

THE PERSPECTIVE

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2015: The Year of Words

The study of the history of words is called Etymology and includes the study of word origins, how words are formed and how their definitions have changed over time. Although the written word was invented in southern Mesopotamia, c. 3500 -3000 BCE, words continue to evolve every day. On the topic of words, American poet Emily Dickinson once wrote, "I know nothing in the world that has as much power as a word". Little did she know when she penned these words how quickly the world of words would evolve.

Today we live in a world where information is readily available through many mediums. But even as advances in technology have enabled us to quickly enlighten ourselves, communication and news is still

driven by the words used by journalists, politicians and policy makers. As a result, it is words that will forever shape our lives, help us form opinions and provide us with the information that we need to make the decisions that affect our future.

To this end, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year for 2015 is "emoji". Yes it's true, a pictograph that is often used to express joy, sadness, anger and mischievousness, beat out traditional letter-based expressions. While the use of the proper emoji was on our minds in 2015, so too were other words, such as the Merriam-Webster dictionaries Word of the Year which for the first time named the suffix "ism" as its annual award winner. This choice illustrated that

in 2015 a commonality existed in its most searched words: socialism, fascism, feminism, capitalism, racism and terrorism. The popularity of these words reflects the impact that events such as the troubling acts of terrorism in Paris in January and November had on 2015 as well as the resurrection of the word “socialism” in the same breathe as American politics.

However, ism’s and emoji’s were not the only words that dominated the political landscape in 2015, as terms such as “Grexit” (which references the potential exit of Greece from the Eurozone monetary union) and “Migrant Crisis” (which summarizes the movement of over a million migrants and/or refugees from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe) were used throughout the year.

While the threat of a Grexit reached its climax in the mid-2015 it subsequently diminished after the Greek government accepted a three-year, 86 billion euro rescue plan from its Eurozone partners in July. With the threat of a Grexit (at least) put on hold we can now draw our attention in 2016 to a similar play on words, that of “Brexit” which refers to, the potential of Britain’s exit from the EU, which will be voted on in a national referendum to be held perhaps as early as the summer of 2016.

The end of 2015 also saw the US Federal Reserve implement the word “tightening” for the first time since June 29th, 2006, when on December 16, 2015, they increased interest rates from an upper bound of .25 per cent to .50 per cent.

While the US tightened much of the rest of the world

“eased”, as the Bank of Canada (BOC), European Central Bank (ECB), the Bank of Japan (BOJ) and the People’s Bank of China continued to maintain their easing biases.

In 2015 it also wasn’t just linguists who chose to create and popularize words; other organizations such as the National Football League coined words such as “Deflategate” (created to enlighten football fans on the amount of air pressure required to inflate NFL game ready footballs), while pop culture popularized the word “Yas” to vocalize ones approval of the subject at hand.

Like any year, 2015 had its share of highs and lows. It was a year that according to a report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration saw average temperatures in the US rise to the second highest level on record (only 2012 was hotter), marking the 19th year in a row that average temperatures have exceeded the 20th century average.

It was a year where the words used by global leaders such as Angela Merkel commanded the spotlight while others used by US presidential hopeful Donald Trump perplexed us. It was a year that on August 24th saw the Dow Jones Industrials Average have its biggest fall in four years, plunging more than 1,000 points at the open to eventually settle down 588 points on the day. And, as a result, saw the increase in the use of the word “volatility” by the financial press.

And finally, 2015 was the year that the “Force” finally “Awakened”, giving young and old alike, a new (and old) set of heroes to cheer for.

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