make it palatable for the many immigrants among us. In a way, it is shocking to have to identify myself as an immigrant and realize that I will never have the same technology fluency as 20-year-olds or teens; however, I also think that these terms offer some real hope.

We are all translators, and most of us did not grow up with more than one native language. I cannot imagine anyone who has learned a foreign language to translation-level mastery who did not feel great excitement in the process of learning that language. Remember waking up after your first dream in the foreign language? Or when you felt that you could express something better in the new language than in the language you grew up speaking? Or when you first felt as much confidence talking in your new language as you do in your first language? I remember those moments vividly. The challenge is to transpose that same excitement into learning yet another "foreign language": technology. Here is the deal: We know we can do it and be good at it, because we have already done it to the point of mastery.

I recently visited Poland for a conference, and I was amazed at how little I understood—there seemed to be so few cognates that I could cling to. I am afraid that this is how many of us feel when we look at the technology that can and should support us in our work as translators. If I had the time, I would love to study Polish, and I am sure that I would enjoy it. As far as technology goes, the question is not whether we have the time or not—the question is whether we want to continue to evolve in our profession or not. We can do it grudgingly, or we can try to approach it as if we were entering into the adventure of learning a new language.

Przejdźmy do rzeczy!

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).

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