

My Manifesto: A Plea for Plain Talk
Ben Rapaport (Spring 2019)

Reader, beware! This is not one of my typical stories about antique pipes. It's about our pipe and tobacco lexicon, our argot, lingo, slang, or whatever else you care to call it, whether formal or informal. Do not read it if you do not want to learn about what's happening, of late, in our hobby: the current coining of contemporary conversation and communication. It's all the rage, and I am well aware that in our fast-paced world, it's often said that the only constant is change.

Three notable changes in the world of pipes and tobaccos in the first quarter of this century are (1) the introduction of myriad new brands and blends of tinned pipe tobaccos; (2) the burgeoning participation of artisan pipe makers from many far-off lands; and (3) unfortunately, renewed FDA and FTC oversight and regulation of tobacco. But another noticeable phenomenon is the adoption of new forms of communication. Tobaccopipes.com introduces its online "Glossary Of Tobacco Pipe and Pipe Tobacco Terms" with: "When you dig into pipe smoking, you will quickly be bombarded by a vocabulary that seems like Greek to you. Even though context clues can help a little, there is still a massive gap in what you need to know."

It's also very Greek to me, so I began to ask: What's going on? Am I out of step? Am I much too old, too un-hip to comprehend? Let me clarify. I'm not railing about our standard terminology, i.e., the long-established terms for pipe shapes and finishes, or the traditional terms for finished tobacco, e.g., shag, flake, cube, etc. I'm talking about the recent adoption, acceptance and use of some rather strange words and phrases. There's lots of online discussion about two contemporary smoker afflictions, PAD (Pipe Acquisition Disorder) and TAD (Tobacco Acquisition Disorder), and I sense a new malaise of late that I coin PTSD (Pipe & Tobacco Slang Disorder). I don't know how or exactly when it started, and I don't know who's responsible for introducing so many new buzzwords and buzz-phrases that have gone viral, gained traction, and are now entrenched in our hobby.

But pipe and tobacco slang is not a new phenomenon. From "Slang" (*Cope's Tobacco Plant*, July 1880, 498): "Under the name of Slang are included all those words, or combinations of words, which deviate from regular, recognised, and classical speech.... Into the Nicotian domain slang has entered, influenced neither by very deep reasons nor by very frivolous causes, but more by that genial playfulness, that sympathetic irony." Long ago a yard of clay or a churchwarden was a clay tobacco pipe; in Cockney, curls were called tobacco pipes; tobacco was also known as snout, witching weed, and cabbage; pigtail was a twist of chewing tobacco; and cigarettes were coffin nails and fags. (See Katherine T. Kell, "Folk Names for Tobacco," *Journal of American Folklore*, October–December, 1966, for many other expressions for snuff, chewing tobacco, and smoking.) And to add to the conversation chaos is the *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang* (2d ed., 2008), tobacco is also known as old rope, snout and weed.

As Matthew Hilton wrote “This [men and women speaking about their smoking habits] in turn revealed both the extent to which the idealised smoking culture of the nineteenth century influenced the language of smoking in the twentieth century, and the multitude of individual, social and communal factors involved in each smoker’s description of his or her pleasure.... It saw how men toyed with the meanings of the cigarette to transform it from its effete, dandified origins into an object which lay at the centre of an often brutal, aggressive and rigorously masculine ritualised language; and how, in the differences articulated between the pipe and the cigarette, these associations could be further subverted as older men regarded the briar pipe as the true symbol of solid, sober, reliable and steady British masculinity” (*Smoking in British Popular Culture, 1800-2000*, 117).

