THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

THE OUTLINE OF A CAREER IN TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING

by **Leonard Morin**

A colleague and member of the Circle who is relatively new to the field suggested to me that she and others starting out could find it useful to hear the professional stories of those of us who have been translating for a few years. This article is my response to that request.

When I was an early adolescent and U.S. immigrant to the Netherlands, people around me expressed admiration for how quickly and well I learned Dutch. My family's circle of friends and my schoolteachers recommended that I consider taking up translating when the time came to choose a career. This seemed to be a profession in which I would have guaranteed success. The way I saw it, they were just trying to dissuade me from my long-held aspirations to become a musician and composer. As years passed, I toyed with the idea of becoming a translator but without much conviction. After all, a continuing passion of mine was to read books in their original languages. I found that reading translations was much less thrilling and it felt like somewhat of a cop-out.

As a young adult, I entered law school in the Netherlands with an underlying strategy of becoming a legal translator. A Spanish teacher whom I consulted about my career path insisted that a university degree in a foreign language was much less valuable to a translator than a degree in some instrumental specialty such as law, medicine, or economics. One could always take language classes on the side. I chose law because of a course I had taken in a U.S. high school called "Street Law," which had inspired and fascinated me. It was my introduction to legal concepts and thinking.

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Once I was immersed in legal studies, I began to fancy myself as a practicing attorney. But my volunteer work in human rights and environmentalism, which I did throughout my studies, eventually disillusioned me about the politics of fighting for causes. I found that there were very few clear victories, and the ongoing struggles wore on me. And I became discouraged by a bleak reality about human nature: even the noblest of the people I worked with could be subject to the basest of vices.

In the end, I gave up law school and returned to the U.S. When I was already 30, I went back to college to pursue a degree in Latin American studies. By the time I finished the program, I was once again more interested in human rights than translation. Although it seemed obvious that I had considerable strengths to bring to a career in translation, particularly of legal documents from Dutch into English, I believed that path could lead to an exercise that was potentially useless to society, or worse. It would not tackle any vital social issues or help anybody who was really in need. Yet I resigned myself to economic reality and decided to translate for a living and do volunteer work as an avocation.

I expected a clear path to becoming a professional translator, an impression I had gotten from others with more knowledge of the field than I had. I spoke four languages fluently and had a solid understanding of law as well as some other subjects. My academic credentials were substantial. So I started looking into translation agencies in New York City first and foremost, since that was where I lived. I had understood that the agencies were the gatekeepers to the profession. In 2004, I called them and sent them cover letters and résumé by mail and by my newly acquired fax machine. I tried to get my foot in the door with the experience I had gained over the years on several one-time translation engagements.

> Even though a person does workshops, talks to colleagues, researches terminology and style, and reads the trade literature—all of which I did—this does not take away the patently solitary nature of working as a freelance translator in the industry's current configuration.

The agencies' initial response was tepid. Whereas I thought they would be my enthusiastic collaborators, they told me they would contact me when the need arose—when they told me anything at all. I would not be daunted, however, and I even did the rounds to several agencies in person. The efficacy of this tactic is debatable, but eventually the work did begin to come in sporadically. The rates I was able to command did not seem to promise financial comfort anytime soon. And despite all of my years of study in law and language, the texts I encountered were fraught with terminology and backgrounds that I sometimes had never even suspected existed. This ordeal tested the limits of my reference resources and obliged me to expand them, an overwhelming task since I had to make gruelingly tight deadlines and spend the rest of my time doing everything else possible to survive on subsistence remuneration.

After a few months, the translations became more consistent, and a few of my acquired clients seemed to like my work, my price, my turnaround time, or all of the above. I was certainly thorough. Even if I knew a term in Dutch, I did not necessarily know it in English, let alone in Spanish and German. I questioned every facile solution, whether it be literal or just suggested by an uncorroborated source. But this did not yet procure me the fluent,

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idiomatic technical prose in my target language of English that I aspired to write. As practice, I devoted considerable time to the drudgery of reading contracts, starting with credit card agreements I received in the mail and my apartment lease. Yet the scope of what I might encounter on the job seemed too colossal to prepare for.

