



Muffin top

PLAYLIST ANXIETY:

tanaholic

Cunning linguists

/ˈkʌnɪŋ lɪŋgwəsts/ noun PEOPLE SKILLED IN CRAFTING CLEVER NEW WORDS FOR THE NOUGHTIES [ME; var. of OE *cunning*, from *cunnan* know, and L *lingua* language + -ISTS] **CHRIS SHEEDY** STARTS READING BETWEEN THE LINES.

When Mikhail Gorbachev developed a policy of openness between his government and the Russian people a new word, 'glasnost', entered common usage in the English language. Similarly, when Carrie Bradshaw, a character on the hit TV series *Sex and the City*, described an at-times-nasty friend as a 'frenemy', that word also found its way into circulation. And after the success of the film *Brokeback Mountain*, in which married cowboys had homosexual interludes during 'fishing trips', such marriages (with one gay partner) became widely known as 'brokeback marriages'.

New words and phrases enter the English language via countless routes. Sometimes the name of a product or brand, such as Hoover or Google, become commonly used verbs. Particular industries, technologies and hobbies produce their own jargon, some of which makes it into mainstream usage. Often a new word, or a new meaning for an old word, becomes popular thanks to use in a film or TV series such as *Kath & Kim*.

In January, the staff of *Macquarie Dictionary* announced the Word of the Year for 2006 was 'muffin top' – the roll of fat squeezing over the waist of tight jeans and skirts on overweight women. Popularised by *Kath & Kim*, it was chosen for its vivid imagery and particularly Australian nature. It was just one of thousands of new words which were analysed, researched and defined

before being added to the dictionary's pages.

"It's impossible to know how many new words appear in the English language on an annual basis," says Sue Butler, editor of the *Macquarie Dictionary*. "We are talking thousands internationally."

Butler says new words are appearing at a greater rate than ever, thanks mainly to the leaps forward in technology over the past decade. She gives the example of her mother, who bought a dictionary when she was a school student and expected that dictionary to do the job for the next few decades. But these days major dictionaries are being revised and reprinted every two years, and online dictionaries are expected to automatically contain every new word as soon as they become a part of the language.

Dr Ruth Wajnryb, founder of the Language & Research Associates (LARA) Consultancy and the Australian consultant for the *Collins Dictionary*, says technology now helps to efficiently trap new words.

"In the pre-digital world most new words would have been lost," explains Wajnryb. "People invent new words in conversation all the time – most don't even realise they've done it. And before digital technology was applied these words were lost."

Now there are web crawlers that search for new words online. As millions of conversations, such as transcripts of TV interviews and blogs, are stored online it means words from spoken English are being searched. Organisations in the business ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY :: CORBIS.



BLOWOUT

BRANGELINA'S

chick-lit heroines ...

MEGGINGS

room!

GOOGLE

FATTITU

PHWO

Wipeout

**Best
LBDs**

BUST-UPS

TOMK

McDreamy

GET STUFFED

Not so okely-dokely!

jackass
the movie
SPECIAL EDITION

HUBBY CHECK-UP!

Whoops!

Sup mate!!!

FIND THE FLIC

DEPARTMENTS
FRESH CUTS

**WHEN EXES
COLLIDE!**

Wax

SPRUCE IT

ion: Hey Ben, what is
Stef's an awesome girl

Yummy mummy!

HICKLIT

O

of creating dictionaries then comb these lists for new words and words which may not yet have reached a level of usage that warrants inclusion on their pages. So what exactly is this stage?

"We're adding about a thousand new words a year to the Macquarie online dictionary," says Butler. "But there have to be some rules, we can't just throw everything in there. For instance, this morning on the radio somebody said 'chequebook diplomacy', which sounded like something that would catch on. I will investigate it to see what sort of frequency it has achieved. I'll search for it on Google to see how many hits it gets, then I'll do another search in 12 months to see whether it's increasing. If it is, and if it has reached a particular level, it will go into the dictionary."

Wajnryb says staff at *Collins* do things the same way. They scrutinise words found across various media then re-examine them on an ongoing basis using numerical criteria. If they see a rise in the word's range of use, they include it in the dictionary.

New words and phrases often stem from particular events. "For example, 'wardrobe malfunction' started off among stylists and perhaps celebrities, but when Janet Jackson went out on stage and one boob came out it was so sensational," Wajnryb says. "We all suspect it was designed to happen but in the aftermath the term 'wardrobe malfunction' was used to explain it and that legitimised the word to the world."

Who comes up with most new words, then? Wajnryb and Butler both say teenagers are responsible for many new sayings as the language of adolescents is something that marks them as different. "As soon as one of their words goes mainstream they don't use it any more," says Wajnryb, "especially if their parents start using it."

