

# It's All Greek to Me

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The Power of Anaphora and Epistrophe  
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Faced with the choice of either receiving goods from Russia or doing without them, Wolodimir Zelensky spoke for the Ukrainian people with a powerful four-line poem:

*Without gas or without you?  
Without you.  
Without you or without light?  
Without you.  
Without water or without you?  
Without you.  
Without food or without you?  
Without you.*

In repeating the word 'without', Zelensky was using 'anaphora', a rhetorical device invented by the ancient Greeks and explained by the Cambridge Dictionary as: 'the practice in literature or rhetoric (= speech or writing intended to impress or persuade people) of repeating the same word at the start of several sentences to achieve an effect'.

'Done well,' writes Martin Shovel in *The Guardian*, 'anaphora can stir and intensify an audience's emotions as the repeated elements build towards an unforgettable climax.' Done badly, present-day politicians reduce the rhythmic power of repetition to 'an irritating tic'.

In everyday speech and text, anaphora often sounds **distinctly** tired:

'Run far, run fast.'

'Go big or go home.'

'Be bold. Be brief. Be gone.'

'Get busy living or get busy dying.'

'Open heart, open mind.'

'Monkey see, monkey do.'

'Stay safe. Stay well. Stay happy.'

Now compare to some of the best:

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of **incredulity**, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness'. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

'You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, **victory**, however long and hard the road may be.' Winston Churchill to the House of Commons (13 May 1940)

'Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.' John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address (20 January 1961)

'I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up [...] I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia [...] I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi [...] I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they

will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.' Martin Luther King, Jr., Lincoln Memorial Speech, Washington D.C. (28 August 1963)

We should also thank the Greeks for 'epistrophe'. Similar to anaphora, it repeats a word at the end of a phrase, sentence, or clause, rather than at the beginning. A famous example of epistrophe is found in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: 'and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.'

The power of Zelensky's poem is a unique combination of anaphora and epistrophe:

*Without food or without you?  
Without you.*

Use anaphora wisely. It strengthens the speaker, it strengthens the message, it strengthens the memory!

Paul Smith

### Vocabulary Trainer

• **distinctly**    deutlich

• **incredulity**    Staunen/Fassungslosigkeit

• **victory**    Sieg

# The Power of the 'The'

—  
The Most Frequently Used Word in the English Language  
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Want to learn a new English word every day? If so, check out: [www.owad.de](http://www.owad.de)

Did you know that about 6% of everything you say, read, and write uses the word *the*? *The* accounts for about one out of every 16 words we encounter on a daily basis. This article, for instance, contains the word *the* 37 times. You could therefore predict that the length of this article will be  $37 \times 16 = 592$  words. The actual length is 607 words, an **accuracy** of 97.5%!

Now, you may think there's some **jiggery-pokery** on my part, especially on account of the excessive use of the word *the* in this article. But just consider *Alice in Wonderland*, which contains 1,638 instances of *the*. Thus, the predicted length would be  $1,638 \times 16 = 26,208$  total words. The actual length of *Alice in Wonderland* is 26,669! An accuracy of 98.3%!

The top 20 most common English words in their order of occurrence are *the, of, and, to, a, in, is, I, that, it, for, you, was, with, on, as, have, but, be, they*.

This word order reveals a most unusual pattern concerning the frequency of words in all the languages of the world, and in all the books, reports, and articles written or typed by the human hand. This pattern is called Zipf's Law, named after George Kingsley Zipf (1902–1950), a Harvard University linguist.

Zipf's Law states that the second most frequent word (in English it's *of*) will appear around one half as often as the most used word (*the*), the third

word (*and*) one third as often, the fourth word (*to*) one fourth as often ... and so on, all the way down.

So, the good news in learning any new language is that **roughly speaking**, nearly 50 per cent of any book, article, report, or conversation will be comprised of the same 100 most frequently used words. The other 56% will be words that appear in that selection around once.

