

Concerning Google Translate and Other Such Tools

As non-native French speakers, we all need to look up words from time to time, either to understand what we're reading or to use in composition. Traditional printed dictionaries provide information on individual words, but the user must know the part of speech and have the hang of figuring out which version to use. Google Translate and its cousins, thus, are very tempting to use: write a block of text in English and cut/copy. The French translation magically appears.

However, this approach results in very little learning and is, in fact a form of cheating. So how can a student use services like Google Translate in a way that provides learning with integrity and honesty? The following are suggestions . . . and rules for all my students . . . and inform you of the consequences of misusing digital resources.

Most importantly: do not write in English and then translate to French. From the beginning, use French. Try to use language that you know. If you really need to use an unfamiliar word in something you're writing, you can:

- * use Google, but for **one word only--no phrases, no blocks of text (this is true of most of the tools I suggest)**;
- * use wordreference.com, which provides contextual information that can be useful;
- * use a print dictionary;
- * circumlocute--write around what you want to say. Don't know the word for "utensil"? Use la cuillère, la fourchette, le couteau--which you have learned. Can't remember (or never learned) how to say "sad"? Say "pas content" or "fâché" or "malheureux."
- * check what you've written at lebonpatron. It's not perfect, but it does provide explanations and you might learn something. Here, you may copy/paste.

It's possible that you've provided an annotated bibliography for a paper you've written for English or Social Studies. I have a pretty good idea of what you know at each level, but I'd like you to annotate any scripts or compositions you do for me. Highlight or underline what you looked up on any reference source. If you pushed the envelope and looked up a phrase, highlight the whole thing and tell me why you didn't find another way to say the same it--i.e.,

circumlocute. I do not want to see or hear any passé simple from any of you, at any level--please do not use it.

So what if you really don't know how to say something you want to say? Well, see above. Better yet, talk to me. Ask me questions; you can even turn things in to me with the questions written on them, if you're in a time crunch. Tell me your idea of how to say it, maybe, and I'll let you know if you're right or actually saying something about the mistreatment of turkeys on Thanksgiving. Honestly, almost anything is better for your learning than having an online source translate a block of text for you.

What if you do that or use passé simple or some structure that I know (and you know) that you haven't learned yet? **Your score will be reduced by 20%.** Period. If you annotate, explain, ask, as suggested already, it won't be a problem. But there are no excuses for not proceeding in an ethical manner and I was not put on this planet to police my students' use of digital resources that do the writing for them. I'd rather correct a hundred grammar errors than run into a single sentence written by Google.

If you have questions or concerns, please talk to me. Otherwise, this document is a statement of my policy.