

Slang, jargon and communicating in the New Zealand workplace

Slang

New Zealand slang

Most languages have 'slang' words. Slang is informal language that is usually spoken rather than written. It will usually be used by particular groups of people. New Zealand English has many slang words. You will have already heard some of them, and you may be using some too!

Here are some common examples:

- ▼ **Sweet as** - that's good, that's fine
- ▼ **Yeah, nah** - can mean no, but can also be a conversation 'filler' word
- ▼ **Bro** - friend (short for brother, usually only used to refer to a male)
- ▼ **Mate** - friend, buddy
- ▼ **Wee** - small, short (e.g. that will take a wee while)
- ▼ **Whinge** - to complain about something
- ▼ **Wobbly** - to have a tantrum or get very upset about something.

Stop and think

Most languages have slang words (these usually change over time). What are some slang words from other languages that you speak?

Who uses these words, and when do they use them?

There are many websites you can use to find out the meanings of New Zealand slang words. You can use your web browser to search for these. Search using the key words 'New Zealand slang words'. Or try these links:

- ▼ www.newzealandnz.co.nz/about-new-zealand/lifestyle/new-zealand-slang/
- ▼ www.brenontheroad.com/travellers-guide-new-zealand-slang/
- ▼ www.newzealandslang.com
- ▼ www.destination-nz.com/learn-speak-basic-kiwi-ese-new-zealand-slang-sayings/
- ▼ www.studyinnewzealand.govt.nz/blog/category/lifestyle/ultimate-guide-kiwi-slang-and-mannerisms

Another way to work out the meaning of slang words is to ask.

- ▼ You could say: 'I noticed you used the word ----- just now. I haven't heard the word used like that before - what does it mean?'

Sometimes, you can work out the meaning of slang words from the context of your conversation.

- ▼ For example, you ask someone to do something for you, and they answer with "sweet as" and smile at you. From this reaction you can work out that they are going to do what you asked.

The best way to learn about New Zealand slang words and how they are used is to spend time with Kiwis who use them in everyday conversation. When you hear the words over and over again, you will understand them, and maybe start using them too!

A true story
**about using slang
the wrong way**

"I worked with a woman who used to say 'Sweet as bro' at the end of every conversation with a customer. She said it to men, women, young people and old people - anyone. She didn't realise you usually only say 'sweet as' to younger people, and you don't usually say 'bro' to women!"

Sometimes, it's a good idea to check with your Kiwi friends or your workmates to find out if you're using the words right!

How you might hear NZ slang in a workplace.

Read through the scenarios, and see if you can translate what the Kiwi speaker means.

Scenario 1

“Hey Sam, would you be able to check this out please? This bloke, Mr James, is throwing a bit of a wobbly, he ordered some items from us a wee while ago, and now we can’t find out where his order’s gone. I want to stop him from packing a complete sad and sort it out.”

Translate the slang!

Choose the best option from the following.

The person wants Sam to:

- a. Take a book out of the library
- b. Find out what has happened in this situation
- c. Look at Mr James to see what he is doing at the moment

‘Bloke’ means

- a. Customer
- b. Angry person
- c. Man

Mr James is:

- a. Unsteady on his feet
- b. Very uncertain about what he should do
- c. Quite angry about the situation

In this situation, a ‘wee while ago’ is most likely to mean:

- a. One week ago
- b. This morning
- c. Yesterday

‘Packing a complete sad’ in this situation is most likely to mean:

- a. Breaking down in tears in front of the receptionist
- b. Deciding to cancel the order and possibly not deal with the company again
- c. Putting some items that he no longer requires into a box

Choose the best answers – then check at the end of this resource to see our answers.

Workplace jargon

Most workplaces use some 'jargon' words. Jargon words are special words and phrases that are used by particular groups of people, especially in their work – so they are a lot like slang, but more formal. They often don't make sense to people from outside of the workplace, or to people who haven't used them before. Some people love to use jargon, while others really dislike it.

Corporate jargon

Corporate jargon involves using words that are taken from another context, and using them to refer to business or work matters.

Here are some examples:

- ▼ **Passionate** – to be very committed to something, to show that you really believe in something
- ▼ **Blue-sky thinking** - A visionary idea without always having a practical application
- ▼ **Think outside the box** - means to not limit your thinking; to think of other possibilities
- ▼ **Get our ducks in a row** - Order and organize everything efficiently and effectively

Stop and think

What are some business jargon terms used in another language you are familiar with?