For example, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* contains 26,669 words. Of these, about 14,000 words (56%) are repetitions of the most frequent 100 words. The remaining 11,000 words (44%) occur about once.

Zipf's Law isn't just used to describe word frequencies – it also predicts city populations, website traffic, earthquake magnitudes, last names, cookbook ingredients, chess move openings, and even the rate at which we forget information.

Some things get most of our attention, some get only a little, and most of what we experience on a day-to-day basis is forgotten. *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* by John Koenig offers a word for this: *Olēka*, the awareness of how few days are memorable. I've been alive for almost 27,000 days, but I couldn't tell you anything about even a fraction of them. Everything we do, see, think, say, hear, and feel is forgotten at a rate quite similar to Zipf's Law, which makes sense. A few things we remember well, but most things barely, or not at all.

Thinking about thinking, the vocabulary of our memories is similar to language. About 100 of our remembrances **comprise** around 50 per cent of what we think about; the remaining 50 per cent are unique feelings and thoughts.

It makes me wonder that so much is forgotten, even things that at the time I thought I could never forget: books I've read, films I've seen, places I've visited. It's interesting that so many memories seem to have disappeared. Or have they? People suffering near-death experiences report seeing their whole life flashing by in cinematographic detail.

And as we grow older, memories of childhood slowly return, suggesting that deep in our minds, those 50 per cent of unique experiences may not be lost after all.

Paul Smith

## Vocabulary Trainer

• <b>accuracy</b>	Genauigkeit/Richtigkeit
• <b>jiggery-pokery</b>	Gemauschel (ugs.)
• <b>roughly speaking</b>	grob gesagt
• <b>to comprise</b>	umfassen



*James Branch Cabell · 1892*

# There Must Be a Word for It!

From Guru to Tsundoku





Want to learn a new English word every day? If so, check out: [www.owad.de](http://www.owad.de)

Descriptive as the English language is, there are some life experiences for which there are no single words or phrases, which is where English **borrows words from other languages**.

Can you match the following nine words to their languages of origin (Arabic, Chinese, French, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Sanskrit, or Spanish)?

The answers are at the end of the next page.

anonymous – cartoon – cigar – cookie – guru – ketchup – loot – safari – tsundoku

Remembering the word 'sudoku', you probably correctly guessed that 'tsundoku' is Japanese.

A headline from a *BBC News* article explains: 'Tsundoku: The art of buying books and never reading them'.

The desire to own more books than one can possibly read in a human lifetime is so universal that Japanese has a specific word for it.

The Cambridge Dictionary now defines 'tsundoku' as 'the practice of buying a lot of books and keeping them in a pile because you intend to read them but have not done so yet'.

If you're a book **hoarder** (like me and my wife), you're probably **relieved** to know that now we can at least name our **affliction**. This

leads to the interesting question of how to organize hundreds (or thousands) of books. Here are some ideas to consider.



### The 'two-thirds rule'

Remember the old adage 'Less is more'? To avoid a feeling of overcrowding, keep each of your shelves just two-thirds full. 30 per cent open space allows a greater appreciation of what is there.



### The placement of objects

Intersperse your books with your favourite objects, such as family photos, holiday souvenirs, **heirlooms**, sculptures, or a vase of flowers. Change or replace these as the fancy takes you.



### The book stack

Consider the relationship of vertically stacked versus horizontally placed books. It's much more comfortable to read horizontal book titles than it is to read sideways and head-flip 180 degrees with every change from an English book to a German one and back again.



## Serendipity

Why organize your books at all? There's surprise and discovery in randomness. We appreciate this when we **peruse** the strange mix of books in beach houses, summer cottages, and second-hand bookshops. Rejoice in the unexpected choice.



## Making rainbows

Consider organizing your books rainbow-style by the colour of their covers – in other words, by grouping all the reds, yellows, greens, blues, and violet-coloured books together. What a great way to quieten the visual **clutter**!



