
Knock-knock words

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A foray into an oddity of word-making

Introduction

One of the most remarkable features of the English word stock is its extraordinary – and to some, annoying – abundance of abbreviations. Because of their ubiquity, these, in their myriad forms and guises, have been thoroughly researched and theorised by a number of authors (see, *inter alia*, Algeo 1975, Cannon 1989 and Rodríguez 1992). Arguably, both the general principle of linguistic economy and the need for euphemism account for the creation of most abbreviations. In the playful, ever-bantering realm of slang, however, many items are abbreviated just for the fun of it. Humour, rather than linguistic energy-saving, accounts for clippings like *phiz* (from *physiognomy*), meaning ‘face’, acronyms such as *BOBFOC* (from ‘Body Off Baywatch, Face Off Crime-watch’) for ‘a person with an attractive body but an ugly face’ and blend words like *chavalanche* for ‘a gang of chavs’. Of all types of abbreviations, those based on homonyms are the most humorous. These often take the form of acronyms or rhyming slang words, as in *Sarah* (from ‘Single and rich and happy’), used to designate a woman who has made her cash in the divorce courts,¹ and the adjective *mutton* (a shortening of *Mutt and Jeff*), meaning ‘deaf’. All these, I believe, are used more for comic effect than for any other reason.

Being a slangman by vocation and avocation, I have long had a fascination with a particular kind of jocular abbreviation, a kind that, so far as I am aware, has no name and remains formally undescribed. What seems to be one of the earliest instances of this is provided by none other than Humpty Dumpty himself in the celebrated opening lines of Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky*, ‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe’. Unlike the other blends in the poem, the

word *wabe* hides a sentence that, rather in the manner of a joke, leads one to its meaning. Here is how Alice and Humpty unravel its etymology:

‘And “*the wabe*” is the grass-plot round a sundial, I suppose?’ said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.

‘Of course it is. It’s called “*wabe*,” you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it –’

‘And a long way beyond it on each side,’ Alice added.

(L. Carroll 1994, *Through the Looking-Glass*, 1st edn 1872, pp. 90–91)

To put this category of word-formation on the intellectual map, I have settled on calling it ‘knock-knock punning’, since the resulting lexical item (a ‘knock-knock word’, hereafter KKW) very much resembles the punning word in a knock-knock joke. Compare, for example, the morphological structure of *wabe* and that of, say, *lettuce* and *Yula* in the following classic jokes:



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Knock, knock
Who's there?
Lettuce.
Lettuce who?
Lettuce in and you'll find out.

Knock, knock
Who's there?
Yula.
Yula who?
You'll apologise for not letting me in straight
away.

Outside the province of jokelore, this type of abbreviation appears to have escaped notice in the literature on word-formation, perhaps because its productivity, besides being quite low, can best be seen in the most informal – and therefore supposedly ‘abnormal’ and ‘disreputable’ – levels of discourse. Of course, one does not have to be a genius to be aware that most KKWs stand as much chance of surviving as a snowball in hell. However, they are to be cherished for the unique insight they provide into language play and linguistic creativity at large. In what follows, I will describe the structural and semantic features of these words and present a glossary with a sprinkling of specimens gathered from a variety of sources.

The shape of KKWs

Delineating jocular words, I gather, is one of the trickiest tasks a lexicologist can face (see Read 1983). Sometimes, though, the principles underlying their formation appear to be quite simple. Such is the case with KKWs. From the point of view of their morphological structure, these words share common ground with jocular shortenings like *Arthur* (pronounced with TH-fronting, i.e. *Arfur*) for ‘half a pint’² and *Ron* for ‘later on’ (as in ‘Saving it for Ron’– K. Brooks 2005a, *Kissing the Rain*, p. 81), for they both result from the reduction of more than one word and their humorous effect sometimes stems from homophony. The word *gofer* for ‘a minion or assistant’ is a good case in point. Originally based on the command ‘go for this, go for that’, the term becomes all the more hilarious by virtue of its homophony with *gopher* and the happy metaphor that this formal link conjures up. Still, the basic difference between a homophone-based shortening and a KKW is that the former stands for the phrase from which it derives, whereas the latter is linked to its meaning in a more convoluted, indirect manner.

As a form of abbreviated joke, these words are closely akin to elliptical witticisms like *mostly* ‘coffee with a lot of milk’, a family word derived from ‘it is *mostly* milk’ (Dickson 2007: s.v. *Coffee Junior*). Interestingly, the relationship between these witticisms and KKWs can best be seen by observing the playful mutations of the (originally insulting) word *Benny* ‘a Falkland Islander’. The term, coined by British soldiers fighting in the Falklands in 1982, was inspired by the fact that many islanders wore woolly bobble hats similar to that of *Benny*, the likeable half-wit character in the UK TV soap *Crossroads*. As the nickname was clearly disrespectful, an edict went out to all ranks that islanders were not to be referred to as *Bennies*. But, of course, a rose by any other name smells just as sweet: to the soldiers, kelpers became known as *Stills*, since they were ‘*still* Bennies’. Soon after, further orders were issued forbidding the use of the new witticism, which came to be replaced by *Andies*, a KKW based on the sentence ‘*And* ’e’s still a *Benny*’.

