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English Revisited:

Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

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The University of Stuttgart's catchy motto for its diversity concept—*Intelligent durch Vielfalt*—draws attention to the benefits of including students and staff from a variety of backgrounds that reflect the general population at large. In keeping with the aim of this concept, this issue of our newsletter focusses in its vocabulary section on gender neutral and sensitive language, in particular on how to get around using the personal pronouns "she" or "he".

Diversity is also front and centre on our intercultural page where I take a look at Germany's role in transnational education and my experience working as a *DAAD Fachlektor* of Canadian and Anglo-Irish descent working for a German university in Mongolia.

Lastly, in our grammar page we examine the multifaceted and versatile verb "to get".

John Nixon

GLOSSARY

catchy:
pleasant sounding and easy to remember

at large:
as a whole

of....descent:
having this nationality/ background

multifaceted:
having many functions and uses

Style Guidelines for Writing Official University Texts in English

The University Communications Department has in collaboration with the Language Center developed a number of style guidelines for publishing official university texts in English, e.g. websites and brochures. Please take a look at these useful tips when publishing university documents in English.

Guidelines

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- Regular Courses
- Mini Workshops (only with login)
- Workshops for Master's and PhD Students
- *Schreibwerkstatt* / Writing Center
- *Englischkurse für Uni-Beschäftigte*
- Intercultural Offerings
- NEW English as a Medium of Instruction (Learn how to teach in English!)

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The Various Uses of the Verb "Get"

Simple though it may be, the verb "get" is on closer inspection more versatile and complex than one might think. If you check an Oxford or Webster's English dictionary, you will find <u>literally</u> dozens of usages for this verb. It can mean "receive", "catch", "understand" or "become" among other things. It can also be used as a helping verb in passive or causative constructions. Further <u>muddling</u> its meaning, "get" can also be found in numerous phrasal verbs in <u>colloquial</u> English. While we will not be able to cover all of the word's meanings and usages in this article, we will take a look at the most important ones.

Full Verb

A full verb is a verb that carries meaning and is not used as a helping verb, for example to create continuous verb forms or passive constructions. Some of the common uses of "get" as a full verb are as follows.

1) I got a new computer. (meaning = bought, obtained or received as a gift)

2) She got a table for three. (meaning = reserved)

3) I got a postcard from my friend in Japan. (meaning = received)

4) They got the flu last month. (meaning = caught, became ill with)

5) He didn't get what he said. (meaning = understand)

6) We haven't <u>gotten</u> to Chapter 6 yet. (meaning = reached)

7) Let's get a cab to the airport. (meaning = take)

8) It's getting cold. (meaning = becoming)

Helping Verb

In spoken English "get" is often used in passive and causative constructions where the helping verbs "be" and "have" would normally be used.

Passive:

9) Because of the storm, the plane got <u>diverted</u> to another airport. (informal)
Because of the storm the plane was diverted to another airport. (regular form)

Causative (1) have/get + object + past participle:

10) I finally got my hair cut the other day. (informal)
I finally had my hair cut the other day. (regular form)

Causative (2) get someone to do something:

11) The professor got the students to verify the results of the experiment once more. (informal)
The professor had the students verify the results of the experiment once more. (formal)
Note that with "get" we need the preposition "to" before the infinitive.

Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb plus a preposition, adverb or both, e.g. "to get down" or "to get down to". Often the phrasal verb takes on a very different significance from that of the full verb and is used colloquially. Some common examples are:

13) Please stop <u>dilly-dallying</u> and get down to work. (meaning = start)

14) I just can't seem to get through to him. (meaning = make someone understand)

15) Do you get along with your roommate? (meaning = have a good relationship) UK: to get on

16) The instructor had problems getting across her message. (meaning = conveying)

17) It's difficult to get by on the minimum wage. (meaning = survive, make a living)

18) What exactly are you getting at? (meaning = suggesting)

19) What time do you get off? (meaning = finish work)

20) He simply couldn't get over the loss of his wife. (meaning = recover from a bad situation)

As you can see, the verb "get" carries so much meaning in English and despite its simplicity is difficult to master. Although it is used frequently in spoken English, try to avoid using it in academic and formal writing.

John Nixon

Transnational Education

Amid recent globalization trends, Germany has stood out in its practices of transnational education. Making money has not been a focus of German initiatives in the area of transnational education. Instead, the emphasis has been placed on sharing German expertise abroad, developing local potential in other countries, collaborating with foreign universities, increasing the reputation of German universities on the global stage and promoting Germany as a world leader in the areas of post-secondary education and research.[1]

One of these German initiatives is the German-Mongolian Institute for Resources and Technology (GMIT), which arose out of talks over a natural resources treaty between Germany and Mongolia during a visit by Angela Merkel to Mongolia in 2011. It had long been the express desire of the Mongolian government to expand its natural resources sector, a mainstay of the local economy. However, the country lacked engineers in the fields of mining, mineral processing and mechanical engineering. Germany with its established reputation in these areas was a logical choice as partner.

As part of a DAAD subject-specific lectureship (*Fachlektorat*), I spent three years as Head of the Language and Didactic Center at GMIT from 2017 to 2020 while on leave from my position at the Language Center at the University of Stuttgart. In addition to teaching courses in English, German and intercultural communication, I was also responsible for organizing and providing training for our largely Mongolian teaching staff in the field of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI).

