SZ

Universität Stuttgart
Sprachenzentrum

English Revisited:
Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

Glossary

perception: view; way of seeing something

advent: arrival

counterpoint: sth. having a different effect

dispense with: do without sth. because it is not needed

strictures: limits placed on one's liberty

disseminate: make (information) available

tie in nicely with: fit nicely with

Editorial

In our last issue we looked at how Britons view uncertainty to explain partially their desire to leave the European Union. In this issue we will explore Americans' perception of political correctness (PC for short) and its influence on language, given that this oft-discussed topic in American society has taken on a new dimension with Trump's advent.

As a counterpoint to PC speech or politically correct language, we will examine the origins and linguistic features of a form of English spoken in London that dispenses with the rigid strictures of the Queen's English, namely Cockney.

And finally our grammar section picks up where we left off last issue with modal verbs and ties this topic in nicely with a previous article on hedging.

John Nixon

University Glossary
The revised edition of our university glossary is now complete and will be disseminated mid-August via our website. Check out how to translate *Juniorprofessor, Repetitorium* and *Studiendekan*.

Upcoming Issues :
- phrasal verbs in business English
- checking understanding and seeking clarification in English
- presenting in English

@ Comments

Do you have any ideas for future issues?
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- **Editing Service and Coaching:** Do you have a paper, abstract or other document that needs to be looked over by a native English speaker before it is published? If so, click here and we can help.

Grammar

Hedging and Modal Verbs

In our article on hedging from February 2015 we noted that English writing is often rife with hedging. Hedging can express a number of things: "genuine uncertainty, an unwillingness to say something that could prove to be false or a desire to be polite and appear modest" (No. 1/2015).

Hedging is often achieved by using adverbs of likelihood, such as maybe, possibly, probably, virtually, likely, fairly, often and usually. Another common way to hedge is to use modal verbs. Some express more confidence like "must" and "has to". If someone utters the statement "that is true", he/she believes that that which is being discussed is true. We can lower the level of certainty slightly be adding a modal verb, such as "must" or "has to", e.g. "that must be true". In this case, the speaker is confident, but not absolutely certain, that what is being discussed is true. We can lower the level of certainty even further by changing the modal verb in this sentence. Hence, the modal verbs in "that could/can/may/might be true" all suggest that the speaker is less certain about what is being discussed.

But to what degree should we employ hedges?

In *Academic Writing and Culture: An Overview of Differences between English, French and German*, Prof. Dirk Siepmann contends that English-speaking academic authors rely more heavily on the convention of hedging than their German-speaking peers. Indeed, hedging is an essential element of academic writing in English, and can be particularly tricky. Failing to hedge exposes the author to harsh criticism for ignoring the exceptions and caveats to her or his claims. Likewise, over-hedging can undermine the author's authority, making the research seem less valuable.

Consider the following:

Unhedged
Given the scale of the inconsistencies between the estimated locations of domestic wells and the 1990 census of households dependent on domestic wells, the map showing the distribution of households dependent on domestic wells (Fig. 7) has inaccuracies at the scale of sections, but is robust at the scales of townships and groundwater units.

Hedged
Given the scale of the inconsistencies between the estimated locations of domestic wells and the 1990 census of households dependent on domestic wells, *it can be concluded that* the map showing the distribution of households dependent on domestic wells (Fig. 7) *may have* inaccuracies at the scale of sections, but *is likely to be* robust at the scales of townships and groundwater units.

Over-hedged
Given the scale of the *likely* inconsistencies between the estimated locations of domestic wells and the 1990 census of households dependent on domestic wells, *it may be that* the map showing the distribution of households dependent on domestic wells (Fig. 7) *could possibly* have inaccuracies at the scale of sections, but *might be* robust at the scales of townships and groundwater units.

Adapted from: T.D. Johnson, K. Belitz / Journal of Hydrology: Regional Studies 3 (2015) 31–86.

Further Ways to Hedge

In addition to adverbs of likelihood and modal verbs, we can also employ verbs that inherently attenuate a claim, for example *tend to, suggest, be liable to, be inclined to, have a tendency to, appear to, seem to, indicate* and intimate. Take a look at the following example.

