
Afterword

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The words in this book are the tip of an unexpected linguistic iceberg. Who knows how many private personal word creations there are in a language? One thing is certain: they are there, in every household, in every social group, and everyone has been a witness at some time or other, if not around the kitchen table then in the garden, bedroom, office or pub.

Linguists have long studied these neologisms as part of their research into children's acquisition of language. The parent with young kids knows how fascinating their private word coinages can be. The rest of the family then pick up these cute forms, and they become part of a household tradition. As you'd expect, linguists have devised a technical term for these dialects of the home: they are called *familects*.

But it isn't just children who invent such words.

As this book shows, coinages can come from anyone at any age and background. Indeed, no species is exempt. Tigger (of *Winnie the Pooh* fame) illustrates the human penchant for such blends as *prezactly* (precisely + exactly). Lewis Carroll was a great inventor of neologisms, especially in 'Jabberwocky'. It is even possible to make a showbiz living out of them, as Stanley Unwin did in 1903. Remember his 'Goldiloppers and the Three Bears'?

Some newspapers and radio programmes have competitions for invented words. The *Washington Post* has a famous one, and I remember one on the Terry Wogan show years ago. When I was presenting *English Now* for Radio 4 in the 1980s, I held a competition in which listeners sent in their favourite examples of home-grown words. The producer and I expected the usual postbag of a couple of hundred cards. That week we got over a thousand. It confirmed my belief that everyone has a linguistic story to tell.

The words in this book may be new, but the processes of word formation that they use are not. Forms such as **bimbensioner** illustrate a standard way of making new words – by blending existing words. Some (such as **bingle**) tap into the ancient phonetic properties of the language. Most inventions will stay private, personal and unknown. Very occasionally, one or two will prove popular and end up as a permanent addition to the language – but, of course, only if people hear about them. That could be one of the surprising consequences of reading this book.