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THERE WAS A MÖÖCOW COMING DOWN ALONG THE ROAD

BY IAN SEGAL

Specialty translation dictionaries always have a focus: business (how do you say "buffet" and "conference hall" in Mandarin?), obscenity (how do you say "****," "****," and "****" in every spoken language?) and, now, animal. Collected with enormous breadth, and still a work-in-progress, Derek Abbott, a professor in the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the University of Adelaide, Australia, presents a table of Animal Sounds, Animal Commands, and Animal Pet Names in a variety of languages (http://www.eleceng.adelaide.edu.au/personal/dabbott /animal.html). His dictionary hints at moments of cultural syncretism and dissonance, and, of course, varying degrees of onomatopoetic accuracy. For instance:

COW LOWING:

Dutch: moe/boe

English: moo
Finnish: ammuu/möö(calf)
French: meuh
German: mmuuh
Greek: moo
Hebrew: moo
Hungarian: mu
Italian: muuu
Japanese: mau mau
Russian: mu-u-u
Spanish: muuuu/meee
Swedish: mu mu
Turkish: mooo (pron: meuh)
Urdu: baeh

And this raises questions like: Is one language particularly accurate? Is one particularly not? And of course, that age-old question: Is my chihuahua speaking Spanish? Or its variant: Is my teacup poodle with a beret a Frenchie or a francophile?

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