



## The last word

# Finally waking up

ON HIS VERY OWN PERSONAL ROAD TO DAMASCUS, STEVE HOLDEN HAS HAD HIS VERY OWN INDIVIDUALISED EPIPHANY AND, NOT TO PUT TOO FINE A POINT ON IT, IT'S BEEN A REAL WAKE-UP CALL.

At the end of the day at this moment in time, with all due apologies and in all honesty, basically, I personally, finally and literally have come to a realisation and an acceptance: considering that we're all more or less fairly unique, I've now realised and accepted that clichés are not really clichés at all; they're just, like, awesome.

Now I know that in my linguistically conservative past I may in this Last Word column have erred on the side of caution, but in the fullness of time, at present, currently, I've come to realise that clichés are just a kind of word synergy and shouldn't be condemned out of hand, frankly, because they are okay or, in other words and needless to say, simply, like, awesome.

The fact of the matter is that when each and every one of us, as single, unique and indeed individualised individuals, use a cliché we essentially renew it, in other words de-cliché it, and thus, you know, make it, like, awesome.

My path to this 20/20 vision has just simply been a 24/7 learning curve, but since being on that curve I've realised pdq it's not rocket science and that realisation has

itself – also, likewise and similarly – been awesome.

The whole cliché thing came home to roost, so to speak, when Oxford University Press published Jeremy Butterfield's *A Damp Squid: The English language laid bare*, which listed the top 10 most irritating phrases, most of which were, like, clichéd, and which make people literally tear their hair out, apparently.

Fair's fair, and not to put too fine a point on it, some phrases can be irritating, but Butterfield seems to be a bit of a damp squid, or squib or whatever, when it comes to clichés, and I'm not, like, alone, by the way, in thinking that.

Geoffrey K. Pullum, a professor of general linguistics at the University of Edinburgh, Language Log blogger and, like, co-author with Mark Liberman of *Far from the Mad-ding Gerund and Other Dispatches from Language Log*, has confirmed – from no less reputable a source than *USA Today* – that no less reputable a deity than God speaks in clichéd ways, even using, like, 'like.' This is, by definition and in no uncertain terms, awesome, in anybody's book.

Pullum's evidence appeared in a *USA Today* report that, 'Religious broadcaster Pat Robertson said Friday he believes God has told him President Bush will be re-elected in a "blowout" in November' – this, not to put too fine a point on it, was in 2004, people. "I think George Bush is going to win in a walk," Robertson said on his *700 Club* program on the Virginia Beach-based Christian Broadcasting Network. "I really believe I'm hearing from the Lord it's going to be like a blowout election in 2004. It's shaping up that way," *USA Today* reported.

As Pullum explained, 'What Robertson is hearing from the Lord is not...a rather odd claim about similarity – that something unspecified is going to be similar to a blowout election in 2004 – but...a claim that a blowout election will occur, with a hedge.... It seems the Lord may have said, "It's going to be, like, a blowout election in 2004, Pat...." One might have thought that God would be a user of the alternate educated-English phrase "if you will," but apparently not. God seems to use "like" in this sort of hedging function. This may indicate, surprisingly, that God uses a younger-generation dialect in his communications with the older generation, or it may indicate a preference for communicating with people in their native dialect.'

This is, absolutely or maybe just possibly, like, awesome, since it means that clichés and any old, plain, humdrum overuses of worn out English phrasing are simply divine. For me, personally, that's been a real wake-up call, people. **1**

*This month's Last Word was written at the end of the day 23 hours later than had originally been planned, to be perfectly honest, basically speaking, by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher, and the 2008 highly commended winner in the, like, Best Columnist category of the Melbourne Press Club Quill Awards for the Last Word.*

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