

# Style Invitational

BY PAT MYERS

## Report from Week 977

in which we repeated a contest from 2004 to see how much Google's translation tool had improved: As we did then, we asked you to have Google translate some English passage of your choice into another language (there are more than 60 choices now), then have Google translate that result back into English, then guffaw over how wrong the final result was.

In techno-time, of course, eight years is past "era" and into "eon." But we were still astonished how Google Translate had become almost creepily adept at this task — almost all the passages that were so comically mistranslated the first time around came out virtually identical to the originals. On top of that, it turned out that sometimes the translations of the Week 977 passages would improve a few days later. (In these cases, we honored the earlier versions.) Fortunately, we allowed an extra step this time: You could keep translating Google's translation into yet another language, and another, before returning it to English. Some of the more determined Losers telephone-gamed their passages through as many as 27 tongues. But we still found lots of gems in the plain old two-step process. All that Loserly digging turned up at least one "Easter egg," a little prank left in the coding by some wag at Google. Judy Blanchard of Novi, Mich., randomly tried out the passage "Nadal is the best player," translating it into Azerbaijani. Translated back to English, it read: "Federer is best player." So many First Offenders this week that we'll just note them with asterisks.



**Original:** Flattery will get you nowhere.

Translated into Tamil, then into Swahili, then back to English: Violence will get you anywhere. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

**2** Winner of the ceramic "dairy mug" that boasts a three-dimensional human "udder": **Mitt Romney enjoys playing pranks on people.**

(via Korean, Hebrew and Finnish) **Mitt Romney was a joke.** (Laurie Brink, Cleveland, Mo.)

**3** I ate the entire veggie platter.

(via five languages) **I eat a vegetarian.** (Jason Talbott, Pendleton, Ore.)

**4** I am beside myself with worry.

(via Slovak) **I am free from fear itself.** (\*Lorraine Gibson, Frederick)

**I hate my menses.**

(via Yiddish) **I hate my husband.** (\*Rebecca Thomas, Rockville)

I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. I'd like to buy the world a Coke, and keep it company.

(via three languages) **I can sing harmony to the world I want to study law. I want to share, Cola Company purchased the world.** (Laurie Brink)

**The Supreme Court upheld the personal insurance mandate.**

(via Traditional Chinese and Basque) **Supreme Court to get health insurance for personal tasks.** (\*John Crowe, Rockville)

**In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life. It goes on.**

(via Dutch) **In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life. Next.** (Mike Caslin, Round Hill, Va.)

**Don't throw the baby out with the bath water.**

(via six languages) **Do not bathe your child.** (Kevin Dopart)

**I'm a big tough girl.**

(via the Kannada language of India) **I am a large man in a tough girl.** (\*Shehzil Zahid, Islamabad, Pakistan)

**Anna will eat ice cream cones.**

(via Yiddish) **Aeneas will eat ice cream enema.** (Jim Newman and granddaughter Kelsey Vaughn, Luray, Va.)

**Do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?**

(via Tamil) **Legally married to your husband and you are the man!** (\*Barbara Mason, Fort Washington)

**Hey, hey, we're the Monkees!**

(via Simplified Chinese) **Hey, hey, we urchin Choir.** (Judy Blanchard, Novi, Mich.)

**Open the pod bay doors, HAL.**

(via six languages) **Unit barley, open the door to God.** (Mike Gips, Bethesda)

**He was as drunk as a skunk.**

(via Kannada) **He was drunk in America.** (Beverley Sharp)

**Bright star, would I were steadfast**

**as thou art.**

(via seven languages) **Bright Star, I want to be a graphic designer.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

**Read my lips. No new taxes.**

(via Greek) **Read my lips. There are new taxes.** (\*Mark and Tammy Clements, Gaithersburg)

**It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Superman!**

(via Azerbaijani and Vietnamese) **He is a bird! Having this plane! This is not Superman!** (Larry Gray, Union Bridge, Md.)

