

[00:00:00] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:00:02] **Monte Belmonte:** Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm your summertime fun time guest bailiff, Monte Belmonte, and we are in chambers this week to clear the docket.

[00:00:11] **John Hodgman:** (*Singing.*) In the summertime, when the weather is cold, and the fog won't go away and you're feeling very old. It's the summertime, here WERU in Maine.

How'd I do, Joel?

[00:00:23] **Joel Mann:** Pretty good.

[00:00:24] **John Hodgman:** Who did that song Joe Budden? The Field Hippies? Who was that?

[00:00:27] **Joel Mann:** Mungo Jerry

[00:00:28] **John Hodgman:** Mungo Jerry.

(*They laugh.*)

Of course. Mungo Jerry. Not only—not only did I channel a weirdly named artist, but of course, Joel Mann had that name on the tip of his tongue here at WERU in Maine. And over there, through my screen, is my friend Monte Belmonte, your summertime fun time guest bailiff, in the studios of New England Public Media there in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts. How are you, Monte?

[00:00:55] **Monte Belmonte:** I'm doing really well. Thank you! Glad to be back with you.

[00:00:58] **John Hodgman:** It is truly—it is the summer now. It is really the summer. I am in Maine. Joel is across the board from me. You are there in your new—still new digs, at New England Public Media. For those who don't know, Monte has moved on from WRSI The River—still a great radio station.

(*Monte agrees.*)

He no longer has to get up at two o'clock in the morning every morning, and instead does a wonderful afternoon, daily show on New England Public Media called: say it again, The Notorious 413. The Vicious 413. The Fantabulous!

[00:01:29] **Monte Belmonte:** *The Fabulous 413.*

[00:01:31] **John Hodgman:** The Grandiloquent 413.

[00:01:34] **Monte Belmonte:** I love these!

[00:01:36] **John Hodgman:** It's all—413, of course, being the area code there. And Joel, it's just such a thrill to be here with you at WERU. We're gonna be recording a lot, because of—well, I mean, I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but we've got—we're gonna—Jesse Thorn and I are gonna go on tour this fall. So, we're gonna be banking a lot of episodes up here at WERU, but because we have a special guest today also from the New England area—I'm gonna chat with you a little later on, Joel, 'cause we'll have a lot of time to chat.

(Joel affirms.)

But only today are we lucky enough to have Emily Brewster back to the show. A longtime friend of the court, senior editor and lexicographer at Merriam-Webster, and a fellow resident of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It's Emily. Hi, Emily! How are you?

[00:02:19] **Emily Brewster:** Hello! I'm doing well. How are you?

[00:02:21] **John Hodgman:** I'm doing well. I'm doing really well, because you're here. Thank you very much for joining us again. You are still in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, correct? Yes or no?

[00:02:28] **Emily Brewster:** I am, yes.

[00:02:30] **John Hodgman:** And are you a commonwealthian by birth?

[00:02:33] **Emily Brewster:** No, I'm a Pittsburgher by birth. No. A actually, no—just by childhood time. Right? I'm actually a New Yorker by birth.

[00:02:42] **John Hodgman:** You've been all—you've been all over. You've been in some big cities. You grew up in Pittsburgh. I've told this story before, but the one time I was in Pittsburgh, or one of two times I was in Pittsburgh, I came out of the hotel to go do a show, and the elevator opened, and there were these two bro-y dudes who got out. And one of them said to the other, “Are you ready to go see Fallingwater, dude?” Fallingwater, of course, being the Frank Lloyd Wright—very famous Frank Lloyd Wright house outside of Pittsburgh. “So, you ready? Hey bro, you ready to go see Falling Water?”

He goes, “Bro, I was born ready to see Falling Water.”

(They laugh.)

Two very bro-y architecture dudes.

[00:03:23] **Monte Belmonte:** I kind of love that!

[00:03:24] **John Hodgman:** But now you live in Western Massachusetts, and—which is where we first met. And you've been on the show before. For those who don't know, I will

say it again. Emily is a senior editor and lexicographer at the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Company. What is a lexicographer? That's a word that needs defining. Merriam-Webster defines a lexicographer as what, Emily?

[00:03:47] **Emily Brewster:** A person who writes and edits dictionaries.

[00:03:50] **John Hodgman:** A person who writes and edits dictionaries. And those of you who don't remember, Emily discovered a new word. That's not exactly how you say it. You realized there was the usage of a word that was not documented in the dictionary, and that word was/is—?

[00:04:05] **Emily Brewster:** “Ah.” I mean, that's just one. It happens all the time. It's just—it is a significant part of the job is just finding these little—these little missing—these little lacunae in the dictionary. Things—words that have not been covered yet, but that are in use. But yes. “Ah.”

[00:04:20] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. “Ah”, the letter A, pronounced “uh”. Not the letter—not the word “uh” like, “uuuh”.

(Monte “uuuh”s.)

The letter A as in “a”, as in “a very pleased John Hodgman welcomed Emily to the show.” Would that be the correct usage that had not been documented?

[00:04:37] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah, that's exactly it. Yes. Yes. So, the “a” there in that case tells your listener that you are not always very pleased, right?

(John confirms with a laugh.)

Because if it were “the” very pleased, then you just might be continually pleased. Like, just pleased all the time. Just going about in a state of great pleasure.

(They chuckle.)

[00:04:55] **John Hodgman:** An intuitively insightful Emily Brewster concluded that John Hodgman is not always pleased. It's true. But I'm very pleased now, because as in the past, Emily's gonna help us sort through your language disputes, your grammar disputes, your phrasing disputes, your pronunciation (*pro-noun-ciation*) disputes. I'm mispronouncing that. Your usage disputes.

You sent in your harsh words about words to the court, and we're gonna settle them with a special docket today that we are calling—I came up with this today—“Mandatory Sentencing Guidelines”.

(They laugh.)

[00:05:27] **Monte Belmonte:** I love it!

[00:05:28] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah, that's good.

[00:05:29] **John Hodgman:** You like that? I came up with that today, man. Put that in the dictionary. And Monte, you're gonna help us by guest bailiff-ing. And we're all gonna drink cheap beer and sit by a pool. So, it's summertime. Let's go! Let's get—let's get through this word docket.

[00:05:43] **Monte Belmonte:** Here's something from Allison in New York, New York.

“My fiancé, Zach, uses the word ‘what’ As a relative pronoun in place of ‘which’ or ‘that’. For example, he'll say, ‘I decided not to go into the store what was too crowded. Or I'm packing a jacket what has a hood.’ His brother also makes this mistake. I presume it's something they learned growing up. I don't think it's a regionalism. They are from the Boston area, whereas I was raised in the great city of San Francisco. I don't want to be an insufferable pedant, but I can't stand it when he does this. Please order that Zach make all reasonable efforts to correct this error.”

[00:06:29] **John Hodgman:** So, ah, wow! Have you ever heard of this, Joel?

(Joel denies.)

No. I'm packing a jacket what has a hood. Allison also sent in some evidence in the form of text messages. So, this is not just a spoken speech pattern, but Zach uses it in writing as well, such as—this is Alison to Zach, “How about you? How was lunch?”

And Zach replies, “Lunch was fine. Fast, thank goodness.” Which I totally—I totally appreciate. And then Zach goes on to say, “It has been fine. I was doing so much outreach today, what is so exhausting.” And—

(Monte laughs.)

And later, Zach says, “We took some good walks today. I actually had a great day. It was pretty low key, what was nice. Then, in a little bit I'll see Adam and Max.” First of all, I just have to—I have to—I'm completely with Zach on this one. A fast lunch is good. Fast lunch is good. Lunch didn't take too long. But as a native of the Commonwealth, Monte, and as a resident of the Commonwealth, Emily—and Joel, where are you from originally?

[00:07:36] **Joel Mann:** Virginia.

[00:07:37] **John Hodgman:** Virginia. Alright, well, different commonwealth.

[00:07:38] **Joel Mann:** But I lived in Cape Cod for a while.

[00:07:40] **John Hodgman:** There you go. Has anyone ever heard a person in the Boston area saying, “It was pretty low key, what was nice” or “I’m wearing a jacket what has a hood”?

[00:07:48] **Joel Mann:** Never.

[00:07:49] **John Hodgman:** Monte?

[00:07:50] **Monte Belmonte:** Never. Unless! But I mean, this doesn't have anything to do with Boston. What if I said like this. (*In a cartoonishly cockney accent.*) “I decided not to go into the store what was too crowded!” That's what it sounds like to me. Like they're speaking with a cockney accent.

