

The Schmooze

Stories with a Yiddish Twist

SLANG WORDS EVERY NEW YORKER
SHOULD KNOW

by
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Syosset, New York

Molly Katz (“Jewish as a Second Language”) wrote that it’s important to understand Jewish chitchat. Her basic vocabulary includes the words “Little sweater” (“I’m freezing in here. Get me a little sweater.” Or, “Take a little sweater so you don’t catch a cold.”)

And then there’s the words “IfGodforbid”—“IfGodforbid Sol should lose one of his stores...”)

And no list would be complete without “feh”—often used to communicate that you are not impressed, especially when you are.

Someone did a study of the three most-often-heard phrases in New York City. One is “Hey taxi.” Two is “What train do I take to get to Bloomingdale’s?” And three is “Don’t worry, it’s only a flesh wound.”

Shown below are some additional slang words:

1. Take it there: to get into some kind of altercation.
Ex. “Hey bro, trust me—you don’t wanna take it there.”
2. Grill: to stare “Why are you grilling me?”
3. To front: To act like you have it, but you really don’t.

“He’s fronting and he don’t own none of that (expletive).”

4. Brick: To be very cold, borderline freezing.
“It’s brick outside. Put your hat on.”
“It’s brick outside and we’re waiting on line at the TKTS Discount Booth to see Cats, which just reopened at the Neil Simon.”
5. Ratchet: A woman with very low standards when it comes to her attitude and sexual conduct.
“You deal with her. She’s too ratchet for me!”
6. Mad: Has nothing to do with being angry, instead, this adds an extra emphasis to the word that succeeds it.

“I’m mad hungry bro! Let’s head for South Street Seaport, get a bite, and see a movie at the new iPic cinema.”
7. Dumb: This word also adds an extra emphasis to the word that succeeds it. “The pastrami sandwich from Ben’s was dumb good.”
8. Tight: To be upset ____“iberkern,” in Yiddish. “I’m dumb tight over the cost of that Viennese Table at the wedding.”
9. Spaz: To get violent or confrontational. “She spazzed out on some waiter at the Gunter Seeger restaurant in the West Village when told that she had to pay \$185 in advance per person for dinner.”
10. Thirsty: To act desperate. “Bro, why are you so thirsty?”
11. Na’ mean: “Do you know what I mean?” “I paid dumb guap for this funky sweater, na mean?”
12. Trippin’ or buggin’: To act dramatic or to blow things out of proportion. “Stop trippin’ over that text message—I didn’t mean it.”
“Me makht a gantsn yontev fun dos.” (You’re making a big deal of this.)

13. I'm good: To indicate you're OK or fine.
"Nah I'm good, my man. What's up with you?"
"Yeder trakht sikh az bay yenem lakh zikh."
(One always thinks that others are happy.)
14. Tight: To express your pleasure with something/one.
"That whip is real tight, my man."
"Me lebt a tog." (This is real enjoyment.)
15. Chill out scrap: To express to a close friend that he or she needs to remain calm or relax. "Honestly, just chill out, scrap. McDonald's will soon make Chicken McNuggets without artificial preservatives...and they're removing the high-fructose corn syrup from its buns."
16. The "Hood": The neighborhood, usually a low income Area. This could also mean that someone is ghetto and/or gantsta.

"She lives in the hood where 40% of the city's school children are actually testing as proficient in either English or math."

17. Kicks: sneakers
"Check out my new kicks—Rick Owens 'Geobasket' in brown iguana." "Far gelt ken men alts koyfn, nor keyn seykhil nit." (For money one can buy anything except good sense.)

It also means "to be great."

"This restaurant kicks." "The new Woody Allen movie, Cafe Society, kicks!"

18. Whip: An expensive vehicle; or nice car.
"That's the whip I want, my man!" Or, "I get a 'shtiknakhes' (a great joy) from owning the Lexis CT 200h Hatchback."
19. Hooptie: A beaten-down car. "I'm not riding around in that hooptie ." "No one is gonna steal that hooptie! Even the Squeegee Men, who are armed with a dripping sponge attached to a stick and a bottle of diluted Windex, don't offer to wash that hooptie."

