

All you need to know

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A GUIDE TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE: FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

(Lavengro Books) Peter Harvey
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This book is all about what happens when advanced learner's dictionary meets encyclopedia of linguistics and culture! Consequently the content is wide-ranging. It covers issues of phonetics, such as accents and diacritics; it looks at problematic vocabulary points like imply/infer and blink versus wink, and at various aspects of the British way of life such as cricket and the Conservative party. Running to a hefty 400 pages, it's hardly a title to carry around in your pocket; it's probably more of a bedside read, a tome to stand next to that similar-sized dictionary most people seem to have nowadays. And although the subtitle may unwittingly deter many, this guide is certainly a more than handy reference tool for all involved in imparting linguistic and cultural knowledge on a regular basis.

In the author's alphabetically arranged detailed content one can only admire the spirit of Dr Johnson (father of the original dictionary); Harvey clearly wishes to include the lot, and abbreviations/acronyms alone must have taken a weekend to put together. Ready for a few of those to test you: ECHR? HTML? GWOT? Easy stuff, especially if you have this guide in front of you of course. I always felt, though, that FAO stood for something other than the stated Food and Agricultural

Organisation. Moving onto other matters, the differences between word ending in -able and -ible do not get just a brief mention; also provided for these are pronunciation help, exceptions, and the commonest examples of both. Harvey's predilection for lists is evident throughout: amphibians and reptiles, animal noises, modern and old English, herbs and spices, modal auxiliary verbs. One not to miss is that on pages 311/312 of the correct preposition, both with adjectives and preceding nouns.

This guide is especially useful for settling arguments or bets over such matters as the correct

of the main strengths of this book, it certainly provides some helpful explanations, and not without controversy, I felt. I've been explaining for years, and to all who would listen, that the word posh comes from the journey to India via port out, starboard home. Simply 'popular belief', at least according to the guide. When it comes to grammatical features there is no stopping the author. If anyone else could devote nine pages to an entry on modal auxiliary verbs then I'd like to buy them a drink. Other noteworthy features that will have readers coming back for more include the list, yes, another

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spelling of Gandhi, or should that be Ghandi? (The former is the correct one.) Other matters it will no doubt settle concern the differences between items like ghost, phantom, spirit and spook, and between hire, rent and let, and idioms and metaphors. In other words it will help out when dealing with potentially awkward classroom customers, or those keen to try out a new teacher. Other uses for such material might be in exams for learners at a high level. What about this one: explain the differences between the words inner, interior and internal. Try that one yourself or maybe on unsuspecting classes or colleagues in the staffroom.

Although etymology is not one

long one, of differences between British and American English, the explanations of insults, many of which almost made this reviewer blush, and help with verbs that take infinitives and/or gerunds. One final question: what's the difference between a tilde and a swung dash? Answers to the address below. First prize could well be a reply containing a combination of the following words: well & done. What are you waiting for?

Wayne Trotman is busy compiling extremely tricky questions for all his writing classes at the Institute of Technology, Izmir, Turkey. waynetrotman@gmail.com.