

WORD WOES

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2014

Etymology

If you are English and had never spoken a word of Afrikaans, the list of words in *WORD WOES* will appear totally English to you. If you are Afrikaans and had never seen any written English, which is highly unlikely, you might recognise these words as totally Afrikaans

There is no logical linguistic reason for the choice of words. In a way they are a *Dada* list – a mini *Dada* dictionary. Their inclusion is strangely dependent on the throw of a dice, in this case, the dice is the fact that the English and Afrikaans meanings of these words of the same spelling have absolutely nothing to do with each other.

The marvel of it all is for the reasonably bilingual person to read a word from one of the two languages, and then, upon reflection, to find the meaning of that word in the other language slowly dawning upon them.

At first I thought of calling the work *LOST IN TRANSLATION* because the words play with irreconcilable meanings. This ‘English-only’ title would, however, only serve to anger sensitive members of the Afrikaans community and I decided to name the etching after two of the words that make strange sense when combined: *WORD WOES*.

The English often see Afrikaans words next to English signage and because of their expectation that all written expression everywhere must necessarily be English, one often gets quite humorous readings. My son, Willem junior, who lives in the United Kingdom, once tried to draw money from the automatic banking machine in the predominantly Afrikaans town of Parys and he could not because he thought the prominence of the word *jammer* on the monitor meant that the machine had been *jammed*, when in fact an apology was issued for the fact that the machine could not print paper slips. *Jammer* in Afrikaans means ‘sorry’. An old English friend wondered for a while about the meaning of the word *slegs* on a road sign – he read ‘only slegs’ and could not, for the life of him, figure out what kind of things the *slegs* are. In Afrikaans *slegs* means ‘only’.