

American Dialect Society

Julie Roberts, Executive Secretary
julie.roberts@uvm.edu

Dept. of Romance
Languages & Linguistics
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405

Contact for Word of the Year: **Ben Zimmer**, Chair of the New Words Committee of the American Dialect Society, and language columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*. bgzimmer@gmail.com, (740) 485-2105

Contact for Name of the Year: **Cleveland K. Evans**, Past President, American Name Society, cevans@bellevue.edu, (402) 557-7524

(For immediate release)

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2018 Word of the Year is *tender-age shelter* as voted by American Dialect Society

SHERATON TIMES SQUARE HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK—JAN. 4—In its 29th annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted for *tender-age shelter* (also *tender-age facility* or *tender-age camp*) as the Word of the Year for 2018. The term, which has been used in a euphemistic fashion for the government-run detention centers that have housed the children of asylum seekers at the U.S./Mexico border, was selected as best representing the public discourse and preoccupations of the past year.

Presiding at the Jan. 4 voting session was Ben Zimmer, chair of the American Dialect Society's New Words Committee and language columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*.

The term *tender-age shelter/facility/camp* first emerged in June 2018 when it was reported that infants and young children were being held in special detention centers after being separated from their families who crossed over the southern border, some illegally.

"The use of highly euphemistic language to paper over the human effects of family separation was an indication of how words in 2018 could be weaponized for political necessity," Zimmer said. "But the bureaucratic phrasing ended up backfiring, as reports of the term served to galvanize opposition to the administration's border policy."

Word of the Year is interpreted in its broader sense as "vocabulary item"—not just words but phrases. The words or phrases do not have to be brand-new, but they have to be newly prominent or notable in the past year.

The vote is the longest-running such vote anywhere, the only one not tied to commercial interests, and *the* word-of-the-year event up to which all others lead. It is fully informed by the members' expertise in the study of words, but it is far from a solemn occasion.

Members in the 130-year-old organization include linguists, lexicographers,

etymologists, grammarians, historians, researchers, writers, editors, students, and independent scholars. In conducting the vote, they act in fun and do not pretend to be officially inducting words into the English language. Instead, they are highlighting that language change is normal, ongoing, and entertaining.

In a companion vote, sibling organization the American Name Society voted “*Jamal Kashoggi*” as Name of the Year for 2018 in its fourteenth annual name-of-the-year contest.

AMERICAN DIALECT SOCIETY VOTE TALLIES

The number after each nomination is the number of votes it received. Winners are indicated by an asterisk. Voting totals for each category might not be identical because the number of voters might have changed for each category.

WORD OF THE YEAR

* **tender-age shelter/camp/facility**: government detention center for asylum-seekers’ children
71/147

yeet: indication of surprise or excitement 107/135

(the) wall: proposed barrier along the US/Mexico border to prevent illegal crossings 19

X strong: expression of solidarity after a tragedy in a particular place, as in “Pittsburgh Strong”¹⁶

Individual 1: pseudonym for Trump in documents from the Mueller investigation 9

white-caller crime: phenomenon of white people calling police on black people for doing
mundane things 68

POLITICAL WORD OF THE YEAR

* **(the) wall**: proposed barrier along the US/Mexico border to prevent illegal crossings 102/168

nationalist: displaying a staunch belief in one’s own nation (used by Trump and supporters)
78/123

blue wave: major Democratic electoral gain 66

caravan: procession of Central American asylum-seekers to US/Mexico border 26

lodestar: guiding principle (used in op/ed by anonymous White House staffer) 18

DIGITAL WORD OF THE YEAR

* **techlash**: backlash against tech innovators 92/113

demonetize: remove ads from a YouTube channel to deprive the creator of revenue 71/77

blackfishing: pretending to be black on social media by using makeup and hair products 71/92

deepfake: realistic digitally composed video used to misrepresent someone 52

finsta: fake Instagram account 7

SLANG/INFORMAL WORD OF THE YEAR

* **yeet**: indication of surprise or excitement 120/156

big dick energy (BDE): calm, unassuming attitude 51

canceled: firmly rejected or dismissed 12

mood, big mood: strong emotion of agreement 10

weird flex but OK: rejoinder to improper boast 109/147

MOST USEFUL

- * **Voldemorting**: avoiding mention of unpleasant person or topic by using a replacement term 114
- himpathy**: flow of sympathy away from female victims toward their male victimizers 26
- orbiting**: ending communication with someone while still monitoring them on social media 61
- preferred pronoun**: pronoun that a person opts to use for himself/herself/themself/etc. 3
- situationship**: undefined or unlabeled personal relationship 25
- self-care**: care for oneself 44

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

- * **single-use**: made to be used only once and destroyed 101/149
- climate grief**: negative feelings caused by climate-change-related weather events 125/146
- cli-fi**: science fiction relating to climate change 21
- hothouse Earth**: scenario of runaway global warming 20

MOST CREATIVE

- * **white-caller crime**: phenomenon of white people calling police on black people for doing mundane things 158
- girther**: person skeptical of the president's reported weight and height 11
- procrasti-**: related to procrastination 13
- today years old**: indication that someone has just recently learned something 60
- treasonweasel**: epithet for a traitorous person 4

EUPHEMISM OF THE YEAR

- * **racially charged**: circumlocution for "racist" 223
- executive time**: presidential down-time 2
- Individual 1**: pseudonym for Trump in documents from the Mueller investigation 12
- tender-age shelter/camp/facility**: government detention center for asylum-seekers' children 45

WTF WORD OF THE YEAR

- * **deleted family unit**: bureaucratic term that referred to asylum-seeking families whose children were removed 95
- emotional support peacock**: therapy animal that airline passenger tried to bring on board 21
- incel**: involuntary celibate (online subculture) 77
- shithole countries**: Trump's epithet for places he does not want to accept immigrants from 51
- soy boy**: term for a man perceived as not conforming to male gender stereotypes 9

HASHTAG OF THE YEAR

- * **#nottheonion**: reporting something true that seems like satire from The Onion 96
- #neveragain**: call for gun-control measures after the Parkland shooting 84
- #thankunext**: expressing gratitude and readiness to move on (from Ariana Grande) 30
- #timesup**: movement protesting sexual assault 58

EMOJI OF THE YEAR

- * 🤔: thinking face (indicating bemused pondering) 149
- 🦞: lobster (adopted by trans community) 49
- 💅: nail polish (indicating air of nonchalance) 25
- 🤦: facepalm (indicating exasperation, disbelief) 49

Founded in 1889, the American Dialect Society is dedicated to the study of the English language in North America, and of other languages, or dialects of other languages, influencing it or influenced by it. ADS members are linguists, lexicographers, etymologists, historians, grammarians, academics, editors, writers, and independent scholars in the fields of English, foreign languages, and other disciplines. The society also publishes the quarterly journal *American Speech*.

The American Dialect Society began choosing Words of the Year in 1990. Winners are listed below. A full account of the previous choices may be found on the American Dialect Society's website, www.americandialect.org.

Not all words chosen for a particular year are destined to become permanent additions to the vocabulary. *Y2K* in 1999 and *chad* in 2000 are examples of prominent terms that faded quickly. An explanation of which words are likely to succeed may be found in *Predicting New Words: The Secrets of Their Success* by Allan Metcalf.

**American Dialect Society Words of Previous Years are at
<http://americandialect.org/woty>**