Oxford Names Not 1, but 16 Words of the Year

Discussion > Advanced 9

Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

spike	A sudden increase in something.
[noun]	*Ex: We usually experience a **spike** in sales this time of year.*

impeachment	The act of charging a government official with a crime.
[noun]	*Ex: The **impeachment** of US President Andrew Johnson took place in 1868.*

acquit	To officially state or decide that someone is not guilty of a crime.
[verb]	*Ex: The jury **acquitted** her of murder because of a lack of evidence.*

offensive	Causing a person, group, etc. to feel upset, angry, or insulted.
[adjective]	*Ex: What you just said is very **offensive**.*

superspreader	A person who spreads a disease to an unusually large number of people.
[noun]	*Ex: Officials believe a **superspreader** at a Sydney beach is responsible for the spike in cases.*

Exercise 2 – Reading

Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.

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How would you describe 2020? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, many people have called it a "strange year" and a "crazy year." In fact, it's been so strange and crazy that Oxford couldn't choose one word of the year as it usually does, and instead chose one or more for almost every month.

Oxford said that 2020 saw huge spikes in the use of different words throughout the year, both old and new. In particular, use of the word "pandemic" increased 57,000% compared to 2019. The word has been used in English since the 17th century, and comes from combining the Greek words pan, which means "all", and dēmos, which means "people."

The first word on Oxford's 2020 list is "bushfire," as Australia experienced its worst bushfire season on record at the start of the year. This was quickly followed by "impeachment" and "acquittal," as US President Donald Trump's impeachment trial began in January and he was acquitted at the beginning of February.

For March, Oxford chose "coronavirus," a word from the 1960s that had previously been used mostly by scientists.

COVID-19, a new word first recorded in a February 11 World Health Organization report, was one of three words chosen for April. Oxford also chose "Lockdown" and "social distancing" as governments around the world tried to stop the spread of the new virus.

"Reopening" was chosen in May as some shops in the Northern Hemisphere began to reopen.

"Black Lives Matter" was the top word for June, as protests grew over the police killing of George Floyd and the killings of other Black Americans.

Oxford chose seven more words between July and October, from "cancel culture" in July, as fans stopped supporting famous people who made statements they found offensive, to "superspreader" in October, as cases of coronavirus quickly spread in the White House.

In 2019, the word of the year was "climate emergency." In 2018 it was "toxic," and in 2015, for the first time ever, it was an emoji.

Exercise 3 – Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your tutor.

1. What are your thoughts on Oxford's words of the year?

2. If you had to pick one word from Oxford's list as word of the year for 2020, which would you choose?

3. What words in your language have risen in popularity this year?

4. What's the most interesting English word you've learned this year?

5. What's the most effective way to remember new words and phrases in a foreign language?

6. When was the last time you used a paper dictionary?

7. Do you think you'd enjoy working as a dictionary editor?

8. "If you have the right words, there's nothing on Earth you can't do." What do you make of this statement?