Originating in such a fanciful way, many KKWs are thought up on the spur of the moment to suit a given situation, their meaning being determined, à la Humpty Dumpty, by their own coiners. Witness the following (apparent) nonce uses of the word *canardly* – *canhardly*. Its meaning is carefully glossed in each quote not just to ensure that the jocularism is understood, but also, I would argue, because the accompanying explanation is as much part of the humour as the word itself.

My son Billy has an old heap. I think it's a Canhardly. He can hardly get it out of the driveway! (M. Berle 1989, *Milton Berle's Private Joke File*, p. 1)

Boy ... that's a CANARDLY!! We canardly wait!!! We will be there at the appointed time, hopefully. (Message on PT Cruiser Club Forum – www.ptcruiserclub.org; posted on 8 May 2001)

In our youth, my brother and I were famous fishermen. Famous for catching nothing edible. “Canardlies” were our specialty, as in ‘can hardly see them’. (Sean Kelly, ‘Life Matters’, interview programme on ABC Radio National, 26 August 2003)

Here in California, we do the “canardly” New Year's party; we gather early, then watch the ball drop in New York, because we can hardly stay up till midnight! (D. Phillips 2006, *Happy Holidays from the Diva of Do-Ahead*, p. 19)

One-offs aside, there are a few KKWs that have won a true place on the fringes of language. The word *canardly* itself has come to be used to denote, among other things, a mongrel dog (because you can hardly tell what it is), a very small diamond (because you can hardly see it) and, in Australian slang, an Oriental person, especially a Chinese or Japanese (because – hold on to your hats – they can hardly see). One need only turn to a good slang dictionary, like Partridge (1984), Lighter (1994), Wilkes (1996), Green (2005), Thorne (2005) or Dalzell and Victor (2006), to see that none of these usages has been recorded, although we do know they have been around for quite some time. Indeed, equally absent from Wilkes (1996), Thorne (2005) and Dalzell and Victor (2006) is the familiar compound *Rolls Canardly* for ‘an old banger’ (because it rolls down one hill and can hardly make it up the next), yet Partridge (1984: s.v. *Rolls-can-hardly*) dates the word to about 1950 and my own citational evidence suggests it has been in fairly widespread use throughout the English-speaking world for several decades now.³ As it happens, a possible forerunner is likely to be found in the tongue-in-cheek definition (and cod etymology) of *canard* as a ‘story one canardly believe’, whose appearance in jokes and humorous anecdotes goes back at least to the mid-1920s:

The boy furrowed his brow over the examination question.

“What is a canard?”

At last he wrote down his reply. “Something you canardly believe.”

He still finds it painful to sit down.

(S. Anderson 1924, *Sparks of Laughter*, p. 247)⁴

As this example indicates, much of the charm of this type of word resides precisely in the way it exploits certain features of allegro speech, like the dropped aitch of *can (h)ardly*, thus making it quite hard to unravel its intended meaning. We can distinguish two main classes of KKWs, depending on whether they result in homophonic puns or completely new forms. Of these two classes, the former is particularly hilarious, for homophony clearly enhances the intrinsically humorous effect of a hidden joke. Nothing better illustrates this than a famous anecdote concerning Mark Twain. At a dinner given by his close and wealthy friend Henry Rogers, another guest sitting near Twain said, ‘Your friend’s money is *tainted*’. Twain quickly responded, ‘It’s twice *tainted*. *Taint* yours and *taint* mine’ (cited in Bier 1968:158).

Both classes of KKWs, homophonic puns and new forms, can be forged in either of two ways, namely, by concertinaing two or more contiguous elements into a single item or by joining non-adjacent words. In both cases, the boundaries of the source words may be kept perfectly distinct or may merge. Predictably enough, when welding the source words, shortening often occurs, as is seen with the punning blend *musty*, a clipping of the sentence ‘I *must eat* some more’. Among those KKWs formed by joining non-adjacent words, a good example is the British wartime expression *Bob Hope* ‘a V-1 flying bomb’, deriving, with more than a small dose of black humour, from the sentence ‘*Bob* down and *hope* for the best’.

Of course, clever specimens may be created by combining the two techniques, but they are indeed few and far between. The one example I have in my entire corpus is the Australianism *Scott Neville* for a socially inept, friendless individual, that is, an ubergeek who’s *got* no friends and *never will*.

