

# The subtleties of a Will Ferrell movie, and other observations from the in-flight entertainment on a Chinese airline

 [devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20101214-01](http://devblogs.microsoft.com/oldnewthing/20101214-01)

December 14, 2010



Raymond Chen

My flights to and from Beijing were on Hainan Airlines, a Chinese airline. One consequence of this is that Mandarin Chinese is the primary language of communication; English is a distant second. It also means that the in-flight movies are subtitled in Chinese, so if you can't read Chinese, you are restricted to movies in languages you understand. I wasn't interested in the English-language movies, although I did watch a little bit of "The Other Guys", a Will Ferrell vehicle. In one scene, Ferrell's character and his friend have dinner in a Chinese restaurant. Ferrell's character says to the waiter, "謝謝" which means "Thank you" in Mandarin. The waiter responds, "唔該" which means (in this context) "You're welcome" in Cantonese.<sup>1</sup> Part of my brain wondered if this language mismatch was some sort of subtle commentary about the nature of Will Ferrell's character, that he's perhaps a bit of a poseur, or that he's out of place and doesn't realize it? And part of my brain couldn't believe that the other part of my brain used "subtle" and "Will Ferrell" in the same sentence. Anyway, the only other language I knew that was offered by the in-flight entertainment system was German. So I watched *Willi und die Wunder dieser Welt*, a movie-length version of the German children's television show *Willi wils wissen*. And watching the movie reminded me that Germans are obsessed with poop. During the course of the movie, you see a flying fox pooping, you see a polar bear pooping, and you investigate a Japanese toilet. I didn't stick around for the whole movie, but I wouldn't be surprised if you also saw a scorpion pooping in the final segment. (In the Canadian segment, somebody talks with Willi in heavily Canadian-accented German which was apparently learned phonetically. I could barely understand him. It reminded me of my high school German class and the students who couldn't shake their thick American accents.) **Footnote**

<sup>1</sup>There are several phrases that roughly mean "Thank you" in Cantonese. The two primary ones are the aforementioned "唔該" and "多謝", and the rules governing proper use of each one are complicated.

Raymond Chen

**Follow**