**I believe marriage is between a man and a woman.**

(via Kannada) **I do not believe in**

**marriage between a man and a woman.** (Melissa Balmain, Rochester, N.Y.)

**Tit for tat**

(via three languages) **Massacre** (Brad Alexander, Wanneroo, Australia)

**And last: The Empress is a dork.**

(via Simplified Chinese) **The Empress is the very dish.** (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

**More mistranslations in the online Invite at wapo.st/inweekoff12.**

**Next week: Am lamb, or Rhyme-Time News,** the results of our contest for "framed couplets" on current events.

## Last in translation: honorable mentions

**The bigger they are, the harder they fall.**

(via Azerbaijani) **Great they are, the more they are paid.** (Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

# ISO: Funny folks. Money is involved.

Are you an armchair humor writer, a closet Dave Barry or James Thurber? Have you thought that, if you ever got around to writing, your wit could be your Plan B?

Now's your chance. Introducing: **The WP Magazine Humor Contest.** Win \$1,000! Or less.

Readers can submit original, unpublished material to any or all of three categories:

**A true memoir:** Entrants must write 1,000 words or fewer; one entry per person. Prize: \$1,000.

**A 140-character Twitter joke:** Submit by tweeting using the hashtag #wphumor. Prize: \$140.

**A funny photo, real, not staged:** One entry per person. Prize: \$300.

Celebrity judges include standup comedians Lewis Black and Erin Jackson, authors Emily Yoffe and Steve Friedman, and Twitter humorists Lisa Cohen



and Harris Wittels.

Find out how to enter at [wapo.st/wphumorcontest](http://wapo.st/wphumorcontest).

Entries must be received by 11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, Aug. 10, so don't delay!



## You can't lose this week!

Because there's not a new contest this week. Three and a half weeks from now, the Empress will be lounging on an exotic (okay, Delaware) beach, blissfully disconnected from this newspaper's "content management system," Methode, better known within the newsroom as "that piece of [not 'blueberry pie'] Methode." So on the weekend of Aug. 18-19, the Invite will feature some of the many worthy entries from recent contests that we didn't have room to run. So you might as well get to work instead on **Week 980, which is still going on — deadline is Monday at midnight (whenever your midnight is): It's to come up with a definition for any of 30-some words that the Losers coined for the Week 976 contest** — words like "twithy" and "butthoven" — neologisms for which we're certain that there are funnier, more clever definitions out there than the ones the entrants came up with themselves. See the list and the contest rules at [wapo.st/inv980](http://wapo.st/inv980).

The subhead for this week's honorable mentions was submitted separately by Chris Doyle, Tom Witte and Kevin Dopart; the alternative headline in the "next week's results" line is by Kathy El-Assal. Join the very lively Facebook page Style Invitational Devotees on [fb.me/invdev](http://fb.me/invdev) for discussions about the contests and results, along with Loserly repartee ranging from links to important news developments ("Talking urinal cakes deployed to curb drunk driving") to impromptu limericks about that night's ballgame.

 **STYLE CONVERSATIONAL** Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join us at [washingtonpost.com/stylconversational](http://washingtonpost.com/stylconversational).

**as thou art.**

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**Read my lips. No new taxes.**

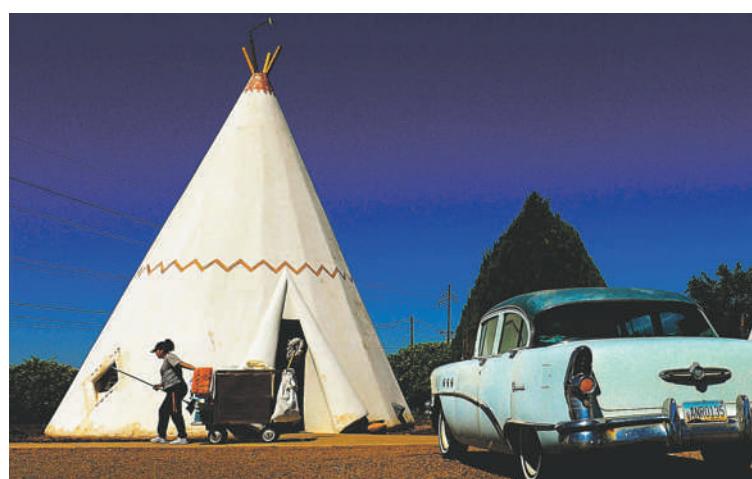
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MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

**FUNNY PHOTO: The Wigwam Hotel is in Holbrook, Ariz.**