How funny can a KKW be?

It may seem a truism to say that KKWs are jocular. But are all of them jocular in the same way and to the same extent? Since humour exists along a continuum, some KKWs may be nonsensical or mildly amusing (*doofer*, from ‘It will *do for* later’), others may be outrageously funny (*couldja house*, from ‘*Could you* love me enough to live in it?’), and still others may be clever, funny and cruel at the same. That the last two are the most common is not at all surprising. They originate as disguised substitutes for other words, but their playful make-up does not make them in any way more innocent than their non-knock-knock equivalents. *Andy* ‘a Falkland Islander’ is no less derogatory than *Benny* or *Still*. In a covertly devious way, the KKW clearly magnifies the offensive intent. As can be seen from the glossary in the next section, this has led to a proliferation of dysphemisms (of all kinds, including so-called ‘euphemistic dysphemisms’ or ‘quasi-euphemisms’)⁵ in two areas which are typically portrayed in informal discourse as something laughable:

- Undesirable social types (*Scott*, *Scott Neville*, *Billy-and-Dave*, *gofer*, *bitser*), including ugly people (*butter face*) and people from stigmatised ethnic groups (*Andy*, *canardly*).

- Old, cheap, faulty or ugly objects (*couldja house, gawf, leaverite, Rolls Canardly, nodad*).

Glossary

The glossary below contains a number of KKW's compiled from a range of primary and secondary sources. Due to the oral and improvisational nature of this category of words, it would be naive to claim that I have collected each and every specimen used in English. Not only is the Anglosphere too big for any single researcher to make such a claim, but even bigger is the creative capacity of its speakers, especially when it comes to making up words for communication within small speech communities, including, of course, their own families. The family being a real cauldron of linguistic experimentation (see Read 1962, Randall 2005 and Dickson 1998, 2007), many KKW's undoubtedly started life as private family expressions before spreading into wider usage. Hence the inclusion here of words like *ashew* and *musty*. I cannot emphasise too strongly that blind luck often plays an important part in the hunt for freak words like the ones we are dealing with here (being always on the prowl, alas, only makes the task slightly less serendipitous), yet I do hope the terms I have collected give a good overall picture of the phenomenon.

Each entry in the glossary comprises a short definition of the term, its variants (if any), a geographical label and an explanation of its origin. As I am not one to entertain etymological myths (at least not deliberately), items whose alleged knock-knock origin has been shown to be a hoax are excluded from the glossary. The funny-sounding Australianism *chunder* 'to vomit', commonly thought to derive from 'watch under', is one such.⁶ Wherever possible, I have illustrated the words with citations, some of which antedate the first written attestations given by other authors. These citations are taken from published material (newspapers, works of fiction, etc.) as well as from online postings, conversations (personal and overheard) and reports from friends and other informants. The bracketed initials following many of the definitions and variants are those of the secondary sources, mostly dictionaries, in which I have attested the words. The initials placed after a definition refer to the source(s) in which I have attested the form given as a

headword. These sources, with their abbreviated titles, are the following:

AL – Baker 1966
 AMT – Taylor 1948
 CDS2 – Green 2005
 CDSUE – Partridge 1989
 DAC – Wilkes 1996
 DAS – Wentworth and Flexner 1967
 DCS3 – Thorne 2005
 DD – Johansen 1991
 DEOD – Rawson 1981
 DPS – Lewis 2003
 DSUE8 – Partridge 1984
 DTD – Barrett 1999–2007
 ECD – Esar 1943
 FW1 – Dickson 1998
 FW2 – Dickson 2007
 IWR – Russell 1944
 JF – Factor, 2005
 JRW – Ware 1909
 MASD – Lambert 2004
 NP – Dalzell and Victor 2006
 NTC2 – Spears 1995
 OED2 – *Oxford English Dictionary* 2002
 PB – Chinn and Thorne 2002
 PDAS – Baker 1941
 RP – Roger's Profanisaurus 2007

Andy. A Falkland Islander.

Used by the British troops during the Falklands War. *Andy, Benny* and *Still* are a prime example of how jocularisms can be formed sequentially through a process of chain derivation (see quotation). It is claimed that *Andy* was eventually banned and replaced by *Yeti*, a KKW derived from the sentence *And yet 'e's still a Benny*; in all likelihood, this is no more than an urban legend.

WIWIFI (When I was in the Falkland Islands) we were specifically ordered not to call Falkland Islanders "Bennies". They were then referred to as "Stills" – still Bennies. This was also outlawed. The islanders then became known as "Andies" – and 'e's still a Benny. (Letter, *The Sunday Times*, London, 23 May 1999, p. 20)

ashew. Either side of the first two steps of a staircase. (FW2) Also **asyou** (FW1).

