

UK charity hopes to 'decolonise' English vocabulary

27th March 2023



The English language has been evolving for centuries, if not for millennia.

Conversations from the Middle Ages would be almost unrecognisable today. In particular, the use and meaning of vocabulary is in

constant flux. The British charity Oxfam has issued a guide that further pushes for changes in how the language is used, especially by charity workers. Oxfam wants to "decolonise" English, which it considers to be, "the language of a colonising nation". It said English needs to change "in order to decolonise our ways of working and shift power". Oxfam has issued a 92-page "Inclusive Language Guide" to advise employees on the use of language "to support everyone to feel empowered to be inclusive in their work".

Oxfam was founded in 1942 to help alleviate global poverty. It now operates in more than 80 countries worldwide. Its new guide recognises the reality that English is the dominant language used by charity workers in former British colonies. Oxfam said: "This guide aims to support people who have to work and communicate in the English language as part of this colonial legacy." The guide focuses on inclusivity for the disabled, the LGBTQIA+ community, migrants, refugees, and others. Suggested language changes include avoiding "colonial" phrases like "headquarters" and "mankind". It said the latter word could be viewed as being patriarchal as "it is often misunderstood as only referring to men".

Sources: foxnews.com / oxfordmail.com / Oxfam.org

Writing

All language should be changed to promote equality and inclusiveness. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

English / language / evolving / the Middle Ages / charity / colonising / nation / guide / poverty / colonies / legacy / the disabled / LGBTQIA+ / inclusivity / headquarters

True / False

- 1) The article says English has been evolving for 10,000 years. T / F
- 2) It would be difficult to understand the English used in the Middle Ages. T / F
- 3) A charity called Oxfam said English is the language of a coloniser. T / F
- 4) The charity issued a 92-page guide book on more inclusive language. T / F
- 5) Oxfam was first established in 1492. T / F
- 6) Oxfam's guide is for people speaking any language. T / F
- 7) The Oxfam guide said the word "headquarters" was a colonial word. T / F
- 8) Some people might think the word "people" really means "men". T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. evolving | a. non-stop |
| 2. constant | b. reduce |
| 3. issued | c. established |
| 4. empowered | d. consequences |
| 5. inclusive | e. developing |
| 6. founded | f. alluding |
| 7. alleviate | g. published |
| 8. legacy | h. steering clear of |
| 9. avoiding | i. all-encompassing |
| 10. referring | j. unchained |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) What do you know about Oxfam?
- c) What are your least favourite English words?
- d) Should vocabulary be more gender neutral?
- e) Do you think the word 'people' is patriarchal?
- f) Should the word 'woman' contain the word 'man'?
- g) What needs to change in your language?
- h) What questions would you like to ask Oxfam?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. language has been evolving | a. power |
| 2. the use and meaning of vocabulary is | b. as being patriarchal |
| 3. shift | c. empowered |
| 4. advise employees on the | d. refugees, and others |
| 5. support everyone to feel | e. in constant flux |
| 6. Oxfam was founded in 1942 to help | f. for the disabled |
| 7. part of this colonial | g. use of language |
| 8. The guide focuses on inclusivity | h. alleviate global poverty |
| 9. the LGBTQIA+ community, migrants, | i. legacy |
| 10. the latter word could be viewed | j. for centuries |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think of the English language?
- How has your language been evolving?
- What are your favourite English words?
- How do you learn English vocabulary?
- What do you think of English words being 'colonial'?
- What do you know about Britain's colonial past?
- How can language make people more inclusive?
- What English words have you learnt recently?

Spelling

- The English language has been oilvvegn
- for centuries, if not for lailminne
- vocabulary is in constant xluf
- advise peemeyso on the use of language
- support everyone to feel rpeowdme
- be cvluneiis in their work
- help telealvai global poverty
- English is the ntdnamio language
- part of this colonial cyagle
- migrants, rusgfee, and others
- hrspeas like "headquarters"
- viewed as being atlahcripar

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. a	3. g	4. j	5. i
6. c	7. b	8. d	9. h	10. f

Role Play

Role A – Speaking

You think speaking is the best way to learn vocabulary. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): using flash cards, reading books or listening to music.

Role B – Using Flash Cards

You think using flash cards is the best way to learn vocabulary. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): speaking, reading books or listening to music.

Role C – Reading Books

You think reading books is the best way to learn vocabulary. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): using flash cards, speaking or listening to books.

Role D – Listening to Music

You think listening to music is the best way to learn vocabulary. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their ways. Also, tell the others which is the least effective of these (and why): using flash cards, reading books or speaking.

Speaking – Vocabulary

Rank these with your partner. Put the best ways to learn vocabulary at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| • Speaking | • Watching movies |
| • Translation | • Vocabulary books |
| • Flash cards | • Listening to music |
| • Reading books | • Language school |

Answers – True False

1 F	2 T	3 T	4 T	5 F	6 F	7 T	8 T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.