



Use of Words Which Lead to Confusion

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ABSTRACT: Language is the most important tool of communication but its careless use can be dangerous. According to Jonathan Swift "Proper words in proper places make the true definition of style" [1]. Infact, words are one of our main means of adjusting to all the situations in life. The better control we have over words, the more successful our adjustment is likely to be. Often, it is said that "Colors fade, temples crumble, empires fall, but wise words endure" [2]. This paper attempts to focus on some common errors of words, grammar etc. with some good examples.

SHADES OF MEANING

You almost never mean: typical you almost always mean : peculiar why :

The two words must be rival cousins, often confused about when to be heard. You say: "Manoj is a typical fellow." Typical how?

Being a fellow member of our species? We know that. You might find typical and peculiar not far from each other in a thesaurus because both words deal with characteristics. Peculiar describes the characteristics of one person, place or thing alone.

But typical exhibits the characteristics that identify a group or category. So you need to say: Manoj is a peculiar fellow. Or, Manoj the miser is typical sake; Manoj could be a typical Fellow of the Indian Society of Accountants, if there be one.

You never mean: I have worked here since five years. You always mean: I have worked here for five years. Why: Both deal with lengths of time, so they are regularly mixed up. Since must be used when you have a starting point: I have worked here since 2008 (or last Diwali); for has to be followed by a certain length of time (five years: 2008 to 2013).

You often say: catch you might mean: hold why: A clear example of our native language interfering, because Hindi, for instance, uses the same verb (pakadna) for both. So, if you're passing a book to someone, it's hold, but if it's a ball you're throwing, it's catch - where somebody stops and then holds a moving object. You could also catch a bus, or catch a cold (the germs move).

You might hear: childlike you think it means: childish Why:

These are close, but their meanings are distinct. One Mumbai artist protested after a reviewer described her work as "childlike" She needn't have. Childlike means pure and innocent (a compliment), but childish means silly or immature. Notice how children's behavior led to both words!

You never mean: no habits you always mean: no bad habits why:

No habits is a term seen most in matrimonial columns: "Tall, handsome software engineer, 29, settled in Delhi, no habits." You'd think this person was some kind of zombie who's not picked up any good or bad behavior in 29 years. (Or a nun who had a problem with the laundry). But no habits seem to imply just that he doesn't smoke or drink. Next time, add the bad bit.

You always say: I combed my hairs. You mean: I combed my hair. Why: Hair usually describes the mass of locks, curls, tresses, wool, pelt, fur and whatever else grows on your head - taken together as one. The same goes for facial or other body hair. So just describe it (or comb or have it cut) in the singular. If you want to use hairs, they should be counted individually ("pull out three hairs") now split hairs over this.

You say: cartoon you mean: carton why:

By this logic you should also giggle every time you see a big cardboard box. Both words have the same origin (French carton via Italian cartone), which at first meant the strong pasteboard made of carta (card) paper used by artists to make preliminary sketches, and by others to make boxes. Say "carton" for cardboard boxes and save the laughs for cartoons.

You say: It is looking better now. You could say: It looks better now. Why: When Peter Sellers starred as Mr. Bakshi in *The Party* (1968), he did a clever imitation of Indian English, thanks partly to a sprinkling of ings: "because the way you are laughing, or " the way you are speaking English." In grammar, the - ing thing is called the gerund when it's affixed to a verb to function as a noun. Avoid unnecessary gerunding! Now, had Sellers said "because of the way you laugh" or "the way you speak English," *The Party* would have lost its fun. But you don't want to be a Mr. Bakshi, and "make everybody laughing".

GRAMMMAR

You say: Myself Ashish. You always mean: I'm Ashish. Why:

There's also the incorrect "Ashish, Krishna and myself are going to..." *Myself* is notoriously misused for I or me (wrong: "My husband and myself have belonged to the club for years"). *Myself* is a pronoun best reserved for occasions when an action is directed towards yourself: for Diwali, I gave myself a gift", or for emphasis ("I myself have done that many times").

