

A Language Lesson

by

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My grandfather went to great lengths to instill the need for correct grammar and word usage in his grandchildren. Unfortunately, today, most people and many academicians in particular, do not have the wherewithal to communicate verbal or written discourse effectively and/or correctly using the English language. I am no means perfect in my use of our language, but. . .

While many people may not know how to express themselves clearly, there is no excuse for academicians and/or graduate students not to use proper grammar and correct word usage. For example, there was doctoral student who was not able to differentiate using the words **their**, **they're**, and **there**. Many other graduate students fill their writings with slang, incorrect word usage and expletives.

While the English language can be confusing, the need to express oneself clearly and succinctly is needed. The inability to express thoughts and ideas clearly can lead to social breakdown and turmoil. For example was the politicizing of “political correctness” in the 1990s. More recently “gender identification” has similarly impacted the English language structure.

Since the Renaissance era (14th -17th centuries), linguists have attempted to create a English language [taxonomy](#). Problematic though has been the complexity and ever changing word usage that has prevented the development of a clear understanding of the English structure. Consequently linguists have, more recently, opted for defining “word categories” such as the parts of speech. [universalteacher.org.uk]

Two other word categories that have been developed are lexical and functional categories which can apply to English grammar. However there are five categories that may be more applicable to presenting thought and ideas clearly.

Homophones are words that sound alike but have different meanings and spellings. They are often they are often misused because people do not take the time to learn the difference between the words. Words such as **there** and **their**, and **or** and **ore** are examples of **homophones**. Another common example are **to**, **too**, and **two**.

Another category is called **homographs**. These are words that are spelled the same, but may differ in origin, meaning, and pronunciation. Examples include:

bow	front part of a ship	used to shoot arrows
bear	to support or carry	the animal
present	a gift	a place in time

Homonyms are a third category can be as confusing as homophones and homographs. They have the characteristics of both homophones and homographs where the definitions overlap. The word homonym can be used as a synonym for both homophone *and* homograph. Example:

Homograph	Lead as in metal	Lead as in guiding others
Homophone	Lead as in guiding others	Led as in having guided others
Homonym	Lead as in metal	Led as in having guided others

There are two other categories that we need to be aware of. First when new words are added to a dictionary or become more or less common, they are called **Neologisms**. Smartphone and Google (to conduct a search) are two examples of neologism.

The fifth classification (**Deixis**) deals with words that cannot be fully understood without additional information. Such words are **deictic**. They have a fixed definition but their meaning varies depending on time, place, and/or culture. Examples include:

	Past	Present
bachelor	a young knight	lowest degree issued by a university, an unmarried man
backlog	largest log in a hearth	large number of jobs to be done
buxom	compliant or obedient	large-breasted

Another deictic word that is in common use today is **Intuitive**. Dating back to the mid 1500s, intuitive, derived from the Latin word *intuitivus*, meant “coming from direct seeing or immediate understanding.” [\[Wikitionary\]](#)

Today’s definition, although similar to its origin, intuitive has a different meaning and impact. [Cambridge Dictionary](#) defines it as:

1. Based on feelings rather than facts or proof
2. Able to know or understand something because of feelings rather than facts or proof

Intuitive is often used to describe how a website is designed and people navigate it. The concept of intuitive design is based on how well a person can navigate from one area in a website to another without having any thought of what to do next. For

example, when filling out an online form, it is **intuitive** to press the submit button once the form is completed. However there is a problem with this concept.

The definition of intuitive is based on **feelings** and not **facts**. Feelings are emotions often based on social culture or background. If the website design does not match up with the user's background, it is more difficult for the user to navigate the website. For example, if a user wants to know about a specific job or task in the Army, they would need to know the difference between DA, AR, TM, TC, FM, and 32 other abbreviations for types of publications and forms. [[User's Guide for Army Publications and Forms](#)]

This can be confusing because the army's culture is different from the civilian world. This is true of various occupations, interests, geographic regions, and subcultures within the same area. For example a person may be born and raised in a specific geographic region, and yet a prevailing subculture(s) can affect how that person feels, believes, and acts. An excellent example of culture and subcultures can be found in the State of Louisiana.

While Louisiana is located in the South, the state has three primary subcultures – the upland, the lowland, and New Orleans. However even these three regions are infused with multiple subcultures. [[Louisiana's Three Folk Regions](#)]

Don't be mistaken, intuitive thought is not just based on social culture(s). As mentioned, intuitiveness is based on feelings and emotions. In other words, intuitiveness is based on a person's psychological makeup, which is impacted by his/her social environment.

Therefore, when someone says that a website is not intuitive, they need to explain why it is not and provide examples on how they believe the website can be made better.

What is the shortest word in the English language that contains the letters: abcdef?

Answer: feedback. Don't forget that feedback is one of the essential elements of good communication.

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“Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.”

Rita Mae Brown