

## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# Know Your English - What is the meaning and origin of 'greenhorn'?

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## What is the meaning and origin of 'greenhorn'?

**(Pranjal Kishore Sharma, Jorhat)**

This word of American origin has been around for several centuries now. When it was first used in the early 15th century, it referred to a young ox or bull – since these animals were 'green' or inexperienced and their horns hadn't matured, they were called 'greenhorns'. The following century, new army recruits began to be called 'greenhorns'. With the passage of time, the word began to be used to refer to anyone who had little or no experience; someone who could be easily duped or cheated. It is in this sense that the word is used today.

\*How could you give a greenhorn like Dilip the job?

\*Don't underestimate Sudha. She is no greenhorn.

## What is the difference between 'fat' and 'buxom'?

**(N. Supriya, Nellore)**

The word 'fat' can be used with men and women, 'buxom', on the other hand, is restricted to women. 'Fat' has a negative connotation; it suggests that the person is rather unattractive. 'Buxom' suggests that the woman in question is overweight in an attractive sort of way. Some dictionaries define the word as being 'healthily plump'. The word comes from the Old English 'bujan' meaning 'bend'. In the past, when a woman promised to be 'buxom and bonny' to her husband, she meant that she would bend according to her husband's wishes. She would be compliant; willing to do whatever her husband wanted her to do. With the passage of time, the word acquired a new meaning – 'good tempered, lively'. Since people who were overweight were generally believed to be jolly, the word began to be applied to women who had a full figure.

## How is the word 'schmaltzy' pronounced?

**(M. Aravind, Chennai)**

The 'sch' is pronounced like the 'sh' in 'ship', 'sheep' and 'shin'. The 'malt' sounds like the word 'malt', and the final 'zy' sounds like the 'si' in 'sit', 'sip', and 'sin'. The word is pronounced

'SHMALT-si' with the stress on the first syllable. It is Yiddish in origin, and in English, it is mostly used in informal contexts to mean excessively sentimental. When you refer to a piece of music or a work of fiction as being 'schmaltzy', you are suggesting that the work is of no significance; it has no artistic value. The sentiments expressed are so overly exaggerated that you find it difficult to relate to them. The word is mostly used to show disapproval.

\*The play was so schmaltzy that many people walked out after the first act.

\*Your favourite author's latest book is pure schmaltz.

### Is it okay to say 'an old adage'?

**(R. Gayathri, Hyderabad)**

First, let's deal with the pronunciation of the word. The first syllable sounds like the word 'add', and the 'age' sounds like the 'idge' in 'fridge' and 'bridge'. The word is pronounced 'A-dij' with the stress on the first syllable. An adage is a rather old saying that people frequently use in their everyday conversation to express some general truth. 'Out of sight, out of mind' is an example of an adage. So is, 'If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all'. Since an adage is by definition something old, careful users of the language argue that it is unnecessary to add 'old' before the word. Native speakers, however, do say 'old adage'.

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*"Visits always give pleasure – if not the arrival, the departure."* – **Portuguese Proverb**

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