Family word; more fully defined by Dickson (2007) as 'either side of the first two steps of a staircase, convenient places to put stuff that belongs upstairs'. From the admonitory remark **As you go up, bring the toys with you**.

Billy-and-Dave. A person with no friends. (DCS3) British. From *Billy no-mates, they've all gone*.

bitser. A mongrel. (CDS2, DAC, DSUE8, PDAS) Also **bitza** (CDS2), **bitsa**, **bitzer**.

Australian and British. From *bits o' this and bits o' that*. Like its synonym *mongrel*, the word is used as both a noun and an adjective to refer to a dog of no definable type or breed, a person of mixed race or an object resulting from the combination

of different types (for example, a mongrel guitar, as in the second quote below). Partridge (1984) and Green (2005) derive the word from the phrase *bits and pieces*. See **summer dog** under **summer soup**.

“[R]jafi’s a bitser.”¶ “Hell’s that?”¶ A bitser, Andy. The same as Marta. The same as me. Part Indian, in his case. (J. Le Carré 1997, *The Tailor of Panama*, p. 76)

Clapton had retired his faithful old “bitser” Strat, Blackie, in 1987, and started to play his new signature models soon after. (T. Bacon 2000, *50 Years of Fender*, p. 92)

Bob Hope. A German V-1 flying bomb (more commonly known by the terms *doodlebug* and *buzzbomb*). (AMT, DSUE8) Also **Bob ’Ope** (IWR).

British; used during World War II. From **Bob down and hope for the best**, the name *Bob Hope* being a pun on the name of the legendary comedian and actor (1903–2003). Whence *Bob Hope Alley* (aka *Doodlebug Alley*), an area of the South East of England which became the flight path of the V-1 bombs aimed at London. Apparently, the punning potential of the name *Bob Hope* was the basis for many a wartime joke: Q: Why is a ‘doodlebug’ like Bob Hope? A: First you bobs, and then you ’opes. (Emrich 1945: 79).

Londoners had a new name for the German rocket bombs: “Bob Hopes.” (*Time*, New York, 25 December 1944)

Our cabbie had a marvelous sense of humor. We were discussing the buzz bombs. They’re called doodlebugs by Londoners and Bob Hope bombs by some[.] (From a letter dated 24 July 1944 – R. Norwalk 1999, *Dearest Ones*, p. 41)

brasco. A toilet. (CDS2, DAC, DCS3, MASD, NP) Also **bisco**, **brascoe** (CDS2), **braska** (DD), **brasker** (AL).

Australian; used since the 1950s. Probably from where the **brass knobs go** (see Dennis 2003 and Wilkes 1996). The word is often pseudo-etymologised as being derived from a toilet manufacturer named *Brass Co*. There is no evidence whatsoever that such a company has ever existed (Lambert 2004).

OK, no one really wants to reach down into the brasco to retrieve their wedding ring, false teeth, spectacles, toothbrush, wallet or watch. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 June 2006)

butter face. A girl or woman with an attractive body but an ugly face. A classic case of ‘nice body, shame about the boat race’. Also **butter-face** (NP), **butterface** (CDS2), **buttah face**, **buttaface**.

American, British and Australian. From *She has a great body, but her face* ... Hence the adjective **butter-faced** (as in a *butter-faced bird*) and the related pun **butter body** for a girl that has a nice-looking face but an ugly body. An unattractive girl with the undesirable qualities of a butter face and a butter body is sometimes referred to as a

doublebutter. An American synonym for *butter face* is **butterhead** (also spelt **buttahead**, **buttah head**, **butter head**), from *Everything looks good, but her head*.

You’re a buttahead and a blockhead too. / Bets believe when you’re sucking / I ain’t looking at you. (Lyrics to the rap song ‘Buttahead’, by Southern Drama, from the album ‘Move It – Volume 1’, 2005)

canardly. 1. A mixed breed dog, a mongrel. Also **cannardly**, **canardly dog**.

American. So called because *you can hardly tell what breed of dog it is*. A synonym is **bitser**. See also **Rolls Canardly**.

Meanwhile, you could try the method used by a Naperville, IL, resident who tells his insurance company he has a “canardly dog.” Luckily, the company, so far, has not checked a breed book. (*Chicago Tribune*, 14 March 2007)

George was a mix of bearded collie, Tibetan terrier, puli, and Portuguese water dog—in other words, a “cannardly.” (From the front matter of J. Downey & C. J. Lau 2007, *The Dog Lover’s Companion to New England*)

2. A tiny diamond. Also **can’ardly**; **canardly diamond** (FW2).

American. So called because *you can hardly see it*.

