

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

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S. UPENDRAN

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## Why do we say 'sell like hot cakes' when cakes are seldom eaten hot?

(Janet Epan, Hyderabad)

If the book that you have written sells like 'hotcakes', it means a lot of people are buying it. The book is doing very good business, and is earning you a lot of money.

\*They tell me Anuradha's old paintings are selling like hot cakes.

\*We are hoping that our new product will sell like hot cakes.

It is true that we never eat cake when it is hot. It is probably because bakeries wait for it to cool down before they actually sell it! Those of you who have watched someone at home bake a cake, probably know that this cooling down period, at times, can be an agonising wait. The word 'cake' in the expression 'sell like hot cakes', however, has nothing to do with the sweet, soft substance that people generally cut on their birthdays and anniversaries. In this expression of American origin, 'cake' refers to pancakes; a dosa-like dish which many people have as part of their breakfast. This fried dish is usually eaten when it's hot, and perhaps this was the reason that in the 17th century, Americans began to refer to 'pancakes' as 'hot cakes'. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, pancakes became a popular item at carnivals, church fairs and fetes. People lined up eagerly at stalls where 'hot cakes' were sold. The fact that stall owners managed to sell them as quickly as they were made gave rise to the expression 'sell like hot cakes'.

## What do you call the dirt that collects in one's eyes?

(Dinesh Kumar, Jhajjar)

When we wake up after a good night's sleep, we sometimes find a sticky substance on our eyelashes and in the corner of our eyes. This watery substance that turns white and sometimes an ugly yellow when it hardens is called 'rheum'. It is pronounced like the word 'room'. The watery fluid that drips from the nose is also called rheum. The word comes from the Greek 'rheuma' meaning 'stream, current, a flowing'.

Is it okay to refer to someone as a 'day-scholar'?

(P Kapileshwar, Secunderabad)

This is a term frequently used in India to refer to someone who does not live on campus. The person attends classes during the daytime, and then returns home. He is not a boarder; in other words, he does not stay in the school/college hostel. 'Day-scholar', though used, does not seem to be very popular among native speakers of English. It is not found in most standard dictionaries. The few that include it, define it as a pupil "who attends a boarding school, but boards at home." Native speakers seem to prefer the terms 'day-student' and 'day-pupil' instead of 'day scholar'. Young children that attend school are sometimes referred to as 'day-boy' and 'day-girl'. Indians are liberal in their use of the word 'scholar'; in addition to 'day-scholars', universities also have 'M.Phil scholars' and 'Ph.D scholars'. It does not mean that all these students are learned individuals. 'Scholar' in all these contexts is being used in the original sense of the word – in Old English, 'scolere' meant 'student'.

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*"I think children are like pancakes. You sort of ruin the first one, and you get better at it the second time around."*

– **Kelly Ripa**

*upendrankye@gmail.com*

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