Today’s language is markedly different. Bob Dylan’s anthem is spot-on, “The Times They Are A-Changin’” but must our pipe and tobacco vocabulary change with it? As I see it, most of this new jargon is pretentious, contrived, and euphemistic. It may seem like harsh criticism, but this new world of words is analogous to what the once U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew said in late 1969: “A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.” I am not waging a battle as in official Washington nowadays—replacing, for example, substance abuse disorder with substance abuse issue, or overseas contingency operations for the global war on terror, or the CDC swapping out fetus for young one—but I cannot abide by this new-age linguistic minefield, an attempt to rebrand, wholesale, our customary terms and phrases or the need to invent new ones. I am probably swimming against the tide, and some will say that my squabble is like Shakespeare’s comedy, “Much Ado About Nothing.” Read on before you decide if this is a just a petty grievance, that I have misplaced nostalgia for the past, that I’m judgmental, persnickety, pedantic, sanctimonious...or worse. I admit that I am a language traditionalist, and this will soon become apparent. And if you doubt what I claim in this narrative, ask yourself why would quora.com that has no connection to pipe smoking post this online question: “Why do tobacco pipe smokers and wine collectors both have a tendency to be ‘snobbish’ about the hobby?” Or why did Kevin Godbee post “Snobbery Is As Snobbery Does” on his website? There must be something to this!

As defined by tobaccospecialists.co.uk: “Pipe smoking is a pastime that is steeped in history and tradition. Many cultures have added their own unique spins, flavours and techniques to smoking a pipe so the hobby consequently has a wide range of unusual and sometimes eccentric terms and phrases attached.” Indeed! In 1884, the effete snob Arthur Machen (pseud. Leolinus Siluriensis), a Welch author and mystic, attempted to describe the art of pipe smoking for the common man in *The Anatomy of Tobacco: or Smoking Methodised, Divided, and Considered After a New Fashion*. From Chapter III (untitled) I offer three of his 11 scholastic definitions of pipes.

“I. Let a pipe (tubulus fumificus) be defined ‘instrumentum per quod tabaci fumus trahitur’— as an instrument by which the smoke of tobacco is inhaled.

“X. A pipe is said to be a simple (simplex) ‘cum solum ex unâ materie constat’—when it consists of only one kind of matter.

“XI. A pipe is said to be complex (complexus) ‘cum habet materiem complexam’—when it is composed of complex matter—that is to say, of more than one kind of matter.”

Machen also offered a definition of tobacco: “With respect to tobacco, let it be defined as follows:— ‘Tabacus est herba in quâ inest nicotinicâ et soporifera virtus’—Tobacco is a herb in which resides a nicotinic and soporific virtue.” There’s much more gobbledygook in his treatise, and I suspect that you readers have read just enough of Machen’s pipe and tobacco pomposity, but I include a bit of heterodoxy. Know what Her Majesty’s Tobacco pipe is? Here’s the answer: it’s “the furnace where the forfeited tobacco from the Customs House is burnt” (John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley [eds.], *Slang and Its Analogues Past and Present*, Vol. III, 1893, 305).

In *The Spectator*, July 17, 1897 appeared “English Slang,” chiding writers who, in their zeal, are too quick to adopt slang without “a judicious period of quarantine.” . . . “The quarantine of which the authors speak should be rigorously maintained, and no word should be included even in a slang dictionary until there can be proved for it an existence in print of at least twenty years. . . We would rather express our gratitude to the authors for their strange and varied collection of picturesque phrases and words, especially those of American origin.” Fast-forward more than 100 years, and my plight is not semantics, analyzing the subtle shades of meaning; it’s about in-vogue vernacular. Maybe it’s smart marketing to choose clever or cutesy names for pipe tobacco blends, e.g., Drew Estate Meat Pipe, Bald-Headed Teacher, Exhausted Rooster, Merde de Cheval, but what about this new-fangled, elitist language?

The following list is not comprehensive; I highlight some of those aforementioned “picturesque phrases and words.” I have defined them literally, not figuratively. Beyond this handful, others are found in the online glossary of Tobacconist University (hereinafter TU)—a predominantly cigar-centric list—that pertain to the pipe world that are worthy of mention.