And remember the smaller the stone the greater the chance it’s real. Even if mounted in silver. Gotta love those canardly diamonds. (Message on Kinzli’s California Metal Detecting Forum – www.cadetecing probboards4.com; posted on 20 July 2004)

Genuine Aussie Can’ardlies (Headline, *JCK – Jewelers’ Circular Keystone*, 1 March 2006)

3. An Oriental person, especially a Chinese or Japanese. Also **can’ardly**.

Australian and New Zealand use. A derogatory term based on the sentence *He/She can hardly see*, in allusion to the distinctive shape of Oriental eyes.

4. (*usually with initial capital*) In over-the-line, a senior division for male players aged forty or over.

American. See the 1993 citation below.

They began watching a woman with dye-damaged hair, who’d probably graduated from high school during Eisenhower’s presidency, weaving in little circles with a geezer in flipflops, jeans, and a T-shirt that said “Canardly” on it.¶ Fin explained that all “Over-The-Line” players knew that it stood for “Canardly get it up.” This as opposed to players in the other divisions like “Cannever,” or “Canalways,” or “Caneasy.” (J. Wambaugh 1993, *Finnegan’s Week*, p. 240)

Over the years, Cummings and Buechler played in the other senior divisions, from Canardly to Cannever and then Cadaver. (*The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 8 July 2005)

5. **to have the canardlies**. To feel tired.

Secret family expression. From *I can hardly do*

anything. Reported in private correspondence from Hanford, California, March 2000.

ceefa. A cat. (NP)

New Zealand. So called because *c* is *for* *cat*. *Ceeefa*, along with its common variant spelling *Ceefer*, has long been used as a cat's name in several English-speaking countries ('She was reunited with 10-year-old Ceefa yesterday.' – *The Evening Standard*, London, 15 September 2005). This technique also accounts for such pet names as *Deefer* ('Deefer, by the way, is our dog.' – K. Brooks 2005b, *Lucas*, p. 25) and *Peefer* (from *p* for *puss*).

comforts. Casual visitors. (RP)

British. So named because *they just come for today*.

cosif. The perineum. (RP) Also **causeif**.

British. So called '*cos if it wasn't there, there would be a big hole / your guts would fall out*.'

couldja house. An old, usually rural, house that is not (or appears not to be) fit for human habitation. (FW1)

Family word. From the ironic question *Could you love me enough to live in it?*

deefa. A dog. (NP)

New Zealand. So called because *d* is *for* *dog*. See *ceefa*.

doofer. 1. A half-smoked cigarette saved for later. (DCS3, NTC2) Also **dufer** (NTC2), **doofa** (DCS3), **doofah**; **doover**, **doovah**, **doovah-dah** (CDS2).

British and American. So called because *it will do for later*. The word *doofer* is also used in several varieties of English as a synonym of *whatsit* or *thingamajig* (and, in some areas of the UK, as a slang designation of a remote control). However, when used in this sense, the word may be formally and semantically associated with other words starting with *doo-*, such as *doo-dah* (BrEng), *doo-brie* (BrEng) and *doodad* (AmEng), which suggests (*pace* OED2) that perhaps we are dealing with a different word.

Paddy had finished his cigarette and he lit another from it and then doofered it, a habit from boyhood, a do-for-tomorrow. His pockets had to be emptied of doofers from areas to time, and aired. (M.L. Settle 1995, *Celebration*, p. 225)

2. **that's a doofer.** An expression used to indicate that something will do for the time being (= that will do for now). Also **that's a dofer**.

American. The variant form *dofer* is recorded by Dickson (2007), who glosses the word as '[s]omething that is not perfect, but will "do for" now'.

"Hey, how about if I throw my bike in the trunk and drive you home?" He glared at me for a few seconds and nodded, the fierce expression still on his face. "Yep, I reckon that's a doofer." (B. Whittington 2005, *Living with Fred*, p. 18)

doublebutter. See **butter face**.

escargot. A young man walking arm in arm with his girlfriend. (CDS3)

American; used by college students since the

1980s. So called, according to Eble (1996: 78), because *she* is *his cargo*.

gawf. A cheap red apple. (CDS2, DSUE8)

British. Perhaps a shortening of the sentence *Go for more* (Green 2005).

A cheap red-skinned fruit, known to costers as "gawfs," is rubbed hard, to look bright and feel soft, and is mixed with apples of a superior description. "Gawfs are sweet and sour at once," I was told, "and fit for nothing but mixing." (H. Mayhew 1861, *London Labour and the London Poor*, p. 61)

gazunder. A chamber pot. (NP) Also **guzunder** (DSUE8, NP), **gazunda** (DSUE8, FW1, PB), **gasunder** (PB), **gusunder** (PB), **guzunda** (RP), **gezzunder**, **gozunder**, **gozunda**.

