

Q. When quoting something or someone, my students often begin: “He contributed that...” or “she shared that...” This seems to be a fairly new usage; the older way to express that idea would have been: “He contributed the argument that” or “she shared the idea that.” I may be getting old and opinionated, but what’s wrong with the former, conventional usage?

A. Nothing. But young people welcome change and, because grammar is no longer taught in schools, they are probably unaware that a change of grammar may affect the basic structure of English. Had they learned English grammar, they would have known that traditionally the language categorizes verbs according to their function as either transitive or intransitive, and that some verbs fit into both categories.

A transitive verb has to have a direct object in order to complete its meaning. One such verb is *shut*: you have to shut something. Another is *like*; you must like someone or something. You cannot use the verb *bring* without saying what it is you are bringing, or say *tell* without explaining what you are telling, or say *bit* without mentioning the direct object of your action.

On the contrary, an intransitive verb does not require a direct object; its meaning is complete. For example, the verb *agree* is intransitive. It expresses an entire idea by itself, although you can add phrases if you like. (For example, “I agreed with my friend to...”) One way to remember the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs is to compare the verb *raise* (transitive) with the verb *rise* (intransitive). You raise a book from a table; but the sun rises from the east.

The verb *share*, like the verb *send*, has traditionally been a transitive verb (transitive verbs are identified by dictionaries as *tr.v.*). You can send cookies and thoughts, or you can share cookies and thoughts, but both verbs were meaningless without a direct object. However, in recent years, people—especially young persons—have considered the transitive verb *share* to also be an intransitive verb (identified by dictionaries as *int.*). Using *share* as an intransitive verb, you can say, as your students are doing, “I’d like to share

with you that...” These same students have also retained *share* as a transitive verb, so they can say, “share cookies.”

Such dual capacity is not unusual. Many verbs can be both transitive and intransitive. For example, the verb *obey*. You can either “obey a rule” or merely “obey,” as in, “When she was told to sit down, she obeyed.” You can break a date; but if you drop a plate, it breaks. Some people bake cakes because they like to bake. Your daughter may like to drive, so she asks to drive your car.

As with any newly introduced changes to language, especially changes that disturb the structure of the language, only those people who introduce the changes approve of them; the rest of us disagree and are often indignant about neologisms.

A large number of neologisms have flooded English because of computer language. A new coinage, *app*, is an abbreviation of “application,” which is something you put on your iPhone™ (a trade-name coinage) to enable you to do various things with your phone. (I am not responsible for the accuracy of the following definitions, but have been briefed by “reliable informants”).

The recently created verb *friend* means that you have added a person’s name to your list of Facebook™ (another trade-name coinage) friends, thus you are now friending the person. (Many of us, recalling the older verb *befriend*, wonder whether the new, shorter version signals the loss of the older verb—and whether the change is desirable.)

Unappreciated by Lake Superior State University were many new words, which were recently included on its “List of [15] Words Banished from the Queen’s English for Mis-use, Over-use and General Uselessness.” Some of the terms listed were *tweet*, *shovel-ready*, *teachable moment*, and *transparent/*

transparency. On the contrary, Wayne State University’s Word Warrior project has released its annual list of “expressive words that have fallen out of use and deserve to return to conversation and prose.” Among them: *antediluvian*, *festoon*, *mendacity*, and *unctuous*.

I would add a few of my favorites, including *uninterested* (displaced by *disinterested*), *healthful* (eliminated by *healthy*), and *terrified* (replaced by *terrorized*). The loss of one member of each pair has eliminated an important distinction. Also disappearing, though unlamented, is the distinction between *perspicacious* and *perspicuous*.

From the Mailbag

Much lamented, however, is my error in the November/December issue, in which I inadvertently substituted the noun *secularization* for the intended noun *securitization*. (Ah, this time I typed it correctly!) The noun *secularization*, of course, has nothing to do with *securitization*, which many of my readers pointed out in e-mails, but both forms occur by adding a series of suffixes to the adjectives *secular* and *secure*. The adjective *secure* first became the verb *securitize* and then a noun, *securitization*.

These forms are so new that my spell-check announces that they do not exist. The suffix -ization is fertile, however. For example, the *Washington Post* recently quoted from a piece by Harold Meyerson in which he discussed “economic elites” who thrive on “the financialization and globalization of the economy.” In addition, the “polarization” of politics is being widely discussed.

Thanks to the alert readers who were the first to inform me of my typo: Attorneys Daniel H. Borinsky of Lake Ridge, Va.; Steven Paul McSloy and Josiah Daniel, both of New York City; and Fred Schubkegel of Kalamazoo, Mich. Would that they had been around to proofread the column before it left my desk! **TFL**

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