

Idiom by Lon Yan

難以啟齒

nan2 yi3 qi3 chi3

Most people find it hard to say sorry. And according to Elton John, sorry could even be the hardest word to say. Sorry is hard to say because people don't want to admit mistakes. Also, saying sorry could be construed as admittance of legal liability, so it is very unwise to say it if you expect to be sued.

But saying sorry should become easier in future, as lawmakers have just passed the Apology Bill, which removes some potential legal consequences that have been causing people's reluctance to apologize. With some exceptions, the new law shields apologies from being submitted as court evidence or "admission of liability" in civil cases.

The idiom that describes the feeling of finding it hard to say something is "難以啟齒" (*nan2 yi3 qi3 chi3*).

"難以" (*nan2 yi3*) is "difficult to," "hard to." "啟" (*qi3*) "to open," "to start," and "齒" (*chi3*) "tooth." "啟齒" (*qi3 chi3*) means "to open one's mouth," "to start to talk about something."

Literally, "難以啟齒" (*nan2 yi3 qi3 chi3*) "hard to open one's mouth."

The idiom means "to have a bone in the throat," "difficult to speak out one's mind."

Things that are "難以啟齒" (*nan2 yi3 qi3 chi3*) are usually embarrassing, like asking your friend for a loan, or tell them that you are unable to repay a debt on time. "難以啟齒" (*nan2 yi3 qi3 chi3*) does not just concern about bad things. Many people also find the words "I love you!" "難以啟齒" (*nan2 yi3 qi3 chi3*).

Terms containing the character "啟" (*qi3*) include:

啟動 (*qi3 dong4*) – to start; to set in motion

啟程 (*qi3 cheng2*) – to set out on a journey

啟示 (*qi3 shi4*) – a notice; an announcement

啟發 (*qi3 fa1*) – to inspire; to enlighten