THE JOYS OF

A User's Guide to the *Real* American Language

A close-up look at buzz-words that have entered the language we all speak and write. You're not alone if you're puzzled by the meanings of...Granularity... Networking...Hands-on... Transparent interface... Upscale marketing...Bells and whistles...Quality circles...Multitasking... Nanosecond...

Learn to comprehend and cope with words that come out of corporate memos, scientific and hi-tech papers, sports journalism, government bureaucracy...

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The Joys of Jargon

by

Tom Fahey

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Jargon Basics 1
In Praise of Interfacing 3
Jargonoids Among Us 15
Types of Jargon 21
Creation: Who Put the Mega in Megachannel Spectrum Analyzer? 27
The Times They Are a Upgradin' 33
Circulating Down the River Jargon 38
Top-down Design: The Tower of Babel 47
The Pros 56
Jargon Etiquette 70
What Good is Jargon? 77
The Art of Jargon 86

Jargon Specifics 91
Why Johnny Can't Read Computerese 92
The Sounds of Science 102
Buzzwords 111
Sprechen zie Doublespeak? 115
Abbreviations—or—You No Gotta Code Book? 124
Power Words: Buzzing Your Way to the Top 135
Money Talks but What's It Saying? 139
Consumerology 144

Jargon Glossaries 149
Science Words 150
Consumer Words 159
Computer Words 164
Money Words 174
Occupational Slang 181
Index 191

INTRODUCTION

The Joys of Jargon can help you identify, understand, and use the latest technical terms, buzzwords, acronyms, and high-tech slang.

As we approach the millennium, the dominant feature of the American language is jargon. It's everywhere and everyone speaks it to some extent. It's also new and confusing.

Even if you don't like jargon or comprehend it (and the two usually go hand-in-hand), you need to appreciate the use of new words to **keep up with the curve** in business and technology. And the demand is **ramping up** in other areas as well: personal health (**HDL—high-density lipoprotein**—so-called "good cholesterol") and finances (**high-grade money market instruments**), home entertainment (**HDTV—high definition television**), government programs (**HARV—High Angle-of-attack Research Vehicle**), and sports (**high-sticking**).

Technical, scientific, and occupational terms run into the hundreds of thousands. To limit our examination, *The Joys of Jargon* focuses on words that have **migrated** from the confines of the purely specialized groups. I'm looking at words and phrases that appear throughout the country in the course of normal business transactions or in the usual media outlets: TV, radio, movies, and magazines.

Yes, we are venturing into deepest, darkest Jargonia, where the trees are thick with dangling verbosities (**Counterforce Plus Avoidance Objectives**), and strange critters such as the **Restructured Extended Executor** and **Odontogriphus** creep about. But—we are not going spelunking into caverns of unimaginable depths where the **Antomosing Ductoliths** lurk. And no—we won't go scuba diving into the black lagoon of **(2-(2- Chrlordethoxy)Ethoxy) Triphenylphosphonium.** We are not dealing with the tens of thousands of arcane words used *only* among certain people in certain situations.

What we will be looking at amounts to a mini-language, maybe 5,000 words, the 5 percent tip of a 100,000-word iceberg. (A mathematician would say we're **capturing a subset** of American jargon.) Pop Jargon. It's jargon all right—it's technical and it's novel—but it's also somewhat widespread. And of these, I've selected and defined 500 words that are either essential, prestigious, or interesting at the moment.

The Joys of Jargon is divided into three parts:

1. Jargon Basics
2. Jargon Specifics
3. Jargon Glossaries

If all this looks like too much, don't worry. You always have another alternative.

> *The man with the soft calm eyes listened to me quietly, even politely, and with extreme attention; but nothing in his countenance indicated that he had understood my story. When I finished, he said not a word. There remained one resource, to speak English.*
>
> —Jules Verne,
> *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*

A swift and swelling ship, full of rich words, full of joys.

—*Walt Whitman*

IN PRAISE OF INTERFACING

I wrote this book to celebrate the words we Americans have been hoisting on each other, and the world, for the past five decades.

No, this isn't another one of those hymns to the English language—or a lament about its decline. I'm more interested in what actually comes out of our mouths every day than in the pure tongue we were taught in grade school. Heck, most of the words in this book didn't even exist back then.

Maybe you had a teacher like the one I had in fourth grade. Sister Margaret Gertrude was such a prune about grammar and usage she turned purple if you said "Can I go to the bathroom?" instead of "May I —?" Well, this book is about words that would make her face pucker.

> *Young man, you what? You* interfaced *with Marjorie in the schoolyard?*

I'm talking about jargon. Computerese, shoptalk, scientific nomenclature, technocratic mumbo-jumbo, psychobabble, pentogonese, acronyms, buzzwords, doublespeak.

Jár-gón.

Don't those two syllables grate on you? Isn't jár-gón wonderfully nonpoetic? The word has this splendid made-up quality about it. As if it didn't have any roots, any Latin or Greek ancestors. As if it were a *substance* like Nylon® or Teflon® and was produced in a plastic-extrusion process. Ladies and gentlemen, may I present—JARGON®!

Actually, "jargon" has been around for quite a while. Old Geoffrey Chaucer wrote in 1386—500 years ago— in the Merchant's Tale:

> *He was al coltissh ful of ragerye*
> *And ful of Jargon as a flekked pye.*

The new *Oxford English Dictionary*—in literati jargon, the OED—just came out. In addition to the half-million entries carried over from the first edition (1927) and the supplements (1933, 1972–86), this second edition contains 5,000 words coined since 1970, mostly from medicine, science, and technology, and mostly American.

Before the new OED appeared, the novelist Anthony Burgess said with certainty: "There will be no greater publishing event this century." And now that it has arrived, we find that most of the newest material in the publication is jargon. Interesting, isn't it?

The OED describes the rich history of jargon:

> *The inarticulate utterance of birds, or a vocal sound resembling it; twittering, chattering.*
>
> *Unintelligible or meaningless talk or writing; nonsense, gibberish. (Often a term of contempt for something the speaker does not understand.)*
>
> *A barbarous, rude or debased language or variety of speech; a "lingo"; used esp. of a hybrid speech arising from a mixture of languages.*
>
> *Applied contemptuously to any mode of speech abounding in unfamiliar terms, or peculiar to a particular set of persons, as the language of scholars or philosophers, the terminology of a science or art, or the cant of a class, sect, trade, or profession.*

Unintelligible, debased, barbarous—what a prickly word!

But who needs a fancy definition out of a dictionary? We all know what jargon is: It's talk that we don't understand.

I'm sure you've had the experience of being among people whose speech is alien to you. They're using mysterious terms, abbreviations, and references—a shorthand that you don't understand. You're totally confused. A friend of mine recently spent a few days in the hospital for tests. In addition to the customary poking and prodding, he was injected with heavy doses of medicalese:

> *Now Mr. Austin, you're NPO so I don't want to catch you snacking. Take your medication PRN and I want to make sure you're voiding regularly.*

The nurse sounded as though she was speaking English, but he couldn't make any sense of what she was saying. NPO? PRN? Voiding? He wished he had a friend there, someone who spoke "normal American," someone who'd understand his dilemma.

If only he had a translator, a clever fellow like the captain of the ship that goes to Skull Island in search of King Kong.

Sailor 1: "Hear that? They're saying 'Kong! Kong!' "
Sailor 2: "Hope you talk their lingo, skipper."
Sailor 3: "Catch any words yet?"
Captain: "I'm not sure. Sounds something like the language the Nias Islanders speak."

Although he's an intelligent guy, my friend was so bewildered by the strange language, he wasn't sure most of the time what he was supposed to do. He had no idea what they meant by **voiding**, but luckily he carried out his normal bodily functions without waiting for a translation. (And he also managed to escape without learning that NPO is Latin *nil per oram* meaning "nothing by mouth"—he wasn't supposed to be eating—or that PRN means *pro re nata,* "as needed." There's a nursing journal called PRN, but in that case, the letters mean "Playfulness, Revelry, Nonsense.")

Maybe you have a friend or colleague who's like Dr. Ray Stantz (played by Dan Akroyd) in *Ghostbusters*. Oh he's bright and enthusiastic all right, but he's always babbling about the latest gadgets and gizmos, like a walking *Popular Mechanics*, or in Ray's case, *Supernatural Mechanics:*

If the ionization rate is constant for all ectoplasmic entities, we could really bust some heads—in a spiritual sense.

Dr. Peter Venkman (Bill Murray), on the other hand, plays someone who's more like the rest of us. He doesn't have any idea what "Total Protonic Reversal" is or how to measure "PKE valences." It may be "ectoplasmic residue" to Ray but it's slime to Peter.

After Ray prattles on about "full derivative girders with cores of pure selenium," Peter finally lets him have it:

Ray, just for a moment, pretend that I don't know anything about metallurgy, engineering or physics, and just tell me what the hell is going on.

Yeah! Just what the hell is going on?

It even happens to the brightest of us. Greg is the vice president for technical development for a major financial institution. He seems to know everything about computers, mathematics, banking, and physics. But he told me a story about the first time he worked with the guys in charge of the computer hardware:

I got this new job as a technology planner and I was there for about two days and my boss comes in and invites me to a change control meeting. That's where you talk about everything you're going to change, because everything's so complex, you can really screw things up.

So for an hour , these people talked and every noun they used was a number beginning in 30. They talked about 3033s, and 3081s, 3890s and 3051s. I had been consulting for several years, so I got used to holding my face still when the client was talking about something I didn't understand. I just nodded and said "Yes, well, I, I agree with him.*"*

When I got back to my office, I started wringing my hands and going "Oh, my god!" I didn't understand ANYTHING!

It turned out that all the 30s were designations of IBM hardware. The techies spent so much time, literally hundreds of hours, working out the details and implications of this or that particular piece of gear, what it was and how it operated, that they just used the model numbers.

When someone else is talking, jargon is indeed the "unintelligible twittering of birds." And so over the years, jargon as an accusation has been applied (contemptuously) by people to words or phrases they don't understand. But to the person speaking, is it jargon? No, of course not; to him or her the word or phrase is meaningful, it communicates, and it's often the only language appropriate to the situation.

How about "fax"? Maybe you don't think of it as jargon now, but I'll bet when you first encountered it ("I'll fax it to you") you probably thought: "Jargon!"

BUT JUST BECAUSE **YOU** DON'T UNDERSTAND SOMETHING DOESN'T MEAN IT'S NONSENSE.

You may feel that the talk of fighter pilots, astronauts, scientists, and engineers is unintelligible noise, but to them it is certainly useful and fitting. To outsiders, it's strange to be sure. The late Richard Feynman, as a distinguished member of the Presidential Commission investigating the Challenger tragedy, had this to say about a NASA official:

Mr. Mulloy explains how the seals are supposed to work—in the usual NASA way: he uses funny words and acronyms, and it's hard for anybody else to understand.

That should make you technophobes feel better—Dr. Feynman was a Noble Laureate and one of the most brilliant physicists of this era. But it doesn't let you off the hook altogether—Feynman was a passionate advocate of laypeople learning science. Astrotalk may be awkward and unmusical, you may not like the sound of **Pings** and **Ags** (Would you prefer Primary Guidance and Navigation Section and Abort Guidance Section?) but with such "gobbledygook" engineers managed to put a human being on the moon.

Still, we don't *like* it. We hate being baffled. So we condemn the talk of other people's trades without bothering to study it because we just don't have the time to find out what it all means. As Norman Mailer observed, such people "live in a world of instruments and concepts which would take years ... to command well enough to make judgements of the other's character." But nothing's to stop us from judging their languages.

It's all JARGON! The terminology of science, law, medicine—all jargon. And let's not forget computers! **Bits, bytes,** and **interfaces!** Jargon! With one word, you can denigrate all of our scientific and technological achievements. For what are anti-lock brakes and heart transplants but the end products of a process that began in specialized languages?

And lately, some Americans have become so appalled by what's happening to the language that they've taken on hired guns to do the dirty work of shooting it out with the bad guys. They've contracted the likes of Edwin "Strictly-Speaking" Newman and John "Correct-Them-We-Must" Simon—tough dudes who go after "loose talk," "obfuscation," "illiteracies," and other nasty lowbred hombres. And one of their favorite targets is jargon.

Some words—what S.I. Hayakawa calls "snarl words"—are considered singularly odious to the critics. Newman, our preeminent pun-dit, empties his six shooter on **interface** ("Dr. Lewis wins the interface-off," "I decided to interface up to the fact"). Simon casually puts another slug into it, calling interface a "vogue word Newman correctly loathes." If Newman, Simon, and Associates had their way, "interface" would disappear forever.

And here they and I part company. The problem with vigilantes (whether they're on horses or typewriters) is that when they take the law into their own hands, they sometimes string up the wrong guy. Their "job" is to defend the language, not destroy it. Go fuss with wind-bagging bureaucrats who misuse language, or harp on bad grammar if you like, but leave the word itself alone. There's nothing wrong with interface!

Certainly, interface gets bandied about in a slovenly way as a substitute for "meet with" or "cooperate with" ("Let's interface over a couple of tequilas."), but it still has legitimate technical applications:

> *My communications program* ***interfaces*** *with a news retrieval service so that I can read a breaking story filed by the Associated Press any time night or day.*

No other word can be accurately substituted. "Connect"? No, connect as an intransitive verb means "to become joined." Interface, in the above statement, indicates that one device *interacts* with another in a specific fashion so that data can be exchanged. There is give and take here, not simple connection. The relationship is not static.

I suspect that some of the deputies in the language posse are as uncomfortable with the technology as they are with the language that accompanies it. H. W. Fowler, the lovable and scholarly curmudgeon who compiled the standard *Modern English Usage,* had a lot to say about jargon, beginning with:

> *Jargon is talk that is considered ugly-sounding and hard to understand.*

The problem with such a retrograde description is that it fails to be constructive in a technological society. ("Modern" books can never remain so.) So what if you consider **PAHs (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons)** or **IPM (Integrated Pest Management)** "ugly"? Who cares if you find **magnetic resonance imagery (MRI)** "hard to understand"? In today's world, such words might reach right into *your* life—whether you like it or not. Acronyms like PAH and IPM may be messy to use, but they describe a much bigger mess, our environment. And Dwight Gooden of the New York Mets recently discovered that MRI could analyze the condition of a muscle tear in his shoulder, a serious matter indeed for a great pitcher:

> *"I never even heard of an MRI before," he said. "Now I've had eight of them. Hopefully, I won't need any more."*

The jargonizers themselves don't care what the pop-grammarians say—they'll continue making up and using jargon. Do you think a computer programmer designing "an application that interfaces with a mainframe data base" worries about an outsider's objection to his use of the word "interface" as a verb?

It's the non-technical Americans who need help. By carping about technical language, they are becoming even further removed from their neighbors in the labs and assembly lines. For, you see, smearing technical words does a disservice—not to the technicians, but to those of us *outside* these disciplines. The United States Department of Education and the National Science Foundation said American society is moving toward "virtual scientific and technical illiteracy." We don't know the jargon.

Sure, a lot of jargon is buncombe and much of it is needlessly abstruse and just plain needless. There are marketing clichés like **user-friendly** and **leading edge:** empty phrases that are meant to dazzle and distract, but like so many brightly colored balloons, soon fizzle out. There are the vague and wordy blusterings of officialdom, the squawkings of public relations flacks, and the poppycock pseudoscience of quacks. The problem is that some jargon is precise and meaningful and some is the opposite. You need to sort out the words that have substance from those that don't.

A more useful (and fun) approach to jargon is not to dismiss the language, but to examine it. Rather than stick your nose in the air, learn something about these words. Study them.

And a good place to start is with a neutral definition of jargon. If you take one of those nasty descriptions out of the OED and strip it of its pejorative huffing and puffing, you have an unbiased view of the subject.

Definition of JARGON #1
The language peculiar to a particular set of persons, as the language of scholars or philosophers, the terminology of a science or art, or the cant of a class, sect, trade, or profession.

But to tell the truth, I personally take a much simpler approach:

Definition of JARGON #2
Technical talk Mom doesn't understand.

This is not only less cumbersome, it also has a clear truth test: If Mom knows it, it's not jargon. Now my mother is a former Army nurse so she is familiar with quite a bit of military and hospital lingo, but the new stuff (**puts** and **calls, LCDs, IRAs,** and so forth) is just so much twitter to her. You're welcome to use definition #2—unless your mother happens to be a rocket scientist or computer programmer.

By either definition, those 5,000 new entries in the OED are jargon. Throughout the 21,000 pages of the 20-volume dictionary, you can find technical terms scattered among the old verbiage, like bits of shiny plastic in the tangled and musty ivy of an ancient castle. There, on the same page with bitacnie ("to shake," documented in 1325) and bitavelen ("to overthrow," 1225), is **bit** ("a unit of information derived from a choice between two equally probable alternatives," 1957). And just below it is **bit map** ("a representation . . . in which each item is represented by one bit," 1984). And there—rubbing shoulders with interfacial ("dihedral angle," 1877)—is our new friend, **interface** APPEARING AS A VERB ("to connect with or to so as to make possible joint operation," 1969).

It's time to set the record straight. If I'm OK and you're OK, then so is jargon. Jargon is here to stay. Without jargon, where would you be? If your eyes became clouded, your doctor wouldn't be able to help you because she couldn't distinguish a **cataract** from the rest of your eye. If your car started spluttering noxious black fumes into the air, your mechanic couldn't find the **PCV** (Pollution Control Valve) even if it were right under her nose.

Lots of words are jargon. If a word is scientific or technical, or *sounds* like something scientific or technical, then it's jargon. (We'll leave the question of whether a term has any scientific *validity* to the experts.) Most acronyms are jargon (**LDEF**, Long Duration Experimental Facility, is; NASA isn't).

On the other hand, some jargon doesn't sound at all technical. Quite a few ordinary words are moonlighters—common words by day, jargon by night—and take on secondary meanings in certain professions. In computing, a **bug** is a programming error. In painting, **value** is the relative lightness or darkness of a color. In stock trading, a **lollipop** is a premium held out to stockholders to interest them in selling their stocks back to a company. Look how many formations you can make with just the word "down." (See box.)

If a certain group of people speaks a certain type of language in their jobs or hobbies, then what comes out of their mouths is jargon. Professional language (the Latin of doctors and lawyers), shoptalk (car mechanics, printers), cop talk—all of these are different forms of jargon.

Jargon is like television or junk food: we condemn it, but we all indulge in it. It's as American as situation comedies and potato chips. Who do you think put **T-bills, strategic fit, order of magnitude, extra sensory perception, biofeedback, bisynchronous communication, pushing out the envelope,** etc., etc., into our mouths anyway? Martians?

Down Jargon

down-and-out	Football pass pattern: receiver runs downfield and makes a 90° turn; like a knight's move in chess.
down turn	A Wall Street euphemism for a catastrophic decline in the market.
down-load	In a computer network, to retrieve a file from another computer.
downscale	Reference to lower-income folks, which may include you, if someone more upscale is talking.
down-link	To bring in satellite communications using a dish antenna.
downside	The bad news; the problems associated with a business deal.
down-size	Move a company, a machine, a car to a smaller version.
down quark	One of those funny sub-sub-atomic particles that scientists say have a $-1/3$ charge and a $+1/2$ spin.
down	What the computer is when it's five o'clock on Friday and you have to turn in a report—not working. Also, down time.
downer	Left-over all-purpose hippy slang (bummer, bad scene, bad trip, barbiturate).

Like it or not, jargon is the language of our times. Just as America (with a little help from its friends) has given the world space-age metals and computer chips, it has also contributed **chrom-moly steel**, **RAM** (Random Access Memory), and **remote call screening**. Jargon is quintessentially American.

If you don't like this idea, check out the sheer quantity of these kinds of words. I mentioned that the OED added 5,000 neologisms, but those prestigious volumes have only lately begun to admit these terms. **Bug** is described, but **debug** is not. A more complete collection is contained in a recent encyclopedia of science and technology that boasts over 100,000 entries. Lexicons on medicine, economics, and engineering are each stuffed with tens of thousands of words. Look at the number of trade terms compiled in recent books: Wall Street (4,500 terms), Real Estate

(1,500), Baseball (5,000)—Baseball? 5,000 terms? "Smith throws a **forkball** but Brown smashes a **Baltimore chop**: the **keystone sacker** fields it and nails him at first." Say hey, Willie?

A conservative estimate of current jargon is therefore 100,000 words. The French language (from which the English "jargon" was derived) has fewer than 100,000 words. *Sacre bleu!*

> We Americans have more *Jargon* than the French have French!

Not only have technical words multiplied, in virtually every nook and cranny of American life, they have *flourished.* It's in our books, our magazines, our advertising. Everyone knows that jargon is spoken by computer people and technicians, but it also pours out of people not normally associated with technology. Presidents: instead of being available to reporters, George Bush says he's in **access mode**. Former Black Panthers: instead of "rip offs," Bobby Seale now refers to **maladaptive criminal behavior**. Grey Panthers: instead of talking to the old, Maggie Kuhn advocates **intergenerational communication.**

The rate of the spread of these new words and phrases into everyday speech is breathtaking. Alvin Toffler (*Future Shock)* quotes the lexicographer Stuart B. Flexner as observing:

> *At one time perhaps no more than fifty people in NASA used the word "A-OK." But when an astronaut used it during a televised flight, the word became part of the language in a single day.*

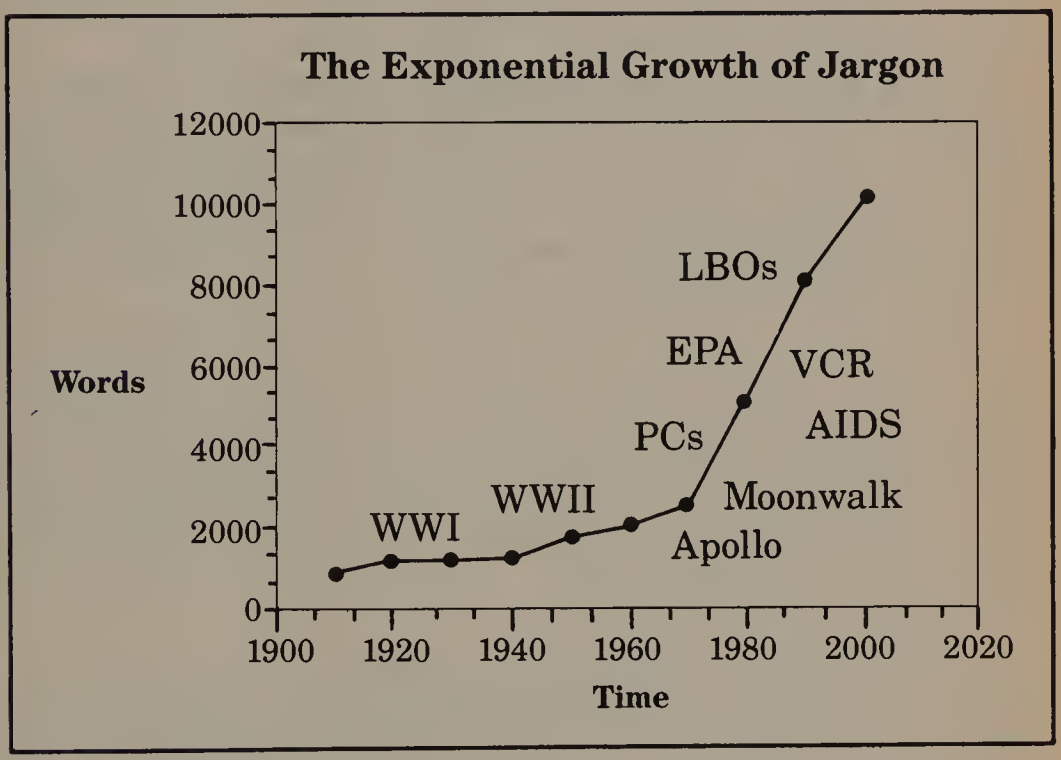
Like fungus in a petri dish, jargon has grown exponentially during the latter half of this century—which some people have noticed coincides with the coming-of-age of Baby Boomers. (See graph.)

Some people give the credit (or blame) to the boomers for all this jargon. Sure, the ME generation, the thirty or fortysomethings. Aren't they the ones who started this buzzword business with their **lap-top plasma-screen computers** and **financial fast tracks,** their $250,000 **floats** and **adjustable rate mortgages** and **personal self actualization**? Come to think of it, doesn't all jargon come from California? And yes, aren't they all . . . should we say it? . . . yuppies?

Well, you've got to admit that yuppies take to high-tech talk like labradors take to water—they run right in on all fours, splash around noisily, and then rush back to get everyone else wet.

Yeah, this new camcorder's got ***strobe and wipe*** *and an* ***8 to 1 power zoom with macro.***

Notice how yuppies sound like TV commercials when they get excited about their latest purchases? No wonder—they're the Boob Tube generation, they learned vocabulary, diction, and language patterns from Proctor & Gamble. They are the perfect consumers. They have money, so they can buy. They like new gadgets, so they do buy. They are articulate, so they convince others to buy.



But the great American donation to civilization, jargon, is the work of all of us, not just a particular age-group or social class. All of us have contributed in someway to this phenomenon and, in turn, have been modified and influenced by it.

Jargon is *the* American language. Inherent in shaking off the bonds of English rule was the loosening of restraints on language. Back in 1781, the president of Princeton (John Witherspoon, a Scotsman) criticized "technical terms introduced into the language" and other "errors in grammar, improprieties and vulgarisms which hardly any person of the same class in point of rank and literature would have fallen into in Great Britain."

In 1833, a visiting Briton, Captain Hamilton, predicted that, in one hundred years, Americans

have only to progress on their present course, and their grandchildren bid fair to speak a jargon as novel and peculiar as the most patriotic American linguist can desire.

He was only off by a couple of decades. Inventing jargon is a perennial feature of Americana, but inventing lots and lots of jargon is a recent phenomenon—the large-scale production and dissemination of jargon is characteristic of the last half of the twentieth century.

So let's toast our undeniable contribution to that most marvelous of human gifts, language. Raise a glass to us all, scientists, stock traders, technocrats, bureaucrats, advertising copy writers, self-improvement junkies, political spin artists, and, of course, computer hackers.

Let's salute our new breed of corporate leaders who, in search of excellence, are **redeploying assets, leveraging resources,** and **optimizing performance.** Hats off to our merchandisers who are discovering that everything can be high-tech, from shoes (**thermoformed anatomical insoles**) to sunglasses (**polycarbonate lens material**) to soap (**exfoliate dead cells**).

Three cheers for everyone who has turned nouns into verbs—now there's a trick—turning silk purses into sow's ears. How easily, with nary a care, we have made words switch hitters, taking inanimate things and converting them into action words. The name of a machine becomes what it does. For years we've been **phoning** and **xeroxing**, but now we're **faxing** and **satelliting** and **scanning** and **digitizing** and **fedexing**. And of course—**INTERFACING!**

But maybe we've gone too far.

Jargon, in the form of verbification, has been supposedly eroding the foundations of English for centuries. 300 years ago, Jonathan Swift, disturbed by the growing tendency of his learned countrymen to tinker with the mother tongue, railed against what he called "Manglings and Abbreviations" and condemned the "Infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon [in] every Writing." In *Gulliver's Travels,* his hero uncovers a linguistic doomsday machine being constructed in the Grand Academy of Lagado:

We next went to the school of languages, where three professors sat in consultation upon improving that of their own country.

Their first project was to shorten discourse by cutting polysyllables into one, and leaving out verbs and participles, because in reality all things imaginable are but nouns.

Their second project was a scheme for entirely abolishing all words whatsoever.

JARGONOIDS AMONG US

It's Saturday morning and Joe Rumpelstiltskin is relaxing in his den in his suburban house. He has just been reading *The Joys of Jargon* and closes it abruptly:

> *Jargon? What jargon? I don't speak like that. My friends don't speak like that. OK, I hear it sometimes—but only at work.*

Joe's a normal, well Joe, a mid-level manager at a government agency, a GS-11. He doesn't know it now, but the reason he doesn't notice any jargon is because he's swimming in it. Like water to the fish, there's so much jargon around him, he doesn't pay it much attention.

His eight year-old is watching *Shane,* the classic cowboy movie,

> *"Put the rod on the sodbuster..."*

"What a sodbuster, Dad?" asks Joey Jr.

"Ah, that's a farmer, Joey. The cowboys didn't like them fencing in the range for their cattle."

"Oh," says Joey and goes upstairs to play with his Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, leaving the TV on.

> *"Let Chris buffalo him at the saloon.". . . "He's no cow-puncher." . . . "Why don't we just gun 'im. . . and then we can stampede the rest."*

A little voice whispers in Joe's head: "Cowboy jargon."

Joe wants to find a program more to his liking so he flips through the TV supplement. On the way to the Saturday program listings, his eye is caught by the advertising. Here's a good deal on contact lens, he thinks. Or is it?

> *Daily Wear Soft Contacts (Plano to −6.00 SPH.) and Eye-glasses (Frames from our '89 Fashion Line with clear S.V. plastic lenses to ±4.00 D SPH.; to −1.50 D CYL)*

What is this supposed to mean?

Then he notices the other ads. A home improvement outfit claims that its doors have **energy-saving 15R insulation**. And a weight-loss center has **Nutrition and Behavior Counseling**! A hair salon offers **Hair Transplantation, Scalp Reduction, ROGRAINE® (Minoxidil) Program.** And a kitchen remodeler brags about his **exclusive FORMICA® laminate-clad system.**

The little voice to Joe: jarrr-gonnn!

Tossing aside the TV mag, he picks up the remote control and scans the channels.

A hockey game:

> *...Black Hawks strike for more...Presley* ***feeds*** *Thomas who* ***sets*** *and fires a* ***slap shot*** *from the* ***blue line****! Chicago leads 2–1 in the second period.*

Zap! A yacht race:

> *...taking their* ***spinnakers*** *down...third and last leg, Robbins' only choice is to pull Haines into a* ***tacking duel****...Haynes tacks away and Robbins* ***covers****...*

Zap! A baseball game:

> *...top of the seventh, Smith's been* ***bending their socks*** *over with that blazing stuff...The Yanks have the* ***go-ahead run*** *at the plate...deep to right...Smith is after it...* ***basket catch****!*

Zap! Golf:

> *Here's what the eighteenth green looks like through NBC's TRUVIEW, a computerized view, actually a 3D view with a 2D camera. It might be called "****undulation illumination****." So when someone misses a four-foot putt you know why."*

The little voice: jarrr-gonnn!

Ah, the hell with it, he says, as he turns off the tube and goes through the day's junk mail.

He opens a letter from a peace group. Peace. It has an almost nostalgic sound to it, now, twenty years after the March on Washington he and his wife went to. Something romantic, idealistic, pastoral—you know, flower power and love. But when he opens the envelope, Joe finds something different. The writer invites him to "deal with the **interface** between

planetary service and deep **personal empowerment**." The letter speaks about "**trilateral exchanges**," "large-scale conflict resolution," and "**desert reclamation** and **reforestation** projects."

It sounds like a bulletin from the Pentagon, he thinks. It says he can send for a catalog dealing with all the new age issues:

> ***holistic healing**, recycling, men/women issues,*
> ***sustainable culture**, ritual, organic gardening,*
> ***interspecies communication**, computer networking,*
> ***permaculture** and hundreds more.*

Permaculture?

Then, "Ringgg! Ringgg!"

> *"Hello! My name is Bob. I'm a very sophisticated telecommunications system..."*

Slam! Argh!!

Joe goes to the spa and rides one of the computerized bikes, programming it for a ten-minute workout while he watches the women doing **low-impact aerobics**. While he's pumping away he overhears two young men talking.

> *Bob: "You doing those **flys** for your **pecs** or what?"*
>
> *Fred: "Yeah, they really work your **lats** too."*
>
> *Bob (getting on the **variable progressive resistance machine**): "How you been? Hear you're getting married."*
>
> *Fred (between grunts): "Yeah, May. . . 19th. We're making settlement. . . on March 31st. . . . We have a mortgage, . . . but I still haven't **locked**. . . into a rate yet. It's at 9.83 percent. . . but Nancy, . . . that's the girl I'm marrying. . . says we should play the **Rate Game**. . . . Don't know where it's going. . . . The **T-bills** are down. . . . And I'm not sure . . . what to do. . . with my **CDs**. (Throws down dumbells.) Boy, those flys burn!"*
>
> *Bob: "Well, you should definitely lock it. And you should go **shorter-term** with the CDs and **roll them over** when the rates go up."*

The little voice in Joe's head: Boy, what a bunch of jargonizing wheeler-dealers.

Joe leaves the spa. While his wife Joan is out at her community college class (something or other in psychology), Joe visits his friends, Ron and Sabrina. Ron's a supermarket manager. All he cares about is having a good time when he's not squeezing the toilet paper. And Sabrina, well, she's just Sabrina. Teaches junior high. At least *they* don't speak jargon.

They sit around the tube. Ron is holding a six-inch long remote tuner. He hits a button. The TV turns on. He hits another button. A small picture appears in the upper right corner of the big picture.

"How do you like that?" asks Ron.

"Great—two pictures," says Joe. "Not bad."

*"**PIP**. Picture in a picture," says Ron. "Now watch. I can move the insert from corner to corner. And I can freeze the main screen in the insert. It's got a* ***comb filter*** *that filters out* ***luminance chromo-crosstalk***. . . ."

Joe turns to Sabrina. "How long's he been like this?"

Ron continues talking, not caring if anyone is listening or not:

"...unrestrained horizontal bandwidth..."

Sabrina answers, "Ever since he got that new TV gadget thing!"

Joe and Sabrina walk into the kitchen, leaving Ron to his technological ecstasy:

"...side-firing speakers..."

"So what have you been up to, Sabrina?" asks Joe.

"I've been studying all about ***Kirlian photography****," she answers.*

"Oh?" says Joe.

And before he knows it, Sabrina is off talking about **Reichen levels** and **meridians** and **Shiatzu**...Joe didn't know she knew so many things he never heard of.

"You know, lately I've been noticing this real rise in my ***Ki*** *energy. I'm a Taurus, you know, with Libra rising, and this month Uranus is in* ***retrograde motion*** *in Capricorn. But then. . ."*


JOAN! NOT YOU TOO!! YOU'RE SPEAKING JARGON !!!
RELAX, JOE, YOUR PARENT IS JUST REACTING TO YOUR CHILD.
JARGONOIDS
EVERYWHERE.

Joe goes back into the living room. There's Ron:

> ***"...sub-bass acoustic suspension..."***

He goes back to the kitchen. There's Sabrina:

> *"...my* ***inner meridians*** *and* ***chakras****. Maybe it's the green* ***hiziki*** *I'm eating. It's high in calcium you know."*

Joe is beginning to feel like the doctor in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* when he discovers that all his neighbors, all his colleagues, all his FRIENDS have been taken over by pea pods. Joe doesn't know what planet they're from, but they sure talk funny.

He makes an excuse for leaving early, drives home like a wild man, and breathlessly warns his wife:

> *"RUN, JOAN, RUN! JARGON, JARGON! RON, SABRINA. THEY'RE ALL TALKING JARGON! IT'S EVERYWHERE!"*

> *"Relax, dear. Don't get* ***hyper.*** *Your* ***child*** *is just reacting ineffectively to their* ***parent.*** *We just need some* ***quality time*** *together."*

> *"Joan? NOT YOU TOO!"*

TYPES OF JARGON

Jargon comes in many forms. Some of it sounds jargony, some of it doesn't. Some words you only hear every once in a while, others you hear frequently. Some phrases you only hear from a particular group of people, others you hear from many different kinds of people.

Like the deadly sins, jargon comes in seven varieties:

- Occupational slang
- Professional/technical terminology
- Technical metaphors
- Buzzwords
- Doublespeak
- Abbreviations
- Ex-Jargon

OCCUPATIONAL SLANG

Mom probably didn't understand the slang you used as a teenager—unless she happens to have been a DJ or a journalist or maybe a high school teacher. But that's not the kind of slang I'm talking about here. Homegrown, everyday slang is not jargon. Calling a credit card "plastic" is slang but not jargon because it's known by practically everyone (including Mom). **Downpayment amortization alignment**, on the other hand, is definitely jargon, but not slang. Calling a photograph of a model a **shirley** (a term used in the film and magazine industries), however, is both jargon and slang, or what I call occupational slang.

Lots of jargon has the informal qualities of slang, such as when a computer programmer talks about **tweaking**, or fine-tuning, the software he's working on. "Tweaking" to Mom is what she did to your cute lil' nose when you were in diapers. "Wiggle" is what you did when your diaper needed to be changed; **wiggle room**, on the other hand, is newscaster talk. Peggy Noonan, commenting on President Bush's "Read My Lips" speech, said:

> *[Bush] wanted to leave himself no wiggle room. He didn't want Bob Scheiffer to say to Dan Rather afterward, "He left himself some wiggle room."*

Workers in particular jobs develop an insider's lingo. It seems to happen naturally in the process of making a living. If you fly jets, you know what it means to **strangle the parrot** (turning off the transponder that

identifies aircraft as friendly or hostile) and that the **howgozit** is a dial that shows how much fuel is left. If you edit newspapers, you use **stringers** (freelancers employed for special reports) and know a **hugger-mugger** when you see one—a sentence jammed with too many facts—which this one probably is.

Police talk is well known to viewers of *Hill Street Blues* and other TV shows. "Snitches" are informers who help cops "pinch" the "perps." What's not so well known are the words the police use locally, which varies across the country. For example, in Philadelphia, bad guys are **critters** who are arrested and charged with **REAP** (recklessly endangering another person) and **PICK** (possession of an instrument of a crime) if they have a knife or **POW** (prohibited offensive weapon) if they have a sawed-off shotgun. Crack smokers are **pipers**, and addicts who shoot up are **bootin'**. If the **ginks** (investigators from Internal Affairs) suspect you of **taking notes** (money), you'll **go to the front** (have a disciplinary hearing) where they find out whether you were taking **good notes** (money for saving someone's life, for instance) or **bad notes** (a bribe not to arrest someone).

Practically every job or hobby has its own peculiar language. Making up and learning new words seems like a natural part of doing work, like having a job title or a boss. We need these special words to meet the specific needs of the situation, process, or people involved.

These words are by nature used only by a narrow group of people. Shop talk generally doesn't get spoken by anyone outside the trade or profession.

When we outsiders hear these terms, we're baffled—which is understandable because they weren't meant for us. In fact, most trades seem to have words to describe those of us who don't belong, whether we're in the role of customers, patients, victims, or just part of the landscape. We aren't supposed to hear these words, they're said behind our backs.

How would you like to hear a car dealer size you up as a **grape** ripe for plucking and squeezing? Or an internist call you a **horrendeoma**, a patient with many complications—or worse, a **hit**, meaning you've been assigned to a resident? But it's worse yet, if a doctor mutters to a colleague that you're a **reeker** which I'm sure you can guess—or a candidate for the **rose garden**, the room where they plant the comatose.