- Kapnismology. C. Bruce Spencer was the founder of the quarterly magazine *Pipe Smoker* that debuted in spring 1983. Wholly unfamiliar with this hobby, Spencer wanted a unique designation for everyone affiliated with pipe smoking, so he reached back to ancient Greece and introduced the following in the spring 1984 issue without much fanfare: “kapnismology, the science or study of smoke; kapnisma, the act of smoking; kapnismologist, one who studys [*sic*] or who makes an art of the business of smoking; kapnizdo, I smoke.” Did we need this term to identify ourselves? It’s beyond my comprehension as to why this term caught on, but it did. The magazine is long gone and it’s time that Spencer’s term is gone.

- Estate pipes. Most every definition of estate refers to landed property or possessions, a condition or circumstances with reference to worldly prosperity,

estimation, and social status or rank. According to estatepipes.wordpress.com, “An estate pipe is simply a pipe that has been previously owned. Most commonly these pipes are pre-smoked, but occasionally they may also be unsmoked, having been owned by a collector and kept in pristine condition, or possibly just been put in a drawer by its previous owner and forgotten about.” And according to C. J. Nandakumar, “Smoky Stuff”: “An estate pipe is a tobacco smoking pipe that is acquired through purchasing a collection from an individual.... Estate pipes are considered a treasured heirloom as vintage cars, as they were pre-owned by eminent and famous people like Churchill or cine personalities like Clint Eastwood. The rich ones are ready to pay any amount to acquire these kinds of estate pipes.” Really? Closely related to this definition is new old stock (NOS) pipes encountered in shuttered tobacco shops. So they’re old, or vintage or, perhaps, antique. And where are these estate pipes found? Pretty much anywhere, but a pipe sold at an estate sale is not, *ipso facto*, an estate pipe. An old pipe at a public auction, on eBay, or at a pipe show is given new life—recycled, refurbished, refinished, refreshed, reconditioned—but it’s a used pipe nonetheless. There’s nothing estate-ish about an estate pipe.

- Vintage pipes. It’s a term used in online chats, a pipe seller’s favorite merchandising term. What is vintage? Most often, it’s a word referring to wine made in a particular year, but it also can refer to something old, something showing high quality and lasting value. So, how old is a vintage pipe? The word antique is customarily assigned to items that are at least 100 years old, so vintage should be of an age less than 100 years, whether pre-owned, whether smoked, whether restored. Syllogistically, a vintage pipe is just a really old and, maybe, used pipe. Why not call it that?
- Collectible pipes. Similar to the excessively used term, vintage pipes, this means pipes worth collecting, pipes of interest to a collector, pipes sought by a collector. It’s a rather useless descriptor. They are wasted words. They lack specificity, are absent qualification, and subject to much interpretation.
- Museum-quality pipes. The term is applied to works of such high caliber and importance that they are included in the collections of prestigious, world-class museums. Museum-quality (as well as museum-worthy) has been an overly used, more often misused, a label assigned to lots of antique meerschaum pipes, so maybe it’s time to learn its true definition. I echo the view of Kim Kenney (bellaonline.com) who opines: “Every time I hear something advertised as ‘museum quality’ it makes me cringe! As a curator, I wonder, “What, exactly, do they mean by that?” Here’s a March 2007 opinion of Rehs Galleries, Inc., New York (rehs.com): “During a recent conversation with a new client they asked me: ‘What does the phrase museum quality mean?’ Initially I had a little chuckle and then told her that the phrase is often used as a sales tool by many high pressure sales galleries to make the potential buyer think they are getting a really good quality work...in some cases this may be true, but in the vast majority it is not.” I can’t think of any contemporary briar pipes that meet this standard. There are many antique pipes that are high caliber, but I am not aware of any U.S. museum that would want pipes of any age to be in its collections or on exhibit. Yet meerschaum.com asserts: “Today

many old and rare meerschaums have found a permanent place in museums and private collections.” I can’t speak to collectors, but I can confidently say that the permanent place for “old and rare meerschaums” in American museums is in storage. More than a handful of online sellers offer museum-quality, or museum/heritage-quality Turkish meerschaum pipes, and meerschaumstore.com boldly claims that it “. . . is the first and only company that produces museum quality meerschaum pipes.” This is a hyperbolic oxymoron.

