



The new ABC: Is the drab language of technology deleting the language of the natural world?

Outcry as
dictionary
ditches
nature for
tech.

Literacy

The Oxford Junior Dictionary is dropping earthy words like 'heather' and 'acorn' for more technical vocabulary like 'analogue' and 'cut and paste'. Are we losing touch with nature?

Literacy

'From its perch on a willow branch, the lark could spy oxen in the pasture, a stoat in the heather and the heron patiently scanning the brook for minnows.'

For generations, the Oxford Junior Dictionary included every noun in this sentence among its compilation of 10,000 essential words for seven-year-olds. But that is about to change. The dictionary's publishers are cutting 50 more nature-associated words from the list and replacing them with words from the world of technology. Words like acorn, herring, kingfisher and leopard will have to step aside to make way for cut and paste, broadband and analogue.

Literacy

The decision has caused dismay from many lovers of language. A 28-strong group of authors including novelist Margaret Atwood and poet Andrew Motion have said in a letter that they are 'profoundly alarmed' that the language of nature is losing out to words 'associated with the increasingly interior, solitary childhoods of today'. They argue that if children lose their connection with the natural world, this could deeply harm their well-being.

Literacy

Many psychologists believe that green environments can boost our mental health. But children are increasingly shying away from them. A National Trust survey found that only 10% of today's children ever play in wild places, and 40% never play outdoors at all. Another study found that three times as many children visit hospital after falling out of bed than do from falling from trees.

Literacy

Linguists also say that our access to language shapes the way we see the world. For example, the Amazonian Pirahã tribe has no words for numbers, so it would not count four or eighteen people, but only many. Speakers of languages that have gendered nouns like French or Spanish have been found to see the world in contrasting ways.

If children lose the language to talk about wildlife, they may lose their capacity to appreciate the natural world.

Literacy

Natural selection

Dictionaries should teach us how to make sense of the world, some say. By cutting words about nature, the Oxford Junior Dictionary is narrowing children's imaginative horizons. Not only does nature bring us happiness: we are part of it. Breaking our linguistic link with nature will deny us a vital part of what it is to be human.

Literacy

Natural selection

Yet the dictionary's compilers reply that their aim is to reflect language as it is used, not enforce it. Language itself evolves like a creature, and adapts to our needs. We have little need to distinguish starlings from wrens, but the language of technology affects us every day. Rather than decrying the loss of redundant words, we should celebrate how new concepts like downloading and crowd-sourcing are reinventing and enriching self-expression.

Literacy

Will young people be any worse off for not knowing the language of nature?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Literacy

Dictionaries should describe language as people use it, not tell people what words they should be using'. Do you agree?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Literacy

noun of the day

linguistics

the scientific study of language and its structure, including the study of grammar, syntax, and phonetics.

*He studies **linguistics** at university.*

Literacy

adjective of the day

redundant

no longer needed or useful.

*Housing was the best way to transform
the **redundant** old church.*

Literacy

**THE LIMITS OF MY
LANGUAGE
MEAN THE LIMITS
OF MY WORLD.**



Ludwig Wittgenstein
Austrian-British philosopher

1889 - 1951

mendacious



**FIND OUT THE
MEANING OF THIS
WORD.
USE IT CORRECTLY
IN YOUR WORK OR
WHEN IN LESSON TO
EARN P POINTS.**



Word Banksy

