

## 'Body' Language

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**A** living language must constantly replenish its word stock to meet the growing demands of expression and communication. Some words and idioms date quickly and drop out of use. Fresh ones are invented as the need arises— new combinations of words, acronyms, anagrams etc. Then there are borrowings from other languages. Further, existing words might be given a metaphoric extension of meaning: for instance, 'mouse' in computer terminology. The 'bulls' and 'bears' of the stock market and the 'fat cats' of the corporate world are probably more real and present than their prototypes in the wild and they get indelibly etched in the imagination of the urban dweller.

As these examples show, metaphoric transference of meaning is a particularly useful device in enhancing the expressive range of a language. It works on the principle of analogy: identifying one thing with another on the basis of perceived similarities. So conceived, metaphors help extend our awareness of the relationships between diverse objects, situations and events. Imaginative constructions like poems and plays might be considered as extended metaphors. So might speculative constructions of the

classifying intellect.

Metaphors not only help extend our awareness; they give body to abstract concepts providing us with a sensory apprehension of reality and add an imaginative dimension to our cerebral perceptions. Consider expressions like 'the heart of the matter', 'the arm of the law', 'the head of the institution'. These same examples show one fertile source of metaphor among many: the human body that is so much involved with the creation and development of language.

Here are more examples: we might as well start with

- ◆ head start - an initial advantage over others; boost.  
A good degree gives you a head start in getting a job.
- ◆ get sth. into your thick skull - to understand sth. with difficulty  
Hasn't he got the truth into his thick skull yet ?
- ◆ brainchild - clever and original idea or invention  
This project is the brainchild of our Chairman.
- ◆ cerebral - intellectual; difficult to understand  
He makes cerebral films that deal with current social issues.
- ◆ bundle of nerves - to be extremely worried  
My cousin was a bundle of nerves on his wedding day.

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### Is It a Printing Mistake?

A 'printer's devil' is not a printing mistake. It is the messenger boy of a printer who used to take the printed sheets from the press which made him black with the ink.

- ◆ tear your hair out - to be very anxious or angry  
She is tearing her hair out over the conclusion of her thesis.
- ◆ browbeat - to intimidate; to bully sb with harsh looks  
The unions browbeat the CEO into signing the document.
- ◆ face the music - to face unpleasant consequences  
If you take French leave, you will have to face the music.
- ◆ tongue-in-cheek - insincere; with ironic intention  
His film is a tongue-in-cheek critique of the world of advertising.
- ◆ to jawbone - to pressurize sb; to persuade  
The Minister jawboned the industrialists into a price freeze.
- ◆ beard the lion in his den - to face sb. boldly  
She bearded the boss in his den demanding early reinstatement.
- ◆ take it on the chin - to face adversity with courage  
She took the reversion on the chin and got on with her work.
- ◆ have an eye for something - capable of perceiving sth.  
Sabu has an eye for detail.
- ◆ be all eyes and ears - to give careful attention  
We were all eyes and ears for his adventure story.
- ◆ nosedive - sudden fall in value; rapid

- decline  
There was panic when the dollar took a nosedive.
- ◆ by word of mouth - orally, not in writing  
The Minister gave all orders by word of mouth as a precaution.
- ◆ pay lip service to - insincere praise or support  
The party is only paying lip service to women's rights.
- ◆ loosen sb's tongue - to make someone talk a lot  
Two pints of whisky loosened his tongue.
- ◆ teething troubles - problems in the early stage of sth.  
We had a few teething troubles at the start of the project
- ◆ palatable - acceptable to the mind  
I don't think the committee will find these changes palatable.
- ◆ be at each other's throats - to argue angrily  
The couple are always at each other's throats.
- ◆ neck and neck - to have an equal chance of winning as another  
They were neck and neck until the last leg of the race.
- ◆ a shoulder to cry on - sb. who gives you emotional support  
"Cry on my shoulder," she said, consolingly.
- ◆ go out on a limb - to be in a dangerous situation; isolated

### Wolf Children

Linguistic experts believe that children left in the wild or otherwise deprived of human contact do not learn how to speak spontaneously. The case of some 50 'wolf children' of India is often quoted as an example.

He is going out on a limb in flaying the party higher-ups.

◆ be up in arms - to be very angry  
The employees are up in arms about the pay revision.

◆ muscle in - to use force to get control of sth.

Two gangs tried to muscle in on our estate last month.

◆ give sb. the elbow - to sack sb. from their job

The Management gave him the elbow due to his rudeness

◆ hands down - easily; effortlessly  
India would win hands down if our players trained regularly.

◆ spend hand over fist - to spend money lavishly  
Despite heavy loans, he spends hand over fist.

