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## The word embarrassed

By Ken Michaels, Guest Writer In Shakespeare's play "Hamlet," Polonius inquires of the prince, "What do you read, my lord?" Not at all pleased with what he's reading, Hamlet replies, "Words, words, words."1 I have previously described the communication model in which a sender encodes a message and then sends it via some channel (or medium) to a receiver, who decodes the message and, ideally, understands what was sent. Surely the most common way of encoding a message is in choosing the most appropriate words for the listener or reader. In Hamlet's case, he so disliked what he read that he described it elementally, as mere words, rather than a message. So I thought I'd devote a little ink to words themselves. "Nym" Words Have Specific Meaning Words ending in nym describe classes of words. Some of the more frequently used nym words are synonym (means the same as); antonym (means the opposite of); homonym (has the same sound as); and acronym (a word derived from the first letters of a more complex term, such as SCUBA or AIDS). Homo means "same," and hetero means "different." Therefore, if there are homonyms, it stands to reason that there are also heteronyms. While homonyms have the same sound but different spellings (like pair and pear), heteronyms are spelled the same but have different meanings and, often, pronunciation: a person who sews is a sewer, but a repository for waste products is a sewer. Sewer, then, is a heteronym. But the lexicon of nym words by no means ends here. One of the websites I visited recently2 lists no fewer than 26 nym words, many of which are pretty arcane and of interest to relatively few. Some are downright amusing. Do we really need a word to mean another word composed of two identical parts? If so, then tutu, pawpaw, yo-yo, and bye-bye are tautonyms. A couple of weeks back, my son asked me what is meant by a metonym. I didn't know, so we looked it up. In retrospect, I ought to have been able to logic it out, as "meta" means change. A metonymy is a word that designates something by a word that is associated with it. For example, Hollywood is a metonym used to mean the U.S. motion picture industry, while the Crown refers to royalty, and the bottle refers to alcohol. My use of the expression "a little ink" a couple of paragraphs back is also a metonym for written communication, even when no actual ink or writing on paper is involved. The point of all of this has to do with precision in the use of our language. It will do me no good to encode a message using a word like metonym, or heteronym, or tautonym, unless I'm certain that my listeners (or readers) are familiar with its meaning. Either that, or I'm prepared to add the definition for their benefit, in which case I might have just used the definition in the first place. Still, learning the proper use of words, however arcane, can be useful, and if you like words themselves, even fun. What's Your Idiolect? In his book "The Half-Life of Facts: Why Everything We Know Has an Expiration Date," Samuel Arbesman3 discusses the changes in language that occur over time, and the two camps that see this phenomenon differently. He explains prescriptive grammarians as those who focus on the way words ought to be used, and descriptive grammarians as those who are more concerned with the way they actually are used. Arbesman asserts that every individual develops his or her own set of rules about how to use words, and that all of us—you, me, and everybody else—have our own personal idiolect. This delightful term describes our unique language and speech pattern, as determined by what we learned when we were young, as well as by who's around us, and includes our grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation of words, and even our accent. There's an important lesson here: If we're really going to communicate effectively, we need to be mindful that every time we encode a message, someone whose idiolect is significantly different from our own may very possibly decode it in such a way as to get a different message entirely. So it pays to be careful about our choice of words; is it really a message, or simply "words, words, words"? 4 2013 Ken Michaels. All rights reserved. References: Shakespeare, William: "Hamlet," act 2 scene 2. Arbesman, Samuel: "The Half-Life of Facts: Why Everything We Know Has an Expiration Date," New York: Penguin Books, 2012, page 190. Ken Michaels, retired manager of Visual Communications, Leidos Biomedical Research, is a special volunteer for NCI at Frederick. Image: Shutterstock How well did you do in English class? Are you a grammar nazi? Does the internet drive you nuts with the prevalence of missused words? Same here! Let's find out if you can ace this quiz.We're on the fence about whether or not we approve of all of the new words that are included in the dictionary each year... ok, that's not entirely true. We don't always agree, but nobody asked us. You might be on our side, and rather that many of these words not have been included in a permanent recording of usable words in the English language, but there they are, regardless. In addition to the words that make it into each revised edition of the dictionary, some words are used every day that just aren't words. Let's go over a few of them.If you are a card-carrying member of the grammar police, you're going to know these words already, but even if you pride yourself on your ability to communicate correctly in English, some of these words are so commonly missused that you may have been abusing them all along and not realize it. We'll forgive you, but please check yourself next time you find yourself uttering one of these travesties.Let's get started. TRIVIA How Good Are You at Spelling, Really? