**SCHOOLKIDS’ SLANG FROM THE UK**

*The following are samples of school playground and teenage slang recorded in 2010 and 2011. Versions of many of these first appeared in the ‘Yoofspeak’ column in the* Times Educational Supplement *magazine.*

**Campet** (n)  
  
**Means:** an annoyingly inert, slow-moving and/or obtuse person  
  
**Usage:** “Holly’s supposed to be here and she’s still at home in bed: what a campet!”  
  
  
Most of our young charges probably don’t use words like inert, laggardly or obtuse, even if they have - and it’s doubtful, isn’t it? - the vaguest inkling of what they mean. But they do need to disapprove of fellow-pupils who refuse to budge when called upon or who always move at less than snail’s pace. Among girls in Redbridge and elsewhere the word *du jour* for this kind of sluggard is campet. It’s in fact a misreading or mishearing for one of the online gaming community’s most hated denizens. In multiplayer games “camping” is staying put, concealing oneself and ambushing opponents instead of moving around and fully participating. Although it’s not actually against the rules the epithet “camper” is usually accompanied by several colourful expletives. Campet, which sounds as if “limpet” has been grafted on, is a more recent version of the insult, expanded now to apply to anyone who won’t get up and join in.

**Bally** (n)  
  
**Means:** a mask used by miscreants  
  
**Usage:** "...grab a bally and go hard down the Centre..."  
  
  
This summer's urban unrest highlighted the dark side of Yoofspeak as police published the contents of social media postings and texts sent from the frontlines by rioters, translating the street argot where necessary for the benefit of an outraged readership. Journalists were taken by the would-be gangstas' use of dated US slang terms "Feds", "5-0" and "po-po" for the police and were bemused by deliberate or accidental misspellings ("Let's have some havic."). Learned articles analysed the social significance of the "hoodie" (garment and wearer), but in their "BBMs" (encrypted BlackBerry Messenger exchanges) the "yutes" (their preferred term) were focused on the practicalities of the moment, warning fellow perpetrators of the location of "bully-vans" - police vehicles - and reminding each other to hide identities from CCTV and press photographers with ballies, seemingly referring both to balaclavas and bandanas.

**Trek** (v,n)

**Means:** (to go on) a long and tedious journey

**Usage:** “Man we been trekkin’ for hours!” “From her endz to ours is a trek.”

Researchers into Yoofspeak will know that in nearly every batch of new expressions offered up as the latest teen lingo, there are one or two which are not really slang at all. This is because most of the younger generation are not familiar with them and don’t realise that they are standard English: also, to be fair, because they sound and look exotic, possibly subversive to the uninitiated.

“Trek”, used more or less in its original sense is a popular feature of playground complaints – the moaners probably don’t know much Afrikaans (from which we got the word), and even *Star Trek the Prequel* is a distant memory. Other examples of the same phenomenon are “luka” or “lookah”, used by some London kids to mean money, which seems like Multiethnic dialect but is really the picturesque old phrase ‘filthy lucre’ after a makeover. “Burly”, which one user explained as a blend of “beautiful” and “gnarly”, expresses admiration for a tough-looking male, and “reek” as in “Ben’s room really reeks” is also considered a really cool novelty.

**Dinlo** (n)

**Means**: an idiot

**Usage**: “You can tell Callum anything and he’ll believe it, he’s a right dinlo.”

Some linguists are claiming that far from dying out, regional dialects – and that includes local slang terms – are being helped by SMS texting, chatting and tweeting on social media sites, as well as old-fashioned word of mouth - to spread further across the UK. A probable example of this is yet another term for a complete dope, or dupe, (in practice nearly always male) which originated in Romany as *dinilo* and has long been in use from the New Forest, via Portsmouth’s ‘Pompey – slang’ to East Anglia. Dinlo(w) is the usual form, although “dinler”, “dindler” and “dingle” have also been recorded. Yoof elsewhere have now added these to their already rich lexicon of insults, sometimes abbreviating to “dinny” or just “din”.

**Jinelz** (n)

**Means:** a con, or a con-artist

**Usage:** “That bargain phone contract is just a jinelz.”/ “Don’t trust ‘im, ‘e’s a jinelz.”

Those high street special offers are a rip-off, your classmates are out to trick you out of your pocket money – and that girl who says she likes you just wants to be paid the Cineplex. The Yoof suffer from paranoia just like the rest of us and Yoofspeak has its own term to describe both the schemers and the schemes.

Probably borrowed from a Jamaican grannie but re-spelled to make it look cool, it’s a fair guess that the multiethnic yoofs who say or text it are ignorant of its colourful history. ‘Ginnal’ is Caribbean patois, a local pronunciation of ‘(con)genial’ and describes a sort of anti-hero of Afrocaribbean folklore, a smooth-talking trickster, typically an urban loafer who swindles out-of-towners or a woman who deceives a naïve suitor. In the UK playground, just as in the original folk-tales, the one who successfully “jams” or “jumps” (outwits) you is often admired while the poor victim is mocked.

