

Q and A of the Week 你问我答

What a shame 真遗憾!



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Rob: Hello, I'm Rob – and this is Question and Answer of the Week. Helping me answer your questions today is Feifei.

Feifei: 大家好!

Rob: Now, we've got a good question today from Wang Xi – I feel that she's almost catching us English speakers out.

Feifei: Yes, I see what you mean. 今天的问题乍一听像是 Wang Xi 发现了英国人在说母语的时候犯的一个错误。

Rob: Now, let's hear what Wang Xi's question is.

Question

Hello, I'm Wang Xi. I just have a question about the use of 'shame'. When you have a – make an accident, someone says "Oh, what a shame". Is it really mean 'what a shame' or 'what a pity'?

Feifei: Wang Xi 想知道英国人在别人出了意外时常用的短语 'oh what a shame' 里面的单词 'shame' 的意思是其原意还是 'what a pity' 的意思?

Rob: Well – yes.

Feifei: Yes to which one?

Rob: Yes to both! They really do mean 'it's a shame' and it does also mean exactly the same as 'what a pity'. So it's not a mistake. It's perfectly correct to say 'what a shame'.

Feifei: 短语 what a shame 和 what a pity 的意思大体是一样的。这两个短语都用来表示遗憾、可惜。What a shame 这个表达只有这一个意思吗?

Rob: Yes – 'what a shame' only has that one use, you don't use it to mean anything else.

Feifei: What a shame 这个表达得意思是真可惜、真遗憾。而单词 shame 本身的意思是羞愧、耻辱。I think that might be why Wang Xi finds it odd.

Rob: Yes, the word 'shame' on its own has quite a different meaning. So when we say 'what a shame' – what do you say in Chinese?

Feifei: We literally say 'really a shame'.

Rob: OK, well, let's hear some examples of people using that phrase 'what a shame' in English.

Examples

Woman: I can't come on Saturday by the way.

Man: Oh really? What a shame! Why not?

Woman: I've got to work, and I won't finish till late so I'll be travelling back.

Man: Her husband died recently.

Woman: Oh what a shame, I didn't know.

Man: Yes, it was very sudden.

Feifei: 第一个例子的对话内容和场景相对比较轻松。The situation is quite light – not serious.

Rob: Yes, it sounds like she's going to miss a party or something like that. And her friend says it's a shame 'oh what a shame'.

Feifei: 不过相比之下，第二个例子里谈论的内容就要严肃很多。In the second example, it's something much more serious.

Rob: That's right, someone's husband has died recently.

Feifei: 例子中的女士听说她朋友的丈夫刚去世后说 'oh, what a shame'.

Rob: And because you can use it in every situation where something is bad, it's a very useful phrase to remember. In Chinese can you use the same phrase for both of these occasions?

Feifei: Yes, we would more or less use the same expression. And would you say we could use the phrase 'what a pity' in both those cases as well?

Rob: Yes definitely. And sometimes you also want to use it to start a sentence, to explain something which has happened. "It's a pity that..."

Feifei: 汉语里我们可以说“非常遗憾的是...”。So, for example, "It's a pity that you can't come to the party".

Rob: And you don't need to use the word 'that', so you could say "It's a pity you can't come to the party".

Feifei: It's a shame 和 it's a pity 的用法相同。比如 it's a shame you can't stay.

Rob: Absolutely. So can you think of a clever way to end the programme, using the phrase?

Feifei: I think so. We could say "It's a shame we have to stop here". 如果你在英语学习中遇到词汇或语法难题，欢迎你通过微博或邮件形式把问题发送给我们。我们的邮箱是 questions.chinaelt@bbc.co.uk. Goodbye!

Rob: Bye!