
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

The English We Speak

You couldn't make it up



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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Jiaying

Hello, I'm Jiaying. This is The English We Speak.

Neil

And hello, I'm Neil. Hey Jiaying, I've just been to the café downstairs and guess what...

Jiaying

You bought me a coffee?

Neil

No! I didn't buy any coffee because now you have to make your own coffee – and you have to bring your own cup. What kind of café is that?

Jiaying

You couldn't make it up!

Neil

But I *didn't* make it up.

Jiaying

I know – I believe you! We say, 'you couldn't make it up' to express how unbelievable or ridiculous a situation is. It is a situation you could not have imagined. So, why are they doing this?

Neil

Something to do with 'health and safety' – who could come up with an idea like that?

Jiaying

Like I said, you couldn't make it up. Here are some more examples of this phrase...

Examples

The breakdown van that's coming to fix my car has broken down – you couldn't make it up!

The session about punctuality will start late because the speaker has been delayed – you couldn't make it up!

You couldn't make it up – the cake shop has started a 'healthy eating' campaign.

Jiaying

This is The English We Speak from BBC Learning English. We're talking about the phrase 'you couldn't make it up', which can be used to express how unbelievable or ridiculous a situation is. So, Neil, where are you going to get your coffee from now?

Neil

Probably from the other café across the street.

Jiaying

Oh, haven't you heard? At that café, you have to bring your own coffee beans and milk if you want them to make you a coffee – something to do with saving storage space.

Neil

How ridiculous – you couldn't make it up.

Jiaying

Actually, I did make it up – just so you could say the phrase one more time!

Neil

Thanks! I'm going to get my coffee now, and I'm not getting you one.

Jiaying

It's OK, Neil. I've got one already. Bye.

Neil

Hmmm. You didn't make that up, did you?