

March 12, 2017

In other words

Editor's Note: *The following was written after a night of very little sleep, and just hours before deadline. Consider yourself warned.*

The other day I discovered a program that I could download onto my telephone, basically turning it into an audio translator. It would allow my phone to create an immediate audio translation of whatever I say, into whatever language I chose. In other words (no pun intended), I could speak into the phone in English, and the phone would repeat the words, except in Spanish! Or just about any other language!

I wanted to shout from the rooftop: *The Tower of Babel has just come tumbling down! No longer will language be a barrier between people! Joyous app! Wonderful app! A gift from God, app! An app to change the world! An app to app-reciate!*

Seriously, I felt very appy.

A few days later came the Rite of Election, the perfect occasion to give the program a try.

I'm not the most social person, so it took me a while to get up my nerve to try it out. I was with the bishop, taking pictures of him with candidates and catechumens and their families at the reception following the ceremony, when a woman approached me.

"Where can I get copies of the photos with the bishop?" she asked in Spanish. It took me a minute, but I eventually put together what it was she was asking. I smiled, looked down into my phone, and recited the answer in English into my new app.

The translation came almost immediately. My phone repeated my words in perfect Spanish: "My dog. She is under arrest."

Overhearing the conversation, a concerned teenage boy looked at me and said, "What did she do?"

"What did who do?" I answered, puzzled.

"Your dog."

Well, this boy was obviously having serious trouble with his English, I thought. So, I took my handy-dandy phone and said: "My dog has not done anything. I was saying that you can find the photographs from today's event on our diocesan website."

Again, the Spanish translation came instantaneously: "My doughnut is not leaving, but the photographs are for dogs. With or without wigs. Window."

I'm not an egotistical person, but I couldn't help but feel a little full of myself at the moment. I felt like Batman after having just added a special tool to my utility belt, a tool called "communication".

The boy smiled and seemed to be trying to suppress a laugh. I understood. It's such a joy to suddenly surpass a high wall that for thousands of years has left us feeling separated by language. Finally, the boy burst out laughing. I laughed right along with him. It felt ... *joyous*.

My confidence was high. The app had given me not only the ability to communicate, but the courage to approach others—Mexicans, Guatemalans, Vietnamese. Did they speak English? Did it matter? *No. It didn't.*

It didn't matter what language they spoke!! This was like a miracle!

I excitedly approached an elderly Vietnamese man who had just sat down with his chili supper. I recalled from an introduction a few years ago that he spoke almost no English.

"Hello! Are you enjoying your chili dinner?" I asked into my phone. The Vietnamese man eyed me with a mix of suspicion and amusement. He glanced down at my phone, which repeated in perfect Vietnamese: "Hello! Your dinner is upon you! Chilly?"

He quickly picked up a napkin to wipe his mouth. He looked down at his shirt and tie. It was easy to see that he was humbled by the experience of this new God-given technology. Then he looked up at me.

I stared at him excitedly, my eyes wide, a grin stretching from ear to ear. He jumped in his chair, startled. Could I blame him? He nodded vigorously and put his hands up as if to say, "Thank you. Yes, I'm enjoying my dinner."

I smiled, stood up and walked away, my mission accomplished. He quickly grabbed his jacket and sped out the door of the social hall. It had been too much for him. *Joyous discovery is not for the faint of heart, my Vietnamese friend!* I said under my breath. *Don't worry! I will be around to communicate with you again someday.* I'm pretty sure that's just what he was thinking as he sprinted down the hall.

I spoke to many people on that amazing March 5 afternoon. Probably more than I've ever spoken to at any event.

To a young Salvadoran woman, my phone translated a simple quote from the Book of John spoken by a priest sitting at her table: "The truth will upset your feet."

To a noble looking man from Guatemala, I shared a tidbit about the weather: "We will have exceptionally powerful winds after our chili dinner," my phone translated. Thanks to me, he knew that he'd have to hold tightly onto his steering wheel getting home!

I finished taking pictures with the bishop, eager to get home and send off a quick email.

My friends, I hope you appreciate the weight of this. You see, the email in question was to our president. Knowing his affinity for sending texts, I knew that he would be thrilled. And I was right.

His response came within the hour: "Thanx for information about the app. Really great. Just wrote to Kim Jong-un. Won't he be surprised."

Anything I can do to help, Mr. President. Anything I can do to help.

Editor's Note: *You were warned.*