

American Dialect Society

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2019 Word of the Year is “(My) Pronouns,” Word of the Decade is Singular “They” as voted by American Dialect Society

HILTON NEW ORLEANS RIVERSIDE, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA—JAN. 3— In its 30th annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted for “(my) pronouns” as its Word of the Year (2019) and *singular “they”* as its Word of the Decade (2010-2019). “(My) pronouns” was recognized for its use as an introduction for sharing one’s set of personal pronouns (as in “pronouns: she/her”), while *singular “they”* was recognized for its growing use to refer to a known person whose gender identity is nonbinary. *Singular “they”* was previously selected by the ADS as the 2015 Word of the Year.

Presiding at the Jan. 3 voting session was Ben Zimmer, chair of the American Dialect Society’s New Words Committee and language columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*.

“When a basic part of speech like the pronoun becomes a vital indicator of social trends, linguists pay attention,” Zimmer said. “The selection of “(my) pronouns” as Word of the Year speaks to how the personal expression of gender identity has become an increasing part of our shared discourse. That trend is also reflected in *singular “they”* being chosen as Word of the Decade, with a growing recognition of the use of *they* for those whose identities don’t conform to the binary of *he* and *she*.”

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 131-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 “*Arrokoth*” (the name of a far-flung minor planet) as Name of the Year for 2019 in its fifteenth 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 (2019)

* **(my) pronouns**: introduction for sharing one’s set of personal pronouns (“pronouns: she/her”) 161

ok boomer: retort to someone older expressing out-of-touch or condescending views 88

cancel: withdraw support from someone considered problematic or unacceptable 10

Karen: stereotype of a complaining, self-important white woman, typically a member of Generation X (also “Generation Karen”) 34

WORD OF THE DECADE (2010-2019)

* **they**: gender-neutral singular pronoun for a known person, particularly as a nonbinary identifier (“they,” “them,” “themselves”) 128/210

#BlackLivesMatter: expression of protest over police violence against African Americans 31

climate: used in phrases related to the impact of climate change, including “climate crisis,” “climate emergency,” and “climate strike” 39

emoji: small icon in electronic communication, used to convey information or emotional attitude, or as a playful substitution for words 1

meme: a shared cultural item in the form of a phrase, image, or video circulated online, often with humorous, creative alterations 110/143

#MeToo: expression of solidarity for women surviving sexual assault or harassment (coined by Tarana Burke) 16

opioid crisis: epidemic of opioid-related drug overdoses across the U.S. 1

selfie: a photograph that one takes of oneself, typically with a digital camera and shared on social media 1

woke: socially aware, especially about issues of racial and social justice (also used negatively to mock ostensibly enlightened attitudes) 23

POLITICAL WORD OF THE YEAR

* **quid pro quo**: exchange of favors (central to Trump/Ukraine impeachment scandal)
114/174

#**IMPOTUS**: derogatory reference to Trump (IMPeached President Of The United States)
92/146

squad: nickname for four House Democrats (Reps. Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, Pressley, Tlaib) 61

Trumpschmerz: suffering induced by constant updates about the Trump administration
41

MOST USEFUL/MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

* **ok boomer**: retort to someone older expressing out-of-touch or condescending views 206

plant-based: made from plants, for food products marketed as meat alternatives 63

stan: to be devoted or enthusiastic about 25

zoomer: member of Generation Z 19

SLANG/INFORMAL WORD OF THE YEAR

* **and I oop-**: catchphrase of VSCO girls, expressing shock, surprise, or embarrassment
(first used by drag queen Jasmine Masters) 142

hot girl summer: a call to live one's best life (after Houston rapper Megan Thee Stallion)
132

zaddy: variation of "daddy" as a term of endearment for an attractive older person,
typically with money 5

MOST CREATIVE

* **nobody**: phrasal template mocking someone providing an unsolicited opinion 220

(X)-curious: interested in something 9

gerrymeandering: drawing convoluted congressional district lines for political gain 8

sksksk: keysmash exclamation, expressing laughter, awkwardness, or amazement 87

EUPHEMISM OF THE YEAR

* **people of means**: rich people (used by Starbucks executive Howard Schultz to refer to
himself and fellow billionaires) 110/173

freedom gas / molecules of U.S. freedom: natural gas (used by Energy Dept. officials)
123/166

Heckboy: Hellboy (used on the marquee of a Tennessee movie theater) 15

self-partnered: single (used by Emma Watson) 68

DIGITAL WORD OF THE YEAR

* **im👮**: emoji representation of "impeach" 112/166

📠: facts (pun on "fax machine" emoji) 85

VSCO girl: young woman who posts trendy pictures of herself on the VSCO photo app
107/128

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>**