**Gimbo** (n)

**Means:** more or lesswhatever you want it to mean

**Usage:** “Can you pass me that gimbo, the one over there.”

“Everyone knows Shelley’s a complete gimbo.”

Not all yoofspeak is urban and cool. The latest generation of inarticulate simpletons have come up with their own modern equivalents of “thingummybob” and “whatchamacallit”, and “oojamaflip” (whatever that meant – I’m still not sure), a case in point being the silly-sounding, essentially meaningless “gimbo”. It also comes in the forms “gimbot”, “gimboid”, “gimble”, “gim” and – a favourite with the video gaming fraternity – “gimulate” or “gimbulate”.

All these can be used to denote what one of my nerdy informants called “a total and absolute idiot”. Sometimes, though, they substitute for anything or anyone whose name is temporarily forgotten, are dropped randomly into conversations or uttered as chants and war–cries (“Gimbo! Gimbo!”). Occasionally they function as Internet pseudonyms (there seem to be several Gimbos, at least one Gimbot and a couple of Gimbles gimbulating online - unless of course they are all one and the same irritating gim).

**Feen** (n)

**Means**: a male person

**Usage**: “Who’s the feen over by the gate?”

The proper names for Yoofspeak, so linguists tell us, are MEYD (multiethnic youth dialect) or MLE (multiethnic London English), but not all playground language emanates from London and ethnic doesn’t only mean Afrocarribean or Asian. One term that’s widely used around the UK is rarely if ever heard in the London area, but belongs to a 300 year-old tradition. Feen, also spelled fein, has been borrowed from the slang of Travellers, the argot formerly used by Tinkers and known as Shelta, itself deriving mainly from Irish Gaelic. In Irish feen simply means “man” but in slang it sometimes has the extra senses of “stranger” or “rogue”. Don’t confuse this with the verb “to feen” (sometimes “feem”), a modern import from US street-talk, which is an alteration of ‘fiend’ and means craving for, or obsessing over, as in “I’m feenin’ for some weed” or “he’s feenin’ over that new girl.”

**Hollage** (n)

**Means:** something hilarious

**Usage:** “Have you seen Charlotte’s latest outfit? Très hollage!”

Posher teens have their own version of yoofspeak, their own mix of would-be street slang, babytalk and invented expressions, typically in the form of girly yells of approval (by both sexes) and squeals of delight (ditto).

When the denizens of the middle-class playground are trading witticisms a favourite trick is to insert touches of French - the odd real word (“quelle disaster”, “beaucoup trouble”) and Franglais pronunciations. “Rummage” (sex), and “bummage” (enthusiasm) have been frenchified, but current favourite is “hollage”, meaning huge amusement or hugely amusing, pronounced to rhyme with English “college” or like French “collage”, or, some young purists insist, as three-syllable “holla-age”.

It looks as if the little sophisticates have adapted “holla”, (the hip-hop version of “holler”, meaning to yell), one of cool Yoof’s iconic expressions from the noughties, and slightly misunderstood it in the process, since it originally described phoning, praising or seducing rather than braying with laughter.

**Soz** (exclamation)

**Means**: the shortest possible apology

**Usage**: “You just ate my last Pringle.” “Soz”

Teens are usually in too much of a hurry, or simply too tough, to apologise for anything, but just occasionally they are moved enough – when they’ve done something unforgivable to a close friend or when there’s a real threat of adult retribution – to mumble their excuses or post a *mea culpa*. It’s still vital, though, to waste as little effort as possible so “sorry” has been edited down to soz or SOZ, with or without verbal or written exclamation mark. If you’re heartbroken the lengthy “so soz” or “sozza” is permissible while in chatrooms or texting the code for a really abject, grovelling apology is SWY, short for “sowwy”, while a tactless question can be followed up, sincerely or ironically, with SIA – “sorry I asked.”

**Teek** (n, adj)

**Means:** (someone or something that is) impossibly old

**Usage:** “Those nylon hoodies are so teek.” “Miss Turpin is a fittie but Mr Collins is a teek.”

Teeks are a species of alien featuring in the *Star Wars* series, and in Hinglish, the Bollywood mixture of Indian and English, “teek” means healthy, but for UK yoof, preferring to live in the eternal present, innocent of the ravages of age, the word is a slur for use when you’re forced to refer – reluctantly and as rarely as possible - to anything to do with the older generation. Perhaps understandably there are very few expressions for older people (“‘rents” being one exception), or old-fashioned in general in the teen lexicon. This offering comes from “antique”, of course, but it doesn’t mean agreeably retro or old-skool cool; it’s only used for disapproval, specifically dissing anything and anyone more than a few months older than oneself, or going back more than a week or two in time.