British (dialect use) and Australian. So called because *it goes under the bed*. The word is in use in several English dialects, such as those of the East, the West Midlands and the North East. Cf. the homophonous verb *gazunder*, a blend of *gazump* and *under*.

Er ... there's not going to be anything like enough vases for them all, even if I use the *guzunder* ... (T. Pratchett 1995, *Maskerade*, p. 146)

The *gadgie's cakky's* in the *guzunder*. (*The Guardian*, London, 8 February 2006)

2. (*always spelt guzunder*) In cricket, a delivery which, after bouncing, stays very low and beats the batsman.

So named because *it goes under the bat*.

Batting last here, however, will not be a boot-filling exercise, and Ponting received one *guzunder* from Harmison yesterday that left him shaping as if for French cricket. (*The Guardian*, London, 23 July 2005)

3. (*always spelt guzunder, Guzunder*) In railway parlance: see quotation. (DSUE8)

So called because *it goes under the bridge*.

A specialised access platform mounted on a specially built **Rail Vehicle**. It is capable of providing a safe working platform immediately under the **Arch Soffits** of the **Viaduct** or **Bridge** it is standing on. Nicknamed the **Guzunder**. (I. Ellis 2006, *British Railway Engineering Encyclopaedia*, s.v. *Viaduct Inspection Unit (VIU)*)

gofer. An employee who performs menial tasks such as running errands and answering phones; an assistant. (CDS2, NP, OED2) Also **go-fer** (OED2), **gopher** (CDS2, NP, OED2), **go-for** (NP), **gofa**.

Originally American; now also used in British and Australian English. From *go for this*, *go for that*, influenced by *gopher*. McCrum *et al.* (2003: 127) note that the term was earlier used to denote 'the free matches at cheap restaurants – that is, the ones that customers were allowed to *go for*'.

Some bosses see all workers as a cross between a gofer and a personal servant. (C. Donovan 2001, *Internships for Dummies*, p. 131)

justin. A half-gallon container. (NP)

New Zealand. Dalzell and Victor (2006)

etymologise it thus: 'Filled with beer, **just in** case you run out'. Cf. the Australian expression for Justin 'just in case': We'll do the shopping for Justin. (Recorded, Melbourne, August 2003).

leaverite. A rock or mineral specimen of little or no value; a pseudofossil. (DTD, FW1) Also **leverite** (DTD).

American, British and Australian; used by rockhounds and fossil collectors. The word, first recorded by Barrett (1999–2007) in 1979, derives from *Leave 'er right there / where you found it* (because it is not worth taking home). Note that the *-ite* ending is typically used in the formation of rock and mineral names.

All that you can legally do now is pick up crystals lying on the ground. The problem is that without diggers exposing the quartz and tossing the "leaverites," there is hardly anything on the ground. (Reader's letter, *Rocks & Minerals*, September–October 2002, p. 297)

"I went out last week too."¶ "How'd you do?"¶ "Just some small fish verts, but mostly PORs [sc plain old rocks] and leaverite." (F.A. Garcia & D.S. Miller 1998, *Discovering Fossils*, p. 29)

musty. (Of food) delicious.

Family word. From *I must eat some more*.

Have you tried the cake? It's musty. (Recorded, Belfast, Northern Ireland, October 2003)

nodad. A flamboyant, tacky or outdated piece of clothing. Also **no-dad**.

British. From *No, dad, don't make me wear that*. The word was coined by comedian Jim Davidson in the BBC1 snooker-based quiz show *Big Break*, which he co-hosted with snooker player John Virgo from 1991 to 2002. Davidson used this word with reference to the jazzy – some would say ill-advised – waistcoats worn by Virgo. It is also employed attributively, as in *nodad jumper*.

non me. A lie. (CDS2, DSUE8, JRW)

British. Used mostly by Cockneys from 1820 to the 1900s. From the Italian *Non mi ricordo* 'I do not remember'. *Non mi ricordo* were the words made famous by Teodoro Majocchi, one of the key witnesses against Queen Caroline at her trial for adultery in 1820.

Rolls Canardly. (*Sometimes hyphenated*) a dilapidated old car. (CDS2, DD, DSUE8) Also **Rolls-can-hardly** (DSUE8), **Rolls Can-hardly** (CDS2), **Rolls Cannardly**, **Rolls Kanardly**, **Rolls Knardly**, **Rolls Kenardly**, **Rolls Kenardly**.

Originally Australian; now also used in British and American English. So called because *it rolls down one hill and can hardly make it up the next*. The word is modelled on the brand name *Rolls-Royce*; hence the use of *Canardly* with other car names (e.g. *Ford Canardly*).

