

Sometimes it's easier just to let the native speaker win

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My entry last month about [that virus that is responsible for the top six Explorer crashes](#) prompted me to check out the blog of the [Anti-Malware Engineering Team](#), and at the bottom of [a report from Microsoft TechEd Boston](#) is a photo of a few members of the Anti-Malware Engineering Team. I've worked with some of those people, and I had forgotten where they had gone to after we fell out of touch. Nice to know they're still working to make the world a better place. I was reminded of a funny story told to me by one of those former colleagues. He studied Japanese in college (I think he may have majored in it), his wife is from Japan, their language of conversation at home is Japanese. You might figure that his Japanese is pretty good. But don't say that to a native Japanese speaker! He tells me that when he goes back to Japan and strikes up a conversation with a new acquaintance, the native speaker will start testing him on his knowledge of Japanese, refusing to believe that a foreigner could learn their deep and subtle language. Usually, the quiz focuses on the written form of the language. "Do you know this character?" — *Yes, that's "dog"*. "Oh, very good. How about this one?" — *That's "hospital"*. "Ah yes, your Japanese is quite good. But what about this one?" — *That's "mushroom"*. It isn't long before my colleague gets tired of this game and gets one wrong on purpose. "I bet you don't know this one." — *Um, I'm not sure. I think it's "soul"*. "Aha, not quite. The character for 'soul' is this one. [Writes the character.] But that is the character for 'clump'. The two are very similar, I admit, so I'm not surprised that you confused them."

Both sides get what they want: The native Japanese speaker gets to feel superior, and my colleague gets to change the topic to something more interesting.

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