Current theory suggests that ecosystem services in fragmented landscapes can be maintained by preserving connectivity of remaining habitat patches.

(Source: D.Y. Maguire et al. "Landscape connectivity and insect herbivory: A framework for understanding tradeoffs among ecosystem services." Global Ecology and Conservation 4 (2015) 73–84)

Not only does the modal verb "can" soften the writers claim but also the verb in the main clause, "suggest". Instead of using a more forceful and certain verb like "shows" or "demonstrates", the writer has nuanced his/her writing by using the verb "suggest".

For further practice with hedging and modal verbs, try these exercises.

Dr. Lucy Blaney-Laible and John Nixon

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Exercises

Glossary

be rife with = be full of

utter = say, express

hence = therefore

contend = claim

caveat = warning

attenuate = make milder, softer

intimate = hint

Intercultural Communication

Political Correctness on US Campuses

One criticism that Germans sometimes have about American culture is that the country has gone overboard with political correctness (PC). There are also Americans who share this viewpoint, like Chris Rock (an American actor and comedian) and Donald Trump, both of whom doubtfully agree on anything else.

Navigating through the United States' PC culture can indeed be a tricky undertaking. The wrong word at the wrong time by the wrong person can have dire consequences, even at institutes of higher learning. Two cases in point: In the fall of 2016, an untentured assistant professor of liberal studies at New York University, Michael Rechtenwald, was forced to go on paid leave for the rest of the semester after he went on Twitter to criticize what he perceived as the university's oversensitivity.[1] One of these criticisms was aimed at a flyer distributed around Halloween, which instructed the students on how to avoid wearing offensive costumes. Rechtenwald called the flyer "liberal totalitarian costume surveillance." In June 2015, a Louisiana State University tenured professor of education, Teresa Buchanan, was fired after using a few swear words and making a lewd joke in class.[2]

While extreme, these two cases represent a recent trend in the US in which many universities are reevaluating what a proper learning environment entails . Several universities have adopted so-called "trigger warnings," advance notices that the subject material of a lecture might upset some students, and "safe spaces," places where students can avoid such subjects. These controversial policies have been flat out rejected by other universities, such as the University of Chicago, which views them as being detrimental to the "free exchange of ideas" and its identity as "a campus that welcomes people of all backgrounds."[3]

The American melting pot has been struggling with equality for quite a while; for example, President Kennedy put affirmative action, the government's attempt at creating employment opportunities for minorities, into effect in 1961. The term and the policy, however, date back to at least the 1930s. But what is behind this new face of PC culture? Many would say that it is a result of generational change. Current college students and young professionals, also known as millennials, have been characterized as having a "lack of trust in authority" and "widespread tolerance" in common.[4]

Further evidence of this characterization is implied by the fact that some popular comedians in the US avoid performing for colleges because they are too "conservative." Chris Rock continues, "Not in their political views, not like they're voting Republican, but in their social views and their willingness not to offend anybody."[5]

Whether or not you think that the US has gone off the deep end with its politically correct customs and policies, there are quite a few words that have come to be regarded as old fashioned or politically incorrect by the majority of Americans. Are you familiar with how politically correct language has changed in American English over the years? Take our quiz below to test your knowledge of the proper words.

PC Quiz

Do you know the proper words?

Click here to take a quick test on your knowledge of PC American English!

Footnotes

[1] http://nypost.com/2016/10/30/nyu-professor-who-opposed-pc-culture-gets-booted-from-classroom/ (accessed June 7, 2017)
[2] http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/06/30/lsu_professor_fired_over_f_word_p_word_off_color_joke_finally_academia_s.html (accessed June 7, 2017)
[3] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/university-of-chicago-trigger-warning_us_57bf16d9e4b085c1ff28176d (accessed June 7, 2017)
[4] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/fashion/Millenials-Millennials-Generation-Y.html (accessed June 7, 2017)
[5] http://www.salon.com/2015/06/10/10_famous_comedians_on_how_political_correctness_is_killing_comedy_we_are_addicted_to_the_rush_of_being_offended/ (accessed June 7, 2017)

