

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

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S UPENDRAN

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What is the meaning and origin of ‘slush fund’?

(R Kulkarni, Pune)

This term frequently appears in the media whenever there is an election. It refers to the money that political parties use for their illegal activities – for example, bribing voters by giving them cash or other incentives! ‘Slush fund’ is also used to refer to the money set aside by business houses to carry out illegal practices – bribing politicians, etc.

*Let’s use the slush fund to buy the votes of those who are still undecided.

*If you wish to run a successful business, you need to set up a slush fund.

The term was first used in the navy. Several hundred years ago, the words ‘slush’ and ‘slosh’ were used to refer to the fat or grease that resulted when meat was cooked. The enterprising cook stored the grease, and sold it when the ship reached a port. The money that was made was called ‘slush fund’, and it was used to buy things for the members of the crew.

How is the word ‘salon’ pronounced?

(GR Vivek, Chennai)

How you pronounce the word depends on which side of the Atlantic you are from. For the British, the vowel in the first syllable is like the ‘a’ in ‘ant’ and ‘pants’, while the following ‘lon’ rhymes with ‘don’ and ‘con’. They pronounce the word ‘SA-lon’ with the stress on the first syllable.

The Americans, on the other hand, pronounce the ‘a’ like the ‘a’ in ‘china’ and the following ‘o’ like the ‘a’ in ‘pass’ and ‘ask’. They pronounce the word ‘se-LAAn’ with the stress on the second syllable. Both ‘salon’ and ‘saloon’ come from the French ‘salon’ meaning ‘reception room’; in the past, the two words were used interchangeably to refer to any large room.

With the passage of time, they began to acquire different meanings. ‘Saloon’ was used to refer to a bar, while ‘salon’ began to be used to refer to an establishment where one went to get a haircut. Nowadays, it is common to hear people refer to salons as ‘parlours’. By the way, the

first vowel in 'saloon' is like the 'a' in 'china', and the following syllable rhymes with 'moon' and 'noon'. The word is pronounced 'se-LOON' with the stress on the second syllable. Nowadays, the word is used to refer to a building or a room used by the public for a specific purpose – for example, people talk about a 'dancing saloon' and a 'billiards saloon'.

What is the meaning of 'happenstance'?

(K Sharadha, Bangalore)

'Happenstance' is a combination of 'happen' and 'circumstance', and the word is mostly used in American English to mean something that happens by chance. The result or outcome of this accidental meeting is usually good. The word is pronounced 'HAP-en-stance'.

*My meeting Aamir at the airport was sheer happenstance.

*It was just happenstance that we were in the same compartment.

Is it okay to say, 'They were paying only a lip service'?

(T Renuka, Tiruchi)

No, it is not. You 'pay lip service' to someone and not 'a lip service'. When you pay lip service to someone, you agree with everything the person has said, but you don't really do anything about it. It's all talk and no action on your part.

"Don't buy a single vote more than necessary. I'll be damned if I'm going to pay for a landslide." –

Joseph Kennedy

upendrankye@gmail.com

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