

Hello Totomi

A normal day, a normal project is finished for a normal client, I send them the normal translation and write them the normal email. The person at the other end is a Japanese girl called Totomi:

Hello Totomi,

We finished this project. Please find the translation in the attachment. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,

XXX

The normal reply comes back:

Dear XXX,

Thank you very much. I confirm safe receipt. Have a nice day!

Best regards,

Tomomi

It's all good, I can have a cup of coffee and get on with my work. There's just one thing — my eye catches on a mistake in the spelling of the name: the correct spelling is Totomi, not Tomomi. I guess the client was rushing, or just hit the wrong key, when she wrote back. It's strange because Totomi is extremely meticulous and has never made a typo before.

The project is finished and I go to move the email into the "Completed" folder. At that moment I notice she has made the same mistake on her last email, too.

It's really strange. I open a few emails from her at random, and this reveals an uncanny thing: she signs off all her emails "Tomomi"! It makes no sense.

I went out of my way to find the first email from her, where she had introduced herself, three years ago. And all the color drained from my face.

She had introduced herself in that email as Tomomi!

...This is what you call an epic fail. For three years I had been sending her hundreds of emails, referring to her incorrectly in every one, and for three years I hadn't once thought to pay any attention, and she hadn't once corrected me!

Lessons

We learn from our mistakes (in this case, unfortunately, my own) and draw lessons from them:

- Do not type in the name of your addressee — it is far better to copy this from their email signature. After this incident, I automatically got into the habit of doing this. If you do have to type in the name, then you should do so extreme carefully.

- You should pay particularly close attention to names that contain uncommon letters — those with umlauts, acutes and so on. Do not delete them under any circumstances. “Frédéric” cannot be substituted for “Frederic”!
- Don’t get the first name and the last name mixed up! With people from countries you don’t know so well, it sometimes isn’t easy to tell where the first name goes and where the last name goes.

I’m sure you can imagine what happened next: I wrote a repentant email, apologizing profusely. Totomi Tomomi wrote back — saying something like, don’t give yourself such a hard time, don’t worry, everything’s fine, it’s great working with you. I wouldn’t have expected any other response from the person who has been receiving emails from me with a mistake in the name practically every day for three years and never once corrected me. Either way, it made me feel a lot better :)



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