



GeekSpeak

Jost Zetsche

jzetsche@internationalwriters.com

What the Font?

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).

The February issue of *The New Yorker* started the first of its obituaries on John Updike with this (very long) sentence:

“John Updike (1932-2009) once said that his first publication and nearly sixty-year-long relationship with this magazine was the great professional event of his life—no, he called it the ecstatic event of his professional life—and he never tired (for younger writers, it was inspiring to see how he never tired) of seeing his prose in Caslon type (...).”

This felt like such an affirmation to me: One of the giants of modern literature got a kick out of seeing his publications appear in a certain font!

You see, I have a real passion for fonts. In fact, I believe that fonts can make our life just a little bit easier. After all, we spend most of our time staring at computer screens, and a change in font can make all the difference in a long day’s worth of work. While it is definitely not a very good idea to change fonts in the files that you are delivering to a client, it may be easy to change the fonts in the translation environment tools with which you process the files, without this having the slightest effect on the actual deliverable files. (Do not do it if you are working directly in the native interface of the file, such as with Trados, Wordfast, Metatexis, or Multitrans within MS Word; however, if you have a tool that works through an intermediary format like pretty much the rest of them, it should be no problem.)

For me, this has the same effect as repainting the walls of a room or putting on brand new clothes—only it is much easier and cheaper.

If you first want to get an overview of what kind of fonts are available on

your system, you can use the Font Sample Generator (www.mousetrax.com/Downloads.html#fontsamples), a macro that allows you to generate a Word document that lists samples of all the fonts installed on your system. Of course, if you have Word 2007, you could just highlight some text in a Word document and then hover with the mouse over the different fonts in the open font drop-down on the home tab. The font of the highlighted text will change for preview purposes with each movement of the mouse. It is a great feature for selecting the right font.

If none of the fonts strike you as worthwhile, it might be time to install some fresh fonts. There are plenty of sites that list free fonts (and even more listing ones for purchase), but a good place to start is 1001 Fonts (www.1001fonts.com), although you will quickly discover that working in a super-decorative font does not really help your productivity. There are plenty of ways to install fonts. You can select Start> (Settings>) Control Panel> Fonts and then select File> Install New Fonts, or you can simply open Windows Explorer (WinKey+E) and copy and paste the .ttf font files into the C:\WINDOWS\Fonts directory.

If you see a font somewhere that you love to work with but have no idea what it is or how to get it, you can have it analyzed at WhatTheFont? (www.myfonts.com/WhatTheFont). It may not find a perfect match, but chances are it will find a “fuzzy match” and suggest similar alternatives.

If you feel particularly creative and would like to create your own font without paying an arm and a leg for a professional font design tool, go right ahead. Sites like vLetter (www.vletter.com) or the much cheaper and easier Fontifier (www.fontifier.com)

allow you to create your font based on your handwriting. The open-source tool FontForge (fontforge.sourceforge.net) allows you to alter an existing font to make it suit your particular needs, and the great site FontStruct (fontstruct.fontshop.com) allows you to create your own font, download fonts that others have created, and network with other font lovers. What I particularly like about FontStruct is that it allows you to select from among 22 different writing systems, including Arabic, Hebrew, Thai, and Japanese Katakana (no surprise that Chinese characters are not among the options!).

Now, you need to be aware that many of the sites mentioned above are also trying to sell fonts alongside their free fonts. However, if you are really keen on getting a font, it may be worth paying a license fee. Plus, it is worthwhile to see that some of the truly powerful commercial fonts are not just the product of an afternoon of goofing around with a font design tool, but well-constructed and designed pieces of art.

Finally, if you have gotten into a real frenzy over the new fonts and notice that your computer has slowed down in the process (and it will if you have lots and lots of fonts), you might want to look at the appropriately named free Font Frenzy (www.sdsoftware.org/default.asp?id=5929). This product manages your fonts by allowing you to temporarily deactivate certain fonts and reactivate them at the snap of a finger.

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