[00:08:05] **John Hodgman:** It feels a little cockney. It’s a little cocked up, is what you’re saying. Emily?

[00:08:08] **Emily Brewster:** I'm familiar with it from a friend from Colorado who says this, uses this construction sometimes.

[00:08:13] **John Hodgman:** Oh, really?

[00:08:16] **Monte Belmonte:** Colorado?

[00:08:17] **John Hodgman:** Well, tell me what you think about this construction. Is it, as Allison says, a mistake?

[00:08:24] **Emily Brewster:** Well, no. So, this construction is at least 450 years old, in a slightly different version of it with a pronoun as an antecedent instead of a noun phrase. That's 800—like at least 820 years old. So, the dictionary of American Regional English has evidence of this—just in the US; I don't even know about what they're doing on the other side of the pond—from Maine to Georgia, Indiana, Texas, Nevada, Hawaii. Emily Dickinson used it in a poem.

(*John “wow”s.*)

No, sorry. Oh, actually it was a letter. She used it in a letter, so that means even—you know, even more natural speech, even more natural language than something that she has slaved over. So, it's definitely dialectal. And it was, you know, apparently in Emily Dickinson's dialect. You know, it's safely dialectical. It's not standard English, but that doesn't mean it's bad.

[00:09:15] **John Hodgman:** And of course, we do not—we do not believe in prescriptive grammar here on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast any more than I imagine the Merriam-Webster dictionary does.

[00:09:26] **Emily Brewster:** I'm very glad to know that. I mean, I wouldn't be here otherwise.

[00:09:29] **John Hodgman:** I know. Well, I—look, I appreciate it. For example, by prescriptive grammar and usage, we mean to say, “this is the correct way to say things; this is the correct way to do it”, which is often tied into various sort of mechanisms of class and discrimination. And it's—we choose instead a descriptive approach, which is to say, “These are the ways people say things what is just fine most of the time.”

(They laugh.)

For example, the Merriam-Webster dictionary refers to a hotdog as a sandwich. I can describe that error and not get upset, because certainly there is some wiggle room there. I know that we have this difference of opinion vis-a-vis hot dogs and sandwich-ness, me and the Merriam-Webster dictionary, and yet we can both agree to disagree and be fine with it. That there's not a mistake there.

[00:10:29] **Emily Brewster:** In this case, there are really two possibilities. One is that Zach and his brother were raised hearing this kind of a construction. And because it's such a basic kind of construction, they just assimilated it into their natural speech, and have not really considered—or until recently, apparently; until maybe until—who knows how often Zach has been confronted about his unusual speech.

[00:10:55] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, they don't know which is wrong with them.

(They laugh.)

[00:10:57] **Emily Brewster:** But what's possible is that they learned this from childhood. You know, who knows why constructions like this fall out of use, but they are maintained by family groups really, and by—you know, sometimes larger groups also. So, it's possible that it's that.

The other option is that this is an affectation that Zach and his brother have decided to adopt. And if they've decided to adopt it, then I think it's reasonable to ask that he—that he be—that he stop. But I think it's also really unlikely that it's an affectation. It seems more likely that it's just this quirky element of her ostensibly beloved partner. And you know, it's just a feature of his idiolect. And she can accept it, and ideally she would find it charming. That's my—that's my opinion.

[00:11:51] **John Hodgman:** You know, I'm glad you said that, because a lot of people know I only ever love ostensibly.

(They laugh.)

[00:11:59] **Monte Belmonte:** I love you.

[00:12:03] **John Hodgman:** (*Laughs.*) I'm glad you take such a firm stance against, uh, affectation though, Emily Brewster. That's—I agree with you. If this is a put on—like, imagine in Monte Belmonte doing that terrible cockney accent all the time. That would be something where an authority would have to step in and prevent him from doing that affectation.

[00:12:20] **Emily Brewster:** Well, and actually I didn't mean that you should make him stop doing the affectation if it's an affectation, just that she could ask that reasonably. But you know, I'm not really clear on the power of the court.

[00:12:29] **John Hodgman:** That would be a reasonable ask.

[00:12:31] **Emily Brewster:** So, I defer to you on that.

[00:12:33] **Monte Belmonte:** What if we mandate that he does use a cockney accent all the time, what with this strange affectation? (*In a cockney accent.*) Just go for it. Full ball! What was nice when I spoke like that.

[00:12:43] **John Hodgman:** I'm concerned. Yeah. I wanna know, Allison, why you have not investigated this further. I will say that I am very curious, because while it is not standard English—nor is it particularly typical for any of the speech ways that I have ever heard in New England; although of course Emily, you say there's documented usage in Maine, and obviously it's a big part of Amherst, Massachusetts lingo. That's where Emily Dickinson wrote and—wrote her poems and letters, what we're very good, honestly.

(*They chuckle.*)

So, I am curious if this is a—you say, Allison, that this is not a regionalism, but I would encourage and indeed I would demand that you investigate and ask your ostensibly beloved, Zach, where this is coming from. And because—not because it's anything particularly wrong, so long as he is understandable and comprehensible to you, but because I want to know. I would like to know. Zach and your brother, you need to make account for yourself and why you say “what” in this way. And if it is affected, I would like to know that too. Where are you cribbing it from? What are you trying to get away with or which are you trying to get away with?

This is the kind of stuff that I'm very curious about. So, I will pass judgment insofar as saying, yes, Allison, you may not want to be an insufferable pedant, but it comes naturally to you. And I will not judge Zach for speaking, quote/unquote “non-standard English”, particularly if it's just an authentic regionalism that you haven't explored yet.

But I am curious to know whether this is an affectation. And if it is, then I agree with Emily Brewster. We can go ahead and ask Zach to knock it off. Knock it off. Is that what we say? Why did I say “aff”? And asked Zach to knock it on, which is how I say knock it off.

[00:14:39] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:14:40] **John Hodgman:** Alright, let's hear another one.

[00:14:41] **Monte Belmonte:** Here's a case from Kimberly in San Marcos, California.

“My friend Rob and I disagree on what to call events that happen every year. We agree the first such event should be called the inaugural event, but what comes next? Rob says that the next time the event occurs that it should be called the first annual event. I maintain that when the second event occurs, the inaugural event retroactively becomes the first annual. Thus, the second event is the second annual. Who is right?”

[00:15:16] **John Hodgman:** Well, first of all, this all feels very abstract to me, ‘cause I don't know what the event is. So, Monte, Emily, Joel, I'm very proud to announce that today is the inaugural reading of this letter. I will read this letter every year on or about early July.

(They laugh.)

And this is the inaugural reading of it. And so, next time, Emily Brewster, would the—would next year's reading of the letter be the first annual reading of the letter or the second annual reading of the letter?

[00:15:50] **Emily Brewster:** It would be the second one!

[00:15:52] **John Hodgman:** It would be the second annual reading of the letter.

[00:15:54] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah, here's what's going on, syntactically. We have the word “event”, and it's being modified by two adjectives. If we go to, you know, first annual event, second annual event. But both of those adjectives modify the noun “event”. It's not like—first or second doesn't modify “annual”. It modifies the word “event”. So, the first event—the first annual event—if the event is not the first one, then it can't be called the first one.

[00:16:26] **John Hodgman:** But let me see—let me put this to the test a little bit. Monte, you do a march, right?

[00:16:33] **Monte Belmonte:** Yes, I do.

[00:16:35] **John Hodgman:** What—tell me about the march that you do.

[00:16:37] **Monte Belmonte:** It is a ridiculous publicity stunt fundraiser to raise money and awareness for the Food Bank of Western Mass, where I push an empty shopping cart—

[00:16:43] **John Hodgman:** *(Sarcastically.)* Yeah. That really is ridiculous. Raising money for the food bank. What an ostensibly ridiculous thing to do.

[00:16:50] **Monte Belmonte:** The ostensibly ridiculous part is I push a shopping cart 43 miles over the course of two days, from Springfield, Massachusetts to Greenfield, Massachusetts. That's the ridiculous part. The wonderful part is the community coming together to donate lots of money to make sure people have enough to eat.

[00:17:04] **John Hodgman:** All throughout the whole region. The whole defenestrable 413.

[00:17:10] **Monte Belmonte:** Yes. Although we—I have not gone to Berkshire County yet. I gotta figure that out.