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Can You Read the Word If We Give It to You Upside Down? 7 Minute Quiz 7 Min TRIVIA If We Give You One Definition for a Word, Can You Give Us Its Second Meaning? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA EASY Can You Pick The Word That Rhymes? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Do You Know the Definition of These 3-Letter Words? 5 Minute Quiz 5 Min TRIVIA Do You Know Enough to Complete All of These Common Phrases? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Are You Brainsy Enough to Pass This Trivia? Vocabulary Quiz? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Can You Get More Than Half Right on This Tricky SAT Vocab Test? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Can You Tell If These Commonly Missused Words Are Being Used Correctly? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min TRIVIA Can You Get More Than 11 Right on This SAT Words Test? 6 Minute Quiz 6 Min How much do you know about dinosaurs? What is an octane rating? And how do you use a proper noun? Lucky for you, HowStuffWorks Play is here to help. Our award-winning website offers reliable, easy-to-understand explanations about how the world works. From fun quizzes that bring joy to your day, to compelling photography and fascinating lists, HowStuffWorks Play offers something for everyone. Sometimes we explain how stuff works, other times, we ask you, but we're always exploring in the name of fun! Because learning is fun, so stick with us! Playing quizzes is free! We send trivia questions and personality tests every week to your inbox. By clicking "Sign Up" you are agreeing to our privacy policy and confirming that you are 13 years old or over. Copyright © 2021 InfoSpace Holdings, LLC, a System1 Company The clients that see Brooklyn-based psychotherapist Emmy Kleine, LMHC, tend to feel embarrassed about three things: money, sex and their bodies. And they assume these issues are unique to them. They assume their behavior isn't normal.Lena Aburdene Derhally's clients tend to feel most embarrassed at work or in social situations — where they also tend to feel most judged by others. They feel embarrassed about making mistakes. They ruminate about whether they said the wrong thing at a get-together.Maybe you get embarrassed about the same things. Or maybe your embarrassment is triggered by tiny things (which feel massive in the moment), like using the wrong word in conversation or in your writing, like tripping over your own feet. Maybe you get embarrassed when you're put on the spot and don't know the right answer. Maybe you feel embarrassed about driving an old car or not owning a home.Kleine believes that embarrassment is a learned response. We learn from society, from our caregivers, from our teachers, from others whether certain behaviors are acceptable or not. Sometimes we learn these lessons because someone shamed us. Derhally, LPC, believes some people are more easily embarrassed than others because they have a louder, harsher inner critic. "If someone has a strong inner critic, the feelings of embarrassment and shame are quite pervasive and constant. Someone with less of an inner critic can laugh and shrug things off much easier."Where the inner critic stems from is more complex. It might be a combination of personality traits—upright, rigid, perfectionist—and environment, said Derhally, who has a private practice in Washington, D.C. Maybe you had critical or emotionally unavailable caregivers. Maybe you were bullied. Derhally has worked with clients whose inner critics were shaped by their experiences with bullies in junior high and high school. (You can learn more about inner critics on Derhally's podcast.)Other deeper issues may underlie our embarrassment, such as work stress, anxiety and a sinking self-esteem, Kleine said. For instance, a toxic environment at work can make you feel like you're walking on eggshells, and making an error can easily become a source of shame. If your self-esteem is especially low, it doesn't take much to make you feel self-conscious or mortified. In fact, we might even feel embarrassed for simply existing. This is when seeing a therapist is important.In the meantime, there are some things you can do on your own. Below are four tips to get you started.Focus on the future. Derhally suggested asking yourself: Will I remember this in 6 months, a year or 5 years? "Often times we don't even remember the stuff we were embarrassed about and it doesn't hold any significance in the grand scheme of life."Redirect your energies. Instead of dwelling on your embarrassment, refocus your energy on something positive, Derhally said. For instance, instead of replaying the mistake you made at work, refocus on how you can improve. Refocus on what you can learn from your misstep. And if you're still ruminating about the error hours later, refocus on tasks you've been putting off or on reading a book you haven't had time for, she said.Calm the body. Derhally's favorite advice comes from trauma expert Bessel Van der Kolk: "Calm the body and then calm the mind." Which is why she suggested taking deep breaths and centering ourselves first. "I've called them deal with the anxious or embarrassing thoughts in our head." It also might be helpful to listen to a guided meditation, or to stretch your body.Rethink the situation. Kleine suggested using a technique from cognitive behavioral therapy to address any intrusive negative thoughts about your embarrassing situation. That is, jot down the automatic