CONFUSED, IRRITATING

You often say: you guys you just mean: you people why:

Calling a group of people "guys" can sound odd at times. In early June, a very young business TV journalist interviewed an elderly company chairman, repeatedly referring to him and his company as "you guys". Embarrassing!

It's best to save "you guys" for your friends and peers, because it implies a degree of familiarity. In fact guy wasn't used so much by today's above-50 s generation of Indians, unless they were comparing you, knowingly or not, to Guy Fawkes, hanged for treason in 1606 after the failed Gunpowder Plot to blow up the British Parliament. After Fawkes, guy became slang, but people gradually identified "nice guys" too and guy took on friendly overtones in the late 20th century, when women remained girls but all men became guys. (Today, even girls call other girls "guys") It's courteous to avoid the informal guys for older people, especially teachers and bosses. Incidentally, saying "You gentlemen" isn't old-fashioned yet.

You might say: Post lunch just say: after lunch. Why:

You've experienced post Graduation, Post-Impressionism, may be even a post-mortem (if you're reading this posthumously, who knows?) But "Post lunch", "post my wedding" or "post the nappy change" came her (via corporate-speak) recently. Each time, post hearing somebody utter it, I've wondered what happened to good old after? Could we just keep office jargon out of food, weddings, babies and the like?

You always say: anyways you'd better say: anyway

This remains the mother of all modern linguistic irritants. But it's only gone viral, infecting other words and creating "anyhow", "any which ways", "no ways", and "midways" - among other bad ways.

WORDS OFTEN CONFUSED

➤ **Access & Excess**

Access - Approach - Students should have easy access to their teachers.

Excess - More than enough - Excess of anything creates problems.

➤ **Adapt & Adopt**

Adapt - to suit - You can succeed only if you adapt yourself to your circumstances.

Adopt - to take up - It is not good to seek success by adopting unfair means.

➤ **Canvas & Canvass**

Canvas - a piece of cloth meant for painting - Canvas shoes are cheap but comfortable.

Canvass - To request people for votes - During elections, almost all the candidates came to our colony to canvass for votes.

➤ **Cast & Caste**

Cast - To Throw - The hunter cast a net to catch birds.

Caste - Social class in Hindu society - In cities people often marry outside their caste.

➤ **Stare & Stair**

Stare - To look very hard and for a long time - Continuous staring brings tears to one's eyes.

Stair - A flight of stairs led me to an elegantly furnished flat.

➤ **Stationary & Stationery**

Stationary - For a long time, astronomers have believed the sun to be stationary.

Stationery - Writing material - The school book shop sells stationery at a very reasonable price.

➤ **Hale & Hail**

Hale - Healthy - His mother was hale and hearty till yesterday when she collapsed and died.

Hail - Frozen rain drops - The rain was accompanied with hailstones.

➤ **Altar & Alter**

Altar - Place of worship - The pilgrims knelt at the altar and worshipped God.

Alter - To change - If we alter our programme without informing others, they may object to it.

➤ **Award & Reward**

Award - A prize or certificate given to a person for doing something well - All these children have won awards for showing great courage.

Reward - Something which is given in return for a favor or for a job well done - The peon was given a suitable reward for his honesty.

Choosing the right word: WORD COMBINATIONS

As well as knowing what a word means, you need to know how to use it and this includes knowing which words it usually goes with. For example, **possibility** is often used with strong but not with **big**. The phrases 'a big possibility' and a strong possibility have the same meaning and both will be understood. However a big possibility is unnatural and is generally regarded as an error. The rule that is broken by putting **big** and **possibility** together is one of word combination or 'collocation'.

Big and **Strong** belong to a group of adjectives that are commonly used with abstract nouns (e.g. **change, risk, possibility, effect, difficulty**). It is important to know which adjectives go with which noun. the table below shows which combinations are acceptable [3].

