

## We're all speaking Geek

*The world wide web, which turned 15 this week<sup>1</sup>, has given us a fantastic outpouring of new words*



**BEN MACINTYRE**

- 1 FIFTEEN YEARS after the birth of the world wide web, the lines of battle are clear. On one side the still young culture of the internet – anarchic, playful, joyfully (and sometimes wilfully) inaccurate, global and uncontrollable; on the other, the traditional printed media – precise, polite, often national in perspective and increasingly paranoid. The latter seeks to manage, limit and define the culture; the former delights in its resistance to regulation.
- 2 The battle rages in the conflict between Wikipedia, the sprawling internet encyclopaedia, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the canon versus the loose cannon. This week it erupted in the nursery, when the best-selling childcare expert Gina Ford threw a tantrum and launched her bizarre attempt to shut down the Mumsnet website because some of the mums had been rude about her.
- 3 But in no area of the culture is the collision more intense than over the English language, for the web has changed English more radically than any invention since paper, and much faster. According to Paul Payack, who runs the Global Language Monitor, there are currently 998,974 words in

the English language, with thousands more emerging every month. By his calculation, English will adopt its one millionth word in late November. To put that statistic another way, for every French word, there are now ten in English.

- 4 That claim has enraged traditional lexicographers. The 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* has 301,100 entries, and purists point out that Mr Payack has little in the way of method and few criteria to define what really constitutes a word. But that, of course, is the point.
- 5 He found the remaining 697,874 words by scouring the internet. Every digital English dictionary was combed, before adding in the emerging words, the hybrids, Chinglish (Chinese-English), the slang, the linguistic odds and sods, and even Hollywoods, terms created by the film industry. If a word is used in English, it was acceptable.
- 6 The nearest rival to English in sheer fecundity is Chinese, and with 1.3 billion Chinese now being officially urged to learn English, the result is nomogamosis (It is on the list: “A state of marital harmony; a condition in which spouses are well matched.”) and many, many offspring, some of them rather sweet. Drinktea, for example, is a sign on a shop door meaning closed, but also derives from the Mandarin for resting.
- 7 The so-called tipping point may have come in the mid-1990s at the same time as the invention of the first effective web browser, for ever since the web has served as a seedbed for language, for the cross-fertilisation and rapid evolution of words.

8 So far from debasing the language, the rapid expansion of English on the web may be enriching the mother tongue. Like Latin, it has developed different forms that bear little relation to one another: a speaker of Hinglish (Hindi-English) would have little to say to a Chinglish speaker. But while the root of Latin took centuries to grow its linguistic branches, modern non-standard English is evolving at fabulous speed. The language of the internet itself, the cyberisms that were once the preserve of a few web boffins, has simultaneously expanded into a new argot of words and idioms: Ancient or Classic Geek has given way to Modern Geek.

9 The web has revived the possibilities of word-coinage in a way not seen since Shakespearean times, when the language was gradually assuming its modern structure but was not yet codified into dictionaries (the first comprehensive English dictionary appeared in 1730). Then, as now, the lack of control, and the rapid absorption of new terms and ideas through exploration, colonisation and science, enabled a great flowering of words. Of the 24,000 words used by Shakespeare, perhaps 1,700 were his own inventions: besmirch, anchovy, shudder, impede.

10 Thanks to the internet, we are witnessing the second great age of the neologism, a fantastic outpouring of words and phrases to describe new ideas or reshape old ideas in novel forms of language. Today, a word does not need the slow spread of verbal usage or literature to gain acceptance. If a word works, the internet can breathe instant life into it.

11 You do not have to be Shakespeare to forge words. George Bush is constantly evolving new words, but no

one should underestimate the ability of lesser wordsmiths to do likewise. So many words that ought to exist inexplicably do not. There should be a term for that momentary flash of embarrassment when a cell phone rings and you wonder if it is yours; and for the vague disappointment you feel when you think you are about to sneeze, take a deep breath and then don't. (National Public Radio in the US recently held a competition to name this proto-sneeze and came up with "sniff-hanger".) Why is there a word for *déjà vu*, but nothing to describe the opposite experience, far more common, of knowing something perfectly well but being quite unable to remember it?