- Cellared tobacco. Cellared, until recently, a word associated solely with wine, means to store in a cellar. The following online definition certainly doesn’t offer clarity: “Cellaring—care and feeding of your tobacco cellar” (“The Pipe Tobacco Aging, Storing and Cellaring FAQ”). Playing devil’s advocate, what if the place where aging and storing takes place is not a cellar? Would the same term apply if stored and aged in an attic? In a storage shed? In a garage? Seems to me that the only term that makes sense is “stored and aged,” irrespective of where the storing and aging occur. What’s wrong with just “aging”? Be aware that tobaccopipes.com informs: “Many pipe smokers consider cellaring tobacco a dividing line between a true connoisseur and a casual smoker.” Well, taken literally, to cellar (be a true connoisseur), or not to cellar (be a casual smoker)? That is the question.
- Boutique tobacco. Boutique pertains to any small, exclusive business offering customized service. TU got it right: “This term refers to smaller cigar, pipe, and tobacco companies with limited production. In general, boutique companies are more artisan-oriented.” The tobacco is not boutique; the company that produces special tobacco blends is a boutique company. Surely, the person who wrote about boutique tobaccos online did not intend what I discovered on a web search: “boutique tobacco E-liquid blends.” Or was he dyslexic, because when the two words are transposed, another quick web search reveals that tobacco boutique is just another name for a head shop.
- Luxury tobaccos. According to TU, they are “tobacco products which are created by master craftsmen utilizing premium quality tobacco and intended to be enjoyed while savoring your time. Luxury tobacco is never homogenized, commoditized, or used out of habit or addiction.” Are these so different from boutique tobaccos? (See DGT later.)
- Tobacco sommelier. The simplest definition of sommelier is a restaurant waiter in charge of wines and their service. . . . a wine steward. How does sommelier apply to tobacco? I think that the linkage may stem from one or both of these sources: “Trial by Fire” (*Pipes & tobaccos* magazine), with its fragrant descriptions of pipe tobaccos, and tobaccoreviews.com’s oenophilic vocabulary, e.g., bouquet, piquant, fulsome, etc. The grandiloquence of so many tobacco reviews is quite over the top, and anyone who claims to be a tobacco sommelier, in my view, is braggadocio personified.

Now to others I found on the Web. Lunting. According to John Mactaggart, *The Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia* (1824, 325), lunting is “walking and smoking a pipe.” Supposedly, the word’s origin is Dutch or German, meaning a slow match, fuse, or wick.

According to “With Pipe & Pen” (rcbabione.org), it’s a noun with two alternative meanings: (1) “a match; the flame used to light a fire,” and (2) “smoke or steam, esp. smoke from a tobacco pipe.” It’s also a verb. Among the several definitions: (1) “to smoke a pipe,” and (2) “to light (a pipe, torch, etc.).” And, he concludes: “And now you have a new word with which to impress all your friends.” Lunting is one of the words that Carmen Lobello includes on deathandtaxesmag.com, March 7, 2013, “18 obsolete words, which should have never gone out of style.” Is someone who can walk and smoke at the same time a lunter, luntist, luntanist, luntarian, luntologist? Join the International Lunting Society, founded in 2015, and find out.

Russ Ouellette, a respected member of our community, posted “A Smattering of Pipe Terminology” (pipesmagazine.com). I quote from the first paragraph: “Most people believe that our terminology exists to allow us to express complex concepts in shorthand, but the truth is that we use this slang to exclude those who are not among the cognoscenti.” I am more than a little disappointed: this is an arrogant assertion!