## Positioning

One final tip is to resist pushing books toward the back wall. Instead, bring them all forward to the leading edge of the bookshelf. This ensures a **uniform** look and hides tell-tale dust.

Before you go, do you think we need a digital equivalent of *tsundoku*? How about 'E-*tsundoku*' or 'tsunkindle'?

Paul Smith

P.S. If you have any comments or questions about this article, just drop me a line at: [paul@smith.de](mailto:paul@smith.de). I'm always happy to hear from you.



## Answers:

- anonymous = Greek (something or someone without a name, someone who does not reveal their identity)

- cartoon = Italian (originally a drawing on hard paper, transformed into comical representation in 1843)

- cigar = Spanish (a cylinder of dried and fermented tobacco rolled in tobacco leaves for the purpose of smoking)

- cookie = Dutch (rolled, sliced, and baked sweet dough, from the Dutch term 'koekje')

- guru = Sanskrit (an individual with influential leadership, exceptional knowledge, and deep, thought-provoking intelligence)

- ketchup = Chinese (in 1692 'Kestiap' referred to a concoction of pickled fish and spices; by the 1790s tomatoes had been added to the sauce)

- loot = Hindi (stolen goods or property)

- safari = Arabic (an expedition to observe animals in their natural habitat)

- *tsundoku* = Japanese (the art of buying books and never reading them)

## Vocabulary Trainer

• to borrow words from another language	Wörter aus einer anderen Sprache entlehnen
• hoarder	Sammler(in)
• relieved	erleichtert
• affliction	Krankheit/Leiden
• heirloom	Erbstück
• serendipity	glücklicher Zufall
• to peruse	durchsehen/durchlesen
• clutter	Gerümpel/ Durcheinander
• uniform	einheitlich





# The Power of the Boo-Boo

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Admitting to Making a Mistake

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Want to learn a new English word every day? If so, check out: [www.owad.de](http://www.owad.de)

Nobody's perfect. So, in English, what's the best way to admit to having made a mistake? You could apologize and **bluntly** say 'I'm sorry, I made a mistake', or 'I screwed up', or 'I **dropped a clanger**', or any number of interesting synonyms.

But if your mistake is a relatively minor one, there's nothing to match the power of the phrase 'I made a **boo-boo**'.

Words like 'boo-boo', which are made up of sounds that repeat, involve a process called reduplication. This repetition of sounds seems to be a primitive human impulse that begins with baby talk and in several cases, like 'boo-boo', **persist** into adulthood.

Boo-boo is a charming synonym for 'mistake' that can provoke a bit more **sympathy** in the listener (think infant apologizing to parent).

'I'm so sorry Tom, I made a bit of a BOO-BOO this morning: I accidentally erased your hard disk. It's all good though, we have a cloud backup.'

There are three types of reduplicative in English:

1. Repeating reduplicatives (aye-aye, bang-bang, ha ha)
2. Rhyming reduplicatives (boogie-woogie, mumbo jumbo, okey-dokey)
3. Vowel change reduplicatives (chit-chat, hip-hop, tick-tock)

## Test your reduplicatives!

Here are some common repeating reduplicatives – do you know what they all mean?

aye-aye, beriberi, cancan, chacha, chin-chin, choo-choo, chop-chop, din-din, goody-goody, ho ho, hush-hush, murmur, Never-Never Land, nighty-nighty, no-no, to pooh-pooh, so-so, twenty-twenty, yum yum

The solutions are on page 34.

Some years ago, *The Guardian* newspaper printed a story about a man who tripped over his shoelace in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Falling down some steps, he knocked over three priceless Qing Dynasty vases, which fell to the ground and broke into more than 400 pieces. He was sitting there in shock when museum staff arrived. Everyone stood around in silence – only the man kept pointing to his shoelaces, saying, 'There it is! That's what made me fall!'

Man has been blaming others at least since Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Somewhat later, Aaron blamed all the sins of Israel on a harmless goat and sent the poor animal – the 'escaped goat' or 'scapegoat' – off into the wilderness.