**Bredder**

**Means**: a copycat

**Usage**: (n) “That sneaky bredder’s always suckin’ up, you don’t need him.”

(v) “Don’t be breddin’ my style, man!”

Although it’s now an all-purpose term for someone who copies, including the fellow-pupil (male or female) who’s peering over your shoulder in class, pen in hand, there are several more layers of meaning to this fashionable insult. The bredder – the word was popularised by grime star Dizzee Rascal in 2007 - can also be a hanger-on, a mini-me who imitates your mannerisms, takes credit for your fashion statements. Breddin’ can consist not just of cheating by copying but of stealing ideas, bigging oneself up, making false claims and letting down friends.

Spelling is usually optional for the Yoof, but in this case there’s a fine distinction that must be observed between “bredda(h)”, Caribbean for brother, a genuine friend, someone you can rely on, and our new and ironic version of the same word.

**Crepz** or **crep** (n)

**Means**: footwear, especially stylish trainers

**Usage**: “Check out Shaz’s well propa crepz.”

“She’s only got one top but she’s got bare crep.”

**Ash Hi-tops ? Vintage Nike Air Force Ones? Old-skool orange Pumas? Adidas Kopenhagens? The debate rages on among the young and kewl. What you wear on your feet has long been crucial for teen style, especially in our own culture where school uniforms severely limit the poor dears’ capacity for self-expression. If you eavesdrop (accidentally of course) on playground conversations or visit online messageboards, an amazing proportion of talk-time is devoted to laces, eyelets, nuances of colour and texture and pull-on-ability, key components in the Yoof’s shoe fetish.**

**For US hip-hop “kicks” is the slang *du jour*, but the *mot juste* right across this country - unlike many of Yoofspeak’s fly-by-night nicknames - has been in vogue for at least a decade, and probably originated much earlier. It’s not quite clear exactly how and when the Yoof acquired it, but crepe-soled suede shoes were worn by upper-class cads in the 1940s, mutating into the “creepers” (originally “brothel-creepers”) favoured by Teddy Boys, Rockabilly fans and Punks.**

**Wallad** (n)

**Means:** a foolish male

**Usage:** “Your gang are all wallads.” “Ya messed up big, ya wallad.”

There are plenty of UK teen terms that originate in afrocaribbean speech, one or two from Bengali, a couple possibly from French, but right now just one significant example that comes from Arabic. “Bint”, the Arabic translation of “girl”, and the more recent “binta” have been used by an older generation as a less-than-complimentary nickname and may still occasionally be uttered in provincial school playgrounds, but the term currently favoured in London is “wallad”, the Arabic (*walad*) for “boy”, “son” or “kid”, and it’s very very far from complimentary. For some young users of the word it just signifies an idiot: they don’t seem to realise that it started out in street gang terminology where it can be a trigger for serious interracial violence. Could it be that they’re, consciously or unconsciously, confusing the new word with the cosy old Cockney insult of the 1970s, “wally”?

**Chenzed** (adj)

**Means:** exhausted (or sometimes, intoxicated)

**Usage:** “No way am I going out partying tonight, I’m chenzed.”

The origin of this week’s star expression is mysterious: it could simply be an invention from nowhere but, despite what many think, that’s almost unheard of in English, even in slang. Despite looking exotic and odd - after all that’s part of the point – virtually all examples of Yoofspeak are traceable back to a logical source – typically to afrocarribean patois, hip-hop street-talk, pop lyrics, videogaming jargon, rhyming or back-slang.

Being dead tired is a major preoccupation of pubescents and adolescents, so

Yoofspeak has a vast range of synonyms for what grownups know as “knackered”, many of which double as synonyms for drunk or high on substances. First recorded by a language researcher in 2006, one user told me this one was Chinese, someone else that it was a misspelling, but they didn’t know of what. It seems to be especially popular outside the Southeast, so could it be from regional dialect? If you think *you* know its true etymology, please share!

**Glicther** (n)

**Means:** someone who cheats

**Usage:** “Miss, Perry’s a glicther!” “I’m organising a glicther clan. You wanna join?”

This weird-looking, weird-sounding word started out as a deliberate rewriting – what sociolinguists call a “creative re-spelling” - of glitcher. Many video games have inbuilt glitches – errors in the programme – that can be discovered and then exploited by skilled players – glitchers - to win unfairly or outsmart other players.

The tradition of messing with spellings began with US street culture’s reclaiming terms like ‘phat’ and substituting its own plural z (doodz, hackerz and crackerz), then the Yoof began to parody online misspellings and the predictive text errors by which “cool” comes out as “book”. Mercifully most kids, despite the howls of conservative educationalists, are adept at code-switching and don’t carry the practice over into school writing assignments. In the case of glicther what was formerly a written gimmick is now said out loud, to the confusion of any passing adult and quite a few fellow-pupils, too.

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