

# It's a good idea to get somebody who knows the language to be your proofreader

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June 15, 2006



Raymond Chen

If you're going to use text from another language, it behooves you to get somebody who knows the language to be your proofreader. Those who fail to heed this advice with respect to Chinese characters may end up featured on Hanzi Smatter 一知半解, which starts with a book titled A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols whose cover depicts the character "book" (書) upside-down. (Psst, they're called "characters", not "symbols".) David Beckham could have done with a good proofreader when he got his wife's name tattooed onto his arm in Hindi, but misspelled it. I get a real chuckle out of the response from Mr. Beckham's poor publicist:

"You have to understand that there is a difference between Hindi and Hindu. The tattoo has been checked by a Hindu expert."

When told that Hindi is a language and Hindu a religion, the spokeswoman insisted: "We know the tattoo is spelt correctly."

The BBC helpfully suggests a way the tattoo can be salvaged.

My final example of consulting with someone who understands the language you're using comes from a dance rave which used passages from the Koran to decorate its advertising brochure.

"We had no idea what any of it meant. It looked good on there. It is a beautiful language. And we had desert and a camel in there."

The kicker is that one of the people involved apologized for the sacrilege with a particularly poor choice of words: "It was an honest-to-God mistake."

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