12 Last year this newspaper reported the existence, in the Bantu language Tshiluba, of the long-needed word *ilunga*, meaning "a person who is ready to forgive any abuse for the first time, to tolerate it a second time, but never a third time". Subsequent investigations suggested that the word may not exist in Tshiluba, but it exists now in English, as thousands of entries on the web attest, and the language is better for it.

13 Rather than fight the word loans and word borrowings, the strange hybrids and new coinages, we should welcome them. New words expand our world. They can even change it. If *ilunga* is the thrice-repeated offence that cannot be forgiven, then its opposite is an Arabic word, *taraadin*, meaning "I win, you win", the face-saving way to end an argument. As bombs fall on southern Lebanon and missiles on northern Israel, the world could profit from learning a new language, in which *ilunga* is solved by *taraadin*.

*The Times*

## Tekst 4 We're all speaking Geek

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- 2p 4 Geef bij elk van de volgende citaten uit alinea 1 aan of dit volgens de tekst wel of niet van toepassing zou kunnen zijn op iemand als Gina Ford (alinea 2).
- 1 "anarchic, ... inaccurate"
  - 2 "precise, ... paranoid"
  - 3 "seeks to ... culture"
  - 4 "delights in ... regulation"
- Noteer het nummer van elk citaat, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".
- 1p 5 What is the main point made in paragraph 3?
- A Language is organic and ever-changing, and therefore impossible to regulate.
  - B The advent of the internet has had a massive impact on the English language.
  - C There are now more words in English than in any other world language.
  - D There are so many new English words emerging that it is impossible to learn them all.
- 1p 6 Which of the following explains the view expressed in "But that, of course, is the point." (paragraph 4)?
- A Since new words are continually invented and discarded, it is impossible to keep count of them.
  - B Standards regarding what constitutes a new word clash with the free spirit of the internet.
  - C The *OED* has no control over the rapid emergence of new words on the internet.
  - D With so many internet users adopting English, new custom-made words are bound to appear.
- 1p 7 Which of the following is true of paragraph 6?
- A It applauds the increase in Chinese learning English.
  - B It goes into a cause for the expansion of English.
  - C It illustrates the cultural similarities in the English and the Chinese language.
- 3p 8 Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen aan of deze wel of niet juist is met betrekking tot de inhoud van de alinea's 8 tot en met 10.
- 1 The rising number of people using the internet accounts for the fast expansion of English.
  - 2 The original jargon of the internet has been greatly simplified.
  - 3 English is taking off in so many directions that it is in danger of splitting up into different varieties.
  - 4 The present development of English is comparable to its development in the days of Shakespeare.
  - 5 Shakespeare coined a large number of English words.
  - 6 These days new words on the internet are guaranteed immediate worldwide usage.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door "wel" of "niet".

- 1p 9 How could the last sentence of paragraph 11 (“Why ... remember it?”) also begin?
- A And why...
  - B So why...
  - C Yet why...
- 1p 10 What does the example of the word “*ilunga*” (paragraph 12) serve to illustrate?
- A Even the reputable *Times* sometimes makes up its own words.
  - B Fictitious words may become part of the language through the internet.
  - C The internet has generated a fashion for new words.
- 1p 11 What does the writer assume when he states that “... the world could profit from learning a new language, ...” (paragraph 13)?
- A Of all the new words generated by the internet, we should focus on those that benefit mankind.
  - B People’s thoughts and behaviour may be influenced by the language they know and use.
  - C The fact that people understand each other’s language facilitates effective communication.
  - D The internet’s contribution to world peace should not be underestimated.

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**Bronvermelding**

*Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.*