

Recording of the week: Epic

This week's selection comes from Rosy Hall, an ESRC-funded PhD student from Oxford University working with the BL's Spoken English collections.

Epic 3. b. *colloq.* (orig. and chiefly U.S.). Particularly impressive or remarkable; excellent, outstanding. (www.oed.com)

According to [one Urban Dictionary entry](#), the birth of 'epic' as a popular catchphrase has its origins among 'avid gamers and pretentious English majors'. This fits with the [WordBank](#) contribution of one of our speakers (b.1991), who attributes it to 'video gamer culture' and his gaming friends.

Um, I think that 'epic' is a very interesting word that I constantly hear my friends use, because, it's interesting because it's, I feel it comes from like some kind of like video gamer culture, cause my friends are like ((bay kid)) gamers, I mean I'm not so much, but they always use the word 'epic,' 'that was epic', or like 'epic fail' and {cough} I just, where, what does it mean? I guess it's kind of like...uh like 'amazing', like it just sort of emphasizes something. You know what I mean? Yeah. It's like a lot of emphasis on something it's epic, it's not just s- – you know ordinary, it's epic. I don't know, maybe it's rooted from the actual word epic where you know, like, I don't know the Odyssey? Who knows? Who knows. But yeah. Bye!

Epic (C1442)

Like so many words whose meanings have evolved over time, *epic* is a common bugbear among prescriptivists – English language mavens who would rather the word were reserved only for Homer and Virgil. As alluded to by this speaker, *epic* hasn't always been a trendy word for something like 'really good' or 'extreme'; traditionally it's a genre of lengthy heroic poetry. Scholars have pointed out, however, that even this definition is fairly fluid – the meaning of *epic* has changed over time to cover both oral and written forms, and extends to novels and even movies (*Game of Thrones*, anyone?). Language change is inevitable, after all; it seems this new *epic* is just the latest iteration.



And we'd better get used to it: unfortunately for the pedants, a high level of objection usually correlates to a high level of usage. Judging from the number of internet rants against it, it's clear that *epic* is here to stay!

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