

BBC Learning English

6 Minute English

Chinglish in Shanghai

NB: This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript



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Dima: Hi, welcome to this edition of 6 Minute English with me, Dima Kostenko

Rebecca: and me, Rebecca Byrne. Hi.

Dima: Today we'll be doing something we don't normally do. In fact, we'll be doing the opposite to what we usually do. Normally you would expect us to talk about how to use English correctly. But today we'll spend some time looking at the inaccurate use of the language - and the funny side of it! How does it sound to you Rebecca?

Rebecca: *Responds*

Dima: Today's topic was prompted by a report by our correspondent in Shanghai, Chris Hogg, and we'll hear parts of that report in just a few moments. But first, it's time for this week's question for you. Rebecca, are you ready?

Rebecca: *Responds*

Dima: Which of these types of incorrect English are we going to be talking about, do you think? Is it

- a) Chinglish
- b) Spanglish, or
- c) Hinglish?

Rebecca: *Responds*

Dima: We'll check your answer in a minute, but first do you mind going through some of today's key vocabulary?

Rebecca: OK. First of all, the phrasal verb 'to get at'. If you're 'getting at' something, you're implying it - you mean to say it. Then another verb, 'to mistranslate', meaning to change words from one language to another incorrectly, losing the original meaning. And the adjective 'crucial' which means vitally important, impossible to do without.

Dima: So that's 'crucial', 'to mistranslate' and 'to get at'. Let's now listen to Chris Hogg:

Clip 1 0'27"

You can find Chinglish all over this city. Often it can be blamed on software used to translate Chinese automatically. Sometimes you can see what the author was getting at, such as the sign that warns people to 'keep valuables snugly, and beware the people press close to you designedly'. Then there are signs where they've mistranslated a crucial word. One in a hotel lift advises people 'please leave your values at the front desk'.

Dima: So which type of incorrect English is mentioned in the report Rebecca?

Rebecca: *Chinglish... Which means that my earlier guess was right/wrong...* Our reporter says that quite often the mistakes are caused by bad automatic translation, and while in some cases you can guess what is meant - or, as he put it, what the author was getting at - in others a crucial word gets translated incorrectly.

Dima: And this can sometimes be quite funny. Let's look at the two examples from the report. First, the sign 'keep valuables snugly, and beware the people press close to you designedly'... What do you think was meant by this and why is it funny?

Rebecca: *Explains*

Dima: And what about the second one, 'please leave your values at the front desk'?

Rebecca: *Explains*

Dima: Let's hear a few more examples, and here are some key words for you.

Rebecca: First, the expression 'the wrong way round', meaning opposite to how it should be, incorrectly. And secondly, the adjective 'surreal' which means very strange, weird, bizarre.

Dima: That's 'surreal' and 'the other way round'. Let's listen:

Clip 2 0'20"

Sometimes they've just got it the wrong way round, such as on this sign in the stairwell of a department store asking shoppers to 'please bump your head carefully'. My favourites though are those which get more surreal, like the one on the Shanghai metro from the public security bureau that reads 'if you are stolen, call the police at once'.

Dima: Chris Hogg reporting there. What do you think was meant by 'please bump your head carefully' Rebecca, and why is it funny?

Rebecca: *Explains*

Dima: And what about 'if you are stolen, call the police at once'?

Rebecca: *Explains*

Dima: Thanks for your explanations Rebecca - and if you would like to find out more about Chinglish, as well as Hinglish and Spanglish - simply follow the links from our website, bbclearningenglish.com. That's it then. Until next week.

Both: Goodbye!