

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – Is it okay to say 'disorientated'?

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MAY 27, 2013 21:30 IST

UPDATED: MAY 30, 2013 15:58 IST

What is the difference between 'different to' and 'different from'?

(Uday Limaye, Pune)

In terms of meaning, there is no difference. The expression 'different from' is used in both American and British English. 'Different to', on the other hand, is mostly limited to British English. There are many people even today who condemn the use of 'different to' in sentences like 'The watch I bought is different to yours'. Traditionalists claim that such sentences should be avoided, and if used, should be limited to informal contexts. Talking about this controversy, H W Fowler, the commentator on usage, concluded: "... that 'different' can only be followed by 'from' and not by 'to' is a superstition."

What is the meaning of 'to go postal'?

(Ravinder, Aurangabad)

The expression is frequently used in American English in informal contexts. When you 'go postal', you become extremely angry, often turning violent. In this case, the anger is directed at your colleagues in the workplace.

*Janaki went postal when her Head accused her of being the VC's mouthpiece.

The expression owes its origin to a number of incidents that took place in post offices in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Several postal workers who were apparently under a lot of stress, shot and killed many of their colleagues in the workplace – before turning the gun on themselves. So when you go postal, you go ballistic like a worker in the mailroom.

Is it okay to say 'disorientated'?

(Chetan Pinto, Udipi)

Yes, it is. Most standard dictionaries list the word. Both 'disoriented' and 'disorientated' have more or less the same meaning. Although there are many people who do not like 'disorientated', it is a word that has been a part of British English for well over 400 years. Like 'disoriented', the word 'disorientated' can be used to mean 'to cause someone to lose their sense of direction'. It can also be used to mean to 'confuse' someone.

*The sudden change of plans left many of the teachers disoriented/disorientated.

How is the word 'harass' pronounced?

(K. Sindhuja, Chennai)

There seems to be two different ways of pronouncing this word. In British English, the 'a' in the first syllable sounds like the 'a' in 'bat' 'fat' and 'cat', while the 'a' in the second is like the 'a' in 'china'. In this case, the word is pronounced 'HA-res' with the stress on the first syllable. In American English, on the other hand, the first 'a' is like the 'a' in 'china' while the second is like the 'a' in 'bat' and 'cat'. In American English, the word is pronounced 'he-RAS' with the stress on the second syllable.

*Raghu, will you please stop harassing your little sister?

"The world is full of willing people; some willing to work, the rest willing to let them." — **Robert Frost**

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Printable version | Apr 19, 2018 11:06:00 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/books/know-your-english/know-your-english-is-it-okay-to-say-disorientated/article4756755.ece>

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