[00:17:14] **John Hodgman:** Okay. So, when was the first time you did this?

[00:17:18] **Monte Belmonte:** What was 14 years ago, I believe.

[00:17:21] **John Hodgman:** Are you answering in the form of a question? This isn't Jeopardy.

(They laugh.)

[00:17:24] **Monte Belmonte:** 14th—this will be the 14th annual one, coming up this November. It's the 14th time I have been doing it, this November. Yeah, so I think that makes it 14 years ago that I did it—

[00:17:37] **John Hodgman:** So, you count the first one as the first annual Monte's March.

[00:17:43] **Monte Belmonte:** Now I do, but I would never have said that back then. I would've said the first ever or inaugural.

[00:17:49] **John Hodgman:** The inaugural. So, the second time you did it is the second annual?

[00:17:55] **Monte Belmonte:** Yes. But thus, making the first one—the inaugural—the first annual. It's like there was no World War I until there was World War II.

[00:18:05] **John Hodgman:** That's a good—that's a good thing. I guess they needed a sequel. Everything needs a sequel these days.

[00:18:11] **Monte Belmonte:** I guess so.

[00:18:12] **John Hodgman:** But Emily Brewster, let me—so, that works, right? That conforms with your understanding and your answer. Right, Emily Brewster? Very confusing.

[00:18:19] **Emily Brewster:** It does.

[00:18:20] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. But what about this. Let's say I get married. Well, Joel, your daughter just got married.

(Joel confirms.)

About a year ago, in Paris, France.

(Joel confirms.)

Now that was what I would call your daughter's inaugural marriage.

(They laugh.)

So, that was just about a year ago and—maybe exactly a year ago. I don't wanna know the date, because I do not have a gift for her. Or you.

[00:18:49] **Joel Mann:** She'll be disappointed.

[00:18:50] **John Hodgman:** But the year commemoration of the first year of marriage is the first anniversary in this case.

(Joel confirms.)

And the first anniversary gift is what Joel? Do you know the traditional first anniversary gift?

(Joel denies.)

Monte? Emily?

[00:19:07] **Monte Belmonte:** Is it paper?

[00:19:08] **John Hodgman:** Paper.

[00:19:09] **Emily Brewster:** Paper? Yeah.

[00:19:10] **John Hodgman:** These are them in order. You ready for this? Paper, cotton, leather, linen, wood. And then the sixth anniversary, hotdog. Seventh anniversary, sandwich. 'Cause they're not the same thing. Eighth, Kung Pao chicken. Oh, by the way, these are the new modern, *Judge John Hodgman* anniversary gifts. Sorry if that wasn't clear to you.

[00:19:36] **Joel Mann:** Where does money come in?

[00:19:37] **John Hodgman:** Uh, well, let's see. The eighth is Kung Pao chicken. The ninth is a complete set of *ALF* trading cards from Put This On Shop. Which are pretty valuable. Yeah.

Then, the tenth is eggnog and Fanta. The 11th is eggnog and Moxie. The 12th is a gallon of scallops—12th wedding anniversary.

[00:20:01] **Joel Mann:** Oh, yeah!

[00:20:02] **John Hodgman:** You get or give a gallon of scallops. And the 13th—and this is very—this is very special. The 13th is the Mitsubishi Delica Japanese Adventure Van Anniversary, because Jesse Thorn really likes the Mitsubishi Delica Japanese adventure van. And do you know that by this fall when we go on tour, it will be the 13th anniversary of this podcast?

[00:20:28] **Monte Belmonte:** Wow!

[00:20:29] **John Hodgman:** So, if you're listening and you're coming to see us on tour this fall, please remember, make sure to bring a Mitsubishi Delica as a gift. And also, it has to be full of It's-It ice cream sandwiches.

And yeah, that's what's going on. The 15th is a cranky Shetland pony. The 16th is a living room sized jellyfish tank. The 17th is a Canadian pizza franchise. The whole franchise. Whole national franchise.

(They laugh.)

The 18th—you'll like this, Emily—it's a bat house and a bat house. That is to say a bat house where bats can live on the side of a house, and also a house that is infested with bats, in honor of our Bat Brothers episode. Plus, you get a complimentary dictionary for the smashing of bats. That was the bat control method used by *(inaudible)*.

[00:21:11] **Emily Brewster:** Could there also be a bath house included? Just to—

[00:21:15] **John Hodgman:** Yeah! That's just another H. A bathhouse is terrific. Yeah. And then, I think we're now at the 18th anniversary. You get lunch with Richard Kind—the actor, Richard Kind. That's your gift, which is actually not very challenging to get. You just call him; he'll show up. 19th, you get a Mr. Peanut jump scare. You get scared by someone wearing a Mr. Peanut costume. And that person is Richard Kind. And the 20th anniversary, for your daughter when she reaches her 20th anniversary, if—and I'm sure we'll both be alive to celebrate it.

[00:21:51] **Joel Mann:** Yeah, you hope.

[00:21:53] **John Hodgman:** Get separate bedrooms for the bride and groom. Finally, they get to sleep in separate rooms. But Emily, what's the difference between a first anniversary and a first annual event? Right? Because if the second Monte's March is the second annual, but the year commemoration of a wedding is the first anniversary, I guess it's—I guess what's different is a commemoration versus a repetition of the event. Would you say?

[00:22:22] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah, I mean, an event is a single thing that happens, and an anniversary is necessarily by definition a repeat, right? It is a marking of something that has already happened.

[00:22:32] **John Hodgman:** Here's my wish to your daughter, Joel. I wish that her marriage be a single thing that happens, and that there'd be only one of them that we honor with a gallon of scallops when the time is right.

(Joel agrees.)

[00:22:45] **Monte Belmonte:** Amen.

[00:22:46] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:22:47] **John Hodgman:** We're gonna take a quick break to hear from this week's partners. We will be back with Emily Brewster from Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of words what is good. Monte Belmonte and Joel Mann and me, John Hodgman, on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast in just a moment.

[00:23:02] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:23:06] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:23:08] **Monte Belmonte:** Welcome back to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. This week, we are clearing the docket. I'm summertime fun time guest bailiff, Monte Belmonte, and we're here with Judge John Hodgman—of course—Joel Mann and Emily Brewster from Merriam-Webster, our dictionary, right down the street from where I am right now in Springfield, Massachusetts.

[00:23:26] **John Hodgman:** That's right, it's a Springfield joint, isn't it? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

(Emily confirms.)

When I think of Springfield, I of course think of the Basketball Hall of Fame, Dr. Seuss, and the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

[00:23:38] **Monte Belmonte:** Yeah. Indian Motorcycles, Friendly's ice cream. Lots of good stuff.

[00:23:43] **John Hodgman:** Oh, let's not talk about Indian Motorcycles.

[00:23:44] **Emily Brewster:** Volleyball too. Oh, no. Volleyball was Holyoke, right?

[00:23:48] **Monte Belmonte:** Volleyball—Holyoke is the birthplace of volleyball. They used to sign all of their—

[00:23:51] **John Hodgman:** Holyoke is the volleyball.

[00:23:54] **Monte Belmonte:** Yeah, almost all of their like faxes, back in the day when I had a morning radio show and I would get faxes from the city of Holyoke about parking bans, they all said on them: Holyoke, birthplace of volleyball.

[00:24:05] **John Hodgman:** Maine is the birthplace of the famous sport of plugging up leaks in your basement.

(They chuckle.)

[00:24:14] **Emily Brewster:** Does it get really competitive up there?

[00:24:17] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, well, it's more person against nature than person against person. It's been very cold and wet here, but we're working on keeping things dry. So, what's this next case we got here, Monte?

[00:24:28] **Monte Belmonte:** Here's a case from Adam in Verona, Wisconsin.

“I have a dispute with my sisters, April and Jessica, about the word ‘since’. When someone uses the phrase ‘X is the best something since Y’, I believe the speaker is making a tacit comparison between the two.”

[00:24:44] **John Hodgman:** Very common. Very commonplace.

[00:24:45] **Monte Belmonte:** Yeah, it's *(inaudible)* algebra.

[00:24:47] **John Hodgman:** I'm always saying, “X is the best something since y!” Go on. I apologize.

[00:24:52] **Monte Belmonte:** No, no worries.

They believe the speaker is making a tacit comparison between the two. They deem the former to be superior. “My sisters say that using since in that phrase does not suggest comparison between the two endpoints; it's simply defining a time period. I think we need Merriam-Webster to weigh in on the case!”

