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English Revisited:

Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials

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Editorial

Scottish independence dominated the front pages of British papers this summer and as we all know the Union survived by more than a wee margin. Aye, the pundits did get it wrong in the end. Find out in our first introduction to typically British expressions who was chuffed by the result of the referendum and whose blunder caused an uproar in the press.

Following up on a request from one of our readers, we have tried in this issue to provide more challenging texts for our subscribers. Do not be surprised then if you find yourself checking the glossary more often.

Another reader wished to obtain suitable English equivalents for typical job titles at German universities. Our exploration of this topic has revealed that even within the English-speaking world a desire for clearer and comparable job titles is a topical issue.

And finally, something for the grammar buffs among us.... Our ongoing examination of verb tenses has led us to the past where we will begin by focussing in on the differences between present perfect and simple past.

John Nixon

Upcoming Issues :

- Learn to improve your English by learning collocations
- Coping with commas
- English proverbs

Do you have any ideas for future issues? Please contact us.



Comments



Subscription

Currently on Offer

If you are interested in any of the following, please **contact us**.

- **Coaching:** One-on-one coaching is available upon request. This is especially helpful if you are preparing for a presentation or planning a new course in English.
- **Workshops in November/December/January :**
Accent Reduction and Voice Training in English:
November 5 (14:15 to 17:15), November 14 and 21 (9:30 to 13:15)
Academic Writing in English: January 16 (12:00 to 15:15), January 23 and 30 (9:00 to 12:15)
- **Editing Service:** Do you have a paper, abstract or other document that needs to be looked over by a native English speaker before it is published? If so, we can help.
- **Free Online Business English Course:** Join our staff business English course and work through material online at your own pace while receiving feedback from one of our experienced instructors. This intermediate-level course (B1/B2) is free and we still have a few spaces left.

Glossary

wee: Scottish for a little

aye: Scottish for yes

pundit: expert

chuffed: pleased (British)

blunder: gaffe, mistake

an uproar:

public criticism

a buff: someone who is very interested in something

cope with: deal with a difficult situation

Grammar

Present Perfect and the Past

The present perfect always has a link to the present.

Why is

I have handed in my dissertation last week.

and

I have handed in my dissertation.

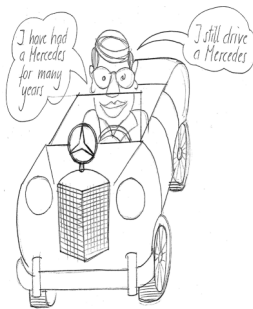
WRONG,

CORRECT?

Some languages have a past tense and a perfect tense to talk about past time in addition to a present tense which refers to present time. English, however, has got PRESENT perfect, a tense which relates a past action to the present. By using the expression *last week* in our example above we definitely place the action firmly in the past and thus separate it from the present: as a result, we have to use the simple past.

The present perfect always has a link to the present. When we use a verb in the present perfect we want to know how this activity affects our situation now. When exactly it happened is not important.

The following three cases highlight the main differences between the two tenses.



Rooting an action in the PAST (Simple Past)

There are quite a number of keywords that indicate an action took place in the past. To mention only the most important ones: *yesterday, ago, last (week, month ...), in 2013, in February, on Monday*

Our printer broke down on Wednesday.
I wrote emails all morning yesterday.

*But, no worries. It's OK again. You can use it.
It is not that morning any longer.*

A past action has an effect NOW (Present Perfect)

I've handed in my dissertation.
Our printer has broken down.

*I am so relieved! No more burning the candle at both ends!
It is not working now. You cannot use it.*

(In American English simple past is often used in this case instead of present perfect. Click on our further explanations below for more details.)

A single / repeated action in a time period THAT IS STILL GOING ON (Present Perfect)

I've been writing emails all morning.
I've spoken at a conference twice.

*It is still morning. And I am exhausted already.
I am talking about my life/experiences up to now without mentioning an exact date.*

I've worked here since 2004.

I still work here.

Important indefinite adverbials that show unfinished time include:

since (with a point in time), for (with a period of time), so far, up till now, recently, lately, all my life, all morning (it is still morning), today, this week (month, year ...), already, (not) yet, just, ever, never, before

Do not forget that *already* is used to say that something happened sooner than expected. Yet, on the other hand, occurs only in questions and negative sentences.

I've already written the report, but I haven't submitted it yet.

For more information on the differences between these two tenses and for more examples, please click here.

Glossary

root (v.): fix firmly

burn the candle at both ends:

an expression meaning staying up most of the night working

submit sth.:

to hand in something, for example a report or an assignment

Sylvia Grade



More Info



Exercises 1+2

Intercultural Communication

A Rose by Any Other Name*: Or What's in a Title?

"The only people who had titles that clearly described their jobs had jobs that he wouldn't have wanted." This reflection made by one of the main characters from the science fiction novel *Idoru* by the American-Canadian writer, William Gibson, who incidentally coined the term "cyberspace", exemplifies the often obfuscating realm of job titles.

While in academia, job titles might generally be considered less vague and confusing than in business, there is a plethora of terms used to describe the various teaching and research positions at post-secondary institutions. This is exacerbated by the fact that British universities tend to employ different job titles for academic staff than American ones. To add insult to injury, the correspondence with German academic titles is not so easy to identify.

