

Language Immersion through Social Media

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Here are some changes you can make and instructions for creating an online, language immersion learning environment, no matter what language you are learning.

Webmail

If you use e-mail every day, you likely can find the buttons for composing, replying to, forwarding and deleting e-mails with your eyes closed. By changing the interface language of your webmail provider, you enable yourself to speak fluently about downloading attachments and checking your spam folder with your target-language colleagues.

Gmail

<http://mail.google.com/support/bin/answer.py?answer=17091>

Hotmail

<http://help.uk.msn.com/safetyandsecurity/password/article.aspx?cp-documentid=4313937>

Yahoo Mail

<http://everything.yahoo.com/us/?world>

Web Searches

When you arrive in a new country, Google will notice the new IP address and start defaulting to Google.xx. This means that when you search for restaurants or cities, it “localizes” the results both in **terms of content and language**. You can create this effect for yourself by changing the settings to prioritize results in your target language. Then it’s just a matter of self-discipline to click on the target-language link rather than scrolling down to look for English!

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Bing

<http://www.bing.com/worldwide.aspx>

Google

<http://www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/static.py?hl=en&page=guide.cs&guide=1224171&answer=35892&rd=1>

Yahoo

<http://everything.yahoo.com/us/?world>

To go even more local, switch to a country-specific search engine. For an exhaustive list, click <http://www.searchenginecolossus.com/>

Social Networking

You can probably navigate your favorite social networking sites without reading the buttons too closely. After changing the interface language, at the very least you will be able to tell people when you like something... and also when you no longer like that thing.

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=147354735337642>

Google Plus

<https://plus.google.com/up/start/?continue=https://plus.google.com/settings/language&type=st&gpcaz=ea3ba758>

LinkedIn

https://help.linkedin.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/997/related/1/session/L2F2LzEv dGltZS8xMzE1NDI5MDc3L3NpZC95NGpTcndEaw%3D%3D

Twitter

<http://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics/topics/107-my-profile-account-settings/articles/119137-how-to-change-language-settings>

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Skype

<https://support.skype.com/en-us/faq/FA73/How-do-I-change-the-language-used-by-Skype:jsessionId=DEC92F26B759B9B3D64D0C71FCEB82EB?fromSearchFirstPage=false>

Having your target language appear throughout your day will also help in some less expected ways. After a few weeks, you will stop thinking “Oh! Everything is in German!!” every time you open your e-mail, which will ease some of your culture shock once you relocate or visit your host country. Furthermore, creating this virtual environment allows you to have control over your immersion experience. Going step by step, you can master small pieces without feeling overwhelmed—and without major emotional or gastronomical distress, such my disappointing pizza... or the time I mixed up the words pechen’e (cookie) and pechen’ (liver).

But perhaps most importantly, once you are in a “live” immersive environment, at some point you will get fed up with the struggle to understand and will want to jump on the first plane home. And when that happens, you can just curl up with your laptop, change your settings back to your native language, and engage in the denial that every expat needs from time to time to stay happy.

More advice for online immersion:

Go slow. Start with one web site or program, and once you feel comfortable, try changing another.

- **Ask your IT department before changing any settings or installing language-specific add-ons for your work computer.** At home, warn your spouse or other family members who share your computer so they don’t get lost in the new language.

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- **Make a cheat sheet of important words and phrases in both your native and target languages** to keep near the computer. For example: *Settings, Tools, Options, Language, Open, Close, Save, Cancel, Quit, Sign out*
- **Keep a list of all web sites or programs for which you have changed the language**, along with the steps for making those changes, so that you can revert back to your native language when necessary.
- Likewise, **know what your native language is called in your target language.**
- **Don't change the language for your bank or other sites dealing with financial or official records**, such as health insurance.
- If a long message pops up that you don't understand, copy and paste it into a text file so you can ask someone or run it through an online translator. Many web sites will only show you new privacy information once, and if it's in a language you do not speak well, you could miss something important.