

## The Wave: Should you fear it, or fear being left out of it?

It's Friday night, you're sitting on the couch in your apartment with a couple of your friends planning out how you should spend the rest of your night. One of your friends asks, "So... what's the wave?" You sit there befuddled unsure of what they're talking about. What does the ocean have to do with your Friday night plans? Is this some new type of slang that you don't understand. Tracing back this word's origin reveals how it evolved to have various meanings that encompass literal concepts as well as metaphorical ones, leaving you to utilize context clues in order to comprehend how it is being used in whatever situation you find yourself in.

The verb form of "wave" was derived from the Old English word *waifan* (OED). *Waifan* was taken from the Germanic base of waver which means "*To go about or travel at random or without fixed destination; to wander, rove*" and from the Middle English word *wawe* (OED). Initially the word in noun form was used to describe "*Senses relating to a moving ridge or swell of water* (OED)". The first recorded usage of the noun version took place in 1526 in the Tyndale Bible. (OED). William Tyndale, who lived from 1490 to 1494, was an English biblical translator as well as humanist and martyr who believed every person should be able to read the bible in their own language. After English authorities prevented him from translating the Bible in that region, he traveled to Germany in 1524 in order to complete his translations without resistance. He managed to publish translations of the New Testament but during his efforts to translate the Old Testament he was captured and executed by Catholic authorities. He was responsible for publishing the first vernacular English text of any part of the Bible and his version became the basis of subsequent translations (William Tyndale). As religion is a very influential element within society and Tyndale's Bible would be the basis of future translations, I concluded that his translation of certain words has a large impact on their spellings, meaning, and usage. In the

Tyndale translation of the Bible, a sentence located in the Book of John reads, “For he that douteth is lyke the waues of the see (Tyndale)”. In this quote, it is being asked that an individual does not doubt and always has faith in God because if a person were to ever doubt him, the doubt would be like waves from the sea being tossed around by the wind (Book of James). From this first recorded usage you can witness the word wave being used in a metaphorical sense. This form of usage illuminates the concept of the word often being used for the sake of comparison rather than its literal meaning.

Later in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was documented that “wave” could be employed to describe a *“A forward movement of a large body of persons (chiefly invaders or immigrants overrunning a country, or soldiers advancing to an attack), or of military vehicles or aircraft, which either recedes and returns after an interval, or is followed after a time by another body repeating the same movement (OED)”*. It appears that although the context in which the word was being used change, its usage was still employed in relation to undulate motion of shape. Examples of this form of usage included, “Europe was peopled by several successive migrations, or, as they have been technically named, waves of population, all flowing from one point in the east (Wright).” From this point, we can look at the word wave through the “Conceptual Metaphor Theory” which provides an explanation for how, “the brain gives rise to thought and language, and how cognition is embodied (Lakoff)”. George Lakoff, professor emeritus of Berkeley, and moral philosopher Mark Johnson of the University of Oregon make an argument for this theory claiming, “We speak in metaphors, every day, and it goes beyond poets and poetry, reaching even the most humble among us (Tannesh)”. Overtime the word “wave” has been able to make abstract concepts more concrete. If we think about a literal “wave” in terms of the ocean and its initial usage, it is a physically overwhelming, all-consuming flow of water. In

drawing conclusions in accordance with Lakoff's theory, we can deduce that the reason why people use the word wave in ways that have strayed away from its initial definition is due to it being a complex conceptual metaphor that has arisen from neural bindings (Lakoff). Referring back to the sentence from the Tyndale Bible, "For he that douteth is lyke the waues of the see (Tyndale)", we can witness this theory taking place as the concept of doubt and its impact are made more concrete in the minds of individuals as it is compared to the waves of the sea, a physical concept our brains are more easily able to grasp.

It is evident that throughout the years the word "wave" has been used in terms of movement or motion, however: overtime the noun version of the word has been transferred from simply being used in reference to movements of bodies of water to movements of groups of people. When "wave" started being used in respect to actual human beings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century regarding immigrants, it began to take on a slightly more negative connotation and perhaps the word went through a certain form of pejoration. Around the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the word was now used in order to reference repeated intrusion into a particular space. This change in utilization can conceivably be attributed to the social climate of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. During this time countless numbers of immigrants, mainly from the countries Ireland and Germany, were being forced out of Europe by several factors such as the Potatoe Famine as well as inadequate agricultural conditions (Cohn 363). Additionally, there were several political revolutions taking place within the continent in 1848 which were all proving to be unsuccessful endeavors especially for many of the emigrants that participated in them (Cohn 363). In 1855, the number of European immigrants entering the United States was less than half as large as it had been in 1854 (Cohn 363). This decrease denoted the end of the first mass migrations of European immigrants entering the United States, which was an amount that reached its pinnacle in 1854 at

480,000 people (Cohn 363). In that one year, immigration added 1.41% to the overall population at a rate that has never been outmatched (Cohn 363). In his paper, “Nativism and the End of the Mass Migration of the 1840s and 1850s”, Raymond L. Cohn, retired Illinois State University professor, argues that the increase since the nativism movement of the early 1850s experienced was a main contribution to the reason why the number of European immigrants entering the United States declined in 1855 (Cohn 361). In accordance with these circumstances, it can be presumed that the nativist public began to use the word “wave” to describe the negative influx of immigrant coming to America. Seeing them as them as an intrusion, it can be deduced that people were utilizing the word in relation to the massive “wave” of immigrants arriving in America who in the eyes of its citizens were overrunning the country. In order to make this concept even more tangible, individual’s cultivated negative connotations of the word wave to provoke sentiments or feelings of being overwhelmed, generating perhaps a groundless fear that this incursion of newcomers would lead to the distortion of cultural values (Boundless).

