GeekSpeak

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Honing Strategies

I am sure many of you have encountered the stunning black and white photograph *Man Feeding Swans in the Snow* in the past few weeks. (See page 29 if you have not.) The photo has gone viral, with millions of views worldwide. I can only imagine that you were as awed as I was by the image captured by Polish photographer Marcin Ryczek. The composition is so simple and yet so striking. It is a modern-day *yin* and *yang*, with its colors and its striking juxtaposition of the sheltering blanket of snow against the cold and chilly waters. In short, it is one of those images that one could spend pages and pages writing about.

But aside from the philosophy and aesthetics, there was one more aspect of the photograph that really struck me. Despite all of the huge advancements in photographic technology, this black and white image is very, very simple. And while I assume that the photographer used a digital camera, it does not appear to be technologically manipulated or enhanced, yet it still strikes us with its exquisite beauty and power.

This provides a classic starting point to write about a misconception in our field that I think is very widespread—namely, that every development in translation technology should find uniform application.

Can you imagine anyone looking at *Man Feeding Swans in the Snow* and complaining that so little technology was used in the image? Or suggesting that making it into a color image or using some Photoshop shenanigans would have properly jazzed it up a bit? The very idea sounds hideous and just as crazy as declaring that all translation should be done with the utmost that technology has to offer.

By and large, the ongoing development in translation technology is relatively linear, meaning that—as it usually works with technology development—each building block is placed one by one on top of more building blocks.

But it is important to understand that this does not mean that every one of us translators—the main actors of this industry—are compelled to adopt each of these blocks as if bound to them by some strange fate. True, we are well off if we understand each of the new translation technology developments so we can assess their usefulness to us, but it should be the *usefulness* and not the mere *existence* of a technology that makes us want to adopt it. In fact, I think the market even requires some of us to limit ourselves to working with technologies that have been around for a long time (such as nothing but personal computers, electronic communications systems, and Internet access). Others will need to work with the latest technologies of today and tomorrow. Still others—the majority, in fact—will fall somewhere in between.

We serve a highly diverse market. To be more exact: we serve many markets with very naturally divergent needs. We need to find the technologically best way to serve the very niche for which we supply translation. Since we often serve several niches, we might have to equip ourselves with slightly different technology for each. And if the latest in technology does not fit one or any of the markets to which we cater, it might just not fit. Period.

The Translation Automation User Society (TAUS), recently published the *Translation Technology Landscape Report* (download it free at http://tinyurl.com/TAUSReport) that matches the development of translation technology with different eras of our industry. According to the report, the

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Washington
Seattle
June 1, 2013
Registration Deadline:
May 17, 2013

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Photo: *Man Feeding Swans in the Snow* by Marcin Ryczek | www.marcinryczek.com | www.facebook.com/MarcinRyczekFotografia
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1980s were the *Translation* era, during which the industry focused on documents that were translated without any technology. The 1990s were the era of *Localization*, in which the focus was on software translation with translation memory and terminology software. The 2000s were the era of *Globalization* and featured the simship (simultaneous shipment) of products in many languages, achieved with the help of translation management systems. In the 2010s, the era of *Integration* (by the way, that is right now), the focus is on integration into enterprise systems achieved with machine translation and advanced leveraging. Looking ahead to the 2020s, the era of *Convergence*, TAUS predicts that translation will be embedded in every app and on every screen, bringing real-time customized machine translation to fruition.

At what point did I lose you?

Do not worry—apparently I am also a few years behind.

Do all of these analytics come out of thin air? Well, some of them might stand on pretty shaky ground, but where they *are* all wrong is in the assumption that our whole industry is heading that way.

Granted, many larger clients have been using translation management systems these past few years. Are these your clients? Some of you will answer in the affirmative, certainly, myself included. But does this mean that our industry as a whole has reached or will ever reach that era? No, because it clearly does not make sense for so many clients and projects to have such massive systems. The same is true for technologies like machine translation in its various forms. Machine translation has already carved out an important place for itself, and that space will continue to grow. If you want to work with that technology, whether as a post-editor or by helping to develop or implement these systems, great. There should be plenty of work for you if you know how to market yourself adequately and have the needed skill set.

If you choose to take an earlier exit from the technology development highway, however, you will find that there are plenty of opportunities at virtually every stage. And if you change your mind, it is never too late to find a feeder road and get right back on the highway.

Man Feeding Swans in the Snow speaks to all of us, partly because the photographer chose a technology that suited his objective. It is the same as good translation aided by technology that is appropriate, useful, and precisely suited to its purpose.

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.*