I almost didn't make it to the show today in my new Rolls Canardly. (*Bozo's Circus*, WGN-TV, US TV show, September 1973)

'There y'are,' he said. 'What you fancy? Straight Eight, Austin Ruby, Rolls-Canardly?' The choice of

cars was nearly all black, but as they came to the first off the road, the possibilities were cut down in other ways. (B. Ashley 2003, *Johnnie's Blitz*, p. 166)

Scott. A friendless person. Also **scott** (CDS2, JF), **scottie** (JF), **scotty** (JF), **Scott No-Friends**, **Scott No-Mates**.

Australian. So called because *he's/she's got no friends*. The word is also informed by *Nigel (no-friends/no-mates)*. Green (2005) dates the word to the 1990s, but derives it from 'the stereotypical middle-class name *Scott*, and the perceived social inadequacies of such public-school educated young men'.

Hey, scott, where are all your mates, scotty, scotty? (J. Factor 2005, *Kidspeak*)

Scott Neville. An unpopular, friendless person; a pathetic loser. (MASD)

Australian. An elaboration of *Scott* (q.v.), the hidden joke being *He's/She's got no friends, and never will*. Like *Nigel*, *Barry* and *Scott*, the word *Neville* is used on its own to refer to a socially inept, friendless individual, a nerd or a geek (e.g. 'As he started to write the ticket I said, "Turn it up Neville, I was only doin' 101.'" – P. Vautin 1995, *Turn It Up!*, p. 109; quoted in Dalzell and Victor 2006); thence *Neville no-mates*, *Neville no-friends* and *Neville Nobody* (e.g. 'McClennan was a Neville Nobody before last year's series but he made an immediate impact on the international scene.' – *The New Zealand Herald*, 13 Oct 2006). Accordingly, *Scott Neville* arose from the happy combination of two independent words with the same meaning.

Only three people have accepted my invitation so far. I'm starting to feel like a Scott Neville (Reported in private correspondence from Brisbane, QL, Australia, 25 February 2004)

snot. Margarine.

Family word. So called because *it's not butter*. The term was reported to me in 2001 by a college student from Bradford, West Yorkshire (UK). Note the catchy American TV jingle of the 1970s, 'If you think it's butter, but it's not, it's Chiffon!', which was an inspiration for many a snot joke.

summer creases. Wrinkles or unwanted creases in a military uniform.

American (military use). See quotation.

His blue shirt had what Air Force security police would call "summer creases," meaning "sum'er here, sum'er there." I guess proper ironing techniques weren't included in the rent-a-cop's how-to manual. (D. Sherman 1997, *Above Black*, p. 15)

summer soup. Non-specific soup. (CDSUE)

British; used by Royal Navy submariners. From *Some o' this and some o' that* – whence also **summer dog** 'a mongrel'.

tainted money. Money that comes from an illegal or morally objectionable source. (DSUE8, ECD)

Jocularly said to be so called because *taint yours and taint mine* or because *taint for you and*

taint for me. Cf. other jokes that exploit the same pun: ‘Tainted money? ’Taint enough of it around for my organization!’ (J. Van Til 2005, ‘Nonprofit Organizations and Social Institutions’, p. 55); ‘The only trouble with tainted profits, they say, is “there ’taint enough of them.”’ (J. R. Boatright 1999, *Ethics in Finance*, p. 107).

School pupils debated Rockefeller ethics, publicists issued lengthy statements, vaudeville comedians cracked jokes. “Sure John D.’s money is tainted – ’taint for you and ’taint for me!” (J. K. Winkler 1929, *John D. Rockefeller*, p. 143)

twofer. 1. A cigar sold at the price of two for five cents (DAS); hence, a cheap cigar (CDS2, DAS, OED2). Also **toofer**, **toofah** (CDS2).

American; obsolete. From **two for five cents**. Partridge (1984) has *two-fer* ‘[a] cigarette: mostly R[oyal] N[avy]: since ca. 1950’, from **two for a penny**, and *toofer* ‘[a]n expensive cigar: ? mainly Cockney: ca. 1910–20’, probably from **two for a crown** (a mere guesstymology, as he readily admits) or from **too fucking dear** (another guesstymology suggested by Partridge’s editor, Paul Beale). The following citation, unearthed by Popik (1996), antedates the OED2’s earliest attestation of the word by thirty-two years.

TWO-FER-FIVE—GUS STOPPELKAM has had great success with his “Twofers” at his new cigar store at No. 240 Grand street. “Twofers” is the name applied facetiously to Gus’s workingman’s favorite. They are cigars that are sold at two for five cents, and the run on them has been so great that the multitude of purchasers have discarded the long name by which they are properly known, and adopted the more familiar and affectionate appellation of “Twofers.” Gus has just purchased another instalment of a few hundred thousands of these favorite “Twofers.” (*New York Dispatch*, 22 March 1885, p. 5, col. 2)

2. A coupon that enables the holder to purchase two items or services (originally, two tickets to a theatre show) for the price of one (DAS, OED2); hence, a coupon to purchase an item or service (originally, a theatre ticket) at a reduced price.

