



Conrad Nied

Short bio

Conrad Nied is an engineering manager with the heart of an anthropologist, passionate about building technology that reflects how people truly communicate. As the Vice Chair of Unicode CLDR's Digitally Disadvantaged Languages initiative, he works to improve core localization support for as many languages as possible. At Translation Commons, he leads the development of Language Navigator, an open-source platform bringing together linguistic, demographic, and digital language data from around the world. Before joining Translation Commons, Conrad spent seven years at Facebook/Meta, where he expanded support for dozens of languages and developed systems to reduce misinformation and societal harm.

Contribution

The focus of my intervention is challenging our perceptions of how people use technology in a multilingual context. When it comes to supporting the global user experience it is way more than translating strings. The most chilling statistic that every i18n professional needs to know: 90% of people on the internet in India prefer to keep their device language set to English while communicating in completely different local languages. This pattern repeats itself in many contexts and many countries -- if we don't understand it we can provide translations that will never reach people while the core i18n-ready functionality that they actually need never makes it to them.

Drawing on experiences building multilingual products for hundreds of millions of users, I will present a practical framework for understanding digital language use across 3 modes: Conversation, Discovery, and Curation. Each of these requires different technical support, from input methods to algorithms to interface design. Understanding these patterns can help translators, technologists, and language advocates work together to build digital experiences that better reflect the multilingual realities of people's lives. At the end of the day, our role as digital technologists is to provide not only translations -- but a platform for linguistic communities to thrive.