

Working with an online dictionary like Wordreference And why not to use GoogleTranslate

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When writing in French, you might need to look up words you do not know. Or you may just want to double check how the word is used (what is the **correct spelling**, what is the **gender**, does it **require the use of a preposition**?)

Google Translate sometimes seems like an easy and fast ressource. It keeps getting better and better and sometimes the translations it provides are very idiomatic. Sometimes not. Sometimes it provides wrong/incomprehensible/awkward translations (see below). Regardless of how accurate *Google Translate* is, it is not a tool that contributes to your learning and refining your French. On the other hand, using a dictionary such as *Word Reference* will provide you with information that helps you grow as a learner/writer of French.

Limitations of GoogleTranslate

English to French

Starting with a perfectly correct English sentence, compare the GoogleTranslate translation and a Human translation:

“In their house, everything comes in pairs. There’s his car and her car, his towels and her towels, and his library and hers.”

- a. *GoogleTranslate*: Dans leur maison, tout vient en paires. Il y a sa voiture et sa voiture, ses serviettes et ses serviettes, sa bibliothèque et les siennes.
- b. *Human*: Chez eux, ils ont tout en double. Il y a sa voiture à elle et sa voiture à lui, ses serviettes à elle et ses serviettes à lui, sa bibliothèque à elle et sa bibliothèque à lui.

Working with a partner, notice the issues with the GoogleTranslate translation. What is not accurately translated?

On the other hand, the human translation had no issues expressing the contrast in genders.

French to English

Now if we use the sentence generated by the human translation (which is perfectly idiomatic French) and put it back into English with Google Translate, you can see how inaccurate the translation is.

“Chez eux, ils ont tout en double. Il y a sa voiture à elle et sa voiture à lui, ses serviettes à elle et ses serviettes à lui, sa bibliothèque à elle et sa bibliothèque à lui.”

Google Translate: At home, they have everything in double. There is his own car and his own car, his own towels and his own towels, his own library and his own library.

Surprisingly, GoogleTranslate does not seem to be able to distinguish the difference between ‘his’ and ‘her’ even when the French sentence clearly states ‘à lui’ or ‘à elle’.

In both cases the English to French and French to English translations, GoogleTranslate falls short and ends up providing a nonsensical sentence.

Examples are taken from:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/01/the-shallowness-of-google-translate/551570/>

When using WordReference

We encourage you to look up new vocabulary when you write a composition or do homework. Because most of you have never used a bilingual dictionary, we want you to pay attention to the following:

1. Check that the word you see is the right grammatical category for your sentence.

For example, the word ‘**present**’ in English, can mean several things:

- I want to **present** this new idea to my colleagues (*verb*)
- I received a wonderful **present** on my birthday (*noun*)
- It is hard to tell what the future holds for us, given the **present** situation. (*adjective*)

2. Check all the examples and descriptions that are listed under the word in order to find a sentence using the word the way you want to use it.

For example :

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| ● Fans attend as many games as possible | - <i>supporteur</i> |
| ● Ariana Grande has a lot of fans | - <i>admirateur/admiratrice</i> |
| ● Fans are a necessity in this climate | - <i>ventilateur</i> |

- The **fan** she is holding was purchased in Vietnam - *éventail*

Your turn - Practice using WordReference

Using *Word Reference*, translate into French the following sentences that use the words '**own**' and/or '**practice**':

1. My team has practice every day.

a.

2. I want to have my own practice.

a.

3. I do not own a car.

a.

4. Do you have your own?

a.

5. Did he own up to breaking the door?

a.

6. Can you put that into practice?

a.

7. Does your band have a practice this evening?

a.

8. It is common practice.

a.

9. She wants to work in the field of family practice.

a.

10. In practice, it is much more complicated.

a.

11. Do you know if he practices medicine or law?

a.

Doing this exercise of translation, what have you found out about the English words ‘practice’ and ‘own’?

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-
- Which sentence was the easiest to translate for you? Circle the number

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11.

- Which sentence was the most difficult to translate for you? Circle the number

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11.

Still using WordReference : Can you spot and fix the issues in the strange/ackward translations below ?

French to English

1. *Chers clients, Vous devez réserver ou appeler un taxi. Merci de composer le 06.50.65.55.17*

Bad translation: *Expensively* customer, you have to reserve or call a taxi. Thank you to *compose* 06.50.65.55.17

a) What are the two words that were poorly translated?

b) Try fixing the issues by using WordReference

2. *Pour le respect de tous, merci de laisser les toilettes dans l'état où vous souhaiteriez les trouver en entrant.*

Bad translation: For the respect of all, thank you to leave the toilets in the state where you would find the entrance.

a) What is/are the problem(s) in the English translation?

b) Try fixing the issues by using WordReference.

3. *Dessert au choix* translation: choice of dessert
Plat au choix translation: choice of flat

a) What is/are the problem(s) in the English translation?

b) Try fixing the issues by using WordReference.

4. *Attention !!! A la dernière marche en descendant ...*

Bad translation: Attention !!! has the last step by coming down

a) What is/are the problem(s) in the English translation?

b) Try fixing the issues by using WordReference.

English to French

1. I have a frog in my throat
 - a. J'ai une grenouille dans la gorge

a) What is/are the problem(s) in the English translation?

b) Try fixing the issues by using WordReference.

The case with/for prepositions

As a native speaker of English, can you say which preposition you would use in the expressions below?

- ___ several occasions

- ___ several cases

Prepositions do not exist in a vacuum. They are always linked to another word (noun or verb). It is something that you acquire as you improve as a learner. Prepositions are difficult in most languages. English is no exception. Think of the verb ‘to look’. How many different prepositions can you add to it to change its meaning?

1. To look at
2. To look up
3. To look for
4. To look into
5. To look within
6. To look forward to
7. To look up to
8. To look on to
9. To look down on

Prepositions are tricky in French too, but using WordReference will allow you to see whether one is needed and which one.

Five reasons to avoid google translate when learning a language. – Errol M. O’Neill, Ph.D

1. Google Translate is a blunt tool
2. You can’t trick anyone (at least not your teacher!)
3. No learning
4. Learning from mistakes is essential learning
5. Your writing is your reward

<https://swedishmadeeasy.com/5-reasons-to-avoid-google-translate-when-learning-a-language.html>