I submit that insecurity about one's craft is endemic to our profession, although there are exceptions—a relatively few highly-specialized linguists among us. Even though a person does workshops, talks to colleagues, researches terminology and style, and reads the trade literature—all of which I did—this does not take away the patently solitary nature of working as a freelance translator in the industry's current configuration. If we run astray, who will put us back on track? One windfall in my career was the help of a luminary in the field of Dutch to English legal translation who corrected some of my translations and gave me feedback. All in all, I have improved exponentially over time, yet still feel at times that the task is bigger than I am.

I do not blame myself for this situation, at least not chiefly. I did not have the money to go back to school for translation or interpreting. And who is to say that some professors there would not teach me more bad habits? The rates and deadlines I was able to negotiate consistently hampered my aspirations for quality. After all, if I earned three times as much as I do and the deadlines were three times as long, I could spend that much more time perfecting my work. Is this really impossible? Did my clients really care or was it just my own desire to do the best I possibly could and fulfill my potential? Production and the craft of translation are in constant conflict. In 2009, in the thick of the Great Recession, work all but dried up and I started to seriously question the viability of this career at all.

I began to pursue interpreting a year or so after I became a full-time translator. My professional interest in it grew because I found it challenging, personally satisfying, and it paid better per hour. I started out as a volunteer interpreting at international relations events. Then I did telephonic interpreting, which actually paid less than translating but served well as practice. Court proceedings, medical interviews, and social services calls were involved, along with a whole roulette wheel of other possible calls. After that, I interpreted at depositions as well as at medical visits onsite in New York City. After a protracted process, I became certified to interpret in the New York State Courts. I have interpreted almost full-time for the courts for a few months as of this writing.

Even after certification, getting into the court circuit has been arduous. One benefit of court interpreting that I did not find in document translation is the constant interaction with people and the opportunity to help them, often in crucial matters involving their safety or a roof over their heads. When you start out in the courts, however, no one really gives you the preparation you need. So it is rough in the beginning but, contrary to translation, you have much more time to come up to speed by doing your homework. You have more downtime on the job, and a shorter work day. You also have many colleagues with whom you can confer about terminology or whatever else comes up. And now, when I do sporadic translation projects, I enjoy them as a change of pace. So I am earning more and I derive more satisfaction from what I am doing. It is too early to call this a happy ending, if such a thing exists. After all, life is a process. Whatever it brings me, I feel grateful to have been able to see so much of the world through language. ■

A Translation State of Mind

by **Nataly Kelly**

Every time I take the train from Boston to New York, I cannot help but mentally play the song, "New York State of Mind." I had the good fortune to travel to New York several times over the past 12 months. I can't deny that I love New York and that this nearby city is often in my thoughts. But during my most recent visits, there was only one word that could describe my state of mind: translation.

Translation has been on my mind a lot lately – often in conjunction with New York. For starters, my new book with Jost Zetzsche, *Found in Translation: How Language Shapes Our Lives*, is being published this October by Penguin, which is headquartered in New York. Jost and I made our way to New York to meet with our editor last spring. Little did we know at the time that New York would also make its way into our book, and in some ways that might surprise you.

New York is the capital of the American fashion industry. In fact, a company called StyleSight actually employs numerous full-time translators for various languages. These colleagues spend their days scanning fashion magazines and websites from around the world to spot the latest trends. They then translate important keywords and content about those trends. You might even say that these translators are in fact fashion trend-setters. We found their work so fascinating that we devoted an entire story to it in the book.

And of course, who can think of New York without conjuring images of Wall Street? New York is an important financial hub, not just for the United States, but for the world, given that financial markets are so interconnected. Did you know that translation can make the stock market tumble? Yes, a translation error regarding a currency valuation actually once caused panic on the trading floor and caused the markets to fall. Of course, we had to share that story in the book as well.

New York is also a welcoming home to the arts. Every time I visit, I try to take in at least one museum. I'm always pleasantly surprised by the array of languages represented in the brochures available for tourists and international visitors. Even the opera, which so many New Yorkers and visitors love to frequent, often includes a libretto translation. In fact, there are translators dedicated to this type of translation as well, and we discuss their unique and interesting work in the book.

