

You Can Ask me Anything ... Almost!



If you have seen on YouTube, the Google Translate/Rick Astley meme, you will understand how translating from one language to another can be a tricky business.

When typed into the translation tool several times in different languages, the lyrics of Astley's 1980s classic, 'Never Gonna Give You Up', becomes a bizarre song about table manners and being nice to camels.

Although exaggerated for comic effect, it shows the absurdity that can happen when translations go awry. The multi-lingual amongst us know very well that direct word-for-word translations often result in gibberish, and that accuracy depends on the sentence or even the whole paragraph for context.



This 'translation issue' is just as much a problem in situations where we are supposedly speaking the same language.

I am thinking, of course, of the jargon-filled language used in legal, engineering, and other environments, including the financial services industry. How would they fare if run through the same translation process?

Although financial services information, both written and verbal, is not communicated in a foreign language, if you are struggling to work out what it all means because the document or person is using a raft of technical terms and jargon, it might as well be in Swahili or Māori.

Unfortunately, jargon is a way of being specific and accurate - Fine if you know the jargon, but not much fun for the unfamiliar.

Now I do not list 'interpreter' as one of my key skills, (although I could have a fair crack if it's basic Chinese you want translating), but it certainly is part of my job description at times given all the obscure terminology I have to deal with on a daily basis.

For example, let's take the UK pension advisers' favourite word, 'Crystallisation'.



It refers to accessing a pension fund through drawdown or an annuity, but sounds like it belongs in a science lab, to the everyday person. It's a bizarre description, even without the 'Twisted Translation' treatment proffered by Google.

Who on earth said 'We'll call that Crystallisation? - It's got more chance of reminding you of a caterpillar when it turns into a chrysalis or a scientific process than anything to do with a personal pension!

Removing the barrier to understanding

Joking aside, I try to avoid the use of financial jargon because it gets in the way of real understanding and discourages people from asking for help when they are struggling with the concept behind it.

Last year in the UK, a Financial Literacy Working Party report was produced by The Institute and Faculty of Actuaries, called 'Money, Knowledge and Power'.

I won't bore you with everything included in the report. However, it did highlight various factors that indicated financial literacy was low in the UK, with large numbers of people not planning ahead, or saving sufficiently.



Although industry jargon has not created those problems, it is a contributory factor to the shutters going up when people need confront the reality of financial decisions.

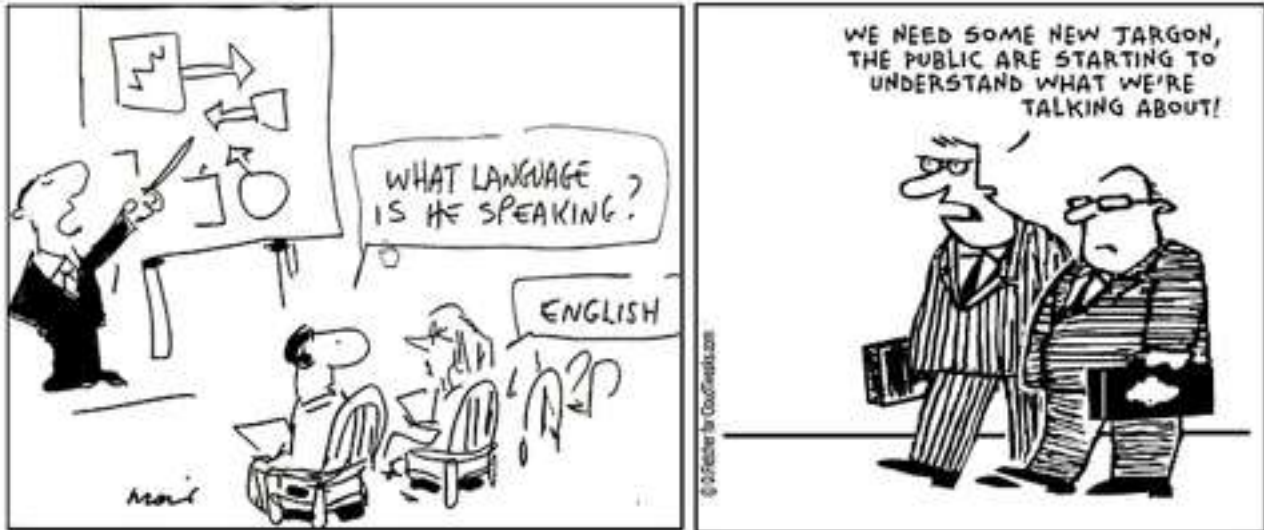
Without doubt, people within the financial services industry use jargon to ensure the exact meaning is clear to colleagues and business partners.

Sadly, there are also some who use it with clients, simply to appear educated and important. It is insulting and, at times, intimidating, and completely unnecessary. We all know, as expatriates, that when faced with a barrage of a foreign language we don't understand, our brains effectively stop listening, filtering out only the language/s we do understand. It seems reasonable to assume this is a natural protection mechanism.

People do exactly the same thing when faced with financial jargon, and who can blame them?

That means that everything needs to be explained in plain English. I believe that conversations about your money should always be framed in logical and straightforward terms, so good advice about retirement planning, therefore, does not include 'crystallisation', but simply 'taking money out of a retirement plan, as a regular income or a lump sum'.

Leave me to say 'Crystallisation' when I am in conversation with the pension plan trustees and the plan providers – they love the jargon!



The most important thing is that you feel that you can ask anything

We started with the YouTube meme about Google translations and how it can go horribly wrong. Humorous it certainly is, but underneath, there's a serious point - Any financial planning means being provided with information that is clear and simple to understand, in order that you can make informed choices about your financial future.

So, with the exception of questions about next week's lottery numbers (they are my secret), you can feel confident asking me anything, and knowing that you won't get a jargon-filled reply that translates into something about being nice to camels!