

Edition

The newsletter of the Editors' Association of Canada, Toronto branch

SEPTEMBER 2010

Social media and related terms now in Oxford Dictionary

- ||| Beginner's luck: Asking stupid questions
- ||| Networking: Your guide to what's going on
- ||| Wordplay: *morpheme*





Social Media

and related terms now in Oxford Dictionary

By Emily Dockrill Jones

THE INTERWEB STRIKES AGAIN! THE newest edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (ODE) contains 2,000 new words, including several selections that point to the continuing influence of the Internet on the English language. In addition to *Interweb*, a popular slang term for *Internet*, new entries from cyberspace include the following:

Defriend: To remove someone from one's list of contacts on social media sites (also *unfriend*).

Tweetup: A gathering of Twitter users, usually arranged through "tweets" (Twitter messages).

Social Media: Websites that encourage, facilitate, and depend on social interaction and collaboration—Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, etc.

Microblogging: Creating small blog entries, usually within limited character counts.

Netbook: A small, portable, lightweight computer designed mainly for surfing the Web and checking email.

Paywall: A feature that blocks access to a website or part of a website to all but paid subscribers.

Freemium: The practice of offering a basic Web service or product for free while charging for additional features or premium editions.

Automagically: Something that occurs automatically and as if by magic; often used in the Web industry and other technical fields to describe complex processes that occur quickly and out of view of the user or operator.



Wordplay

By James Harbeck

morpheme

“I celebrate myself;” so says Walt Whitman, beginning *Leaves of Grass*, “And what I assume you shall assume; / For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you.”

Ah, atom to atom: a shape-shifter! A form that can become another form, taking only the barest bits from one form to the other. Later in the same piece, Whitman writes:

*I am exposed, cut by bitter and angry hail—I lose my breath,
Steep’d amid honey’d morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death;
At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles,
And that we call BEING.*

Ah, she’s alright, morphine...but it is only when it lets up, when one sees again not the peace but the piece, the piece in the puzzle, that we can find being: the concrete bits come together and reality takes shape.

So, too, is it with words: they are made of bits, linguistic pieces, shapes that in

many cases can take only real form when combined with other forms. What can you say is *-ed*, or *-y*, or *-s*, or *-th* by itself? And what of bits that change shape all by themselves—*anger* to *angr*, *long* to *leng*? What shape shall they assume, and what bits belong to what?

Do I blaspheme against the language, the sanctity of our words? Ah, but one who sees a language as being but one way is a veritable Polyphemus: a name that speaks of many words, but designates one who is but half-seeing.

The *pheme* in *blaspheme* and *Polyphemus*, you see, is from Greek *phemos* “speaking.” But the *pheme* in *morpheme* is not. It is not a morpheme, not productively or even



historically, even though morphemes undeniably have to do with words and speech.

Morpheme, as it happens, is modelled on *phoneme*. And what is *phoneme*? An anglicization of *phonema*, Greek, “sound”; it refers to a sound that is accepted as being an identifiable sound in a given language. Phonemics is the study of the sounds that languages identify as discrete sounds. Phonetics is its counterpart: the study of actual speech sounds, which are rather more in number. For instance, the /n/ in *Banff* is not exactly the same sound as the /n/ in *Toronto*, nor is the /l/ in *Calgary* just the same as the one in *Halifax*, but we perceive them as the same sound nonetheless, local variation notwithstanding.

This distinction is the *emic/etic* distinction: the codified (culture-internal) versus the objectively actual. Dizzying? Emetic? It is relevant. For there are morphemics, but no morphetics—words, and parts of words, have only a culturally determined reality, not any objective form at all. A piece from which a word is made up is called a *morpheme*—*morph* for shape, and *eme* as we have just said.

So *steeped* is the morpheme *steep* plus the morpheme *ed*; *windpipe* is a compound made of two morphemes that make whole words unto themselves. And then there are the morphemes that are not functioning separate bits now but historically were

bits that made up the words: *throttle* is from *throat* (shifted in shape) plus *le* (a frequentative suffix), but one may not make a similar word now from *chest* or *tweet* or what have you plus *le*. Oh, and as just seen, a morpheme may shift shape all of its own: *anger* to *anгр*, historically, for instance, but also *lose* to *los* plus *ed* to *t* to make *lost*, and *crazy* to *crazi* (note the change in pronunciation! pronunciation is primary!) plus *ly* to make *crazily*.

Oh, dizzying it is, but not emetic: intoxicating. One may be entranced, set into a reverie, as by the god of dreams, Morpheus, so called because he could take on the shape of any person (Why? Because he was none other than they, in the mind of the dreamer). And it is after him that *morphine* was named: the principal alkaloid of opium. Inhale your words, and dream; but it is only when they take solid form that they arise from their slumber, come together as pieces of a puzzle, and are fit to arise through the windpipe as words. ■■■