



# Globalization Bites The Wax Tadpole (/english/culture/globalization-bites-the-wax-tadpole)

By PHYLA.EXE - 📅 04 Feb 1998 - 👁 Hits: 6917



Most of us have heard about how Coca-Cola pulled a massive boo-boo when it launched a campaign in China which translated the soft drink's name literally into: 'Bite the wax tadpole' or the even more mouth-watering, 'Female horse stuffed with wax' (depending on the dialect).

Or, how the people pushing Chevy Nova cars did a rather pathetic sales job when Spanish speakers understood 'Nova' to mean, "No go".

• The 40.000 character problem

蝌蚪蠟 - Kē Kē Kèn Là  
 - "bite the wax tadpole"  
 可口可乐 - Kè Kou Kè Lè  
 - "happy mouth drink"



Considering the colossal amount of marketing dollars at corporate disposal one would think that this would be a fairly infrequent phenomenon.

*Not so.*

The Ford Motor Co. had a similar problem in Brazil when the Pinto flopped. The company found out that Pinto was Brazilian slang for "tiny male genitals". Quick to learn, Ford pried off all the nameplates and promptly substituted the name Corcel, or "horse" instead.

As the following compilation illustrates, our esteemed mind-manipulating marketers have often fallen prey to their own negligence. In their directed efforts at keeping the jingles and slogans in our heads, many advertisers apparently forgot the rather important expenditure of hiring a translator when attempting to open and entice foreign markets:

— When Pepsi started marketing its products in China a few years back, their slogan, "Come alive with the Pepsi generation" suggested to the Chinese that "Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back from the Grave."

— The marketers for Kentucky Fried Chicken didn't do much better when their slogan "Finger-lickin' good!" came out in Chinese as "Eat your fingers off!"

— The Scandinavian vacuum manufacturer Electrolux should have thought twice before it surged into the



(<https://wise.com/invite/dic/jeffreeb>)

American market with the campaign: "Nothing sucks like an Electrolux."

— Coors did a nice job of translating its slogan, "Turn It Loose," into Spanish, where it was read as "Suffer From Diarrhea."

— When Gerber first started selling baby food in Africa, they didn't bother to change the packaging and used the same label as they did in the US — jars with pictures of the cute little baby on the front. Only later, however, did they realize that in Africa, companies routinely put pictures on the label that describes what's inside since most people can't read.

— Vicks did a really good job of 'rubbing it in' as in German, the pronunciation of "v" is "f," which is the slang equivalent of "sexual penetration."

— Not to be outdone, Puffs tissues later introduced its product, only to learn that "Puff" is a colloquial German term for a whorehouse.

— The American slogan for Salem cigarettes, 'Salem - Feeling Free,' got translated in the Japanese market as 'When smoking Salem, you feel so refreshed that your mind seems to be free and empty.'

— Parker boldly announced its ballpoint pen in Mexico with ads that were supposed to say: 'It won't leak in your pocket and embarrass you.' However, the company mistakenly thought the Spanish word 'embarazar' meant embarrass, and the ads said, 'It won't leak in your pocket and make you pregnant,' instead.

— In Italy, a refreshing campaign for Schweppes Tonic Water translated its name into Schweppes Toilet Water.

— The Jolly Green Giant translated into Arabic means 'Intimidating Green Ogre.'

— Colgate introduced a toothpaste in France called Cue, the name of a notorious porno magazine.

— Bacardi came up with 'Pavian' for their new fruity drink to suggest French chic . . . however, its desired naming effect did not come out as well in Germany where 'Pavian' means 'baboon'.

— America's favorite chicken man, Frank Perdue's slogan: 'It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken' took on a whole new meaning in Spanish where it became: 'It takes a sexually stimulated man to make a chicken affectionate.'

— Clairol introduced the 'Mist Stick,' a curling iron, into Germany only to find out that 'mist' is slang for drug.

— Japan's second-largest tourist agency was a bit concerned when it entered English-speaking markets and began receiving requests for unusual sex tours. Upon finding out why, the owners of Kinki Nippon Tourist Company changed its name.

— In an effort to revitalize orange juice sales in England, a campaign was devised to pronounce the drink's eye-opening, pick-me-up qualities. Ergo, "Orange juice. It gets your pecker up."

— Hunt-Wesson introduced its Big John products in French Canada as Gros Jos before realizing that the phrase, in slang, means "big breasts." In this case, however, the translation did not have a noticeable effect on sales.

— And currently in Japan, Microsoft's slogan: "Where do you want to go today" is showing its true colors with flashy, stylized ads that helpfully assert: "Microsoft: If you don't know where you want to go, we'll make sure you get taken."