How would you feel if you found out that the undertaker is putting your loved one in a **tin can**? I'll bet you're happy when you find out you're on some stock trader's **sucker list** for potential investors in a lousy stock. Wouldn't you love to find out that you got rejected for "Wheel of Fortune"

because the screeners thought you were a **pasadena** ("pass on this bozo").

Occupational slang isn't nice or romantic, but it serves a purpose: making the drudgery and squalor of labor more colorful and human. There's a whole slew of occupational slang in the GLOSSARY section.

PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL TERMINOLOGY OR, WHAT COLOR *ISN'T* YOUR PARACHUTE?

As I promised in the Introduction, we will not be tromping into the quagmires and caverns of professional (academic) languages. A glimpse of what you're missing is required, however, to put the more popular spin-offs from pure technology (slang and buzzwords, for instance) into perspective. If you've ever fantasized about being an archaeologist à la Indiana Jones, you should be aware that **stereological identification** and **opal phytolith populations** are as much a part of the terrain as poison arrows and booby-trapped labyrinths.

If you're sitting in your humdrum office day-dreaming like Walter Mitty about being an astronomer ("Boy, I could have been a Carl Sagan!") or any number of other cerebral vocations, someone needs to wake you up. And it might as well be me. So here's just a sampling of titles of articles appearing in recent academic journals, which should be grim enough to remind you why you don't subscribe to:

The American Sociologist:
"Dual-Careerism and the Conjoint-Career Couple"

or *The American Statistician:*
"A General Model for Estimating ED_{100p} for Binary Response Dose-Responsive Data"

or *The American Anthropologist:*
"On the Irrelevance of the Segmentary Lineage Model in the Moroccan Rif"

or *The American Psychologist:*
"Inferring Psychological Significance from Physiological Signals"

or *The American Journal of Primatologists:*
"Dermatogylphic Patterns and Pattern Intensities of the Genus *Cacajao (Cebidae, Platyrrhini)* with Observations on Interspecific Differentiation"

or *The American Journal of Semiotics:*
"Transvaluation and Myth: Markedness and the Structure of Elementary Narration"

or *The American Philosophical Quarterly:*
"Doxastic Freedom: A Compatibilist Alternative"
or *The American Economic Review:*
"On the Treatment of Anticipated Shocks in Models of Optimal Control with Rational Expectations: An Economic Interpretation"
or *The American Journal of Philology:*
"The Latin Construction *fore/futurum (esse) ut (i)*: Syntactic, Semantic, Pragmatic, and Dranchronic Considerations"

I apologize if you really enjoyed imagining what it would be like to be a primatologist or a semiotician, but, at least, you now probably have a greater appreciation of your good old *Life* and *Reader's Digest.*

In addition to the professional terminology expressing ideas and concepts and the intangibles of intellectual inquiry, there are also thousands of technical terms that name things, the components of man-made objects and natural phenomenon. They are applied to specific organisms or elements or pieces of machinery, such as the **chrominance detector and decoder** that produces the color signals for your TV so that you can see the blush in the cheeks of Vanna White. This category includes scientific nomenclature and component labels. Technical terms appear throughout this book, especially in "Why Johnny Can't Read Computerese."

TECHNICAL METAPHORS

These are constructions that are used every day by most of us, whether or not we understand the technology on which they're based. Often we aren't even aware that the phrase had technical origins when we're throwing around words like **leading edge, litmus test,** or **black hole**. We're speaking figuratively. When someone complains about being **out of the loop** (when decisions are being made without his **input**) he's being metaphorical, not technical. He's taking a technical concept and applying it to an ordinary situation. Fowler called these words "popularized technicalities." We'll be referring to these formations throughout the book, especially in "Top-Down Design: the Tower of Babel."

BUZZWORDS

Buzzwords are the latest "in" phrases. They are the stuff of advertising, politics, and sales. Sometimes, they have a technical origin, but soon they are applied to anything, as in **user-friendly**—a concept so ubiquitous that a container of shampoo is now labeled "**ozone-friendly**." Since

these words and phrases—which are also called vogue words—are so much a part of the culture, I have devoted a chapter to them. See "Buzzwords."

DOUBLESPEAK

Doublespeak is deliberately obscure language intended to mislead—whether by overselling ("Doz is the best") or understating ("I cannot comment upon that eventuality at this point in time, securitywise"). Doublespeak is jargon when it is used consciously and professionally, as when a bank disguises a bad loan by calling it a **nonperforming asset**. Again, this subject, slimey though it may be, warrants its own chapter. See "Doublespeak."

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations come in the form of initials (**rpm** for revolutions per minute) and acronyms (**AWACS** for Airborne Warning and Control System), as well as clippings, such as when your doctor talks of **bronching** (inserting a bronchoscope into a patient's trachea) or a dental hygienist thinks you need **perio** (periodontry). See "Abbreviations—or—You No Gotta Codebook?"

EX-JARGON

And sometimes, in the course of time, a word ceases to be jargon. When a term becomes known by virtually everybody, in other words, when it stops being a word "peculiar to a particular group," then it can be said to be no longer jargon. Radar used to be known only to the military, now it is recognized by everyone, including Mom. But few of us know that it originated as an acronym (for **RA**dio **D**etection **A**nd **R**eceiving).

Sometimes, jargon just expires and goes out of circulation, dissolving into the compost heap of language. There are thousands of words that live and die in a lab and never see the light of public awareness.

Other words become so completely assimilated into the mainstream they are indistinguishable as jargon. When a word ceases to be "peculiar," it no longer appears in *The New York Times* handcuffed in quotation marks and Peter Jennings doesn't give a parenthetical explanation. For example, AIDS is not translated anymore.

When a word becomes so universally recognized, known, and used, and its original, specialized, insider sense completely disappears—it's no longer jargon. It is now part of the vernacular, part of the everyday speech of nearly everyone.

The vernacular, by the way, is all the language that isn't jargon, the words and idioms shared by most Americans by reason of birth. It consists of the words we have in our vocabularies without any kind of study. The words you *never* look up in the dictionary. The phrases and expressions you hear on TV and read in newspapers (albeit at the fourth-grade reading level perhaps). The vernacular is right up there with Mom and apple pie. It comes with being (or becoming) an American.

Some words categorized (accurate for a limited time):

Jargon	**No Longer Jargon**	**Never Jargon**
corvus corvus		crow
	radar	
NMR		
Capricorn in retrograde		What's your sign?
Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	AIDS	
stylus		needle
	flak	

CREATION: WHO PUT THE MEGA IN MEGACHANNEL SPECTRUM ANALYZER?

In 1961, Barry Mann and Gerry Goffin had a hit song that asked the question on everyone's minds: "Who Put the Bomp (In the Bomp Ba Bomp Ba Bomp)?"

We all wonder from time to time where a word or phrase came from, but most of us don't go much beyond wondering. Tracing the actual origins of a word can be a lifelong pursuit. Allen Walker Read, lexicographer and socio-linguist, attributed the word "blizzard" to one man, Lightnin' Ellis, who was talking to the editor of a paper while warming his hands over a stove in 1870. Read then went on to scale the summit of his profession by finding the first documented usage of "OK." And that was the first time the expression was written down, mind you; he didn't actually prove who first said it. Sure, there are words here and there that are "coined," and an individual is credited with bringing the word into the world. But for the most part, jargon is created anonymously.

John Tukey, a statistician at Bell Labs, is credited with inventing **bit** (binary digit) in 1946, but trying to find the hacker who made up **gronk** (to stop working; applied to either a machine or a human) is as futile as trying to find the jokester who made up "Why did the chicken cross the road?" This book is not going to pretend to get to the ultimate mystery of the genesis of language; we are not tracing the source of the Nile.

Basically, jargon is made up by insiders—scientists, inventors, jet pilots, computer hackers, GIs, people performing the thousand and one tasks of a given trade—who then pass it on to the rest of us.

Most newfangled expressions are not, strictly speaking, neologisms. There are some words that are invented seemingly out of nothing, with no roots to existing words, but they are generally mere novelties. For the same reason that minting your own coins won't make you rich, coining words for their own sake has no value. You hear made-up words in science fiction sometimes, ersatz-alien talk such as "Gort, Klaatu barrada nicto" from *The Day the Earth Stood Still.* But just as the proverbial "driven snow" has been polluted by hydrocarbons, most words are no longer very "pure." This is how Lewis Thomas put it in an essay in *The Medusa and the Snail:*

> *An etymon is supposed to be a pure ore of a word, crystalline, absolutely original, signifying just what it was always intended to signify. These are very rare these days. Most of*

the words we use are hybrids, pieced together out of old, used speech by a process rather like the recycling of waste.

For the most part, the technical terminology and nomenclature of the professions is created in the upper stratosphere of the intelligentsia. And generally these words stay in the Ivory Towers, laboratories, and the various professional chambers, and will never be heard by anyone outside these clans and cults. A mutated fruit fly is more likely to escape the sealed experimental facilities of the gene-splicers than is a phrase like "**divalent cation indicator 5F-BAPTA.**"

Most jargon gets made up by people on the job. When someone wants a new word, he or she doesn't go to a philologist (as seriously proposed by Fowler) or to a government agency "devoted to the breeding of new words, like the Agricultural Experimental Stations of the past century," (as facetiously suggested by Dr. Thomas). No, people don't usually wait for an expert, they just make it up themselves.

And so, for the most part, creators of jargon rummage through the hundreds of thousands of words and word structures that lie about in the English peat bogs or in the Latin or Greek ruins until they find something to their liking. Once they have the raw materials, they make new words in a number of different ways.

Cannibalizing

Taking parts from different words and combining them into a new word. Forging parts from two or more words and forming a new word.

Binary + dig**IT** → **BIT**

MOdulation + **DEM**odulation → **MODEM**

EXCited + d**IMER** → **EXCIMER**

(a dimer is a two-atom molecule; an excimer is a dimer who's excited because he has an extra electron)

CYBernetic + **ORG**anism → **CYBORG**

(human body with electromechanical parts)

PIX (picture) + **EL**ement → **PIXEL**

(the dots that make up a picture on a computer screen)

Adding

This is the process of appending an affix to a root word. Take your pick. You can add a prefix: poli-, macro-, mega-, meta-, micro-, multi-, super-, supra-. Or you can add a suffix: -ize, -ian, -ite.

Ite: John McPhee in *Basin and Range* describes the horrendous things that geologists can do with those three little letters:

> *Metakirchheimerite, phologopite, katzenbuckelite, mboziite, noselite, neighborhite, samsonite, pigeonite, muskoxite, pabsite, aenigmatite. Joesmithite.*

And what's next, budlite? A calciforous rock formation composed of anatomosing aluminum?

The latest kick is to add a word, such as -driven. Companies are said to be **technology-*driven***. Software applications are called **menu-*driven***.

Recycling

Making do with an already existing word and applying it to a special concept, process, or phenomenon. Taking a word that's in the vernacular (in ordinary usage), and putting another meaning to it. **Value** is a favorite. To an artist, value means the amount of light or darkness in an area of a painting, a very light patch has a high positive value. To a musician, value is the duration of a note. To a business person, value equals the benefits of a product or service minus the cost. To a computer programmer, a value is a constant entered in the computer's memory or an entry in a spreadsheet.

Other recycles: **migrate** (to move from one system to another, "We migrated our account receivables to the St. Louis office."); **insulate** (to shield an employe from outside interference or other tasks, so he can finish a project); **loop** (a complete electrical circuit; also, a programming device); **bundle** (to send a product with something else: "The software is bundled with the documentation.").

Borrowing (or stealing)

Taking a word from another language. To describe their breakthrough, a dry (as opposed to chemical, or wet) printing process, the coiners of Xerox borrowed from the Greek *Xeros* meaning "dry." Of course, our scientific nomenclature comes from Latin. Crow is not jargon, *corvus corvus* is.

Hybridization

Joining a stem from one language to a suffix or prefix from another language. A famous (or infamous) example of linguistic miscegenation is the naming of the geological time scale, specifically, the Cenozoic Epochs. You remember, naturally: Paleocene ("old recent"), Eocene ("dawn of

recent"), Oligocene ("but a little recent"), Miocene ("moderately recent"), Pliocene ("more recent"), Pleistocene ("most recent"), and Holocene ("recent").

Fowler, a lover of the classical languages, railed against marrying the Greek (paleo-) to the Latin (-cene). "Barbarisms," he called them:

> *To create them is a grave misdemeanour; and the greater the need of the word that is made, the greater its maker's guilt if he miscreates it.*

I suppose the creator, in this case Charles Lyell, is in the third circle of philologist hell because I'm afraid these particular words are now carved in stone. The Epochs may be around for as long as the cumulative time span they delineate: 65 million years.

No one's stopping you from raiding the hoards of mythology either, as when hackers described a certain type of computer virus as being a **Trojan Horse**, a set of instructions that is welcomed by your computer as a guest, but once inside, wreaks havoc with your data.

Immortalizing

Naming something in honor of somebody. When Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier in 1947, he flew faster than **Mach** 1. The Mach numbers (the ratio of the velocity of an object to the velocity of sound) are in memory of Ernst Mach, an Austrian physicist who studied motion one hundred years earlier.

When chemists constructed one molecule within another molecule, they observed that the outer structure had a geodesic shape. They named this molecule, **buckminsterfullerine**, after the inventor of the geodesic dome. Since then, the word **fullerine** has been applied generally to geodesic compounds.

You can also immortalize yourself, if you care to. Add Syndrome, Program, Condition, Theory, Constant, Principle, or System to your favorite word: your last name. Planck's Constant. Newton's System. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. [YOUR NAME HERE] Theory.

A dozen famous immortalizations are defined in the "Science Glossary."

Transforming

In 1839, Captain Frederick Marryat noted how technical terms entered the everyday speech of Americans by metaphor. He noticed, for instance:

In the West, where steam navigation is so abundant, when they ask you to drink they say, "Stranger, will you take in wood?"—the vessel taking in wood to keep the steam up, and the person taking in spirits to keep his steam up.

People in technical professions habitually put their shop terms to non-technical uses. A friend of mine works in MIS (Management Information Systems) for a major corporation. When I asked him how his kids were doing he said that one of them was almost out of college. "Yeah," he said, "I'll be real glad to be on the **backend** of that." Backend refers to an output device—a printer is said to be on the backend of a computer system. Here, the backend is the conclusion of a seemingly endless process, paying for his child's education.

These transformations from the purely technical to the figurative become part of everyone's speech. Rarely are the original meanings known. People who ramble excuse themselves for "going off on a tangent," but how many of them remember their geometry teacher telling them that a tangent is a line meeting a curve in a single point?

See "Top-Down Design: The Tower of Babel" for more examples.

Truncating
Lopping off either the head or the tail, such as **boot** from "bootstrapping" (to start up a computer). A judge will ask a trial lawyer if he has "prepared his **cross**," meaning his cross-examination of a witness.

Daisy chaining
Linking multiple words into phrases. In Pentagonese, you put "Command and Control" at the end of something and you have the beginning of a multi-billion dollar program. A daisy chain defense is when lawyers and psychiatrists get together and concoct a sure-fire way of getting a murderer off. "Post prandial shock syndrome" (murderous impulses brought on by eating too much).

Nounizing
Taking a verb and making it into a noun. **Puts** and **calls** on the options market are examples of this. Also, **interrupt** (as noun) is a computer term describing a particular kind of signal that breaks the normal flow of a program, as in the phrase, **multi-level priority interrupts**.

Verbizing
Also called noun-turning, such as fax and fedex. Terminal jockeys mix up

parts of speech frequently, I suspect, because they fell asleep during the classes when the teacher taught that lesson. But it's now part of the way Americans fabricate speech. De-institutionalized people, de-programmed moonies, and de-flowered hippies are said to be **mainstreamed** when they enter the world outside their prisons, hospitals, cults, and lifestyles.

Washingtonians are masters of this as well. One person testifying before Congress let them know that he could not "**mirror image** that."

Admiral John Poindexter, testifying before Congress, explained that Colonel North's answers "were very carefully crafted, **nuanced**."

David Stockman described how President Reagan informed him that "the fellas in the Cabinet **round-tabled** all this" (meaning they had discussed a proposal).

One of my favorites appeared in a government publication:

> *Black-and-white reproduction of NOAA-AVHRR image mosaic of the United States that was produced by* ***mosaicking*** *15 separate AVHRR false-color images.*

THE TIMES THEY ARE A UPGRADIN'

It used to be we had friends. . .NOW we have "interpersonal relationships."

It used to be only people could be friends . . . NOW machines are "user friendly."

It used to be you jotted down a To-Do list and stuck it on the refrigerator. . .NOW you have to have a "Time Management System."

It used to be you had a radio and a TV. . . NOW you have to have a VCR, a CD, and some salesguy's trying to convince you, you need an **MTS decoder** for full stereo sound!

It used to be the United States Army had C-rations. . . NOW they're serving the troops **MREs** (meals ready to eat). Hummm-good!

It used to be you saved money by putting it under your mattress or in a bank. . . NOW you have your **IRAs** (Individual Retirement Accounts), your **401Ks**, your **SEPs** (Simplified Employee Pension plans), your **money market instruments**.

It used to be after you saved your money, you went to the bank to get a home mortgage. . . NOW you have to make up your mind whether you want a **GPM** (graduated-payment mortgage), an **ARM** (adjustable-rate mortgage), or a **GPARM** (a graduated-payment adjustable-rate mortgage).

Today, it seems, you *are required* to learn this stuff. You have to understand a new word one day and then be able to use it the next day *without sounding stupid.* And this seems to be happening every day. . . with every new gadget (did that same TV salesman tell you you'll be upgrading to **HD**, High Density, next year?). . . with every new disease (**PMS**, pre–menstrual syndrome). . . with every new carcinogen (**PCBs**)...with every new whatever. . . .

With the introduction of high-tech wonder products, our culture has been altered by technical language. The price of enjoying microwave ovens, VCRs, CDs, faxes, and cellular car phones is learning how to speak a new dialect.

And there's one thing that none of us can avoid: the computer. "Bits" and "bytes" and "bugs" are no longer merely technical, they are part of the larger culture. Even if you don't use a computer, at least you recognize these words.

On the other hand, unless you work with IBM computers, you may not have heard of terms like **VTAM** and **SNADS**. Or even how to say them.

VTAM is pronounced VEE-TAM. SNADS, on the other hand, is pronounced, well, SNADS. You say the whole word, like GADS!

Let's say you just got a job with a Fortune 500 company in a fairly non-technical capacity such as personnel (excuse me, *Human Resources*). You need to talk to the computer jocks about a resource allocation report that seems to be inaccurate. You go down to the computer room where the floor is raised and the machines have those famous blue initials stamped on them.

You wouldn't think anything of saying I,B,M, so when you come across VTAM written on the top of the report, you naturally say:

> *"I have a question about this V,T,A,M report..."*

Suddenly, the white-shirted engineers snicker and you can tell they're thinking "This jerk doesn't know squat about computers." You've broken the number one rule in the big leagues: DON'T LOOK STUPID.

So don't think you can get ahead without grasping the buzzwords. In a standard industry text, *The Computer Dictionary and Handbook,* Charles J. and Roger J. Sippl state this inexorable truth:

> *Users, especially those in the business community . . . must study and master at least the basics because it is becoming very unbusinesslike, and even* **unfashionable** [my emphasis], *to ask exactly what is a 64K RAM, a semiconductor, or a bubble memory.*

I don't know how important it is to take in "bubble memory" anymore, (words, just like technologies, come and go) but, if you want to get ahead, really get ahead, you should speak only the fashionable words. We're interested here in a word's cachet, what gives it prestige, acceptance. As business expert Peter Drucker has written in *The New Realities:*

> *Since school learning and school diplomas increasingly control access to jobs, livelihoods, and careers in the knowledge society, all members of society need to be literate. And not only in "reading, writing, and arithmetic." Literacy now includes elementary computer skills. It requires a considerable understanding of technology, its dimensions, its characteristics, its rhythms—something almost totally absent today in any country.*

To rise up the corporate pyramid, you need to be articulate in the languages that cut across corporate disciplines. You need to master the cream of the crop from financial management, marketing, information management, and perhaps engineering, production, or some other field that characterizes your business. (More about this in "Power Words—Buzzing to the Top.")

Because, you see, you don't want to get bogged down in the nitty-gritty either. If you come into a senior managers meeting burbling about "4-channel serial add-on boards and 16 MHz 68000 accelerators," you'll be pegged as a "techie"—a specialist, a one-trick pony, someone who can push around the bits when needed, but not management material. You'll have people saying behind your back:

> *Sally is really whiz-bang—but, it's too bad—she's just not a PEOPLE PERSON.*

It's like having a Post-it™ Note stuck on your back saying KICK ME. The secret is speaking the right kind of jargon.

Even if you're not "into" the corporate world, you may still have to converse in buzzwords. Techno-hip talk has insinuated itself so deeply into our culture that even space-age Aquarians speak it. New Agers, those who respect the ancient, the ethereal, and the ineffable, are also the ones who speak of **preventive energetic medicine, behavioral flexibility,** and **interspecies communication**. The people who are most willing to walk out on the skinny branches of rationality speak like aerospace hardware salesmen:

> *We sell polarized magnets for healing sicknesses; pyramids for detoxification and increased psychic abilities; wire wrapped crystal pendants for harmonic brainwave synergy.*

The folks who challenge the basic assumptions of science do so with such jawbreakers as:

> *Join a dolphin/human shamanic circle for apprenticeship to dolphin master shamans through shapeshifting.*

You're either in or out. Whether you're trying to be cool with the guys on the corner or trying to squeeze out the old guard in the boardroom, the operating principle is the same: Words are power. Perhaps the real source of jargon is our need to be hip; if we can't be trendsetters, we can at least

keep up with the curve. To use the right lingo in the right place, to use power words well, to put that certain spin on them—that is the art of jargon.

And spinning words, altering their meanings by manipulating the context, can be a mean business.

In a letter to a friend, Joseph Hazelwood, the ill-fated captain of the Exxon Valdez, wrote:

> *These days, after much of the media hype and lunacy has abated, left simply with a gut feeling of frustration. Had to learn the hard way the lexicon of the 80s and discover exactly what "spin" means.*

Jargon is not simply hi-tech talk. Jargon is a sociological phenomenon. People use language to form their identity and to identify like-minded individuals. Language is tribal.

Maybe you've heard the biblical story about the Gileadites and the Ephraimites. These two tribes were so closely related that the only way they could be distinguished was by dialect. The Ephraimites could not pronounce the "sh" in "shibboleth." So, when they went to war with their neighbors, the Gileadites slew on the spot anyone who said "sibboleth" instead of "shibboleth." As described in Judges XII, 42,000 Ephraimites perished at the fords of the River Jordan for not having mastered that one all-important syllable. Shibboleth then passed into the vernacular to mean any secret password.

Jargon is used the same way. Saying V,T,A,M instead of Vee-Tam will get you nailed just as surely as saying "Sibboleth" to a Gileadite.

And let's face it. Once you've picked up a few of the current buzzwords, isn't it fun to use them?

Some years ago, I was attending a meeting with a dozen engineering types. You know who I mean, the guys who wear plastic pocket protectors and say things like "What are the deltas on that, Joe?" I was new in the company and I had to establish myself. The techno-gab was swirling around me and I was getting dizzy, so I decided to start splashing around with the others.

> *We've got to be more* ***proactive****!*

Now there's a hot word for you. PRO-active. Everyone swivelled to face me. I continued.

The ball's in our court. We've got to take it and run with it.

Sports jargon. Shows you're one of the guys. I got some nods of agreement.

It's a matter of ***granularity.*** *Let's take the issue of* ***expanded functionality off-line*** *and focus on getting in the* ***fixes.*** *John, you're on the* ***critical path.*** *. . .*

Whoa! Linguistic hyperdrive!

Or is it hyperdrivel?

This type of speech is dominating the business culture. Wait a minute, "business *culture*"? The phrase itself is a newly minted oxymoron—what are we talking about here, Michelangelo on a graphic arts workstation? Bach on a synthesizer composing the latest cola commercial?

My advice in this brave new world: Don't worry, be proactive!

CIRCULATING DOWN THE RIVER JARGON

How did it happen? How did America become the Land of Jargon? Where are these words coming from? Did someone just make them up? And how do they get so quickly from coast to coast? How come you can hear people talking about **LBOs** and **high-end markets, upgrading** and **cloning, black holes** and **quarks** *anywhere* in the United States? And why is it—?

Questions, questions, questions.

The process of circulation and dissemination, the spread of language from point A to point B and on to point Z, has itself changed radically in the past few decades. It used to be that a word passed almost from person to person and then from town to town. Lightnin' Ellis (to use the example cited earlier) made up the word "blizzard" in 1870, then someone else used it, then another and another, until ten years later "blizzard" was heard throughout the Midwest (where there was plenty of need for it).

Today, a word can be manufactured and shipped around the country almost instantly. Not only is there more jargon, there are more ways for it to permeate the culture. We have over 200 communication satellites circling the earth and beaming news to all parts of the country, news about space launches, political scandals, scientific discoveries, medical breakthroughs, environmental disasters, fluctuations in the stock markets, and perturbations in world affairs. We have computers, faxes, car phones, electronic and voice mail, video teleconferencing, as well as the old standbys: books, magazines, movies.

All of these sources pump new words into the nation's main communications artery: the River Jargon, a great body of language flowing across America from coast to coast. The cartographers don't show it on their maps, but it's there nevertheless. A mighty stream fed by tributaries which spring from deep pools of water high in the mountains of this great country— from Science, Business, New Age, Sports, High Technology, and from thousands of different occupations—a constant source of words. Eventually, the River Jargon disappears into the Vernaculantic Ocean stretching from America to Great Britain.

Most new terminology remains forever in those deep lakes: the clinics, labs, and classrooms from whence it springs.

Some words, however, do get sent downstream into the cities of mass culture. Usually they are launched by the fury and power of particular events or propelled by trends—or should I say megatrends?—into a wider circle of usage.


High Tech
Science
Hat-Trick
DNA
Sports
BYTE
Business
AOK
LBO
Ectoplasm
New Age
The River Jargon

Sometimes a specialized term makes a dramatic entrance into the popular language in the manner of "A-OK." When former Vice President Spiro Agnew's lawyers entered his plea against income tax charges in 1973, they also threw a legal term into the ear of America. **Nolo contendere** ("I do not wish to contend") became a household word overnight.

Although not always as dramatically as "A-OK" or "nolo contendere," countless jargonizations have been tossed into the River Jargon during and following the notable events of the past 50 years.

EVENTS

The wars
With every conflict, new military jargon is invented and when the conflict ends, many of these words slip into civvies and mingle in the general population. WWII (**AWOL, B-52, A-bomb, flak, section eight, dog-tags, blitzkrieg**). Korea (**MASH**, which of course entered the national consciousness not by the conflict itself but through Ring Lardner Jr.'s book *M*A*S*H* and the subsequent movie and long-running TV show). Vietnam (**fragging, domino effect, terminate with extreme prejudice, napalm**).

Space launches:
1962-69 (**A-OK, LEM, pulling gs, scrubbing flights**)

Earth Day:
1970 (**Spaceship Earth, EPA, ecology, acid rain, greenhouse effect**)

Watergate hearings:
1973 (**point in time, black bag job, stonewall, plumbers, deep six**)

Three Mile Island accident
1979 (**rem, China Syndrome, fissionable material**)

Stock market crash
October 1987 (**electronic trading, greenmail, junk bonds, insider trading**)

TRENDS

There are also deep, culture-altering currents that run through the country and carry words from one sector to the other. These forces are

vaguer in outline than the events reported in the news media, but they are every bit as powerful in terms of influencing our speech.

Data processing
It's hard to believe that only twenty years ago the only people directly using computers (and speaking the lingo) were technical specialists in isolated rooms of corporations and institutions and the IBM sales and engineering force. Perhaps there were 500,000 computer professionals around the country (and maybe a dozen amateurs hardwiring circuits in their garages and basements). Now, with the invention of the integrated circuit (1959) and the successful commercialization of the personal computer (Apple, Commodore, and Tandy introduced their first microcomputers in 1977; IBM launched the PC in 1981), 45 *million* of us own computers (and are learning the lingo: **floppy, boot, RAM, database**). Sixty-six million white collar workers use personal computers. It's fair to guess that at least one-quarter of all American citizens have some degree of computer literacy.

High-tech consumer goodies
As the new generation of electronic gadgets (VCRs, camcorders, CDs, cellular car phones) makes its way into American homes it brings new words: **time-shifting, SFX, frequency response.**

Environmentalism
With every new disaster, whether it's localized like the Valdez oil spill, or hemispheric like the holes in the ozone layer over Antarctica, or global like the greenhouse effect, we are subjected to daily revelations from scientists. And if each morning brings a new crisis, each evening brings a new word in the American household. **Ozone depletion** is linked to **chlorofluorocarbons. Bio-diversity-conservation** is attempting to protect tropical rain forests. There's a new trend in environmentally-safe, so-called **green products** that are **bio-degradable**. New words: **toxic waste, decommissioning nuclear reactors.**

Health concerns
Like environmental issues, health issues generally bring changes into our vocabularies only in the company of bad news. The new words force us to confront changes in our habits, lifestyles, and relationships with our fellow citizens. Some medical terminology becomes headline material and is known throughout the literate world. AIDS does not have to be translated to **acquired immune deficiency syndrome**; however, the virus that

causes AIDS, HIV is still not widely known and must be interpreted in the news as **human immunodeficiency virus**. **Bio-technology** is a brand-new science bringing to the world **gene machines**, **DNA sequencers**, and **gene-splicing**. In 1954, the first American child was born of frozen donor sperm, now 80,000 children a year are brought into the world through **artificial insemination**. There's now a medical-industrial complex of **PET scanners, CAT scanners,** and **coronary angiograms**. New words: **interferon, aerobics, cholesterol, Alzheimer's disease, angioplasty, beta blockers, chemotherapy.**

Science

And then there are the scientific discoveries, the marvels of nature. From teeny-tiny matters (sub-atomic particles with strange names like **quarks, gluons,** and **muons**), to the biggest things of all (**supernovas, black holes, quasars**). From new inventions (**superconductors, lasers**) to enhancements of old inventions (**electron microscopes**), from grand theories (**quantum mechanics, superstrings**) to fizzled theories (**cold fusion**), science is in the news. New variations on scientific research, **gene splitting, bionics, bio-engineering,** and **exobiology** (study of life in the universe) bring out new words such as **clone**.

New age

The '60s, that schizophrenic period of violence (the assassinations, urban riots, Vietnam) and peace (flower power, Love-ins, groovin' and hangin' out), brought together the old (astrology, tarot and I-Ching) and the new (dianetics, esalen, Silva Mind Control, est, the Fischer-Hoffman process, Primal Therapy, Transactional Analysis).

Whether it's New Age or Old Age, exploring and discovering and tinkering with consciousness has created a complex mix of words. "New Age" encompasses everything from ancient druidic rites to synthesized music and is attached to anything "far out" or "weird"—depending on your point of view. New Age includes the mystical, the magical, and the medicinal, as long as it's new and different:

> *Do you believe in UFOs,* ***astral projections****, ESP, mental telepathy, spirit photography, clairvoyance,* ***telekinetic movement, full trans mediums****, the Loch Ness monster, or the Theory of Atlantis?*

That's the extent of a job interview in *Ghostbusters*. It also covers a fair bit of what passes for science in the super-market tabloids. New words: **self-actualization, biofeedback, crystal therapy.**

Business and finance

With all the acquisitions and mergers, employees are interacting with many more disciplines. More business degrees are being cranked out than ever—MBA talk is moving through the ranks: **IRR** (Internal Rate of Return), **ROE** (Return on Equity), **wraparounds**, **evergreen loans**. When a giant company—already producing razor blades and dairy products, let's say—gobbles up a company that manufactures watches, disposable diapers, and electronics, the new conglomeration will be home to scores of new languages.

As the deals become bigger and the methods of financing more outrageous, business becomes big news. Wall Street in the last decade has been front-page consistently (**junk bonds, leveraged buyouts, white knights, hostile takeovers**).

And it wasn't just Big Business. Entrepreneurs numbered 93,000 in 1964, and 600,000 in 1984. During the same period, information workers increased from 17 to 65 percent of the American workforce.

And the numbers of ways these people exchange information has widened. In addition to telephones and letters, there are faxes, teleconferences, electronic mail systems (**e-mail**), and electronic bulletin board services (**bbs**). The information network has grown, and the **information float**—the time between sending a message and receiving it— has shrunk to almost nothing. A coast-to-coast letter by regular mail takes days, by e-mail, it takes seconds.

But how does **in the loop** get from coast to coast so quickly? In two words:

Mass communications

More and more TVs tuned in to more and more stations. Thanks to satellites and cable TV, we can now enjoy (or despise) up to 180 channels—a 60-fold increase over the holy trinity (CBS, NBC, and ABC) that reigned supreme for three decades. Some of these additional stations specialize in sports (ESPN) and politics (C-Span), exposing viewers to lots of jargon. There's a new method of teaching called **distance learning**, made possible by satellites beaming TV programs across the country.

And then there are movies. Anyone who doubts that this is the Age of Jargon has only to listen to popular movies—the most representative artform of twentieth-century America. Script writers regularly use jargon both to spice up the dialog and to lend an air of verisimilitude to the characters and locale.

Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1966) was one of the first movies to capture the ring of military/

technocratic nukespeak. Here's the B-52 crew responding to a bomb-bay door malfunction:

"Bomb door circuit negative function!"
"Switch in backup circuit!"
"Engage emergency power!"
"Operate manual override!"
"Fire explosive bolts!"
"Still negative function, sir. Operating circuits dead, sir!"

Which prompted Judith Crist to say:

For this is the way the world will end, in a welter of mechanical failures, human bloopers, jargon and gobbledygook.

The seventies brought us Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (1973), in which **cryogenics** (deep-freezing of a human being) and **cloning** (reproduction of a biological whole from a part, in this case, a nose), played an important role. *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1977) had children singing a nursery rhyme from the pages of "Mother Goose and the Manhattan Project":

Ring-a ring o' neutrons,
A pocketful of positrons,
A fission! A fission!
We all fall down.

But it wasn't until the eighties that movies began reflecting the new culture of yuppies, takeover artists, computer hackers, and new age technicians. The Jargonites had arrived big time!

Here's how love speaks in *Working Girl:*

Boss: "I think he's it and I think this could be the weekend we decide. He said there was something very important he wanted to discuss with me. I think he's going to pop the question."
Secretary: "You do?"
Boss: "I think so. We're in the same city now. I've indicated I'm **receptive to an offer**. *I've cleared the month of June. And I am, after all, me."*
Secretary: "Well, what if he doesn't pop the question?"
Boss: "I really don't think that's a **variable**."

In *Die Hard*, a young Manhattan wheeler-dealer tries to negotiate with a ruthless European terrorist:

> *Yuppie: "Business is business. You use a gun, I use a fountain pen. What's the difference? Let's put it in my terms. You're here in a* **hostile takeover**, *you grab us for some* **greenmail**, *but you don't expect some* **poison pill** *was going to be running around the building. Hans! Boo-by! I'm your* **white knight**!"
>
> *Terrorist: "I must have missed Sixty Minutes. What are you saying?"*

In *War Games*, it's the old way of playing Total Thermonuclear War versus the new way:

> *Presidential aide: "What you're telling me is that all this trillion dollar hardware is really at the mercy of those men with the little brass keys?"*
>
> *Computer director: "That's exactly right—whose only problem is that they're human beings. But, in what, 30 days we could replace them with* **electronic relays**. *Get the men* **out of the loop**."
>
> *General: "Gentlemen, I wouldn't trust this overgrown pile of* **microchips** *any further than I could throw it. And I don't know if you want to entrust the safety of the nation to some* **si-li-cone di-ode**."

In *Spies Like Us*, the hero is the nerd, hot-wiring the salvation of humankind:

> *Nerd: "Bring me the* **SATSCRAM dish**. *I think we can* **recall** *it."*
>
> *Partner: "What do you mean, recall it? You mean like a defective Pinto?"*
>
> *Nerd: "We can divert it. It's made to respond to inflight commands. ...What we have to do is switch* **sending boards**. *Start sending the launch sequence in reverse order. Fitzhugh! Hold these together— I don't care how painful it is. You are the* **circuit bridge**."

And then there was *Ghostbusters*. One of the most successful, and delightful, movies of the decade. The script was almost completely

jargon, a constant patter of sci-fi new-age wonder-words such as "**free-floating, full torso vaporous apparition**," and "the **Ecto Containment System**," and "**total protonic reversal**," and "the **Positron Collider**."

> *What you had in there is what we refer to as a* ***focused, non-terminal repeating phantasm*** *or a* ***Class V full-roaming vapor****. A real nasty one, too!*

And in the literary world, there's a new genre on the best seller list, the "techno-thriller." These works of fiction are the product of technical documentation, as much as imagination. The most popular of the breed was Tom Clancy's bestseller *The Hunt for Red October*:

> *"Why put an anti-surface-ship weapon on a* ***strategic platform****? We don't, and we deploy our* ***boomers*** *a lot further forward than they do. The doors are symmetrical through the boat's axis. You can't launch a missile out of the stern, sir. The openings barely clear the screws."*
>
> *"Toward* ***sonar array****," Davenport said.*
>
> *"Granted they could do that, if they trail one screw. But why two of them?" Ryan asked.*
>
> *Davenport gave him a nasty look. "They love redundancies."*

In *The Ransom of Black Stealth One*, Dean Ing states that experts who had a "low observable" status assisted in authenticating the book's futuristic technologies:

> *We built Blue Sky Three as a* ***two-place*** *with* ***shrouded pusher props****. A little heavy because of the skin heaters. Y'see, the skin of the entire* ***airchine*** *is stretched over a* ***matrix*** *of little electric heat strips. With* ***heat-sensitive paint****, this airchine can change color like a chameleon. We're talking more heat than you'd get from skin friction or sunlight, of course, so it carries a little* ***weight penalty****.*

The River Jargon flows on and on, and megabuck movies and best-sellers are riding the crest.

TOP-DOWN DESIGN: THE TOWER OF BABEL

> *And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language . . . Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."*
>
> —*Genesis 11:6-7*

Yes, the American language certainly is a mishmash, but I don't think we can blame Him for it. We have one language, more or less, but any given word can point to a dozen different things, depending on who's doing the talking. And the situation is especially confusing given our national love for words that sound scientific. Scientists use their terms precisely and carefully, but when we—the ordinary folks—get a hold of those words—watch out!

