THE ☙ HINDU

Know your English

S. UPENDRAN

Is it wrong to say 'competent enough'?

(L. Maithili, Bangalore)

No, it isn't. But careful users of the language might frown upon it; they would argue that the use of 'enough' after 'competent' is unnecessary. "He is competent" is adequate is what they would say. Although the word 'enough' may be redundant, native speakers of **English** do say 'competent enough' quite frequently. Dictionaries contain examples of sentences with 'competent enough'.

*Sailaja is not competent (enough) to answer that question.

What is the meaning and origin of 'crocodile tears'?

(MK Chandhini, Chennai)

Whenever there is a tragedy in some part of the country, we often see politicians breaking down while they are making a statement to the press. In some cases, the tears are genuine; the politician is genuinely moved by what has happened. But in many cases, the crying is just an act; the man/woman is only pretending to be grieving. He/She is merely putting on a show of being sad. The insincere tears and the hypocritical show of grief are usually referred to as 'crocodile tears'. The first syllable of 'crocodile' rhymes with 'frock' and the 'o' in the second sounds like the 'a' in 'china'. The final syllable rhymes with 'pile', 'mile' and 'file'. The word is pronounced 'CROCK-e-dile' with the stress on the first syllable.

*Your crocodile tears won't work with me, Malini.

For a very long time, people believed the crocodile often lured its potential prey by shedding tears and moaning. Once it had caught its victim, it gulped it down with tears flowing from its eyes. Scientists have found that crocodiles, like human beings, do shed tears. But this is to keep their eyes clean, and not to lure a potential prey. The word 'crocodile' comes from the Greek 'krokodilos' meaning 'pebbles worm'.

What is the difference between 'I have two brothers and a sister' and 'I have got two brothers and a sister'?

(N. Dileep, Trichy)

In terms of meaning, there is no difference between the two. In both cases, you are telling someone that you have three siblings. The two sentences, however, would be used in different contexts. Native speakers of English would limit the use of the second sentence (have got) to informal contexts. Also, in the case of 'have got', native speakers generally prefer to use the contracted form of 'have'. "I'm sorry I've got no money on me". "You've got to help me."

How is the word 'putrid' pronounced?

(J. Gokhale, Pune)

The first syllable rhymes with 'mute', 'cute' and 'newt'; the second syllable is pronounced like the word 'rid'. The word is pronounced 'PYOOT-rid' with the stress on the first syllable. Any decaying matter that emits a foul smell can be said to be putrid. The word has a figurative meaning as well; anything that is putrid is repulsive.

*We found the putrid body of a dead rat behind the fridge.

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"A consensus means that everyone agrees to say collectively what no one believes individually." — **Abba Eban**

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