Roman emperors liked to kill messengers who brought bad news, and in the Middle Ages

a prince would often be given a 'whipping boy' – an unlucky servant who could be beaten whenever his master had misbehaved.

We may shake our heads at the blame-passers of history, but in the heat of the moment, when hammer hits finger or phone battery dies, how many of us spontaneously accept responsibility?

Maybe it's human nature to find a whipping boy when things go wrong. Before you go, though, consider the old saying: 'He who points the finger of blame at another does well to remember that the three fingers point back at himself.' A nice reminder to admit 'I made a boo-boo.'

Paul Smith

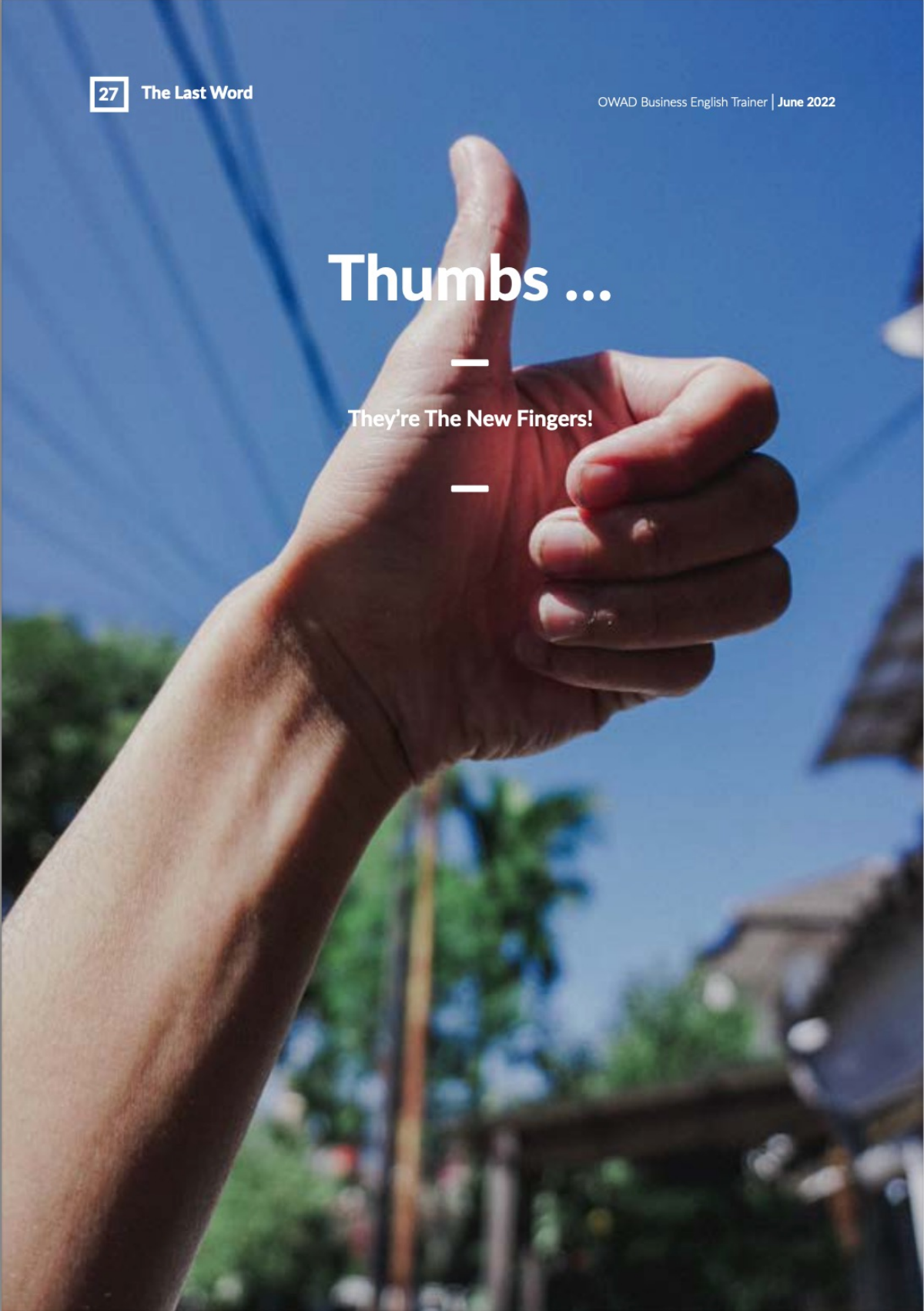
P.S. If you have any comments or questions about this article, just drop me a line at: [paul@smith.de](mailto:paul@smith.de). I'm always happy to hear from you.

