

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – meaning and origin of 'Indian summer'

S. UPENDRAN

MAY 13, 2013 22:44 IST

UPDATED: MAY 13, 2013 22:44 IST

What is the meaning and origin of 'Indian summer'?

(BC Koshy, Bangalore)

The Indian in the expression has nothing to do with people from our country. It refers to the 'Red Indians' in America – 'Native Americans' as they are called now. The term 'Indian summer', which has been part of the language for over two centuries, refers to the heat wave that occurs in North America in autumn – the sudden rise in temperature is accompanied by dry and hazy conditions. Many believe J H St. John de Crevecoeur, a French-American farmer, coined this term in his book, *Letters from an American farmer*. This is the only thing that people can say with any certainty about the expression. As to its origin, no one is really sure. According to one theory, Native Americans did a lot of hunting in late autumn in order to stock food for the winter. Very often, they set fire to the dry grass making it difficult for animals to see the hunter's approach. It was these prairie fires that made things look hazy. Nowadays, 'Indian summer' refers to a happy period that occurs late in one's life or career. It can also be used to refer to someone who experiences success late in life.

*The professor is in the Indian summer of his brilliant career.

Which is correct? Whom/Who did you see last night?

(LaxmiDevi, Vishakhapatnam)

Native speakers of **English** use both forms of the question every day. The use of 'whom' at the beginning of a question is mostly limited to formal contexts. Whom are you meeting at the library this evening? For whom are you taking those sandwiches? In everyday contexts, however, most people prefer to use 'who'. The use of 'whom' at the beginning of questions is considered unnatural and somewhat old fashioned. Who are you meeting at the library this evening?

What is the difference between 'yes' and 'yeah'?

(S Vikram, Secunderabad)

'Yes' can be used in both informal and formal contexts. Since most dictionaries define 'yeah' as an informal word for 'yes', it is best avoided in formal contexts. In India, the word should be used with caution with people you do not really know. There are some who get offended when you answer their question with 'yeah'; they feel it is a form of disrespect. When someone says something and you respond by saying 'Yeah, sure', it suggests that you do not really believe what the person had to say. It is an ironic way of saying you do not believe. 'Yeah sure' can also be used to indicate surprise.

Does the term 'welcome address' exist?

(K Charumathi, Udupi)

Though the term is frequently used in India in the context of meetings and seminars, it does not find a place in all dictionaries. A 'welcome address' is what a person gives when he is welcoming the speaker and guests at the beginning of a meeting, conference or seminar. Native speakers use this term, but it is not as popular as 'welcome/welcoming speech', 'opening remarks' and 'word of welcome'.

"Tact: Ability to tell a man he's 'open minded' when he has a hole in his head." — **F. G. Kernan**
upendrankye@gmail.com

Printable version | Apr 20, 2018 12:21:56 AM | <http://www.thehindu.com/books/know-your-english/know-your-english-meaning-and-origin-of-indian-summer/article4712296.ece>

© The Hindu