

A brief history of dude

Dude may be the most Mandarin Chinese word in American English. In Mandarin, depending on how I *intone* the single *syllable* ma, I could be saying “mother” (mā), or I could be saying something as radically distinct as “horse” (mǎ).

intone 吟诵; 发音

syllable 音节

Dude has a comparable quality. Just think of the last time you did something awesome in the presence of a friend who affirmed your awesomeness with the *exclamation* Duuude! Or the last time you said something *objectionable* to someone who began setting you straight with a firm and *sober* Dude. The difference in *connotation* is pretty major.

exclamation 欢呼; 惊叹

objection 反对; 缺点

sober 冷静的; 清醒的

connotation 内涵; 暗示

So what does the word itself mean? Dictionaries struggle with this question. Here, for instance, is Merriam-Webster: 1. a man extremely *fastidious* in dress and manner 2. a city dweller unfamiliar with life on the range 3. fellow, guy — sometimes used informally as a term of address

fastidious 挑剔的; 苛求的

But according to Scott F. Kiesling, the author of a *seminal* 2004 study — titled, yes, “Dude” — the term has long implied a particular understanding of fellowship among guys. Its dominant linguistic function, Kiesling argues, has been to enable men, mainly young men, to address one another in a *laid-back* camaraderie.

seminal 精液的; 种子的; 重大的; 开创性的

laid-back 懒散的; 悠闲的

And women now use the word, too — both with men and with other women. Perhaps unsurprisingly, usage patterns vary by gender: Kiesling’s work indicates, for instance, that women show a relative tendency to deploy the term when trying to *mitigate* conflict with friends or *acquaintances*. (“Dude, you know I’d never do that.”) But even this usage is a variation on a theme. It always implies the same thing: reinforcing a specific kind of social relationship without intimacy.

mitigate 使减轻；使缓和

acquaintance 熟人；相识