HARK THE BARK

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Everyone knows that dogs bark "Bow-wow". Except for Orphan Annie's dog Sandy, who barks "Arl".

Living as I do near the interface with Mexico, I have a working vocabulary of several hundred Spanish words which I use indiscriminately with English. Thus, it seemed no more strange to me that dogs bark in Spanish "Pan-pan" than that the Spanish word for hat is sombrero or for beans is frijoles.

At least, not until three years ago when I found myself on a Montreal Metro with a group of college students chattering in French. The boy next to me was asking questions about Texas and I was giving him the usual tall answers. Then I asked him, "What does the dog say in French?"

At first he wouldn't believe that I was serious. But when I repeated the question he relayed it on to several others. In a short time the entire car was full of barking students. It seems that French dogs say "Ouah-ouah" which is pronounced "Woof-woof".

About a year later, I was in a German restaurant. Our waiter spoke very little English, so I wrote:

In English the dog says Bow-wow
En Español el perro dice Pan-pan
En Français le chien dit Ouah-ouah
Auf Deutsch der Hund sagt "Haf-haf!"

He read it, shook his head sadly, and walked away. But, half-way across the dining room he turned and with a big smile exclaimed  "Ha-ha."

In a London hotel, I noticed the night clerk was reading a book in Arabic. When I struck up a conversation with him, I found that he was a Turkish architectural student interested in black magic. After we had discussed Voodooism for awhile, I asked him my question.

"Are you a student of linguistics?" he asked.

"No," I replied. "If anything, I am a student of trivia. And you can't get much more trivial than this."
"Are you going to write an article on it?"

"That had crossed my mind," I replied.

"Then you are a writer?"

"I've done some writing in my day."

After several more questions about what I had written, who my publishers were, and so forth, he finally told me that Turkish dogs say "Ha-ha."

About that time my wife came along.

"Are you still asking that fool question?"

When I admitted I was, she took me shopping.

My most difficult encounter was with a history professor in Rome. He simply would not believe that I was serious. He was convinced that I was trying to make fun of him in some obscure American manner. It was only after showing him my notebook listing my findings that he admitted that Italian dogs bark "Bow-bow."

On the other hand, a charming little American Express hostess in Paris with the improbable name of Rose Ng took it in her stride. When I asked her "How does a dog bark in Chinese?" she simply answered "Wah-wah" as though she had been asked the question a dozen times a day.

And there it is. I know how dogs bark in seven languages. I have only about four thousand more to go.