[00:25:11] **John Hodgman:** Merriam-Webster is the—wait, is it synecdoche? If I were to—if I were to refer to Emily Brewster as Merriam-Webster, would that be a synecdoche?

[00:25:21] **Monte Belmonte:** I believe so.

[00:25:22] **John Hodgman:** I'm asking Merriam-Webster, not you, Monte.

[00:25:25] **Emily Brewster:** Well, there's actually some overlap in the use of synecdoche and metonymy. But yes, synecdoche is the more precise term.

[00:25:33] **John Hodgman:** Oh, so I was more in the synecdoche side of things than metonymy?

(Emily confirms.)

Beautiful. Merriam-Webster, I have a question for you.

(They chuckle.)

Emily, did you understand the question that Adam was posing?

(Emily confirms.)

What do you have to say about it?

[00:25:48] **Emily Brewster:** Well, when we say that, you know, X is the best something since Y, it's very clear that a comparison is being made. So, Adam is right about that. But the new item I think is either equal to or about equal to or better than. So, I think he's, he's wrong about it being clearly superior. So, if you were to say, for example, you know, "This is the best *Judge John Hodgman* episode since the last one about language," it doesn't mean that this one is better than that one. In truth, the phrase really is just good at denigrating everything that's come between.

[00:26:26] **John Hodgman:** *(Laughs.)* I mean, isn't it marking a point in time to a degree? Like if I say this new upgraded voiceover internet protocol telephone line, installed in WERU, is so clear and so smooth compared to the janky copper wires that were being used in the years past. It's the best thing since sliced bread."

Now, there is no comparison between VoIP and sliced bread. It just means to say this is the best thing that happened to be invented since sliced bread was invented. No?

[00:26:56] **Emily Brewster:** Yes, but is it saying that it is better than the sliced bread?

[00:27:01] **John Hodgman:** I don't—see, I don't think it is. I agree with you, Emily. I think that it's simply saying, "Remember how awesome it was when sliced bread came along and we were so excited? Well, guess what? I'm excited about something new, and it's happening now, and it's called VoIP."

[00:27:16] **Monte Belmonte:** But Adam's dispute makes it seem like the former is superior—meaning that sliced bread is better than anything to be compared with.

[00:27:21] **John Hodgman:** Please stop saying the former is superior!

[00:27:24] **Monte Belmonte:** (*Cackles.*) I'm simply quoting!

[00:27:27] **John Hodgman:** Alright, let's unpack this sentence one more time. A dispute with April and Jessica. When someone uses the phrase “X is the best something since Y”, I believe the speaker is making a comparison between the two.

I took out “tacit” there. I took out “tacit”, Adam. There's too many words. You didn't need that. The speaker deems the former to be superior. The latter would be Y, the former would be X. So that is saying that—right, that is saying that VoIP is better than sliced bread. And that I will not say. I will not say that that's true. I mean—

[00:28:00] **Emily Brewster:** But is sliced bread really good actually?

[00:28:03] **John Hodgman:** Oh, well, it's true. Oh no, you're right Emily!

[00:28:06] **Emily Brewster:** I mean, what if you put a hot dog on it?

[00:28:08] **John Hodgman:** I don't want—whoaaa!

[00:28:10] **Monte Belmonte:** Joel Mann's daughter's former husband is X.

[00:28:15] **John Hodgman:** Hold on, put a hot dog piece of bread? Why don't you put a worm on a hook, the way you're trying to bait me into this argument?

[00:28:22] **Emily Brewster:** (*Laughs.*) You started it. For sure. I did not—I was not coming here planning to talk about hot dogs at all or sandwiches. And now, we've got bread.

[00:28:27] **John Hodgman:** No, no. I know. We're not talking about it. We're not talking about it. It's terrific. It's terrific. Hot dogs are great in any form they take.

[00:28:33] **Emily Brewster:** I think there's—I think there's some complexity to this particular phrase, right? It can either be used to compare things that are alike—like in my example—or things that are very unlike. And I think that the function differs when—depending on whether two things are alike or two things are, you know, dramatically different.

[00:28:53] **John Hodgman:** So, you're saying the answer is kind of Adam's a little bit right and April and Jessica are a little bit right. It depends on—what should we call—usage and context.

[00:29:03] **Emily Brewster:** I think so.

[00:29:04] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. Because the sliced bread thing really is a celebration of ingenuity, whether or not you think sliced bread is so hot. And you know what? I'm gonna be honest with you, Joel. VoIP is better than sliced bread, now that I think about it.

[00:29:17] **Joel Mann:** It could be sliced sourdough.

[00:29:20] **John Hodgman:** (*Chuckling.*) Yeah, but I mean, when you think about the fact that I'm talking to my friends, Emily and Monte, and I'm in a room—and they're in Massachusetts, and I'm in a room with you in Maine, and I can see pictures of them crystal clear because of the internet. Now, we all know that the internet is destroying civilization, but this is still pretty cool!

(*They laugh.*)

And I'd rather slice my own bread than never get to see Monte Belmonte's smiling face on my teleconferencing program again. Here's my rule—here's my ruling. I'm gonna rule in favor of April and Jessica. For the most part, there is a comparison, but it is not necessarily a comparison of value or superiority. And I'm gonna rule against Adam. Because even as I say that, I'm not sure which one of you holds what position. Because your letter was very confusing to me. And I didn't—(*sighs*) I'm sorry about that. And I'm gonna say this: sliced bread? To quote Jesse Thorn: hang it up, sliced bread. We don't need you.

(*They giggle.*)

[00:30:22] **Monte Belmonte:** We need a new gold standard of comparison.

[00:30:25] **John Hodgman:** I mean, I think that sliced bread was a huge innovation for its time. And was a big increase in convenience for hardworking parents trying to shove peanut butter and jelly into the grubby hands of their offspring. But I would say, this is the best thing since VoIP. I think that's the new phrase.

[00:30:44] **Monte Belmonte:** Today is the inaugural time that VoIP has become the new gold standard replacing sliced bread.

[00:30:50] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:30:51] **John Hodgman:** What about—do we have anything from Janice in Toronto, perhaps?

[00:30:54] **Monte Belmonte:** We sure do.

Janice writes, “I have a dispute with anyone who says something is addicting instead of addictive. I know it is a futile venture to police how people speak and have zero desire to do so. I just want—”

[00:31:08] **John Hodgman:** Really? Zero desire? It seems like you're writing me a letter!

[00:31:11] **Monte Belmonte:** It sure does! (*Laughs.*) “I just want someone to agree with me, in truth.”

[00:31:18] **John Hodgman:** So, (*chuckling*) Janice, I understand. And Paul in Toledo posed a similar question about the distinction between “toward” and “towards”, two words that are

just a little bit different, and there's some dispute over which—if either of them—is quote/unquote “correct”. And Paul goes on to say, “I also am vexed as to how I grew up with ‘utmost’ when I'm now faced with the daily reality of ‘upmost’.”

(Monte affirms.)

Uh, I've never heard “upmost” before in my life. Of the upmost importance? Have you ever heard that, Joel?

[00:31:53] **Joel Mann:** Never.

[00:31:54] **Monte Belmonte:** Never. Monte?

[00:31:56] **Monte Belmonte:** No.

[00:31:57] **John Hodgman:** Emily? Maybe we're hearing a neologism.

[00:32:00] **Emily Brewster:** No, no. It's not a neologism.

[00:32:02] **John Hodgman:** You've heard the—something being of the upmost importance?

[00:32:06] **Emily Brewster:** Well, I have. But also, upmost—before people were kind of making upmost do the job that utmost traditionally does—upmost is a word, meaning uppermost. Like, you know, “You're gonna sleep on the upmost bunk tonight.”

[00:32:19] **John Hodgman:** Right. Yes, of course. That's where all only children sleep.

(They laugh.)

All only children have bunk beds, and they always sleep on the top bunk just to lord it over everybody who has to share their parents' love. And also, to represent the horrible absence of siblinghood beneath them, as they fall into slumber.

Upmost is a word, Paul. Upmost also sounds like something someone would say in an elevator that's stuck, as I once got stuck in an elevator in Toledo. That's the only thing I can think of when I think of Toledo, Paul. I'm sorry. I wish I had better associations with Toledo. I'm sure it's a terrific town. So, let's talk about it. Addicting vs. addictive vs. toward vs. towards vs. utmost vs. upmost. What do you have to say about these not so classic pairings?