While in New York, Jost and I also visited the United Nations head-

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quarters, where we sat down for an interview with Mr. Hossam Fahr, the Chief Interpreter. He humbly recounted a hilarious story of making such a magnificent blunder while interpreting that the entire General Assembly erupted in laughter. That story too ended up in our book. For the book, we also interviewed a Japanese<>Spanish<>English baseball interpreter who interprets for players from the New York Yankees. We also tell the story in the book of the interpreter for Oscar-winning actress Marlee Matlin, who is currently in New York, filming the next season of the Apprentice, with iconic New Yorker Donald Trump. I began to ask myself, "Where can't you find translation in New York?"

Indeed, in a city as diverse as New York, where you can hear hundreds of different languages spoken, it's nearly impossible to make a move without bumping into translation. There are dozens upon dozens of translation agencies in the city. There are interpreters working in hospitals, courts, schools, and government offices. There are translators working both in-house at businesses and freelance from home. Walk outside, take a look around, and in a city like New York, you're sure to see the impact of translation nearly anywhere you go.

This – the idea that translation surrounds us all – is at the heart of *Found in Translation*. New Yorkers have it lucky in many ways, because linguistic diversity is a bit easier to see in this amazing city than it might be in other places. However, translation also touches our lives in many ways that are not so visible. From the news reports of events in distant lands, to the religions people may choose to practice, to the food we eat, the sports teams we follow, the technologies we use, and the products we buy – translation affects every aspect of our lives.

Jost and I wrote *Found in Translation* not just for translators or interpreters, but to help the general public – the mainstream reader – understand why translation is so important. Translation is a thread that is invisible to many, but is woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. Our hope is that, through the book, we'll encourage many people to adopt a new state of mind – one in which translation plays a more prominent part than ever before.

Who knows, maybe before too long, we'll see throngs of people wearing T-shirts that say "I heart translation." ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nataly Kelly is the co-author of *Found in Translation*, published by Perigee/Penguin USA and available from booksellers everywhere starting in October. She is a court-certified interpreter for Spanish and a translator of poetry. She works as the Chief Research Officer at the Boston-based market research firm Common Sense Advisory. Contact: nataly@commonsenseadvisory.com

CAT Corner is a monthly feature that looks at computer-aided translation software and other helpful tools for the translation industry.

CAT Corner

Get Your Head In The Clouds

How Cloud-based Translation Memory Can Revolutionize the Way You Work

by **Kristyna Marrero**, Wordfast

Ernest Hemingway wrote his novels with a typewriter that he owned, using paper and ink that he had to buy. His manuscript pages remained stacked in a neat pile on his desk and had to be mailed to his publisher when finally finished.

Can you imagine Hemingway opening a browser with his Mac, logging into Google Docs, typing a new chapter of *The Sun Also Rises* and then simply closing his computer? No evidence of his new work exists, nothing more than a promise it will be there when he logs in next time. There is no paper, no ink, no file – no program, even – on his machine that belongs to him.

Cloud-based technology has come a long way and overcome many doubters. Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions such as Google Docs and Salesforce.com have grown popular by offering individuals and smaller businesses affordable alternatives to traditional software tools that can be expensive and high-maintenance, typically requiring frequent and time-consuming updates. Sharing files can also be dramatically easier and more efficient with cloud computing, a potentially huge advantage for an industry like translation.

However, despite their many advantages, cloud-based tools have not been adopted as enthusiastically as many predicted, and translators have proven more reluctant than most when it comes to making the move skyward.

A number of vendors now offer cloud-based translation tools. But a recent poll of 1,200 translation professionals conducted by ProZ.com showed that 74% have yet to use a cloud-based TM tool. Translators across the globe are clinging to their familiar desktop environment, where the whole process is completed on their local machine.

When asked why, many cite confidentiality issues and connectivity concerns. In other words, if the dream of the cloud is defined by the liberty to work anywhere and share with colleagues at any time while avoiding expensive licenses and annoying updates, then the nightmare is a slow and unreliable internet connection, stolen content, and disappearing data.

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These fears are largely unfounded and easily overcome. Millions of us each day put our faith in web-based email applications like Gmail and Yahoo, storing reams of personal and professional contacts and communications in the cloud. And after learning more about the benefits and security of cloud-based tools, most translators agree that the pros significantly outweigh the potential risks.

