

Don't be a plank. Read this and get really clueful

By Neil Tweedie
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People appalled by the uglification of English have fresh meat to chew on today with the publication of a new Oxford dictionary.

The language of Shakespeare, Milton and Keats has officially taken delivery of a host of new words following their inclusion in the latest single-volume Oxford Dictionary of English. Needless to say, each one is more hideous than the last.

Some of the worst offenders come from the home of dumbed-down English, the United States. They include spendy (expensive), twofer (two items sold for the price of one), cockapoo (a crossbreed derived from cocker spaniel and miniature poodle) and picturize (an alleged verb describing the adaptation of a story for film).

There are plenty of other monstrosities: clueful (knowledgeable), greige (a colour between grey and beige) and the truly dreadful multi-task. If you don't know what that means, you are overdue for an eighty-sixing*.

And then there is chav, an inelegant word that nevertheless describes perfectly its label-obsessed, bling-coated, ASBO-boasting target. The acronym derived from Anti Social Behaviour Order is, of course, also in there.

Some of the new words are formed by bolting together two perfectly good ones to form a horrible one. So a chugger is a collector for a charity who "mugs" his victims by approaching them in the street, while a dramedy is a programme or film in which the comic element derives from character and plot development.

Sixty years after the end of the Raj, the Indians continue to change the language of the one-time imperial master. Thus bindass is carefree, lehnga an ankle-length skirt and masala a varied mixture of elements (as well as the curry).

On the subject of curry, the dictionary includes a well-worn example of rhyming slang, Ruby Murray, together with Rosie Lee, which has taken decades to gain acceptance.

The internet has provided a wealth of ugly new words, such as podcast (digital recording of radio or other programme made available for downloading) and phishing (the fraudulent practice of sending e-mails purporting to be from reputable companies in order to steal passwords and credit card numbers).

There are 355,000 words and phrases in the dictionary. Judy Pearsall, the publishing manager for Oxford English Dictionaries, said the changes reflected the constant evolution of the world's most important language.

And just in case you need to insult someone at short notice, she offers 20 handy words: blockhead, dork, lamebrain, lummoX, ning-nong, tosspot, wassock, mooncalf, gowk, toerag, berk, plank, numpty, gobdaw, nyaff, mompara, bosthoon, drongo, fribble and dandiprat.

*Eighty-six: verb N. Amer: reject, discard, or destroy.