[00:33:12] **Emily Brewster:** Well, I mean there, they're three very different cases, to my mind. So, I think that Janice doesn't have as much to worry about as she thinks she does, because addictive is so far and away more common than the word addicting. But they're both fully established. The word addicting dates to like the 1930s. Addictive is a late 19th century word. And they're—so, they're both—they're both used. They're both perfectly fine. Even, you know, medical professionals will use the word “addicting” to describe true physical

addiction. So, it's—but addictive is so much more common, even in kind of informal uses. Like, you know, “so addictive” is more common than “so addicting”, for example.

So, there is like anecdotal evidence that addicting is the word that you should choose when it's like a—you know, it's an inclination that you're indulging. And that addictive is what is the—is the proper word for the compulsive chronic need.

[00:34:15] **John Hodgman:** The substance itself automatically has an addictive quality. That's how it—that's how it scans to my ear. The substance—let's say, um, scallops that you eat by the gallon-full. Like a scallop is addictive if it means that you eat one, you're probably gonna get addicted to that scallop. Whereas I feel like addicting means it's very—it's very tasty and I might develop a behavior of eating more scallops than I should, but there's nothing chemical in the scallops that is causing me to suffer scallop withdrawal when I don't eat a gallon a day.

I'm trying to describe Joel who's suffering with this. This is actually an intervention, Joel.

(They laugh.)

Is it—is that a distinction that I am inventing in the moment? Or is there anything there? Emily Brewster, would you say?

[00:35:09] **Emily Brewster:** I think that's a distinction that you are not alone in making, but it is not inherent to the words actual meaning, either way.

[00:35:17] **John Hodgman:** Addictive is older than addicting, at least in terms of its citation—printed citation?

(Emily confirms.)

Okay. Alright. So, Janice, take it easy. You know? Don't—you know what—you know what tends to be a little bit addicting? Correcting people's language. Gives you a real high. Believe me, I know! I'm a recovered prescriptivist. It gives me a little high to say, *(snootily)* “No, you're saying it wrong. Heh-heh-heh, look at me. Look at me, polishing a shiny apple on my cardigan in college.”

Yeah. Don't get addicted to correcting other people. What about toward and towards? Are those interchangeable?

[00:35:54] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah. Those are also interchangeable. They're both about 1000 years old—more than 1000 years old. More like 1200 years old. Both of them.

[00:36:02] **John Hodgman:** So, not one—I mean, you know, obviously if there was one that was distinctly older than the other, then a pedant might make an argument like, “Well, this is the new one because, you know, case A was used in the 1500s, and case B didn't come

around until the 1600s or whatever.” But this is one where they go back pretty much interchangeably for as long as we have written record it sounds like?

[00:36:27] **Emily Brewster:** Yes, that's right. And that argument that something is better because it's older is spurious anyway, right? Like that's a garbage argument, right? Like, who cares which one's older? Which one does the job better? But in this case, they both go back to the very beginning of the English language, and that word, that W-A-R-D, also obviously goes back to the same time period. And there are a whole bunch of other words that also allow both forms. So, you know, forwards, backwards, forward, backward, inward, outward, inwards, outwards—all of those have been in use for a thousand years. They're just—they're all out there doing their thing. And some speakers prefer one and some prefer another.

It's weird that English allows this. Or more specifically, it's weird that English in Old English times allowed it. Because back then they had these—you know, case endings were like a complex part of the English language. Case endings were very important, and they changed according to an—you know, whether it was an adjective or what case of the sentence it was. And still, the language allowed this variation in these words.

[00:37:36] **John Hodgman:** I'm gonna posit a theory that like “backwards” was originally backwards, but then they got rid of the S. Because back then S's were F's, and it was hard to say and write backwardf. You know what I mean?

(They laugh.)

I think I'm probably—I think I'm probably *(inaudible)*.

[00:37:52] **Emily Brewster:** That's a very interesting theory!

[00:37:55] **Monte Belmonte:** Speculative etymology is one of my favorite things to do too.

[00:37:58] **John Hodgman:** I think I'm right.

[00:37:59] **Monte Belmonte:** I think it was because of witches that they got rid of the S. They thought that the S looked like an F, and because of witches in Old English time, they were like, “We're gonna persecute it. Remove it!”

[00:38:06] **John Hodgman:** But when you talk about Old English, it seems to me like Old English didn't have any rules whatsoever!

[00:38:12] **Emily Brewster:** Oh, it had way more rules! It really did. I mean, it used to be much more like modern German than it is now. And so, it would matter if something was in the accusative case or in the dative case. And adjectives and nouns would take endings the way that they do in German.

[00:38:28] **John Hodgman:** So, when did we shed that kind of—that sort of Teutonic self-policing?

[00:38:34] **Emily Brewster:** I mean, it was really before middle English that that had mostly fallen away, because by the time Chaucer was writing, that stuff was kind of—it was like, you know, for the most part gone. Which is what made it possible for English to adopt so many words into it from French. Right? It didn't matter—you didn't have to conjugate them. You didn't have to worry about what endings they took. You just threw the word into the language and used it.

[00:38:58] **John Hodgman:** And that magpie nature of the English language is one of the things that makes it so difficult to learn and yet so fun to use and play around with, I think. Personally. All the lone words that we've stolen for that reason? I think it's a—I think it's terrific, is what I would say. I'd add an S to it; that's how strongly I feel about it.

(They laugh.)

So, we know—

[00:39:18] **Emily Brewster:** I do have one more thing to say about toward and towards, and that is that in British English, they really like the S.

[00:39:26] **John Hodgman:** They like it. So, in England, you would say towards more often than you might say toward?

[00:39:32] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah.

[00:39:33] **Monte Belmonte:** It's untoward to say toward.

[00:39:37] **John Hodgman:** In England, is what you're—and why are you saying it? Why aren't you saying it in your incredible cockney accent?

[00:39:41] **Monte Belmonte:** *(Hamming up the cockney.)* It's untoward to say toward, governor! What with all the S's that have been milling about.

[00:39:50] **John Hodgman:** Oh my—*(laughing)* oh my goodness.

[00:39:51] **Monte Belmonte:** I feel like Dick Van Dyke.

(John agrees.)

I'm like a one-man band over here!

[00:39:58] **Emily Brewster:** I like how your elbow come into play when you do that accent.

[00:40:00] **John Hodgman:** I wish the listeners could see that while he's speaking, Monte is holding an imaginary chimney sweep in one hand, and he's walking around with a pair of cymbals between his knees at the same time.

[00:40:15] **Monte Belmonte:** You're lucky that it's my elbows. What with it being a cock-knee accent.

[00:40:18] **John Hodgman:** Oh, boy. Uuugh. Though we may agree, finally, that language is what is used not as what you are instructed to use. Let's instruct Monte no more puns for the rest of the show, if you don't mind.

[00:40:32] **Monte Belmonte:** Ugh, dang it. Alright.

[00:40:34] **John Hodgman:** No, you don't have to do it. Do as much as you want, of course.

(Monte thanks him.)

So, upmost, of course, means uppermost—as in the bunkbed that we talked about earlier, Emily. What is the origin of the word utmost? Because I don't see a lot of uts in the English language, typically.

[00:40:48] **Monte Belmonte:** I do! With pretzels!

[00:40:51] **John Hodgman:** Look, they don't sponsor us. There's no—they're never gonna come around. I still love—listen, the taste of the summer for me? And this—frankly, this is pretty addicting and addictive. Utz Special Dark Pretzels dipped in Hell of a Good Onion Dip. Those are my store—my brand name combos for a cold afternoon on a pebbly beach in Maine. But Emily, do you happen to know the etymology of utmost?

[00:41:20] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah, it's—again, it traces back to—it dates to Old English. The “ut” was originally an adverb, pronounced oot, that meant out.

[00:41:30] **John Hodgman:** Oh, the outmost!

(Emily confirms.)

Is it the same root of the word utter? Not udder as in a cow, but utter like the utter gall?

[00:41:39] **Emily Brewster:** No, no, it's not. This particle—this word particle does not exist in very many words that are still used. I found exactly one. And—

[00:41:49] **John Hodgman:** Oh! What is it?

[00:41:50] **Emily Brewster:** It is—well.

[00:41:52] **John Hodgman:** Oh, no, no, no, no. Wait a minute! This is a perfect opportunity. We'll reveal that after a break.

