

Media release

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“Demising” judged worst word of 2013

The Plain English Foundation has voted **demising** the worst word of 2013.

Bankers HSBC abused this word when announcing that “the bank will be **demising** the roles of 942 relationship managers”. That meant they were losing their jobs.

“At a time of rising unemployment, companies need to handle job losses with honesty and sympathy,” said Foundation Executive Director Dr Neil James. “Yet again, we found a major corporation turning to euphemism to paper over the unpleasant.”

Closely behind **demising** in the doublespeak stakes was **loss of separation**, a conveniently technical term that Qantas used to downplay what might have been a mid-air collision.

Each year, the Plain English Foundation collects dozens of examples of doublespeak, corporate jargon and fancy pants language via television, radio, newspapers, the internet and social media. The Foundation’s staff vote on the shortlist and winner.

“This year’s shortlist also featured the latest corporate jargon,” Dr James said. “It seems we can’t get anywhere these days without **ideating** in a strategic planning workshop, possibly about how our transactional DNA has evolved the **fabrics of personal engagement**.”

“In the year of a federal election, politics was always going to make the list. We farewell serial worst-word contributor Kevin Rudd, who replaced the jargon of “detailed programmatic specificity” with a more hokey “sorry, folks, **gotta zip**”. To be even-handed, the Coalition redefined what it means to keep an election promise: you just retain the **funding envelope**.

At other times, we witnessed unnecessary fancy pants language, such as the film director who didn’t intend to make a **durational work** (a long film) or the car maker having an **all out clearance event** (a sale).

“And while our language is always evolving, the list also features some of the year’s ‘Frankenwords’: new terms that we hope don’t take on. While it may be too late for **twerking**, we hope to bury **footify** and discourage the **-elfie** trend,” Dr James said.

The list rounds out with the verbal slip-up of the year: **suppository of all wisdom**. And the **mixed metaphor** of the year as usual comes to us from the world of sport.

Worst Words of the Year is part of the Foundation’s campaign to improve the quality of public language in Australia by raising awareness of poor language use.

The Plain English Foundation’s full list of 2013’s worst words and phrases follows.

Dr Neil James is available for interview over the Christmas period.

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Worst words 2013: the short list

Doublespeak

Demising (winner of the worst word of the year)

At a time of rising unemployment, corporations need to handle job losses with honesty and sympathy. Yet HSBC decided it was only “demising” some 1,000 workers.

“The roles of commercial financial advisers will be **demised** ... As a consequence the bank will be **demising** the roles of 942 relationship managers.”

Loss of separation

When two Qantas planes came a little too close to each other in the sky, the airline helpfully downplayed what might have been a mid-air collision:

“Indications are that the **loss of separation** occurred when one of the Qantas aircraft received clearance to climb from air traffic control.”

Honourable mention also goes to **ecoeggs**, the rather misleading brand name for a product produced by chooks that are stacked 20,000 animals per hectare.

Buzzwords

Ideating

We used to have ideas. Now we get together in strategic planning workshops and **ideate**. This apparently helped the NSW Office of Preventative Health to develop its *Active Travel to School Program* guide. Or maybe they sniffed too many of the coloured whiteboard markers.

Fabrics of personal engagement

2013 was a rich year for corporate nonsense-speak. But nothing quite captured “phatic brand building chores” like this sentence from a blog on “brand socialization”:

Our transactional business DNA has evolved, our **fabrics of personal engagement** have morphed, and we keep a glowing mobile device at our sides 24 hours a day.

Politics

Gotta zip

Having contributed classics like “detailed programmatic specificity” to the worst examples of public language, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd changed tack in the last election with some daggy dad language: “Sorry folks, **gotta zip**”.

Funding envelope

To keep things politically even-handed, we couldn’t help noticing how you can change a promise but keep it, so long as you retain the same **funding envelope**.

Fancy pants terms

All out clearance event

Have you noticed we no longer use simple words for simple things? “Rain” becomes a **rain event** and a bushfire is now a **bushfire event**. Worst of all, in 2013 Toyota decided to have an **all out clearance event**. We used to call that a “sale”.

A durational work

This year, the arts showed it could match the worst of corporate and political language. While making his film *River of Fundament*, Matthew Barney opined that he wasn’t “planning a **durational work**”. That means he didn’t think it would be a long film.

Verbal slip-up of the year

Suppository of all wisdom

We know it came out at a doorstep in the middle of an exhausting election campaign. But we can never un-hear Tony Abbott explaining:

“No one, however smart, however well-educated, however experienced ... is the **suppository of all wisdom.**”

Frankenwords

Footify

NAB kicked off the year “to **footify** Australia”, which apparently means “to convert every single Australian into an AFL devotee”. They developed a glossary of footy terms, but a dictionary would have been more useful to confirm there’s no such word as **footify**.

-elfie

While “selfie” has become a useful and popular word, surely we can resist the awful spin-offs, like “helfie” (photo of your own hair), “belfie” (photo of your own bottom) and “drelfie” (photo of yourself while drunk). What’s next, a “pelfie”?

Twerking

A blend of twisting and jerking. Made far too prominent by Miley Cyrus. Enough said.

Mixed metaphor of the year

As usual, nothing can top the world of sport when it comes to a mixed metaphor. Here’s an epic from a media story on the use of drugs in sport:

“It’s not enough to just muddy the waters. If you’re going to poke that bear, you better not go to a gunfight carrying a spoon.”

Honourable mention went to a real estate agent discussing the commission for a property:

“There’s room to sharpen the pencil.”