

It Started at the Tower of Babel

By Dennis Knight

And so God scattered them upon the face of the Earth, and confused their languages, and they left off building the city, which was called Babel "because God there confounded the language of all the Earth" ([Genesis 11:5–8](#)).

So how many languages are there? According to a report of the Linguistic Society of America in 2010, there is no scientific count, but it is likely in the thousands. That same report states that parts of the bible have been translated to over 2,500 languages, and so it appears the language of Earth has indeed been confounded.

Computers to the rescue! I spent last week playing with two translator programs, Babel Fish and Microsoft's Bing translator. I typed in quotations from Shakespeare and Twain to see how they would translate from English to French and back to English, repeating the same process with other primary languages. The programs worked quite well, which was disappointing, because I was counting on getting some returns that would make an entertaining piece.

So I upped the ante to see how popular quotations would come out if translated through a succession of multiple languages. For instance, Mark Twain once wrote, "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society." Thirty Five translations later, it comes back in English as "*The man wore a small amount of the nude in a public place.*"

That was promising, so I gave the grinder a larger challenge, paragraphs from my 2011 piece, "My Career as a Male Belly Dancer". Here's what I originally wrote:

It was a grand opportunity to showcase my unique and secret performance talent, really my only performance talent. That genius was the ability to roll my stomach, a contraction and expansion of belly muscle that began at the sternum and proceeded in rolling waves to and from my waist. Nobody outside my family had ever seen me do this, and I was excited and not even a little bit embarrassed to bring it to the public. Even Ray Walston couldn't do it.

I visited Woolworths and a grocery store for cotton yardage to pin around my waist, some cord, and a nice, round coconut. Materials in hand, and with little knowledge of coconuts and absolutely no experience with brassieres, I proceeded.

Using some of dad's tools, I cut the coconut in half, drilled the necessary holes and assembled my new top. Trying it on, I discovered one weighty engineering problem. While I'm sure the Maidenform people deal with gravity issues in all variety of ways, I solved mine by eating the coconut, or enough of it that I had a light and balanced load hanging around my neck.

With some colorful felt tip pens, I tattooed my belly with a fine, steaming tugboat to ride the waves. I borrowed some of mom's rouge to do my cheeks.

Eight translations later, my piece bounced back to English thoroughly confounded:

It is a good opportunity to bring my talent into view and the only secret is really my only talent agents. This day is in my stomach will start narrowing and broadening of the sternum in the abdominal muscles and continue to swing back, and my family, I saw it and it's not even the public is excited, a little embarrassed. Ray Ray Walston. I visited the

Volvo and hangs around the waist and a large supermarket in cotton, circular cable some coconut. Promotional material in your hand and coconut bras and absolutely no experience, he said. Using tools can dig a hole, cut half a coconut, my father arranges it. Also discovered a difficult technical problem. Maidenform gravitational problems, even when I load my people resolve or coconut and light enough and some neck depends on the color of the pen do I poke a knife-tip. Breast cancer well, connect the power of steam. And my mother lent me double Cheek Rouge.

I ran the piece through another twenty-seven translations, and it was confound compounded, right to the end where my double cheek rouge was now *“shown in red color vampire courts.”*

Perhaps I will someday write a book with a worldwide demand, but when it happens, I am going to have to hope my publisher uses something other than Bing to get it ready for the Polish market, or my cheeks will be definitely be in the red color of vampire courts.