

SLAY SO HARD

FUN WITH YOUR WORDS OF THE YEAR

In the December unit of BRIDGE we looked at our words of the year 2025, and we asked you to send us your own picks. Here are our three winners – and some language fun for everybody.

Paul Farrington-Douglas (UK)

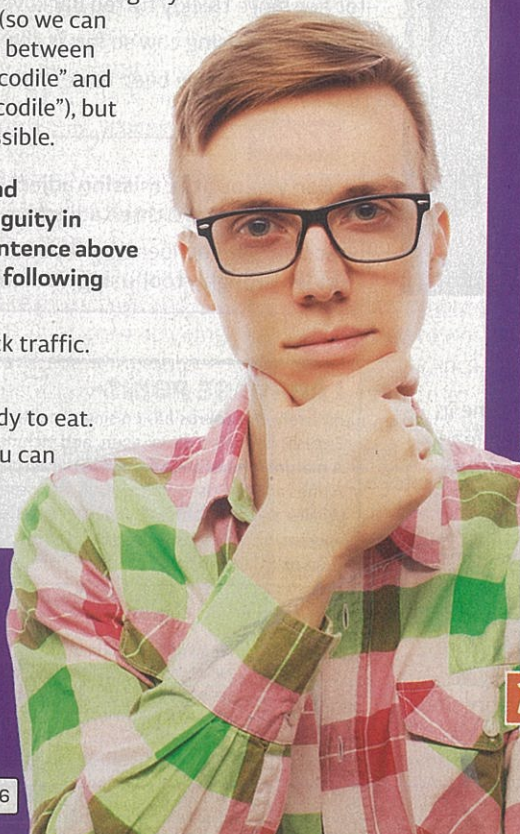
SMART USER

“Smart user” is usually used in the context of technology, where it means someone who uses a product efficiently and effectively. One of Ms Fleisznerová’s students in class 4.S at Gymnázium Čakovice misinterpreted it as meaning “someone who uses their smarts” (i.e. their intelligence). It amused the class, and they adopted “smart user” in the new sense of a person who thinks all the time – and as one of the highest forms of compliment one can receive.

Here at BRIDGE, we like ambiguity more than most people. Ambiguity is when it’s possible to read a sentence, word, etc. in more than one way, and it’s very common in English. We can sometimes avoid ambiguity with punctuation (so we can tell the difference between “a man-eating crocodile” and “a man eating crocodile”), but it’s not always possible.

TASK Try to find the ambiguity in the underlined sentence above and in each of the following sentences:

- There’s heavy truck traffic.
- Call me a taxi.
- The chicken is ready to eat.
- At the dog café you can eat and stroke dogs.



SLAY

According to Mariana Nováčková and Kateřina Šteflová from VOŠZ & SZŠ Hradec Králové, “This word represents confidence, good energy and positive energy on TikTok. People use it to celebrate someone doing something impressive or when they want to hype people.”

The original use of the word slay is a rather poetic way to say kill. In this sense, it’s got an irregular past form: “St George slew a dragon”, for example. It’s also transitive, so there must always be an object. The slang sense is regular and intransitive (without an object): “Girl, you totally slayed last night.” “Slay” – often written as slayyy – has been around in African-American English for a long time, but broke through into mainstream culture via the American TV show *RuPaul’s Drag Race*.



TASK Quite a few slang words have entered English by the same path as “slay” did. Do you know how to use the expression yas, queen? What does it mean to say that someone is servicing, or that they ate? What about to throw shade or spill the tea? Can you match each phrase to one of the following contexts?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| A insulting someone cleverly | D sharing gossip |
| B succeeding spectacularly | E praising someone for speaking their truth |
| C looking sexy | |

TWIN

“I don’t have a twin sibling, but I refer to my best friends as my twins because we are as close as twins are, even though we aren’t blood-related,” says Nela Chaloupková from VOŠZ & SZŠ Hradec Králové. “Sometimes I change the word to ‘twinster’ or ‘twinek’. It’s a beautiful word with a beautiful meaning.”

This special use of a word within a small group is an example of “familect”. Such words commonly develop in families (hence the term, a mix of “family” and “dialect”) and other small groups, often following a funny mistake that then becomes part of the group language. Sometimes, children grow into adulthood before realising that a word they’ve used every day has a different meaning to everyone else, or even does not exist. A project a few years ago collected hundreds of these, such as *colourbetical* for the order in which you might put coloured pens away, and *tangersuma* as an umbrella term for tangerines, satsumas, mandarins and clementines. They also found 47 different family names for the TV remote control!



TASK Can you think of any “familect” words in your family or friend group?