

Chinglish Writing Buster



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Why Bust Chinglish?

What's the point of Chinglish?

Hong Kong's long experience with English has resulted in a localized version of English – Hong Kong Chinglish. Chinglish can be fun and using it can be an expression of identity and group belonging. However, Chinglish is unhelpful when dealing with foreigners and unnecessary when dealing with local people (you could just speak Cantonese!).

English as “Internationalish”

English is the language of global communication. Used well English can facilitate quick, clear and exact communication. However, when English becomes localized these benefits are lost. Even between native English speakers, dialects can destroy communication – for example a Geordie (from Newcastle in England) may not be able to communicate with a Jamaican despite both speaking the same mother tongue.

The Causes of Chinglish

Chinglish can be described as a fusion of English and Chinese. This fusion can be through translating structures and vocabulary, differing viewpoints and contexts and outdated language education.

Translation/Thinking in Cantonese Errors

Translation errors can be separated into 2 groups:

1. Structure errors
2. Vocabulary errors

Structure Translation Errors

Although both English and Chinese favour *Subject + Verb + Object* structures, Chinese structures tend to be looser than the rigid, inflexible structures of English. In Chinese, subjects are often dropped as they may be seen as obvious and so unnecessary (this is a feature of high context languages). English is a low context language and always demands a subject (except in imperatives e.g., “stand up please”).

English has 5 **types of basic structure**:

<u>Structure</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Comment</u>
1. Subject + verb	He smiled.	This is only possible with verbs that don't require an object (intransitive verbs), usually body actions, so <u>it is rare</u> . It's more common in the second clause of a sentence where the object is clear – e.g. I didn't do my homework to because I forgot.
2. Subject + verb + object	She finished her work	
3. Subject + verb + complement	Her work was excellent	The most common structure
4. Subject + verb + object + complement	This made her pleased.	
5. Subject + verb + object + object	He gave her an excellent report.	Certain verbs (usually involving affecting someone with something) need 2 objects.

The structure units are:

Structure units	He made me angry
Subject	He (shows who did the action)
Verb	made (shows what action he did)
Object	me (show who was affected by the action)
Complement	angry. (describes the object 'me'.) A complement can describe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the subject (e.g. I felt <u>sad</u>.) • or the object (e.g. He made me <u>angry</u>.) • or the verb (e.g. He danced <u>wildly</u>.)

The 5 structures can make sentences on their own or be linked with a conjunction to produce longer, more complex sentences. E.g., He made me angry because his presentation was offensive.

Activity 1: Common Structure Errors

The following sentences have missing structural units or errors. Can you:

- *Identify which units, if any, are missing and add them to make complete sentences.*
- *Correct structure errors by adding, deleting or changing the order of structure units.*

1. Grateful if you would send on Friday.
2. Although I went there, but I didn't stay long.
3. I afraid we not can process you request.
4. She back to home.
5. There have many people waiting outside.
6. For the civil servants of Hong Kong, they often use old fashioned colonial
British English.
7. I am not good at English, but maths.
8. To write in English is easy to make mistakes.
9. Here is very crowded.
10. I and my wife every morning six o'clock get up.

Solution Tip!

Draft documents using single, separate, active voice 'subject + verb + object' sentences. Then link them up with conjunctions later.

High vs Low Context Language

High context languages like Chinese place demands on the reader or listener to follow and interpret what is being said. This is aided by shared culture, thought processes and context (such as hierarchy, body language, educated assumptions about purposes etc).

English as low context language requires the writer or speaker to be very exact and make meaning clear to the receiver. This is especially important in Global English as parties may have very different cultural backgrounds and thought processes.

Activity 2: Context Confusing

Look at the following passage and answer the questions that follow:

Jason and Max saw a strange dog and an unusual cat dancing in the moonlight in the garden. It was weird. It looked happy. He felt very confused and then went home.

1. What was weird?
2. What/who looked happy?
3. Who felt confused?
4. Who went home?

Solution Tip!

Don't substitute your subjects and objects unless you're certain your reference is clear. Don't worry about repeating words (although you may have to write more) – being clear is more important than being stylish and confusing.

Use 'this'. 'This' is a multifunctional backwards referencing word. Although 'this' is a singular pronoun, you can use it to refer back to a number of things or facts (even better if you can use it with a qualifying word to make the subject clear):

- 'This' can be used to refer back to a subject in a previous sentence.
- 'This' can be used to refer back to the whole of a previous paragraph.
- 'This' can be used to refer back to a whole document.