(They laugh.)

It's an incredible tease opportunity! When we come back, Emily Brewster will reveal the one other word in the English language that uses the term “ut”—or oot—meaning out. But first, let's take a little break.

[00:42:13] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:42:18] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:42:19] **John Hodgman:** Monte, we're taking a break from clearing the docket, “Mandatory Sentencing Guidelines”. Let's talk about what we have coming up. I'll tell you Monte, I mentioned it at the top of the show. Very, very excited to say that the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast is going on tour, and this is a big one. We are going not only around the country more than ever before—dates forthcoming; watch this space for details—but also over the seas to the London Podcast Festival.

We're returning to the London Podcast Festival on Friday, September 15th and Saturday, September 16th. Information and tickets are available now via the MaximumFun.org events page. Just go to MaximumFun.org/events. We're doing two big shows while we're in London for the podcast festival. I can say on some authority that Jesse Thorn will also be there. We'll be doing a live *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* during the same festival. It's a wonderful time. We haven't been there since 2017. We cannot wait to go back. And does that mean we're gonna do some more shows overseas? I can't say for sure, but the answer is yes. We will, and we'll be announcing those shows as well as all of our other dates very soon. So, as I say, listen to the space for details.

And meanwhile, send us your London beefs. You know what they have over there? The beef eaters, you know what I mean? The beef eaters are the ones who wear the hats and make the gin and guard the Tower of London. That's what that's what we are. We need your beefs. We need your beefs to survive. We need your disputes. We need your arguments. We need your fights. We need all of your disputes, particularly if you're living in the London area or can be there during September, because we are putting on a show, the one I was just talking to you about. So, please send in your London beefs so we can eat 'em right up at MaximumFun.org/jjho.

Monte, what's going on with you out there in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts?

[00:44:11] **Monte Belmonte:** I've got my new radio show. I've jumped ship from my beloved WRSI 93.9 The River, and started an afternoon daily—at least Monday through Friday—talk show with my co-host Kaliis Smith, called *The Fabulous 413*, where we try to talk to as many interesting people about the interesting things that are happening in the four counties of Western Mass. And it's also a podcast that people can subscribe to wherever podcasts are available—called *The Fabulous 413*.

[00:44:36] **John Hodgman:** And listen, I have a question for you. When you're living and loving life there in Western Massachusetts—specifically in the area around Turner's Falls, I know that you love to go see a show or host a show at the Shea Theater, which is a wonderful place to go. But when you get thirsty or you want a little snack, where do you slake your thirst or satisfy—or sate your hunger?

[00:45:01] **Monte Belmonte:** I can't tell you how many times after an event at the Shea, we've crossed the street and shut down my favorite neighborhood bar, called the Rendezvous.

[00:45:11] **John Hodgman:** The Rendezvous in Turner's Falls. I've enjoyed many a drink and snack there as well as I did—I've done some shows there, and if it's not clear, I highly recommend it.

Emily, what do you think about the Rendezvous? Yes or no?

[00:45:27] **Emily Brewster:** Yes, absolutely. Yes, yes, yes.

[00:45:30] **John Hodgman:** It was completely unbiased opinion, correct?

[00:45:32] **Emily Brewster:** Completely unbiased opinion, having been one of the three owners for 15 years now. So yes, unbiased.

[00:45:36] **John Hodgman:** (*Playfully.*) Oh! I had no idea.

[00:45:38] **Monte Belmonte:** What?!

[00:45:40] **John Hodgman:** And do you have—do you have some events at the Rendezvous as well? Some live events still?

[00:45:44] **Emily Brewster:** Oh yes, all the time. We've got bingo, we've got quiz nights, we've got live music frequently.

[00:45:50] **John Hodgman:** Where would one go to find out what events are coming up and where the Rendezvous is and how to get there, and how to meet up with a friend and truly have a rendezvous there?

[00:45:59] **Emily Brewster:** Yes. TheVoo.net is the website, also on Instagram and on the Facebook, etc..

[00:46:06] **John Hodgman:** That's TheVoo.net. T-H-E-V-O-O dot net.

And you ever have a jazz trio come and play?

(Emily confirms.)

Oh really? Well, why don't you fire them and hire a different one? I'm recommending the night and day jazz trio. Right, Joel?

[00:46:23] **Joel Mann:** That's right. The Pentagoet, every Tuesday, 5-8.

[00:46:26] **John Hodgman:** That's the Pentagoet Inn, in Castine, Maine. 5-8PM. Live jazz on the porch, with Joel Mann—the Maine man, Joel Mann—laying down base. And if you're listening to this, it's probably the beginning of your summer. And—but you'll be playing every Tuesday?

[00:46:45] **Joel Mann:** Every Tuesday until, uh, sometime in October.

[00:46:48] **John Hodgman:** So, you got plenty of time to get thee to Castine and get thee to the Pentagoet Inn. And here's some wonderful live jazz, and say hello to the Maine man himself, Joel Mann. And you are also on Instagram, right?

(Joel confirms.)

[@TheMaineMann](#). T-H-E-M-A-I-N-E-M-A-N-N?

(Joel confirms.)

Alright. I think that's everything we need to know about where to go, what to eat, and what to listen to. Let's get back to the docket.

[00:47:13] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:47:15] **Monte Belmonte:** Welcome back to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Monte Belmonte. We're here with Emily Brewster from Merriam-Webster, and I am filled with utter delight—or the utmost delight!—to find out what other word in English uses “ut” besides the pretzels.

[00:47:31] **Emily Brewster:** Are you ready?

[00:47:33] **Monte Belmonte:** I'm ready.

[00:47:33] **Emily Brewster:** Okay.

[00:47:34] **John Hodgman:** I am. I'm on the—I'm on the edge of my seat!

[00:47:37] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah. Are you on the ut? The ut of your seat?

[00:47:40] **John Hodgman:** I am on the ut of my seat.

[00:47:43] **Emily Brewster:** Now, this is a word that just rolls off the tongue so easily. Alright. The word is utfangthief.

[00:47:50] **John Hodgman:** Can you—can you use it in a sentence?

(They laugh.)

[00:47:53] **Emily Brewster:** Not really. I really can't. It's defined as the right of a Lord, under medieval English law, to try in his manorial court a thief or other felon dwelling in his manner but caught outside it. So, the ut means out. Fangen is the past participle of fōn, meaning to seize or capture. And the thief is just thief.

[00:48:15] **John Hodgman:** And the thief is just thief? Would you spell—?

[00:48:17] **Emily Brewster:** Now, this word is pretty obscure, but here's the thing. It's actually a more obscure variant of outfangthief. So, utfangthief is even rarer than outfangthief.

[00:48:29] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, no, I mean, I know what outfangthief is.

(Monte agrees.)

Though I don't know how to—how do you spell—what is the word or the word particle after ut or out that you were saying? 'Cause I don't know how to spell it. I can't picture it in my mind.

[00:48:41] **Emily Brewster:** F-A-N-G. Like a dog's fangs.

[00:48:45] **John Hodgman:** Utfangthief?

[00:48:46] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah.

[00:48:46] **Monte Belmonte:** It's my new band name.

[00:48:47] **John Hodgman:** There's gotta be a—there's gotta be a psychedelic band called Utfangthief.

[00:48:51] **Joel Mann:** Ut-oh!

[00:48:53] **John Hodgman:** *(Laughs.)* Ut-oh!

[00:48:57] **Monte Belmonte:** Oot-oh!

[00:48:58] **Emily Brewster:** I mean, all the other ut words that—all the other ut words that don't have a double T are—the U says its name, right? It's like utility, utopia, utensil. We are not used to saying ut at the beginning of a word. We just are not.

[00:49:14] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, that's right. U. It's mostly U. I wanna say you-tmost from now on. And I'm placing the you-tmost importance.

[00:49:22] **Emily Brewster:** It would be a natural thing for the language to make this shift completely, but it has not happened. Utmost is still definitely the favored pronunciation of

this word. Utmost is not going anywhere immediately, but it would kind of make sense for it to switch over to upmost.

[00:49:38] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:49:39] **John Hodgman:** Why don't we go into the next case?

[00:49:42] **Monte Belmonte:** Here's a case from Gabriel.

