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Pierogis - with Bryndza Sheep Cheese

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> English please
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> - A waiter at this really yummy pub [a] in Bratislava, Slovakia, the other day after I asked if he preferred English or German

I know Slovakians speak Slovak. I just found it really interesting that in Bratislava – less than two miles from the border with Austria that English was the language of choice after Slovak (for both the waiter and the menu). This interest is perhaps misguided and it's entirely reasonable for former countries of the Eastern Block to speak languages (Czech, Polish, etc) reflective of their history behind the Iron Curtain but it's been nearly 30 years and Slovakia makes an exceedingly large number of (mainly German) cars.

The English = lingua franca argument is an pretty developed one [b] that seems to go:

—> British Empire had a bunch of colonies that kicked things off —> the United States became a major world power after winning the Second World War exporting its culture and language pretty much everywhere —> the internet was invented and a lot of the early people on it were from American universities —> massive network effects

While it's pretty useful that English gets me by just fine in Slovakia and a whole host of other nations and people from countries with comparatively few native speakers (and some from larger ones that seem to think English is really cool like in Germany) will probably continue to learn English or another "world language" [c], I wonder if increased communication over the internet and rapid advances in machine translation will change the world less than we think.

Later on this trip in Lyon, France, my friend and I found ourselves with an extremely kind and excited AirBnb host who spent 45 minutes giving us a tour of his loft and pouring over a map of the city entirely in French. Helped by cognates between French and Spanish, a lot of smiles, and the Google Translate App, we made it through but this is a UX I would definitely take steps to improve if I expected to encounter it with any frequency. At this point, the only way to improve would seem to be to apprendre le français.

Related reading:

The Slovak Pub's menu [d] is almost enough to make me get on a plane back to Slovakia right now. We had 207: Slovak Platter for Two with dumplings with bayndza' sheep cheese, pierogi also with bayndza' sheep cheese and the dumplings with cabbage and bacon (where dumpling [e] are more similar to macaroni and cheese then what you would find at dim-sum).

Machine translation is usually pretty great for ordering food and other simple things but even then it messes up like in this case: [f]

"a Palestinian construction worker wrote "good morning" in Arabic on Facebook. The company's automatic translation service translated the post to "attack them" in Hebrew and "hurt them" in English, prompting the Israeli police to arrest the individual."

Cool travel tools:

People sporadically ask me for a list so here we go:

I'm a big fan of TripIt [g] to make pretty itineraries and to track things, Citymapper [h] for transit maps in places Google doesn't have (Lyon smh), Ofo/Mobike/Lime for magic dockless bikes, the AR translate in Google Translate they integrated after they bought WorldLens [i], and ofc T-Mobile for the magic international (albeit somewhat slow) service that's only failed me in Cuba.

Links

a. goo.gl/maps/x5kJQe9PTSs
b. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_as_a_lingua_franca
c. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_language
d. slovakpub.sk/en/#daily-menu
e. blog.arousingappetites.com/halusky-slovakian-potato-dumpings
f. csoonline.com/article/3234644/security/man-arrested-after-good-morning-post-mistranslated-by-facebook-as-attack-them.html
g. tripit.com
h. citymapper.com
i. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_Lens