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Oxford Word of the Month – April: temp

adjective: exciting; trendy.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

In 2018, a campaign has been run by Nova FM breakfast show hosts Ryan ‘Fitzy’ Fitzgerald and Michael ‘Wippa’ Wipfli to create a new word, or, rather, a new sense for an existing word. This word is **temp**, abbreviated from *temperature*, and used to refer to things that are exciting, trendy, or ‘cool’. It was coined by Wippa, in an attempt to find an Australian alternative to the (originally) American *cool*.

This is not the first word to be invented: this happens all the time with words that refer to new inventions or technologies, for example, and authors have often made up words that have become part of everyday vocabulary. Examples include *robot*, coined by Czech author Karel Čapek in a 1920 play, *cyberspace*, coined by science fiction writer William Gibson in 1981, and *cultural cringe*, coined by A.A. Phillips in 1950. Politicians often create new terms, sometimes unwittingly; in 2017 US President Donald Trump’s possible mistyping led to the creation of the word *covfefe*, although what it means was left to the imagination of those on social media.

Campaigns to create a new word are slightly different and can vary. In 2012, the Macquarie Dictionary was involved in a campaign to come up with a neologism for the action of snubbing someone in favour of your mobile phone – *phubbing* was the winning suggestion and it has gone on to become a word with some currency, perhaps because it was a term that described an activity that had yet to find a name.

It is trickier to have a slang term enter the broader vocabulary. Many slang terms only gain currency within small groups – for example, within a group undertaking a particular activity (such as surfing or skateboarding), or within particular youth groups. Social media has helped slang gain wider currency to some extent, although why some slang words take off and not others sometimes remains a mystery.

In trying to popularise **temp** the power of radio was harnessed, with Fitzy and Wippa promoting the word on their program and encouraging celebrities such as Chris Hemsworth and Keith Urban to use it. Social media has been another

way of popularising the word:

@fitzyandwippa @nova969 so nova has the best ever cohost @edsheeran this doesn't get better than that guys and that's a fact guys—1 million tickets sold too. Let's tune in via the application if you can't listen direct on FM tonight is going to be #temp. (Nathan Henry @DJ_NATDOG, February 28)

A legal graffiti of the word was made on a wall in Marrickville, and the word has been discussed on several television programs, including Channel Seven's *Sunrise* and Channel Ten's *Studio 10*.

Whether **temp** gains widespread and continuing usage remains to be seen, but its story provides an interesting example of one of the many ways words can find their way into our language.

The Australian National Dictionary Centre will be monitoring **temp** for possible future consideration for inclusion in the *Australian National Dictionary*.

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