Referencing a definition provided earlier, “*A forward movement of a large body of persons*” this time in relation to, “*soldiers advancing to an attack*”, it should be noted that there appears to be a lull in the word “wave” being used to describe large movements of people until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which is when the word’s recorded usage was present in the context of war (OED). Two of the direct instances where the word “wave” was being used in this fashion took place in 1915: “They send forward wave after wave of men, regardless of the punishment (*Times*)” and in 1943: “Longer raids will always be liable to attacks on their last waves whenever fighters can fly ( JONES 382)”. It's important to note that during both of these instances the first and second world wars were taking place. Therefore, it can be argued that the change in usage of the word was dictated by this period of war time where “wave” was now utilized in the context

of military operations. In the Times article specifically, the fear and terror the reporters experienced as they witnessed “waves” of young soldiers being continually sacrificed is a factor that should be highlighted. The reporters witnessed an overwhelming amount of young men being sent to battle in continuous droves, many of them just acting as martyrs as the number of US soldier deaths suggest totaling at 2,197,000 (Casualties of World War I). Using the word wave, in order to describe this event allowed reporters to put in words how overwhelming and fear-inducing witnessing the large amounts soldiers being sent out just to die on the battlefield was.

Branching off and looking into a separate definition, the word “wave” was additionally used to describe “A *swelling, onward movement and subsidence (of feeling, thought, opinion, a custom, condition, etc.); a movement (of common sentiment, opinion, excitement) sweeping over a community, and not easily resisted. Also, a sharp increase in the extent or degree of some phenomenon;*(OED).” In this context the word is being used to express the growing influence of a thought, opinion, or interest that could not be avoided during a certain period of time. In 1851 it was used in a sentence discussing politics, “Its last vestiges were fast disappearing before the wave of democratic equality (BRIMLEY 112).” It can be presumed that the word was being used in order to discuss popular trends and in this specific context, political ideals. In this situation “wave” is being used to define incoming movements of thoughts, ideas or opinions. The definition of the word experiencing this form of expanded usage illuminates the fact that the term was being used in order to encompass more abstract concepts. As the number of ways and situations, the word could be used in continued to grow, it still retained its original nature which in a basic sense is “a large forward movement” whether it's being used in the context of people or a of a sentiment. This version’s usage has filtered heavily into current times. It is usually

being utilized in order to describe thoughts and opinions concerning popular culture concepts such as fashion, music, or lifestyle. When people use the term wave, they're usually reflecting on sentiments that have become widespread and, in a way, are attempting to completely overtake the masses. In this instance, a person may strive to be a part of the wave. Rather than the element of fear being generated by the wave itself, fear is generated by not being a part of it or being left out.

In more recent times “wave” or the “the wave” has taken on a meaning that has combined several of the word's original definitions. When an individual asks, “So what’s the wave” they mean, “What’s the hype or what’s the move?” In more basic terms, what does everyone else plan on doing or where does everyone else plan on going? An example of this terminology in action, can be found in a conversation example located on Urban Dictionary:

Goon 1: Whats the wave for tonight bigg baby?

Goon 2: Shai n her girls are havin a cookout; madd bitties goin

Goon 1: Oh, we in there mah g (Wave).

The goons or “a group of friends” are having a conversation about what they plan on doing that night. One of the friends asks the question, “what the wave?” in order to indicate that they want to know what that night’s activities are going to consist of. The other friend states an activity, and in response the friend who initially asked the question confirms their attendance. Goon 1 asks “what's the wave?” because they want to be a part of it. They don’t want to be and maybe even fear being left out. Furthermore, this phrase combines both elements of the word's definition, considering both the concepts of “a large movement of individuals” and “a large movement of sentiments or thoughts”. Asking “What’s the wave?” is essentially, where is the best or most popular destination at this time that we should travel to?

I believe the word wave is still worth considering because it is a term that's meaning has experienced a series of alterations, however, due to the way people throughout the years have employed the word, it has still managed to retain elements of its original definition. From its initial records, the word wave was often used in a metaphorical sense rather than a literal one and evolved to pertain to the concept of large, overwhelming, fear-inducing movements. However, what makes the word a compelling topic for analysis is the fact that its reasons for generating such fear have progressed in a fashion where in certain situation rather than individuals fearing being consumed by the wave, they instead fear being left out of it.

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“Wave, n” Urban Dictionary. <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=WAVE>