20. What it do: To ask, “What’s up or how someone is doing” “Hey my man, what it do?” Or, “Hey my man, I got confused between a ‘high five’ and a ‘fist bump’ and punched a guy in the face.” (Dan Piraro cartoon)
21. Mr G: a close friend, also is short for gangsta.
“What’s going on, my G?” “They arrested “Muscles,” “Nicky the Wig,” “Tugboat,” and “Mustache Pat.”

There are 2 types of gangsters:

1. A wannabe thug, often illiterate and an inhabitant of a downtrodden ghetto that hangs around in “gangs.” Note: The Yiddish word for an illiterate person is “der analfabet.”
 2. The “real” gangsters are those behind organized crime, most notably the Mafia. “The Godfather” portrays the archetype of true gangsters, showing the brutality of mob beating, shootings, running rackets, abusing women, alcohol and everything in between. (Source: Urban Dictionary)
22. Real Talk: To indicate you’re serious. “Real Talk. I’m not down with how you were actin’ last night.”
“Tokhes oyfn tis!” (Get serious. Buttocks on the table.)
23. What’s good, madude? This expression is used to ask what’s going on, or what’s up. It’s short for brother, or close friend. In Yiddish, we’d say,
“Vos tust du? (What are you doing?)
- “What’s good Madude? Bratton is stepping down as NYPD Commissioner!”
24. Kid: A very close friend. “What’s poppin, kid? You’re moving to Alphabet City?” In Yiddish, a “friend” is a “fraynd” or “khaver.” To have a “friendship” is “di frayndshaft.”
25. Schmear: eating a bagel with a small amount of cream cheese (“shmirkez”). Lisa Alcalay Klug, (“Good

Jew - The Ultimate Guide for Every Member of the Tribe”) says that one day, in the not-too-distant future, “Jewish physicists will solve the mystery of the hole in the bagel.”

26. The Burg: A nickname for Williamsburg, a trendy neighborhood (“shkheyneshaft”) in Brooklyn.

Some Yiddish signs attached to trees in Williamsburg recently caused a stir among the Hasidic community. One sign read: “Dear Jewish Daughter, Please step aside when a man approaches.”

Then there’s the Freddie Roman frog (“frosh”) joke: A Hasid with a frog on his shoulder comes into a bar. The bartender stares at the frog and asks, “Where did you get it?” The frog answers, “In Williamsburg; they’re all over the place.”

27. Greengrocer: a 24-hour grocery store owned by Koreans, with no-nonsense help, and an extensive, if somewhat suspicious, food buffet.

Listen, kid, to this Greengrocer story: A young man (“yunger-man”) was walking through a Greengrocer store in NYC to pick up a few things when he noticed an elderly (“alt”) lady following him around. Thinking nothing of it, he ignored her and continued on. Finally he went to the checkout line, but she got in front of him.

“Pardon me,” she said, “I’m sorry if my staring at you has made you feel uncomfortable. It’s just that you look just like my son, who died recently.”

“I’m very sorry,” replied the young man. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Yes,” she said, “As I’m leaving, can you say, “Good bye, Mother.” It would make me feel so much better.”

“Sure,” answered the young man.

As the elderly woman was leaving, he called out, “Good bye, Mother!”

As he stepped up to the checkout counter, he saw his total was \$127.50. “How can that be?” he asked. “I only purchased a few things.”

“Your mother said that you would pay for her,” said the clerk.

According to Spoiled N Y C, the True New Yorker will NEVER SAY:

“I can’t find a Duane Reade [pharmacy] around here.”

“I really want to be friends with my landlord. He’s so sweet!”

“It’s okay. You can have this cab. There’s plenty more around.

“I found this cool party in Staten Island this weekend. We should go.”

According to Marjorie Wolfe, a true New Yorker would never say, “Donald, who?”

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Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:



