

English C2.1

[2025/2026]

Translation Bloopers
Week 3

Dr. Carlos Lindade

U. PORTO
FLUP FACULDADE DE LETRAS
UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO

Attendance

2025/2026





Text 1: Read the following text, paying special attention to the passages highlighted in bold.

LOST IN THE TRANSLATION

According to the signs, foreign translators trying to accommodate their English-speaking visitors may run into problems.

With Americans making more and more trips abroad, it is interesting to note that foreign nations are making greater attempts to accommodate their English-speaking visitors. Unfortunately, there is still a significant language gap, and translations made into English by restaurants, hotels and stores often fall short of their intended meaning, frequently with disastrous — and sometimes riotous — results.

2) Patricia Besner, president of All-Language Services, a large translation firm based in New York, recently asked several members of her staff to take note of any incorrect translations they might come across while traveling in their native countries. The resulting list, she thought, might make future employees more aware of the many pitfalls that translators face in their daily work.

3) Two absurdities came from clothing stores—one from Italy and one from France. The Italian shop had a sign in its window to catch the eye of the American tourists. It read: "**Dresses for street walking.**" The one in the Paris window said: "**Come inside and have a fit.**"

4) A staid Berlin hotel left a card in its rooms for guests that said: "**Because of the impropriety of entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose.**" It may well have been the busiest lobby in all of Germany.

5) One airline advertised the "**rendezvous lounges**" on its flights in Brazil and lost customers as a result. The reason for this became clear when someone finally remembered that "**rendezvous**" in Portuguese is a place to have sex.

6) One of our translators who visited his homeland of Austria did more than jot down what he read on the menu for American tourists. He brought it back with him to prove that, in Vienna, the fare for English-

speaking customers included "**Children Sandwiches**" and "**Chopped Milk.**"

7) He said he could not bring home another offering and declaration to tourists because the sign was nailed to the restaurant wall. It read: "**You will be singing the praises of the food served to you here to your grandchildren even as you lie on your deathbed.**"

8) A Russian linguist at All-Language Services told us he stayed at a Moscow hotel where a notice exclaimed: "**If this is your first visit to the USSR, you are welcome to it.**"

9) And when this Russian linguist was amusing a Czech friend about the sign, he was given a laugh in return when the friend reported to him that he had seen a sign in Czechoslovakia that urged visitors: "**Take one of our horse-driven city tours. We guarantee no miscarriages.**"

10) A British-born employee of our organization was amazed on his European tour when he passed a café in Warsaw that read, "**Five o'clock tea served all hours.**"

11) A Romanian hotel, according to one of our translators, had its elevator broken. To let him and the other visitors know of the inconvenience, a sign was posted on the elevator door reading: "**The lift is being fixed. For the next few days we regret that you will be unbearable.**" The guests probably were, depending on what floors their rooms were located.

12) A Barcelona hospital let it be known to those coming to see patients that the rule was inviolate: "**Visitors: Two to a bed and half an hour only.**"

13) Perhaps the most amusing error was back in Paris, where one of our staff members saw a hotel sign that sought to discourage Americans from wearing slacks in its plush dining room. It read, "**A sports jacket may be worn to dinner, but no trousers.**"

 **Worksheet 2:**

Translation Bloopers

The translation bloopers listed below have been extracted from Text 1. In the space provided after each one, 1) give a brief explanation of what makes the error funny, that is, explain what word or phrase has been used inappropriately, and 2) suggest an alternative, sensible formulation of what you believe the translator's intended meaning was.

1. “Dresses for street walking.”

Why the translation is funny: **It is funny because the expression “street walking” is associated with prostitution.**

Alternative formulation: **“Dresses for casual wear” or “Casual dresses” or “Dresses for everyday wear”**

2. “Come inside and have a fit.”

Why the translation is funny: **It means to have a tantrum or an attack. Here, the translator obviously intended to use the word “fit” in a different sense**

Alternative formulation: “Come inside for a perfect fit.” or “Come inside to have yourself fitted.”

3. “Because of the impropriety of entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose.”

The phrase “this purpose” refers anaphorically to the phrase “entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom”, the very activity the sign openly qualifies as inappropriate behavior. The implication is that the word “entertaining” is being used euphemistically to refer to illicit sexual activity. The result is that the sign appears to recommend that guests have sex in the lobby.

Alternative formulation: “Visits from members of the opposite sex are restricted to the lobby area.”

4. “rendezvous lounges”

Why the translation is funny:

if rendezvous in Portuguese bears a sexual connotation, it is necessary to find other words to communicate the intended message.

Alternative formulation:

Possibilities: “Business lounges” “Board room lounges” “Cocktail lounges”

5. “Children Sandwiches”

Why the translation is funny:

The sandwiches in question are made of, not for children.

Alternative formulation: “Children’s sandwiches” or “Sandwiches for Children”.

6. “Chopped Milk”

Why the translation is funny: Erroneous use of the verb “to chop”. this verb should only be used in the context of cutting something solid, like wood or meat.

Alternative formulation: “Skimmed Milk”

7. “You will be singing the praises of the food served to you here to your grandchildren even as you lie on your deathbed.”

It seems not only morbid, but rather counterproductive to mention death in the context of a restaurant. What's more, the sentence is formulated in such a way that it appears to imply that customers will, once they've eaten in the restaurant, go off and die (because of the food which is tasty but toxic?)