> *"We try to do things in* ***real time****, but let me underscore real time is changing faster and the pace is almost dizzying," said Paul D. Wolfowitz, the undersecretary of defense for policy planning.*

"Real time," that's a good one. To an air-traffic controller, "real time" means that the blip moving on his computer screen matches the path of an object moving hundreds of miles an hour a mile above him. If the computer is not powerful enough to process the signal from the plane and display it on the screen almost instantaneously, the controller is not dealing with "reality." Real time is the actual time a process takes place, and to be applicable at all, it is measured in **nanoseconds** (one billionth of a second). The very idea of a government bureacracy (which measures its labors in months and years) doing anything in "real time" boggles the imagination. And what are we going to do when real time gets even "faster"?

The problem is not with the language, but with how we learn it. Actually, we don't *learn* new words, we "pick them up." (Some of you are thinking right now: OSMOSIS!) Most of us don't study words before using them, we just appropriate them. After all, words are free, aren't they? And you don't need a license to talk like a psychiatrist, do you? That's why it doesn't take you years of study to know that schizophrenic means "split personality." And you don't need a license to declare that anything divided in two is schizophrenic. "The company's schizo over this union thing."

If we like the way a phrase sparkles in the air, we'll use it. Oh, we have some *sense* of what it means, but don't ask us to define it. "Real time" is a term heard around computer people. I'm sure Undersecretary Wolfowitz sensed that real time meant something like "very fast"—he's got the idea of the word—but he'd be better off just saying he and his staff are "working as fast as they can." But then he wouldn't get quoted in a major newspaper.

Word of mouth: that's how our personal vocabularies are enriched. With all the mass communications going on, most day-in, day-out language transactions are still carried out one-on-one. There's a continual social cross-pollination taking place. A cop confers with the district attorney, the DA goes to the dentist, the dentist gets her hair done, the hairdresser takes a human development course and meets a stockbroker who tells him about. . . .

Every time you interact with a specialist of one kind or another, you're exposed to jargon. When you're buying or selling a house, you hear of **ARMs** and **Radon** tests. When you're being examined by a doctor you hear about **EKGs** and **cholesterol counts**. When you're being examined by an IRS auditor, you hear about—never mind, you shouldn't have to hear about *that* if you don't need to.

Of course, talking to an expert for a few minutes doesn't make you an expert, but some of the words rub off, and like the pollen that covers the bee after a dip in the clover, you carry jargon from one place to the other.

A spokesman for the Democratic National Committee said:

> *To those who were saying the party is braindead, the EKG just registered something.*

If you work in a large corporation, one that is national or international, you will hear the words of other specialists. **Cross-functional teams, interdisciplinary approaches, transnational exchanges**— these are the buzzwords of corporate America entering the '90s. As Peter Drucker wrote in the *Wall Street Journal:*

> *Successful innovations in all fields are now being turned out by cross-functional teams with people from marketing, manufacturing, and finance participating in research work from the very beginning.*

With all this verbal intermingling, a good deal of technical precision gets lost in the translation. Each time a word gets passed from person to

TOP DOWN DESIGN

THE TOWER OF BABEL

another person, it's modified, it no longer "means" what it originally did. **Semantic fluidity**— that's what Allen Walker Read calls this process— a word's meaning is altered every time it is used.

Altered, though, is probably too weak. Skewered might be more like it. Or, as the poet John Dryden wrote three hundred years ago:

> *And torture one poor word ten thousand ways.*

Parameter has became the equivalent of perimeter. A parameter is a mathematical/computer term that means a constant that can be varied, for example the radius of a circle. A perimeter, as we all know from grade-school, is the boundary of a given area. Here's how the manager of a radio station responded to a complaint about a broadcast:

> *The material contained in this taped segment was clearly outside the parameters of good broadcast journalism.*

Quantum describes a discreet packet of energy; a quantum leap is the movement from one energy level to another as measured by a whole number. It now simply means a "big change" (where "big" has no parameters). A CEO can brag about a quantum leap in productivity. And you can buy a VW Quantum, which may require the assistance of one of those Quantum mechanics who work for Click and Clack, the Tappet brothers, otherwise known as Tom and Ray Magliozzi of NPR's *Car Talk*.

Superheated refers to a liquid that is heated above its boiling point but is not converted to vapor. In Washington parlance, an issue is not a "hot potato" any more, it's superheated! Or in other words, "hot air." But it sounds so much better—at least David Stockman thinks so:

> *The issue was so superheated that I decided I had to invite Haig to my office beforehand in an effort to calm things down.*

Out of the loop, another favorite. Originally meaning among other things, "a terminal not connected in a network of computers," now meaning "to not be in the know." Stockman again provides a clear example of its usage in his book, *The Triumph of Politics*:

> *For all practical purposes, however, [Reagan] had been out of the loop completely since inauguration week.*

In fact, Stockman provides a welter of these "popularized technicalities":

> *I soon became a veritable* ***incubator*** *of shortcuts, schemes, and devices to overcome the truth now upon us...*
>
> *...backloaded revenue* ***hemorrhage****...*
>
> *...32 billion— a figure fiscal* ***light years*** *away...*
>
> *Here the* ***chain reaction*** *should have been disrupted...*
>
> *My day had begun at 4:30 AM and wouldn't end until after midnight, so to me a half hour was a* ***nanosecond.***

No wonder Stockman's budget never balanced. A nanosecond (one-billionth of a second, remember?) is to a second as a second is to a million years. For Stockman to have a half-hour equal a nanosecond, his day would have to be a umpty-ump billion hours long. Put that into your supply-side equations!

We do such amazing things with science. When the environmental issue got stirred up twenty years ago, a realtor on Cape Cod proudly welcomed people to move to "**ecology**-free Sandwich," marvelously equating pollution with ecology. **Fallout**, as everyone growing up under the nuclear sword of Damocles knows, is the stuff that rains down after an atomic bomb explodes. In the business world, fallout is adverse publicity. "We've got to reduce the fallout from our auto recall." In the backyards of America, fallout seems to be replacing "falling out." "Judy had a fallout with Betty over her dog digging up the garden."

Naturally, none of these people are scientists. They aren't speaking scientifically, and no one expects them to be accurate. The problem is that terms that are precise in one segment of the population are chaotic in the other segment. One word means any number of different things depending on who's talking. You might call this the Babel Effect:

> *Once a word leaves the province of its origin it almost immediately becomes corrupted.*

At first, a word gets subtlely changed; later the transformations are more extreme. By the time it gets to the popular level, a word can mean just about anything. The democratic urge to take a word and use it anyway

you want leads to wild and unpredictable usages. The process is anything but organized. But there is a pattern—of sorts.

Our modern American Tower of Babel is a grand three-tiered ziggurat, a pyramid-like structure built in stages with outside staircases and a shrine at the top. Like something Donald J. Trump would build and promote as the Ninth Wonder of the World! At the pinnacle are the scientists, technicians, professionals, and skilled tradespeople; in the wider middle section are the merchants and media types; and at the broad bottom are the masses (the public, hoi polloi, you and me). The vast majority of jargon is a top-down phenomenon. It is created at the top, moves through the commercial avenues, and eventually filters down to the streets.

In the top tier, the people speak many different languages, but each language is precise and technical. Whether professionals (scholars, doctors, lawyers, engineers) or non-professionals (sailors, aviators, carpenters), they generally obey a fundamental rule: One word refers to one definition that refers to one phenomenon. When a physicist uses the word **quantum**, another physicist (even one from another country) knows what he means (although they might debate the theory). When a sailor says "belay that," another sailor knows just what to do.

In the second, middle, level, the language is more interdisciplinary. There is a great amount of cross-fertilization. This is the realm of commerce and publicity. Business is the point of language confluence; it's where commodities are bought and sold, theories are turned into products, technologies are exchanged. And words are traded. It's how language has been going around the world for centuries.

At this level, language is borrowed, not invented. The people with the capital, the people who sell the merchandise, interact with the technicians and learn a smattering of new language, but they don't really understand the words. The merchandisers begin applying words heard in one context to other things. They gleefully violate the rule about one word referring to one thing. The journalists and media folks popularize these "new words." By the time a word becomes fashionable in the world of commerce, it refers to many different things. An auto-maker calls his car a Quantum because it sounds futuristic, not because he's describing a discreet quantity of energy.

In the third level, the public area, technical language no longer has any intellectual integrity. But it is entertaining. Fred tells me he's taken a **quantum leap** in income: He's gotten a raise.

The One-Two-Three Shift is described by this matrix.

TIER		# OF USERS	MEANING OF WORDS	USE OF WORDS
1	Scientists Technicians Trades Professions	relatively few	precise one-to-one specific criteria	square serious analytical rigorous
2	Merchants Journalists Filmmakers	many	plastic one-to-many vague criteria	pragmatic commercial creative
3	Consumers General public	very many	anarchic one-to-any no criteria	hip loose colorful

Some examples of babelizing:

Black Hole

1. A scientist makes a new discovery, he writes a long paper, he calls his discovery a "black hole."
2. "Black hole" appears on the front page of the *New York Times*. Dan Rather gives it fifteen seconds on the evening news. It shows up all across America as a Walt Disney movie.
3. A woman at a bowling alley curses her ball as it careens into the gutter and disappears into the "black hole."

Quasar

1. Another astronomer finds a distant object in space; he calls it a **quasi-stellar radio source** or **quasar** because it's a star-like object.
2. A television manufacturer christens his new model "Quasar" because it evokes images of the 21st century.
3. A teenager calls his date a quasar. (Stel-la!)

Clone

1. Biologists find that genetic material can be reproduced from single cells, they call this cloning.
2. Woody Allen makes a movie where a South American dictator is assassinated and his loyal subjects try to clone him from his nose. Down at Macy's, Mary Smith wants to save some bucks so she

buys a clone-phone, a copy-cat of a product made by a better-known phone company.

3. Disgruntable taxpayer refers to anonymous, indistinguishable bureaucrats as "clones." Business managers talk about "cloning" programs, "cloning" organizations, and "cloning" Jones (who's such an outstanding performer).

One more example of a word tumbling down the tower of Babel—

Upgrade

1. Upgrade was used by cattle breeders when they were improving the grade of their livestock by introducing purebred sires. The word referred to getting a higher USDA grade. There was a specific, objective criteria. Upgrade was also technically employed by personnel analysts to describe the reclassification of a position to a higher payrange. Clerk typists were upgraded to GS 5.
2. Then business people began employing "upgrade" to refer to adding accelerator cards and hard disk drives to a computer to make it faster and store more data. Although the word is still technical, it has lost its specificity. There are no specifications against which the computer is *graded*; there is no strict classification system for personal computers. If you buy a PC compatible and install a megabyte of RAM, you may have a more useful computer but you don't have a grade AA machine. You have an upgraded clone.
3. Now that "upgrade" has made a precipitous (and inevitable) slide into the pool of everyday talk, it means "to buy a better, more expensive product." Its semantic decline was lubricated by the incessant chanting of sales reps: Upgrade Now. So, to keep up with the Joneses next door (or should I say "the Cloneses"?), don't buy a new Toyota, *upgrade* to a BMW.

Generally, the specialists don't mind their language being appropriated, but they deplore its being misused.

Back in 1897, Joseph Conrad had this to say about nautical jargon being abused by landlubbers:

> *Your journalist, whether he takes charge of a ship or a fleet, almost invariably "casts" his anchor. Now, an anchor is never cast, and to take a liberty with technical language is a crime against the clearness, precision, and beauty of perfected speech....*
>
> *[The chief mate] . . . is the man who watches the growth of*

the cable—a sailor's phrase which has all the force, precision, and imagery of technical language that, created by simple men with keen eyes for the real aspect of things they see in their trade, achieves the just expression seizing upon the essential, which is the ambition of the artist in words. Therefore the sailor will never say, "cast anchor," and the shipmaster aft will hail his chief mate on the forecastle in impressionistic phrase: "How does the cable grow?" Because "grow" is the right word for the long drift of a cable emerging aslant under the strain, taut as a bow-string above the water. And it is the voice of the keeper of the ship's anchors that will answer: "Grows right ahead, sir," or "Broad on the bow," or whatever concise and deferential shout will fit the case.

And Tom Wolfe expresses the contempt that test pilots have for non-aviators appropriating their slang:

The real problem was that reporters violated the invisible walls of the fraternity. . . . They presumed a knowledge and an intimacy that they did not have and had no right to. Some aviation writer would sidle up and say, "I hear Jenkins augered in. That's too bad." Augered in!*—a phrase that belonged exclusively to the fraternity!—coming from the lips of this* ant.

THE PROS

We all speak jargon to some extent, but some of us spit it out more fluently than others.

In fact, some people get PAID to talk that way. These professionals use jargon in different ways and for different purposes, and if you listen closely enough, you can see there are three categories: Jargoneers, Jargonizers, and Jargoons. No, no—there are four!—four categories: Jargoneers, Jargonizers, Jargoons, and Jargonauts.

JARGONEERS

True enthusiasts; they have the gift of gab; they have kissed the Blarney stone of jargon. Jargoneers make good salesmen and ideal upper managers because they can keep the palaver going, they are fluent in easy-listening techno-talk.

> *We see growth stocks replacing leveraged buyouts as the investment choice in the equity markets of the '90s. Investors are migrating to high-quality growth companies with solid franchise and manageable debt loads.*
>
> *We're pushing the envelope of the personal computer interface. And VARs are bringing user friendliness to productivity applications like spreadsheets and databases.*
>
> *We make a state-of-the-art pencil sharpener—a real cutting-edge-of-technology piece of equipment.*

Marketeers, political spin artists, tellers of tall technical tales, computer evangelists—these people are Jargoneers. Good Jargoneers are not tethered to a particular technology; they may have been trained in a speciality of some kind, but they seldom betray their technological roots. They quickly pick up the lingo of other disciplines. They may not be the best computer programmers, engineers, chemists, or accountants in the enterprise—their forte is being able to communicate with other specialists. What they lack in depth, they make up in breadth.

Think of how a company might create a new toothpaste for market. The chemists who come up with the new formula must explain to the engineers what the end product must be. The engineers design a process and then work with the computer analysts and programmers to develop the databases and automated systems to run and monitor the process.

Then of course, the scientists and technicians must communicate with the marketing and sales departments so that the toothpaste can get into stores and be sold to consumers.

This involves a lot of talking. The chemists have no trouble making sense to one another, but when they try to talk to the systems analysts—it's like the United Nations.

What's needed is a translator. And this is where the Jargoneers come in. They don't translate one-on-one. They let the individual specialists bang heads together until things really get screwed up and then they call a meeting. Bring the troops together. Circle the wagons.

Jargoneers often get ahead in the most highly-technical of organizations without being particularly technically adept themselves. Gilbert and Sullivan's Major General Stanley was the very model of a modern Jargoneer because while he was "very good at integral and differential calculus" and knew "the scientific names of beings animalculous," he knew about as much about military matters as "a novice in a nunnery." But Jargoneers are quick studies. They know the secret is to know a "smattering" of the technical stuff.

It is precisely because they are glib and technically lightweight that Jargoneers can move across industries. They are a lateral migration commodity. Throughout the corporate world, Jargoneers serve a most valuable function and are compensated accordingly.

John Sculley, who reportedly makes over two million dollars a year, meets the criteria of a Jargoneer. Moving adroitly from selling cans of carbonated sugar water (Pepsi-Cola) to selling boxes of computer chips (Apple Computers), Sculley proved he could reach into any jargon bag and pull out the right word, like the Wizard of Oz pulling diplomas, medals, and heart-shaped watches out of his black bag. And like most skilled Jargoneers, Sculley works in sports talk to lighten the technical banter and make the whole presentation sound more sporty, and likeable.

> *We're trying not to set our expectations too high, but my guess is the Mac IIcx is going to knock one right out of the park.*

Sport-talk is a key jargon ingredient. All the big boys (and girls) of corporate America speak it because they know the ears of their listeners are tuned to that frequency. They also know that sports-talk is quotable and printable. The trade journals are more inclined to quote an executive in a **call-out** (text that is drawn out of the main text and presented in a box) when his remarks have an athletic ring to them. Here are some bizness leaders quoted in a *single* issue of a magazine:

In the high-end segment . . . we can be the ***big winner.*** *We realize this is a multiyear proposition. We don't need to* ***hit a home run*** *in the first six months.*

If it can do a good job in less than eighteen months, then it can get us ***in the game*** *before (our competitor) has the market sewn up.*

We have the opportunity to be the only serious contender. Our goal is to make this a ***two-horse race.***

Considering that the market is so robust and is dominated by only ***one big player,*** *we can be a* ***big winner*** *by being No. 2 or 3 in a few categories.*

Even government officials have the habit of sports phraseology. Here's a HUD bureaucrat describing how vigilant his department had been:

There were lots of phone calls, there was a ***full-court press.***

But why sports? Because corporate execs and government honchos are initiates of the sport cult—where the high priests, the ultimate Jargoneers, are sports announcers!

They can speak faster than a dribbled basketball!

Looks like a ***1-2-2 trap*** *and remember on a trap the corners are open . . . Thomas hits from outside! . . . through the* ***point guard*** *now . . . Magic scored 4 points . . . in the corner, Woolrich . . . plenty of time on the shot clock . . . Cooper fires it up for 3 and hits it! . . . and now each team has connected on a* ***3-point basket.*** *. . .*

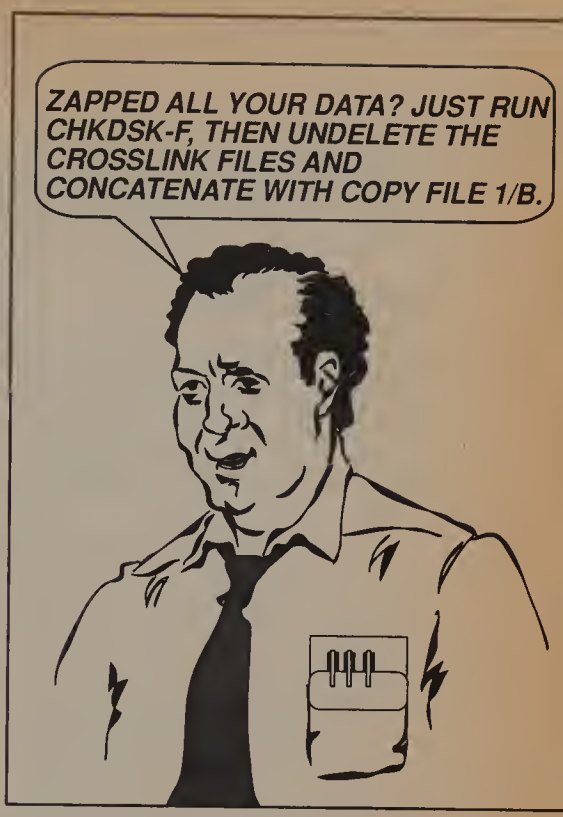
They can be as slippery as a hockey puck careening down the ice!

. . . ***hat trick*** *for Lemieux! three goals . . .* ***back hand shuffle.*** *. . . what a great move from a great player!*

And they can drill their message home like a bullet pass!

. . . they're playing somebody with nose at the center, a great center in a ***4-3 setup.*** *. . . the Eagles need to keep the drive alive . . . a simple* ***hitch pattern,*** *5 yards turnaround—bam!*

JARGONEER



JARGONIZER

JARGOON

JARGONAUT

Is it any wonder we elected a former baseball announcer to give us the national play-by-play for eight years?

JARGONIZERS

Techies. These guys have tin ears, they have absolutely no appreciation of the musical qualities of jargon; they seem to care little about the listener's comprehension or appreciation. Long after his audience glazes over, the true Jargonizer will ramble on about:

> *Your cylinder head is probably warped, so you're looking at an after-market head-gasket and your head block should be re-torqued.*
>
> *or*
>
> *His drinking impacted the preexisting familial and vocational dysfunctions. . . .*
>
> *or*
>
> *. . . according to the inverted yield curve, I predict a significant distribution predicated on maximum. . .*

Perhaps Americans were disappointed in the whole Apollo 11 adventure because the dialogue they heard on their radios and televisions sounded like two computers exchanging data:

> *CAPCOM: "Coming at you with a DOI pad. 101361-407981 minus 00758 plus all balls plus 00098 plus corrections 00572 perigee plus 00085 00764 030000293 986 minus 00759 plus all balls plus 00090 rest of the pad is NA. Stand by on your read-back. If you are ready to copy the PDI data, I have it for you. Over."*
>
> *Aldrin: "Go ahead with the PDI."*
>
> *CAPCOM: "Roger. PDI pad, PIG 102330436 0950 minus 00021 182287000 plus 56919."*

But if the Jargonizer cares not a fig for your ear, he's not after your wallet either. Jargonizers are normally nice guys, your neighborhood do-it-yourselfers, hobbyists, ham radio operators, hot rodders, and hackers. In the '50s, they worked on hotrods, in the '60s, they took apart hi-fi speakers, in the '70s, they soldered together kit-computers, in the '90s, well, they'll probably go back to retooling hotrods.

Their idea of poetry reached its heights in the '60s with the auto-

eroticism of the Beach Boys (*Lil' Deuce Coup, Shut Down, 409*) and Jan and Dean (*Dead Man's Curve*), when young men sang of **ram induction** instead of teenage infatuation and bragged about the measurements of their **demi-semi-hemi dual-barrelled fuel-injected** engines instead of their girlfriends.

Jargonizers don't mean any harm, they're not trying to confuse you or impress you. REALLY! They're not trying to make you look stupid, it's just that they can't talk any other way. They're generally disappointed if you don't understand and will be happy to spend hours describing gizmos and gadgets.

We have affection for our Jargonizers. They're helpful, harmless, quirky, and innocent—unlike the Jargoneers whom we distrust or the dreaded Jargoons whom we fear (described in the next section). *Star Trek's* Mr. Spock is a Jargonizer, explaining how "the rhobidnium crystals in the transponders can form a crude laser if held 27.2 millimeters apart." Data of the "Next Generation" is also a Jargonizer, burbling about "a rotating neutron star of approximately . . ." until he's cut off.

The problem with Jargonizers is that they have difficulty explaining what they know to the rest of us. They describe things in increasing granularity, in other words, they give you more and more detail. If you don't understand the difference between a **gas-plasm display** and an **LCD screen**, they'll tell you all about **super twist** and **backlighting** and **charged particles**.

Jargonizers are not usually adept at ratcheting up to a larger vision, i.e., they fail to draw the big picture. They like taking things apart, but once they get down to the bits (and pieces), they can't tell you what it's all about. In short, they make lousy teachers. So, of course, they're called upon constantly to **brain dump**—which gives them an excuse to take the arcane and turn it into the inexplicable.

Jargonizers can, for the most part, be trusted when you're the customer—to them, it's all data. They're not impressed with the **bells 'n whistles** of **user-friendly software**. They make money despite themselves; they would write **quick 'n dirty** programs for free if someone would let them. They're carefully controlled by their managers because they're liable to give away the goose that lays the golden chips. That's why Jargonizers are put in the backrooms and basements of computer stores, where they can **plug in accelerator boards** and **troubleshoot the coaxials.**

When you walk into a computer store, say a national chain like Computer***** or Computer****, Jargoneers will be there greeting you with **multimedia database application platforms** but if you get a

chance to talk to the Jargonizer, he'll talk about the **bugs** in the program, how much **RAM** it consumes, and under what conditions it will **crash**. And if you hang out long enough with him, he'll probably tell you about a much cheaper program that can do the job twice as well. His store doesn't carry it, but he'll give you the name of a reliable mail order house.

Engineers or scientists routinely replace everyday words with technical terms. For the most part, I've found they speak this way all the time, so it's not meant to impress laypeople; rather, I think they're really just more comfortable with their esoteric lexicon. Therefore, instead of saying there are many options available, an engineer will say "we have enough bandwidth on this one to play around with the margins."

Instead of: "I added up these numbers five times to make sure I got it right," they say: "I went through five iterations to validate the input."

Computer types favor certain peculiar words for simpler words: **truncate** replaces shorten; **interface** replaces talk to; **concatenate** replaces combine; **transparent** replaces easy; **user friendly** replaces uncomplicated.

Norman Mailer was intrigued by the speech of the astronauts:

> *"No," Armstrong went on, "that's not a prerogative we have available to us." He could of course have said, "We can't do," but in trouble he always talked computerese. The use of "we" was discouraged. "A joint exercise has demonstrated" became the substitution. "Other choices" became "peripheral secondary objectives." "Doing our best" was "obtaining maximum advantage possible." "Confidence" became "very high confidence level." "Ability to move" was a "mobility study." "Turn off" was "disable"; "turn on" became "enable."*

This speech habit may, in fact, be pathological.

The Warning Signs of Jargonitis

*Jargonitis: an acute condition affecting the vocal chords preventing a person from producing any vocalizations in the normal vocabulary. The person seems to have an involuntary reflex that causes the words to be highly technical—even for everyday events. He or she uses scientific words to express ordinary thoughts, such as saying "**What are the deltas?**" instead of "What's new?" Instead of saying he is "almost done" with his work, a person suffering from*

*jargonitis will say: "**I'm asymptotic to delivery.**"*
If you, or anyone you know, shows any of these symptoms, call your Word Doctor.

In the event there's no Word Doctor in your area, the case may prove to be intractable, a "sickness unto death" (to use Soren Kierkegaard's diagnosis). If you're a Jargonizer, you may be constrained to speak jargon to the very end. Whereas other dying people have visions of white light, you may spend your last breath uttering something like:

I observe . . . a polarized phenomenon . . . multiphased luminosities . . . . Communication terminated.

But your family and friends may cut you off before then.

If you know that you have the symptoms of a Jargonizer, you will have no trouble in a homogeneous, homogenized environment. However, from time to time, you will have to make that dreaded presentation to outsiders. Don't panic. There are several things you can do:

1. Change your vocabulary by aiming at a different level of comprehension.

or

2. Change *your listeners'* vocabulary by educating them, defining your terms, illustrating your description with examples.

or

3. Don't change anything. Continue blathering and ignore the stoney silence on the other side. Watch their eyes roll in their heads, glaze over, and finally close. Then you can get back to your real work.

JARGOONS

"I quite agree with you," said the Duchess; "and the moral of that is— 'Be what you would seem to be'—or, if you'd like it put more simply—'Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.'"

"I think I should understand that better," Alice said very politely, "if I had it written down: but I can't quite follow it as you say it."

The Duchess was a Jargoon. A Jargoon is someone in authority who uses language to confuse us.

When Attorney General Dick Thornburgh acknowledged that his spokesman was involved in a leak to the press, he said:

> *If a product of my instructions to my staff that they not mislead the media is that the media on occasion interprets the fact that we will not deny information or wave them off a story, as confirmation of an unauthorized disclosure, then this is the inevitable byproduct of our policy.*

Jargoons use language to obscure, misdirect, coverup, conceal, confuse, and **obfuscate**—to use a word that was specifically invented for Jargoons (and probably by them).

Alice would have a hard time understanding some Jargoons, like Herman Kahn, even when they write it all down:

> *This strategy might be combined with a large and flexible pre-attack mobilization base so that one might hope to deter provocation or mobilization by the other side with the threat of an appropriate counter-mobilization, and, failing deterrence, be able to initiate corrective action either to prevent a future failure of deterrence and/or to control the consequences of the original failure.*

A Jargoon is like a kid who gives elaborate and *incorrect* directions to drivers who get lost:

> *Stanton Boulevard? Sure, I can tell you how to get there. Take a right at the fourth light. Go six blocks. Then you come to a Dunkin' Donuts. . .*

He grew up and became a Jargoon:

> *Senator: "Did you bug that conversation?"*
> *Ehrlichman: "No, Senator, I did not."*
> *Senator: "What did you do?"*
> *Ehrlichman: "I recorded it."*

John Ehrlichman was just one of the many people we hear from after the elections are over. They weren't on any ballot, but we see and hear from them more often than from the people we voted into office.

Who are they? Cabinet officers, State Department representatives, military officials, press aids, official spokespeople. . . . These are the people who will explain why we just attacked a country you never heard of, or why the latest **revenue enhancement** doesn't break the candidate's promise of no new taxes, or why the government didn't warn civilian passengers that a plane would be the likely target of terrorists.

A congressional report cited the Chinook CH-47D helicopter for the deaths of fifteen people. The Pentagon sent one of their Jargoons to shore up the damage.

> *"Soldiers' safety is the Army's primary concern, and the Army would not allow the CH-47 to continue flight operations if it were not a safe aircraft," said a senior Army spokesman, who asked not to be named.*

Note how the spokesman doesn't actually say the helicopter was safe. Note how he substitutes Latinate terminology for Anglo Saxon ("flight operations" instead of "flying"). Note the impersonal voice: he doesn't say "We are concerned about the soldiers' safety." Note that the spokesman is anonymous.

The military's Jargoons are called brass. They like the sound of vaguely menacing, cryptic words. They talk like the Colonel in *Apocalypse Now* who orders the Captain to "terminate the colonel's command. Terminate with extreme prejudice."

Jargoons present an incongruous picture. They look directly at you, they talk in sound bursts, they shoot "straight from the shoulder," they look tough and no nonsense, and then they proceed to mince words and prance around issues. Lt. Col. Oliver North looks like a Hollywood marine, a John Wayne All-American no BS kind of guy. But can you really imagine the Duke reading North's script?

> *Sen. Mitchell: "Do you agree that no covert action should occur unless the President first finds that it's necessary and specifically authorizes it?"*
>
> *Lt. Col. North: "Well, again, I want to go back to what I just said a minute ago. It was—and I'm leading with my recollection unrefreshed, but the law provides that the President does or makes a finding in the case of covert actions which will expend taxpayers' monies."*

What's that again, Pilgrim?

They have the job of making death and destruction sound innocuous.

Their words and syntax are like fake food and meat by-products: They seem to be genuine but they leave you feeling vaguely betrayed. Like the phony flavors the food technologists call **flavorgeins**, Jargoon talk is peppered with **verbalgeins**, pompous phrases like **inoperative** and **mission** and **zero option**, to enhance the flavor of the remarks.

In the business world, Jargoons are corporate flacks. They are paid to slough off major ecological disasters as "mishaps" and near nuclear catastrophes as "incidents." Admittedly, they have a difficult job. They are interviewed following airplane crashes, chemical spills, product failures, and the host of other disasters, tragedies, and blunders that produce banner headlines.

Jargoons use an authoritarian type of jargon to bully anyone who dares to interfere with their agenda. David Stockman relates being "rolled" by the Archjargoon General Alexander Haig, who was then Secretary of State:

> *I cannot tolerate being micromanaged by OMB accountants.*

Haig is the patron saint of Jargoons, a status assured by his testimony on the American nuns who were murdered in El Salvador:

> *I'd like to suggest to you that some of the investigations would lead one to believe that perhaps the vehicle the nuns were riding in may have tried to run a roadblock, or may accidently have been perceived to have been doing so, and there'd been an exchange of fire and then perhaps those who inflicted the casualties sought to cover it up. And this could have been at a very low level of both competence and motivation in the context of the issue itself. But the facts on this are not clear enough for anyone to draw a definitive conclusion.*

The next day, Haig was asked if he was suggesting that the nuns ran the roadblock, with guns blazing ("exchange of fire").

> *Not at all, no, not at all. My heavens! The dear nuns who raised me in my parochial schooling would forever isolate me from their affections and respect.*

Parochial school, that's it! Like some of us, he was exposed to ecclesiastical technicalities at an early age. Maybe he memorized question/responses like we did from the *Baltimore Catechism* such as:

Q. "What is a plenary indulgence?"

A. "A plenary indulgence is the full remission of the temporal punishment due to sin."

This may explain the odd words, the divagating syntax—he was indoctrinated into a twenty-centuries-old tradition of Latin constructions, Aristotelian hierarchies, and ingenious interpretations long before entering West Point. This is a rich vocabulary compost, jargonistically speaking. After eight years of Catholic schooling, we developed a solid grasp of polysyllabic terms and their usage. How many ten-year olds do you know who can say transubstantiation, benignity, and omnipotent?

But no. The "dear nuns" and parochial schooling can't be blamed for four-star Jargoons. As Haig himself said:

But the facts on this are not clear enough for anyone to draw a definitive conclusion.

See "Doublespeak" for a further discussion.

JARGONAUTS

This is a special breed, the "bold, the brave, the happy few," those who have ventured into new linguistic territory, coining new words, and fabricating new constructions—the originators of jargon. They stir up controversy by propelling novel concepts into the culture with their books and lectures. Years later, their messages are passed into the mainstream by others, who may have never heard of them. They create whole industries of jargon.

R. Buckminster Fuller, for example, not only invented the geodesic dome and the Dymaxion car, he also invented words or, more accurately, re-invented words. Fuller gives his business associates credit for coining **dymaxion** (DYnamism + MAXimum + ION = dymaxion, "doing the most with the least"), but Bucky (as he liked to be called) might as well have patented the word along with the car. **Comprehensive propensities** (we are naturally generalists, or comprehensivists, as opposed to being specialists which is how we have been educated) is another phrase of his.

And of course, **synergy**. The word actually preceded Bucky by three hundred years (it appeared around 1660), but he should have trademarked it because through his evangelism, synergy has entered the popular culture. It was not as well known in 1971 when he wrote:

> *By questioning many audiences, I have discovered that only about one in three hundred are familiar with synergy. The word is obviously not a popular word. Synergy is the only word in our language that means* behavior of whole systems unpredicted by the separately observed behaviors of any of the system's separate parts. *There is nothing in the chemistry of a toenail that predicts the existence of a human being.*

Bucky died in 1983. He would probably be amused to hear how popular the word has become. Perhaps twisted out of shape by misuse, but definitely in circulation from the ad room to the board room. Synergy has become an essential corporate buzzword, a term used by transnational executives who are attempting to get their myriad industries and profit centers to work together. A reporter described a new online computer service:

> *See the connections? The on-screen advertising pays for the low subscription costs. In turn, the color display means more subscribers. Sears and IBM are clearly banking on this synergy.*

Bucky wrote plainly at times, in relatively brief statements with a minimum of scientific and metaphysical jargon. He was a superb teacher. But Bucky was at his best, and most characteristic, when he was spinning long, Faulknerian, sentences. Usually these sentences were the culmination of a patient, logical process that extended over several pages. If you kept up with him, the long finish was poetic—but if you fell behind the pace of his logic, you were in for a bewildering roller-coaster ride:

> *Whereas entropy is increasing disorder evoked by dispersion of energy, wealth locally is increased order—that is to say, the increasingly orderly concentration of physical power in our ever-expanding locally explored and comprehended universe by the metaphysical capability of man as informed by repeated experiences from which he happens in an unscheduled manner to progressively distill the ever-increasing inventory of omni-interrelated and omni-interaccommodative generalized principles found to be operative in all the special-case experiences.*

In a less esoteric way, Red Barber, the legendary baseball announcer, is a sportsman Jargonaut. "The Old Redhead" spiced up the language of the game and American life with words such as **rhubarb** (a squabble between opposing players or between coaches and umpires) and the **cat bird seat** (the announcer's press box vantage point, popularized by James Thurber, whom many people mistake to be the originator).

Marshall MacLuhan created the phrase "the medium is the message" ("any technology gradually creates a totally new human environment") and altered the society as a result. He brought us the global village and measured media in degrees of coolness and warmth. He viewed the car as "a mechanical bride," a TV viewer as "a skin diver," and a typewriter as "an elusive pumpkin coach." Most importantly, he heralded the Information Age. "Man the food-gatherer reappears incongruously as information-gatherer. In this role, electronic man is no less a nomad than his paleolithic ancestors."

Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr. (*In Search of Excellence*) gave us **chunking** ("breaking things up . . . to encourage action"), and **nichemanship** ("finding a particular niche where you are better than anybody else"), and **adhocracy** (informal, task-team approach to problem solving), and phrases such as "competitive bands of pragmatic bureaucracy-beaters" and, of course, EXCELLENCE, the *perestroika* of American industry.

Often, their work is misunderstood or even ridiculed, but Jargonauts have enriched the linguistic soup by adding entirely novel ingredients and stirring in a few outlandish words, creating whole new culinary-linguisitic experiences. These are the adventurers, the Balboas, the Captain Kirks, who enable others to discover new contextual realms of jargon.

. . . to explore new words . . . to study new syllabifications
. . . to boldly go where no mouth has gone before!

JARGON ETIQUETTE

There are two kinds of people in America. Those who did good in English in school, and those who did not. (If you just now mentally corrected me by saying "Those who did *well* in English . . ." you know what category you're in.) The funny thing is that the kids who were not whizzes in "Language Arts" went on to create thousands of new words and idioms that have completely changed the course of the language, forever.

I'll let that sink in.

The English types—the "word people," the journalists, writers, lawyers, academics, politicians—can moan all they want about the degradation of the tongue. But it is they who are forced to learn the terminologies of the accountants, engineers, scientists, computer hackers—not the other way around.

For you see, poets were not the first ones to go to the moon—although they had been writing about it for thousands of years. Miffed at having his muse trampled on by philistines, W. H. Auden put it this way:

> *. . . Irreverence*
> *is a greater oaf than Superstition.*

But poets weren't given equal access to global communications. A few thousand people may have read Auden, but the human *race* listened to the engineers and space cadets.

> *CAPCOM: "Roger. Are you having any difficulties with gas in the food bags like the janitor reported?"*
> *Collins: "Well, that's intermittently affirmative, Bruce."*

"Intermittently affirmative"? Surely Collins knows the word "sometimes"? English majors were amused. Why, they talk like robots! And commentators like Norman Mailer made wisecracks:

> *When they mouthed their portions of rhetoric, when they spoke, lo! their mouths poured forth cement.*

But then along came the computer—no laughing matter. Everyone was compelled to use it. Including journalists and English teachers and copy writers. The literate, the literary, the literati, the preservers of the language of Twain and Melville and Fitzgerald were being accused of being

"computer illiterate." They couldn't believe it—illiterate?! Who are these uncouth barbarians to talk about literacy? Listen to them! Everything is *impacting* something else. They *input* this to that. Input! And *interface!*

I personally learned the hard truth soon after getting my degree in English and starting my first real job. It was at the Board of Education. My supervisor, Jeffrey Michaelson, escorted me through the marble halls of the administration building to meet people. He introduced me to a big mahaf, the Superintendent for Curriculum Development, who pounded me on the shoulder and said in a big mahaf voice:

> *Welcome on board, Tom! You come at a very exciting time. We're mainstreaming the pacing schedules for the standardized curriculum. I suppose you've heard about that.*

It was an awkward moment, I didn't know anything about educational theory and had no idea what to say. Thinking quickly, Jeffrey remembered that I majored in English:

> *Say something in English to him, Tom.*

They both had a good laugh over that. It was well known there wasn't much use for English at the school board; they all spoke Educationese. English was a quaint area of study, like archeology.

