



“Let’s Learn Local English!”

This column will look at some of the pitfalls that Koreans tend to fall into when speaking English at the workplace. Let’s speak English the right way!

BUSINESS FASHION

These are some expressions that we use day-to-day related to fashion that are not used by native speakers of English.



1) muffler (X) → scarf (O)

In the spring, people wear thick scarves on their way to work to keep them warm. Many Koreans refer these scarves as “mufflers”, but native speakers will think you are talking about part of a car. Call them simply “scarves” instead.

» It’s -10 degrees outside today, so I wore this scarf to work.

2) padding (X) → winter jacket, down jacket, padded jacket, puffer jacket (O)

Another popular winter clothing item is an insulated jacket to keep us warm. Koreans refer to these as “padding”, but this is another common Konglish mistake. Aside from simply calling them “winter jackets”, you can call them “down jackets”, “padded jackets” or “puffer jackets”.

» That’s a nice down jacket. Where did you get it?

3) walker (X) → work boots / safety boots (O)

Walker boots are another popular fashion item in Korea, but native speakers of English will not understand what you mean when you call them “walkers”. Instead, you should call them “work boots” or “safety boots”.

» I like those work boots.

4) Burberry (버버리) (X) → trench coat (O)

The Burberry brand has become synonymous with its trademark trench coat, and a lot of Koreans now refer to a trench coat as a “Burberry coat”. However, English speakers refer to this fashion item as “trench coat”.

» I want to buy this trench coat to wear to work.



If you use these expressions at a restaurant, native English speakers may not understand what you mean!



1) One shot! (X) → Bottoms up! (O)

When you’re doing shots and drinking the entire contents of your glass, you should say “Bottoms up!”

» Here’s to our successful partnership! Bottoms up!

2) service (X) → (be) on the house / compliments of the house (O)

The word “service” is used by Koreans when offering something for free to customers, but a native speaker of English may not understand what you mean. Instead, say that what you are offering it “on the house” or with the “compliments of the house”.

» This drink is on the house.

» Here you go. Compliments of the house.

3) cider (X) → Sprite or 7-Up (both brand names) (O)

Cider refers to an alcoholic beverage made from fermented apple juice. If you want to ask for a soft drink, you need to order a Sprite or a 7-Up, depending on which brand they carry.

» Can I have Sprite?

4) prim (in coffee) (X) → cream (O)

Derived from the brand name Prima, we mistakenly refer to “cream” as “prim”, but an English speaker will not know what a prim is.

» Two creams and one sugar in my coffee, please.



These are some expressions that we use everyday situations that will confuse native speakers of English.



1) apart (아파트) (X) → apartment (building) (O)

Urban areas in Korea are filled with apartment buildings, so we should know the proper English expression by which to refer to them. An apartment is a single unit of a larger building, while “apartment building” is the term used to refer to the whole structure.

» I live in an apartment building. » My apartment has 2 bedrooms.

2) Fighting! (X) → Go ____! / Come on!! / Let’s go! (O)

“Fighting!” is a very commonly used Konglish expression found in everyday conversations among Koreans. Even though it uses an English word, this is not what English speakers say to cheer people on. Try saying “Go (person/team)!” “Come on!”, or “Let’s go!”

» Go Seok-Jun! You’re almost there!

» Come on, Dae-Han! You can do it!

3) Masscomm (매스컴) (X) → mass media (O)

Masscomm is short for “mass communication”, which refers to exchange and imparting of information on a large scale. However, Koreans commonly use this word to refer to “mass media”, such as TV, newspapers, radio, and magazines. These media should be called “mass media” not “masscomm”.

» Do you think we rely on the mass media for information too much?

4) cut line (X) → cut-off (point) (O)

When you say that the cut line is at 50 people, a native speaker may not understand what you mean; it is not accurate English. Instead of saying “cut line”, call it the “cut-off” or “cut-off point”.

» What is the cut-off?

» The cut-off point is set at 70%.