

Applied Sociology Thematic Group *For the Australian Sociology Practitioner* **Contact Email for June 2013**

Greetings one and all,

In my last Contact Email I mentioned the book I had discovered, Jeffrey Kacirk's *'The Word Museum: the most remarkable English words ever forgotten'* so I looked to see if I could find a couple of words sociologists could reintroduce and claim as their own. I found two possible candidates. The first **'Trilemma'**, it comes from the late 19th century and it means, of course, *'A choice between three alternatives'*. I am sure we find plenty of use for that. The second **'Faffle'** comes from the north of England and is also from the late 19th century. It was used to describes *'Work that occupies much time and effort, but the results are not satisfactory or commensurate with time and effort put in.'* Again, I think we can find times when we might want use it.

The discovery of this book has prompted me to think about how word use could be of value to sociology. For instance, vocabulary relates to education level, but it also relates to employment areas, and a particular social environment. This is usually called slang which is really an academic way of saying it is not proper English. The Oxford dictionary defines it as *'informal language that is more common in speech than in writing and is typically restricted to a particular context or group.'* Whilst this might be true, knowledge of a particular slang, be it prison, army, politics, the stock exchange, etc., can identify the social milieu a person, has some contact with. It can even go to a much smaller group. I know of an army unit where one person generated, in the course of one conversation, a hyphenated word that was then used right across that group in normal conversation, but to the best of my knowledge it has never been used elsewhere. However, if I heard it today, I would immediately know that person had some connection with that unit. Dictionary writers and grammarians rely on the written word for authentication. Whereas much of the world relies on its patois for its communication. Spoken words are sociological clues.

Getting rid of sociology

For some time now, there have been efforts in the U.S. to marginalise and delegitimise the social sciences. One university in its general education requirements had required students to take one course in the natural science and one in the social science. In a revision of this curriculum, the social science course requirement was eliminate. A few months ago the Republican majority leader in Congress proposed that all federal funding for social science research should be eliminated. In Florida, there is a move to only have as stem courses, the physical sciences, engineering and maths. If you want to do major in any other subject you will have to pay much higher fees. In Australia, with cuts to university funding, I am sure administrators are looking for what or who they can get rid of and because the value of sociology is little appreciate I am sure, sociologists will be looked at very closely. One corollary of this is that if governments, commercial organisations', or the non-profit groups are not looking to employ sociologists; things could get very tight.

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