

## FRACTURED ENGLISH

NINO LO BELLO

From a Continental shop window: 'Dresses for street walking'.

From another clothing store window: 'Come inside and have a fit.'

Your trip abroad will be full of surprises as everything is so different. Even English. You can usually bank on having a chuckle or three when some native tries to take the words out of your mouth and assassinates the King's English. What comes out is something Funk would never tell Wagnall.

In a foreign country the name of the game is 'Inglish'. It's fun to play and the rules are simple. All you have to do is carry along a pad and a ballpoint pen ever at the ready and when you spot some Fractured Inglish and/or other assorted literary lulus, you copy it down. Meanwhile, here are some howlers I have collected over the last decade or so - like the beaut I spotted in front of a doctor's office, which proclaimed him a 'Specialist in women and other diseases'.

Get the idea?

Now that more than a billion people have a working acquaintance with the English language, it has already become the world's most widespread tongue. Unfortunately the Queen's lingo can turn into Le Joke Hilarious when it comes from the machinations of someone for whom English is not a mother tongue. It seems everybody is popping signs in windows which will tell you for

your benefit that 'here speeching English' or 'American pronounced' or 'Inglish goodly spoken'.

Some old pros in the tourist business seem to have studied English in order to cater to the annual avalanche of travellers who lug their dollars with them for a hoppy haliday. All fine and dandy - but more often than not, restaurant and hotel keepers who mean well when they put up a notice or write down a menu, don't quite get it correct, alas. Here's what one hotel told clients:

'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.'

Or the hotel which wants to warn guests about the fire regulation. So for your benefit (?), sic, here's the notice you find on every floor:

'Fire! It is what can doing we hope. No fear. Not ourselves. Say quietly to all people coming up down everywhere a prayer. Always is a clerk. He is assured of safety by expert men who are in the bar for telephone for the fighters of the fire come out.'

That slip of the tongue is reminiscent of the downtown Continental eatery that is pushing three specialities, each of dubious gastronomic appeal:

'Fried milk'  
'Children sandwiches'  
'Boiled sheep'

And the precious morsel issued by Poland which tells prospective visitors that 'as for the tripe served you at the Hotel Monopol, you will be singing its praises to your grandchildren as you lie on your deathbed.'

Not to be outdone by their communist brethren, the Soviets are guilty of the following found tacked on a Moscow hotel-room door:

'If this is your first visit to the USSR, you are welcome to it.'

During my frequent travels behind the Iron Curtain, where I accumulated samples of skewed syntax, Marxist style, I have come to the conclusion that the hotels and elevators constitute the

soft underbelly of communism. In my favourite hotel, this is what the Magyars have posted in every room by way of warning:

'All rooms not denounced by twelve o'clock will be paid for twice.''

Not to be outdone by their comrades in this dialect materialism, an East European once handed me a printed folder at an international sporting event. It read:

'Sports in the rotting capitalistic countries are the declared enemy of the socialist athletes who consider it their duty to worth the superiority of the socialist races. Yet we wish you good luck. Our applause for you will be as enthusiastic, but mind that this applause is never delivered to the capitalistic system, of which we have our own views.'

In Prague, a Yank also gets the impression that the Czechs have never bothered to double-Czech their mangling participles. For example, take this questionable piece of prose in the office of Cedok, Czechoslovakia's State tourist agency:

'Take one of our horse-driven city tours - we guarantee no miscarriages.'

While aboard a Soviet ship in the Black Sea some months ago, I found the following life-saving instructions on my cabin door: 'Helpsavering apparata in emergings behold many whistles! Associate the stringing apparata about the bosoms and meet behind. Flee then to the indifferent lifesavering shippen obediencing the instructs of the vessel chef.'

The Russians are also proud of their ice-cream, a type which one of their ambassadors to Washington brought from the United States and which Soviet dieticians copied fairly successfully. On the wrapper one is privileged to be told:

'Do not taste our Ice Cream when it is too hard. Please continue your conversation until the Ice Cream grows into a softer. By adhering this advisement you will fully appreciate the wonderful Soviet Ice Cream.'

On a highway in Poland, there's a sign that tells foreign motorists to 'Go soothingly in the snow, as there lurk the ski demons.' Another Polish traffic sign: 'Right turn toward immediate outside.'

Strolling in the heart of Warsaw, you can buy 'US ham burgers' and for the Britons there's even a café which serves 'Five

o'clock tea at all hours.' The theatre programme issued during a performance of *Rigoletto* in Warsaw's opera house, says that the 'act ends with the rape of Gilda, organised by the knight Marullo, which is convinced doing so, to play a vindictive joke to the buffoon of whom the young lady is considered lover.'

But of all the tricky translations I've collected in the communist world, perhaps this one deserves a special plaque. On the elevator door of a Rumanian hotel lobby is this classic of classics:

'The lift is being fixed for the next days. During that time we regret that you will be unbearable.'

As I said earlier, elevators constitute part of communism's soft underbelly. As witness, what Belgrade's State-owned skyscraper hotel (are you listening, Marshall Tito?) tells users of the elevator:

'1. To move the cabin push button of wishing floor. 2. If the cabin should enter more persons, each one should press number of wishing floor. Driving is then going alphabetically by natural order. 3. Button retaining pressed position shows received command for visiting station.'

Also posted in a Yugo hotel elevator was this notice:

'Let us know about an unficiency as well as leaking on the service. Our utmost will improve it.'