"Slang is the province of the young," Butler says. "If you're looking for trendy new ways to say 'hello', 'goodbye', 'that's good', 'that's bad', etc, then you'd need to look to the adolescent group. You'd look at

their magazines to see what they're saying.

"People who work or have hobbies in specialist fields come up with their own words, and there are also some people who want to create words and get them into dictionaries," continues Butler. "If you want your new word to be accepted then my advice would be to pick the most popular presenter on television and get them to use the word all the time."

The English language contains somewhere between half a million and a million words – nobody will ever know the exact number as it's changing on a daily basis. Some of the words, such as 'groovy', go in and out of usage while others, such as 'cool' (which has been used in the same way as 'groovy' since the early 1900s) never go out of style.

Technology loves to re-purpose old words, such as 'virus', 'mouse', 'wireless', 'icon', 'office' and 'windows'. A person's understanding of the meaning of these words would depend on whether they're a 'digital native' (somebody who has been familiar with information technology since childhood) or a 'digital immigrant' (a person who has become familiar with information technology as an adult).

Butler says one industry intriguing her at the moment is that of hotels, which is constantly coming up with new titles. "There are 'bath butlers', who organise your bath, and before they prepare the bath they will often offer you a 'bath menu'. There's the 'pillow butler' who will sort out whether you want a hard or soft pillow. All this began with 'IT butlers', who became necessary because nobody could ever get their computers to work in hotel rooms."

Wajnryb is entertained by several new words, particularly 'nom de womb', the pet name given to an unborn child by its pregnant mother, and 'truthiness'. "Truthiness refers to what you want to be the truth," she explains. "It's not just what you want people to believe – that would be propaganda – rather it's what you desperately want to believe, or what you have come to believe. George Bush, for instance, is full of truthiness." ▶



S

SOME OF THE WORDS ON THE STREET – YEP, IT’S ALL ENGLISH TO US...



Administrivia: the miscellaneous organisational details relating to the administration of a project, organisation, etc.

Affluenza: the dissatisfaction that accompanies consumerism as a path to happiness.

Approximeeting: the practice of a group of people making indefinite plans to meet and then altering those plans regularly via mobile phones according to changing circumstances.

Babymoon: the period after a newborn is brought home, planned to be without the stress of day-to-day living in order to adjust to parenthood.

Barbecue stopper: a controversial current affairs issue or a social gaffe that is likely to interrupt a barbecue with loud debate or shock.

Beigism: a disparaging term for the conventional or conservative attitudes of suburbia and its resulting bland culture.

Biblical diet: a strict vegan diet.

Cakeage: a charge levied in a restaurant for serving cake brought in from outside the premises.

Car crush: a competitive sporting event in which monster trucks are raced over a course covered with cars which are crushed in the process.

Carbage: snack food that is of limited nutritional value but low in carbohydrates, and a term used by over-enthusiastic proponents of low-carb dieting to describe carbohydrates in general.

Dark tourism: tourism directed towards sites of death and disaster, often for the purpose of remembrance or education.

Extremophile: a microscopic organism which thrives in extreme conditions, such as extreme levels of heat or cold, acidity or alkalinity, high or low pressure, etc.

Fattitude: a positive attitude displayed by an overweight person towards their own body.

Frenemy: a friend who exhibits hostility to another.

Hose rage: the rage expressed by a person observing someone else’s illicit use of water while water restrictions are in force.

Lamestream: the traditional media, as opposed to the blogosphere.

Manscaping: the trimming or shaving of a man’s body hair for cosmetic reasons.

Nanna nap: a short sleep taken, often in the afternoon, in order to re-energise oneself.

Plausible deniability: a carefully crafted situation in which a member of government can truthfully deny any direct or exact knowledge of, and therefore any association with, any illegal or unpopular activity carried out by servants of the government, in the event that these activities become public.

Privatopia: a society that those who live in gated communities are attempting to create.

Ransomware: a form of malware which encrypts certain files in the victim’s computer, the victim then being required to pay money to an extortionist to have the files decrypted.

Sports ears: a personal radio which allows a spectator at a sportsground to hear the match officials and television commentary.

Swarm attack: term for a type of mugging where an individual is suddenly surrounded by many attackers.

Toe cleavage: the split between the big toe and next toe, visible in shoes with the vamp cut low.

Tryvertising: a form of marketing in which consumers can use products for free for a period of time.

Ubersexual: a heterosexual man who is stylish but not ultra-groomed, confident but not aggressive, sensitive but also completely masculine.

Urban climbing: a form of free climbing on the external walls of buildings, on road structures, etc, often dangerous and illegal and thus mostly undertaken at night; aka ‘buildering’.

Xenotransplantation: transplantation, implantation or infusion into a human recipient of live cells, organs or tissues from an animal source.

Sources: *I Smirt, You Stooze, They Krump...* by J Crozier,

C McKeown & E Summers; Macquarie Dictionary Online.