Teaching Mongolian students and working with Mongolian academic staff provided me with first-hand experience that I could use in my class on intercultural communication. Two cultural dimensions in particular that often gave rise to critical incidents were chronemics and collectivism.

According to Edward T. Hall, an American cross-cultural researcher and anthropologist, cultures can vary in how they view time (chronemics). Monochronic cultures place importance on plans, punctuality and deadlines as well as doing one thing at a time. Their view of time is linear. This contrasts with polychronic cultures, which have a more flexible approach to time and in which plans can change and relationships are just as important as or even more important than the tasks that need to be completed. Time can be viewed as a cycle in these cultures. Given the nomadic traditions of a country that has only recently experienced rapid urbanization, Mongolian culture is the epitome of a polychronic culture. At the other end of the spectrum lie Germany with a penchant for regulating time and my own North American perception of time as being a precious quantity. As you can imagine, a transnational educational project involving these two cultures does pose challenges.

Fortunately, another area of difference, namely collectivism, as laid out by Hofstede in his Cultural Dimensions Theory, provided an answer to the challenges of working in a polychronic environment. In order to survive the rough adverse climatic conditions of the Central Asian steppes, nomadic groups relied on working together to survive. Collaboration and a group-based approach were in evidence at GMIT on a daily basis. Rarely did I hear someone say, "That is not my job." The knowledge that I could depend on my colleagues, even in other faculties and departments, when I was in a pinch reduced the stress that I typically felt when juggling competing priorities and last-minute tasks.

In the end, GMIT has begun to develop its own working culture, one in which cultural elements from Mongolian, German and international staff have fused and morphed into something new. That is perhaps the likely and inevitable result of transnational educational projects, where a sharing of perspectives and ideas is at the forefront.

John Nixon

Footnote
[1] https://static.daad.de/media/daad_de/
pdfs_nicht_barrierefrei/der-daad/
daad_standpunkte_transnationale_bildung_englisch.
pdf

Gender Neutral/Sensitive Language

Maybe you know the following <u>riddle</u>: "A father and son were in a car accident where the father was killed. The ambulance brought the son to the hospital. He needed immediate surgery. In the operating room, a doctor came in and looked at the little boy and said, "I can't operate on him; he is my son."

Who was the doctor?
Well, his mother! [1]

"Language is central to our experience of being human, and the languages we speak profoundly shape the way we think, the way we see the world, the way we live our lives." [2] Language develops and can be changed – in order to alter stereotypical perceptions that limit how we see the world. Language carries value judgements about how the world <u>ought to</u> be perceived.

In the above example, the son can be assumed to be a heterosexual male. What, however, if his gender identity was <u>non-binary</u>? And what about the doctor? Did you first see a male rushing to the operating theatre? A 'he'? Gendered pronouns not only <u>evoke</u> pictures in our heads, they can also be felt as inadequate, disrespectful and labelling as they do not allow alternative perceptions [3], which is why there is a tendency in English today to replace them by gender neutral or inclusive personal pronouns.

Just think about it:
> A judge – he or she?
> A beautician – he or she?
> A mechanical engineer – he or she?
> A drag queen – he or she?

Some ways to avoid having to use "she" or "he" include using plural nouns, the impersonal "one", the expression "this person", the indefinite pronoun "everyone" and the passive voice.

Another way is to use gender neutral or inclusive pronouns. These pronouns do not indicate whether the subject or object of a sentence is specifically male, female or non-binary and are a sure way to respect a person's gender identity and reverse a stereotypical perception of the world. The most commonly used gender neutral pronoun is "they". Other gender neutral pronouns include "Ze" and some lesser used ones, such as:

- He/She -- Zie, Sie, Ey, Ve, Tey, E
- Him/Her -- Zim, Sie, Em, Ver, Ter, EmHis/Her -- Zir, Hir, Eir, Vis, Tem, Eir
- His/Hers -- Zis, Hirs, Eirs, Vers, Ters, Eirs
- Himself/Herself -- Zieself, Hirself, Eirself, Verself, Terself, Emself [4]

Of all these gender neutral/inclusive pronouns "they" and "them" are currently the most frequently used ones. This might have to do with the fact that using "they" and "them" as a singular pronoun is nothing new. Authors like Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400 <u>CE</u>), William Shakespeare (1564-1616 CE) and Jane Austin (1775-1817 CE) used "they" to describe characters who had a specific role. Things changed in the 18th century, when the pronoun "he" was used to refer to people with a non-specific gender. However much "he" was meant to be non-gender specific, Dr. Emma Moore points out, "[t]here's lots of psychological studies that show when people hear [he] generically, they don't hear it as gender neutral – they do just think about men." [5] – and hence make the world a male playground.

The advantages of inclusive or gender neutral pronouns are obvious. Firstly, everyone is included in what is being said or written. Secondly, sexual bias and hurtful discrimination are avoided. Thirdly, no assumptions about a person's gender identity have to be made. Lastly, just as Ms has widely replaced Miss/Mrs, as it does not refer to a woman's marital status (similar to Mr), new language conventions can be learned to make the world a better place.

Sources
[1] https://www.riddles.com/1225
[2] https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think?language=en
[3] https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/
[4] https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/gender-neutral-pronouns
[5] https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-49754930

Dr. Ines Böhner

GLOSSARY

riddle:
a statement requiring cleverness to figure out

ought to:
should

non-binary:
not defined by or limited to male or female gender

evoke:
call up; bring to mind

CE:
Common Era = AD (BCE, Before Common Era = BC)