

Oxford Dictionaries' "Word" of the Year? An Emoji

Each year, Oxford Dictionaries selects one "Word of the Year" that "best reflect[s] the ethos, mood, and preoccupations" of a given year.

Yesterday, Oxford [announced](#) that its selection for 2015 wasn't a word; it was an emoji. More specifically, this emoji:



Oxford justified its selection by pointing out that "Emojis are no longer the preserve of texting teens – instead, they have been embraced as a nuanced form of expression, and one which can cross language barriers."

Others on Oxford's shortlist for the 2015 Word of the Year were "on fleek," "lumbersexual," and "they" as a singular pronoun. (As convenient as the "they" addition is, we at Intellectual Takeout might hold off on utilizing it for a while for the sake of avoiding the vitriol of less current grammar trolls.)

The rise of emojis has been applauded by some academics for its flexibility and surprising complexity. Casper Grathwohl, the President of Oxford Dictionaries, [said](#) that "Emoji are becoming an increasingly rich form of communication."

Linguistics Professor Vyv Evans of Bangor University [boldly proclaimed](#) that "emoji has already far eclipsed hieroglyphics, its ancient Egyptian precursor which took centuries to develop."



Others, however, see emoji as a sign of the degeneration of English language and culture. As Joanna Stern pointed out in a *Wall Street Journal* [column](#), emoji "lacks the grammar,

vocabulary, syntax and semantics of a true language,” which can result in “complete and utter ambiguity.”

And as far as the hieroglyphics comparison goes, here’s what Jonathan Jones of [*The Guardian*](#) had to say:

“Ancient Egypt was a remarkable civilisation, but it had some drawbacks. The Egyptians created a magnificent but static culture. They invented a superb artistic style and powerful mythology – then stuck with these for millennia. Hieroglyphs enabled them to write spells but not to develop a more flexible, questioning literary culture: they left that to the Greeks.”

What do you think? Are the emergence of emoji a sign of development or decline?