## Vocabulary Trainer

• <b>bluntly</b>	direkt/unverblümt
• <b>to drop a clanger</b>	ins Fettnäpfchen treten
• <b>boo-boo</b>	Fehler/Schnitzer
• <b>to persist</b>	fortbestehen
• <b>sympathy</b>	Mitleid/Mitgefühl

# Thumbs ...

—  
They're The New Fingers!  
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Want to learn a new English word every day? If so, check out: [www.owad.de](http://www.owad.de)

If someone is 'all fingers and thumbs' it means that they move their hands in an awkward or uncoordinated way. So, should you drop something on the floor, or spill some beer or wine, you might remark, 'Oh dear, I'm all fingers and thumbs today!'

This expression dates all the way back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it was used to describe **clumsiness** or a lack of **manual dexterity**.

It's ironic that the thumb should be **singled out** for an expression of clumsiness because the transverse human thumb gives Homo sapiens superb manual dexterity and was an important anatomical feature enabling precision toolmaking and, ultimately, writing.

In modern times, the **ubiquity** of smartphones and other hand-held devices may be leading to a physical mutation of the human hand.

Research has shown that the thumbs of teenagers and young adults have overtaken their fingers as the hand's most muscled and dexterous **digit**.

In Japan, such is the extent of this change that young people have been nicknamed the 'thumb tribe' or the 'thumb generation'. Instead of using fingers for common tasks such as pointing or ringing doorbells, they have started using their thumbs.

Dr Sadie Plant, author of the global study 'Thumbs are the new fingers' writes: 'The relationship

between technology and the users of technology is mutual, we are changing each other', echoing the earlier words of Winston Churchill who famously said 'We shape our buildings, then they shape us.'

Language also shapes us. How familiar are you with the following 'thumb idioms'?

- to twiddle one's thumbs = to be waiting with nothing useful to do, to pass the time by twirling one's thumbs
- thumbs down = a sign of disapproval or refusal
- to be under someone's thumb = to be under another's authoritarian control
- to stand (or stick) out like a sore thumb = to be very obviously and often embarrassingly different from the surrounding people or things
- to thumb (or hitch) a ride = to get a ride from a passing motorist
- a rule of thumb = an approximation or guideline, a general principle developed through experiential rather than scientific means.

Here are three interesting rules of thumb:

1. A surname starting with 'Mc' is more likely to be Irish; one starting with 'Mac' is more likely to be Scottish.
2. If you have to choose between

two barbers in a shop, choose the one with the worst haircut: barbers cut each other's hair.

3. 97% of people believe that odd numbers are more believable than even numbers.

Regarding building your English vocabulary, a good rule of thumb for choosing words is: wait until you read or hear a new word or phrase on three different occasions, then you can be reasonably sure that it is statistically important and is therefore worth learning.

Do you have any rules of thumb for learning English? I'd love to hear them!

Paul Smith

P.S. If you have any comments or questions about this article, just drop me a line at: [paul@smith.de](mailto:paul@smith.de). I'm always happy to hear from you.