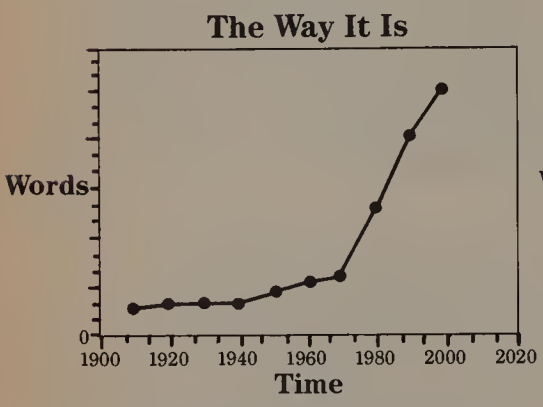
English was becoming a subculture. And how did it happen? We could blame the educators who thought of kids as bipolar objects. Like magnets, kids were oriented either to the North or the South, they would naturally swing in the direction of either language or mathematics. So they gave the kids a battery of tests and put them on educational **tracks**. Some of them went on the train that passed through the Land of Literature, and others went on the train headed for the Territory of Differential Equations.

Whichever way they went was all right for most kids. The verbally-oriented breathed a sigh of relief ("One, two, three! No calculus for me!") The mathematically-oriented hardly noticed their basic course in English composition because they were so busy calculating their ground speed with their slide rules, glancing up occasionally to notice the terrain. "Hey don't those two hills over there look like a Sine Cosine?

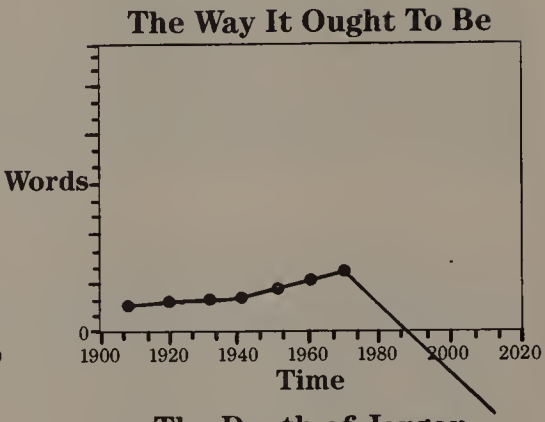
Basically everybody was happy. The English teachers didn't have to put up with kids whose idea of a conjunction was a + sign. And the mathematics teachers didn't have to waste time trying to teach kids who were always whining "Who needs trigonometry?" And, for the most part, the kids were less resistent because they didn't have to take subjects they didn't like.

And so, years later. . .

The verbal types noticed a disturbing trend in language.



The Growth of Jargon



The Death of Jargon

And every time they opened their mouths, the math types thumbed their noses at all those English teachers who had held down their GPAs:

> *Hey, Cheryl, dump this to disk and then spool it to the 3600, will ya? We got to check the printout for a loop in the subroutine.*

We have, in fact, two cultures, those who use jargon regularly, which we'll call Type-As (the math types) and those who don't, Type-Bs (the English types). Although the literati have their own jargon of course, (anapests and dactyls, antoteler and architectonics) these words are not major societal influences.

Ellen Goodman, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist syndicated in over 400 newspapers, is a classic Type-B:

> *I am mechanically illiterate. I cannot blame my mother for this one. I inherited a deep disability from both sides of my family.*

Chuck Yeager, first man to break the sound barrier, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, TV personality—Mr. "Right Stuff" himself was a math man. Type-A all the way!

> *By the time I reached high school, I excelled at anything that demanded dexterity or mathematical aptitude. My best grades*

were in typing and math. My geometry teacher, Miss Gonza Methel, considered me one of her better students. But my English and history teachers had to search for excuses to pass me.

Neither Yeager nor Goodman are slouches. They represent the two sides of the fence. Despite your preferences, one side is not better than the other. But there is a fence, and the trick is trying to communicate with the folks on the other side.

Because we have two related, but different, ways of speaking, it is necessary to adopt some protocols: the same as between countries. We need some rules—guidelines might be more acceptable—to show us how to relate to one another verbally.

And make no mistake about it, protocol is needed because jargon is indeed on the cutting edge. People have the scars to prove it. In business and social situations, breakdowns in communication can strain relationships and make working together difficult and unpleasant.

Take a look at a public place where differences in language result in confusion, upset, and sometimes emotional trauma. Hospitals.

According to a TIME/CNN poll, a majority of Americans thinks that doctors do a poor job of explaining to people what they are doing.

Hospitals are places where different languages are heard. The administrators of a hospital in California had to change a sign because patients on their way to get x-rays walked right past the one that said "Radiology." They also found that women were upset to hear their miscarriages described as "abortions." Technically, an abortion is any terminated pregnancy, when a pregnancy is purposefully ended, it is called an "elective abortion."

Sometimes, doctors get a taste of their own medicine. At the same hospital, during a strategic planning meeting, an accountant said that the TPA (an in-house term, Total Product Analysis) would have to be increased substantially. The doctors and nurses were aghast: "Do you know how much TPA (a blood clotting agent created by gene splicing) costs?" It was some minutes before the medical people realized the accountant wasn't talking about medicine at all.

Let's look at how the professionals handle the problem of talking to people who don't understand their jargon:

- The Jargoneers are quite skilled in conventional English. If need be, they translate for the non-professionals, whether they are shareholders, clients, potential customers. They can speak English if needed.

- The Jargoons on the other hand, probably can speak English, but they are not going to. At least not to you or me. Their attitude is take it or leave it. "My statement speaks for itself."
- The Jargonizers speak Jargon. That's it. They are strictly ESL (English as a second language). If asked for a translation, they will only use a different level of jargon.
- And Jargonauts: they certainly speak English well enough. It's just that they want to take it places it's never been to before.

We need to establish some kind of Emily Post-type guide to good manners, jargonwise.

You could take the advice of John "Dress for Success" Molloy:

> *There is one other rule for people writing or speaking to those outside their field. Jargon is for jerks.*

But Molloy doesn't suggest what the executive fast-tracker is supposed to do as an alternative to speaking jargon. What if a superior calls on his expertise? What if he has to make a presentation to clients who know nothing about his field?

IF YOU ARE THE SPEAKER

If you are in a business setting you can assume that people are intelligent. Maybe they are uninformed, maybe they are not aware of the latest buzzwords, maybe they are not from your area of speciality— but generally, you can start on the assumption that people are at least as smart as you and should be treated as such.

Know that people operate out of not wanting to look foolish in front of other folks. They may not know a word, but damned if they're going to admit it. Tell the truth, aren't you the same? If you're a scientist (let's say) and you're meeting with the bean counters that dribble out the money for your experiment, don't you pretty much ignore their gobbledygook?

You don't want to insult their intelligence, nor do you want to put them to sleep.

Translate the specialized terms to familiar names. Sure, it may not be absolutely accurate, but if you can find a rough equivalent in a language shared by all parties, use it. You can add a proviso that "technically it's called a humma-humma, but for purposes of the conversation we'll call it a widget."

Spell out all acronyms—at least the first time. Use common sense.

Don't explain what FBI means (unless to you it means something other than Federal Bureau of Investigation).

Pass out of a sheet of paper (not a book, please!) defining terms and explaining acronyms. This is a time-saver as well as an ego-saver. If a person attending the meeting knows the terminology, he won't be insulted; if he doesn't, he can refer to the sheet without **taking down** the meeting.

IF YOU ARE THE LISTENER

Wouldn't it be great to have a friend, a really smart friend, who could whisper in your ear whenever you were confronted with an unfamiliar term? And if he didn't know everything, he at least could see through even the densest fog. The late, great Richard Feynman was, in a sense, just such a friend to all of us when he investigated the Challenger disaster.

> *At any rate, the engineers all leaped forward. They got all excited and began to describe the problem to me. I'm sure they were delighted, because technical people love to to discuss technical problems with technical people. . .*
>
> *They kept referring to the problem by some complicated name—a "pressure-induced vorticity oscillatory wawa," or something.*
>
> *I said, "Oh, you mean a whistle!"*

Of course, people like Feynman are rare. So who you gonna turn to? Jargon Busters? No. . . . The secret is in the title of the book from which the above Feynman anecdote was taken: *What Do <u>You</u> Care What Other People Think?* You see, Feynman was not afraid to ask questions; he did not care if other people thought he looked foolish.

You may say that a Nobel Laureate has a certain license the rest of us don't have: They can afford to appear less than all-knowing. But I think the opposite is probably true; smart people are expected to be smart in everything. But whether you're a prize-winning physicist or not, my advice is still the same: If you don't know, ask questions!

SPEAK UP, YOU'RE PROBABLY NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO'S IN THE DARK.

In corporations, often entire meetings go by without anyone asking the basic questions that everyone is thinking. It's like the Emperor's New Clothes; no one wants to ask the obvious. Sure the stakes are high. Someone may think you're backward, not with the team, not up with the

curve. But perhaps your ignorance may be the thing that opens up a fresh line of inquiry. But watch out—it's risky.

I was at a meeting involving several groups from different parts of a multinational corporation. The latest technologies were being discussed and the project was many months behind schedule. Things were clearly bogged down, but it didn't look like there was a clear **path forward**. Then Susan asked: "I'm not clear about this. Just what do you mean by **artificial intelligence**?"

Heads abruptly turned. Four hours of heated debate and discussion about AI and *now* she asks what it is? You could almost hear people say to themselves: "I didn't know Susan was such a bozo!"

The group leader answered the question. But then something unexpected happened. Another person spoke up. "Not so," he said, and proceeded to give *an entirely different* explanation. It turned out no one was really clear what AI was, at least in the context of this specific project. That there were dozens of different notions about AI did in fact indicate what the problem was. The project was stuck in first gear because all parties had not agreed on what the project was all about.

The members established a **task group** to resolve the AI question and the meeting was adjourned. On the way out, someone said to Susan, "You know, I was going to ask the same question, but I didn't have the nerve."

WHAT GOOD IS JARGON?

At 8:45 PM on January 26, the crew of Avianca Airlines Flight 52 informed air-traffic controllers that they were concerned about their dwindling fuel supply. At 9:24, they aborted a landing at Kennedy Airport because of fog and wind-shear. Some minutes later, this conversation was recorded on the plane's recorder:

Pilot: "Did you tell them we have an emergency?"

Co-pilot: "I told them we're low on fuel."

At 9:35 PM, the jetliner, which had been kept in holding patterns for a total of 88 minutes, ran out of fuel and crashed into a wooded area of Long Island, New York. Seventy-three of the 158 people on board, including the cockpit crew, died.

After a thorough investigation, a member of the National Transportation Board reported the cold fact that made all the difference:

The word "emergency" was never used. The word "priority" was used.

In everyday life, there is little contrast between "priority" and "emergency." In aviation, the distinction is a matter of extreme importance. A "priority" indicates to the ground controllers that the situation requires attention but not extreme measures. When dozens of planes are put in holding patterns, a controller must follow the protocol strictly to maintain order and safety. Under Federal rules, when a captain declares an **emergency**, he is given immediate clearance to land.

The Avianca tragedy points to the fact that in some situations, jargon is a matter of life and death, and mistakes in language can be fatal. There was also a recent situation in which jargon—and ignorance of it—made a *historic* difference.

Mr. Nields: "Did there come a time when you stopped writing documents relating to your support for the contras?"

Lt. Col. North: "There came a time when I stopped sending up what we called "in system memoranda." I continued to communicate with my superiors, using the PROF [sic] system, and I continued to send forward non-log or out of system documents, yes."

Mr. Nields: "And, where are they?"

Lt. Col. North: "Well, the PROFs notes you've got, I guess."

Mr. Nields: "Where are the non-logged documents?"

Lt. Col. North: "I think they were shredded."

Mr. Nields: "And, the—"

Lt. Col. North: "Or burn bagged."

Mr. Nields: "And, the PROFs messages, you thought had been deleted."

Lt. Col. North: "I had hope that they had been, yes."

The reason North was compelled to testify was that he did not know what "non-log" meant back in 1985 (the above testimony was made in 1987). The whole case against North rested upon documents that he thought he had erased from his electronic mail system, which is called PROFS.

PROFS (not "PROF," as the congressional stenographer recorded) stands for Professional Office System, an IBM electronic mail and scheduling product. PROFS is used by hundreds of thousands of people throughout corporate America.

PROFS allows you to type messages at your computer terminal that can be read by your colleagues at other terminals. And they can send messages to you. These communications don't involve a secretary or any paperwork; there's no carbon paper and no xeroxing and no phone calls. In short, it appeared to the NSC staff to be the perfect "closed system"—to borrow one of the intelligence community's favorite phrases. What you typed was only between you and your receiver. And the computer.

North had forgotten about the computer. When he put papers through the shredder, he eliminated the paper trail. And when he erased his PROFS messages, he thought he had eliminated the electronic trail as well. However, he didn't realize that the central processing unit of the computer records all electronic transmissions.

The Justice Department investigators went to the computer specialists who maintained the system. All the memos North thought he had destroyed were stored on magnetic tapes. Without those tapes, Congress would have had no "hard" evidence and, arguably, no grounds for a hearing.

As shown in his testimony, North was a real Jargoneer ("in-system" and "out-of-system memoranda" and "burn bagged"), but he had little technical expertise. Had he read the PROFS documentation back in 1985,

he would have learned how to prevent the computer from recording his messages. All he had to do was type ".nl" (which means "non-log") at the end of his notes.

If North had only typed ".nl"—if only, he had *really* known the jargon...

JARGON IS GREAT SHORTHAND

So, jargon is of consequence, and it certainly is useful, especially when you need to be brief. One of the most characteristic forms of insider talk is shorthand. Saying a lot with a little. Cutting the communication down to the bone. It occurs in situations where the action is fast and the situation is complex, where teamwork is needed and the clock is running—that's when codetalk comes in handy.

Take stock trading. When an order gets wired to the **floor** of the stock exchange from a brokerage house, a **runner** takes the order slip to a trader who negotiates with a stock specialist:

Trader: "GM! 500 at 3/8."

Specialist: "No."

Trader: "Give me 500 at 1/2."

Specialist: "Done."

In twenty seconds, the transaction is completed, thousands of dollars are exchanged electronically, the sale is keypunched, and appears on the Big Board.

Here are nurses and doctors in the emergency room going over the incoming cases.

*Doctor 1: "I've got an **MI** here. His **enzymes** are up and his **segments** are all over the place. Are we gonna need to **strepto** him?"*

*Doctor 2: "There's an **OD** here. We'll have to **hose** 'im."*

*Nurse: "There was an **code**, so we **shocked** him and sent him to the **unit** with a **nitro drip**."*

"MI" is a myocardial infarction. "Enzymes" refers to the results of a blood test. "Segments" are the patterns on an EKG reading. "Strepto" is the drug streptokinase. "OD" is an overdose (but you knew that). "Hose" is an oral-gastric tube roughly the size of a garden hose, which is used to pump out a patient's stomach. "Code" is cardiac arrest. "Shocked" refers to shocking with the cardioverted paddles. "Unit" is intensive care. "Nitro drip" is to administer nitrogylcerin drop-by-drop intravenously.

High stakes, high tension, all of them. But for sheer white-knuckle suspense, you can't beat the jet jockeys. Remember when the Air Force downed a Libyan fighter in January 1989?

> *"Bogies have jinked back into me now, for the third time, noses on, at 35 miles, Angels 7."*
>
> *"Bogies have jinked back at me again for the fifth time. They're on my nose now, inside of 20 miles."*
>
> *"Master arm on. Master arm on. Centering up the T. Bogies have jinked back into me again. Sixteen miles. Centering the dot."*
>
> *"Fourteen miles. Fox 1. Fox 1."*
>
> *"Ten miles, he's back on my nose. Fox 1 again. "*
>
> *"Tally 2. Tally 2."*
>
> *"We're showing two good chutes in the air here."*
>
> *"Roger. Two floggers. Two floggers splashed. We're heading north."*

If you're sitting in your favorite chair in your living room jabbering with your friends, you can wax eloquent about "the leading edge of graphite composite wing skin," but if your chair is being thrown through the air by five tons of thrust—a chair in a 30,000 pound brick—you're not going to be philosophically verbose, especially if another 30,000-pound brick is being thrown at you at the same time. If you're an F-14 pilot and you're confronting a Libyan MiG-23 fighter over the Mediterranean, you don't want to stumble over big words. When you're flying at Mach 1, only strategically-focused talk is permitted on the combat frequency. Jargon is not only appropriate, it's a matter of life and death.

JARGON IS COLORFUL AND FUN

Once you learn the lingo, jargon is a blast to use. War may be hell, but Tom Clancy makes a battle sound like fun—a bunch of alert young men snapping out commands and slinging around adrenaline-pumping techno-military terms in the heat of battle:

> *The air group commander looked at the form and walked to a phone. "Shoot off the plus-fives, recall the patrol aircraft when they get on station, and set up two more Tomcats and a Hummer on plus-five. I want the returning aircraft turned around immediately. Reserve one catapult for tankers." He*

JARGON-FREE ZONE

JOINT VENTURE OF NASA AND NCTE (NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH)

came back. "With your permission, sir, I propose to put another pair of F-14s and another Hummer up in an hour, and put all the fighters on plus-five. At 0600, the rest of the fighters go up, with tankers in support. We'll meet them with everything we have about two hundred miles out and kick their ass."

JARGON IS DEMOCRATIC AND GLOBAL

Jargon is democratic, anybody can use it. You don't need to have gone to a certain school or been born into a certain family; no one stops you because you don't know Latin or Greek; you can be a poor kid and speak it fluently.

Jargon now has international status and forms a kind of Esperanto, the long-wished for universal language. *Webster's Dictionary* describes ISV, the International Scientific Vocabulary, this way:

Much of the technical vocabulary of the sciences and other specialized studies consists of words or word elements that are current in two or more languages, with only such slight modifications as are necessary to adapt them to the structure of the individual language in each case.

And jargon is much better than Esperanto because it's evolving naturally in conjunction with technical developments, not artificially according to quacky theories. Jargon is not an unnatural language being forced on anyone by zealots; it's a living tongue that is heard around the world.

The language of medicine, science, and technology is global. Naturally, there must be translations, but there is more relationship between the computer engineers of the superpowers than there is between the politicians. Jargon gives you a built-in relationship to people internationally. In *The Story of English*, William Cran, Robert MacNeil, and Robert McCrum wrote:

American English permeates the world in which we live through its effortless infiltration of technology and society. In fact, there is evidence that within the last decade or so, this process has evolved to the point where English is no longer wholly dependent on its British and American parents, and is now a global language with a supra-national momentum. English is now everyone's second language, and has a life of its own in totally non-English situations.

JARGON GIVES A SENSE OF BELONGING

Jargon is also the language of insiders. It's special. Jargon can be a secret language that is available only to initiates; it goes with mastering a craft, an art or an occupation; the right to use a certain kind of speech goes with paying the dues. A member of President Bush's staff explained the advantages being part of the in-crowd:

> *They are people you worked with. It helps you cut through layers. You know who to call. You talk in abbreviated form to get things done. You don't have to spend a lot of capital building new relationships.*

It gives a sense of accomplishment; it's a milestone in your development in a trade. It's part of belonging, of knowing secret passwords. It allows you to take part in powerful discussions.

Sharing a common language with other engineers, a friend of mine describes it as "feeling at home" when he meets strangers at conventions or on assignments.

Say you're at a corporate party and you decide to go on a brain-picking expedition. You want to learn something new—see what the hotshots in the west coast lab are up to. But you don't want to waste time having *your* brains picked. How do you recognize the people who are going to be worthwhile interacting with if you've never met them before?

This is the moment to put jargon to good use: check the crowd out. An important function of language is to answer the all-important survival question: is he ONE OF US, or ONE OF THEM? At conventions, we trade buzzwords to find out what the other fellow's speciality is; it's akin to bees circling each other to learn what hive they're from. An adept, jargon-spouting conventioneer, for instance, can float out a few words, and by observing the reaction of his listener (or lack of it), he can determine if he's one of us or one of them.

> *Like real Americans, they always talked in code. It happened to be technological code. "The whole philosophy of power descent monitoring is that when the Pings (PGNCS) have degraded. . ." or "The bulk of Delta V is to kill his retrograde component.". . . Yes, real Americans always spoke in code. They encapsulated themselves into technological clans. Codes were like bloodlines. So they could be friendly and helpful and polite but they quietly separated themselves when their codes did not flourish.*
>
> —NORMAN MAILER, *Fire on the Moon*

You can see how well your codes match by observing your listener's response.

If he/she nods appreciatively and responds in kind, dipping into the same pool of jargon, he/she speaks knowledgeably and unselfconsciously; in short, he/she speaks your tongue fluently.

Your listener says "Yes, I've heard something about interactive multimedia. . . . that operates on a HyperCard platform doesn't it?" He's not pretending to be an expert on the subject, but you now know he's probably at least on the same education level; he may not be in the same profession or speciality; he speaks a different dialect of your language.

Your listener glazes over and nods off: a junior marketeer or an orderly, a foreigner for sure!

Your listener asks, none too politely, "What the hell are you jabbering about?" He probably wandered into the wrong convention. Check his name tag and steer him across the hall.

Your listener parrots your words back, you feel like you're hearing an echo; the man is saying the words, but only the exact words you just spoke. He's smooth, maybe even a pro: he's a salesman, an outsider, or most likely, in up-per man-age-ment. Watch out!

An outsider can, of course, learn the lingo, so to speak, at least well enough to be accepted. Sales people hang around with the technical types just long enough to pick up the *au courant* words. They know that it's certain death to use a buzzword incorrectly, but it's almost as bad to use a discredited one.

JARGON IS (SOMETIMES) IMPRESSIVE

Jargon might also be used when you need to assert your credentials. For instance, you're a doctor and you have to make a speech to an audience of highly specialized engineers. Most of what they say passes over your head but you can maintain the professional equilibrium by addressing "therapeutic modalities."

Recent college grads, you'll need jargon to help you with that big job interview. So what if you don't fully understand the concepts? Learn the buzzwords and shoot them out. The interviewer won't have time to go into any more depth, he'll just note down on his pad that you strike him as having GOOD ORAL SKILLS. Jargon is also helpful in any situation where you need to pretend, such as making a sale, avoiding punishment, or being accepted by your technological betters. The downside is that they might see right through you. (See "Buzzwords.")

JARGON IS CREATIVE

Outsiders to a particular form of jargon often feel that these sub-languages are signs of George Orwell's Newspeak. I disagree. To be sure, there is deliberate lying and mangling of the truth (doublespeak) and needless use of big words that few intelligent people understand (bamboozling). But Newspeak? No.

> *"The Eleventh Edition is the definitive edition," he said. . . .*
>
> *"You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words—scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. . . .*
>
> *"In your heart you'd prefer to stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning. You don't grasp the beauty of the destruction of words. Do you know that Newspeak is the only language in the world whose vocabulary gets smaller every year?"*

You certainly can't say that about Jargon.

THE ART OF JARGON

Jargon, when applied precisely and with regard for the listener or reader, can be quite beautiful.

I know the purists say "avoid jargon at all costs!" but then they're always proposing ways to stifle creativity, aren't they? God forbid that you use a word the reader doesn't know! And don't those specialized words sound so ugly? Well, I say, if you want to communicate clearly go ahead and employ technical, professional language, only be sure to either: 1) define terms your audience may not be familiar with; or 2) write so well your readers (or hearers) won't care. If you have a masterful English prose style, your readers will run to their dictionaries — and they'll never accuse you of being a jargonizing jerk.

MARK TWAIN

Mark Twain evoked life on the Mississippi through authentic riverboat jargon of the kind that inspired his *nom de plume:*

> *"Starboard lead there! and quick about it!"*
> *. . . Then came the leadsman's sepulchral cry:*
> *"D-e-e-p four!"*
> *Deep four in a bottomless crossing! The terror of it took my breath away.*
> *"M-a-r-k three! M-a-r-k three! Quarter-less-three! Half twain!"*
> *This was frightful! I seized the bell-ropes and stopped the engines.*
> *"Quarter twain! Quarter twain! Mark twain!"*

Twain was at one time a professional riverboat pilot; he learned its technical language the hard way, by experience.

JOSEPH CONRAD

Another master writer, Joseph Conrad, spent seventeen years in British merchant shipping and rose to the rank of captain before beginning his writing career. His books are among the greatest works of sea literature in the English language:

> *The ship was ready for sea. The carpenter had driven in the last wedge of the mainhatch battens, and, throwing down his maul, had wiped his face with great deliberation, just on the*

stroke of five. The decks had been swept, the windlass oiled and made ready to heave up the anchor; the big towrope lay in long bights along one side of the main deck.

JAMES JOYCE

Here's an extremely precise description of a mundane subject that has its own poetry without using any "poetical" metaphors:

What concomitant phenomenon took place in the vessel of liquid by the agency of fire?

The phenomenon of ebullition. Fanned by a constant updraught of ventilation between the kitchen and the chimneyflue, ignition was communicated from the faggots of precombustible fuel to polyhedral masses of bituminous coals . . . gradually raising the temperature of the water from normal to boiling point, a rise in temperature expressible as the result of an expenditure of 72 thermal units needed to raise 1 pound of water from 50° to 212° Fahrenheit.

What announced the accomplishment of this rise in temperature?

A double falciform ejection of water vapour from under the kettlelid at both sides simultaneously.

For what personal purpose could Bloom have applied the water so boiled?

To shave himself.

In the above passage, James Joyce may be poking fun at formal, scientific language, but the end product is wonderful. It's rich and rhythmical—besides being a limpid, accurate depiction of an everyday phenomenon. But I guess he could have merely said "Bloom boiled the water."

THOMAS PYNCHON

A more recent polyglot, Thomas Pynchon, expresses an exuberance in things technical that is unmatched in the literary world.

Imipolex G has proved to be nothing more—or less—sinister than a new plastic, an aromatic heterocyclic polymer, developed in 1939, years before its time, by one L. Jamf for IG Farben. It is stable at high temperatures, like up to 900° C., it combines good strength with a low powerloss factor. Struc-

> *turally, it's a stiffened chain of aromatic rings, hexagons like the gold one that slides and taps above Hilary Bounce's navel, alternating here and there with what are known as heterocyclic rings.*

A breathtaking variety of subjects provides the multi-disciplinary jargon that makes Pynchon's prose so inventive and colorful, and (admittedly) difficult at times. Some of the areas of knowledge Pynchon called upon in his masterwork, *Gravity's Rainbow:* thermodynamics, quantum physics, cyberneticism, behaviorism, U-2 rocket development, mathematics, the Kabbala, astrology, Freud, Jung, and Max Weber—to name a few.

But good writing is not limited to high-brow literature. Workaday sportswriters like Bill Lyon of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* produce colorful, lively prose sparkling with jargon:

> *By then, Scott Brooks had* ***stripped*** *Maurice Cheeks. Yes,* that *Maurice Cheeks. And then Brooks, who missed his* ***pull-up jumper****, had sneaked in the* ***side door****, outflanking the unsuspecting Ewing, snatching the* ***rebound*** *away and scoring on a* ***put-back****.*

And who knows what the language of computers, science, and space exploration may lead to? Mario Pei, the eminent linguist, described the possibilities of these words this way:

> *What is scoffed at and despised today may be exalted and respected at a later date: or it may shrivel away and disappear . . . .Neither is it fitting to scorn words which today are heard only in the slums or within the restricted confines of a trade. Tomorrow those same words may sweep the nation and find their way into the everyday vocabulary of a twenty-first century Shakespeare.*

I wonder what that would sound like?

THE HACKER'S SOLILOQUY

To **boot**, *or not to boot, that is the* **query**:
Whether 'tis faster in the **CPU** *to* **buffer**
The **bugs** *and* **glitches** *of* **pre-released** *software,*
Or to code **fixes** *against a sea of* **instabilities**
And by **debugging zap** *them. To* **loop**: *to* **crash**
No more; and by a crash to say we **disable**
The keyboard and the thousand **opcodes**
That silicon is heir to: 'tis an **enhancement**
Devoutly to be **tweak'd**. *To loop: to crash.*
To crash? perchance to **dump**. *Ay, there's the bug;*
For in that final crash what dumps may come,
When we have **logged off** *this local* **node**,
Must make us **recode**. *There's the* **protocols**
That make garbage of so much data;
For who would bear the **spikes** *and surges of storm,*
The hacker's **patch**, *the ad man's hyperbole,*
The **downtime** *of* **mainframes**, *the slip in schedule,*
The insolence of **OEMs**, *and the* **clones**
That users purchase tho' they're **incompatible** *fakes,*
When he himself might his **peripherals** *stop*
With a pull'd plug? Who would **spreadsheets** *bear,*
To **crunch** *and* **sort** *under a* **kludged macro**,
But that the dread of **wedged algorithms**,
The **virus**-*infect'd routine from whose* **queue**
No **distribution** *returns,* **fragments** *our files,*
And make us rather bear those **versions** *we have*
Rather than try **upgrades** *that we know not of?*
Thus computing does make **end users** *of us all,*
And thus the **multi-platform solution**
Makes us sick all o'er with its steep **learning curve**
And **applications** *whose many* **bells and whistles**
With this release their distributors prosper,
Soon turn to **vapor**.

Ill fares the land, to galloping ills a prey,

Where gobbledygook accumulates, and words decay.

—*James Thurber*

WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ COMPUTERESE

Several years ago, I was doing some consulting work for GenSoftComCom (Generic Software Communications Company). At the time, I wasn't much of a computer expert—in fact, I wouldn't have known a **coaxial cable** if I tripped over one, which I did once because I didn't understand a hacker's warning: "Watch the co-ax!" I barely had time to think "Co-ax?" before I was stumbling into the **multiplexer,** a Medusa-like box with dozens of wires snaking out of it whose function I wasn't clear about but whose cost I was certain far exceeded my contracted stipend. The only co-ax I had heard of up until then was the chorus of Aristophanes' *The Frogs:* Breke-ke-ke-kex Ko-ax! Ko-ax!

Why would a computer company hire someone who didn't know a **RS-232** connector from a hole in the ground? The reason I was there, you see, was precisely because I was so ignorant of computers and their terminology. Like the shoemaker whose own children went barefoot, GenSoftComCom, a specialist in communications, couldn't communicate. It had a deficiency common to many other high-tech firms: its computer geniuses could talk about their technologies to each other but not to potential customers.

Their products were so complicated that a software engineer (programmer) frequently had to accompany the sales rep on appointments. The engineer explained the technicalities and the sales rep did a simultaneous translation:

> *Customer: "So you say this, uh, poly one connector will let me send a mail message to our sales director who's on the DEC system?"*
>
> *Engineer: "By dynamically reconfiguring the nodes so that VTAM recognizes APPN routing, we can interrupt message packet transfers— "*
>
> *Sales rep (interrupting): "No problem!"*

But the engineers were needed to build products, not sell them. So, some bright light back at GenSoftComCom suggested: "Why not hire someone as dumb as our customers?" What they wanted was a low-tech end-user (i.e., someone who could speak English) to write a user manual for their state-of-the-art merchandise.

And that's how I got into the computer business.


WATCH THE COAX!!
COAX?!?!?
BREKEKEKEX
KOAX KOAX.

GenSoftComCom was like a beehive buzzing with hyperactive bees. A high-tech **start-up**, it was energized with a fresh infusion of **venture capital** and swarms of bright young techies. They were all over the place. Pecking away at keyboards. Scurrying around with printouts. Connecting wires. Talking on the "HOTLINE." Huddling around blackboards and making complex diagrams with wax pens.

My job was to write **user doc**. People were users and books were documentation. I was supposed to describe some **user-friendly** software and tell people like myself how to use it. Jill, a developer, sat down at one of the **PCs** and **demo'd** the program for me. While she typed on the keyboard, she prattled about **booting from the floppy** and following the **prompts** and selecting from the **menus**.

Since I had never used a computer before, I jotted down what I could.

Boot
Floppy
Prompt
Menu

After she left, I sat there, staring at the screen, then looking down at my scrap of paper, then back up at the screen. Fifteen minutes later, my tutor whisked by and breathlessly asked if I wanted to get my **hard copy** from the **6670**.

Hard copy? 6670?

"No, uh, no thanks," I mumbled. I didn't have the nerve to tell her I hadn't even touched a key yet.

My problem? I was a computer illiterate. I couldn't do step one because I didn't know what "boot" meant. And what was a "floppy?" I had looked into a computer dictionary: it explained **bits, blocks,** and **Boolean Algebra**, but not "boot."

By the time my helper zipped by again, I was more humble. "I really don't know what I'm doing . . . "

She looked down distractedly at the square flexible disk (the "floppy") and shoved it into a slot in the computer. There was whirring and blinking. And more whirring and blinking. The floppy was now "booted." "Oh . . . is that what you meant?"

"Booting," as I learned later, is the process of giving a computer its initial instructions, telling the computer to "wake up" so to speak. "Booting" was clipped from bootstrapping, as in "to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." "Booting" was one of dozens of words that had been coined so recently and so informally that they had yet to appear in any dictionary of computer terms.

Hard copy meant paper. And 6670 referred to an IBM laser printer about the size of a Honda Civic that kept jamming. Because it was so sensitive, the 6670 rated its own office (cooled to a constant 60°), a perk not granted the development manager.

My first encounter with computer jargon was befuddling and humiliating; it was the beginning of a rite of passage into a new culture.

COMPUTERS—FROM CULT TO MASS CULTURE

Once upon a time. . .

Computers were big, multi-million dollar behemoths owned by giant corporations. These **mainframes** (so-called because their components were housed on racks, or frames) occupied specially-designed, air-conditioned, rooms and they were tended to by highly-trained technicians and engineers who wore laboratory coats and dealt with matters almost unknown to outsiders. Only large corporations and bureaucracies possessed these machines, and only a small fraction of their personnel actually operated them.

And most of those high-tech boxes were stamped with three blue letters, IBM. IBM was making more money than twenty countries that had a seat in the UN, and had more employees than the major cities of a dozen states, and had more agents in more countries than the CIA—so it was only fitting that it should have its own language. Citizens of IBM wore white shirts and exchanged BIG words like **partition emulation programming extension** and **node initialization block** and **single-thread application program**. . .

Like monks with their Latin and illuminated manuscripts, computer people belonged to an almost secret society. In Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose,* a young novitiate marvels at a monastery's library:

> *I leafed through the catalogue, and a feast of mysterious titles danced before my eyes:* Quinti Sereni de medicamentis, Phaenomena, Liber Aesopi de natura animalium, Liber Aethici peronymi de cosmographia, Libri tres quos Arculphus episcopus Adamnano escipiente de locis sanctis ultramarinis designavit conscribendos. . .

An IBM library can be just as mystifying:

> *"Programmer's Guide to the Server-Requester Programming Interface for VM/SP," "RSCS Planning and Installation," "System Product Editor Command and Macro Reference," "Application Migration Guide for CMS," "Connectivity Programming."*

The 1960 computer cult membership was limited to maybe 500,000 nationwide (most of them at IBM) and they all spoke a cabalistic language. While their fourteenth century ecclesiastical counterparts said things like:

> *Monasterium sine libris est sicut civitas sine opibus, castrun sine numeris, coquina sine suppellectilli, mensa sine cibis...*

the computer worshippers chanted:

> *You can have programmed control of terminal I/O with the INPUT FIELDS statement which gives you arrays of up to seven dimensions and versatile character string handling for extracting, inserting and moving character strings or sub-strings of variable length.*

At first, computerese was a minor blip on the linguistic radar.

Now, however. . .

Computers are owned and operated in all segments of the population. In large corporations, most office employees have terminals or standalone computers on their desks, while in small companies, a computer is usually available. Many homes have computers. Most schools have them. Computerese, at least to some extent, is spoken by tens of millions of people. With computers in schools, practically an entire generation will become computer literate.

COMPUTER LITERACY—PICKING UP THE LINGO

But what does computer literacy imply, really? Sally is an expert on the technology of Digital **VAX** computer systems but knows nothing about IBM **TSO/VTAM** (Time Sharing Option for the Virtual Telecommunications Access Method). Alex delivers lectures on **integrated circuits** and isn't able to write a simple **PASCAL** program. Both Sally and Alex are certainly computer literate; therefore, the term refers to an understanding of the computer fundamentals, not expertise in any particular discipline.

And what constitutes the fundamentals?

Remember pick-up sticks? You threw a handful of plastic sticks on the floor and then you and your friend tried to remove sticks one at a time without moving any other sticks. It was tough to pick up the first few sticks because they were all touching each other. Later, after many sticks were removed, it got easier.

It's the same way with computerese. There are thousands of words in a disorganized heap. It's almost impossible to pick up a new word by itself because it almost always touches some other word. Say someone is teaching you the rudiments:

> *"A bit is the most fundamental unit of information. It's short for binary digit."*
>
> *"Ok, what's binary?"*
>
> *"Binary is a number system based on two rather than 10. It consists of two numbers, zero and one. Computers understand programs as a series of ones and zeroes."*
>
> *"What's a program?"*

Some years ago, you could probably master the essentials of computing by a Socratic dialog similar to the above. You learned a little bit here, a little bit there, and soon you thought you actually knew something. The computer world appeared finite. There was IBM and DEC (Digital Equipment Corporation) and its "VAX family of computers." If you wanted to program there was COBOL and FORTRAN.

Then the **PCs** arrived. Apple, Tandy, Commodore, and later IBM came out with micro (or personal) computers. Then came networks, local area networks (**LANs**) and wide area networks (**WANs**). . . . new programming languages (BASIC, PASCAL, ADA, C). . . . new kinds of programs (desktop publishing, painting, drawing). To continue the pick-up sticks metaphor, it was as though just when you cleared away some sticks, someone came along and dumped another pile on top. Any amateur who thought he or she could handle this computing stuff with no sweat was like Mickey Mouse as the Sorcerer's Apprentice when the broomsticks began cloning themselves and pouring bucket after bucket after bucket of water.

If you were like most hobbyists, you learned computing by fooling around with a personal computer of some kind (professionals generally start out programming) and got accustomed to words like **A-drive, floppy, initialize, autoexec.bat,** and **config.sys.**

Then you learned how to use a word processing program and encountered some new terms like headers and footers but they weren't so bad because you knew something about them from typing. And eventually, you decided to do budgets on the computer and thus got into spreadsheets—another pile of terms: **macros, cells, functions, floating point notation**. And then databases—another pile of terms: **fields, records, relational, query, DBase**. And then desktop publishing—

another pile of terms: **fonts, styles, kerning, leading**. And then telecommunications—another pile of terms: **baud, handshaking, protocols, parity, full duplex**. And then graphics—another pile of terms: **Infographics, color separation, posterization, solarization, stripping.**

Enough already!

Now—for those of you who have not yet begun playing computer pick-up sticks—here's the bad news: The longer you put off getting into the game, the higher the pile of sticks you'll have to start with.