Benefits of Cloud-based Translation Memory

Access data anywhere, anytime

In an increasingly mobile world, the ability to work from anywhere is becoming more and more important. By securely storing all TMs, glossaries and files on a remote server, cloud-based systems free translators from their home or office, allowing them to work from anywhere they have an internet connection. Although some users are skeptical about trusting their data to the cloud, hosted applications are in many ways more reliable than desktop-based systems. The cloud offers users the promise that their data is backed up frequently and automatically, whereas data stored on personal computers can easily be lost – users are typically not as disciplined about backing up their data, and their computers can be lost, stolen, or corrupted by viruses.

No software installation or maintenance

For many translators, downloading and installing software can be time-consuming and daunting, especially when this needs to be repeated several times a year as software updates become available. With cloud-based TM tools, deployment is instant; just log on and begin working. Users never need to worry about what version they are using, and there won't be a need to upgrade the software. Users are guaranteed that they are accessing the most up-to-date version each time they log on.

For small to mid-sized LSPs, purchasing hardware, storage space and the staff to support it can sometimes be cost prohibitive. Cloud-based solutions make it easy to adopt a translation memory system without a huge financial investment.

Collaborate instantly

A cloud-based environment makes collaborating with colleagues much simpler and more efficient than traditional desktop systems. There is no need to export and import files from individual user systems and no need email files back and forth or upload them to FTP sites – users can share and update files right inside of the online environment, often with a few simple clicks. Users who are collaborating will have up-to-the-minute access to each other's translated content, reducing the total new word count and increasing consistency.

Cross–platform compatibility

Historically, few desktop TM applications have offered cross-platform support, even with a growing number of translators working on Macs. Since cloud-based TM tools are accessed through the user's browser, they can run on any web-enabled computer regardless of platform, making them particularly advantageous for translators working on Mac or Linux.

Wordfast Anywhere

In 2010, Wordfast introduced a cloud-based TM tool, Wordfast Anywhere, which promised to liberate translators from their desktop applications and

allow them to work on translation projects, as the name would imply, from ANYWHERE.

The Wordfast Anywhere platform is a confidential, password-protected workspace on a centralized server. Once logged in, users can upload TMs, glossaries and files for translation to their private workspace. Wordfast Anywhere can be used to translate DOC/DOCX, XLS/XLSX, PPT/PPTX, RTF, TXT, HTML, TXML, INX and PDF, and users can store 10 files at a time in their workspace. Wordfast Anywhere recently added support for IDML, MIF and TTX formats as well.

Users can upload existing TMs and glossaries in as many language pairs as they want or they can create new TMs and glossaries from scratch inside of Wordfast Anywhere. The system supports TMX, the industry standard exchange format for TMs, so users can always download their TMs for use in other tools.

In less than two years, Wordfast Anywhere has reached over 17,000 registered users in over 165 countries. In addition to the benefits over traditional desktop applications discussed above, Wordfast Anywhere offers several unique advantages.

Compatibility with smartphones, tablets, and PDAs

Wordfast Anywhere will run on virtually any web-enabled device. This includes not only tradition computing devices uch as desktops and laptops, but also PDAs and smartphones. In 2010, Wordfast Anywhere became the first TM tool to add support translation on the iPhone and iPad as well other leading mobile devices, including Windows Mobile, Android, and Palm OS.

Free automated alignment utility

Wordfast Anywhere offers users the ability to create TMs from previously translated content using the Wordfast Anywhere AutoAligner. Users simply upload their source and target files to the Aligner and Wordfast Anywhere will automatically detect the language pair and use heuristics to match up the source segment and its corresponding translated segment. The resulting TM can then be downloaded or emailed directly to the user in either TMX or standard Wordfast TM format. The aligner allows users to drag and drop files directly into the interface and includes support for multilingual files and batches of files at once.

Support for scanned PDFs

Typically, scanned PDFs need to be converted to a text-based format before they can be translated in most major commercial CAT tools. When users upload a PDF file to Wordfast Anywhere, the system automatically recognizes whether the text is live and converts scanned PDFs to RTF format using server-side OCR technology. This eliminates the extra step needed to convert scanned PDFs to a translatable format. Users also have the option to download the resulting RTF file to perform any necessary edits prior to translation.

