

3 Visual Literacy: Signs in English in Foreign Countries – Answer Key

Text: Broken English (p. 49: picture), from: David Beal, *Britain in Europe*, Viewfinder Topics New Edition plus (München: Langenscheidt, 2010).

B SIGNS IN ENGLISH

1 SIGNS IN THE STUDENTS' BOOK

1. The wooden board in Mexico (p. 49): Explain why this sign is amusing.

It is an amusing as well as an ambiguous warning. The sign tells the tourists visiting the waterfalls that they are in danger if they don't swim. Of course, the sign should say: "Don't swim here. It's dangerous." or "Swimming forbidden!". (However, you cannot deny the correctness of that statement if you're already in the water!)

2. Sign in a takeaway restaurant (p. 50): Rewrite the sentence at the bottom in correct English.

"Please throw the empty noodle soup cups into the kitchen's rubbish bin."

"Please throw the noodle soup cups into the rubbish bin in the kitchen."

2 MORE FUNNY SIGNS

1 What makes the sign funny? Rewrite it in correct English.

The sign is funny because it seems to say that the people working in the shop can't change their behaviour or way of life. But, of course, the person who put up the sign wanted to say that – if you buy something with large bank notes - the shop can't give you the rest of your money in lower denominations. Official signs would probably read "Sorry. No change."

Note: the long form of can't is cannot.

2 What was this Chilean trying to say in the public notice?

▫ If you see a pregnant woman who is about to give birth to a baby, she must go to a hospital at once.

3 This tip for tourists in the lobby of a Moscow hotel across from a Russian Orthodox monastery is highly interesting. What does it say in fact?

What makes the sign unintentionally funny is a misplaced modifier (*daily except Thursday*); it is too close to the verb "buried" and therefore suggests that famous people are being buried there daily, except for Thursday, of course. The phrase "daily except Thursday" should be used at the beginning of the sentence:

"Daily, except Thursday, you are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian and Soviet composers, artists, and writers are buried."

4 For Europeans, Japanese is really difficult to learn. And obviously some Japanese people also have problems with correct English signs. This sign can be found on rubbish bins in an amusement park in Osaka, Japan. Explain the sign's unintentional irony.

The sign which tells you in a polite way ("please") to produce waste is ironic as Japan is one of the top producers of waste in the world. The sign should read: "Please dispose of your rubbish here." or simply "WASTE".

5. Explain the mistake in the Swiss wine menu and rewrite the slogan in good English.

The writer of this sign mixed up “to hope for something” and “to wish for”/ “to desire”. The sign says that the wines are no good. Of course, it should say that there is the perfect bottle/glass of wine for all of their guests. Then the correct slogan would be: “Our wines leave you nothing to wish for.” or “Our wines leave nothing to be desired.” (meaning: *lassen keine Wünsche offen*).

(Daniela Pröls)