Computers may be simpler today, but the language is more complex. There is now sufficient history to the field that it has its own hidden roots. Words left over from obsolete technologies are reapplied to newer technologies. Someone brand-new to computing wonders why a three-and-a-half-inch rigid plastic square is called a "floppy." (The first floppies were ten-inches across and extremely flexible.) Why do you **spool** a file to a printer? (SPOOL originated as an IBM acronym for Simultaneous Peripheral Operation On-Line.)

Technology is complex, but what makes it more complicated still is the nature of tech-talk itself. Often, it's not real English at all; just accretions of model names and numbers, marketing adjectives, chunks of acronyms ALLINCAPS. Well, you think to yourself, there must be a remnant of English in that mass, a faint reminder of the retrograde language of Shakespeare, Dickens, and Hemingway. Unfortunately, computerists think that anything unnecessary—and often that means the English language—must be **truncated** (shortened). Ads in computer magazines are sometimes almost wholly devoid of English words:

> *At 16 MHz, our 80C286 can outperform the 80386SX by up to 20 percent when running 80286 code.*

The numbers aren't so bad once you know the basics. Some numbers measure the *size* of a computer—not the physical dimensions, but the storage capacity of its memory. These numbers are also applied to magnetic disks, tapes, laser disks: anything that stores data.

Measurements of Size

bit	1 unit of data. Yes or no. 0 or 1.
byte	8 bits. 1 byte is needed for each character.
nibble	4 bits, one-half byte.
kilobyte	1 thousand bytes or, more accurately, 1,024 bytes or 2^{10}. Usually abbreviated **1K.**

megabyte 1 million bytes, or 1,048,576, or 2^{20}. Usually abbreviated **1MB** (and sometimes 1 **M**, or 1 **Meg**); either way, it's normally pronounced 1 **"meg."** From Greek *meg,* great.

gigabyte 1 billion bytes, or 1,073,741,824, or 2^{30}. Abbreviated 1 **G**. From Greek *gigas*, giant.

terabyte 1 trillion bytes. From Greek *teras*, monster.

Other numbers measure speed, how fast a computer processes bits.

Measurements of Speed

millisecond 1 thousandth of a second.

microsecond 1 millionth of a second.

nanosecond 1 billionth of a second. One nanosecond is to one second as 1 second is to 35 years. Also called a **lightfoot**. Grace Hopper, one of the pioneers in computer science, has a 11.78 inch piece of wire to demonstrate how far light travels in a nanosecond.

picosecond 1 trillionth of a second.

femtosecond 1 quadrillionth of a second. 1 femtosecond is to 1 second as 1 second is to 35 million years.

mips Million Instructions Per Second, a measurement of how fast a computer calculates. Known by insiders as Meaningless Indication of Processing Speed.

flops Floating point operations per second.

bps Bits Per Second. Measures how fast a modem can send data from point A to point B. Usually called the **baud rate**.

cps Characters per second. Measures the speed of printers.

megahertz Millions of cycles per second. Measures the speed of a microprocessor. Abbreviated MHz.

But who says computer people are totally quantitative and not qualitative? They can be sensitive to the nicer touches of language—sometimes.

Software can be **elegant** (simple architecture, accomplishes more with less) or **kludgey** (ugly, clumsy product). If things go wrong, the program will terminate **gracefully** (if it "quits," it won't bring down your whole computer, it will just close up and return you to the operating

system). The highest praise is that software is **rich** (has many features) and **robust** (it's hard to break).

Software marketeers are enamored of words ending in -ity. There's **flexibility** (the program can use more than one file format) and **stability** (the program won't easily crash) and **granularity** (fine level of detail) and **adaptability** (you can use the software in different environments) and **compatibility** (the software will work with different computers) and **functionality** (can do a lot of different things) and **generality** (what you learn using this particular application can be applied to others) and **interconnectivity** (the system can work with other types of systems) and **productivity** (you can pump out more graphs, charts, and databases in less time) and **interoperability** (can be implemented by different systems) and **satisfiability** (said of a formula, not a customer, that can be made true when assigned a certain value).

ITY words make slick phrase builders and computerists love linking long words together almost as much as organic chemists enjoy creating chains of carbon molecules. They talk of **linear expandability** and **seamless interconnectivity** and **multi-vendor binary compatibility**. And you don't have to put the -ity word at the end. Your product can also provide **additional usability enhancements**.

Andy Lippman, head of the Paperback Movies Project at MIT's Media Lab, defined **interactivity** as having "**interruptability, granularity, limited look-ahead, graceful degradation,** and the **appearance of infinitude**."

There are also some refreshingly Anglo-Saxon words in the standard lexicon. There are creatures, some of them well-known like the **bug** (according to Grace Hopper, the first bug was a real insect that got into a relay) and the **mouse** (the gismo that you push around to move the cursor on the screen). There are **turtle graphics** (a technology to draw shapes on a screen) and **CATs** (Computer Aided Training programs). Now we have **WORMs**, which can be good (hardware devices that **W**rite **O**nce **R**ead **M**any times) or bad (destructive programs), and **viruses**, all of which are bad (uninvited programs that destroy data and disrupt operations).

But for the most part, computerese has been the language of computerists, by computerists, and for computerists. Until 1977—when Apple Computers introduced its Macintosh and a new language appeared for non-technical people. The Mac, as it is known, used a first grader's vocabulary. Instead of "NON-SYSTEM READ ERROR ONLY," there were words like **box** and **button** and **point** and **click** and **drag** and **window**—heck! you didn't even have to know how to read to operate the

computer. All you had to do was push a **mouse** and point to a picture (**icon**).

The Mac became a cultural as well as a technological and marketing phenomenon. This computer became a kind of Statue of Liberty, inviting non-technical refugees into its embrace. A rather large segment of the population who would not tread willingly on the raised floors of main frames and tape drives, and only hesitatingly pecked around on personal computers, skipped happily into the apple orchard.

The two nicest guys in television use a Mac. You can see a Mac SE sitting on Judge (Harry Anderson) Stone's credenza right next to the framed picture of Mel Torme on *Night Court*, and there's another Mac right in the living room of MacGyver (Richard Dean Anderson) whose name sounds like an Apple product. MacGyver. Like hundreds of Mac-prefixed products: MacDraw, MacWrite, MacPlan, MacPascal, MacUser, MacWorld, MacGolf, MacEtc, MacEtc.

Mac paraphernalia require Mac labels: anytime two words are connected, the space between the words is dropped and the first letter of the second word piece is capitalized: MultiFinder, ImageWriter, HyperCard, AppleTalk, QuickDraw, QuicKeys. Then punctuation marks were introduced to get attention: Open IT!, Icon-It!

Yikes! It's a new strain of computerese: MacYak!

But ironically, the little computer company named after a fruit became BIG, and it too began spewing forth BIG words like **desktop publishing** and **interactive multimedia** and lots of acronyms just like the other company with the blue initials. They produced **SIMM** (Single Inline Memory Module, a strip of chips holding RAM) and **TIFF** (Tagged Image File Format) and **EPSF** (Encapsulated PostScript Format) and **AIFF** (Audio Interchange File Format) and **SANE** (Standard Apple Numeric Environment) and **MIDI** (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) and . . .

And as the Macs get more business-oriented, IBMs become more user-friendly with **pop-up windows, action bars,** and **action bar pull-downs**. The two corporations are gradually converging! Like political candidates seeking the middle ground in a campaign, they both want to be the ideal computer provider, a "friendly business tool." Perhaps at the turn of the century, there'll be a new corporate logo, IBMAC. And we'll all be speaking one language.

Fat chance.

THE SOUNDS OF SCIENCE

Nineteen fifty-four gaped in astonishment at the arrival of *Tom Swift and His Atomic Earth Blaster*! Under the pseudonym of Victor Appleton II, a syndicate of writers wrote four other Tom Swift adventures that year and then pumped out an adventure-a-year for the next 16 years. Young minds lapped up the genius inventor's fantastic advertures and couldn't wait to find out all about those miraculous contraptions of his. Why the titles alone were worth it!

In 1957, Tom scooted around in his *Ultrasonic Cycloplane,* and in '58, launched his *Deep-Sea Hydrodome* as well as his *Space Solartron*. In the following years, he zoomed into space in his *Electronic Retroscope* ('59) and dove into the deepest oceans in his *Spectromarine Selector* ('60) and then he invented his *Electronic Hydrolung* ('61), his *Megascope Space Prober* ('62), his *Triphian Atomicar* and *Repelatron Skyway* (both in '63), his *Aquatomic Tracker* ('64), his *3-D Telejector* and *Polar Ray Dynasphere* ('65), his *Subocean Geotrain* ('66), his *G-force Invertor* ('68) his *Dyna-4 Capsule* ('69), his *Cosmotron Express* ('70) and then I suppose he finally settled down and lived off his royalties.

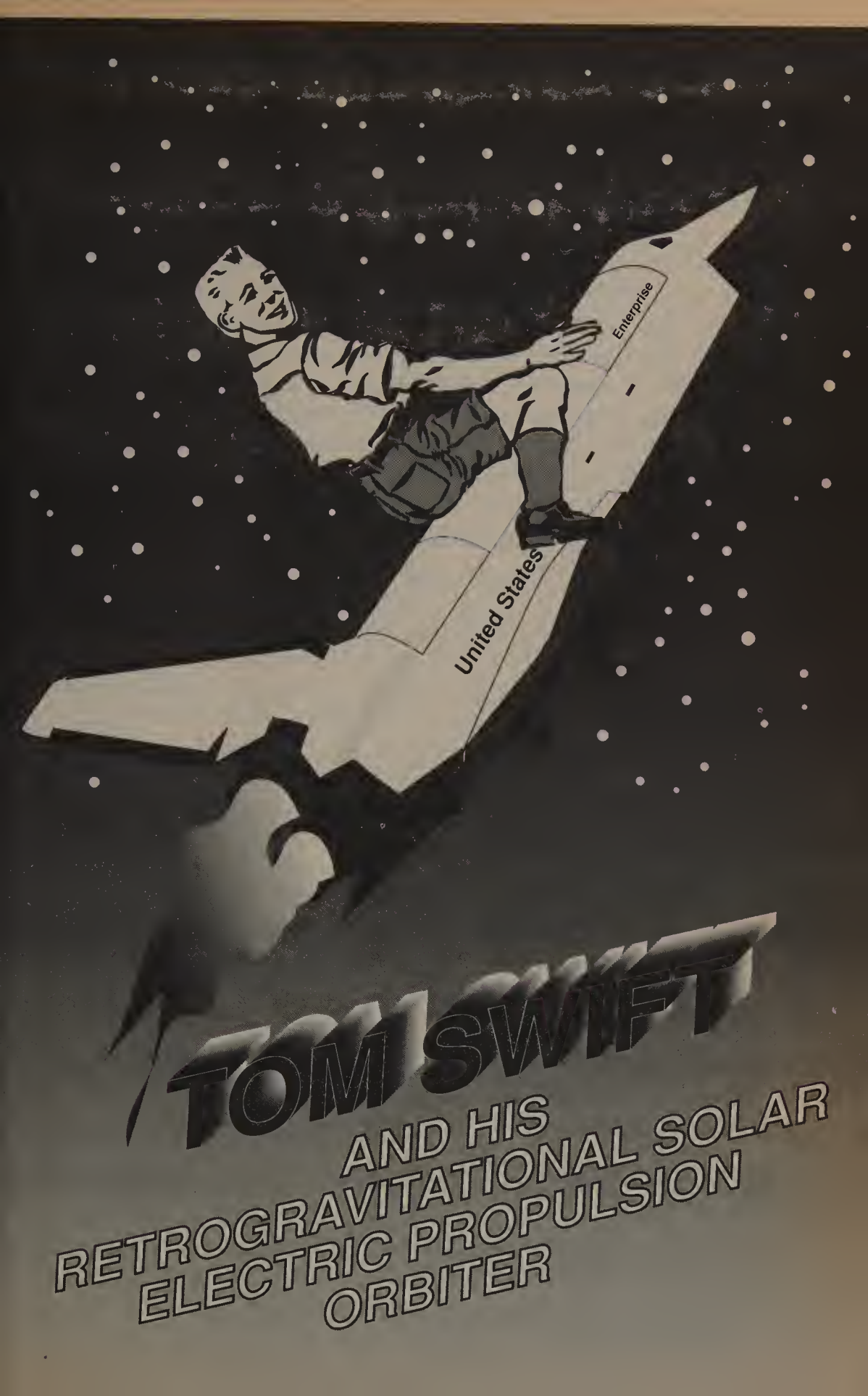
Meanwhile, thousands of eager kids who read about those fictional marvels grew up and went to M.I.T. and Cal Tech and created incredible things for real. And they had no trouble at all in finding words to fit their inventions. The aeronautical engineers christened their flying machines and other inventions in the great Swiftian (Tom, not Jonathan) tradition:

Landsat Multispectral Scanner System (MSS) and Thematic Mapper (TM) and Advanced Very High Resolution Radiometer (AVHRR) and Thermal Infrared Multispectral Scanner (TIMS) and Long Duration Exposure Facility (LDEF) and Lunar Landing Module (LLM) and Advanced Automated Directional Solidification Furnace.

And even the very small things the whiz-kids made sounded big, like the **Twenty Gigahertz Monolithic Microwave Integrated Circuit** (MMIC). How does the idea of a "monolithic" silicon chip grab you? The term monolith is traditionally applied to monster stones such as the twenty-ton columns of Stonehenge; in computers, it describes something the size of a fingernail.

Then there are the strings of words that convey wonder just in speaking them: **superalloy honeycomb material, quadruply redundant electronic flight controls.**

Why even a bland building in the middle of nowhere can invoke awe.



TOM SWIFT

AND HIS RETROGRAVITATIONAL SOLAR ELECTRIC PROPULSION ORBITER

How would you like to go to work at the Argonne National Laboratory (West) Zero Power Plutonium Reactor Criticality Facility?

The fact is, to many Americans, SCIENCE SOUNDS NEAT!

It's no accident that the most publicized areas of speculation have sexy names. Anything Super is big with the US public. **Superconductors. Supersymmetry. Superstrings. Supergravity. Superparticles** (called "sparticles"). And the biggest of the big: the **Superconducting Supercollider**, the 53-mile-round underground particle accelerator. This $7.9 billion donut will search for such elusive things as the **top quark** and **Higgs' boson** and **dark matter**. And new things: **Big Bang, black holes, white holes**. And now whole new branches of science: **chaology, exobiology, biospherics, chronobiology**. These aren't necessarily the most solid scientific enterprises, but they are the most popular. The press picks them up and the public asks for more. As a nation we are enamored of words that *sound* scientific. We love the ring of technology in our ears.

Science-talk pops up in the strangest places. During a TV talk show, John Chancellor described how the White House press staff increased seven-fold between the Kennedy and Reagan years. "It just **metastasized**!" he gushed. There were some titters in the audience. (Metastasis is medical jargon for a change in state, as in the spread of a malignant tumor—but that might be just what Chancellor meant.)

Even if we don't have degrees in science, we feel entitled to enjoy the benefits of all that knowledge. As a country, we've loved sci-fi movies since the genre began. It didn't matter if the science was accurate or even believable, it just had to sound scientific. The classic movie formula called for a legitimate scientist to give a little lecture at some point in the movie. We knew it was just some gobbledygook to justify having a monster in the movie, but the science scene was important. In the 1930 classic, *Frankenstein*, an older scientist explains the hero's credentials:

> *Scientist: "Well you know his research is in chemical galvanism and electro-biology. We're far in advance in the field here at the university."*

In *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, scientists discuss a mysterious clawed hand:

> *First Scientist: "It's amazing!"*
>
> *Second Scientist: "It's incredible!"*
>
> *Third Scientist: "Could it possibly have belonged to a pleistocene man?"*

Fourth Scientist: "The chances are much greater that that hand belonged to an amphibian, Mark. One that spent a great deal of time in the water."

Needless to say, all that scientific talk went over the heads of eleven-year-olds who couldn't wait to see what the hand belonged to. The whole movie is filled with great sounding, but preposterous, science. And one scientist tells us with great certainty that the creature could only be found "150 million years ago in the Devonian Period" (which as we all know was the period 395 to 345 million years before the present).

In *The Thing* (1950), science confronts an alien life form composed of vegetable matter but capable of traveling millions of light years to Earth.

Reporter: "An intellectual carrot! The mind boggles."

Scientist: "Shouldn't. Imagine how strange it would have been in the Pleistocene age to have forecast that worms and lizards would evolve into us."

A decade later, a Cornell biologist did in fact clone a carrot from a single carrot cell.

In the 1980s and '90s, we are more sophisticated, and movies are written with a higher level of science in them. In the re-make of *The Fly*, a reporter's stocking has just been **teleported:**

Reporter: "Is that a ***hologram****? Where's my stocking?"*

Scientist: "That's it. The real one. Go ahead pick it up... Your stocking has just been ***teleported*** *from one pod to another. Disintegrated there and* ***reintegrated*** *there. Sort of... I'm really a* ***systems management man****. I farm bits and pieces out to guys who are much more brilliant than I am. I say 'build me a* ***laser*** *this' and 'design me a* ***molecular analyzer*** *that,' and they do, and I just stick 'em together."*

Well, if we love the sound of science so much, why is it that so few of us are really science literate? If we're so keen on the allure of space, why do only 45 percent of us know the Earth revolves annually around the Sun? There are all sorts of studies and recommendations about the problem, but I think the truth is simple enough. At some point along the line, science became for many people just another word for JARGON.

It's popular to blame science for the ills of the twentieth century: pollution, the threat of nuclear war, the hole in the ozone, the extinction of animals, angst. So why not blame it for the Biblical deluge of jargon in the world? The post-war Japanese saw a threat in modern technology that they expressed in movies such as *Godzilla vs. Gigan* ('71) and *Godzilla vs. the Bionic Monster* ('74). So too, some Americans see a horrible monster that will never die—who will save them from JARGONTUA?

LATIN BY THE BUCKET

Think of all those jaw-breakers you struggled with in high school: **endoplasmic reticulum, carbon tetrachloride, photosynthesis, ultraviolet radiation, recombinant-DNA, spontaneous generation, thermodynamics.**

And even after you left Biology 101 far behind, you still get bombarded by scientific nomenclature by the media. **Thermonuclear explosion, ozone depletion, polyvinyl chloride, REM sleep, AIDS, DNA, RNA, A-bomb, DDT, PCBs, O-rings. . .**

To outsiders, the problem with scientific language is that there are simply so many *things* to label and most of the labels are in another language.

The Name Game started with Adam:

> *So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field.*
>
> —*Genesis 2.19-20*

But our common progenitor only labeled the *basic* birds of the air and beasts of the field. He called them such things as "cow," "black bird," and "wolf." It was left to the classifiers to give us *bos*, *corvus corvus*, and *Canis lupus*. Carl von Linné, an 18th century Swedish botanist, was such an enthusiastic classifier he even Latinized his own name and is better known as Carolus Linnaeus.

The Latin and Greek nature of most scientific terms make them remote from the guy in the street. The language of science is distinct from the native Anglo-Saxon stock we are accustomed to. Science jargon did not evolve from Latin, it was consciously and deliberately fabricated. And the

people who speak it are separate from the rest of us just as much as if they were speaking Hindi. Whole professions live in a different world because of their language.

Doctors: one of whom was fondly remembered by none other than Long John Silver:

> *It was a master surgeon, him that ampytated me—out of college and all—Latin by the bucket, and what not; but he was hanged like a dog, and sun-dried like the rest, at Corso Castle.*

And geologists. John McPhee digs into the language of geology in *Basin and Range* with his characteristic thoroughness and vitality. He marvels at the two strains of geological language, the colorful:

> *Geologists communicated in English; and they could name things in a manner that sent shivers through the bones. . . . There were festooned crossbeds and limestone sinks, pillow lavas and petrified trees, incised meanders and defeated streams.*

and the ugly:

> *Someone developed enough effrontery to call a piece of our earth an epieugeosyncline. . . . The same class of people who called one rock serpentine called another jacupirangite. Clinoptilote, eclogite, migmatite, tincalconite, szaibelyite, pumpellyite.*

But McPhee always sees the human side of the equation, the professionals who work with the words that seem as hard and varied as the stones they chip away at:

> *The enthusiasm geologists show for adding new words to their conversation is, if anything, exceeded by their affection for the old. They are not about to drop granite. They say granodiorite when they are in church and granite the rest of the week.*

Laypeople are always asking: why does it have to be so complicated? Why can't scientists just speak ordinary words? Why all the hocus-pocus? In his essay "The Common Language of Science," Einstein gave a lucid

explanation of the difference between science and the more day-to-day forms of communicating:

> *What distinguishes the language of science from language as we ordinarily understand the word? How is it that scientific language is international? What science strives for is an utmost acuteness and clarity of concepts as regards their mutual relation and their correspondence to sensory data. . . . [This] system of concepts has served as a guide in the bewildering chaos of perceptions so that we learned to grasp general truths from particular observations.*

The problem is that most of us are not able to read the pure language of science. Perhaps we can understand the words—by careful reading and looking words up in a dictionary—but we are not likely to *appreciate* what we have translated.

In 1955, addressing the National Academy of Sciences, Richard Feynman spoke about the "awe and mystery" of scientific investigation and the difficulty of communicating the true marvels of science to outsiders:

> *This value of science remains unsung by singers: you are reduced to hearing not a song or poem, but an evening lecture about it. This is not yet a scientific age.*
>
> *Perhaps one of the reasons for this silence is that you have to know how to read the music. For instance, the scientific article may say, "The radioactive phosphorus content of the cerebrum of the rat decreases to one-half in a period of two weeks." Now what does that mean?*
>
> *It means that phosphorus that is in the brain of the rat—and also in mine, and yours—is not the same phosphorus as it was two weeks ago. It means the atoms that are in the brain are being replaced: the ones that were there before have gone away.*
>
> *So what is this mind of ours: what are these atoms with consciousness? Last week's potatoes! They now can* remember *what was going on in my mind a year ago—a mind which has long ago been replaced.*

Thirty-five years have passed, and I doubt that a good case could be made for claiming that this is a scientific age. Most of the United States

population is only semi-literate in the sciences (we rank seventeenth in the world).

There are many attempts to bridge the gap, ranging from serious television shows such as *Nova* to the sensational exposés of Big Foot and aliens; from serious magazines such as *Scientific American* and *Science* to more mainstream magazines such as *Popular Science, Discovery*, and *Omni*, to the more far-out publications such as *UFO Review*. Some of these only want to razzle-dazzle non-scientists with modern scientific discoveries and theories by watering them down and transmogrifying them into science fantasy. A recent promotion for a new series of books sounds like Victorian erotica:

> *The itinerary staggers the mind—a sweep past a swelling red giant, a passage through interstellar dust clouds, a brush with a powerful black hole, a plunge through a planetary disk, a visit to a neutron star, a ringside seat for a cataclysmic supernova.*

All that swelling and plunging I suppose gives the arm-chair star voyager heart palpitations.

Perhaps the best solution lies in the writings of scientists that are intended for the general public. Isaac Asimov, Lewis Thomas, people who are especially sensitive to explaining words not familiar to their readers. Stephen Jay Gould, the highly regarded writer (National Book Award) and professor (of biology, geology and the history of science at Harvard) took great pains to exorcize jargon from his book, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History:*

> *I believe—as Galileo did when he wrote his two greatest works as dialogues in Italian rather than didactic treatises in Latin, as Thomas Henry Huxley did when he composed his masterful prose free from jargon, as Darwin did when he published all his books for general audiences—that we can still have a genre of scientific books suitable for and accessible alike to professionals and interested laypeople.*

A PERSONAL NOTE TO SCIENTISTS

I'd like to say something about the recent trend of idiosyncratic nomenclature. For the past century, science has been the most macho of intellectual pursuits. We call biology, geology, chemistry, and physics the "hard" sciences, as opposed to the "soft" sciences, such as sociology and

psychology. We speak of "hard" facts. When people argue, they claim to base their position on "solid" evidence. We honor what is concrete, weighable, and measurable.

The irony is that in physics, the hardest of the hard sciences, nothing is hard anymore. When you peer into the most solid of substances, you find nothing, nothing at all. **Quarks**, subatomic non-particles, have properties called **strangeness** and **colors**, one of which is **beauty**. What are the quantum mechanics up to with names like **charms** and **muons** and **gluons** and **sparticles**? Come on, fellas, get back to work! Let's hear some more about **supercolliders** and that new SDI stuff like the **Multimegawatt Space Nuclear Power Program**! Cut out the sissyness—charms, beauty, color—sounds like a hair salon!

A NOTE ON THE SCIENCE GLOSSARY

There's a section in the Glossary for Science Words. In it, I describe some of the words that are currently fashionable in intellectual circles. These are the words favored by science fiction devotees and government officials and space/weapons lobbyists. A lexicon for all you intellectual couch potatoes out there.

BUZZWORDS

Remember when you were a kid and you repeated a word—an ordinary word, "cool," "geometry," anything—five, ten, fifteen times until suddenly the word didn't mean anything to you? "Cool" became a mere sound, you had no idea what it referred to anymore. And if you did this with your best friend (who was staying overnight), you would say the word ("cool, cool, cool,") until the giggles came up out of you like popcorn and your mother came in and told you to keep the noise down. Say "bottom line" enough and you'll know what a buzzword is. It's a phrase that has been beaten into a meaningless pulp.

Buzzwords come and go. One good thing about them is that you know they will be gone before too long. Like relatives who have overstayed their visit, eventually they do move along. Or do they? I can hear you thinking—what about the buzzwords from hell? I know. I ask myself the same question. Will the Edges *ever* leave? Leading and his wife, Cutting?

Soon, I hope. . .

In the meantime, there's no shortage of buzzwords. They're in, they're out. We have an insatiable demand for new phrases that's matched by an inexhaustible supply: networking, hands-on, transparent interface, competitiveness, excellence, desktop publishing, upscale marketing, streamlining, quality time. . . .

Buzzwords form a subset of jargon because they may have had some technical merit at some point. It's just they've been twirled around by so many marketeers and spin-artists that they've lost practically all precision and meaning. What the heck does "state-of-the-art" or a "user friendly interface" really mean, other than they're associated with a new product? You know someone's trying to take money out of your pocket when you see grocery store items that never had cholesterol trumpeted as "cholesterol free."

Buzzwords may be just a euphemism for another two-syllable word beginning with the same letter.

For a short while back in the seventies, I was in business with some friends selling energy management—you remember, the energy crises? lines at the gas pumps? Con-ser-va-tion? In a short period of time, I had to master dozens and dozens of concepts: from engineering, microprocessing, heating and air conditioning, and financing.

After stumbling through many failed presentations, I finally made what I thought was a slick, professional pitch to the president of a small

company. I told him about HVAC controls and air handlers, and heat sinks and electronic room sensors and retrofits and ROIs. He listened very patiently and then asked politely:

> *"Well I see you know all the buzzwords. But what do you recommend I do about reducing the kwh consumed by my reserve generator?"*
>
> *"Well, uh, you see, I'm not an engineer."*
>
> *"Well, I am. You had me fooled there for a minute."*

At least he was smiling when he showed me to the door.

Buzzwords can give you the illusion of expertise, but just don't try them out on an expert.

Buzzwords are the clichés of jargon. Whatever value they've had has been squandered. Now they're as dry and lifeless and innumerable as tumbleweeds on the prairie. In modern corporations, buzzwords make a kind of a verbal muzak, a white noise we do our best to tune out. If you wander into a meeting you'll hear the harmless drone of "quality circles" and everyone telling everyone else what "the bottom line" really is. It's the repetition that makes these catchphrases so annoying.

On TV, radio, movies, and electronic bbs (bulletin board services). And magazines—there are magazines not merely specializing in computers, but particular manufacturers, and now, particular models. There are five major magazines devoted to the Macintosh, and at least that many devoted to the IBM PC. Any bookstore has dozens and dozens of specialty magazines, each with hundreds of advertisements. When a new product comes out, Madison Avenue starts beating the drums about its bells and whistles (drums, bells, whistles—what a racket!) And the next thing you know a new word is being bandied about in corporations from coast to coast.

Like most high-tech industries, computers seem to breed buzzwords. **Relational databases. Desktop publishing. True multitasking.** When these catchphrases first came out, they were novel and provocative, but then they started making the rounds everywhere. Serviceable words begin to disintegrate right before your eyes. Maybe we should take worn out words out of circulation and burn them the same way the Fed disposes of old dollar bills.

Imagine the first murmuring of a buzzword.

An eager salesman (is there any other kind?) overhears some neat terms in the lab, converts them into an instant marketing slogan: "Polycarbon fiber," and then tries it out on his best customer who, in turn, likes

it so much she uses it during her next **task force** meeting which so impresses her peers that they then call up their distributors who all think it would sound super in their next ad campaign. And so when you get your monthly *Widgets Today* magazine, there's fourteen ads extolling the virtues of "Poly-carbon fiber"—the same phrase you overheard ten minutes ago in the cafeteria.

Even "buzzword" is a buzzword—it only came along in the past 20 years or so. Webster's Ninth gives a circulation date of 1967 and, like most dictionaries, defines it pejoratively:

> *An important-sounding usu. technical word or phrase often of little meaning used chiefly to impress laymen.*

Buzzwords are also called vogue words. And those who need to be in the vogue, are sensitive to overexposure. The word spinners are careful to distance themselves from the old words, even as they are creating the new ones:

> *Freedman himself de-emphasizes the terms multimedia and hypermedia in the description of his project. "Those are buzzwords," he says. "The project is really an electronic book."*

Can we now look forward to seeing "electronic book" on next week's Top 40 Buzzwords?

If you are like most professionals, from time to time you are "forced" to use a buzzword. So you add a proviso, something to insulate yourself from the opprobrium associated with the word. You say "the current buzzword is. . ." or "in the jargon. . . ." An alternative is simply to encapsulate the offending word or phrase in quotation marks. Or, to be really subtle, *italicize* it with a sneer and a slight drop in modulation. Whatever the technique, the result is that your audience pictures you holding the odious syllables at arm's length like a dead rat.

The authors of a business management book expressed concern about the fate of its title, *Market-Driven Management*:

> *There will always be a risk that a term like market driven will simply turn out to be a faddish play on words. The risk is very real since so much of the business literature today is overloaded with buzzwords, catchy titles, and simple solutions. And the term market-driven management could easily fall into any of these categories. However, it does not.*

Uh-huh.

Explaining how he "agonized" before firing the co-host of a morning TV show, an executive producer said he only did it when he learned that a news anchor from another network was available:

> *We were told by [the other newswoman's] agent that she had an eight-day "window" in her contract in February. If we didn't sign her then, she would re-sign with [the other network] for four years.*

The Philadelphia Inquirer, in which this remark appeared, did not say why "window" was in quotes. Window, in this sense, is certainly an overused word—there must be more "windows of opportunity" opening and closing everyday in America than there are panes of glass in the World Trade Center. But it's not clear—did the editors consider the word sub- or non-standard, or did the producer *pronounce* it that way? (It's interesting that no quotation marks were placed around another non-standard word, "re-sign." Re-sign, resign—what a world of difference that hyphen makes!)

Buzzwords, though despised by everyone (until they find them useful), are part of the language and culture and so we have to include them in the jargon family. I mean, someone must be using them, right? Anyway, I think that only a good buzzword (of all our multitudinous verbal inventions) fulfills the oxymoronic vision of Sam Goldwyn:

> *What we need are some new clichés!*

SPRECHEN ZIE DOUBLESPEAK?

Doublespeak is language that is *deliberately* vague, misleading, or inflated.

True to its dual nature, doublespeak is used in two ways: to hype something up or to play something down. Generally, Jargoneers—people in sales, marketing, advertising—will use the first form, making loud noises that mean nothing. On the other hand, Jargoons, as defenders of Big Government and Big Business, speak quietly to make a huge, messy situation sound like nothing. The one brings out an ULTRA-MEGA-MULTI-*vitamin* while the other calls a 70-megaton nuclear bomb a "device."

PLAYING IT UP

Doublespeak as a tool of the advertisers comes in the form of weasel words and hyperbole. The weasel word, a term popularized by Teddy Roosevelt, is based on the notion that weasels suck out bird eggs and leave the empty shells in the nests. Weasel words suck the meaning out of any language in the immediate vicinity. Saying that a pill is "guaranteed to help relieve" some kind of ailment is a fair example of the technique. The weasel word is "help"—it means nothing and alleviates the manufacturer of any responsibility to prove the product actually does anything. Try collecting on that guarantee!

Weasel words are funny once you look for them. Just go through your pantry and medicine cabinets. Here's a moist towelette that claims to be "twice as thick"—but it doesn't say what it is twice as thick as. A detergent is "bolder! fresher!"—than what? A breakfast cereal proudly proclaims "verified organic"—verified by whom?

Hyperbole is the other favored card to play. It seems that the more outrageous the words, the less accountable the producer is. Pseudo-science works wonders. The billions of dollars we put into space exploration produced many wonderful **spin-offs**. But you can call anything a "space-age material" because this is the age of space, isn't it? Now the environmental and health movements have yielded bushels of words to brighten up the packaging of otherwise dull personal-care products: **biodegradable, organic, ph-balanced**.

Doublespeak in merchandising is as old as hawking snake oil. The new twist in doublespeak is how to handle 11 million gallons of snake oil once you've spilled it on the coastline.

PLAYING IT DOWN

While the Jargoneers are maximizing publicity, Jargoons are trying to minimize it. Damage control. They speak softly, almost inaudibly, into microphones at Congressional hearings or on the steps of the Capitol or at ad hoc press conferences set up near disaster sites. When they can be heard, their words are eerily unsettling. They make sense, but they don't have any meaning. Syntactically the words sound correct, but semantically, they're missing something. The professional spokesperson will move his lips, producing sound but a minimum of substance. He's speaking code, an elaborate language designed to make you wonder what he meant but not bother to ask.

The Doublespeaker's job is to "put the issue behind us" and "hold the line" and "contain the situation."

Not all talk that is vague is doublespeak, and not all doublespeak is jargon. Doublespeak-Jargon is characterized by words and phrases that are so consciously applied to particular situations as to amount to a technical language. D-J is also associated with certain professionals, constituting a kind of argot.

Doublespeakers operate in a realm where truth is non-locatable, a blip on the screen that disappears and leaves no trace. Even when they're caught in a direct lie, they can find a place to stand. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Bridget O'Shaughnesy (played by Mary Astor) parries the cynical detective Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart):

> *O'Shaughnesy: "I deserved that. But the lie was in the way I said it, not at all in what I said. It's my own fault if you can't believe me now."*
>
> *Spade: "Ah. Now you* are *dangerous."*

Lt. Col. (ret.) Oliver North finessed such matters in the same way when countering the Senate interrogator.

> *Mr. Nields: "And, this statement that, 'emphasizing political rather than a military solution was as close as we ever came to influencing the military aspect of their struggle' is just false, isn't it?"*
>
> *Lt. Col. North: "It's not entirely false, but it is false, and I admit that there are other parts of this thing that are false."*

Whenever a fellow is on the spot—sitting in the witness chair, standing before a bank of microphones, caught in the cold eye of a TV camera—you

DOUBLESPEAK

can bet he'll be using doublespeak. It's a way of speaking reserved for those adverse situations when he is compelled to say something, as long as it's not the truth.

Let's face it, when you're in a tight spot, you generally end up talking funny. Here are two notorious examples of official jargooniness from the war zone.

After the United States bombed Cambodia in 1974, a Colonel tried to set the press straight:

> *You always write it's bombing, bombing, bombing. It's not bombing! It's* ***air support!***

And in 1983, after the Grenada invasion, another military official explained why United States casualties were so high:

> *We were not* ***micromanaging*** *Grenada* ***intelligence-wise*** *until about that* ***time-frame.***

But although they may sound, well, peculiar, Doublespeakers are formidable adversaries. Like mythical warriors in a dungeon and dragons fantasy, they have powerful weapons. The main ones are: the Cloud of Impenetrability, the Cloak of Invisibility, the Power of Plausible Deniability, and the Wand of Replacement.

The Cloud of Impenetrability

Government spokespeople are masters of smokescreening and sending smoke signals. Smoke has all the right properties, it is vague in outline, it shifts with the breeze, it eventually dissipates and above all else, it leaves no lasting impression. And let's not forget that smoke is essentially hot air.

These folks make a living by facing up to questions they can't answer. Often they are confronted by reporters the minute an international crisis develops. Now we all know that global diplomacy demands that nothing drastic or firm be announced prematurely—we know the spokesman will not deliver a major foreign policy speech—so, in a sense, we all *expect* the spokesman to display virtuoso doublespeaking.

Marlin Fitzwater, George Bush's spokesman, had this to say when asked what the United States response would be to Lithuanian soldiers who were deserting and taking refuge in churches and homes.

> *We would not want to comment on the deserter issue in a specific sense.*

The issue of Lithuania's declaration of independence proved to be so ticklish that the ghostspeakers of officialdom tripped over themselves to say something without saying anything. A "senior State Department analyst" said:

> *Our moral commitment is not playing any role in our policy. It is simply being viewed as a problem to be managed.*

Another "official" said:

> *The ladder of escalation of actions against Lithuania has gone up faster than we thought it would.*

A "Soviet specialist in the Pentagon" said:

> *There is no bottom line to the bottom line.*

Do language schools offer a total immersion course in Diplobabble?

HGOs (High Government Officials) are adept at saying things very carefully and very precisely to achieve the ultimate linguistic paradox: signifying nothing and anything at the *same time*.

> *"It'll be a* ***stepped-up status quo,*** *" one Pentagon official said of the military's final anti-drug plan, which is to be announced today. "I wouldn't look for any drastic changes."*

Status quo (Latin, "state in which") means "the existing state of affairs." "Stepped-up" means "increased in intensity." An increase is a change. By definition, you cannot have a changing status-quo, so we are hearing a phrase elastic to the point of meaninglessness. It adroitly attempts to placate those who favor the current strategy while allowing for a change in policy, if one is needed.

These people don't speak, they "send signals." They communicate by means of elaborate semaphore. Handwaving cannot be recorded. You cannot quote a gesture. You cannot remove someone from office (or send him to jail) over a momentary movement through the air. The words themselves are ephemeral. Spokespeople make their prepared statements. Reporters scribble the remarks down. Newscasters read them. We hear them. But we are more numbed than enlightened.

We have grown accustomed to the formulas for meaninglessness: "The White House can neither confirm nor deny." And when someone says

something untoward, his press office immediately issues a statement saying he misspoke or misstated or was misquoted or he misremembers what he misspoke. Tom Brennan, a spokesman for Alyeska, the consortium that owns the Trans-Alaskan pipeline, came up with a new wrinkle:

> *There was absolutely no deliberate deception. There may have been some misassumptions.*

The Cloak of Invisibility

> *"I wish you wouldn't keep appearing and vanishing so suddenly: you make one quite giddy!"*
>
> *"All right," said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it had gone.*
>
> *"Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin," thought Alice; "but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life!"*

Doublespeak is spoken by nameless entities. Pentagon officials. Informed sources. Sources Close to. A High Government Official who asked not to be identified and his cousin, A Reliable Source. Not for Attribution. The cast of characters reads like the roles in a morality play.

