

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – What is the meaning and origin of 'Young Turks'?

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What is the meaning and origin of 'Young Turks'?

(Said Khan, Guwahati)

The expression is frequently heard in the world of politics. When you refer to someone as a 'Young/young Turk', you are suggesting that the individual is keen on making some radical changes in a well-established organisation. It could be anything: a political party, a company, a university, etc. This young individual is bubbling with ideas and is rather impatient to implement them. He and his group of friends are keen to usurp power from the old conservatives who have been running the show till now.

*At the meeting, it was only the Young Turks that spoke against the Director.

*The young Turks in the teaching faculty want the VC to apologise to the students.

The term 'Young Turks' was first used to refer to a nationalist party that was keen on bringing about changes in the political system in Turkey. The members of the party were called 'Young Turks' because the founding members were all very young – most were in their early thirties, while a few were in their late twenties. In 1908, the party succeeded in overthrowing Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

What does 'in law' stand for in 'mother-in-law'?

(C Radhakrishnan, Neelambari)

The word 'in law' is normally used to indicate that you are not biologically related to some individual; you have formed a relationship with him/her through marriage. The term 'mother-in-law' was first used by the Church to refer to one's spouse's mother. According to the laws of the Church (Canon Law), this individual had the same legal rights and responsibilities as the biological mother. In the eyes of the law, she was a mother too. This probably explains why in the past a 'step father/mother' was sometimes referred to as 'father/mother-in-law' – in the eyes of the law, the two individuals were not biologically related to the child.

Some people are afraid of seeing other people naked. Is there a word for this?

(Joseph, Hyderabad)

Yes, there is. The word that is frequently used to refer to the fear of nudity – whether it is the fear of seeing someone else or yourself naked – is 'gymnophobia'. The word 'gym' comes from the Greek 'gymnos' meaning 'naked'. In the past, when an athlete went to the gymnasium, he always trained naked. 'Gym' is the shortened form of 'gymnasium'. Imagine the pandemonium that would result if all members started showing up in their gym in their birthday suit! In ancient times, women were not allowed to witness any of the events at the Olympic games. The reason being that all participants were men, and many chose to perform without a stitch on.

What is the difference between 'stink' and 'stench'?

(Sunil Rao, Bangalore)

Both words are used to refer to a foul, unpleasant smell. Some people maintain there is no difference between the two. Others, however, claim that 'stench' is stronger and overpowering of the two. It is a smell that most people would agree is foul; it is something makes you want to throw up.

*Please get those socks washed. They stink.

*The stench from the rotting corpse made him open the windows.

"Political discourse has become so rotten that it's no longer possible to tell the stench of one presidential candidate from the stink of another." – **PJ O' Rourke**

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