◆ grease/oil someone's palm - to bribe someone  
Before signing the contract, we had to grease the M.D.'s palm.

◆ thumb through - to turn through the pages of sth.  
I thumbed through the catalogue in vain.

◆ knuckle down - to start working or studying hard  
I can't knuckle down to my studies due to several distractions.

◆ at one's finger tips - close at hand; completely  
She had all the details of the project at her finger tips.

◆ nail-biting - tensed up due to an uncertain outcome  
We spent nail-biting hours awaiting the election results.

◆ not to have a leg to stand on - unable to prove sth.  
In the absence of an eye-witness, I didn't have a leg to stand on.

◆ smite hip and thigh - to attack unmercifully  
The boxers were smiting each other hip and thigh.

◆ bring someone to his knees - to completely defeat sb.  
The trade unions' strike brought the economy to its knees.

◆ ankle-deep - deeply involved or entangled  
The company is ankle-deep in financial troubles

◆ get off on the right foot - to make a good beginning  
The speaker got off on the right foot with a witty remark.

◆ hard on sb.'s heels - to follow someone closely  
The film star walked cheerfully with the fans hard on his heels.

◆ toe the line - to conform  
MPs who refused to toe the party line were reprimanded.

◆ backbiting - to speak ill of sb. in their absence  
A lot of backbiting is going on in our office.

◆ a skeleton in the cupboard / closet - a

### Magazines Still Going Strong

*The Harper's Magazine*, which first appeared in 1850 and *The Atlantic Monthly*, launched in 1857, are still published today. The former serialized stories and records from Dickens and Thackeray and the latter carried short stories by Mark Twain and Bret Harte.

shameful secret

Many rich families have one or two skeletons in the cupboard

send shivers down one's spine - frighten

The possibility of being convicted sent shivers down her spine

backbone - the most important part of sth.

Agriculture forms the backbone of the country's economy.

have a bone to pick with sb - to have a cause for dispute

have got a bone to pick with my roommate for snoring loudly

get sth off one's chest - to confess a worrying secret

I felt highly relieved when I got the truth off my chest.

keep abreast of - keep pace with; side by side

He always keeps abreast of current scientific developments.

in the bosom - loving care and protection  
He intends to spend Christmas in the bosom of her family

to rib - to laugh at in a friendly way  
The cousin ribbed him about his new girlfriend.

gazing at your navel - engaging in too much self-analysis  
Don't while away the afternoon gazing at your navel.

gird (up) one's loins - to prepare for energetic action

The champion girded (up) his loins to

face the challenger.

◆ seminal - important and influential  
He played a seminal role in the formation of the party

◆ embryonic - starting to develop; immature  
The metro rail project is still at an embryonic stage.

◆ visceral - emotional, instinctive  
The film fails to convey the visceral excitement of the novel.

◆ not have the stomach for sth - not feel brave enough  
He didn't have the stomach for another encounter.

◆ vein - a temporary state of mind; mood  
A rich vein of humour pervades his novels.

◆ artery - a main road or railway line  
The main arteries leading to Delhi are all blocked.

◆ bloodletting - reducing the number of employees  
The company is contemplating further bloodletting.

◆ heartbeat - a moment; a very brief period of time  
The Oval Office is just a heartbeat away from the Vice Presidency.

◆ at the top of one's lungs - as loudly as possible  
The naughty child cried at the top of his lungs.

◆ liverish - irritable, melancholy

### Linear A and Linear B

Two Minoan scripts from Crete dating from 2000 B.C. are believed to be the first scripts written in regular lines. They are known as Linear A and Linear B.

It is difficult to get on with people of a liverish disposition.

◆ bilious - extremely unpleasant  
His new shirt is a bilious shade of red.

◆ vent your spleen on - get angry with someone

The meeting was an occasion for us to vent our spleen on the MD.

◆ kidney - temperament, sort  
He is quite at ease with men of his own kidney

◆ gut feeling - a mysterious, intuitive feeling  
I have a gut feeling that this affair will not last.

◆ intestinal fortitude - bravery and determination  
The oldman's challenge is a tribute to his intestinal fortitude.

◆ flesh sth. out - to add more details to sth

### Mickey Mouse's Fan Mail

Mickey Mouse, one of the famous creations of U.S. filmmaker Walt Disney, was reported to have received 800,000 letters in 1933 - an average of 66,000 a month. The cheerful rodent starred in the first animated film with sound, *Steamboat Willie* in 1928.

The report needs to be fleshed out with some more facts.

◆ go against the grain - not in one's nature

It goes against the grain for me to admit a mistake.

◆ by the skin of one's teeth - very narrowly

The thief escaped by the skin of his teeth.

◆ body and soul - completely  
He threw himself body and soul into the project.