Digging deeper, smokingpipes.com offers an online glossary with the introduction: “Pipe smoking, like any specialized pursuit, is replete with its own cryptic words.” Here are a few synonyms for cryptic: enigmatic, mysterious, puzzling, obscure, arcane, ambiguous, elliptical, and oblique. From another of its posts: “7 Words That Every Pipe Smoker Should Know”: cake, dottle, ferrule, mortise/tenon, mount, button/slot, stummel,” with the advisory “...check them out and never be left scratching your head again.” It could be construed that without command of these seven, a novice pipe smoker might be a lost soul. There’s more information overload on this site from Ted Swearingen, “8 Advanced Pipe Smoking Techniques: Have You Learned Everything?”: Retrohaling, Twine Lighting, Breath Smoking, and Flake Folding are four of what he calls tricks. They’re not tricks; they’re just tricked-out terms. And further to tricks, are you familiar with trick pipes? This is from TU: “This name refers to uncommon or non-traditional pipes that have some novel or useful feature. They include folding pipes, pipes with hidden tampers, etc.” All these years being around pipes and I never knew certain pipes were trick, i.e., cunning, deceptive, scheming pipes.

And how about Czech tool? Does this ubiquitous, metal, three-part, pocket pipe tool now need a new name? As tobaccopipes.com claims, it’s called that, because “...they were mostly made in the Czech Republic.” Forgive me, fellow pipe people, but this pipe-cleaning aid was in circulation and use in the USA and Great Britain long before Czechoslovakia became a country in 1918.

From tobaccopipes.com: “Delayed Gratification Technique: DGT is the act of smoking half, or roughly half, of a bowl of tobacco then leaving the rest—ash included—to sit for a few hours or even a few days before finishing. Many tobaccos have a slight change in flavor when allowed to sit partially smoked, and many smokers prefer to smoke their tobacco in this manner.” DGT also crossed the Pond. On tobaccospecialists.co.uk, there is a slightly different interpretation: “Useful Pipe Lexicon, Delayed Gratification Technique (DGT): This technique helps build the excitement and anticipation of smoking

Pipe Tobacco and allows it to settle. Simply pack the pipe and do the charring light, then set the pipe to one side. After a short period of time, return to the pipe and begin the smoking.” Perhaps a yet more elaborate explanation can be found in the quarterly magazine, *Delayed Gratification*, “the world’s first Slow Journalism magazine”?

More from tobaccopipes.com: “A ghost is the leftover flavor of a previously smoked tobacco. Ghosting is generally considered a negative side effect that most smokers want to avoid. Ghosting can be caused by residual moisture resting in the shank or stem of a pipe but is usually blamed on the cake.” And “The room note refers to the unique aroma that a particular tobacco emits into the room in which you are smoking.” I had no idea that there were names for pipe tobacco after-smells!

From TU: “Differentiation Threshold: The Sensory Threshold where we can sense and perceive gradients in the tastes and smells (aromas) of a substance; lighter to heavier, milder to stronger.” (I assume that to smoke *à la* DGT and enjoy the sensory threshold, one has to smoke a boutique or a luxury tobacco.) “TobaccAromatherapy. Term coined by TU in 1998 to describe the beneficial and therapeutic effects of pleasant tobacco aromas,” and “Smokerism. A belief of moral superiority over smokers, manifested as discrimination and punishment. Since the latter part of the 20th Century Smokerism has become a pervasive global social trend.”

