

Cripes! Spiffing English words dying out

Cripes! Thanks to the Twitter generation some spiffing words in the English language are slowly dying out. Traditional words like 'balderdash' and 'cripes' are being replaced with modern trendy shortened text-style terms like 'lol', 'jel' and 'soz'. In fact, a quarter of us use these terms in verbal conversations, as well as using them in written communication on mobile phones, emails and social media sites. There has been a significant decrease in the words which our parents and grandparents used to utter on almost a daily basis. According to researchers 'bally' and 'swell' are among words that Brits said they don't use anymore. Just nine per cent used the word 'bogus', ten per cent have used 'fiddlesticks' and only three quarters have used 'oopsy-daisy'.

Only half have used the word 'knackered' and three quarters have never used 'diabolical'. Three quarters don't use 'cheerio' and a fifth say they don't know what 'myriad' means. Only 82 per cent are familiar with the word 'raconteur' 70 per cent have never used the word 'shenanigans'. One in fifteen adults has never used the word 'drat' and half didn't know what a 'cad' was. Other not so used words which few people even know the meaning of any more include 'rambunctious', 'verily', 'betwixt' and 'salutations'. Researchers questioned 2,000 adults in Britain to mark the launch of *Planet Word*, a book which tells the story of language from the earliest grunts to Twitter and beyond. Its author, J.P. Davidson, said: "Language is something that is constantly evolving."

Top 20 forgotten words – part 1

- 1. Bally:** *A British word from 1885 which is a euphemism for bloody*
- 2. Laggard:** *An 18th Century word to describe someone who lags behind or responds slowly*
- 3. Felicitations:** *From the noun of action felicitate, you would use this word to express congratulations*
- 4. Rambunctious:** *Boisterous or unruly, the word is believed to have originated in 1830*
- 5. Verily:** *From Middle English, simply means true or in truth*
- 6. Salutations:** *A welcome greeting*
- 7. Betwixt:** *Originated before 950, and means neither the one nor the other*
- 8. Lauded:** *From the Latin laudāre, to praise*
- 9. Arcane:** *Known or understood by very few*
- 10. Raconteur:** *A person skilled in telling stories, originated in the 19th Century, from the French verb, raconter, to tell*

Category: English / Language / Disappearing Words
Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate

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Top 20 forgotten words – part 2

11. **Cad**: An ill-bred man, originates from 19 Century, derived from the word Caddie
12. **Betrothed**: The person to whom one is engaged or the past tense of the associated verb to betrothe
13. **Cripes**: Twentieth Century slang for an expression of surprise, euphemistic for 'Christ!'
14. **Malaise**: A vague or unfocused feeling of mental uneasiness
15. **Quash**: To put down or suppress completely; quell
16. **Swell**: Originates before 900 from the Middle English verb *swellen*, meanings include the verb to inflate and an adjective which describes if something is excellent
17. **Balderdash**: From the 1590s it was originally a jumbled mix of liquors (milk and beer, beer and wine, etc.), before being transferred in 1670s to 'senseless jumble of words'
18. **Smite**: To strike, deal a blow
19. **Spiffing**: From the word *spiff*, meaning well-dressed, means superb
20. **Tomfoolery**: Foolish behaviour

Other words in article

1. **Bogus**: Not genuine, counterfeit, spurious, sham, e.g. a 'bogus' note
2. **Myriad**: Ten thousand, a very great number of people or things, of an infinite great number
3. **Diabolical**: Terrible, excruciating bad, outrageous. An intensifier e.g. a diabolical liberty
4. **Oopsy-daisy (Oops-a daisy, Oopsie daisy)**: Urban slang- something people say when they screw up badly. A polite way of saying oh shite! Oopsie daisy I pooped in my pants!
5. **Fiddlesticks**: An interjection-used to express impatience or dismissal of something
6. **Knackered**: Tired, exhausted, especially after working long hours, e.g. I am knackered
7. **Cheerio**: Goodbye, farewell. A toast of 'cheerio' to someone leaving
8. **Shenanigans**: Mischief, prankishness e.g. Halloween shenanigans. A mischievous or deceitful trick or practice
9. **Drat**: To damn, confound: Drat your interference! An exclamation of annoyance. Drat it! Drat you! Also an interjection – used to express mild disgust, disappointment, or the like, e.g. Drat, there goes another button off my shirt

Note:

1. **Ups-a-daisy!** Commonly used when a child, in play, is assisted in a spring-leap from the ground by an adult
2. **Whoops-a daisy!** This is said after someone makes a mistake or stumbles. It can be shortened to whoops or oops. American origin (1925)

From article - the text words

1. **Lol**: Laughing out loud. Used in a response to someone telling a joke or something funny or a follow up to something said as a funny or joke
2. **Jel**: A stupid person – a slang definition – Oh David, don't act like a 'jel'
3. **Soz**: Short for 'sorry' (Brit Eng)

EXERCISES

1. Words your grandparents used to use: Think of three words your grandparents used to use that are not used today? What do they mean? Go round the room swapping details in English.

2. Dictation: The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

3. Reading: The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

4. Vocabulary: Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

5. The article: Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

6. Spiffing old English words: In pairs, think of ten spiffing old English words. You can use the words from the article or others from e.g. a dictionary. Write them below. Discuss together. What do these words tell you?

