

# 口不擇言

*kou3 bu4 ze2 yan2*

Lawmaker Ann Chiang Lai-wan (蔣麗雲) got into trouble by making remarks about patients with mental illness and their doctors during a council meeting. Her prompt apology did not save her from being criticized by social workers, psychiatrists and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Chiang said psychiatrists are at high risk of suffering mental illness as they have to keep listening to their patients. Doctors pointed out that contrary to what she may believe mental illness is not a condition that you can catch through speech.

We can say that those remarks were the result of “口不擇言” (*kou3 bu4 ze2 yan2*).

“口” (*kou3*) is “the mouth,” “不” (*bu4*) is “not,” “擇” (*ze2*) is “to select,” “to choose,” and “言” (*yan2*) is “speech,” “words.” Literally, “口不擇言” (*kou3 bu4 ze2 yan2*) is “mouth not choosing words.”

## Idiom by Lon Yan

The mouth, of course, does not choose what words to say. It is the job of the mind. All the same, the idiom means “speaking without thinking,” “to throw out unthinking remarks” which is exactly what Chiang did.

A similar idiom is “信口開河” (*xin4 kou3 kai1 he2*), which means “saying whatever comes to one’s mind, without proper consideration.” When someone talks nonsense, we can say he or she is “信口開河” (*xin4 kou3 kai1 he2*), or “口不擇言” (*kou3 bu4 ze2 yan2*).

Chiang said she was just venting her frustration as another member kept throwing a procedural spanner in the works of the copyright bill meeting.

### Terms containing the character “擇” (*ze2*) include:

- 選擇 (*xuan3 ze2*) – to choose
- 擇偶 (*ze2 ou3*) – choose a spouse
- 擇日子 (*ze2 ri4 zi*) – pick a date
- 擇吉開張 (*ze2 ji2 kai1 zhang1*) – choose an auspicious day to start a business