thoughts and feelings that arose during the situation. Jot down what you did in the moment, then come up with a healthier perspective.For instance, you were giving a presentation at work when you completely blanked. Immediately, you started thinking, "Oh no! I'm such an idiot! Of course, I'm messing up. It's what I always do! I'm going to get fired. I just know it." You started panicking, and abruptly left the room. Your healthier perspective is that yes, you did mess up—and so does everyone, in different ways, because perfection doesn't exist. Plus, it's rare that someone is a great presenter without a lot of practice. Your shaky performance simply means you need more training. You decide to take responsibility for your poor presentation, and apologize to your boss. You also hire a speaking coach to help you.Getting embarrassed does have some upsides. For starters, all emotions have purpose, Derhally said. Being embarrassed helps us to relate to others. It helps us to self-reflect and correct our mistakes. "It can also help us fit in to social circles, which is part of our survival."Ultimately, know that it's totally OK to feel embarrassed. As Derhally said, this is a universal experience. You are absolutely not alone. And, if after doing some self-reflecting, you realize that another issue might be swimming beneath the surface, don't hesitate to seek professional support. Photo Courtesy: Pascal Le Segretain/Getty Images A person's final words can be clever and profound. However, many popular figures' last words are just utterly tragic. Famous people like Lucille Ball and James Brown said their dying words while they were gravely ill. But other celebrities spoke their last lines before their unexpected death. From Pocahontas to Robin Williams, here are the heartbreaking last words of 30 famous figures from history. Warning: Ugly crying may ensue. Robin Williams' third wife, Susan Schneider Williams, revealed her husband's last words in an emotional ABC interview. As the couple was getting ready for bed, his final words were, "Goodnight, goodnight." Williams was known as one of the funniest m in the world, making everyone laugh until their bellies ached. He wowed audiences with his acting in films, like Good Will Hunting and Mrs. Doubtfire. Photo Courtesy: Amblin Entertainment/IMDb A Mer Robin Williams passed away in 2014, many celebrities, friends, co-stars and fans paid tribute to him. Heartbroken fans built a memorial with flowers, photographs and letters for him at a house made famous by Mrs. Doubtfire in San Francisco. Touched by the world's support, his wife says that Robin Williams's greatest legacy was bringing joy and happiness to others. In 1997, Princess Diana died in a horrifying car accident. The event shocked more than just the United Kingdom; it shook the world. As an international icon, Diana was known for her activism and fashion. But she also gained popularity for her tumultuous marriage and divorce from Charles, the Prince of Wales. Photo Courtesy: Russ Quinlan/Flickr The paparazzi followed Diana wherever she went, ultimately leading to her death. Her driver, Henri Paul, went 60 mph to escape the paparazzi, but crashed in the Pont d'Alma tunnel. One rescuer at the scene claimed he heard Diana say, "My God, what's happened?" before going into cardiac arrest. Reggie legend, Bob Marley, created many unforgettable hits, including Is This Love and Turn Your Lights Down Low. While he was at the top of his career, Marley was diagnosed with a serious skin cancer called acral lentiginous melanoma in 1977. But Marley decided that the show must go on. Photo Courtesy: Pete Still/Redferns/Getty Images Marley continued to perform and go on tour. In 1980, he collapsed while jogging and was brought to the hospital. The cancer had spread to his brain and throughout his body. In response, Marley cancelled the rest of his tour and sought treatment, but it failed. Before dying, his final words to his son were, "Money can't buy life." Before dying of natural causes, Conrad Hilton said, "Leave the shower curtain on the inside of the tub." Who was he speaking to? Maybe housekeeping. After all, Hilton was in the hotel business until his death. In fact, he founded the international hotel chain, Hilton Hotels, in 1919. Photo Courtesy: J. R. Eyerman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images Hilton bought his first hotel in Cisco, Texas, in 1919. After expanding west to California and east to New York, Hilton took his business global in 1948. Hilton worked until he became ill of pneumonia, passing away at the age of 91 in 1979. Hours before her death, Whitney Houston said, "I'm going to go and see Jesus." On Feb. 11, 2012, she was found unconscious in a bathtub at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles. The coroner's office discovered Houston died from an accidental drowning. Photo Courtesy: Roadside Attractions/IMDb Houston began her music career by singing gospel, but transitioned into pop and R&B in the 1980s. With her powerful voice, Houston moved audiences during her performances. Her memory lives on through her music, with notable songs like I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me) and How Will I Know. Famously known as the King of Pop, Michael Jackson created many No. 1 hits, including Thriller, Billie Jean and Beat It. Many sources report that Jackson's last words were, "I'd like to have some milk. Please, please give me some more." Jackson had been prescribed propofol due to insomnia. However, he became addicted to the drug, calling it "milk." Hours after taking a dose of propofol, Jackson died. 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