Communist English to the contrary, even those who speak the language well muff one occasionally, as for instance a hospital sign that reads:

'Visitors. Two to a bed and half-an-hour only.'

Blimey, I wonder who was responsible for this linguistic lapse:

'Our establishment serves tea in a bag like mother.'

One hotel in Europe, seeking to discourage Americans from wearing slacks in its plush dining room, informs men that 'A sports jacket may be worn to dinner but no trousers.' That same hotel, eager to put on airs and preferring not to call an egg an egg, pretentiously lists an egg on their menu as 'Extract of fowl, peached or sunside up.'

Discovered in a small seaside hotel, which doesn't supply dictionary facilities, was this bobble: 'To all Hotel assistant,

in order to prevent shoes from misleying, please don't corridor them. The Management of this Hotel cannot be held. He is responsible for articles deposited to the office against receipt.'

Then there is the dentist in Istanbul whose doorway proclaims: 'American dentist, 2th floor - teeth extracted by latest methodists.' What makes this sign doubly delightful (and it gets the grand prize!) is that the second floor would be pronounced according to this particular dentist, 'tooth floor'.

I have accumulated the most tee-hee collection of nutty nouns and preposterous prepositions this side of Webster's Unabridged. It seems tourists just can't avoid Europeans who speak the excellent English as she is wrote (but God bless 'em for trying ...):

'Offering my honoured guests delicious meals as well as selected beverages,' proclaimed one hotel restaurateur, 'is my endeavour served by well-trained waiters. Every readiness and efficiency to obtain this target is essential. Kind assist me in this task by taking at least one meal a day at my place where my specialty is pig.'

Another well-meaning restaurant owner provides his foreign clientele with the following explanation as to how his gift to the alimentary canal should be eaten:

'Dear Foreigner and Guest: The spaghetti are not to be cut for making them shorter, nor with the fork - so much the less - with the knife. You ought not to help yourself with the spoon for better rolling them up. The secret in succeeding is to plunge the fork only a little into the spaghetti mass, remembering that they are very long. It is sufficient to seize with the point of the fork, supported by the plate's cavity, they will - for their length, form a bit just right to be introduced into your lightly open mouth.' Significantly, this message was signed by the Ass. Mgr.

Not long ago, I came upon a sign that I consider the slickest one yet, partly because there is some kind of method behind the madness. In bold letters the sign reads:

'Our dresses advertise in Harp's Bazar.'

Contrary to my usual reaction, this time I decided to go into the boutique to apprise the owner of the fluff - but when I explained to him that the sign was a grammatical no-no, he curled a smile across his lips, nudged me with this elbow and said confidently:

'My friend, that sign brings in business. Every day at least a half dozen women come in to tell me about the mistake. And you know what? About half of them end up buying one of my dresses!'

Adled adjectives and venomous verbs are not the sole monopoly of the Europeans, however. On my last trip to the Far East, I came away with an x-number of philological freaks that would have had Prof 'enry 'iggins in a dither. So don't go away - there's m-m-more, folks ...

One day I spotted a sign advertising a donkey-ride for tourists. It read:

'Would you like to ride on your own ass?'

Not to be one-upped by private enterprise, there is a notice posted near the Burma border asking foreigners for their co-operation. It reads:

'Please give us your hand in order to collect statistics,'

Vying to become one of my real favourites, on the other hand, is a senseless sentence that seems to have sprouted like mushrooms everywhere. In a Far East hotel, where I saw it the last time, the sign announces: 'Is forbidden to steal hotel towels, please if you are not person to do such is please not to read notice.'

Since Orientals are the biggest tricky translators of all, you will naturally find the Far Eastern geography rife with gems. Like the official notice at an expo some years back. If you wanted to get a ticket for a ride on the mono-rail, the dispensing machine had a metal plaque that told you:

'When ticket do not come out, push the button to back your money.'

That same exhibit was a gold mine for the collector, what with such grammatical boo-boos as:

'Prohibit with shoes on.'

'No passage this way for the walker.'

'Here purchasing babble gum.'

Also to the credit of the Far East is this hotel bedroom notice: 'The flattening of underwear with pressure is the job of the chambermaid. To get it done, turn her on.'

From an article in an Oriental English-language magazine, I once culled the following: 'The banana are a great remarkable fruit. He are constructed in the same architectural style as the honorable sausage. Difference being skin of sausage are habitually consumed while it is not advisable to eat rapping of banana. Perhaps are also intrissing the following differences between the two objects. Banana are held aloft while consuming, sausages are usually left in reclining position. Banana are first green in culler, then gradual turn yellowish.'

Witness this corker: on the box of an alarm clock you are told: 'Thank you to perfection of alarming mechanism, you are never awake when you are sleeping.'

In another sun-seared Far Eastern capital, at one of the temples of Buddha, was this dire warning:

'It is forbidden to enter a woman even a foreigner if dressed as a man.'

Not far away, you are invited to cool off in 'The Shadiest Cocktail Bar in Town.' Whereas in the heart of downtown, a sign advises you to 'Visit our bargain basement - one flight up!' Enter, and you will find 'Pork Handbags' on sale.

And how's this for a fizzle? A Far Eastern restaurant, which specialises in English cuisine, offers on its menu a 'Sir Loin Steak with potato cheeps.' Another food emporium features 'ut-most of chicken fried in bother.'

Had enough? Well, here's one for the road. It's my all-time favourite. A sign which lets you know that you can have your eyes examined while you wait!

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