“I have a dispute with the word ‘onomatopoeia’. I'm told that in other languages, ideophones exist as a word category. These are words that sound like their meaning, similar to onomatopoeia, but in English we don't have that category. I would like the honorable Judge John Hodgman to order onomatopoeia to include ideophone as a category. I would further request that grandiloquent can be the first inclusion in the ideophone category, so that I don't have to run for political office in order to make it so.”

[00:50:17] **John Hodgman:** Hmm. Like the Grandiloquent 413!

[00:50:20] **Monte Belmonte:** That's right!

[00:50:21] **John Hodgman:** I know what—I know what an onomatopoeia is. That is a word that sounds like what it is describing. Which—the easiest version of it is like a dog. You say a dog's—a dog barks, because when a dog makes that sound, it often sounds like “bark, bark, bark”. Or there was one time, when I was on the Jonathan Coulton cruise, and we got off in Loretto, Mexico for an excursion. And I was walking down the street, and there was a dog behind a fence. And that dog did not go “bark, bark, bark”. I swear to you, the dog went, “mark, mark, mark”.

(They laugh.)

But of course, onomatopoeia are subjective as well, because as I learned reading, the Hergé comic books featuring the boy reporter/adventurer, *(with a French accent)* Tintin—AKA *(with his usual accent)* Tintin. When his dog, Snowy, barks, he doesn't go “mark, mark, mark”. He goes “waouh, waouh”. Which I guess is what they think dogs sound like in France.

You were in France, Joel, did you ever hear a dog go waouh?

(Joel denies it.)

(Stammering.) How does a French dog bark?

[00:51:35] **Joel Mann:** I have no idea. *(Laughs.)*

[00:51:38] **John Hodgman:** Never heard a French dog bark?

[00:51:39] **Joel Mann:** No, actually I haven't.

[00:51:41] **John Hodgman:** Waouh. That's what it sounds like, I guess.

[00:51:44] **Monte Belmonte:** In some Spanish speaking countries, dogs say “guau-guau”.

[00:51:47] **John Hodgman:** Guau-guau! And of course, bow wow is an onomatopoeia describing, I guess that sound that dogs make when they go “wah, wah, wah, wah, wah”, when they're pathetically begging. Sorry, dogs. Have some self-respect.

[00:52:01] **Emily Brewster:** I've heard that in France, the Ducks say “kwan, kwan”.

[00:52:05] **John Hodgman:** (*Laughing*)Kwan, kwan? But Emily Brewster, what is an ideophone? I've never heard of this term before, have you?

[00:52:13] **Emily Brewster:** Yes.

[00:52:13] **Monte Belmonte:** It's like voiceover internet protocol. It's got all sorts of ideas that you can use but using the internet over the phone.

[00:52:19] **John Hodgman:** Alright, I now am going to make wordplay illegal again.

(Monte cheerfully agrees and apologizes.)

I opened the door, you walked through it, and we have an actual expert here. So, let's turn it back over to Merriam-Webster, AKA Emily Brewster.

[00:52:34] **Emily Brewster:** Thank you, John. An ideophone is an onomatopoeic element that functions as part of a distinct word class, and it's especially common in some African languages. English is not really—we're not an idiophonic language, but we do have some idiophonic elements. So, for example, words that refer—or that mean “small” often have an Ee or Eh vowel sound in them, like teeny weenie, bity bitsy. What a cute little beebee! You know, the smaller the baby is, you call it—you're more likely to call it a beebee instead of a baby.

[00:53:07] **John Hodgman:** So, the sound of the word and the pitch of the word conveys a meaning or a feeling that the hearer recognizes, even though it is not imitating a sound. Right? Like teeny weeny has a little bit of a feeling of smallness to it.

[00:53:20] **Emily Brewster:** Yes, yes. And not pitch really. I know I was using my pitch in describing that, but an ideophone is specifically the sound.

[00:53:25] **John Hodgman:** I thought it was terrific.

[00:53:27] **Emily Brewster:** And the sounds correlate to ideas, in ideophones. So, we also have this in—if you think about words for things that are slimy or smooshy. I mean, like there's so many words that start with “sm” and “sl” that are like slush and slippery and slick. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:53:44] **John Hodgman:** Ugh. Yeah. We're gonna get a lot of letters from the misophonics out there, but (*makes grossed out noises*). Yeah, it sounds like that a little bit.

[00:53:52] **Emily Brewster:** I was really curious about this letter. The letter writer, Gabriel, his dispute is actually with the word onomatopoeia, which is—I mean, I didn't know that people could bring cases to *Judge John Hodgman* to actually settle matters with words.

[00:54:12] **John Hodgman:** I—this—normally, I would not—I would not allow it. Normally, our cases are between two distinct human parties, not with words or concepts. I don't even allow people to bring disputes against themselves. But I wanted—I like talking about onomatopoeias, and this was an interesting subject to me. So, I made an excuse this time, the way I made an excuse to let Monte go do wordplay again. And that was a mistake that I made. So, Gabriel, don't make me regret this.

(*They chuckle.*)

[00:54:42] **Emily Brewster:** Well, I like this very much. You might also like to know another rare, related word. And that is if you have a word that is exhibiting onomatopoeia or that is onomatopoeic, you can call it an onomatope.

[00:54:56] **John Hodgman:** Onomatope? That's terrific. That's a great name for a dog. Onomatope is second only to Hambone as a good name for a dog.

“Waouh, waouh.” “Hey, Onomatope. Come on over here.” “Waouh, waouh!”

(*They chuckle.*)

Well, in the case of Gabriel vs. onomatopoeia, I say: (*blows a raspberry*). Sorry. Sorry to spit all over your brand-new board here at WERU. Yeah, exactly. Really—we really are in a new time, but yeah, Gabriel, you don't win. I love the idea of ideophones, and I can sort of see the argument that you're making for grandiloquent, because I guess it's—I mean, it's really subjective, Emily Brewster, but would you say that grandiloquent as a word conveys—I don't know what to say? Just in its sound, a sense of grandiloquence? Yes or no? Is that an ideophone, would you say?

[00:55:53] **Emily Brewster:** I think it has hints of that. I don't feel like I'm an authority enough on ideophones in particular, because English doesn't really have very many of them to say if it truly is. The authority on them is a linguist named Mark Dingemans. And he's Dutch. So, he would know for sure, but it is true that we've got grandiloquent.

[00:56:11] **John Hodgman:** His name gave me the feeling of Dutch, that's for sure. Definitely an idiophonic name.

[00:56:14] **Monte Belmonte:** It's a grandiloquent name, for sure.

[00:56:16] **Emily Brewster:** But there's also loquacious, and also sesquipedalian. You know, there are words that actually evoke their meanings through the very existence of the word itself, it seems.

[00:56:28] **John Hodgman:** I hope sesquipedalian means incredible confusion on my part, 'cause that's the feeling that it evoked in me.

[00:56:34] **Emily Brewster:** It just means very long. It traces back to a Latin phrase, meaning a foot and a half. So, a sesquipedalian word is a word that's like approximately a foot and a half long.

[00:56:43] **John Hodgman:** It's a long—it's a long word describing a long length of words.

(Emily confirms.)

A long length. Oh, okay. I like that. I'm gonna—I'm gonna let you try out grandiloquent, Gabriel. But onomatopoeia, you have no—there's no argument with onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is—you can't have a dispute with that word, A) 'cause it's a word, and B) it's a terrific class of words.

[00:57:05] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:57:06] **John Hodgman:** We've talked before about how farts around the world all have the same sound, no matter what language you're talking in. It's usually put-put or brap. But I didn't know—I was doing my own little research on this—that for obvious reasons, snoring—the words that describe snoring are pretty common and have a lot to do with each other.

So, for example, in Afrikaans snoring is “snork”, and in Azerbaijani it's “xor”. And in Danish, it's “snork” as well. And in Estonian, it's “norr”. You know, these are onomatopoeias. They describe the sound that they're—the words imitate the sound that they are trying to describe. But I was very surprised that while most nations and language groups have maybe one or two words for snore, the Basque people, in what we now know as Spain, have—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 onomatopoeias for snore, including “gurrunga”, “korroka”, “korronga”, “korronka”, “korrox”, “korroxka”, “kurrun”, “kurrunka”, “pzzz”, “rru-rru”, “ru-ru-ru”, “zirri-zorro”, “zorro-zorro”, “zurru”, “zurrun”, “zurruzta”, and “zzzzz”. That's five Zs.

(Monte cackles.)

