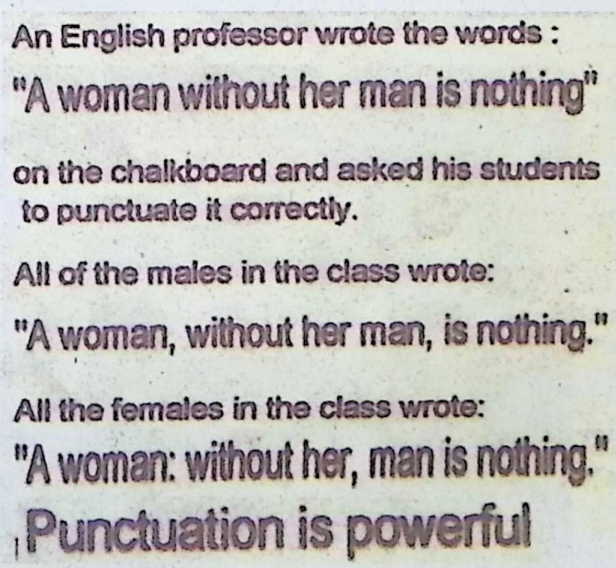
than Kennet Santana, the Adventist high school teacher. Like the time when Bill Murray apparently prevented a robbery in Tokyo as the result of an unexpected encounter with a fan. The robber had successfully carried out his heist, and was running away with the money when he saw Bill Murray walking along the street outside and stopped to talk to him. It turned out that he was a fan.

In Murray's account of the incident, he saw a man on the street running towards him with a bag in his hand. The man suddenly stopped and asked him if he was Bob Harris (the character that Murray played in the movie "Lost in Translation"). Somewhat amused, Murray responded, "Sure, why not." The man then started telling Murray how much he admired him, and just as Murray was telling him how nice he was to say so, the police showed up and tackled the man.



Paul Horner, a 34-year-old American on business in Tokyo, was in the bank when the robbery took place. Standing behind the miscreant in the queue, he was shocked when the man began to start waving around a knife, demanding money. Apparently the robber had made off with a measly $5000 from one of the cash registers before he got side-tracked by the unexpected encounter with his movie idol. I will confess that I questioned the veracity of this story, and I even attempted to verify the truth of it through a series of Internet searches. To date, I have not found anything that confirmed that this was a spoof story.

Nevertheless, even if it were subsequently to be proved that the "Bill Murray stops a bank robber in his tracks" story is inaccurate - and I don't see why it should be, because I would certainly interrupt any bank robbery I was carrying out if I were to run into him on the street ("Ghostbusters" is still one of my favourite movies) - there is no doubt whatsoever that all bank robbers are not equally, ahem, dedicated. Some of them aren't even particularly competent.

Like the first-timer who attempted to stick up a bank in London, and got his lines wrong. Instead of yelling, "Put your hands up - this is a stickup!" this poor chap ended up bleating, "Stick your hands up - this is a f**k-up!" As it turned out, he was quite right. So I suspect that his first attempt at armed robbery may well have been his last. Bad enough not to have been successful in his chosen career, but to be followed by ridicule for the rest of his life must have been particularly harsh.

Of course, he could have taken consolation in the knowledge that he was not alone. Historical record provides examples too numerous to quote on the matter of robberies gone wrong (for the robber). And not necessarily stories of going out in a blaze of glory like Butch and Sundance, either. Take the man who tried - and failed – to rob two separate banks on the same day, located a mere three blocks apart.

It seems that the words on his demand note were spelt incorrectly, and he was unable to articulate his demands clearly. The note simply read "100s 50s 20s 10s", and the woman at the counter heard him say "money", but she couldn't understand how much he was asking for. When she returned the note to him, he wrote "all mona", so the confused bank teller in the downtown Washington Sun Trust Bank turned him away, saying that she couldn't help. It was after he had left that another customer told her that he thought it had been an attempted robbery.

The robber didn't do much better at the second bank he "hit" a few blocks away. There the bank teller was quicker off the mark - though she too was initially confused by the note that read "all mona". After the robber told her that he wanted "what's on that", referring to the note, she realised that the man standing in front of her window was in fact not a customer. She alerted security, and the man fled.

D.C. police officers apprehended a 20-year-old suspect a block away, and Maurice Fearwell (you might think that that was an alias, but apparently it wasn't!) was charged with two counts of attempted bank robbery. Unsurprisingly, a federal magistrate ordered that the suspect be held and to undergo a psychiatric evaluation. Personally, I think he should also have been sentenced to remedial spelling classes. ■