It's a real trick to say something that appears in every major publication in the world, and then vanish, leaving only your grin.

Probably the most high-profile invisible man is the White House spokesman. He is a Doublespeaker in all senses of the word: he literally speaks for another. He's the President's alter ego, a kind of Doppelgänger. It may be demeaning to call the spokesman for the President a ventriloquist's dummy, but isn't that what he is? After all, he's not supposed to deliver his own comments or answer questions as if he were speaking for himself. (Larry Speakes tried that when he fed ersatz Presidential quotes to the press during the Reykjavik summit.)

The spokesman for the President (formerly the Press Secretary) uses several carefully crafted techniques for protecting the Boss. Some of the chief tools are telling "previously devised stories" and the "most probable lies" and "shading the truth." Tricks as old and obvious as the shenanigans you went through for the teacher when you didn't do your homework. But somehow, what didn't work with your fifth-grade teacher works with the national press corps.

The Power of Plausible Deniability

There are many ways of avoiding the responsibility of making a decision. Instead of writing their own decisions, executives have underlings write "proposals" that they can "sign off on" or "agree to." During the Iran-contra hearings it was brought out that a memo would be sent "up the line" with a line for "approved" and a line for "disapproved." All the Chief Executive had to do was check one or the other off. Check marks are not signatures. Therefore, he can give written consent to an operation, but still maintain **plausible deniability**.

Anonymity is accompanied by lack of accountability. And the way they talk is consistent with being non-entities. These Nowhere Men have their lines written; they do not make off-the-cuff remarks, they place each word in the public ear as carefully as a bricklayer selecting a brick one at a time and systematically erecting a wall.

The Wand of Replacement

On March 24, 1989, the Exxon Valdez struck a reef in Prince William Sound and 11 million gallons of North Slope crude oil gushed out. *The New York Times* printed the story on the front page the next day. Everyone the *Times* quoted was upset—the fishermen, the Coast Guard, the politicians—everyone that is, except for one man. He was unbelievably calm.

> *David Parish, a spokesman for Exxon, said the company did not expect major environmental damage as a result of the spill.*

In the weeks that followed, Exxon boldly assumed full financial responsibility for cleaning up the site. But when the full extent of the disaster unfolded—1,000 miles of coastline!—Exxon called up its Department of Doublespeak to work a miracle. And it did. Exxon would no longer be accountable for "cleaning up" (which has a clear meaning), but for making the area "environmentally stable" (which means whatever Exxon wants it to mean).

Perhaps the single most important weapon of Doublespeak is the *replacement* because once a word has been replaced, it remains there, in the newspaper, on the video tape, in the official record. Doublespeakers are always seeking ways to replace a bad word with a good one.

Lt. Col. North fussed with the word "diversion," preferring the word "residuals." Hedrick Smith reports that Reagan and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger apparently did not understand that the "nonnuclear

defense" they were proposing included an X-ray laser which was triggered by a nuclear bomb. When the Pentagon's top-ranking scientist, Richard DeLauer informed Weinberger of the facts, this exchange took place.

> *Weinberger: "Is it a bomb?"*
>
> *DeLauer: "That's how you're going to get the X-ray. You're going to have to detonate a nuclear device in space."*
>
> *Weinberger: "But it's not a bomb, is it?"*
>
> *DeLauer: "No, it's not a bomb. It would be a nuclear event."*

Don't call it bombing, call it air support. Don't call it an accident, call it an event. Don't call it a diversion, call it a residual. Don't call it a this, call it a that. This is different from the Victorian practice of substituting euphemisms for unpleasant realities. Calling a bathroom a "WC" is one thing, calling a lie a "terminological inexactitude" is another thing altogether. Euphemism is the language of aversion, doublespeak is the language of domination.

Doublespeak replacement is similar to what the cryptologists call "speech code"—the substitution of secret words for usual ones. To defuse loaded words. To take the sting out of pointed issues and to blunt the edge of reality.

Doublespeakers have all the phrases they need right at hand so that when asked any question, they can immediately immure themselves (and their clients or superiors) within impenetrable ramparts. The words they choose are ready-made, pre-fabricated.

Not all these replacements come from the government. There was a bankruptcy hearing recently in which the court examiner stated that his report "presents evidence, not fact." Who knows what that means? Its intent was not to elucidate, but rather to provide the court examiner a safe piece of ground to stand on while the creditors, demanding to get paid off, duked it out with the shareholders who insisted on a reasonable settlement.

Similarly, Art Museums don't sell art—o no, that's much too tacky! They de-accession. And you can't buy a used Mercedes Benz, or even a pre-owned one; if you must, you purchase a "previously acquired" machine.

Some people feel that as long as there are politicians, there will be doublespeak. As long as something is to be gained by obscuring the truth, covering up the facts, and avoiding accountability, there will be double-

WORD OR PHRASE	REPLACEMENT
tax increase	revenue enhancement
military invasion	predawn vertical insertion
people killed in war	nuclear collateral damage
nuclear accident	core rearrangement
burglary	covert operation
shooting or bombing US troops by US troops	friendly fire
murder	executive action
illegal break-in	black bag job
napalm	soft ordnance
nuclear reactor out of control	above critical
drop in stock	adjustment downward
lie	categorical inaccuracy, or terminological inexactitude
doctor error	therapeutic accident, or misadventure
official spying	surveillance
kill	unlawful or arbitrary deprivation of life
acid rain	poorly buffered precipitation
[environmental] hazard	mitigation of risk

talk. Perhaps. But perhaps it is possible to speak honestly in the real world: to speak the truth in the face of failure, setbacks, and disagreements.

Vaclav Havel wrote a play in 1965 in which an incomprehensible language is imposed by leaders on all business transactions. It is ironic that a man who saw the evil of doublespeak so clearly, should one day be able to refute its basic premise *from the very platform of its origin*. On the day of his inauguration as President of Czechoslovakia, Havel demonstrated that it is, in fact, possible for a national leader to talk straight:

> *For forty years, you have heard on this day from the mouths of my predecessors . . . how our country is flourishing . . . I assume you have not named me to this office so that I too should lie to you.*

ABBREVIATIONS—OR—YOU NO GOTTA CODE BOOK?

HELP WANTED
DATA PROCESSING

LANs, WANs, and MANs
VSAT
SNA/SDLC
ISDN
DB2
VAX/C
FOCUS
INGRES
ISPF/CLISTS
IDMS,ADS/O
ADABAS/Natural

Enemy losses in I CTZ have been heavy, with about 13,000 killed; some NVA as well as VC units have been hurt badly. However, NVA replacements in the DMZ area can offset these losses fairly quickly.

—*Neil Sheehan, The Pentagon Papers*

NATO radar surveillance aircraft kept their customary position high over the Rhein. The E-3A Sentry Aircraft, better known as AWACS, and the smaller, lesser-known TR-1, . . . an upgraded version of the venerable U-2, looked for vehicles on the ground.

—*Tom Clancy, Red Storm Rising*

The COSTR program was a new initiative in 1987 to support NASA participation in ISTP. In particular, this initiative enables NASA to support ISAS in providing a GEOTAIL mission to monitor the Earth's magnetic tail region. COSTR also supports collaborations with ESA on the SOHO which will conduct solar seismology and coronal diagnostics at the Earth-Sun Lagrangian point.

—*NASA, Aeronautics and Space Report to the President: 1987 Activities*

Ah, abbreviations! We'll do anything to make words shorter and life easier.

You have your initials—from BC (before Christ) to CPA (certified public accountant), from FDR to JFK.

You have your acronyms—pronouncable constructions made up from strings of words—like NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and TIGER (Typographically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing System). That last one is a new software developed by the United States Census Bureau and the United States Geological Survey. And you thought only the military had good acronyms.

You have your short forms, or clippings, such as amps for amperes.

You have your slang short cuts, such as T-bill for Treasury bill.

You have your symbols, such as AL, for aluminum, Rx for prescription.

And there are all sorts of other contractions and condensations, what the United States Government calls "brevity codes" and some others call "abecedisms."

But, alas, when we make life easier for ourselves, we often make it harder for others. The abbreviations at the beginning of this chapter are fairly standard within certain disciplines, but there are very few people who could say what they all mean. Chances are, you would only know these abbreviations if you're in one of the professions that uses them regularly.

In fact, we can often manage quite well without knowing the *meaning* of the initials. We can use them competently and appropriately in day-to-day business, but would be stopped cold if someone asked us what they meant. Most of us see a **FICA** deduction on our paychecks, we know it has something to do with social security, but few of us know it stands for Federal Insurance Contributions Act. Thousands of people contribute generously to **CARE** without knowing that it means Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere. We all send letters with **ZIP** codes, but do you remember it stands for "zone improvement plan"?

And being a professional doesn't change things. Computer pros regularly use the word **spool** to indicate that a file has been sent to the printer while they're editing another file, but few of them could tell you off the top of their heads that it means "simultaneous peripheral operations on-line." A careful writer knows when to use "e.g." (before examples) and when to use "i.e." (before paraphrases), but he or she may have forgotten (or never known) that the former in Latin is *exempli gratia* or the latter is *id est.*

But who cares? Abbreviations are useful, even when we don't know what they stand for.

The problem is that many times we hear abbreviations and we have no idea what they refer to. That's when abbreviations become jargon. When you see a doctor write down that you are a **SOB** patient, should you feel insulted? No, he's just recording that you're short of breath. Is **LIDAR** worth spending taxpayer's money on? You can't form an opinion unless you know that it stands for Light Detection and Ranging system, an EPA program to test air quality in urban areas.

Abbreviations are used for many purposes: convenience mostly, but often for concealment and exclusion.

Muttering mysterious initials is nothing new. Abracadabra, the all-purpose nostrum, is a coupling of the Hebrew words for Father (Ab), Son (Ben), and Holy Spirit (Ruach Acadasch). Another ancient non-word was the Tetragrammaton (from Greek meaning four letters) transliterated as YHWH, spoken as Jehovah or Yahweh, the sacred name of God.

Initials are the ultimate code, the oldest and simplest of encryption devices. They have the beauty of being easy to use—once you know them. But, boy are they SOBs to crack.

Many abbreviations are standard across an industry or throughout the country, but many more have only a local meaning. Abbreviations grow like mushrooms; they seem to multiply in darkness and sprout overnight. If you're sent to a different branch of a company, you're liable to run into varieties you never heard before. Picking up how they're used is like trying to learn all the license plates of the new town you moved to.

To outsiders, abbreviations are opaque. They are not transparent. You can't memorize them, you can't deduce them, you can't study a base and then extrapolate. Sometimes, you can't even pronounce them correctly.

The obduracy of initials is often too readily ignored by those who use them. (Remember your Jargon Etiquette!) Say you're down in the nation's capital to meet some semi-high government official who tells you she'll meet you at the "EOB." You've heard these letters before: in your business, they mean "end of [the] business" day. Now you've understood the time for the conference but not the *place*, so you naturally ask: "Where do you want to meet?" To which she answers, with some petulance: "Like I said, the EOB—if that's all right with you." Uh-oh. You aren't familiar with any *place* called the "EOB," so you have to ask. (Even if you're too proud to ask, you'll have to anyway because where are you going to meet her?) When you're told it means Executive Office Building, you go (like most of us) "Ohhhhhh —" As though you either A: knew but forgot or B: didn't know but should have. In either case, you're left feeling a little dumb. "Of course, Executive Office Building, EOB—of course!"

That's the thing about initials: of course they're SIMPLE—but what the hell do they MEAN?

This point is often overlooked: whereas a lot of jargon is based on a language and is rooted in the common verbal mulch, initialisms are fragments, the merest of shreds. Someone took a few words, put them together and knocked off ninety percent of the letters. Good luck in trying to make sense of them! Coming across an unknown acronym is like finding the hieroglyphics of an undeciphered ancient language, or a shard, or a single fossilized bone.

Someone with a deep base of information about a language could conceivably understand an unfamiliar technical term by taking it apart, but would most likely be completely stumped by an abbreviation. The meaning of the term may not be self-evident, but it is at least deducible. You might not know exactly what a word refers to but you could get a good handle on it by reducing it to its known roots. The parents of the word are buried inside the word itself; if you dig, you may be able to find the bones *in situ* and thereby understand the context and hence the meaning. An acronym, on the other hand, does not reveal its parents. An acronym is just a collection of letters: meaningless, arbitrary, and inscrutable. It could have any number of sources.

Sometimes, if you're powerful enough, you can call something any damn thing you please and it will stick. Recently, the **SR-71**, a magnificent black spy plane, broke the coast-to-coast airspeed record (elapsed time: 68 minutes; speed: 2,100+ mph). It was originally named the RS-71 (for reconnaissance and surveillance), but when President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced the plane in a 1964 television broadcast, he screwed up a little bit and called it the SR-71. And coming as it did from LBJ, the name changed then and there.

The pronouncement of arbitrary sounds and letters whose meanings cannot be deduced is jargon in a very old sense. The basis of passwords, incantations, charms and symbols is often mere letters. You either know them (and what they mean) or you don't. Which is why acronyms are so effective at excluding outsiders. Cabals, cults, clubs—and companies—all use them.

Suppose you want to snow someone under with your business acumen. You say: "With this device I'm getting a return on investment of six months." The other person may have never heard of a "return on investment," but the phrase is simple enough and he doesn't have to be a genius to figure out that you're getting your investment back in half a year. But if you had blithely said "I'm getting a six month **ROI** with this device." Ah! then the other fellow is baffled and is forced to ask you for an exegesis.

And where is the Rosetta Stone?

Maybe a book would help, a cheat sheet of some kind.

Remember the "tootsie-frootsie" con job in *A Day at the Races*?

Dr. Hugo Z. Hackenbush (Groucho Marx) buys a tip sheet from Tony (Chico Marx):

> *Tony: "Get your ice cream. Tootsie-frootsie ice cream." (He walks away from Hackenbush.)*
>
> *Hackenbush (reading from the paper that Tony gave him): "Z-V-B-X-R-P-L. I had that same horse when I had my eyes examined. Hey, ice cream. What's this optical illusion you just slipped me? I don't understand it."*
>
> *Tony: "Oh, that's not the real name of the horse, that's the name of the horse's code. Look in your code book."*
>
> *Hackenbush: "What do you mean code?"*
>
> *Tony: "Yeah, look in the code book. That'll tell you what horse you got."*
>
> *Hackenbush: "Well, I haven't got any code book."*
>
> *Tony: "You no gotta code book?"*
>
> *Hackenbush: "You know where I can get one?"*
>
> *Tony: (Opens ice cream wagon): "Well, just by accident, I think I got one here. Here you are."*

Aside from buying books from the tootsie-frootsie man, you could consult sources such as the authoritative Abbreviations Dictionary, which bulges with 250,000 definitions. But if you really want to be a master of the alphabet universe, get yourself the definitive *Acronyms, Initialisms and Abbreviations Dictionary* (Gale Research, Inc.)—AIAD for short—which has 480,000 terms, half a million of the little buggers.

In practice though, these tomes (the standard version of AIDI comes in three volumes) aren't really very useful in the middle of a conversation. Let's say you're on the phone with Lou—a superior from another branch of your company—who's frantically trying to get the specs (technical specifications) together to meet a deadline for an **RFP** (request for proposal) on a large government contract. Lou is one of these guys who talks like an AK-47—bap! bap! bap! bap! bap! bap!

> *Listen, Bill, run the PM figures through the MAC before we go before COMCON. This is on the qt. We need this by 1400 Z-time.*

You mutter "Uh-uh . . . uh-uh" to show you're tracking him, but you have no idea what he means by "MAC" and he slams down the phone

before you can ask him. You know he doesn't mean a Macintosh computer because Lou is strictly IBM. So you frantically flip through your trusty AIDI . . . Mac, Mac, oh, here we are, Mac. And there—on page 1881—is "MAC." But which one is it? There's a whole column! And there are more than fifty in a column! At random you pick some out: Macedonian? Machine-Aided Cognition? Maintenance Allocation Chart? Maximum Acid Concentration? Message Authentication Code? Mean Aerodynamic Chord? No, no! It must be Military! Mediterranean Air Command? You turn the page. There are two more columns! Missile Advisory Committee? Mission Assignment Code? Multiple Access Control? Military Airlift Center? Master of Accountancy?!

By this time, you have no idea what he meant by Mac. Maybe "Mac" is just some guy's nickname. Mack? MacArthur?

THE ABCs OF NASA

Even if you have the Nobel Prize in physics, you still have to fumble around trying to make sense of arbitrary names. When he investigated the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster as a member of the Presidential Commission, Richard Feynman had to unscramble the NASA patois:

> *The first thing we had to learn was the crazy acronyms that NASA uses all over the place: **"SRMs"** are the solid rocket motors, which make up most of the **"SRBs,"** the solid rocket boosters. The **"SSMEs"** are the space shuttle main engines; they burn **"LH"** (liquid hydrogen) and **"LOX"** (liquid oxygen), which are stored in the **"ET,"** the external tank.*
>
> *Everything's got letters.*
>
> *And not just the big things: practically every valve has an acronym, so they said, "We'll give you a dictionary for the acronyms—it's really very simple." Simple, sure, but the dictionary is a great, big, fat book that you've gotta keep looking through for things like **"HPFTP"** (high-pressure fuel turbopump) and **"HPOTP"** (high-pressure oxygen turbopump).*

Who says government agencies are dehumanizing? NASA, for one, believes in friendly technology, so it has a whole neighborhood of folks to pal around with on the weekend. There's **SAM** (Spacecraft Anomaly Manager) and his wife, **PAM** (Payload Assist Module) and his mother-in-law who's visiting for a while, **MAW** (Mission Adaptive Wing). And here are SAM's golfing partners, **ROSS** (Remote Ocean Sensing System) and **HARV** (High Angle-of-attack Research Vehicle). And all over the neigh-

borhood, a bunch of **TIMS** (Thermal Infrared Multispectral Scanner) and **TOMS** (Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer) are running around.

And if you think **RV** stands for "recreational vehicle," guess again. The DOD refers to incoming enemy warheads as RVs (for Reentry Vehicles). Try to go for a vacation on one of those babies!

Maybe the trend to initialize started fifty years ago, around the Second World War when the Army started to popularize abbreviations like **NONCOM, AWOL**, and **POW**. In the fifty years (and two wars) since WWII, the Armed Service and their sidekicks at the Pentagon have been very busy indeed—at least at manufacturing initialisms. One recently compiled computer listing catalogued 10,000 of the alphabet soup stuff!

Then along came television, which we originally shortened to "the telly" and eventually to "TV." Then came VHF and UHF, and later VCRs (in VHS and Beta formats) and CDs and FAXs.

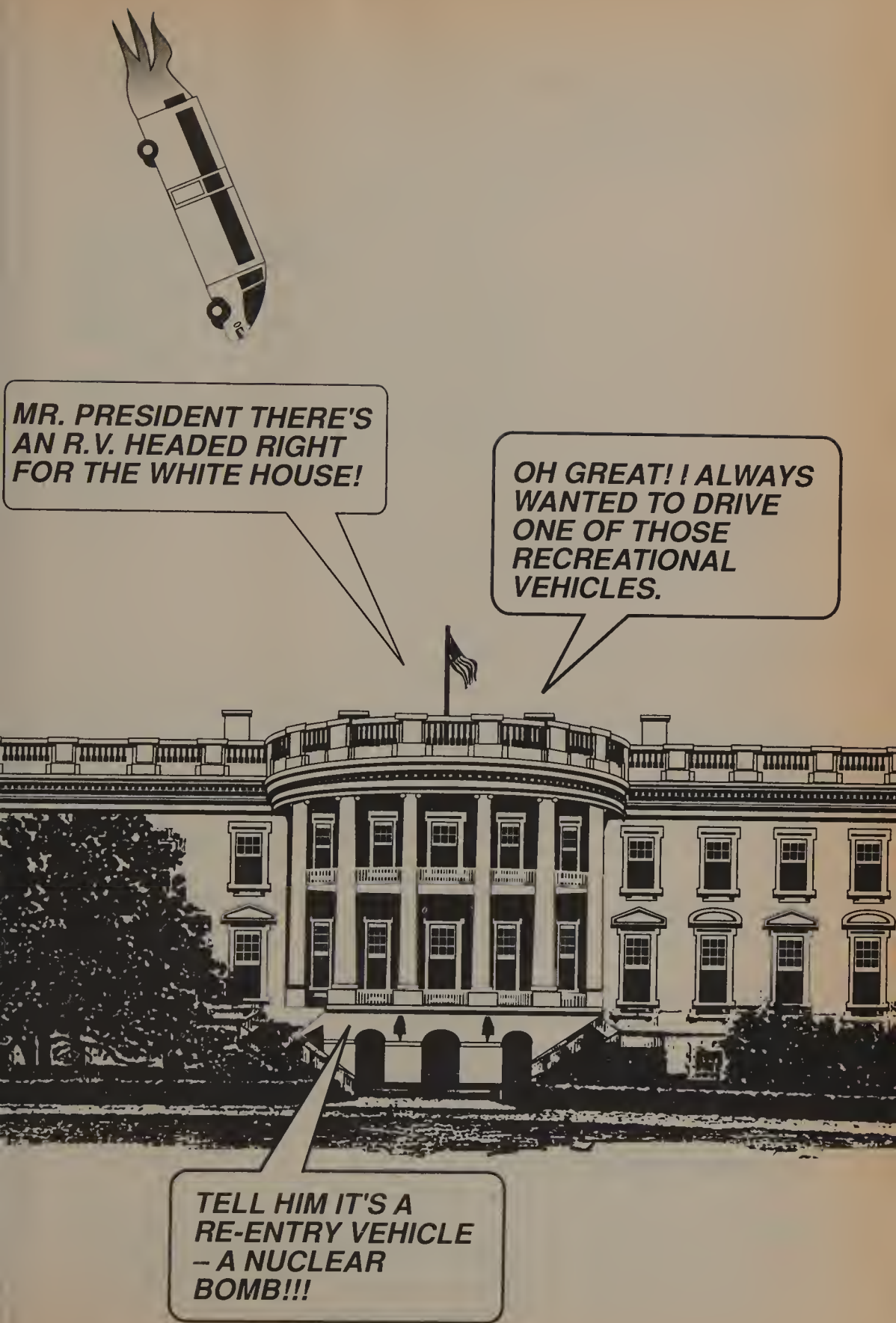
The space flights of the 60s and 70s threw dozens of abbreviations at us. There was the **LM** (Lunar Module) that was constructed in the **VAB** (Vehicular Assembly Building) where they also put together the **PLSS** (Portable Life Support System) and prepared the **EASEP** (Early Apollo Scientific Experiment Package) so the astronauts could perform **EVA** (Extra Vehicular Activity) and **LOR** (Lunar Orbit Rendezvous) when the time came.

Dozens of other initialisms are in the news:

PMS	Pre-menstrual syndrome
MSG	Monosodium glutamate
MADD	Mothers Against Drunk Driving
IRA	Individual Retirement Account
PVC	Polyvinyl chloride
MIRV	multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles.
UV	Ultraviolet
CPR	cardiopulmonary resuscitation
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid

INITIALS HAVE SEIZED THE EXECUTIVE SUITE

Who's in charge here? The **CEO** (Chief Executive Officer)? The **COO** (Chief Operations Officer)? The **CAO** (Chief Administration Officer)? The **CFO** (Chief Financial Officer)? How about the **CIO** (Chief Information Officer)? Or **CQO** (Chief Quality Officer, which was a new title added by


MR. PRESIDENT THERE'S AN R.V. HEADED RIGHT FOR THE WHITE HOUSE!
OH GREAT! I ALWAYS WANTED TO DRIVE ONE OF THOSE RECREATIONAL VEHICLES.
TELL HIM IT'S A RE-ENTRY VEHICLE – A NUCLEAR BOMB!!!

the chairman of American Express). The guy who probably really runs the show is the COO-COO.

Some abbreviations you may run across in the course of business:

NIH	"Not-Invented-Here" syndrome. A bias inherent in businesses that leads to loss of competitivenes. Instead of making use of possibly superior technology originated by a competitor, companies will stubbornly hold on to their own stuff. "If we didn't make it, it ain't good." (Not to be mistaken for the National Institute of Health.)
JIT	Just in time. (Optimal level of production.)
JTL	Just too late.

And if you have too much JTL, you are...

OOB	Out of business

Some acronyms make you wonder which came first, the acronym or the program. Can you imagine getting a $2 million budget to fund a bunch of initials?

ARISTOTLE	Annual Review and Information Symposium in the Technology of Training and Learning

Some have become so insinuated into our vocabularies, that their acronymal origins have all but vanished.

scuba	Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus
radar	Radio Detecting And Ranging
necco	New England Confectionary Company—the makers of the candy wafer, dummy!

MYSTERIOUS INITIALS

BVD	Not "Baby's Ventilated Diapers" as some people believe. "BVD" is really named after the company founders, Bradley, Voorhies, and Day.

NBI This company has one of those names you can't pry out with a crowbar. National Biscuit Institute? No, NBI make computers. What "NBI" stands for is **N**othing **B**ut **I**nitials.

Some acronyms are fun:

GUI Gooey—**G**raphical **U**ser **I**nterface.

NIMBY **N**ot **i**n **M**y **B**ackyard. The reference is to the average American family's aversion to having any public facility (whether a toxic waste dump or a halfway house for drug abusers) located near its home.

SWAG **S**lightly **W**ild-**A**ssed **G**uess, as in "how long will it take you to find the bug"? "40 manhours, that's a SWAG." These figures usually end up on CPM (Critical Path Method) and PERT (Program Evaluation Review Technique) charts as very precise estimates; then, when there's a slip in schedule, everyone wonders why. Careers are made or lost based on just how slightly "slightly" is.

RSN **R**eal **S**oon **N**ow. What you write on your **PERT** chart when you don't want to be pressed for a date.

Some acronyms are no fun:

AIDS **a**cquired **i**mmune **d**eficiency **s**yndrome

MAD **m**utually **a**ssured **d**estruction

Some acronyms aren't fun anymore:

WYSIWYG "**W**hat you **s**ee **i**s **w**hat you **g**et." At first, this was short hand for the Holy Grail of Computerdom: seeing exactly on your screen what would be printed out. The idea was you avoid "cutting down trees" (i.e., save paper) because you could fix the formatting of a document totally on the

screen. The acronym is now merely annoying, as advertisers made the claim for too many products. There's probably an entire forest of stumps produced in the name of desktop publishing. "How come the font looked one way on the screen and different when I printed it out on the laser printer?"

WISIWYS "**W**hat **I** **s**ee **i**s **w**hat **y**ou **s**ee." In a network of computers, the image on one screen (and any changes) will be seen immediately on other screens. Term invented by Mark Steif at Xerox Parc. Falls into the category of **NARY** (**N**ot **a** **R**eality **Y**et), a term coined right here.

And some acronyms are just plain funny like the one heard in *No Time For Sergeants:*

*Colonel: "What's a **PLO**, Private?"*
Private: "Private Latrine Orderly, SIR!"

POWER WORDS: BUZZING YOUR WAY TO THE TOP

Just as there are power ties and power lunches, there are power words. Sorry, but that's the way it is. If you don't speak the lingo, you can't lead the gang on the street corner. If you don't know your corporation's equivalent of voodoo magic spells, you'll never make it with the big witch doctors in the board room. If you don't know the sound bites that grab the voters, you can't sit in the Oval Office. But what the heck are these power words?

I'll tell you what they are not. They are not the words found in those books that promise to increase your WORD POWER. Oh, there's nothing wrong with most of those books, or the words in them, it's just that they have nothing to do with power, not in modern business or political usage. Most of those books promise that you can become some kind of verbal Charlie Atlas. "I was a 98-word weakling. At the bookstore, the guys with the big vocabularies would humiliate me in front of my girlfriend. But I studied the Noah Webster method® and built up my vocabulary. The next week at the bookstore, I oppugned their malapertness!"

The trouble with those so-called power words is that they may impress snobs and conservative columnists, but they're wimpy in the real world. Fashions change. Impressive, latinate tongue twisters no longer do the trick. You say "I educe your adumbration," and people will think you're trying to be funny. The big words are out, and the tech words are in.

For "power" is the capacity to turn an idea into a reality. Power is measured as a function of time: the quicker something happens after you speak (or write), the more powerful you are. And since ideas are communicated by words, a key to power is to speak the language that is known and appreciated by the people in the organization. But we can't talk of "organization" any more. The power word is "environment." A business environment, a political environment.

Corporate America has changed. The major shifts have been globalization, new information technologies, entrepreneurism, and a more flexible corporate structure. Business leaders recognize that Americans don't like bosses, but they like sports, so managers are out and **coaches** are in, and their job is not to supervise but to **empower**. Corporations no longer have efficiency experts telling people what to do, they have **champions** selling their colleagues new ideas for **adding value to the chain**.

Globalization is *the* word now. President Bush talks of "global stewardship" and John Reed, CEO of Citicorp, the biggest United States

bank ($230 billion in assets) shows us how corporate leaders will be talking in the '90s:

> *I'm really hoping and expecting and working towards the emergence, if you will, of Citicorp as this global thing. I would expect by the end of the century and the decade that people will see us just as Citicorp, as unique, not as a "bank" or a "financial service company." The thing that will make us unique is our* ***globality*** *and the importance of the consumer, the presence within the fabric of Citicorp of a* ***consumer marketing culture*** *as opposed to a trans-national banking culture.*

Back in the '50s, you could go to the bank and get money for "building an international company." But today, for an entrepreneur to get the bank's ear, you'd have to upgrade your pitch to: "We're **growing** a **global enterprise**." But first you must **nurture** the **embryonic** business and talk about your **strategic thrust**. Much of the new corporate talk comes from the human potential movement so mention that you're **actualizing** your goals and **channeling energy** and **activating forces**. And don't say you're going to build a better mousetrap, say you're **productizing a prototype** with **next-generation enhancements** using **emerging technologies**.

People aren't people anymore and they're not employees, they are **human resources**. And resources don't get fired, they get **out-sourced**. Bureaucracies have been replaced by **adhocracies**. Divisions have been broken down into **teams** and **task forces**. Projects **fulfill their missions** in **skunk works**.

And make no mistake about knowing the culture and the language. Being "one of the guys" is essential—and even the women have to be "one of the guys." For the essence of corporate and political power in America today is the group. If you're top dog, you may have more power but you still run with the pack.

Team players are a big thing with George Bush. Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor said:

> *This administration will be closely integrated and coherent, a parallel-minded team.*

At an international conference on global warming, James Brady, the Secretary of the Treasury, was introduced as the "captain of the economic team."

A good portion of Bush's cabinet had dinner together at a Japanese restaurant where they had to remove their shoes before entering. When they were finished eating, they couldn't find their own shoes among the ten pairs of *identical* expensive, black, Italian slip-ons neatly lined up along the wall. They were all wearing the POWER SHOE. The President himself had no such problem since he was the only one wearing laced shoes. He didn't have to play the power game, but his subordinates did.

As in most power environments, an accoutrement is recognized as having special properties. Once a particular shade of silk glows with the mystical aura of power, it must be worn. We no longer have symbols of rank, heraldry, and such, so suits, ties, and shoes have to suffice.

The same goes for language. The political powers-that-be speak roughly the same tongue. Bush's cabinet may not speak with one voice, but they certainly use the same words. And power words cross professional and institutional boundaries. The following is an exchange between two men as reported in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Can you tell what business these gentlemen are in?

> *"I'm saying you can't wait for this to happen through an* ***evolutionary process****," he said. "It won't happen. You've got to take advantage of that* ***window of opportunity****."*
>
> *"What we're a little baffled about is the fact that somebody who's preaching a* ***bottom-up approach*** *is using a* ***top-down approach*** *to achieve it," said Tony Napoli, political and legislative director of the union.*
>
> *"We'd rather see Fernandez concentrate on quality . . . proposals and forget the* ***fluff****, because much of it is fluff as we perceive it—much of it is come in,* ***hit the ground running****, make a big impression."*

Well, as you may have guessed, it's an exchange between management and labor. Note the allusion to science, the bottom-up stuff, the sports-military flavor of "hitting the ground running." Could be any industry, you say, automotive, aerospace, mining. Would you believe, education? Napoli was debating Joseph A. Fernandez, the chancellor of New York's schools. Educators still have their educationese, but today education is big business (New York's school budget: $6.4 *billion*), and the get-ahead administrator speaks the language of the corporate executive.

And the quickest way to the top is to realize that your power is contained in your mouth. How do you get things to happen? You describe, motivate, correct. In short, you use language.

Rule #1 of Becoming #1

You know you've finally made it when the only thing you really do all day is talk.

Think about it, what do most white collar workers do? They analyze corporate budgets, they write computer programs, they distill chemicals—all of these functions are cerebral to be sure, but they all involve doing long, tedious, trial and error kinds of exercises. When they get promoted to managers, they go to some more meetings, but they still have their hands on things. They still crunch numbers, debug programs, and troubleshoot the chemical processes.

It's only when they get to the executive level that they find out the big secret: The sole function of an executive is to talk. That's it. They talk. Chairing meetings and giving speeches and negotiating deals. The Big Cheeses may have to do all kinds of labor on the way up, but ultimately, they end up doing nothing but exercising their lips.

And the exercise of power is therefore in language.

So here's a sampling of Execu-talk. Executives use this language to describe their vision, to paint the BIG PICTURE, to set specific goals, to motivate, and to keep the troops in line.

Excellence ... Quality ... Globalization ... Forward-looking ... Challenge ... Thrust ... International opportunity ... Appreciation of diversity ... Return on equity ... Competitive challenge ... Business alliance ... Internal partnering/ external focus ... Strategic fit ... Innovative culture ... Consequence management ... Accelerate that trend ... Add value to the chain ... Personal action plans ... Path forward ... Cost satisfaction ... Time and cost accounting ... Capture the results ... Correlation of numbers to reality ... Defect removal efficiency ... Complexity assessment ... Risk/value analysis ... Perestroika ... Glasnost...

MONEY TALKS BUT WHAT'S IT SAYING?

This little piggy had ***greenmail****, and this little piggy had a* ***golden parachute****, and this little piggy had a* ***leveraged buyout****, and this little piggy had a* ***white knight****, and this little piggy got nabbed* ***insider trading*** *and went "wee wee wee" all the way to jail!*

They don't call them the roaring '80s for nothing. The boom years may or may not have poured money into your pockets, but they sure trickled a steady stream of monetary jargon into your ears.

America got stampeded by vast herds of new phrases and acronyms, mostly through the budgetary firefights of the Reagan Revolution, the boom-bust roller coaster ride of Wall Street, movies like *Trading Places, Wall Street,* and *Working Girl*, and the legal troubles of the biggest of the new plutocrats.

With Reaganomics came the **supply siders** (ideologues preaching tax cuts and budgets cuts) who tried out the **flat tax**, the **reformed tax**, the **Kemp-Roth bill**, the **trigger tax**, the **contingency tax**, and ended up teaching us the meaning of **cooking the books** (what happens when politicians and accountants get together) and **deficit spending**. The **buy-now pay-later** Republicans debated the **tax-and-spend** Democrats about **tax bracket creep** (when you're earning more but taking home less) and **COLAs** (cost of living adjustments) and **SSI** (Supplemental Security Income) and **TEFRA** (Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act). Now that the cold war is over, taxpayers are hoping for a **peace dividend** (capital from the reduced defense spending being applied to domestic programs), which, if it comes at all, will most likely be sucked up by the **S&L bailout** and the **structural deficit**.

And if you were confused during this period, you could have read the famous "woodshed" article in which David Stockman, Directory of the OMB (Office of Management and Budget), said that in designing the Reagan Revolution, the ten-percent-per-year tax cut "was always a **Trojan horse** to bring down the top rate. . . . It's kind of hard to see **'trickle down.'** So the **supply-side** formula was the only way to get a tax policy that was really 'trickle down.' Supply-side is 'trickle-down' theory."

Or, you could read his book, *The Triumph of Politics,* which explains the legerdemain of Federal budget makers:

"There are two major actions happening," I told Grieder. "One is we're ***disinflating*** *the economy. The other is we're*

stimulating production. And unfortunately the two must happen in the same time sequence. The fiscal leg of this policy stool will determine whether the two are compatible or not."

"In other words," I said, arriving at the ***bottom line*** *of it all, "if the* ***permanent deficit*** *remains, then the* ***monetary policy*** *will probably cancel the* ***supply side.***"

I'm with you, Dave.

The news from Wall Street spotlighted twenty-two year olds driving Porsches by **selling short** and **rolling over** and peddling **zero coupon bonds** and making more than the President of the United States. Then there was **merger-mania** when Conoco found a **white knight** in Du Pont to avoid being acquired by Mobil. And **Black Monday** (October 29,1987) when the stock market plummeted 508 and lost 22.6 percent of its value. Another **downside** of the crash was the loss of 22,000 jobs, mostly brokers and traders, in the securities industry. It was a yuppie massacre.

And then there were the **takeovers**, the biggest one being Kohlberg Kravis Roberts acquiring RJR Nabisco for $25 billion, and the messiest was perhaps when Time bought Warner Communications for $14 billion to avert being taken over by Paramount Communications.

We heard about **hostile** takeovers being perpetrated by **raiders** who were after **damsels in distress** who had to offer **greenmail** in exchange for leaving them alone or encourage a **white knight** to come to her rescue. If that failed, the company could try concocting a **poison pill** which would have made a takeover nasty indeed or a **sugar pill** to sweeten the deal for shareholders so that they would refuse the raider's **tender offer**.

While in the background, with an uncanny sixth sense (or some **insider information**) **arbitrageurs** bought immense amounts of stock hoping to cash in on the deal. Although it started in 1929 on the Paris Stock Exchange, **risk arbitrage** was almost unknown until the eighties. It involves buying stock in companies that are **"in-play"** (as takeover targets are known) with the hope that the price will rise after the deal is cemented. Most of us had never heard of it until the **King of the Arbs**, Ivan Boesky was sent to jail.

Many of these deals were financed by **junk bonds** (high-yield, high-risk investments), which made possible the boom in the communications and electronics industries. The career of the Einstein of Junk, Michael Milken, reached the highest peaks imaginable: in 1987, the King of Junk

Bonds received $550 million dollars from Drexel Burnham Lambert. And the lowest valleys: two years later, he was indicted on 98 counts of fraud, and in 1990, he agreed to pay a $600 *million* fine.