In order to eliminate any confusion, Oxford University recently decided to abolish the use of the title and grade of *reader*, as it was widely misunderstood outside of the United Kingdom. After all, a reader could be any number of things: someone who reads a newspaper or magazine; an electronic device that can read information; or even a compilation of texts for a university course. What many non-Brits did and still do not realize is that a reader is also the title for a senior academic with considerable teaching and research experience, i.e. a full professor, yet one who generally does not hold a chair. It is not a junior academic, a difference that was lost on many on the international stage.

In light of ongoing discussions at Oxford University, the same fate likely awaits the terms *lecturer* and *senior lecturer*, the common terms used in the UK for senior teaching and research staff. Currently, a committee at Oxford has been tasked with examining the merits of replacing

these terms with *assistant* and *associate professor* respectively, which would bring the university in line with universities in North America, even though Oxford takes pains to point out that it would be an attempt to make clear to all international applicants, who might already hold a professorship, that the positions of *lecturer* and *senior lecturer* are actually senior posts and would not mean a demotion from a professorship.

The table to the right outlines the general equivalencies between academic titles in Britain and in North America.

The aforementioned example taken from the British context of higher education highlights the challenges of finding the right nomenclature for academic positions across cultural and linguistic divides. A further example would be the nebulous job title *research assistant*, one that can be used for students and doctoral candidates alike. Depending on the context, the title *research assistant* can be translated as *Wissenschaftliche Hilfskraft* oder *Wissenschaftliche/r Mitarbeiter/in* in German. For the latter, I would recommend adding *doctoral* or *postdoctoral* to research assistant in order to avoid any confusion or to choose another title altogether (see accompanying table for suggestions).

To assist our readers in choosing an appropriate job title for their business cards, I have compiled a table linking German titles with corresponding English ones. While this list is by no means exhaustive, you might find something that fits your particular situation. Take care to ensure that your job title reflects the actual work you do and the rank you hold within the university.

John Nixon



Table of Academic Titles

Britain	North America
Professor	Professor (with chair)
Reader	Professor
Senior Lecturer	Associate Professor
Lecturer	Assistant Professor

***A rose by any other name would smell as sweet**
It doesn't matter what something is called. Its essence is important.
Romeo and Juliet
 William Shakespeare

Glossary

incidentally:
by the way

obfuscating:
deliberately confusing or difficult to understand

plethora:
an amount that is more than is needed

exacerbate:
make worse

add insult to injury:
make worse

compilation:
collection

be lost on someone:
not understood by someone

demotion:
opposite of promotion

nebulous: unclear

Vocabulary

A Touch of British English: of Havering Scots and a Purring Queen

Scots in for a jammy deal



Glossary of British Colloquial English

food for thought:
something to think about

havering: going mad (Scottish)

a load of codswallop:
a lot of nonsense

jammy deal: a great deal (in the sense of lucky or fortunate)

rubbish s.o.:
talk someone down, emphasize someone's disadvantages

a pig in a poke:
something you buy without seeing (D: die Katze im Sack)

have a chinwag: gossip, chat

purr down the line:
make a sound of contentment like a cat on the phone

dress s.o. down:
reprimand s.o.

tear up: cry

a different kettle of fish:
a different subject or matter

well chuffed: highly delighted, pleased

The recent referendum on Scottish independence not only provided us with food for thought in the political arena, it also gave us another great platform for one of our most successful world exports: the English language.

Even though a majority of the electorate may have thought that the Scottish National Party were merely havering with many of their election promises, or talking a load of codswallop, the chances of the Scots emerging mid to long-term from the referendum with a jammy deal from Westminster must now be rather high.

For the last two years both sides, i.e. the Scottish nationalists, also known as the 'Yeses' (those campaigning for a yes to Scottish independence), and the 'Nos' (those campaigning to stay within the UK), have lost little opportunity in rubbishing their counterparts. At the end of the day 55% of the electorate in Scotland voted to stay in the UK. Perhaps they were frightened that independence would turn out to be a pig in the poke.

The rest of the world often seemed understandably baffled by the referendum; particularly flabbergasted were presumably those who had previously believed that the entire British Isles were all actually English in the first place.

Background:

The term 'UK' stands for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (political union), whereas 'Great Britain' is the geographic and political term used for the largest British island consisting of England, Scotland and Wales. England is the greatest part of Great Britain by land mass and the part with the highest population density. The locals will generally refer to and think of themselves as being English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish, rather than British.

Through a process called 'devolution', central government in Westminster has been awarding more and more powers to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, unlike the federal system in Germany, these powers are not guaranteed by any constitution and may therefore be taken away again.

The Queen was chuffed

Since the actual vote, other reactions to the referendum have dominated the news to a greater extent, namely the reaction of the Queen, who was presumably 'not amused' when the Prime Minister, David Cameron, was captured on camera whilst having a chinwag with former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Dave then reported that the Queen had purred down the line when he told her that Scotland had voted against independence.

The Prime Minister has since publicly apologized for this gaffe. It was this same blunder which also led to the BBC getting a dressing down, not only for broadcasting the PM's private conversation, but also for their subsequent conjecture in reporting that the PM had probably said that it was great to hear the Queen 'tear up'. Channel 4 then claimed the phrase he used was actually 'cheer up' which is, as we all know, a completely different kettle of fish. Nonetheless, it's still probably safe to assume that the Queen was well chuffed with the outcome.

The latest news from Scotland? The nationalist party has, for now, abandoned the battle for independence and is now pushing for "devo max" (maximum devolution) and the talk continues....

Cheryl Stenzel