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[Back to previous page](#)

Style Invitational Week 977 results: Twisting the tongues of Google Translate

By [Pat Myers](#), Published: July 19, 2012

You can't lose this week! That's 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." And 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.

The subhead for this week's honorable mentions was submitted separately by Tom Witte, Chris Doyle 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 for a discussion 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.

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.

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The winner of the Inkin' Memorial

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, Md.)**

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.)**

I hate my menses.

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

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, Md.)

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, Md., who got her only other Invite ink in 2005)**

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, Md.)**

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, Md.)**

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)**

I am suffering from a boil on my butt.

(via four languages) I suffer from boiling ass. **(Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)**

Romney supports self-deportation.

(via Latin) Romney supports his deportation. **(Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)**

A mind is a terrible thing to waste.

(via four languages) This is an awful idea, and many eat it. **(Larry Gray)**

Is that a gun in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me?

(via six languages) Today, I am a bag, or just happy. **(Melissa Balmain)**

I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

(via three languages) Usually depends on the type of alien. **(Larry Gray)**

She'll have fun, fun, fun till her daddy takes her T-bird away.

(via four languages) T-bird takes his father, he was fun, fun, fun." **(*Skip Livingston, Hopewell, N.J.)**

We had intercourse.

(via Latin and Chinese) Sino-US trade. **(Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.)**

He entrances all the ladies with his magic wand.

(via French) He entered all the ladies with his wand. **(Jeff Contompasis)**

Your mama is so ugly even her warts have warts.

(via Slovenian) Your mom is so ugly not even her nipples are nipples. **(Robert Schechter)**

It all depends on what "is" is.

(Latin, Chinese) The important thing is "yes." **(Chris Doyle)**

This sentence is made of words guaranteed to survive the most rigorous translation process.

(via 11 languages) It is very difficult to translate words. **(Robert Schechter, Dix Hills, N.Y.)**

And last: The Empress is a dork.

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

Visit the online discussion group [The Style Conversational](#) , in which the Empress discusses today's new contest and results along with news about the Loser Community — and you can vote for your favorite among the inking entries, since you no doubt figured the Empress chose the wrong winner. If you'd like an e-mail notification each week when the Invitational and Conversational are posted online, write to the Empress at losers@washpost.com (note that in the subject line) and she'll add you to the mailing list. And on Facebook, join the far more lively group [Style Invitational Devotees](#) and chime in.

Next week: Am Iamb, or Rhyme-Time News, the results of our contest for “framed couplets” on current events.

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