



GeekSpeak

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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.

Getting Physical

My mother-in-law Donna is a remarkable woman. She is wise beyond her years, she is full of creative and unconventional ideas that defy her age, and she is very intelligent and highly practical. The quilt that she handmade for our wedding many years ago is one of the most beautiful and meaningful creations I have ever seen.

However, when it comes to her computer, which would seem to present the perfect opportunity to use her plentiful creative and organizational skills, an impenetrable wall separates her from it. The digital divide that she experiences is more like a digital abyss, an abyss that seems to deepen rather than become more manageable every time she tries to bridge it. As a quilter, gardener, and pianist, if only she could actually physically get her hands around the applications with which she is working, she would be great.

I think this lack of tactility with our computers is exactly what blocks many of us from success. It is what prevents us from being truly confident and efficient. We may have built ourselves tenuous, swaying bridges of vines to span the divide between the computer and ourselves, but few of us beyond the age of 30 are able to ignore the gap completely and walk straight into the digital world and its virtually tactile experience.



This is the toy I have been bringing to recent workshops.

In recent workshops I have given for translators, I brought along an odd sculptural toy I have had since my youth, a network of chunky, interconnected wooden joints that can be twisted into unlimited patterns and forms. It really has no rhyme or reason, but I love to see how people are drawn to it, how they start playing with it almost unconsciously, trying to create shapes and taking pleasure from its fluid, ever-changing movement. In my workshops, I have challenged attendees to recreate a certain figure that I

love to make. There is no trick to making it; you simply need to gently force your will onto the toy until it gives way to that shape. I tell attendees that is how we need to work with the programs in our computers. Do not be overwhelmed with the many different options and the apparent complexity of your translation environment tools or whatever you primarily use. Try the virtually tactile approach (and make sure to wipe those fingerprints off your screens afterward).

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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 translation affects every aspect of your life.

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