

## Re: Chinese dictation

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Richard Herring <junk@[127.0.0.1]> wrote in message news:<Wf3rOHDJ+woBFw8l@baesystems.com>...

> In message <d1835a57.0411230129.10a9822a@posting.google.com>, Sean

> O'Leathlobhair <jwlawler@yahoo.com> writes

> >Lee Sau Dan <danlee@informatik.uni-freiburg.de> wrote in message

> >news:<87sm7127te.fsf@informatik.uni-freiburg.de>...

> > >>>> "Dylan" == Dylan Sung <dylanwhs.tsktsktsk@pacific.net.hk> writes:

> >>

> >> Dylan> If you're distinguish characters from another character,

> >> Dylan> you could say it's the one with such and such a radical and

> >> Dylan> means so and so as in the compound XY.

> >>

> >> Just like "Janet(te)? With 'et' or 'ette'?".

> >> Or "D (B)? Bravo or Delta?", or "B for boy or D for dog?".

> >>

> >> Is that so difficult to understand?

> >>

> >>

> >>

> >> >>> How do you write [huz sOrd] in English?

> >> >> I don't know. Please spell it for me.

> >>

> >> Dylan> who's sword or it could be whose sword

> >>

> >> Yeah. It's strange that 2 persons who learnt English as L2 can

> >> communicate this way, and that apparently native speaker is seeking

> >> help from us.

> >>

> >>

> >> Dylan, could you explain to Richard how come you know the spellings

> >> "whose" and "sword" should be used to write down the words [huz sOrd]?

> >

> >The most obvious inference from Richard's request is that he is

> >unfamiliar with IPA.

>

> Or he's making a point about how spelling can be used to resolve an

> ambiguity in an alphabetic writing system ;-)

I was replying to LSD's surprise that two L2 speakers of English could communicate in IPA when a native speaker could not. My reply was that this should not be surprising. IPA may be useful to learners of English but it is not necessary for native speakers. So I do not find it surprising that some non-natives are familiar with English in IPA and some natives are not.

Similarly intermediate learners of Mandarin could probably communicate in Pinyin. I can read and write considerably more Pinyin than traditional script yet I have met native speakers who do not know any Pinyin. Is this as strange?

- > > *Is there some special reason why a native*
- > > *speaker should be familiar with it? It is not taught in schools and*
- > > *in my experience, it is not commonly known among native speakers. It*
- > > *is not even commonly used in foreign language lessons in school. I*
- > > *only encountered it when my interest in language went further.*
- > >
- > > *It is actually evidence for the effectiveness of the English script.*
- > > *Natives don't feel the need for IPA or any other alternative spelling*
- > > *(e.g. Pinyin or Romaji). IPA transcriptions of English may be useful*
- > > *to foreign learners, as IPA transcriptions of foreign languages are to*
- > > *me, but most natives do not feel the need for it.*
- > >
- > > *I have an English dictionary with IPA but I use it mostly for helping*
- > > *foreign friends. I use it occasionally with English friends to give*
- > > *them examples of IPA prior to showing them one of my foreign language*
- > > *dictionaries.*
- > >
- > > *On your original question, "Who's sword" is rather contrived. Can you*
- > > *give an example of a conversation that uses it? It would seem to*
- > > *require someone called "Sword". In general, context should make it*
- > > *quite clear which is correct.*
- >
- > *In the context of this discussion, context is exactly what's being*
- > *assumed to be absent.*

Ideally context would never be required but English spelling is not ideal. Nonetheless, most of the time it is not required and it is rare that more than a few adjacent words are required to resolve the ambiguity.

Even in a very regular language such as Spanish, context is sometimes required for dictation. There are a number of homophones distinguished in writing only by accents and I think that the silent h adds a few more.

I think that even Esperanto has some problems in which the word boundary is unclear.

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In none of these cases (English, Spanish or Esperanto) does the problem render the script unusable.

Seán O'Leathlóbhair