

Meaning of Tingo Assembly

I have always had an interest in unusual words – in our mastery of English we share a beautiful and complex language. In future assemblies I will suggest some interesting and unusual English words. But today I would like to explore the quirkiness of languages other than our own. Foreign words are a rich source of interest. For example, who would have thought that the Albanian language has no fewer than twenty-seven words for eyebrows and the same number for moustache, ranging from a **mustaqe madh** to a **mustaqe posht**.

There is a fascinating book called *The Meaning of Tingo* which gives a number of interesting words from other languages. What Tingo actually means we shall come to later, but I would like to share some of my favourites with you. Forgive my pronunciation, if any of these languages are familiar to you.

Nakhur, for example, is a Persian word (which may not even be known to most native speakers) meaning.... ‘a camel that won’t give milk until her nostrils have been tickled.’ Many described strange or unbelievable things. When and why, for example, would a man be described as a **marilopotes**, Ancient Greek for.... ‘a gulper of coaldust’?

And could Japanese samurai really have used the verb **tsuji-giri**, meaning.... ‘to try out a new sword on a passer-by’?

Others expressed concepts seem all too familiar. We have all met a **Zechpreller**, the German description of.... ‘someone who leaves without paying the bill’; spent too much time with an **ataoso**, Central American Spanish for....

‘one who sees problems with everything’; or worked with a **neko-neko**, Indonesian for.... ‘one who has a creative idea which only makes things worse’.

There are beautiful words to describe things for which we have no concise expression in English, like **serein**

– roughly one language for every million people on Earth. Europe, with a quarter of the world’s population, has only 234 languages spoken on a daily basis. Although English does well as the world’s business language - at least for the time being - it is only 3rd in the league table of native speakers.

328 million people speak English, only 1 million behind Spanish, but a long way from the 845 million Mandarin speakers.

Indonesian for.... 'sad and not sure what to do' or **mukamuka**, the Japanese for.... 'so angry one feels like throwing up'?

Most reassuring is to find the thoughts that lie on the tip of an English tongue, here crystallised into vocabulary: from the Zambian **sekaseka** 'to laugh without reason', through the Czech **nedovtipa**.... 'one who finds it difficult to take a hint', to the Japanese **bakkushan**.... 'a woman who appears pretty when seen from behind but not from the front'.

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