We’re not alone. It’s also happening in the cigar world. Here is a point of view from David Nadel, “Learning the Cigar Lingo” (bnbtobacco.com): “After generations and generations of smoking cigars, there has naturally developed some lingo around this area of social life. It is a lingo that keeps evolving through the years but still holds enough form to create a vernacular. . . . Whether you are a newbie or have been smoking cigars for ages, it is important to keep up on the lingo that is being used. Lingo is a window into the way that a certain social group works and functions. If you want to participate fully in the cigar smoking community, learning the cigar lingo is important.” See also famous-smoke.com for Tommy Zman Zarzecki’s “Ci-Jargon: Newfangled Cigar Slang for the Millennium.” This, by way of introduction: “So, please find below a list of perhaps the top dozen slang terms we cigar smokers like to bandy about . . . then, find below that, 22 brand-spankin-new uses of cigar related jargon, or as I would like to refer to it as “Ci-jargon.”

Unfortunately, I am someone who does not buy into the premise that to participate fully in either the cigar or pipe community, one needs a special vernacular or lingo. This is a more pointed commentary. “He looked at me contemptuously. ‘I said areas.’ I had reference to gobbledygook, to the ridiculous lingo affected by government employees and educators. . . . ‘One of the great fallacies of would-be writers and talkers,’ he said, ‘is that it is more impressive and generally better, to say a thing in three words instead of one, and with an element of indirection rather than of bluntness.’” (Oliver LaFarge, *The Man With The Calabash Pipe. Some Observations*, 2011, 110). Almost 50 years ago, Irwin Ross wrote an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, “Caution: Pipe Smoking May be Hazardous to your IQ.” He alleged: “. . . pipe smokers were slow-witted, criminally

inclined, snobs, indolent, physically unfit and bad-tempered.” Screed, for sure, but there’s that snob word in print a half-century ago.

Does the simple act of smoking a pipe now require complex, geeky terminology? Is the purpose of these trendy phrases and expressions snob appeal, to elevate the status of pipe smokers, to earn cachet? It’s as if we’ve replaced Main Street language with cringe-worthy catchphrases from Madison Avenue or, perhaps, with 21st century Orwellian Newspeak. In several instances, it’s essentially obfuscation, and is probably bewildering, confusing, and befuddling folks. Even Tarek Manadily (theitalianpipe.com) seems to agree. In his post “Pipe Smoking: A Realm of Confusion” he begins: “I’m sure you will agree that the world of tobacco and tobacco terminology, in particular, is quite mind-boggling.”

What about the KISS principle? It means keep it simple, stupid, or keep it short and simple. KISS should be the goal, and unnecessary complexity should be avoided. Can’t we be pipe smokers without the invasion of our simple pleasures by a few (or many) posturing elitists or academics who believe that we need to adopt and employ a special pipe patois? I am well aware that as the social situation evolves, so does the language, but many are just vague buzzwords, implying something that isn’t necessarily accurate or true. I would not go so far as to echo the English author Evelyn Beatrice Hall: “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” We are a very special community, for sure, and I understand why every pipe smoker needs to know the nomenclature of a pipe’s parts and some essentials about various types of pipe tobacco, but we don’t need a special glossary beyond fundamentals to communicate. Here’s true KISS: “Pipes have a rich typology: Egg, Tulip, Liverpool, Canadian, Lovat, Blackpool, and many more. The single parts of a pipe have precise names: stem, shank, bowl, heel, bit. Only a connoisseur is familiar with this language” (Bernard Cova, et al., *Consumer Tribes*, 2007, 321).

Let’s not mirror scientific and medical literature that contains highly specialized terminology, confusing phrases and superfluous information that are not needed to convincingly communicate a message. I would like to push back. I have lived this hobby for more than 50 years without considering myself a member of an exclusive community of cognoscenti. I wish that others would see the futility of striving to be so unique that we come across as pompous, elite, and affected language snobs. Words matter! I hope that this forecast declared more than a century ago eventually materializes: “The most characteristic mark of slang is that it is usually here to-day and gone to-morrow” (Charles Sears Baldwin, *Writing and Speaking. A Text-Book of Rhetoric*, 1909, 41). Life is complicated enough already, so please, let’s get back to plain talk ... and no more pipe and tobacco prolix.