	<i>big</i>	<i>deep</i>	<i>great</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>serious</i>	<i>strong</i>
<i>accident</i>					√	
<i>attempt</i>					√	
<i>change</i>	√		√			
<i>concern</i>		√	√		√	
<i>cost</i>			√	√		
<i>crime</i>					√	
<i>damage</i>					√	
<i>danger</i>			√		√	
<i>difference</i>	√		√			
<i>difficulty</i>			√		√	
<i>effect</i>	√		√		√	√
<i>fun</i>			√			√
<i>impression</i>		√				
<i>improvement</i>	√		√			
<i>income</i>				√		
<i>influence</i>	√		√		√	√
<i>interest</i>					√	√
<i>mistake</i>	√		√		√	
<i>possibility</i>				√		√
<i>price</i>						
<i>pride</i>			√			
<i>problem</i>	√		√		√	
<i>risk</i>	√		√	√	√	
<i>shock</i>	√		√			
<i>skill</i>			√			
<i>speed</i>			√	√		
<i>surprise</i>	√		√			
<i>threat</i>					√	
<i>trouble</i>	√	√			√	

body	?	His dead body was flown back home for burial.
	√	His body was flown back home for burial. when it is clear from the context that the person referred to is dead. use body (WITHOUT dead) : 'The police found his body floating in the river.'
book	×	I'm afraid that we're out of stock but I can book one for you.
	√	I'm afraid that we're out of stock but I can order one for you. book = reserve a seat on a plane, a room in a hotel, a table at a restaurant etc : 'The train was packed and I wished I'd booked a seat.' Order = ask for certain goods to be sent to a shop, especially because a customer wants to buy them : 'If you want to be sure of getting a daily newspaper, it's best to order one.'
bored 1	×	My job at the bank was very bored.
	√	My job at the bank was very boring.
2	×	I don't think I'll ever get bored of the book.
	√	I don't think I'll ever get bored with the book.
	×	She soon got bored of talking to him.
	√	She soon got bored with talking to him. be/get bored with (doing) sth: I'am bored with pasta and tomatoes - I want something different. I got bored with lying on the beach and went off to explore the town.
boring	×	We get very boring with the same food everyday.
	√	We get very bored with the same food everyday.
	×	You'll be boring with nothing to do.
	√	You'll be bored with nothing to do. If someone or something is boring/exciting/frightening/interesting (-ING) you feel bored/excited/frightened/interested (-ED) : 'The lecture was terribly boring. Some of us were so bored that we fell asleep.'
born 1	×	My name is Ali Sariat and I born in Tehran.
	√	My name is Ali Sariat and I was born in Tehran be born : 'Do you realize that a child is born every few seconds.' The baby was born in the middle of the night. It was the first time I'd actually watched a child being born.
2	×	I have been born in a town in a town just outside Paris.
	√	I was born in a town just outside Paris. Use 'I was born' 'They were born' etc (NOT I have been born or I am born) I'll never forget the day when the seven puppies were born.
3	×	He was born in a Catholic family.
	√	He was born into a Catholic family. be born into a particular type of family, world etc. (NOT in) : 'She was born into a world that was on the brink of war'.
borrow	×	I asked my friend to borrow me some money.
	√	I asked my friend to lend me some money.
	×	He borrowed me some of his books.
	√	He lent me some of his books.
	√	I borrowed some of his books. When you borrow something (from someone), you are allowed to use it : 'Can I borrow one of your pencils ?' When you lend something (to someone), you let them use it : 'He asked me to lend him one of my pencils'.

