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恒管英萃

Wen Wei Po

鍾可盈 2016-09-23

一竅不通希臘文 直截了當買火雞

觀看奧運會開幕及閉幕典禮除可一睹健兒風采,亦可閱覽各國國名。英語不少片俚語帶有國名,細味 之下更可上一堂有趣的歷史課。

希臘初一是絕無僅有

談及奧運會當然不可不提起源國: 古希臘。當世界各地皆為一年之始大舉慶祝,片語the Greek calends(古希臘初一)卻代表天方夜譚。初一是每月首日和新月出現之重疊日,在希臘曆法中絕無僅有,固the Greek calends和俚語when pigs fly之義相似, 就如廣東俗語的「太陽從西邊升起」般不可能發生: At/on/till the Green calends can you expect his loan repayment to you. (你別奢望他會還錢給你了。)

古希臘文明被美譽為西方文化搖籃,希臘文(Greek)理應廣為人道,但 It's all Greek to me卻指一竅不通。此俚語源於莎士比亞的一齣悲劇《凱撒大帝》(The Tragedy of Julius Caesar),劇中羅馬將軍Casca被問到如何面對元老院議員批評時說道:It was all Greek to me,以不諳希臘語作藉口。

聽不懂請「講返英文」

遇到艱深之事,不論以任何語言表達,除說I don't understand之外亦可選擇用It's all Greek to me幽默一番: What you just said about biology is all Greek to me. English, please?(你所說有關生物的課題我真的大惑不解,可否簡單說明?)即使對方已在說英語,在此語境下的English, please?或 Please speak in English是希望對方簡化語言或內容。有趣的是,在希臘文、西班牙文、阿拉伯文、法文、德文等同樣有表達不明所以的俚語,英譯版本是This is Chinese to me!似乎漢語在不少民族眼中難如登天,幸好這是我們的母語啊。

雙倍荷蘭難以理解

英文和荷蘭語本乃植根於日耳曼語的方言,但14世紀開始英語成為英國官方語言,英荷兩語愈見分歧,英國人更認為荷蘭語艱澀難明,固以double Dutch形容莫名其妙或難以理解的話。

相反地,talk Turkey表達直截了當,當然「打開天窗說亮話」非土耳其人專美特質。據說以前原居美洲的印第安土著與開拓者的溝通主要圍繞野生火雞買賣,因此原居民一見這批拓殖者就斬釘截鐵般問: You come to talk Turkey?(你是來買火雞嗎?)因此talk Turkey現指直截了當的討論及商談。■鍾可盈博士恒生管理學院英文學系高級講師

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