From **LBOs** to **TBOs**, from **leveraged buyouts** to **turnaround buyouts**. The **takeover artists** (aka **raiders, bust-up artists, sharks**) have been followed by the **turnaround artists**, specialists in resurrecting debt-ridden companies. Of course, the company's salvation comes at a cost—cutting thousands of jobs and liquidating subsidiaries. Or maybe if they're nice guys, they'll negotiate a **two-tier pay scale** with the union, whereby new employees are placed on a lower pay scale than current employees.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, forty-six **futures traders** at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and the Chicago Board of Trade were indicted for mail fraud and tax fraud; twenty-one of them were indicted for racketeering under **RICO** (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization act). They were **dual trading**, the legal, but ethically ambivalent, practice of simultaneously trading for yourself and your customers. This easily leads to **front-running**, making a profit ahead of your customers.

Some say that the end of the era of the junk bond came after the **crashlet** of 1989 when the **Dow** (the Dow Jones Industrial average) declined 190.58 points, the second biggest one day decline ever. Or when Drexel Burnham Lambert declared Chapter 11 and went **belly up**, or **toes up**, or just **toes**, if you really know what it means to loose billions of dollars. But there are still **bottom fishers** out there who are attracted by the incredibly high rates of junk.

And during all the excitement and calamity, the little guys all across America dreamed of becoming **tenbaggers** (making ten times their investment; taken from baseball's fourbagger, or home run). And then millions of **lambs** (new investors) plunged into the market. Meanwhile, the rest of us got vicarious thrills out of the high-stakes electricity of greed and glamour which crackled in every line of the movie, *Wall Street:*

> *OK. When the market opens tomorrow, I want you to buy 1500* ***July 50 calls****. You hear me? And start buying a* ***thousand share blocks*** *and take it up to $50. When it reaches 50, give out a little* **taste** *to your friends.*

But before they got their "taste," the newcomers had to learn the lingo which they found to be both bland (**variable amount master demand notes**) and colorful (**pin striped pork bellies**). They tried to make sense of the formal, turgid prose of a prospectus:

> *In managing the Funds, [we] may employ a number of professional money management techniques, including varying the composition of investments and the* **average weighted maturity** *based upon its assessment of the relative values of various* **money market instruments** *and future interest rate patterns, in order to respond to changing economic and money market conditions and to shifts in fiscal and monetary policy.*

And they tried to cope with the slang of bond salesmen—much like the father trying to understand his son in *Wall Street* (played by real-life father and son, Martin and Charlie Sheen):

> *Son: "Yeah, I had a tough day. Some jerk* **DKd** *me and I gotta cover his losses."*
>
> *Father: "Speak English, will ya?"*
>
> *Son: "DK. Didn't know who I was when the* **options** *he bought took a bath. The bastard reneged on me."*

The Wall Street menagerie has some animals which are familiar to most of us: the bears (down market investors) and bulls (up market investors). But now there are **CATS** (Certificates of Accrual on Treasury Securities), **TIGRs** (Treasury Investment Growth Receipts), **PIGs** (Passive Income Generators), **vulture funds** (buying real estate in depressed markets), and **alligator spreads** (when your profit is chewed to pieces by commissions). There are **strips** and **futures** and **options** (including **naked options**), **Fannie Maes** and **Ginnie Maes** and **Freddie Macs; no-load money markets, evergreen loans, limited partnerships, zero sum financing,** and **zero options.**

And Hollywood even provided some real-life money-magic when Art Buchwald sued Eddie Murphy for a share of the profits of the $150 million blockbluster *Coming to America*. The columnist won the suit, but learned that Hollywood's creativity is not limited to celluloid. Even though the picture grossed $150 million, it didn't make a profit. In fact, it lost money. How was that possible? Through three words: **rolling break even**. "The more a picture makes, the more it costs." Out of the gross, the studio takes its distribution fee, miscellaneous charges, and overhead, etc., etc., insuring that, even when a flick is hugely successful, the bottom line will be zilch. Presumably, Buchwald also discovered why Eddie Murphy calls net percentage **monkey points**.

And how can we review the language of money and fail to mention economists? During all the hub-bub of Wall Street and Washington, the

economists were still talking like weather forecasters. Although their econometric models were getting more complex everyday, and their reports were getting ever more verbose, they still couldn't guarantee that we wouldn't get soaked.

> *The data were buffetted by unseasonable weather in December and January, by monthly gyrations in auto sales and output, and by the aftershocks of last year's strikes and natural disasters.*
>
> —*Business Week*

Some of the academic formulas manage to make even life down on the farm seem surreal and complex:

> *Suppose the farmer has wealth W_0 in January, produces y, incurring costs C(y), and sells z on the futures market at price p_f. This leaves him $W_0 - C(y) + p_f z$ to invest at interest r. In June he sells the remainder of his output $(y - z)$ on the* **spot market**. *His wealth in June is*
>
> $$W = p_s(y - z) + [W_0 - C(y) + p_f z](1 + r)$$
> $$= p_s y - C(y)(1 + r) + [p_f(1 + r) - p_s]z + W_0(1 + r).$$

Gosh, with farmers having $W_0 - C(y) + p_f z$ left over to invest, who needs Farm Aid?

As always, economists can be counted on for prophecies only marginally less obscure than those of Nostradamus:

> *Specifically, the results indicate that if the rate-of-return regulated sector has a significant enough impact in factor markets, then the induced allocative inefficiencies may indeed cause regulation to have the perverse effect of lowering the regulated sector's output and social welfare as well.*

With American taxpayers facing a $500 billion bailout of the S&L institutions and a $200 billion trade deficit, we have reason to be concerned. What's it all mean?

Money. Liquid. P/E Ratio. Net profit. What's money really? Maybe a guy who has a lot of it—Sam Walton—said it best when he lost $2 *billion* in the '87 crash:

> *It's paper anyway. It was paper when we started, and it's paper afterward.*

CONSUMEROLOGY

Quick Quiz. What are **volume generators**? A financial term of some kind? No. A shampoo ingredient. And what are **multi-use solutions**? Shampoos, you say? No. Computers!

Consumerology is the science of buying. No longer can you merely exchange money for goods; today, you must be an *informed* consumer. And to be informed, you must learn the jargon.

Think of it, every time you buy a new product, get a disease, or listen to the news, you're bombarded with buzzwords.

Today, even simple products have become **systems**. I guess as long as something has more than two parts, merchandisers can call it a "system." Witness the car phone, touted by one manufacturer as a **"personal cellular communications system."** Or the razor blade and holder that constitutes a **"shaving system"** or a shampoo and conditioner that's a **"hair restorative system."**

One manufacturer has a running shoe (remember when they were sneakers?) with an **"energy return system,"** while a competitor has a **"HydroFlow system"**: a **"two-chambered pad filled with silicone fluid."** And there's a ski boot with a **"Total System"** adjustment knob.

The Type-A people (high-tech, high-jargon) love this stuff.

The Type-B people (low-tech, literary) loathe it.

Ellen Goodman (Type-B) describes how shoppers read the fine print of labels silently:

> *. . . sucrose, carbohydrates, riboflavin, niacin, calcium, iron, potassium. A few, the sort who were grinds in high school, go to the small print: niacinamide, pyridoxine, hydrochloride, palmiate, thiamin hydrochloride. . . .*
> *Neither illiterate nor innumerate, we are faced daily with the possibility that we are in-nutritionate. We cannot separate the information from the disinformation. . . .*
> *Indeed, being a serious consumer has become a full-time job.*

Shopping for the necessities (food and health items) used to be a chore, now it's a *concern*. We're concerned about the ingredients in the food. We're concerned about the best form of exercise. We're concerned about protecting ourselves from hazards in the environment. And we're concerned about putting hazards *into* the environment.

We even have to be concerned about what a product comes in. The packaging. A bottle is sold by what it's made out of as much as by what's inside it. "Made by a **modified-atmosphere packaging process.**" "**Ozone-friendly container.**" "No **chlorofluorocarbons.**" "**Biodegradable.**" A plastic shopping bag claims that it's been **engineered for the environment** and assures you that it is **non-leaching** in landfills and **degrades in sunlight.**

Well, I don't know about you, but I, for one, definitely "degrade in sunlight." In fact, I look forward to it. But now even going to the beach is complicated. Not too long ago, like most Americans, I just went to the beach with my cheap sunglasses, smeared on some lotion that wasn't much different from cooking-oil, and roasted myself for a few hours.

Now I know better. I have to block out **ultraviolet (UV)** light, especially **UVB**, the shorter-wavelength variety, or I may suffer eye damage. So I have to get $80 Vuarnets. And I need a sunscreen with an **SPF** (Sun Protection Factor) of 8 or more to stay in the sun for four hours—SPF 15 or more is needed if I already have a burn and need a complete sun block.

You can avoid exposure to UVB with SPF 15, but you can't avoid being exposed to the jargon.

Aerobics have been around for hundreds of years. Ben Franklin, an avid health and fitness patriot, advised his son about what we now call "executive exercise":

> *When one is pinched for time . . . [one can have] . . . a great quantity of exercise in a handful of minutes. The dumbell is another exercise . . . by the use of it I have in forty swings quickened my pulse from 60 to 100 beats in a minute.*

But now exercise is Big Biz. Can't you just see old Ben do **low-impact aerobics** and climbing on the **Stairmaster™**?

Technology, as Marshall McLuhan observered, has social implications. Cordless phones and cellular car phones have changed us. The fax is a social invention. "We want to be everywhere at the same time and be somewhere we're not," says a Bell Labs scientist who saw the technological revolution from the inside.

Who says Americans are monolingual? We speak "Home Entertainment."

The average American has two or three TVs, one or two VCRs, a hi-fi system (receiver, speakers, turntable), tape desk, CD player, maybe

a camcorder, a phone answering machine, two or three phones (maybe a cordless phone or a cellular car phone), a computer (maybe a laptop).

Just the act of buying requires you to learn new words to distinguish between products, and to identify features you want from those you don't want. Camcorders: **digital superimposer, flying erase head, power zoom with wide macro, 7 lux light sensitivity, white fade**. CDs: **oversampling digital filters, dual D/A coverters**. Receivers: **Dolby sensuround processor, tuner matrix**. Cassette stereo: **hyper bass subwoofer**.

To a non-audiophile, a cassette label might as well as be written in Korean:

> *Crystal-Clear Sound ••• UDII—The use of Clear Epitaxial magnetic particles has improved the output level by 2.5dB at high frequencies and reduced the noise level by 1dB. (Compared with our HIGH (CrO2)-position reference tape 211.)*
>
> *HR (High Resonance-Proof) Cassette-Mechanism—Outstanding vibration absorption characteristics have been achieved through the adoption of an Oval Window Cassette Shell, HR cassette mechanism and DD (dual damping) slip sheets.*

There are high-tech sports, such as airsailing and hang-gliding, which were not even possible until breakthroughs in construction and design. Activities that were once low-tech are now high-tech. Bicycling and skiing. Biking involves **spokeless disk wheels, aerodynamic handlebars**, frames made out of **titanium** and **molybdenum**, push button shifters, deraillerurs, ski-binding peddle systems, and if, you really want to go fast, **tri-spoke carbon-fiber wheels** costing $1,000 each. Originally, you were lucky to ski on barrel staves, now you have to study space-age material, Kelvar® (stretches but doesn't compress) and graphite and carbon. And you have to learn about **torsional stiffness** and **tail-to-toe flex balance** and **turn indexes**.

Even traditionally low-tech hobbies, such as fishing, are now decidedly high-tech with **sonar fish finders**. If you go sailing, you might want to bring along WhatStar, a computer program conceived by W. F. Buckley, Jr. (yes, that one), so that you can identify the star you're looking at through your sextant.

I think all this technology worship started with the audiophiles with their **woofers** and **tweeters, intermodulation distortion, subsonic filters,** and **pink noise generators.**

HIGH-TECH PATAGUCCI GARB

Just a **5db roll-off** *at the high end, up to around 14,000hz and you can decimate the* **harmonics**. *Boy, it's like being at an open air concert!*

Even roughing it (hiking, camping, rock climbing) can be done in the high-tech way:

The Serac Skiwear System offers . . . leading edge insulations from Dupont combined with Tactel fiber that perform under all weather conditions.

How did Daniel Boone and our pioneer forefathers and mothers ever survive in the wilderness without these products?

. . . waterproof insulated footwear with B-400 Thinsulate . . . rare "Krymnp" oxhide . . . breatheable, waterproof inner Gore-tex fabric bootie.

The Zurich III™ sunglasses has special "Quartz" coating to resist scratching, multiple layers of ultraviolet A&B and infrared retardant coatings and polycabonate lens material.

Salomon boots have a "Internal Fit System". . . with new thermo-formed anatomical insoles . . . binding flex plate . . . central profile ridge.

moisture-permeable waterproof ENTRANT . . . has been tested in Toray's technorama, an artificial weather room.

And it's only 1990! That means we have a lot to look forward to. But in the meantime, we should get **seasonized**, check our **aerobic target rates**, and shop for the **best price performers** around. But we better hurry if we want to be the first in the neighborhood to have one of those neat cameras that uses two-inch videodisks instead of film. And let's try out that new palm-sized computer that lets you write words on the screen with a special pen. I hear it uses **fuzzy logic**.

Diddie wa diddie

Diddie wa diddie

I wish someone would tell me

What diddie wa diddie means!

—*Arthur "Blind Blake" Phelps*

SCIENCE WORDS

acid rain — When a fossil fuel, such as coal, is burned, oxides of nitrogen and sulfur are given off into the air. When it rains, these oxides dissolve in the water and turn the rain, and hence any ground water, acidic.

android — A robot that looks like a man. Compare **cyborg** and **replicant**.

anthropic principle — A concept that proposes that the universe is changed, however subtly, by human observation.

antimatter — "Antimatter" is composed of particles spinning in the opposite direction of particles in "regular" matter. Antimatter has been produced in laboratories since 1965, but none of it has been found in nature. This is great stuff for sci-fi writers and movie makers as well as for theoretical physicists.

archetype — The fundamental images that make up the **collective unconsciousness** proposed by Jung. Most often used as a bloated substitute for "great." But doesn't it sound so much better to say "Reggie Jackson is an archetypal baseball player"?

artificial intelligence — A phrase coined in 1956 by John McCarthy at M.I.T. Building a machine that thinks is the dream of computer engineers and programmers. Until it's a reality, we'll just have to watch the movie versions (HAL in *2001*).

Bell's theorem — Particles that were once in contact continue to influence one another no matter how far apart they get.

Big Bang Theory — The idea that the universe began with an enormous explosion—a kind of cosmological Fourth of July. As the resulting energy and particles shot out, space itself expanded, and still is expanding, according

to some theorists. Support for this theory lies in the **red shift** phenomenon.

binary system A numbering system based on 2 digits (0 and 1) rather than the 10 digits (0–9) of the decimal system. This system is useful in computers because data can be expressed in binary code and relayed as electrical pulses either ON (1) or OFF (0).

biospherics The study of how biological and planetary processes interact.

black hole A star that has collapsed into itself. The resulting concentration of mass is so dense that nothing can escape its gravitational field, not even light. Coined in 1960 by John Wheeler.

catastrophism A theory proposing that a worldwide catastrophe, rather than evolution, accounts for the disappearance of extinct forms of life, such as the dinosaurs.

chaology The study of how very slight changes in the initial quantities of an equation produce unpredictable results. In other words, you can't predict the weather or the economy with any certainty.

chronobiology The study of rhythmic patterns of living things, the internal clocks that govern the change of seasons, our vital signs, and jet lag.

clone An organism that is genetically identical to its source. In the '60s, carrots and frogs were cloned, and who knows what might be next? Think of a politician you don't like; now imagine two of them.

collective unconscious A "collective spirit," according to Jung, which influences our lives and probably explains why we suddenly all begin using the same buzzwords like "collective unconscious" at the same time. See **archetype**.

critical mass In nuclear **fission**, neutrons in an atomic

nuclei are "split." Critical mass means there are so many "ready-to-split" neutrons available that they cause other neutrons to split. This results in a chain reaction and, ultimately, an explosion.

cryogenics The branch of physics studying temperatures approaching absolute zero (−459.7° F or −273.16° C) where strange things happen, such as **superconductivity**.

cybernation Computer automation of an operation, such as a manufacturing process, 1962.

cybernetics The study of automatic controls governing electronic machines and animal nervous systems. Coined in 1948 by Norbert Wiener from Greek *kybernetes*, pilot.

cyborg A human/robot combo from cyb(ernetic) plus org(anism). A machine with parts of a human like the "Terminator" or a man with parts of a machine like "Robocop."

dark matter Only one-tenth of the observable universe is luminous. The remainder is called dark matter, or missing matter, or just "stuff."

Delphi technique A method for developing a forecast by asking questions of an expert, and then using the information gathered from the first interview to ask questions of a second expert, and so on. By asking progressively more refined questions, you will arrive at a reliable consensus—you hope.

DNA Deoxyribonucleic acid. A large molecule in the nucleus that carries the template for reproduction, the genetic information, from one generation to the next.

double helix The spiral staircase model of the **DNA** molecule created by James Watson and Francis Crick.

entropy The tendency in the universe for things to go towards disorder or randomness. Cars

fall apart on their own, but rubber and plastic and metal don't come together on their own to make a car. The more highly ordered the system, the lower its entropy.

exobiology The study of the origins and biology of life from places other than the Earth. From where? you ask. That's what they're trying to find out.

Fibonacci sequence A sequence of numbers in which every third value is the sum of the preceding two values. For example: 0,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21 and so on. Although a "purely" mathematical concept when devised in 1202, it has since been observed that natural phenomenon, such as the ratio of the walls in a Nautilus shell, follows a Fibonacci pattern.

fission The "splitting" of an atom that releases enormous amounts of energy.

fusion Bringing together two nuclei into a smaller mass, thereby liberating energy. Cold fusion refers to the claim of the controversial Pons-Fleischmann experiment that more energy was produced, in the form of heat, than the process consumed.

game theory A branch of mathematics concerned with choices and conflicts of interest. John Von Neumann developed the **zero-sum game** (see entry in Money Glossary) in which total losses and total gains equals zero.

Gedanken experiment A "thought" experiment, a purely theoretical approach to problem solving. Einstein imagined that he was on a beam of light and formulated the special theory of relativity. Much cheaper than building a multi-billion dollar supercollider.

Gödel's Theorem Mathematician Kurt Gödel said that all branches of mathematics are based on propositions that cannot be proved within the systems themselves. No approach is self-sufficient; therefore all are suspect.

	See **Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle**.
grand unified theory	A set of equations that accounts for all of reality, reconciling relativity and quantum theory, explaining both the microscopic and macroscopic world. Presumably, the all encompassing equations are more elegant than "Life's a bitch and then you die." Since there are so many different versions, the pros call them **GUTs**. See **TOEs**.
greenhouse effect	Overheating of the planet, or global warming, caused by gaseous by-products of the industrial revolution.
Hawthorne effect	People who feel appreciated perform better than those who don't. In practice, this means that almost anything can improve performance, even merely studying a person's performance. Based on studies at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant. To discount the effect a consultant has on a business, simply say: "Oh, that's just Hawthorne."
Heisenberg uncertainty principle	The idea that it is impossible to measure both the position and the momentum of a moving particle at the same time. Sounds like a sure thing to me.
holism	The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Fred Astaire did not dance step-by-step. Picasso did not paint by numbers. See **zen-lock** in Occupational Slang Glossary.
holography	Apparent three-dimensional images created from intersecting laser-wave patterns. Holograms have interesting metaphoric possibilities because each part contains the entire image. They also have tremendous potential as information storage mediums for computers.
homo erectus	Probable ancestor of modern man, homo

	sapiens, who walked upright and lived during the Middle Pleistocene period.
Hubble's law	The farther away a galaxy is, the faster it moves. If you're in a room that instantly doubles in size, a person who was three feet from you is now six feet away, and a person 20 feet away is now 40 feet away. The second person therefore moved faster.
hypersonic	Speeds between Mach 6 to Mach 12.
light year	The distance light travels in a year, about six trillion miles.
Maxwell's demon	An imaginary creature created by James Maxwell, Scottish physicist, who sits in a box and produces perpetual motion by negative **entropy**, an impossibility. Thus, to accuse someone of having a "Maxwell's demon" is an intellectual put down.
nova	A star that undergoes a tremendous increase in luminosity in a burst, expelling surface material into space. See **Supernova**.
Occam's razor	The principle of economy in logic. Both Sherlock Holmes and scientists practice this: look for the simplest explanation that accounts for all the facts. Occam was a 14th century philosopher, not a barber.
Papez-MacLean theory	The idea that we have three "brains," held over from different stages of evolution, each with different characteristics. Reptilian (cold, appetites). Mammalian (warm, emotions). Neo-mammalian (logic, insight).
paradigm	A model. A set of theories that constitutes a world view. We have gone from a Copernican to a Newtonian to an Einsteinian paradigm of the universe.
Poisson distribution	A statistical model for the occurrence of an event in a large number of trials. Provides an uncanny prediction of everyday events.

The number of misprints per page in a newspaper has a Poisson distribution.

quantum mechanics What you need when your warp drive fails you—no, really, this refers to Max Planck's theory that radiation is made of discreet packets, or *quanta* (Latin, "how much?"). This theory is the dividing line between modern physics and Newtonian, or "classical" physics.

quarks As elusive and glamorous as film stars, quarks are particles that make up the larger particles of an atom. Three quarks make up a baryon (proton, neutron, and their consorts, the antiproton, antineutron). This reminded Murray Gell-Mann, the physicist who proposed them in 1961, of a line in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: "Three quarks for Muster Mark." (Incidently, according to Hugh Kenner, Joyce came across quark ["to croak"] from browsing the OED.) You may hear about u- and d-quarks (for up and down), as well as s-quarks (sideways). And how could we forget c-quarks (or "charms")? Did you know quarks come in different flavors?

quasar A radio source in deep space that can be 15 billion light years away and 100 times as bright as an entire galaxy. Called "quasi-stellar radio sources" because they seem to be like stars but aren't quite. The phrase was shortened to quasar in 1964 by Hong Yee Chiu.

QWERTY phenomenon **Artificial Intelligence** expert, Seymour Papert, coined this term to refer to practices that have an historical, but no rational, basis. The typical keyboard follows an arrangement of letters (QWERTYUIOP) contrived to prevent early typewriters from jamming.

red giant A huge star that has low density but high luminosity like Betelgeuse (100 times the size of our Sun) in the constellation Orion.

red shift Objects in space seem to be moving away, relative to us, at such a speed that their light is shifted to the red end of the spectrum. See **Big Bang**.

replicant A robot that looks like a man inside and out. The perfect game show host.

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis Our world view is shaped by the language we speak. Most of us have only one word for "snow." The Inuit has many words for "snow," and is therefore better equipped to deal with the Arctic.

Schrödinger's cat A cat in a box is killed by a series of events, but according to quantum theory, the cat is still alive until someone *observes* that the cat has, in fact, died. A paradox: How would the SPCA handle this? If they show up, the cat will die, if they don't . . .

Searle's Chinese Room An argument against **artificial intelligence**. John Searle, an American philosopher, argued that, if a man (who doesn't speak Chinese) sits in a sealed room and follows specific instructions he could conceivably produce perfect "Chinese" responses without understanding a word of Chinese. If a computer follows an algorithm it has not necessarily "understood" anything.

SETI Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. The United States Government agency featured in the movie, *ET*.

space-time In the Einstein **paradigm**, the universe is four-dimensional, with time being the fourth dimension. Space and time are so closely involved with each other, that they are really one reality, space-time.

superconductivity A property of certain materials that lose

	almost all electrical resistance when they are cooled to within a few degrees of absolute zero. Will make computers of today seem like tortoises. See **cryogenics**.
supergravity	What you call gravity when **supersymmetry** is made local.
supernova	A huge explosion resulting from a star throwing off an immense amount of its own mass in the form of charged particles and light.
supersonic	Speeds above the speed of sound (approx. 700 mph. Mach 1, the so-called "sound barrier"). See **hypersonic**.
superstrings	A theory that says that the basic elements of the universe are strings: an approach that combines the general theory of relativity and Quantum theory.
supersymmetry	A theory that unifies bosons and fermions. Check it out.
symbiosis	Two organisms existing in a biologically complementary way.
synchronicity	A Jungian theory. Coincidental events have a significant relationship to each other. "There are no accidents."
TOEs	Theories of Everything. See **Grand Unified Theory**.
Turing machine	Not a physical machine, but a mathematical abstraction. Alan Turing, English mathematician and computer scientist, conceived of a "machine" that could answer, in principle, all the problems of mathematics.
white dwarf	A white-hot star with the mass of a star but the size of the Earth. It has collapsed into itself because its nuclear fuel is too low to overcome its own gravity.

CONSUMER WORDS

accuracy In sound electronics, the ability to produce uniformly all parts of the musical spectrum without emphasizing or de-emphasizing any part.

antioxidant Retards the action of oxygen on fats and oils which makes them rancid.

BHA Butylated hydroxyanisole. **Emulsifier.** Also prevents fats and oils from going rancid.

BHT Butylated hydroxytoluene. **Antioxidant.** Also prevents fats and oils from going rancid.

coaxial cable A cable that is immune to the affects of electrical and magnetic interference because one cable is inside the other cable and the two are separated by insulation. Used in cable hookups. Called coax.

contrast On a camcorder, the dial that adjusts the lens until the contrast of the image is at maximum, when the image is in sharp focus.

DAC Digital analog converter.

damping The ability of an **amplifier** to reduce the tendency of loudspeakers to vibrate. The higher the damping number, the better.

DAT Digital audio tape, now issued with copy-protection circuitry.

dead room An anechoic (absolutely soundproof) room.

Dolby Patented noise reduction technology.

drift Variation in speed.

dub Replacing the video or audio portion of the tape.

dynamic range How well a recording device picks up sounds, loud and soft, near and far.

electronic viewfinder In a camcorder, a miniature black and white rendition of what is being shot.

emulsifier Keeps oil and water mixed together in commercial products.

exposure control Keeps a camcorder's exposure constant when moving from sunlight to indoor lighting.

flavor enhancer Does not have much flavor on its own, but brings out natural flavors.

flutter Frequency distortion caused by variation in speed that makes the sound seem wavery.

flying head The element in a VCR that produces clean transition from scene to scene.

frequency response Ability to reproduce sounds across musical spectrum, shown as a ratio curve.

headroom extension Circuitry that expands the treble range.

howlback Unwanted positive acoustic vibration (noise).

hunting When an image goes in and out of focus as the autofocus tries to get a fix on a target.

impedance Resistance to the flow of energy; measured in ohms. Although it doesn't affect sound quality, a low-impedance speaker draws more current than a high-performance one.

indexing Designating a particular section of a tape with an electronic mark to be read by a VCR.

infrared triangulation How a camcorder uses an infrared beam to focus on a target.

loudness The button that boosts the bass sounds when volume is down.

lux A measurement of a camcorder's light sensitivity. The lower the number, the dimmer the light the camcorder can handle.

MASH No, not the TV show. How does multi-stage noise shaping grab you? It's a technology used in CD players to process sound signals.

MSG Monosodium glutamate. Flavor enhancer.

	An amino acid that brings out the flavor of protein-containing foods.
MTS	Multichannel sound; an enhancement to a TV that enables it to receive stereo sound.
mute	On a receiver, the button that reduces volume without changing setting so that you can answer a phone call and return to the exact audio conditions you had. On a TV tuner, the button you use to turn off sound during commercials.
on-screen programming	A feature on a VCR that enables you to program recordings using an on-screen display.
OTC drug	An Over-the-Counter drug is one that the FDA considers safe for self-medication.
oversampling	Artificially generating more measurements of sound than have been recorded; with more measurements, it is easier to filter out unwanted noise.
preamp/amplifier	Components that boost the electrical signal from the CD, tape deck, or VCR to push through the loudspeaker; amplifying power is measured in watts per channel.
pseudo-stereo	TV. Illusion of stereo created by splitting a monophonic broadcast signal.
rebound effect	A flare-up of symptoms when a medication is stopped.
remission	Temporary absence of symptoms.
remote control	Infrared device that controls TVs, CDs, VCRs, receivers; everything but the weather.
S/N ratio	Signal to noise ratio. Compares desired sound to background noise; a perfect S/N ratio would have no buzzing or hissing during quiet periods.
SFX	Camcorder special effects, such as time-lapse and animation, stop action, fade, titles, editing.

shotgun remedy A medication combining several drugs.

SPF Sun Protection Factor. The measurement of a sunscreen's protection against UV light. Numbers range from 2 (weakest) to 15 or higher (strongest).

Steadicam A camcorder device used to keep pictures steady without a tripod.

syndrome A set of symptoms that together characterize a disease.

systemic Refers to the body as a whole, not just one of its parts.

therapeutic equivalent Said of a drug that is as effective as another one.

thickening agents Carbohydrates that absorb some of the water in food and make it thicker.

time-shifting The ability of a VCR to record multiple events in different time segments. Does not apply to the owner's ability to figure out how to use this feature.

tone-control bypass A feature that lets you hear the recording in its unenhanced form.

troche Pill that is dissolved in the mouth.

trombosed Said of a vein or artery that has become clogged with clotted blood.

tuner On a receiver, the dial that enables you to select a station.

tweeter A loudspeaker that produces high frequency sound. See **woofer**.

Type I tape Ferric audio tape. Type I has a "normal" bias—an inaudible tone added to reduce distortion.

Type II tape Chromium dioxide audio tape, which has a "high" bias. (See Type I.)

Type III tape Multilayered chromic-and-ferric audio tape. Obsolete.

Type IV tape Metallic iron audio tape. Has the widest dynamic range of the commercial varieties.

Ultraviolet light Ultraviolet light is at the lower end of the light spectrum and is harmful to eyes. Radiation from UVB, the shorter wavelength light, is to be most avoided.

VOX Voice sensing circuitry in a camcorder.

white balance Adjusts colors so that they look normal in different lighting

white fade A camcorder feature for automatically fading (or opening) to a blank white screen.

woofer A loudspeaker that produces low frequency sound. See **tweeter**.

wow Low frequency noise. Holding a finger on a record while it is playing will produce this effect, but why you would want to is beyond me.

zoom ratio The difference between the widest and tightest camcorder shot possible.

COMPUTER WORDS

accelerator	Hardware add-on that makes your computer faster or, more technically, improves its processing performance.
algorithms	Methods of computing, a way of calculating something.
analog	Data encoded by continuous variations such as a phonograph. See **digital**.
applications	Computer programs that assist people in doing jobs that are not necessarily computer-related.
array	A rectangular arrangement of something usually used for a method of referring to one of a group of related variables.
ASCII	A code for assigning characters to 8 bit (byte) data groups. Stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange. Pronounced ASS-key. See **EBCDIC**.
asynchronous	A way of sending signals over a line one direction at a time. See **synchronous**.
batch	Usually work performed on many records at once with long processing deadlines as opposed to online, which suggests seconds.
bells and whistles	Features of an application or hardware added on after the main functions are completed.
binary	A numbering system based on two is used in computers because it is easy to build switches that go on and off.
board	Printer circuit boards, breadboards, motherboards.
boot	Short for bootstrapping, which refers to a bootstrap loader, a small program that when moved into memory will load the rest of the operating system.

buffer A part of a machine's memory that holds data until it can be processed. For instance, when a computer sends a two-page document, a printer can "hold" one page in its buffer while it is printing the other page. See **handshaking**.

bug An error in a piece of code or in hardware.

bus A group of wires that allow signals to be shared between devices on several circuit **cards**. Included in the bus are the data bus and the address bus.

byte Eight bits. Used to designate characters. Why 8? Because 8 bits can be arranged in 256 unique ways. This allows for a standard set of alphabetic, numeric, punctuation, and control characters.

card A printed circuit. Only older folks need to be told that "card" no longer refers to the punched card that said "Do Not Bend, Fold, Spindle, Or Multilate."

CD-ROM Compact Disk Read Only Memory. One of a set of competing standards that make use of the large data density of optical disks.

chip An integrated circuit (IC) that comes in a standardized package.

clones Computers that operate like other computers. In the **mainframe** world, those that ran like IBM mainframes were called PCMs (Plug Compatible Mainframes).

CPU Central Processing Unit. The part of the computer that does the arithmetic. The CPU contains the arithmetic-logic unit and control unit. In a **microcomputer**, the CPU is the machine's **microprocessor** chip. In casual conversations, CPU usually refers to the physical unit, the "box" that contains the chips, the "brains" of the machine. CPU can mean anything from a mainframe to a laptop.

crash To stop working suddenly. Lots of things can cause crashes, as it is inherently difficult to keep machines operating.

crunch A description of a computer executing millions of numerically intensive computations.

data To a computer, data is something that is intelligible to the hardware/software system in question. In general, data is a set of distinctions related to a problem.

database A structured way of keeping data. May be simple or very complex in structure. The telephone directory is a database.

debug Removing errors from a system. Most of the work in debugging is in identifying the error or in finding where the error is located. This is usually not obvious.

demon In a multitasking system, a program that wakes up periodically to perform a function.

desktop publishing Near-typeset quality documents produced with a system that can be placed on a desk.

digital Data encoded by discrete, rather than continuous, variations. All data is reduced to numbers. The major advantage of digital over **analog** is the control it provides. A compact disk is digital.

directory Table of contents of the files contained on a disk.

disable To make inactive without necessarily shutting off. Has the sense of putting into neutral.

disk drive A storage device that retains data by magnetizing small domains on the surface of a platter or disk.

diskette Whatever you call it, floppy, micro cassetee, micro-floppy, floppette, disk, it's either a 5 1/4" square or a 3 1/2" square that you stick into the slot of your computer.

distribution The people who receive reports and other output.

download/upload Moving whole files of data from one machine to another. The up/down direction refers to the relative sizes of the machines. Down is from big to little. Up from little to big.

downtime When machines are inoperative, they are "down." Downtime is the period a machine is down.

dump Typically to write the entire status of a machine to disk or paper. Done in the case of an unexpected error so that the probable location of the error can be determined.

EBCDIC IBM's mainframe translation between characters and bytes. Allows base 10 arithmetic to be done with greater accuracy in binary circuits. Stands for Extended Binary Coded Decimal Interchange Code. Pronounced EB-se-dik. See **ASCII**.

end-user Anyone who uses a computer. Originally referred only to users whose jobs did not relate to computers.

enhancement A feature or function that should have been installed in the first place.

file A group of data that belongs together such as a letter or a spreadsheet, typically on magnetic media.

fixed point notation Integer arithmetic in which no decimals are used. Very fast and appropriate for many **applications**. See **floating point notation**.

fixes A rapid resolution of an error or bug. Usually applied in a hurry to get something to work.

FKEY Keys not on a typewriter that can be given different interpretations by programs.

floating point notation Arithmetic that uses real numbers (i.e., with decimals). Slow unless special purpose circuits are installed. Also called scientific notation. See **fixed point notation**.

flowchart A diagram of the actions and flow of control in a program.

font A typesetting term to describe variations in typefaces.

format As a noun: the appearance of a document. As a verb: to make a document look a certain way. To "format a disk" means to write markers in appropriate places.

fragment As a verb. To store data, a computer will often write files in different places on its disk. This slows down processing speed.

fuzzy logic Logic based on the proposition that statements might not all be either true or false. For example, "Tom is tall." Depending on the standard of measurement, the statement might be true, false, or in between.

garbage The stuff you should throw away.

glitches Intermittent brief failures of undetermined cause. Usually said of hardware, rather than software, problems.

hacker Originally meant a hobbyist. Then in the media, it signified a brilliant programmer. Now the media apply it in a pejorative way.

handshaking Part of the etiquette, naturally. Refers to the signals sent from a device (e.g., a printer) to a computer when it (the device) is ready to receive data. Prevents overloading the device's **buffer**.

hard disk Originally referred to floppies developed for large-scale systems. Now applied to the drives in microcomputers to distinguish them from **floppies**.

HyperCard A brand-name implementation of HyperText, which is a non-linear text with many levels of interconnection between information available to the user.

Icon The little pictures of files, folders, and programs that make the Apple Macintosh so much fun to use.

incompatible Two things built to different standards. Apple disks cannot be read on IBM PCs because the disks have different formats.

instabilities Optimal control term for situations where large, unexpected changes may happen. A software package that crashes unexpectedly is said to be unstable.

interactive Systems that respond to user input in a way that invites more input in a short period.

interface As noun: a defined set of inputs to a device such as a parallel printer interface that has 25 wires, each one having a defined function. As a verb: to interact with a specific device so that data can be exchanged in a defined fashion.

jitters Brief, intermittent failures usually not enough to cause a **crash**.

kludge As noun: an inelegant design or execution of a portion of a system.
As a verb: to put something together in a hurry to solve one specific problem.

learning curve In industrial engineering, the percent that costs fall as volume is doubled. Mostly used to mean the time it takes to learn something.

local node In a network of computers, the system that you can access. The other computers are remote nodes.

logged An accounting term for the time and resources used and who pays for it.

loop A set of instructions that a machine executes repetitiously. Used in most programming languages to perform repetitive actions. If a loop does not terminate, then the computer never stops executing the loop.

macro In spreadsheet languages, a set of instructions or a program within the spreadsheet.

mainframe A large computer. As large as a living room and costs as much as a 747. See **minicomputer, microcomputer.**

microcomputer A small computer. Also known as a PC (personal computer). Other variations: portables and laptops. As small as a breadbox and costs as much as a small car. See **minicomputer, mainframe.**

microprocessor The processing component of an **integrated circuit.** It contains the elements for arithmetic, logic, and control. It runs the In/Out basket, receiving instructions from the program in **RAM**, data from the keyboard, and sending output to the printer.

minicomputer A medium-size computer. As large as a refrigerator and costs as much as a house. See **mainframe, microcomputer.**

MTBF Mean Time Between Failures. The MTBF for chips is about 300 years. Sometimes, you'll see MTTR, Mean Time To Repair.

multi-platform solution A marketing fantasy.

multitasking A computer that switches between operations so quickly it appears to be doing several things at once.

networks Communication hardware and software to enable computers to exchange data. This allows people using the computers to communicate much more fully and faster in data transfers.

OEM Original Equipment Manufacturer.

OOP Object Oriented Programming, a form of programming that uses objects which combine information and operations. Simplifies development of complicated software packages.

opcodes Mnemonic names for the commands that the **CPU** responds to. Usually written only in assembly language.

parallel More than one byte transferred at the same time. Faster than **serial**.

parity A way that errors in transmission can be detected by odd or even sum of the bits being transmitted.

patch A **fix** installed in machine language, usually by a user—not by the people who wrote the software.

peripherals Originally, the devices external to the **CPU** of the **mainframe**: printers, tape drives, etc. Now, used to refer to anything connected to anything else.

pixel The basic element of an image (analogous to a bit, the basic element of data). A blend of pix (picture) and el(ement).

