

- * Phrasal verbs review
- * Vocabulary: meanings of phrasal verbs
- * Vocabulary: understanding language

1 Read and listen

a What do you think are the biggest challenges in translating from one language to another?

b Read the article quickly and find:

- 1 what mistake was made on a sign welcoming visitors to a National Park.
- 2 what two languages were in the Welsh road sign?

c ▶ **CD2 T22** Read the text again and listen. Answer the questions.

- 1 In your opinion, what does the writer think of people who only speak one language?
- 2 What can happen when a dictionary is used without knowing how to use one?
- 3 How can we test the accuracy of automatic online translation services?
- 4 Why did the officials from Swansea believe they were doing the right thing when they used the email reply for that road sign?

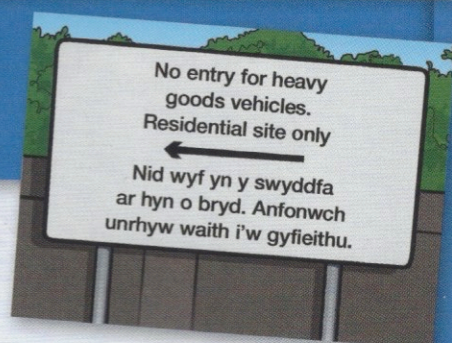
LOST IN TRANSLATION

1 People who have never learnt a foreign language often don't understand that translating from one language to another can be a rather tricky business. Unfortunately, on quite a number of occasions, this ignorance can bring about embarrassing misunderstandings.

2 English-speaking tourists who go to the Tirkavaya Balka National Park in Tajikistan, for example, may be rather surprised to be greeted by a sign saying 'Welcome, expensive visitors.' Well, someone with good intentions but little language sensitivity had obviously looked up a word in a bilingual dictionary and found two possible translations, 'dear' and 'expensive'. Unfortunately, they went for the wrong one. They were obviously completely unaware of what the English on the sign really said!

3 Some people think they can get away with using automatic online translation services rather than human translators, but this too can lead to surprising results. You can easily find out for yourself. Just key in a phrase in your mother tongue into an online translator and choose any language from the drop-down menu that you want to have your phrase translated into. Then use the translated phrase and ask the machine to translate it back into your mother tongue. You may be rather surprised by the results you get!

4 Fortunately, automatic online translation services have never really taken off – they just don't seem to work well enough! However, translation is a dangerous thing, even when professional translators are involved – as officials from the city council of Swansea in Wales recently found out. Wales has two official languages, English and Welsh, and so road signs have to



be in both languages. The officials wanted to come up with a sign in both languages that made it clear to lorry drivers that their vehicles were banned from a certain area. So they wrote it in English, and sent it to a translation bureau in an email. When they got a message back, they thought it was the reply they needed, after all it was in Welsh. However, what the email response actually said was something like 'I'm not in the office at the moment. I'll get back to you later.' And so a big board went up, with exactly that sentence in Welsh, causing a lot of hilarity for local people who speak both languages!

5 Your comments:

Hi! I recently came across another striking example of Lost in Translation, and again from English to Welsh. Not far from our place, there's a sign for pedestrians reading 'Look right' in English. The same sign says 'Look left' in Welsh! Gerry, Cardiff

I was in stitches when I recently read that the producers of a famous soft drink (let's call it 'X' here!) had their slogan 'Come alive with X' translated into Chinese. Imagine their surprise when they found out it had been translated as 'X brings your ancestors back from the grave!' Al, New York
Good one, Al. Reminds me of a famous fast-food chain selling fried chicken. Their slogan is something like 'finger-lickin' good'. Only, when it was translated, it came out as 'eat your fingers off'!

14 Comments