For some more examples of workplace jargon, do your own search, or check these websites:

- ▼ www.examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-jargon-in-the-workplace.html
- ▼ www.stuff.co.nz/business/10040920/Beef-up-your-business-language
- ▼ www.hcamag.com/nz/news/general/fun-friday-top-10-most-hated-office-jargon/214401

Be aware that corporate jargon changes over time. New words and phrases will start to be used, and people will stop using other terms.

Profession or trade jargon

As well as corporate jargon, there will be jargon words that are only used by people in your profession or area of work.

For example, the word 'dolly' is a term for a child's toy.

In the workplace, it can also mean:



a type of tool used in panel repair workshops



an item used to move a trailer by hand



a device that helps trucks to move heavy loads

Stop and think

What are some trade or professional jargon terms you are already familiar with through your study or work experience?

Acronyms

Acronyms are formed by taking the first letters of the words in a phrase, and using that as a word instead. People then use the acronym instead of saying the full phrase. Education providers use a lot of acronyms so you probably already know quite a few.

Here are some examples:

- ▼ **WOF** - **W**arrant **o**f **F**itness. The safety certificate that your car has to have to legally drive on New Zealand roads.
- ▼ **UCOL** - **U**niversal **C**ollege **o**f **L**earning. An education provider based in Palmerston North.
- ▼ **WITT** - **W**estern **I**nstitute of **T**echnology at **T**aranaki. An education provider based in New Plymouth.

Acronyms can be very confusing – and not just for people who are new to working in New Zealand workplaces. Organisations may have their own acronyms that only make sense in that organisation. Sometimes the same acronym is used to refer to different things.

An acronym used in one country can mean something completely different to an acronym used in another country.

Examples:

- ▼ The acronym **TDC** is used for both **T**aranaki **D**istrict **C**ouncil and **T**aranaki **D**istrict **C**ouncil
- ▼ The acronym **H&S** is used for **H**ealth **a**nd **S**afety, **H**ead **a**nd **S**houlders, **H**elp **a**nd **S**upport, **H**ardware **a**nd **S**oftware and many other terms.

If you are not sure what an acronym means, and you can't work it out from the context, a good question to ask is 'What does that stand for?'

Or you could say – 'I'm trying to work out what that acronym stands for here. I've heard it used before and it meant is that what it means here?'

If you hear someone use a word or an acronym, and you don't understand what they mean - ask!

Stop and think

Have you seen any acronyms in New Zealand that are also used in another country?

Do the acronyms mean the same thing in the two countries?

Communication in the workplace

There are some excellent resources that have been developed to help migrant workers better understand workplace communication – and to help employers communicate with migrant workers.

Take some time to find and review these.

The WorkTalk website www.worktalk.immigration.govt.nz includes video interviews of migrant workers talking about some of the communication difficulties they have experienced.

It also has a series of scenarios you can work through to explore communicating in different types of workplace situations in New Zealand.

This excellent written resource covers similar points: https://worktalk.immigration.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2019-11/DOL-more_than_words-d3.pdf

The blue pages are written for migrant workers. The orange pages are written for New Zealand employers.

Immigration New Zealand also provides resources for migrant workers about communication in specific industries – you will find these here:

- ▼ www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/work-in-nz/nz-way-of-working
- ▼ www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/working-in-construction
- ▼ www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/working-in-dairy-farming
- ▼ www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/working-in-hospitality

Sometimes it isn't the English speaking that's the problem – it's the way the message is conveyed. And remember – it's better to ask if you don't understand something.

Answers to scenarios

Scenario 1

The person wants Sam to: b. Find out what has happened in this situation

'Bloke' means: c. Man

Mr James is: c. Quite angry about the situation

In this situation, a 'wee while ago' is most likely to mean: a. One week ago

'Packing a complete sad' in this situation is most likely to mean: b. Deciding to cancel the order and possibly not deal with the company again

Scenario 2

Our translation - Sam's work colleague is arranging a barbeque meal for all the staff to celebrate the Christmas holiday season together. They are going to cook sausages and chicken on the barbecue. They would like to know if Sam will eat this food.

They would also like to know if Sam has a large cold storage box for some of the food, and if Sam can bring that along.