In-browser preview

Wordfast Anywhere offers a preview feature that gives users a PDF preview of the file they are translating. This allows users to view how the text will appear once the final translated document is generated. This is particularly helpful in cases where

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the user does not have access to the program in order to view the final file, such as InDesign.

Integration with additional resources

Wordfast Anywhere users are also able to leverage translations from other resources. Users can access the VLTM (very large translation memory), a set of large TMs available in 23 different language pairs, donated by members of the Wordfast community. Wordfast Anywhere can also integrate with the following Machine Translation engines: Google Translate, Microsoft® Translator, WorldLingo, and iTranslate4. Wordfast Anywhere also offers a web search feature that allows users to launch web searches on terms or phrases as they translate. The feature is configurable so users can choose their two preferred search engines.

Complete privacy and confidentiality

Data security and privacy is perhaps the translation community's biggest concern and argument against using cloud-based TM tools. Wordfast understands the uncompromising confidentiality requirements of the translation community and recognizes the importance of having rigorous polices in place to safeguard customer data. Unlike Google Translator Toolkit, which by default shares users' translations with other users of the system, all data (TMs, glossaries, files, personal information, etc.) uploaded and stored on Wordfast Anywhere remains strictly confidential and is never shared with any third party unless the user specifically invites them. Once a user deletes anything from his/her workspace, it is permanently and irreversibly deleted. For users who require more peace of mind, Wordfast is willing to execute Non-Disclosure Agreements regarding the confidentiality of their data.

To further protect data that is passed between the user's local machine and Wordfast's server, Wordfast has established an encrypted SSL connection. SSL can prevent unauthorized users from gaining access to sensitive data.

Free of charge

Wordfast Anywhere is offered free of charge to all translators. Users simply register for a free account at www.freetm.com and login to begin translating instantly. In the future, Wordfast will likely offer a paid version of Wordfast Anywhere with more advanced functionality, increased storage space and other advantages that may appeal to agency and corporate customers and some translators.

Wordfast Anywhere can also integrate with the following Machine Translation engines: Google Translate, Microsoft® Translator, WorldLingo, and iTranslate4.

But for now, translators and small to mid-sized LSPs who are able to take advantage of the free functionality that Wordfast Anywhere has to offer will find fewer reasons to purchase expensive translation memory software in order to run their businesses. ■

The Catskills Translation Seminar moved to the Estrie Region of Quebec this Summer

by **Maurice Devroye and Andie Ho**

From August 19 to 22, one hundred translators gathered in Orford, Quebec, a small ski town an hour and a half east of Montreal, for the third annual Translate in the Townships conference (called On traduit dans l'Estrie in French, and previously called Translate in the Catskills). Speakers came from Canada, Europe and the U.S. to hold seminars and workshops targeted toward premium-market French<>English translators.

The conference featured two educational tracks (French>English and English<French), each with its own set of speakers, topics and translation tips. On the French>English side, **David Jemielity**, who heads a translation team at the Banque Cantonale Vaudoise in Switzerland, offered a glimpse into the inner workings of his in-house team, revealing the extensive preparation required for meetings with the bank's CEO to review translations of major annual publications. He also dove into the nitty-gritty linguistics concept of deixis, wherein a word's semantic meaning depends on its context. Literary translator **Ros Schwartz**, who recently published a new translation of The Little Prince, spoke on the importance of translations that are pleasing to the ear and led a workshop in which attendees tried their hand at translating excerpts of a novel by François Lavallée, one of the speakers for the English>French track. **Chris Durban**, a Paris-based financial translator, provided an in-depth look into the process of translating a seemingly short, simple text for a television commercial, and also gave a presentation on the importance of writing style in technical translations. Finally, **Grant Hamilton**, owner of Quebec City-based Anglocom, held a hands-on workshop in which participants practiced crafting natural-sounding marketing translations, as well as a short seminar on hard-to-translate French words. Scattered throughout all the seminars were helpful business hints for finding, talking to and negotiating with direct clients.

