

Wordsworth's Newsletter

Words of Wisdom from The Words Workshop



Wordsworth says ... All hail Emma Thompson!

Emma Thompson has declared war on the sloppy use of the English language.

The 51-year-old mother of two, who has penned a new version of the classic musical *My Fair Lady*, said she was being driven "insane" by youngsters who used slang when communicating.

Sounding like a modern day equivalent of Henry Higgins, she told the *Radio Times* using words such as "like" and "innit" made individuals sound stupid.

Ms Thompson, who has an 11-year-old daughter and a 23-year-old adopted son, said it was vital that teenagers learned the difference between speaking to their friends and talking to people in authority. She said, "We have to reinvest, I think, in the idea of articulacy as a form of personal human freedom and power."

"I went to give a talk at my old school and the girls were all doing their 'likes' and 'innits?' and 'it aint's', which drive me insane. I told them, 'Just don't do it. Because it makes you sound stupid and you're not stupid.'"

She went on to say that she believes it necessary for youngsters to have two languages - one that they use with their mates and the other that they need in any official capacity. "Or you're going to sound like a knob," she concluded.

While it may alienate millions of teenagers, we greatly appreciate Ms Thompson's rant. However, John Humphrys believes adult jargon is far worse and recently wrote:

Intelligent teenagers will grow out of teen speak. The danger is that they will grow into jargon.

*You doubt that jargon can be dangerous? Let me close with an extract from a document that a friend who once advised big City firms showed me. It was so preposterous that I included it in my book *Lost for Words*.*

'The main role of the Equity Derivatives Group is product innovation: to define and write new payoffs with sales, traders and quants (pro-active and reactive), participate to the study (sic) of the risk management of the new payoffs. The objective is to increase sharply the amount of pro-active business.'

That was in 2003. My friend did not understand a word of it. Neither did I.

Five years later, with banks around the world teetering on the brink of collapse and most of the world plunged into recession, we all understood the lethal power of 'derivatives' and this kind of 'pro-active' business. But by then the damage had been done.

I agree with Emma Thompson that it would be nice if children stopped saying 'innit'. I think it's far more important that when they become adults they use a language we can all understand.

So, which is worse: teen speak or adult jargon? What do you think?

Wordsworth's jargon buster ...

Some of you old-timers may remember 'Wordsworth's management speak to avoid' where Wordsworth tried to decode management jargon into plain English. Well, in light of Emma Thompson's recent comments, we thought the



parents, aunts, uncles, grandmas and grandpas out there might appreciate a little teenage jargon busting.

This month's word is:

"Gantin"

Which is a term meaning 'bad' or 'horrible'. So, one might say, "Oh dear. The weather is gantin' today." Or, more likely, "Yo homey, it's, like, gantin' today innit?"

Wordsworth will be bringing you more like this over the next few months, however if you want to swot up go to www.gotateenager.org.uk for more teenage jargon busting.