## Vocabulary Trainer

• <b>clumsiness</b>	Ungeschicklichkeit
• <b>manual dexterity</b>	handwerkliches Geschick/ Handfertigkeit
• <b>to single sth./ sb. out</b>	etw./jdn. herausgreifen
• <b>ubiquity</b>	Allgegenwart
• <b>digit</b>	Finger/Daumen/Zeh



# Animal Sounds

—  
The Noises Animals Make in English  
—





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If you want to win a pub bet, ask your drinking friends which animal makes the loudest sound: an elephant, a donkey, a lion, or a chimpanzee?

The surprising answer is a lion – with a roar as loud as up to 114 decibels, it can be heard more than five miles away. This remarkable performance **is attributable to** a lion's unique larynx. While most animals' vocal cords are triangular, a lion's are square and flat. This allows air to pass through more easily and results in a loud roar that requires relatively little effort.

It's not for nothing that lions are considered the 'kings of the jungle', and the English verb 'to lionize' means to give a lot of public attention and approval to someone, or to treat them as a celebrity.

Lions may roar, but can you guess what sounds other animals make in English? Try matching these onomatopoeic words to their equivalent animal: 1. purr; 2. howl; 3. oink; 4. hee-haw; 5. gobble; 6. hoot; 7. honk; 8. chirp; 9. cluck; 10. cock-a-doodle-doo.

1. We all know that cats meow when they want something, but when they're happy being stroked, they PURR. A purring cat sounds like a well-oiled little engine! Unhappy cats sometimes yowl, or they may even hiss like a snake when angry.

2. Children soon learn that dogs say woof, but they make many other noises too. **Depending upon** their size and mood, angry dogs growl, frightened dogs whimper, and some dogs (like wolves)

HOWL. Tiny dogs are said to yip and yap – and, by the way, a yappy person is someone who talks a lot.

3. In English, pigs say OINK, but they also squeal, which is a high-pitched whine. Humans squeal too, but usually to show sudden happiness. 'She squealed in delight when she saw her birthday present.' Another pig noise is the grunt. Humans sometimes grunt too, especially when doing something physically difficult – which led to the term 'grunt work', describing boring jobs that no one wants to do.

4. The two-toned HEE-HAW of a donkey is also called braying and sounds very funny. 'Hee-haw' is the American spelling – the British version is written as 'eeyore', which is also the name of the sad donkey in the *Winnie the Pooh* stories.

5. Turkeys GOBBLE, which means to eat quickly and loudly. You can gobble up a turkey, but it wouldn't be considered good manners.

6. Despite being very silent predators, owls will sometimes HOOT when not in flight, and like other birds of prey such as eagles and hawks, they also make loud and frightening screeching noises.

7. Although ducks and geese sound very much the same, we say in English that ducks quack and geese HONK. Cars and trucks also honk their horns, and a quack is a fake doctor.

8. Birds of all kinds CHIRP, trill, and warble. They also tweet and twitter, which we all recognize as the name

of a very popular social media service with a blue, flying bird logo.

9. A hen is a female chicken **recognizable by** its CLUCKING sound. Baby chickens say cheep cheep and are called chicks. Different languages seem to agree on these sounds pretty closely, but male chickens are a quite different matter!

10. Roosters cry COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO in the morning, but only in English-speaking countries – in Germany, roosters greet the day with Kikeriki, in Spain with Quiquiriquiin, in Turkey with U Uru Uuuin, in China with Goh-Goh-Gohi, and in Wales with coc-a-dwdl-dŵ, go-go-go.

The sound of a rooster may travel a few miles, but the **outright winner** is the king of the jungle, whose roar is augmented with growling, snarling, meowing, purring, and humming.