Dans le volet Anglais-Français, des sujets très divers ont été abordés par des traducteurs chevronnés qui n'hésitent pas à écourter leurs vacances d'été pour assurer des formations hors pair. Voici un aperçu du programme et des animateurs :

« La boîte à astuces du traducteur » par **Dominique Jonkers** (Belgique),

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traducteur économique et financier réputé. Trop de traductions correctes restent soporifiques et manquent de rythme. Traducteurs, osons trahir parfois les mots pour restituer les idées.

« Le grand art des petits mots » par **François Lavallée** (Québec), fondateur de Magistrad et auteur du livre *Le traducteur averti*. Pas besoin d'être atteint de locutiomanie aigüe pour connaître et appliquer les deux grands principes et trois grandes techniques qui président à la traduction des prépositions.

Signalons que la première session du séminaire fut consacrée à un « traduel ou traduo » durant lequel Dominique et François ont, phrase par phrase, disséqué leur traduction respective d'un texte qui leur avait été soumis antérieurement. Occasion, pour les participants ébahis, de (re)découvrir les différences (de style, techniques ou lisibilité) entre le Français québécois et le Français d'Europe.

« La traduction littéraire » par **Rachel Martinez** (Montréal), lauréate du prix du Gouverneur général pour sa traduction française de la biographie du pianiste Glenn Gould. Après avoir œuvré dans des domaines commerciaux, nombre de traducteurs se sentent attirés par le domaine littéraire. Sur quelle réalité débouche la fiction ? Quelques outils, conseils et mises en garde (« *jamais vous n'aurez autant travaillé pour si peu…* »). Avec de nombreux procédés et exemples (bons et mauvais) analysés sous l'angle du style, de l'efficacité et du respect de l'auteur. Avec aussi des expériences personnelles et des références professionnelles.

« L'adaptation publicitaire » par **Réal Paquette** (Montréal), traducteur publicitaire émérite. Domaine de créativité par excellence, la publicité obéit à certaines règles et son adaptation est assujettie à certains paramètres (aspects psychologiques, éléments iconographiques et scripturaires, repères culturels) qui, tous, concourent à une adaptation réussie en français. Session agrémentée de slogans et d'affiches tels que « *On s'attache au Québec* » et « *Depuis 1786, le plat pays est beaucoup moins plate* » (une pub Stella Artois).

Lors du bilan, les animateurs se sont engagés à établir et communiquer une liste de leurs ressources préférées, dont les principales sont en ligne. Ce qui fut fait. Qu'ils en soient chaudement ici remerciés ! En conclusion, je vous renvoie à « Intelliwebsearch »,

l'interface pas gourmande du tout mais éminemment pratique qui vous permettra d'utiliser efficacement ces bases et outils de recherche.

Though the daytime sessions were intense, the evenings were filled with organized social activities, including a vineyard tour and a lake cruise, where attendees could get acquainted with their new colleagues and discuss the day's events. Some people also took advantage of the hotel's spa services or even lingered an extra day, making a mini-vacation out of the trip.

Plans are already in the works for next year's edition of the conference, so keep an eye out for details in the months to come! ■

Marketing Faux Pas

The Chevy Nova didn't sell well in Central America because "No va" in Spanish means "doesn't go."

An Australian company had its soft drink slogan "Baby, it's cold inside" translated for the Hong Kong market. Back translation revealed that the slogan had become "Small mosquito, on the inside it is very cold"; the translator used the local term for "small child" rather than "lover."

Scandinavian vacuum manufacturer Electrolux used the following in an American campaign: "Nothing sucks like an Electrolux."

Colgate introduced a toothpaste in France called Cue, the name of a notorious porno magazine.

When Gerber started selling baby food in Africa, they used the same packaging as in the USA, with the beautiful baby on the label. Later they learned that in Africa, companies routinely put pictures on the label of what's inside, since many people can't read.

An America T-shirt maker in Miami printed shirts for the Spanish market, which promoted the Pope's visit. Instead of "I saw the Pope" (el Papa), the shirts read "I saw the potato" (la papa).

When Parker Pen was marketing a ballpoint pen in Mexico, its ads were supposed to have read "It won't leak in your pocket and embarrass you." Instead, the company thought that the word "embarazar" (to impregnate) meant to embarrass, so the ad read: "It won't leak in your pocket and make you pregnant."

Pepsi's "Come alive with the Pepsi Generation" translated into "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave," in Chinese.

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