

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English - Soft corner

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Is it okay to say 'He has a soft corner for her'?

(N. Karthik, Bangalore)

This is an expression mostly used in India to mean to have warm feelings for someone or something. You have a great deal of affection for the person or thing, often without knowing why. The individual for whom you have this affection may not deserve it or may not return it. Native speakers of English do not use this expression. They tend to say 'have a soft spot for someone,' not 'soft corner.'

*The kids in my class have a soft spot for the lame puppy.

*Why Ganesh has a soft spot for Urmila is beyond me.

How is the word 'disparage' pronounced?

(C.R. Janani, Bangalore)

The 'dis' in the first syllable sounds like the 'dis' in 'dismiss,' 'distance' and 'disturb.' The 'a' in the second syllable is like the 'a' in 'cat,' 'bat,' and 'hat,' and the final 'rage' rhymes with 'bridge' and 'fridge.' This rather formal word is pronounced 'dis-PA-ridge' with the stress on the second syllable. When you disparage someone, you ridicule or make fun of the individual.

*The disparaging comments Harish made about the boss stunned everyone.

*Whatever you do, don't disparage me in front of my in-laws.

What is the meaning of 'take the mickey out of someone'?

(R. Hamsa, Chennai)

This is an expression that is mostly used in British English in informal contexts. When you take the 'mickey' out of someone, you are teasing or making fun of the individual. You often make the individual seem silly by imitating his mannerism or by playing a joke on him. It is also possible to say 'take the mick out of someone.'

*If you attempt to take the mickey out of Ram, you'll get into trouble.

*Aren't you tired of taking the mickey out of him all the time?

Scholars believe that the expression is an example of rhyming slang. The original expression was 'to take the piss out of someone.' With the passage of time 'piss' was replaced by 'Mickey Bliss'. Nobody really knows who this Mickey Bliss was; some people say that the name was used because 'bliss' rhymes with 'piss'. Later, the rhyming element (bliss) was dropped, and what remained was 'take the mickey out of someone.'

What is the difference between 'mess' and 'kitchen'?

(A. George, Tiruvananthapuram)

A 'kitchen' is a place where food is cooked, and a 'mess' is a place where people go to eat. You can eat in the kitchen, but you don't cook in the mess. According to dictionaries, 'mess' is mostly used in the context of the military. For native speakers, a 'mess' is a place where military personnel 'eat' or 'socialise'. In India, we use this word to refer to any place where people gather to eat. This probably explains why we talk about the 'hostel mess'.

Is it okay to say, 'Could you repeat that again?'

(Suvarna Thampuran, Pandalam)

There is nothing wrong with the sentence grammatically. We often hear people say 'repeat that again,' but the use of 'again' is unnecessary. When you ask someone to repeat something that he has said, you are requesting him to say it again. Dictionaries define repeat as 'to say something more than once.' It is enough if you say, 'Could you repeat that?'

"The mistake a lot of politicians make is in forgetting they've been appointed and thinking they've been anointed." – Claude D. Pepper

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