It would be better to rephrase the sign to take the focus off death and put it on life: “You will be singing the praises of the food served to you here for the rest of your life.” or “You'll enjoy our food so much you'll want to tell all your friends and family about us.”

8. “If this is your first visit to the USSR, you are welcome to it.”

The expression “you’re welcome to it” does not mean, as it would seem to many foreign readers, “welcome”, but rather bears a sarcastic undertone, and means something akin to “take it or leave it” or “it’s up to you – take your chances”. Possible solution: “If this is your first visit to the USSR, we’d like to give you an extra special welcome.”

Alternative formulation: “If this is your first visit to the USSR, we’d like to give you an extra special welcome.”

9. “Take one of our horse-driven city tours. We guarantee no miscarriages.”

Why the translation is funny:

The humor here is a result of the incorrect use of the word “miscarriage”, which is actually a spontaneous, naturally-occurring abortion. The translator surely only meant to assure the reader that a ride in the advertised carriage is safe.

Alternative formulation: “Your safety guaranteed.”

10. “Five o’clock tea served all hours.”

Why the translation is funny:

It sounds absurd to announce that five o’clock tea (a lexicalized expression) may be served at any time.

Alternative formulation:

The solution is simple: say “tea” instead of “five-o’clock tea”.

11. “The lift is being fixed. For the next few days we regret that you will be unbearable.”

Why the translation is funny:

The problem lies in the word “unbearable”, which means “intolerable”.

Alternative formulation:

Solution: “We regret that you will have to use the stairs for the next few days while repairs are being made.”

12. “Visitors: Two to a bed and half an hour only.”

Why the translation is funny: **The phrasing here with the word “bed” produces a sexual innuendo.**

Alternative formulation: **If the word “bed” is replaced with “visitor”, the problem is solved.**

13. “A sports jacket may be worn to dinner, but no trousers.”

Why the translation is funny: **The sign is funny because it appears to encourage customers to enter the restaurant naked from the waist down.**

Alternative formulation: **Better: “...but formal trousers are required.”**

Can you find local translation bloopers?

Na nova auto-estrada para o Algarve, um casal de alentejanos resolveu montar um restaurante de bom nível, com os melhores pratos da cozinha portuguesa de Norte a Sul, de Leste a Oeste, incluindo também as Regiões Autónomas e alguns pratos da gastronomia internacional. Tiveram, porém, de traduzir a ementa para inglês e para outras línguas. O anexo é o resultado dessa tradução, apenas para a língua de Shakespeare.

Ementa

Entradas

Presunto pata negra
Queijinhos de Azeitão
Amêijoas à Bulhão Pato
Cadelinhas à algarvia
Percebes

Sopas

Sopa de nabos saloia
Caldo de penca com coentros
Sopas do Espírito Santo

Peixes e Mariscos

Imperador no sal
Caldeirada à frigateiro
Arroz de navalhas da ilha de Faro
Choquinhas na sua tinta
Bacalhau assado com batatas a murro
Jaquezinhos com açorda
Bacalhau com todos
Delícias do Mar com saladinha de tomate
Arroz de Lampreia malandro à moda de Entre-os-Rios

And Mint

Way in

Black paw ham
Little cheeses from Big Olive Oil Land
Clams in the manner of the ever-fighting duck
Little bitches from the Algarve
Do you understand?

Soups

Soup of stupid peasants
Nose broth with ass entries
Soup especiality from Espírito Santo Bank

Fishes and Gays

Salty emperor
Boiler in the frigate's commander style
Knives rice from the island of Ferry
Little shocks in their own ink
Grilled codfish with punch violent
potatoes
Little Jackies with bread pudding
Codfish with everybody
Sea delight with a darling little tomato salad
Bastard's lamprey rice done in the manner of between

Frango à cafreal

Carne de porco à alentejana
Jantar da matança em vinha d'alhos
Rancho à moda de Viseu
Mão de vaca à jardineira
Arroz de Frango malandrino à moda do Porto
Iscas com elas

Acompanhamentos

Peixinhos da Horta
Feijão frade
Grelhos sauteados

Sobremesas

Toucinho do céu
Macedónia de frutas com gelado
Bolo pôdre da Madeira
Bolo delicia da avó
Delicia do chefe
Baba de camelô
Rabanadas douradas
Tarte antiga de gila
Queijo da serra com marmelada

A acompanhar á refeição, recomendamos que prove o nosso vinho verde à pressão ou a nossa agradável e sempre fresca sangria
Estamos abertos das 12h30 às 15h30 e das 19h00 às 23h00

Meats

Chicken from the black people
Pork meat alentejana style
Dinner massacre with garlic wine
A ranch like the one we had in Viseu
The cow hand in the gardener's way
Harbour's small bandit chicken rice
Baits with the girls

Keeping company

Small fish from the orchard
Friar bean or cyclists
Jumping clitoris

Over the tables

Bacon from heaven
Fruits with ice from an old part of Yugoslavia
Rotten cake made out of wood
My grandmother is delightful as a cake
The chef is also a nice guy
The camel is going to spit on you!
Golden asses
Gill is an old tart!
Mountain cheese with foreplay

With the meal, we recommend you try our green wine to the pressure or our pleasant and ever refreshing bleeding
We are open: from 12h30 to 15h30, and 19h00 to 23h00