PRAM Parameter Random Access Memory. The memory location where date and time information are stored. Maintained by a battery so your microcomputer keeps track of the time after you shut it off.

pre-released The people who like to "be the first on the block" to do something are the ones who get software products before they go on the market. Also known as beta test versions.

protocol In telecommunications, as in diplomacy, when two parties want to talk, they must first agree on matters of etiquette. It just won't do if each party is speaking a different lingo—your communications settings must match.

query A question, usually used in connection with a database language.

queue A line. Since so much stuff in computers passes through bottlenecks, a good deal of performance managing is how to line jobs up for processing.

RAM Random Access Memory. Silicon memory that any byte can be read or written to.

release A particular version of software that is shipped is given a number such as 2.1 to maintain control. Also known as Rev Level, for Revision Level.

ROM Read Only Memory. Chips that contain instructions "burned" into them at the factory. Cannot be altered.

routine A set of instructions that may be used many times in different locations of a program.

SCSI Small Computer Systems Interface (pronounced scuzzy). A standard connector between the computer and peripheral devices.

serial One at a time. In communications, one bit is sent at a time. See **parallel**.

silicon The main ingredient of the chip: note the word is sil-i-kon, not sil-i-kone, the stuff you implant in, well, never mind. Chips also are made of germanium; that's the element, not ger**a**nium, the flower.

software Instructions for the hardware.

sort To arrange in some order through a variety of different ways.

spikes Rapid increases in a very short period of time. Power spikes are the most worrisome because they can literally fry chips. Same as surges.

spreadsheets An accounting tool used for centuries and translated to microcomputers.

SYLK Symbolic Link. A spreadsheet and database file format.

synchronous More than one direction at the same time. A synchronous line can have data moving from and to a terminal simultaneously. A telephone allows synchronous communication. See **asynchronous**.

terminal emulation A kind of electronic masquerade: your com-

puter pretends to be another type of terminal.

tweak To make small changes to. A ham radio term applied to software programming.

upgrade The new, improved version of the product you were told was the new, improved version.

vapor Short for vaporware: software promised but never released.

variable In software, a data element that can be changed.

virtual Not physical. Exists in the software only or in the imagination of the machine. A virtual screen can be much larger than a physical screen.

virus A program that can infect other systems and cause damage.

MONEY WORDS

ADR — American Depository Receipts, a way of investing in foreign companies.

alligator spread — A **spread** with so many commissions taken out that the client's profit gets chewed to pieces.

AMEX — American Stock Exchange.

annuity — A contract in which you pay an insurer a fixed amount and in return receive a set monthly payment.

arbitrageur — Stock market pro who buys stock in companies about to be taken over, expecting the final tender offer to make him a considerable profit.

asset-stripping — Buy a company, sell the assets, dump the employees.

ATM — Automated Teller Machine.

bears — Investors who expect a declining stock market or bear market.

bonds — A way for corporations and governments to issue IOUs which are traded on the **NYSE** or **OTC**. See **coupons, junk bonds, par.**

book-to-bill ratio — The proportion of orders to billings.

bulls — Investors who expect a rising stock market or bull market.

calls — Options to *buy* a stock at a predetermined "strike price" on a later date. You're betting the price will rise to a greater price by that date. See **put.**

CATs — Certificates of Accrual on Treasury Securities. A type of **zero coupon bond.**

CD — Certificate of Deposit.

COLAs — Cost of Living Adjustments.

commodity — The volatile futures market, which can include anything from agricultural products to foreign currencies.

common stock In theory, a way of owning a company; in practice, such "owners" are only paid off after creditors and **preferred stock** holders.

coupon A measure of a bond's current yield. A bond that pays $70 a year interest has a 7 percent coupon.

discount The amount of money below **par** that a stock or bond sells for.

dividend What the stockholders receive from a corporation's earnings.

Dow Jones Averages A picture of market activity that's given by indexing the market prices of a mix of industrial, transportation, and utility stocks. News reports most often use the DJIA, the average of 30 Industrials.

EFTS Electronic Funds Transfer System.

ESOP Not the fabulist—stands for employee stock-ownership plan.

Fannie Mae FNMA (Federal National Mortgage Association).

FDIC Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

futures contracts A contract to buy or sell a certain amount of a commodity at a certain time. The price is determined when the deal is made, but the commodity is delivered in the future. More of a gamble than an investment since the buyer doesn't own anything as a result of the deal.

Ginnie Mae Government National Mortgage Association (GNMA) bond.

golden parachute Paying an executive salary and benefits in the event of a takeover; now a normal part of executive compensation.

greenmail Buying a raider off by purchasing his stock at a premium.

halo effect The blessing bestowed on a particular stock

	once it has been purchased by an important player.
hostile takeover	Buying a company that doesn't want to be bought. See **tender offer, lollipop, raider, poison pill**.
index of leading economic indicators	Index set by commerce department based on unemployment rate, cost of finished goods, United States deficit, consumer prices, prime lending rate and GNP.
insider trading	The illegal act of buying or selling stock based on information known only to a few people such as corporate officers.
IPO	Initial Public Offering. When a company "goes public" by selling shares to raise money.
ISO	Incentive Stock Option.
ITC	Investment Tax Credit.
junk bonds	High-risk, high-yield **bonds**. Sometimes just called "junk." But how many junkmen do you know who make hundreds of millions of dollars in a year?
LBOs	Leveraged buyouts. Using borrowed money to make an offer to buy a company at an inflated valuation.
liar's poker	A game played by bond traders using dollar bills instead of cards; made popular by the bestselling book of the same name.
limited partnership	Investors whose risk is limited to the funds they invest. They are not liable for what the business does. See **Master Limited Partnership**.
liquidity	The measure of how quickly an asset can be converted into cash.
lollipop	An offer by a company to buy shares from stockholders at a premium, thus avoiding a hostile takeover. Also known as a sugar pill, the opposite of a **poison pill**, but accomplishes the same thing.

margin trading	Buying securities with a portion of the purchase price borrowed from the brokerage firm.
Master Limited Partnership	Similar to limited partnerships, except individual investors sign no partnership agreements and can divest at any time. Called MLPs.
money market funds	An account in which the funds are invested in short-term obligations. Your money earns interest and is easy to withdraw.
municipal bonds	Bonds issued by local governments to pay for public projects. The interest is free of federal and local taxes.
mutual funds	A pool of funds amassed by the contributions of many investors and invested by a professional manager. Mutuals are broad-based or specialized, and seek to produce either long-term growth or short-term growth.
naked options	Selling an option to buy a stock that you don't own. You're betting the price will not hit a certain mark. If you're wrong, you have to buy the stocks at the set price and then immediately sell them at a loss.
near-money	Assets that are very liquid but cannot be used to buy anything directly.
Nifty Fifties	High-quality growth stocks that can be put away for the long haul. Also called "one decision" stocks because there was only one decision: buy them.
no-load funds	Mutual funds that charge no commissions or other charges.
NOW account	Negotiable order of withdrawal account.
NYSE	New York Stock Exchange.
options	Buying the right to buy (**call**) or sell (**put**) a stock at a certain price on a specified date.
OTC	Over-The-Counter trading of stocks.
PALs	Passive Activity Losses. Tax shelters that

use debt and depreciation to create a loss which is deducted against income. See **PIGs**.

par The issuing value of a stock, the redemption value of a bond.

penny stock If you can spare a dime, you can buy a stock or two; they are traded **OTC** rather than on the stock exchange. At one time you could have bought Apple Computers for a few cents, now it's going for about 40 to 50, dollars that is.

PIGs Passive Income Generators. Syndicated investments whose earnings are designed to be sheltered by **PALs**.

poison pill Making a takeover so unattractive, by diluting a company's stock, that a **raider** passes it up. See **lollipop**.

POS terminal Stands for "Point-of-sale." A machine that allows funds to be shifted from the purchaser's account to the seller's account.

preferred stock Owners receive preference in payment of dividends and are first in line for the company's assets after creditors and before **common stock** holders.

put An option to *sell* a stock at a predetermined "strike price" on a later date. You're betting the price will fall to a certain price by that date. See **call, selling short**.

raider Someone who buys a company against the will of management; also known as a takeover artist.

REITs Real Estate Investment Trusts. Pronounced REETS. Mutual funds invested in real estate whose earnings go directly to shareholders and avoid corporate taxation.

S&L Savings and Loan association. Well-known now due to multi-billion dollar bailout scandal.

S&P The Standard and Poor's 500 Composite Stock Price Index. One of the two major indicators of stock market activity. See **Dow Jones Averages**.

selling short Selling a stock that you think is going to go down by borrowing the shares from someone else. It's called "shorting the stock." You win if the stock falls in price; you lose if it goes up. You can hedge your bets by buying **puts**.

soft money Portion of an investment that can be taken for an income tax deduction.

spread The markup, the difference between the cost to buy and the cost to sell, or the difference between the bid and the ask. The spread is what a broker charges you *in addition to* a commission. You can always try to **shave the spread** by going to another broker.

strip An interesting acronym-metaphor combo; means "separate trading at registered interest and principal of securities" and also refers to being created by "stripping" a treasury bond issue into a number of **zero coupon bond** issues. See **CATS** and **TIGRs**.

supply sider Someone who argues that economic growth can be accelerated by reducing taxes on the supply-side of the economy.

T-Bills One-year United States Treasury borrowings sold at a discount and redeemed at par. They are virtually risk-free and you can sell them easily. Treasury **notes** are issued for two to ten years; Treasury **bonds** (called "the long bond") for thirty years.

takeover artist See **raider**.

tender offer An offer to buy stocks directly from the stockholders of a company.

TIGRs Treasury Investment Growth Receipt. A type of **zero coupon bond**.

venture capital Funds invested in new businesses by outsiders in exchange for sharing ownership.

vulture funds Buying real estate in areas where the market has fallen and making money when and if the properties recover.

white knight Someone who comes along to rescue a company from a **hostile takeover** by making an offer to counter that made by a **raider**.

zero coupon bonds Referred to as **zeros**. Pay no interest, but are issued at less than the redemption value. A **zero convertible** is not a new Japanese car, but a coupon that can be converted to stock.

zero-sum game In this game, for someone to win, there must be a loser. Said of the options market in particular. See **game theory** in Science Glossary.

3I League (Politics) A fictitious club for politicians who have visited the three I's: Ireland, Israel, and Italy, countries that just happen to have the largest constituencies in the United States.

aa (Medical) Of each. Latin abbreviation.

AAs (Publishing) Author's alterations. EAs are editor's alterations.

ABD (Education) All but dissertion.

abozzo (Art) A rough sketch.

AC (Medical) Before dinner. Latin abbr. *ante cenum.*

academy leader (Entertainment) Those numbers you see flickering by before the actual film begins. Did you ever wonder why the countdown doesn't reach 1? The numbers go from 12 to 3 only.

ace (Aviation) A dogfighter with five kills.

Alfa Bravo (Military) The military (or radio) alphabet substitutes a word for every letter to make transmission of messages more reliable. The following designations are used internationally: Alfa, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf, Hotel, India, Juliet, Kilo, Lima, Mike, November, Oscar, Papa, Quebec, Romeo, Sierra, Tango, Uniform, Victor, Whiskey, X-ray, Yankee, Zulu.

Angels (Aviation) Altitude in thousands of feet. Angels 2 is 2,000 feet.

Annie Oakley (Entertainment) A free pass, so called because tickets used to be punched with holes the way Annie plugged the Ace of spades.

anti-g suits (Aviation) Outfits that pilots wear that constrict the lower part of the body to prevent blood from flowing down and causing pilot to blackout. Suit allows pilot to remain conscious with up to 9 gs.

arrows (Aviation) Enemy bullet holes in an aircraft.

asymmetrical joke relationship When one person laughs at another's expense. A suitable response to the person who made this phrase up.

augers in (Aviation) A plane that crashes. Also "bites hard," "buys the farm," and "plant it in the yard."

bandit (Aviation) Enemy intruder.

blade (Medical) A surgeon.

blow jobs (Aviation) Twin engine German jet fighters, the Me-262.

blue pipe (Medical) A vein.

blue suiters (Aviation) Air force test pilots, as opposed to civilian or "white suiters."

bogey (Aviation) Unknown intruder, may be a **bandit** or a **friendly**.

bounceback (Medical) A patient who gets better, unexpectedly.

bronk (Medical) Bronchoscopy.

call out (Publishing) Sidebar, special material written in a box adjacent to a main article.

catch a wire (Aviation) Carrier term. When an incoming plane hooks the arresting cable that runs across the deck of a carrier in order to stop.

catching flies (Entertainment) Actor pantomiming in the background while other actors are performing. Like Chevy Chase making faces while Jane Curtin read the news on *Saturday Night Live*.

cathed (Medical) Catheterization.

CAVU (Aviation) Ceiling and visibility unlimited.

chicken (Aviation) Friendly plane.

cold shot (Aviation) Carrier term. When a plane is revving up and the restraining cable breaks, sending the plane off the front of the ship.

cyberpunk (Entertainment) Set design with a glossy

	facade as well as all the nasty wiring that makes it all work. As in *Blade Runner.*
dailies	(Entertainment) The first rough print after a day's filming.
dakota	(Entertainment) Lines spoken before singing a song.
dangle the dunlops	(Aviation) Lower the landing gear.
day for night	(Entertainment) Use of filters to do a night sequence during daylight hours.
dead fish	(Baseball) When the ball comes to a sudden stop.
dead matter	(Publishing) The proofs after a book is printed.
dead stick	(Aviation) To fly with no engine power.
deadly embrace	(Computing) Two programs that are stuck because each is waiting for the other to act first.
deaf smack	(Military) Defense Special Missile and Aeronautics Center.
defcon	(Military) Defensive Condition. 5 is normal; 2 is called "double take"; 1 is full alert.
demote maximally	(Espionage) To eliminate an enemy.
dequeue	(Business) Go out of business; taken from computing term for removing a job from the processing queue.
DNR	(Medical) Do not resuscitate.
dumbo	(Aviation) A multi-engine sea plane that rescues airmen who have splashed.
duster	(Baseball) Ball purposely pitched at batter's head to shake him up.
dutch lead	(Publishing) A lead that is all fantasy, used to draw reader into main story.
dutch roll	(Aviation) Wobbling of plane due to wind like a Dutch sailor's gait.
ELINT	(Espionage) Electronic intelligence, gathered by means of spy satellites.

ELSUR (Espionage) Electronic surveilance, including hidden microphones, wiretaps, radio interceptions.

exquisite corpse (Art) A surrealistic exercise. A drawing created by three people in which each person does not see the work of the others. Usually done with a paper folded in thirds, with hash marks to indicate where to continue the drawing.

eyes only (Espionage) Written at top of report, means take no notes, just read.

FLK (Medical) Funny looking kid. A child with nothing particularly wrong.

fly-by-wire (Aviation) Computer assisted flight. Some planes are very unstable and computers are needed to keep them within their "stability envelope."

flying wing (Aviation) Flying in a tight formation.

foley artist (Entertainment) The sound specialist who supplies the sounds for a film, such as a door slamming, a bottle breaking, etc.

free swinger (Baseball) A batter who swings at anything, regardless of the coach's instructions.

friendly (Aviation) A plane that's on your side.

FSI (Advertising) Free Standing Insert. The coupons and special ads that are dropped into newspapers.

fungo (Baseball) Lazy fly ball.

fumigate (Espionage) See **sweep**.

George Spelvin (Entertainment) Pseudonym that appears in the film credits when someone either doesn't want the credit because he dislikes the film, or can't take the credit because he's been blacklisted.

glockem (Military) ALCM, air-launched cruise missile.

go down on the deck (Aviation) To land, whether on a carrier or even on dry land.

graceful degradation (Military) Designing your defenses so that they last longer than your enemy's during a nuclear war. (Computer) Computer design objective that the computer will not crash if software fails to execute a function properly.

grape (Business) Potential customer ready to be squeezed.

grapes (Aviation) Aircraft refuelers who wear purple jackets.

grasseater (Police) Corrupt cop who accepts bribes but doesn't solicit them. See **meateater**.

green light (Baseball) Go ahead signal from running coach.

hangar queens (Aviation) Complicated new planes that spend a lot of time in the hangar while engineers work on them.

heat (Entertainment) A performer's box-office power. (Baseball) A pitcher's speed.

hit (Medical) A patient assigned to a resident.

hitting the bricks (Business) A strike.

honcho (Business) (noun) The boss; (verb) to closely supervise a project.

honey shot (Entertainment) Brief shot of a pretty girl at a sporting event.

IFR (Aviation) Instrument flight rules.

L-pill (Espionage) The infamous cyanide capsule (or any lethel variation) to be taken before being captured.

logline (Aviation) A brief plot description of a movie, given with the hope of selling a project or a script.

LSO (Aviation) Landing Signal Officer. Guides aircraft to land on carriers.

marine mouth (Police) Negotiator with a bullhorn.

meatball (Aviation) A large red disk that a pilot sees when he is properly aligned to land on a carrier.

meateater (Police) Cop who solicits bribes. See **grasseater**.

MFC (Medical) Measure for coffin.

on top (Aviation) Above the clouds.

paint the corner (Baseball) A pitch that barely gets in the strike zone, one that just ticks the corner of the plate.

PERRLA (Medical) Pupils equal, round, reactive to light and accommodation.

prep (Medical) Make ready for surgery.

price leader (Advertising) The brand within a category with the lowest price.

pup rounds (Medical) Pick up the pieces. Finding out the status of your patients from staff from the previous shift.

quote (Entertainment) The amount of money an actor can get. "No quote" is when a star appears in a low-budget film and gets paid less than his or her normal quote.

rabbit (Baseball) A lively ball. (Track and field) The pacesetter in a long-distance race.

rainmaker (Business) Person who brings in big accounts for a firm. (Baseball) A high, arching fly ball.

rat (Aviation) Enemy plane.

ratchet up (Business) To set a higher standard; to move the quality bar up a notch.

reach (Advertising) The percentage of the targeted audience that is exposed to a message in a certain period.

rear admiral (Medical) A proctologist.

red dog (Football) Defensive linemen charging quarterback.

red pipe (Medical) An artery.

ride time (Advertising) The times of day when the most commuters are listening to the radio.

salesman (Espionage) Agent, whether a spook, a mole, or a double-agent.

scoop (Medical) A mastectomy.

scrap (Art) Reference material for artwork.

scumple (Entertainment) To age a movie set by making the props dirty and broken.

scut work (Medical) Dirty work, usually given to an orderly.

sea lawyer (Maritime) Shark.

shadow gazer (Medical) A radiologist.

shirley (Entertainment) Picture of a model.

shoe (Espionage) Fake passport.

shotgun (Football) Defensive lineup.

six sheet (Entertainment) To lie. The word refers to the LARGE movie posters.

skull cracker (Construction) The big ball that is swung into a building to knock it down.

skunk works (Business) Small team of specialists working on projects who are left alone like the white-striped critter. (Coined by Lockheed engineers in the '40s.)

sky hook (Basketball) The long arching shot of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. (Mountaineering) A hook fastened to a mountain, to which other hooks are fastened.

slap shot (Hockey) To hit the puck with a full windup swing.

sleeping policeman Bump in the road to make you drive slower.

slickum (Military) SLCM, sea-launched cruise missile.

slumber room (Undertaking) Room where the corpse is prepared for funeral.

soapbox derby syndrome (Medical) Patient is going downhill fast.

soldier (Construction) The pillar that holds up a wall at a construction site.

SOOB (Medical) Patient is sitting out of bed.

spearing (Hockey) Illegal use of hockey stick. (Business) When a car salesman traces your license plate.

spiking (Football) Throwing ball down after touch-

	down. (Volleyball) Hit ball hard and low over net. (Science) Enrich a nuclear reactor with an isotope.
spinach	(Design) Excessive ornamentation.
spud locker	(Aviation) The back of the ship where the potatoes are kept; what pilots crash into if they misjudge the landing.
spudding	(Oil) To start drilling a well.
squib	(Publishing) Brief news item. A filler.
step on the laughs	(Entertainment) When a comedian's timing is off and tells jokes too quickly.
stick and rudder man	(Aviation) Natural flyer like Chuck Yeager.
stooper	(Gambling) Someone who looks for winning tickets thrown away by mistake at a racetrack.
stroke out	(Medical) A stroke, or CVA (cerebro-vascular accident).
studhorse type	(Publishing) Large, bold headline.
swash	(Advertising) Broad, bold stroke of color.
sweep	(Espionage) Search a room for bugs; also known as **fumigating**.
sweet spot	(Golf) The most resilient part of a golfball.
swing-by	(Aviation) Voyager-type mission in which spacecraft uses the gravity of a planet to change its flight path and go further into space.
symbiotic marketing	(Business) Two firms marketing a product together.
tabasco sauce	(Oil) Acid used to break down limestone when drilling.
TACAMO	(Military) Take Charge and Move Out. A worldwide network of communications stations and radar carrying planes.
tachy	(Medical) Tachycardia, abnormally fast heart rate.

tag line (Entertainment) The short slogan on movie posters. For example, the tag line for *Alien* was "In space, no one can hear you scream."

tail chase (Aviation) One plane flying in back of another.

tail end charlie (Aviation) A dogfighting term for the last in a line of fighter planes, which usually gets hit first.

tern (Medical) An intern.

the Es (Medical) The things that bring on angina: exertion, emotion, eating, extreme elements such as cold, and entercourse. (Doctors can't spell.)

Titanic clause (Law) In a will, the section that addresses the possibility of both the willmaker and the spouse dying together: what actually happened to a number of people on the *SS Titanic*.

tone and rack (Entertainment) Recording of random background noise to provide a realistic atmosphere for a scene.

top spin (Entertainment) Generating publicity for an actor. See **heat**.

TPR (Medical) The vital signs: temperature, pulse, and respiration.

truck driver (Aviation) The pilot of a multi-engine plane.

TTAd (Medical) Transtracheal aspiration.

USP (Advertising) Unique Selling Proposition. The feature that sets one product apart from the rest.

V/STOL (Military) Vertical/Short Takeoff and Landing.

VFR (Aviation) Visual flight rules.

waxed his fanny (Aviation) In a dogfight, when one plane comes up behind another and blows it away.

wishbone (Football) An offensive formation with the half-backs behind and to the side of the quarterback.

wobbleyscope (Film) Hand-held movie camera. What makes home videos so charming.

woodpusher (Chess) Knowing the moves, but lacking the skill to play well.

wrap (Entertainment) End of a day's filming.

wring it out (Aviation) To push a plane to its limits.

yips (Golf) Spasms, twitches, itches, and shakes that make you blow your putt.

yo-yo stock (Business) Stock that inexplicably goes from high to low and back again.

zen lock (Entertainment) Brilliant ad libbing. Robin Williams says "It's like Shirley MacLaine Meets Stanislavsky. You're best when you're not in charge. The ego blocks the muse." See **holism** in Science Glossary.

zero delta (Medical) No change.

zulu time (Military) Greenwich mean time. GMT. Greenwich is on zero degrees longitude (0°).

INDEX

A

A Day at the Races, 128
aa, 181
AAs, 181
Abbreviations, 124–134
ABD, 181
abozzo, 181
AC, 181
academy leader, 181
acid rain, 150
accelerator, 164
accuracy, 159
ace, 181
adaptability, 100
additional usability enhancements, 100
adhocracy, 69
ADR, 174
Ags, 7
AIFF, 101
Alfa Bravo, 181
algorithms, 89, 164
alligator spread, 142, 174
AMEX, 174
analog, 164
android, 150
Angels, 181
Annie Oakley, 181
annuity, 174
anthropic principle, 150
anti-g suits, 181
antimatter, 150
antioxidant, 159
applications, 89, 164
arbitrageur, 174
archetype, 150
ARM, 33
array, 164
arrows, 182
artificial intelligence, 150
ASCII, 164
asset-stripping, 174
asynchronous, 164
asymmetrical joke relationship, 182
ATM, 174
Auden, W.H., 70
augers in, 182
Avianca Flight 52, 77
AWACS, 25

B

backend, 31
bandit, 182
Barber, Red, 69
batch, 164
baud rate, 99
Beach Boys, 61
bears, 174
Bell's theorem, 150
bells and whistles, 89, 164
Beneath the Planet of the Apes, 44
BHA, 159
BHT, 159
Big Bang Theory, 150
binary, 164
binary system, 151
biospherics, 151
bit, 10, 28, 98, 164
bit map, 10
black hole, 53, 151
blade, 182
blow jobs, 182
blue pipe, 182
blue suiters, 182
board, 164
bogey, 182
bonds, 174

book-to-bill ratio, 174
boot, 88, 94, 164
bootin', 22
bounceback, 182
bps, 99
bronching, 25
bronk, 182
buckyfullerine, 30
buffer, 88, 164
bug, 10, 165
bugs, 88
bull, 174
bundle, 29
bus, 165
buzzwords, 111–114
byte, 98, 165

C

call out, 57, 182
calls, 174
card, 165
catastrophism, 151
catch a wire, 182
catching flies, 182
cathed, 182
CATs, 100, 174
CAVU, 182
CD, 174
CD-ROM, 165
Cenozoic Epochs, 29
chaology, 151
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 3
chicken, 182
chip, 165
chronobiology, 151
chunking, 69
circulation:
  events, 40
  mass communications, 43
  trends, 40
Clancy, Tom, 80, 124
clone, 53, 151
clones, 89, 165
cloning, 44
coaxial cable, 159
COLAs, 139, 174
cold shot, 182
collective unconscious, 151
commodity, 174
common stock, 175
compatibility, 100
computers, measurements, 98–99
Conrad, Joseph, 54, 86
consumer words, 144
contrast, 159
coupon, 175
CPR, 130
cps, 99
CPU, 88, 165
crash, 88, 166
creating jargon:
  adding, 28
  borrowing, 29
  cannibalizing, 28
  daisy chaining, 31
  hybridization, 29
  immortalizing, 30
  nounizing, 31
  recycling, 29
  transforming, 30
  truncating, 31
  verbizing, 31
critical mass, 151
critters, 22
crunch, 89, 166
cryogenics, 44, 152
cybernation, 152
cybernetics, 152
cyberpunk, 182
cyborg, 28, 152

D

DAC, 159
dailies, 183
dakota, 183
damping, 159
dangle the dunlops, 183
dark matter, 152
DAT, 159
data, 166
database, 166
day for night, 183
dead fish, 183
dead matter, 183
dead room, 159
dead stick, 183
deadly embrace, 183
deaf smack, 183
debug, 88, 166
defcon, 183
Delphi technique, 152
demons, 166
demote maximally, 183
dequeue, 183
desktop publishing, 166
Die Hard, 45
digital, 166
directory, 166
disable, 88, 167
discount, 175
disk drive, 166
diskette, 166
distribution, 89, 166
dividend, 175
DNA, 130, 152
DNR, 183
doctors, 73
Dolby, 159
double helix, 152
Dow Jones Averages, 141, 175
down, 11
down quark, 11
down turn, 11
down-and-out, 11
down-link, 11
down-load, 11
down-size, 11
downer, 11
download/upload, 167
downscale, 11
downside, 11
downtime, 89, 167
Dr. Strangelove, 43
drift, 159
dub, 159
dumbo, 183
dump, 89, 167
duster, 183
dutch lead, 183
dutch roll, 183
dymaxion, 67
dynamic range, 159

E

EBCDIC, 167
EFTS, 175
Ehrlichman, John, 64
electronic viewfinder, 159
elegant, 99
ELINT, 183
Ellen Goodman, 72
ELSUR, 184
emergency, 77
emulsifier, 160
end-user, 89, 167
enhancement, 89, 167
entropy, 152
EPSF, 101
ESOP, 175
excimer, 28

exobiology, 42, 153
exposure control, 160
exquisite corpse, 184
Exxon Valdez, 121
eyes only, 184

F

Fannie Mae, 175
FDIC, 175
femtosecond, 99
Feynman, Richard, 6, 75, 108, 129
Fibonacci sequence, 153
file, 167
fission, 153
Fitzwater, Marlin, 118
fixed point notation, 167
fixes, 88, 167
FKEY, 167
flavor enhancer, 160
flexibility, 100
FLK, 184
floating point notation, 167
flops, 99
flowchart, 168
flutter, 160
fly-by-wire, 184
flying head, 160
flying wing, 184
foley artist, 184
font, 168
format, 168
fragments, 89, 168
free swinger, 184
frequency response, 160
friendly, 184
FSI, 184
Fuller, R. Buckminster, 67
fullerine, 30
fumigate, 184
functionality, 100
fungo, 184
fusion, 153
futures contracts, 175
fuzzy logic, 168

G

game theory, 153
garbage, 168
Gedanken experiment, 153
generality, 100
George Spelvin, 184
Ghostbusters, 5, 42, 45
gigabyte, 99
ginks, 22
Ginnie Mae, 175
glitches, 88, 168
glockem, 184
go down on the deck, 184
go to the front, 22
golden parachute, 175
Gödel's Theorem, 153
GPARM, 33
GPM, 33
graceful, degradation, 185
gracefully, 99
grand unified theory, 154
granularity, 100
grape, 22, 185
grapes, 185
grasseater, 185
greenhouse effect, 154
greenlight, 185
greenmail, 175
gronk, 27

H

hacker, 168
Haig, General Alexander, 66
halo effect, 175
handshaking, 168

hangar queens, 185
hard disk, 168
Havel, Vaclav, 123
Hawthorne effect, 154
HD, 33
headroom extension, 160
heat, 185
Heisenberg uncertainty
  principle, 154
hit, 22, 185
hitting the bricks, 185
holism, 154
holography, 154
homo erectus, 154
honcho, 185
honey shot, 185
Hopper, Grace, 100
horrendeoma, 22
hostile takeover, 176
howgozit, 22
howlback, 160
Hubble's law, 155
hugger-mugger, 22
Hunt for Red October, The, 46
hunting, 160
HyperCard, 168
hypersonic, 155

I

Icon, 168
IFR, 185
impedance, 160
incompatible, 89, 169
Index of leading economic
  indicators, 176
indexing, 160
infrared triangulation, 160
insider trading, 176
instabilities, 169
insulate, 29
interactive, 100, 169
interconnectivity, 100
interface, 7, 10, 62, 169
interoperability, 100
interrupt, 31
IPM, 8
IPO, 176
IRA, 33, 130
IRR, 43
ISO, 176
ITC, 176

J

jargon, 3, 7
  circulating, 38–55
  creating, 27–32
  definition, 3, 9
  etiquette, 70–74
  types of, 21–26
jargon, types of:
  abbreviations, 25
  buzzwords, 24
  doublespeak, 25
  ex-jargon, 25
  occupational, slang, 21
    also 181–190
  technical metaphors, 24
  technical terminology, 23
Jargonauts, 67–69
Jargoneers, 56–60
Jargonizers, 60–63
Jargoons, 63–67
jitters, 169
Joyce, James, 87
junk bonds, 140, 176

K

Kahn, Herman, 64
kilobyte, 98
kludge, 169
kludged, 89
kludgey, 99

L

L-pill, 185
lambs, 141
LBOs, 176
LDEF, 10
learning curve, 89, 169
liar's poker, 176
LIDAR, 126
light year, 155
lightfoot, 99
limited, partnership, 176
linear expandability, 100
liquidity, 176
local node, 169
logged, 169
logged off, 89
logline, 185
lollipop, 10, 176
loop, 29, 88, 169
loudness, 160
LSO, 185
lux, 160

M

Mach, 30
Macintosh, 100
MacLuhan, Marshall, 69
macro, 89, 169
MADD, 130
Mailer, Norman, 62, 70
mainframe, 170
mainframes, 89, 95
Maltese Falcon, The, 116
margin trading, 177
marine mouth, 185
MASH, 160
Master Limited Partnership, 177
Maxwell's demon, 155
McPhee, John, 29, 107
meatball, 185
meateater, 185
megabyte, 99
megahertz, 99
MFC, 186
microcomputer, 170
microprocessor, 170
microsecond, 99
MIDI, 101
migrate, 29
millisecond, 99
minicomputer, 170
mips, 99
MIRV, 130
modem, 28
Molloy, John, 74
money market funds, 177
monkey points, 142
moonlighter, 10
MRE, 33
MRI, 8
MSG, 130, 160
MTBF, 170
MTS, 161
multi-platform solution, 89, 170
multi-vendor binary compatibility, 100
multitasking, 170
municipal bonds, 177
mute, 161
mutual funds, 177

N

N.P.O., 5
naked options, 177
nanosecond, 47, 99
NASA, 129
near-money, 177
networks, 170
nibble, 98
nichemanship, 69
Nifty Fifties, 177

no-load funds, 177
node, 89
non-log, 78
North, Lt. Col. Oliver, 65, 77, 78, 116
notes, 22
nova, 155
NOW account, 177
NYSE, 177

O

Occam's razor, 155
OEM, 89, 170
on top, 186
on-screen programming, 161
OOP, 170
opcodes, 88, 170
options, 177
Orwell, George, 85
OTC, 177
OTC drug, 161
out of the loop, 50
oversampling, 161
Oxford English Dictionary, 3

P

p.r.n., 5
PAH, 8
paint the corner, 186
PALs, 177
Papez-MacLean theory, 155
par, 178
paradigm, 155
parallel, 171
parameter, 50
parity, 171
pasadena, 23
patch, 89, 171
PCV, 10
peace dividend, 139
Pei, Mario, 88
penny stock, 178
perio, 25
peripherals, 89, 171
PERRLA, 186
Peters, Thomas J., 69
PICK, 22
picosecond, 99
PIGs, 178
Pings, 7
pipers, 22
pixel, 28, 171
PMS, 33, 130
poison pill, 178
Poisson distribution, 155
POS terminal, 178
POW, 22
power words, 135
PRAM, 171
pre-released, 88, 171
preamp/amplifier, 161
preferred stock, 178
prep, 186
price leader, 186
productivity, 100
PROFS, 78
protocol, 89, 171
pseudo-stereo, 161
pup rounds, 186
put, 178
PVC, 130
Pynchon, Thomas, 87

Q

quantum, 50, 52
quantum mechanics, 156
quarks, 156
quasar, 53
query, 88, 171
queue, 89, 171
quote, 186
QWERTY phenomenon, 156

R

rabbit, 186
raider, 178
rainmaker, 186
RAM, 11, 171
Ransom of Black Stealth, The, 46
rat, 186
ratchet up, 186
reach, 186
Read, Allen Walker, 27, 50
real time, 47
REAP, 22
rear admiral, 186
rebound effect, 161
recode, 89
red dog, 186
red giant, 156
red pipe, 186
red shift, 157
Reed, John, 135
reeker, 22
REITs, 178
release, 172
remission, 161
remote control, 161
replacement, 121
replicant, 157
RFP, 128
rich, 100
ride time, 186
River Jargon, 38
robust, 100
rolling break even, 142
ROE, 43
ROM, 172
rose garden, 22
routine, 172

S

S&L, 178
S&P, 179
S/N ratio, 161
salesman, 186
SANE, 101
Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, 157
satisfiability, 100
Schrödinger's cat, 157
scoop, 186
Scowcroft, Brent, 136
scrap, 186
SCSI, 172
scumple, 187
scut work, 187
sea lawyer, 187
seamless interconnectivity, 100
Searle's Chinese Room, 157
selling short, 179
semantic fluidity, 50
SEP, 33
serial, 172
SETI, 157
SFX, 161
shadow gazer, 187
shirley, 21, 187
shoe, 187
shotgun, 187
shotgun remedy, 161
silicon, 172
SIMM, 101
six sheet, 187
skull cracker, 187
skunk works, 187
sky hook, 187
slap shot, 187
Sleeper, 44
sleeping policeman, 187
slickum, 187
slumber room, 187
soapbox derby syndrome, 187
SOB, 126
soft money, 179
software, 172
soldier, 187

SOOB, 187
sort, 89, 172
space-time, 157
spearing, 187
Spies Like Us, 45
SPF, 145, 161
spikes, 89, 172
spiking, 187
spinach, 188
spread, 179
spreadsheets, 89, 172
spud locker, 188
spudding, 188
squib, 188
SR-71, 127
SSI, 139
stability, 100
Steadicam, 162
step on the laughs, 188
stick and rudder man, 188
stooper, 188
strangle the parrot, 21
stringers, 22
strip, 179
stroke, 188
studhorse type, 188
sucker list, 22
super-conductivity, 157
supersymmetry, 158
supergravity, 158
superheated, 50
supernova, 158
supersonic, 158
superstrings, 158
supply sider, 139, 179
swash, 188
sweep, 188
sweet spot, 188
swing-by, 188
SYLK, 172
symbiosis, 158
symbiotic marketing, 188
synchronicity, 158
synchronous, 172
syndrome, 162
synergy, 67
systemic, 162

T

T-Bills, 179
tabasco sauce, 188
TACAMO, 188
tachy, 188
tag line, 189
tail chase, 189
tail-end charlie, 189
takeover artist, 179
tax bracket creep, 139
TEFRA, 139
tenbaggers, 141
tender offer, 179
terabyte, 99
terminal emulation, 172
tern, 189
the Es, 189
therapeutic equivalent, 162
thickening agents, 162
Thomas, Lewis, 27
TIFF, 101
TIGER, 125
TIGRs, 179
time-shifting, 162
tin can, 22
Titanic clause, 189
TOEs, 158
tone and rack, 189
tone-control bypass, 162
top spin, 189
TPA, 73
TPR, 189
troche, 162
Trojan Horse, 30
trombosed, 162

truck driver, 189
TSO/VTAM, 96
TTAd, 189
tuner, 162
Turing machine, 158
Twain, Mark, 86
tweak, 21, 89, 173
tweeter, 162
Type I tape, 162
Type II tape, 162
Type III tape, 162
Type IV tape, 162
Type-As, 72
Type-Bs, 72

U

Ultraviolet light, 130, 162
upgrades, 54, 89, 173
USP, 189

V

V/STOL, 189
value, 10, 29
vapor, 89, 173
variable, 173
venture capital, 180
versions, 89
VFR, 189
virtual, 173
virus, 89, 100, 173
VOX, 163
vulture funds, 180

W

War Games, 45
Waterman, Robert H., 69
waxed his fanny, 189
wedged, 89
Weinberger, Caspar, 122
white balance, 163
white dwarf, 158
white fade, 163
white knight, 180
wiggle room, 21
wishbone, 189
wobbleyscope, 190
Wolfe, Tom, 55
woodpusher, 190
woofer, 163
Working Girl, 44
worm, 100
wow, 163
wrap, 190
wring it out, 190

Y

Yeager, Chuck, 30, 72
yips, 190
yo-yo stock, 190

Z

zap, 88
zen lock, 190
zero coupon bonds, 180
zero delta, 190
zero-sum game, 180
zoom ratio, 163
zulu time, 190

F

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