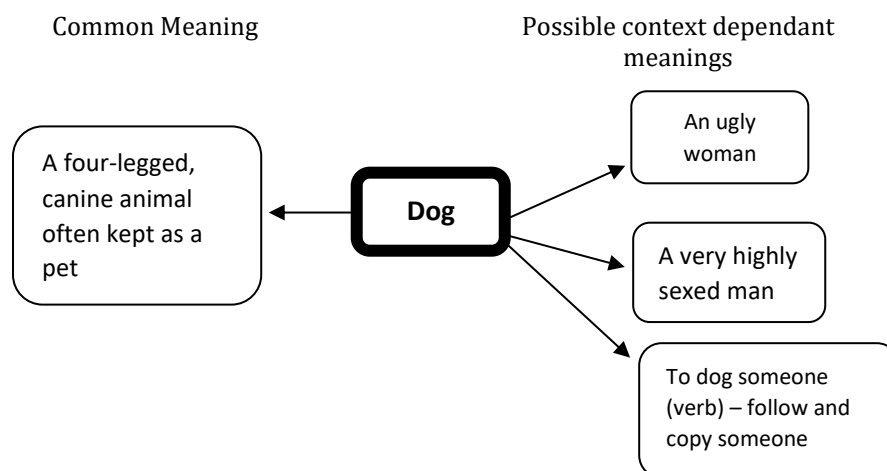
Examples (with qualifying subjects):

At present, GM's practice is to keep the door open during peak hours. This practice is not a desirable solution since it offsets the security provisions and disturbs the staff at the counter.

Nothing will motivate people to undertake narrowly vocational training if there is little prospect of obtaining a job at the end of it. This common view is another reason for broadening the

Chinglish through Direct Translation

Translation can be quick and seemingly easy. However, it can also be dangerous. Words in one language may not have an exact equivalent in another and often may be used very differently – meaning and use may be lost or mangled in translation. The same basic word may have different meanings depending on the context it is used, for example:



Translating single words can also result in combinations that are unnatural and confusing.

Activity 3: Collocation Errors from Direct Translation

The following collocation (word combination) errors are a result of direct translation from Cantonese. Put them in good English.

1. *close the air-con*
2. *eat cigarette*
3. *play yoga*
4. *open the TV*
5. *eat medicine*
6. *play phone/computer*
7. *look book*
8. *This product will let you to be more beautiful.*

Note: Let overuse

“Let” is commonly used in Cantonese and is quite multifunctional. However, it is far less widely used in English – ‘allow’, ‘enable’ and ‘can’ are far more commonly used.

Chinglish through Outdated Teachers and Text Books

Hong Kong English language education targets native speaker proficiency rather than global communication skills. Many textbooks are out of date and feature old fashioned British English set phrases and vocabulary as well as overly formal expressions that are of little use in modern global English. Naturally teachers taught with these obsolete materials go on to teach obsolete English.

Activity 4: Outdated Language

Can you find more modern, high frequency language for the following:

Outdated/Redundant	Global Modern high frequency equivalents
a) moreover	
b) seldom	
c) shall	
d) pursuant to	
e) kindly	
f) subsequent to	
g) the above captioned	
h) first and foremost,	

Solution Tip!

Find modern, high frequency global English at:

http://www.kerryr.net/webwriting/plain_english.htm - see outdated/redundant vocabulary and their everyday equivalents, exercises tips and more.

<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/A-Z.html> - an A - Z of phrases to help find every day alternatives for business terms produced by The Plain English Campaign

www.googlefight.com - pair up words or phrases to contend against each other for Google hits and quickly find high-frequency global English – can also be used to avoid Chinglish.

Use MS Word 'Readability Statistics' to check how easy your text is to read.

Activity 5: Commonly Confused Words in Hong Kong

Complete the gaps with the easily confused words below. You may need to change the spelling of some words (e.g., a plural).

colleague advise elevator expect accept outlook past
college advice escalator expert except look passed

1. Civil servants can't _____ gifts.
2. The office is open daily _____ Sundays and public holidays.
3. They've _____ our proposal.
4. If you need _____, ask my _____ Daniel. **He's an** _____ I think he'll be able to help.
5. When the air pollution index reaches 200, schools and _____ are _____ to arrange for all students to avoid outdoor activities.
6. That sounds like a good idea. I think I'll take your _____ .
7. I can't take this wheelchair on the _____ . Is there an _____ I can use?
8. Interest rates and unemployment are both low: the _____ for the economy is positive.
9. You _____ very smart today.
10. Our company is on Nathan Road, just _____ the post office.

Activity 6: An Informal Chinglish Email

Rewrite the email in correct English

Subject: need favour

Dear Dan-sir

Long time no see! Remember me? You may wish to note, I am the girl with the pretty outlook. Regarding to the above captioned, I very need your help.

This year I did not get much red pocket. Would you mind to borrow me some money? You know my mother is just a sales and my father just a blue collar so they can't borrow me. I would go to your office tomorrow. Hope you can help me. I should be very grateful and I shall be happy.