Dr. Joseph Michaels

Glossary

go overboard: to exaggerate

dire: serious, grave

untentured: a temporary position in academia

lewd: improper and sexual in nature

entail: consist of

flat out: without hesitation or reservation

detrimental to: to cause harm

go off the deep end: to exaggerate

Vocabulary

The Real McCoy

There are many Englishes around the world, yet, none as iconic and sustainable as the Queen's English and Cockney English. Placed at opposite ends of the linguistic spectrum and <u>chiefly</u> in London, they <u>denote</u> formal and informal British English. What is more, Cockney is often considered the "real" London English and not surprisingly so. Cockney is very well-known not only amongst the inhabitants of London's working-class East End as it has been popularized in literature and the movies. It became popular because many laughed at how incomprehensible it was. This is the story of Cockney in brief and its description.

The first written record of the term "Cockney" dates back to 1362 when it described a cock's egg, i.e. a broken one. Later its meaning was extended to describe a pampered child and only in the 16th century was it used for the first-time to refer to city-<u>dwellers</u>. By the 17th century, the Bow-bell Cockney we know today had come to refer to someone who was born within the sound of the "Bow bells", i.e. St Mary-le-Bow on Cheapside. These church bells could be heard from Bethnal Green to Whitechapel, Spitalfields, Stepney, Wapping, Limehouse, Poplar, Millwall, Hackney, Hoxton, Shoreditch, Bow, and Mile End, as well as Bermondsey, south of the River Thames. In the 18th century the meaning of Cockney shifted from the people to their language. It was the dialect of those who worked hardest for what little they had. Dickens portrayed them in his novels and George Bernard Shaw in *Pygmalion* (1913).

Though Cockney was ultimately a dialect that was looked down upon by the upper classes of the 18th and 19th centuries, it has always <u>instilled</u> identity and pride in its speakers, the people who are the salt of the earth, the very stuff Ealing comedies like *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) were made of. It is the <u>vernacular</u> spoken in the ever-popular soap *East Enders* and Guy Richie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998). As Mockney, an imitation of Cockney, it has spread far across the borders of the East End and has been somewhat fashionable with non-working class young professionals. Nowadays it is fusing with Jamaican and Creole English, which is known as Jafacian.

Cockney is versatile, cool, different and definitely a "sleeves-rolled-up" form of speech. So what does it sound like? The dry and formal description would run something like the following: the <u>shwa</u> sounds are more pronounced, "h" is dropped, "l" can sound like "w",

"t" becomes <u>glottal</u>, the voiceless "th" is pronounced "f" and the voiced "th" "v". There is the double negative (e.g. *I don't want nothing.*) and the possessive pronoun "my" is replaced by "me", for instance "me book" instead of "my book". But best of all, there is rhyming slang and <u>back slang</u>! Click <u>here</u> for an example taken from *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* or try the *Tow Ronnies* Cockney service <u>here</u>.

The reasons Cockneys started to rhyme and encrypt the meaning of words are obscure. All that is certain is that rhyming slang and back slang, in which words are spoken backwards, emerged in the mid-19th century as an in-group language of labourers and <u>costermongers</u>, possibly to exclude the police and Irish. For examples of rhyming slang click <u>here</u>.

What emerged at around the same time as rhyming slang and back slang is the Pearly Kings and Queens, and, though not limited to the East End, their attire is associated with Cockneys on account of Henry Croft, a street sweeper, who used the buttons that he had found on the street for elaborate designs on his clothes to raise money for <u>orphans</u>. The trend was copied by costermongers. Throughout his lifetime Croft collected £4,000 to £5,000 and helped to enhance the identity and status consciousness of Cockney speakers, just as the language itself has done.

Learn the Cockney Accent with Jason Stathan <u>here</u>.

Dr. Ines Böhner

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pearly_Kings_and_Queens

Glossary

the Real McCoy: the real thing

chiefly: mainly

denote: refer to

dweller: resident

instill: (here) provide

vernacular: everday spoken language of a particular group

shwa (also schwa): the /ə/ sound in the

glottal: sound produced at the top of the windpipe (glottis)

back slang: slang in which sounds are produced backwards

costermonger: a person selling food from a cart on the street

orphan: an abandoned child or one whose parents are dead