1	6
2	7
3	8
4	9
5	10

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

7. Trendy text English words: In pairs, think of ten trendy text English words. You can use the words from the article and others. Write them below. Discuss together. What do these words tell you?

1	6
2	7
3	8
4	9
5	10

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

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8. **Let's think!** In pairs. On the board write as many words as you can to do with **English language**. *One-two minutes*. Compare with other teams. Using your words compile a short dialogue together.

9. **Let's roleplay 1: BBC News:** In pairs/groups. One of you is the interviewer. The others are one of the following people. You are in the *BBC News* TV studio in London. Today's interview is: *Spiffing English words dying out*. *5-10 minutes*.

1	Yourself	3	An English teacher
2	A grandparent	4	J.P. Davidson

The teacher will choose some pairs to roleplay their interview in front of the class.

10. **Let's roleplay 2:** In pairs. One of you is a person from 2011. The other is a British person from 100 years ago. You meet in a time travelling coffee bar in 1950. You have a conversation. Over a coffee compare the words used today and in the past. Use English words as well as your own country's words. Use modern and past language to help you in the conversation. (Make it up!) *5-minutes*.

11. **Presentation:** In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation in English on: **Dying words in my language**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation to the class. The class can vote on the best presentation.

12. **Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) Name the book.
- 2) Who wrote the book?
- 3) Name three modern text words.
- 4) What does 'knackered' mean?
- 5) Explain the word 'rambunctious'!

Student B

- 1) What does 'cheerio' mean?
- 2) What does 'oopsy-daisy' mean?
- 3) What did the author say?
- 4) How many people were questioned?
- 5) Explain the word 'shenanigans'.

13. **Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **'Words dying out in my language (and their meanings in English)'**.

14. **Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Cripes! _____
- b) Oopsy-daisy _____
- c) LOL _____

DISCUSSION

Student A questions

- 1) Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- 2) Do you use any of the old English words in the article?
- 3) Do you use any of the modern words in the article?
- 4) Should we try to use older words? Explain.
- 5) Is it important to keep old words alive or not?
- 6) What do you think of the sentence in the article "Language is something that is constantly evolving"?
- 7) What other modern words do you use?
- 8) Where do you pick up new words?
- 9) Are people brainier today than in the past?
- 10) Why do words evolve?

Student B questions

- 1) What do you think about what you've read?
- 2) Have you learnt anything in this English lesson?
- 3) What traditional words do you use in your language?
- 4) What do you think about the 20 forgotten words?
- 5) Have you ever used ups-a-daisy, whoops-a-daisy or oopsy-daisy?
- 6) Explain the meaning of the words ups-a-daisy, whoops-a-daisy or oopsy-daisy.
- 7) What words in the article interest you most?
- 8) Did your grandparents used to teach you new words?
- 9) Will you be buying the book?
- 10) Did you like this discussion?

SPEAKING

Let's test yourself

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

Test your partner/small group with the meanings of the following from the article:

1	The top 10 forgotten words	3	The other words
2	The bottom 10 forgotten words	4	The 'note' and 'text' words

The teacher can moderate the session.

GAP FILL: READING:

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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Cripes! Thanks to the Twitter (1)_____ some (2)_____ words in the English language are slowly dying out. Traditional words like '(3)_____' and 'cripes' are being replaced with modern (4)_____ shortened text-style terms like 'lol', 'jel' and 'soz'. In fact, a quarter of us use these terms in verbal conversations, as well as using them in written communication on mobile phones, emails and social media sites. There has been a (5)_____ decrease in the words which our parents and grandparents used to (6)_____ on almost a daily basis. According to researchers 'bally' and '(7)_____' are among words that Brits said they don't use anymore. Just nine per cent used the word 'bogus', ten per cent have used '(8)_____' and only three quarters have used 'oopsy-daisy'.

swell

significant

spiffing

balderdash

fiddlesticks

utter

trendy

generation

Only half have used the word '(1)_____' and three quarters have never used 'diabolical'. Three quarters don't use '(2)_____' and a fifth say they don't know what 'myriad' means. Only 82 per cent are familiar with the word 'raconteur' 70 per cent have never used the word 'shenanigans'. One in fifteen adults has never used the word '(3)_____' and half didn't know what a 'cad' was. Other not so used words which few people even know the meaning of any more include 'rambunctious', 'verily', 'betwixt' and '(4)_____' . Researchers questioned 2,000 adults in Britain to mark the (5)_____ of *Planet Word*, a book which tells the story of (6)_____ from the earliest (7)_____ to Twitter and beyond. Its author, J.P. Davidson, said: "Language is something that is constantly (8)_____."

grunts

evolving

cheerio

language

launch

knackered

drat

salutations

GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

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SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings:
Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20

1	cripes	11	diabolical
2	raconteur	12	cheerio
3	cad	13	generation
4	myriad	14	balderdash
5	traditional	15	trendy
6	knackered	16	familiar
7	oopsy-daisy	17	shenanigans
8	communication	18	drat
9	researchers	19	salutations
10	fiddlesticks	20	rambunctious

LINKS

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2053670/Cripes-Traditional-British-words-face-extinction-text-speak-norm.html>

<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9780718157746/planet-word>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/8850281/Drat-Spiffing-old-words-dying-out-soz.html>

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