Originally American. From **two for the price of one**. The first citation below antedates the OED2’s record of this usage by twenty-five years.

With the decline of the New York theatrical season has come an increase in the use of the “twofer” system by managers who are not yet quite ready to send their attractions to the storehouse and would rather have them play at bargain rates than close them. The “twofers” are two-for-ones – two tickets to the same production offered at the price of one. (*Time*, New York, 19 May 1923)

3. Also used in various technical and transferred senses, such as (a) an item that is selling two for the price of one; (b) a two-CD or two-LP set; a double album (in LP or CD format); (c) a person who belongs to two minority groups and can satisfy two quotas (especially applied to a black

woman, who, as far as equality of opportunity is concerned, can be counted by an employer as part of two quotas); (d) a person, thing or action that serves two purposes; and (e) the simultaneous or consecutive performance of two actions. Hence, by analogy, **threefer** (e.g. ‘A newspaper ad from the Drapery Depot in Escondido, California, offered a “threefer”: two free window blinds for each one bought “at suggested retail price.”’ – L. Ware and the editors of Consumer reports 2002, *Selling It*, p. 124).

The group’s two ’60s albums (*Silver Apples* and *Contact*) were previously combined as a twofer a few years before this identical release[.] (V. Bogdanov *et al.* 2001, *All Music Guide*, p. 363)

Last night’s prime-time hour kicked off with Condoleezza Rice, Bush’s choice for national security adviser: she is black and a woman (and therefore a “twofer”, quips one Republican strategist). (*The Guardian*, London, 2 August 2000)

To help save time, try doing a “twofer”: Pack a healthy lunch while watching television. (R. A. Carpenter & C. E. Finley 2005, *Healthy Eating Every Day*, p. 181) ■

Notes

1 I cannot help but wonder whether anyone has ever used this word (and other acronyms like it) in speech without carefully explaining it afterwards. The fact that it is (nearly) always accompanied by an explanation is good evidence that it is used just for fun.

2 Cf. the related Cockney slangism *narfer narf* for half a pint of mild and half a pint of bitter (Protz 2004:216).

3 For example, ‘This is a Rolls Canardly.’ (B. W. Brink 1968, ‘Bird Problems at Military Airports’, p. 8).

4 The same jokey explanation occurs in Muller (1935:136). Note that the re-analysis of *canard* has also been exploited to humorous effect in other contexts: ‘I was particularly interested in this project for several reasons, not the least of which was that I wanted to disprove those who refer to canard designs as “canardly fly”[.]’ (*Model Airplane News*, May 1999).

5 ‘Euphemistic dysphemisms’ (Allan and Burrige 1991: 30) or ‘quasi-euphemisms’ (Crespo 2007: 223) are words meant dysphemistically but uttered euphemistically.

6 See Quinion (2004:71–72) for a full discussion of its etymology.

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Swiss 'cool' continued from page 47

And there are other recognisably 'English' items in the cited titles, if now international:

'Cool': given a standard German superlative ending <-ste> (as in 'coolest'), has been adopted into German in its style sense alongside the standard cognate equivalent 'kuhl', both pronounced alike, much as in English – the point being that this is a graphic rather than a spoken distinction.

'Magazine' or 'Magazin': from English, though from the French 'magasin' ('shop', 'store') in the first place, if with now a different meaning.

'Swissair': what other common language for the erstwhile Swiss national airline than the international flight language?

'-trends': of proto-Germanic origin in any case.

'web': now international.

More obviously international items, ultimately from Latin (that earlier international language, still a source for neologisms) – if via French:

'Analysen', 'Argumentum', 'design', 'Digital', 'info', 'national', 'Manager' (as an unmarked

plural in German)/'Management', 'Original', 'Technologie-', 'Tests'.

The distinction is between words that have become established as standard items in French and German, whatever their cross-Channel and cross-border comings and goings, as opposed to newer items used currently for deliberate stylistic effect – as a rough rule of thumb, the distinction between those recorded or not in my twenty-year old French and German dictionaries. Essentially modish, of the moment, some may endure; it is a normal linguistic process, vogue words adopted from other languages becoming established as permanent 'borrowed' or 'loanwords' – English can't get enough of them. Some are examples of 'calque' (20th century borrowing from French), original coinages from English: 'upscale', 'epaper'. And they are not all peculiar to Switzerland. But, if French and Germans are apprehensive about the invasiveness of English, the Swiss seem more relaxed than their neighbours about the 'cachet' (17th century borrowing from French) of English in publicity and the press. ■