Kindly regards

Kitty

Activity 7: A formal Chinglish Email

Rewrite the email in correct English

Dear Sir

Re: Form-1 Application for Licence (lost)

Corporation – Type 3

We refer to the telephone conversation between your goodself and our Mr Edwin Lam on 25 March 2010 and our letter ref. R74/13/01/06 dated 21 March 2010 for the captioned matter. As per your request, we would like you to re-submit the original correspondence for our perusal and please find the examples for your easy reference for completion as per attached:

<http://www.sfc.hk/sfc/html/EN/forms/licensing/samples/samples.html>

You are welcomed to contact our Mr Edwin Lam for further enquiries.

Thank you for your kindly attention.

Yours faithfully

Mixed Up Patterns and Set Phrase Confusion

The flexibility of English vocabulary and the far greater number of prepositions can be very confusing for Chinese users. Various structures for the same function available in English are frequently mixed up. Sometimes these mixes are so commonly used (even taught) they become fossilised errors that HK people don't realize are incorrect.

Activity 8: Set Phrase Quiz

Look at the following set phrases and patterns. Tick the correct phrases.

1.

- a) I will wait you in Hong Kong side
- b) I will wait for you in Hong Kong side
- c) I will wait for you on Hong Kong Island.

2.

- a) Your appointment is on next Tuesday at 11am.
- b) Your appointment is on Tuesday at 11am.
- c) Your appointment is next Tuesday at 11am.

3.

- a) ...a complaint about something
- b) ...to complain about something
- c) ...to complaint something

4.

- a) I spoke to a member of staff in your department.
- b) I spoke to a staff in your department.
- c) I spoke to staffs in your department.
- d) I spoke to a staff member in your department.
- e) I spoke to staff in your department.

5.

- a) How to spell your name
- b) How do you spell your name?
- c) Spell your name for me please.

6.

- a) To place emphasis on something
- b) To emphasise on something
- c) To emphasise something

7.

- a) In regard to English/using English
- b) Regarding English /using English
- c) Regarding to English

9.

- a) I'd like to report use of English.
- b) A report on use of English.
- c) I'd like to report on use of English.

11.

- a) They let me to speak English.
- b) They let me speak English.
- c) They let me speaking English.

13.

- a) I very like Chinglish.
- b) I really like Chinglish.
- c) I like Chinglish very much.

8.

- a) The next team briefing would take place next Tuesday at 11am.
- b) The next team briefing will take place next Tuesday at 11am.
- c) The next team briefing takes place next Tuesday at 11am.
- d) The next team briefing is taking place next

10.

- a) I recommend/suggest to stop the English.
- b) I recommended/suggested to them that they stop the English.
- c) I recommend/suggest stopping the English.

12.

- a) Kindly regards
- b) Kind regards
- c) Regards

14.

- a) English lets me easy to be confused
- b) English is confusing
- c) English confuses me easily.

Extra Summary Task

Can you find and correct the Chinglish in the following message?

I very like VTC. It easily to let me to know more friends. There have many interested people and activity for do. Moreover, I would go to there because I will take my further studies of degree programme of marketing. Besides, there have more famous courses you can choice for join. It can let you to get more qualification, I suggest you to there. I not mind to use more one hour to back to home.

Activity 6 Possible Answer

Subject: I need a favour

Dear Dan

I haven't seen you for a while! Do you remember me? I am the pretty girl. Regarding asking you for a favour, I really need your help. This year I did not get many lucky money packets. Would you mind lending me some money? You know my mother is just a salesperson and my father just a blue-collar worker so they can't lend me any money. I will go to your office tomorrow. I hope you can help me. I would be very grateful and I will be happy if you can help me.

Kind regards

Kitty

Activity 7 Possible Answers.

Below is a possible answer. Note the frontloading (removing any unnecessary background and details) and short, simple active voice sentences as well as high frequency vocabulary.

Dear Sir

Re: Lost Application for Licence (Form-1)

Regarding your lost licence application, please re-submit your application.

You can find completed examples here:

<http://www.sfc.hk/sfc/html/EN/forms/licensing/samples/samples.html>

Feel free to contact Mr Edwin Lam on 29826645, if you have any questions.

Regards

Extra Summary Task Possible Answer

I really like the VTC. At the VTC I can easily make friends. There are many interesting people to meet and activities to do. Also, I go there because I will do my marketing degree programme there. In addition, there are popular courses you can choose to join. The VTC can help you get more qualifications so I recommend you go there too. I don't mind travelling more than one hour to get back home.

Here's some links about Chinglish:

<http://www.boredpanda.com/funny-chinese-translation-fails/>

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2099518/slippery-will-no-longer-be-crafty-china-cracks-down-bad-english>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijal.12163>

<https://writers.hk/en/blog/chinglish-transcreation>

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2139072/defence-chinglish-cultural-glue-hong-kong-and-valuable>