Paul Smith

### Vocabulary Trainer

• <b>to be attributable to</b>	auf etw. zurückzuführen sein
• <b>depending (up)on ...</b>	je nach ...
• <b>recognizable by sth.</b>	an etw. erkennbar
• <b>outright winner</b>	eindeutiger Gewinner/ eindeutige Gewinnerin





# Chinese Walls



Body Language and Algospeak







Want to learn a new  
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To the Western mind, the Chinese have had a strong reputation for **inscrutability**. Why? Is it the complexity of the Chinese language? Or is it our inability to differentiate Chinese faces? Or maybe it's our sense of Chinese 'reserve' in social interactions. 'Gentlemen must be able to control emotions and maintain gravity,' said Confucius, adding to the perception that the Chinese are cool and lacking emotion. To reveal neither joy nor anger is a characteristic of strength and nobility to the Asian mind, but to Europeans and Americans the 'poker face' signals **suspicion** and distrust.

Studies show that Western subjects are likely to express emotions with explicit and incidental facial expressions involving their eyebrows and mouths, whereas Chinese respondents tend to express emotions with implicit and controlled facial expressions, especially when feeling excitement and **revulsion**. The Chinese are also more reserved and calmer when excited or disappointed.<sup>1</sup>

In the West, people are focused on individualism, the 'I', and 'rights of privacy', whereas Eastern collectivist culture values 'we', harmony, and belonging.

In the field of human perception, research into eye movement reveals different strategies when scanning own- and other-race faces.<sup>2</sup> This is known as the other-race scanning effect (ORSE). This effect has been observed among not only adults but also children and infants. Chinese participants

spend more time looking at the eye region of Caucasian faces relative to Chinese faces and more time looking at the noses and mouths of Chinese faces relative to Caucasian faces.

Chinese faces tend to have wider noses and smaller mouth widths than Caucasian faces. Also, nearly all Chinese people have black eyes, whereas Caucasian eye colours vary greatly. Thus it makes sense that Chinese observers spend longer scanning the Chinese nose region because this provides more information for distinguishing individual Chinese faces. In viewing Caucasians, Chinese people scan the eye region because it affords more information to distinguish Western faces.

Body language may not be changing anytime soon, but in internet communication a new movement is happening in Chinese society. Computer surveillance has **given rise to** a new English word: "Algospeak" is changing our language in real time,' wrote Taylor Lorenz, a columnist at *The Washington Post* on 8 April 2022. 'Algospeak', a combination of 'algorithm' and 'speak', refers to the replacement of phrases that are disfavoured by social media algorithms with seemingly harmless ones. To evade Chinese government's filters, Chinese internet users have developed an extensive **lingo** of substitution phrases to **outwit** the authorities. For example, after Covid-19 first exploded in China, the government blocked the word 'Wuhan' – so users started using the shortform

'wh'. When the Chinese Red Cross's logistics were under scrutiny, citizens figured those conversations would get shut down too, so they began calling it 'red ten' (since the Chinese character for 'ten' resembles a cross).

In the West, as the pandemic pushed more people to communicate online, algorithmic content-moderation systems down-ranked videos mentioning the pandemic by name in an effort to combat misinformation. To counter this, anti-vaccine groups on Facebook and Instagram began changing their names to 'dance party' or 'dinner party'. Vaccinated people were termed 'swimmers' and 'pandemic' became 'panini' or 'panda express'.

So if you want to keep your online information private, 'algospeak' may be a smart way to build a Chinese Wall around your secrets.

Paul Smith

### Vocabulary Trainer

• <b>inscrutability</b>	Unergründlichkeit
• <b>suspicion</b>	Verdacht
• <b>revulsion</b>	Abscheu
• <b>to give rise to sth.</b>	etw. entstehen lassen
• <b>lingo</b>	Fachsprache (ugs.)
• <b>to outwit sb.</b>	jdn. austricksen

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#### Sources

<sup>1</sup> Explicit and incidental facial expression processing: an fMRI study – M L Gorno-Tempini, et al.

<sup>2</sup> Visual scanning and recognition of Chinese, Caucasian, and racially ambiguous faces – Qiangdong, Wang, et al. Gorno-Tempini, et al.