boss	?	My father is the boss of a small shipping company.
	√	My father is the manager of a small shipping company. Boss is usually used in informal styles : 'From the way he acts. you'd think that he was the boss.
both 1	×	Both of them have not apologized yet.
	√	Neither of them has apologized yet.
	×	both the husband and the wife aren't reliable.
	√	Neither the husband nor the wife is reliable.
2	×	Anne and John both are scientists.
	√	Anne and John are both scientists.
	×	Two of the biggest firms are Apple and IBM, which both are in the computer business.
	√	Two of the biggest firms are Apple and IBM, which are both in the computer business.
bread	×	He's gone to buy a fresh bread.
	√	He's gone to buy some fresh bread.
Break 1	×	The family broke just after he was born.
	√	The family broke up just after he was born. break up = stop being together as a couple or group : 'Did you know that Carol and Richard have broken up?' Can you remember when the Beatles broke up?"
2	?	The police had a break the door to get in.
	√	The police had to break down the door to get in. In an emergency situation, policeman, firemen, etc break down the door of a room or building : 'if the door's locked, you'll just have to break it down.

verb + Noun Combinations :

DO - HAVE - MAKE - TAKE

Many phrases begin with a very common verb such as do, make, have or take : ' I felt very nervous about taking the test but, after having a long talk with Mrs. Fisher, I decided I would just do my best and try not to make too many silly mistakes. This verb can be combined with some nouns but not with other and since they do not have a clear meaning of their own, choosing the right combination can be a problem. Phrases which tend to cause difficulty are shown in the table below [4].

HAVE	
have a <u>bath</u> (or esp. AME take)	She is probably upstairs having a bath.
have (your) <u>breakfast</u>	We usually have breakfast in the kitchen.
have (your) <u>dinner</u>	We had dinner and then went for a walk.
have a <u>drink</u>	I'll collapse if I don't have a drink soon.
have (an) <u>experience</u>	He has no experience of running a large company.
have <u>fun</u>	You can't stop people from having fun.
have a <u>holiday</u>	It's almost a year since we had a real holiday.
have an <u>interview</u>	I've and had six interviews but no one has offered me a job.
have a <u>lesson</u>	Every morning we have three fifty- minute lessons.
have (your) <u>lunch</u>	Isn't it about time we had lunch ?
have an <u>operation</u>	Before I had the operation I could hardly walk.
have a <u>party</u>	On Saturday we're having a party.
have a <u>picnic</u>	If it's sunny we could have a picnic.
have a <u>shower</u>	(or esp. AmE take) It only takes me a minute to have a shower.
TAKE	
take /do an <u>examination</u>	Why do we have to take so many tests ?
take (your) <u>medicine</u>	Don't forget to take your medicine.
take a <u>pill</u>	He refuses to take sleeping pills.
take/ do a <u>test</u>	The last test I took was a disaster.
MAKE	
make an <u>effort</u>	I had to make a big effort not to laugh.

make a <u>journey</u>	It was the first journey he'd made all on his own.
make a <u>mistake</u>	he has made a serious mistake.
make a <u>noise</u>	how can one small child make so much noise ?
make <u>progress</u>	I made very little progress at the start of the courst.
DO	
do your <u>best</u>	Don't worry, Tim. Just do your best.
do (or cause) <u>damage</u>	The storm did a lot of damage to the crops.
do an <u>exercise</u>	Have you done your exercises today ?
do an <u>experiment</u>	To do this experiment, you'll need two eggs.
do (sb) <u>good</u>	The holiday had done him a lot of good.
do <u>harm</u>	A scandal would do his reputation a lot of harm.
do your <u>homework</u>	Have you done your homework yet ?
do a <u>job</u>	I;ve got one or two jobs to do this evening.
do the/some <u>shopping</u>	Jake has gone into town to do some shopping.
do <u>research</u>	We need to do a lot more research.
do <u>things</u>	We've done lots of different things today.
do your <u>training</u>	Where did you do your training?
Note also: do something/anything etc: I'can't come now - I'm doing something'. 'He hasn't done anything wrong.	

REFERENCES

1. Dictionary of quotations, Oxford University Press, New Delhi
2. Ibid
3. Dictionary of Common Errors, N.D. Turton & J.B. Heaton, Longman Corpus Network
4. Ibid