

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English - April 12, 2015

S. UPENDRAN

APRIL 11, 2015 22:42 IST

UPDATED: APRIL 18, 2015 21:48 IST

What is the meaning of 'swashbuckler'?*(SA Faizal, Kottayam)*

This is an example of how the meaning of a word has changed over the years. Nowadays, when we think of a 'swashbuckler', the person that immediately comes to mind is Captain Jack Sparrow – a character in the 'Pirates of the Caribbean' film series. 'Swashbuckler' is mostly used now to refer to someone who is cocky and is always on the lookout for adventure. He is skilled at using weapons and travels the world looking for hidden treasure. Originally, the word was used to refer to a loud bully. The word 'swash' meant to move about in an arrogant manner, and 'buckler' referred to the small shield that a fighter held in one hand to protect himself. The original swashbuckler was a bully who made a lot noise by banging his sword against his 'buckler'. But thanks to Hollywood and Bollywood movies, our notion of a 'swashbuckler' has changed completely.

*In many of his movies, he played the role of a dashing swashbuckler.

How is the word 'disparate' pronounced?*(K Laxmikanth, Erode)*

The vowel in the first syllable is like the 'i' in 'bit', 'sit' and 'kit', while the 'a' in the next two syllables sounds like the 'a' in 'china'. The final 'e' is silent. The word is pronounced DIS-pe-ret with the stress on the first syllable. Some people tend to drop the vowel in the second syllable and pronounce the word 'DIS-pret'. The word comes from the Latin 'disparatus' meaning 'to divide or separate'. In **English**, 'disparate' is mostly used to mean 'very different'. When you say that two objects are disparate, you are suggesting that it will be impossible to compare them for they are very different from each other – they belong to different groups, and are very dissimilar.

*Getting the disparate groups to work together is proving to be impossible.

What is the meaning and origin of 'to chomp at the bit'?

(RV Seetha, Chennai)

Most of us get rather restless when we are made to wait for someone or something. To become impatient is one of the meanings of the expression 'chomp at the bit'. It can also be used to mean to be anxious to do something.

*The players were chomping at the bit to enter the field.

It is possible to say 'champ at the bit' as well. The expression comes from the world of horses. The 'bit' refers to a horse's mouthpiece; the metal piece that a rider puts in the mouth of the animal in order to direct and control it. When you 'chomp' or 'champ' on something, you chew or munch on it rather nosily. When a horse gets restless or impatient, it begins to 'chomp' on the 'bit'.

Which is correct: Geetha went for a swim or Geetha took a swim?

(K Nandini, Chennai)

Both are acceptable. In the case of certain activities like swimming and walking, Americans tend to say 'take', while the British use 'go'.

*She goes for a walk/swim in the morning.

*I took a swim/walk in the evening.

"It's a lot like nuts and bolts. If the rider's nuts, the horse bolts." – **Nicholas Evans**



Printable version | Apr 24, 2018 8:06:58 AM | <http://www.thehindu.com/books/know-your-english/know-your-english-april-12-2015/article7093236.ece>

© The Hindu