I wanna know more about the snoring culture of the Basque people and why they got so many—maybe they just have a genetic palate difference that makes their snoring much more diverse than mine, which is really just (*honk-shoos*) like cartoon snoring.

[00:58:50] **Monte Belmonte:** They make excellent cider there. I'll tell you that. Maybe they just take excellent naps as well after they've had their excellent cider.

[00:58:56] **John Hodgman:** You know, I've never been to that part of the world. I'd like to get there. Hey, you say you're from Virginia originally, Joel?

(Joel confirms.)

Where's McLean, Virginia?

[00:59:04] **Joel Mann:** That's where I'm from.

[00:59:05] **John Hodgman:** Really!?

(Joel confirms.)

[00:59:06] **Monte Belmonte:** Whooooa!

[00:59:06] **John Hodgman:** Because we have a—we have a dispute from Kurt in McLean, Virginia.

[00:59:10] **Joel Mann:** Oh, Kurt. Yeah.

(They laugh.)

[00:59:14] **Monte Belmonte:** Kurt says, “I have a dispute with my wonderful, brilliant 16-year-old daughter, Sophia. Sophia insists that the abbreviation spelled B-R-O-S should be pronounced bros. I respectfully but vehemently disagree. It should be brothers. This disagreement ignites phonetic dissonance in our family whenever the Super Marios, Warners, Smashes, or other famous male siblings of this world make an appearance. Thank you kindly for your consideration.”

[00:59:44] **John Hodgman:** So, in other words, Sophia wants to say the name of the game is *Super Mario Bros*. Whereas Kurt wants to say the name of the game is *Super Mario Brothers*. Do you have any thoughts on this, Emily Brewster?

[00:59:59] **Emily Brewster:** Well, I mean, there's an argument for either one, right? We don't say lbs. for pounds. We say pounds. L-B-S, right? But we do say Mr. for M-R period. So—

[01:00:13] **John Hodgman:** Well, that's true.

[01:00:14] **Emily Brewster:** It's—the pronunciations of abbreviations are just subject to change like any other linguistic form.

[01:00:20] **John Hodgman:** In any—well, let's do this specific ruling then. *Super Mario Bros* or *Super Mario Brothers*? We'll go around the horn. Joel? Brothers or Bros?

[01:00:33] **Joel Mann:** Brothers.

[01:00:34] **John Hodgman:** Monte?

[01:00:35] **Monte Belmonte:** *Super Mario Brothers*.

[01:00:37] **John Hodgman:** Emily Brewster?

[01:00:39] **Emily Brewster:** Brothers, but I think it's only generational.

[01:00:42] **John Hodgman:** Well, do you think that there are kids out there saying *Super Mario Bros*, and they're okay?

[01:00:45] **Emily Brewster:** Well, yeah!

[01:00:46] **John Hodgman:** Well, look. Kids these days—I know this is supposed to be a descriptivist language episode, but I'm getting pretty prescriptivist around this. I don't know about this. I think the old way of doing things is the correct way. I've been around longer, and therefore I'm more correct. Warner Bros or Brothers? Warner Bros or Brothers? Joel?

[01:01:06] **Joel Mann:** Definitely brothers.

[01:01:07] **John Hodgman:** Monte?

[01:01:08] **Monte Belmonte:** Warner Brothers.

[01:01:10] **John Hodgman:** Emily, you gonna hold the line? It could be either.

[01:01:13] **Emily Brewster:** Brothers for me personally, but not—yes, no. Same thing. Same thing. Generational.

[01:01:18] **John Hodgman:** Alright. I'll put this one to you. What about the famous Adult Swim cartoon, *Venture Brothers* or *Venture Bros*? Joel?

[01:01:26] **Joel Mann:** I have no knowledge of that.

[01:01:28] **John Hodgman:** You have no knowledge of the *Venture*?

[01:01:29] **Joel Mann:** Yes. So, I can't make a—I have to recuse myself.

[01:01:33] **John Hodgman:** You're gonna recuse yourself on the basis of cultural ignorance.

(Joel confirms.)

I understand. Monte? I would do the same.

[01:01:38] **Monte Belmonte:** *Venture Brothers*.

[01:01:39] **John Hodgman:** I would do the same. It's not a judgment. I'm just—right.

[01:01:43] **Monte Belmonte:** I'm *Venture Brothers*.

[01:01:45] **John Hodgman:** Emily, what would you say?

[01:01:46] **Emily Brewster:** Yeah, same.

[01:01:48] **John Hodgman:** *Venture Brothers*?

(*Emily confirms.*)

Well, it so happens that the co-creator of *Venture Brothers* is a person named Jackson Publick, AKA Chris McCulloch, whom I bothered via text while he was on his vacation this morning at 5AM. Luckily, he was in another country. So, I reached him at a reasonable hour. And I said, “Even though it is spelled *Venture Bros*, do you say *Venture Bros* or *Venture Brothers*?”

And according to the co-creator—and I'm sure that his co-creator, Doc Hammer, would support him—it is *Venture Brothers*.

[01:02:17] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[01:02:19] **John Hodgman:** Now, does it matter that the creator of a thing says, “This is how you pronounce it”? Of course not. I went to Yale for comparative literature. I know the author is dead. I know that authorial intent is meaningless. I know that we all die, and we leave behind our only texts to be interpreted and reinterpreted by 16-year-olds like Sophia, who is gonna last far long—far beyond my own gallon of scallops anniversary on this planet.

I get it. But for now, I'm just gonna say *Venture Brothers*, because it's a really good show. Joel, you should watch it. *Venture Brothers*. And it's—the very, very last bit of it is coming out. You know, it ran for seven seasons on Adult Swim. Very funny cartoon. And I—this is—I'm just doing this as a plug now, at this point.

[01:03:06] **Joel Mann:** Yeah. I'm not allowed to watch cartoons.

[01:03:07] **John Hodgman:** You're not allowed to watch cartoons? I'm giving you special dispensation. Okay? Monte opened the word—opened the wordplay floodgates. We're also gonna open the cartoon floodgates for Joel. *Venture Bros*.

[01:03:17] **Monte Belmonte:** Has he not watched—has he not watched *Dick Town*, starring none other than Judge John Hodgman?

[01:03:23] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, didn't you watch *Dick Town* starring John Hodgman, David Rees?

[01:03:26] **Joel Mann:** Is that on Hulu?

[01:03:28] **John Hodgman:** Well, I can't say, 'cause I'm on the writers' guild strike, so I'm not supposed to promote things. But factually, yes.

[01:03:32] **Joel Mann:** Yes, I don't watch any television since the strike.

[01:03:35] **John Hodgman:** And this is also a fact—and I'm just describing. This is not prescriptive; this is descriptive. *Venture Brothers: Radiant is the Blood of the Baboon Hearts*, the final film of *Venture Brothers* adventures is available July 21st digitally, and on Blu-ray July 25th. It is wonderful. It is a wonderful end to a wonderful piece of art, which you should check out. Sophia, it's called *Venture Brothers*, Sophia, not Bros. These are not bros. They're brothers. And it's got a lot of voice talent in it, including my last trip in the rodeo as Snoopy.

Didn't you—not Snoopy the dog. But didn't you ever watch any *Peanuts* cartoons, Joel?

[01:04:17] **Joel Mann:** Just in the comic strips?

[01:04:19] **John Hodgman:** No? (*Baffled.*) Is there something—?

[01:04:21] **Monte Belmonte:** He flips them together from different newspapers from different days previous.

[01:04:26] **John Hodgman:** Are you part of a sect that doesn't—that considers moving drawn images to be sacrilegious?

[01:04:33] **Joel Mann:** I did watch that when I was a young kid, but since I got married, my wife—Michelle; wonderful, wonderful woman—never let me watch *The Simpsons*.

[01:04:42] **John Hodgman:** Oh, really?

[01:04:43] **Joel Mann:** Yeah. So, that's kind of culty.

[01:04:44] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. There was a time—there was a time when *The Simpsons* were kind of controversial. And I had my mom and dad saying, “I'm not sure you should be watching that.”

(*Joel agrees.*)

But then, I grew up, Joel. Maybe you should try it.

(*They laugh.*)

Anyway. Emily Brewster. Do you like cartoons? Do you have any cartoons you wanna recommend? Since we're talking about cartoons, and I just put in a shameless plug for the *Venture Brothers*.

[01:05:10] **Emily Brewster:** No, no, I'm not really allowed to recommend cartoons.

[01:05:13] **John Hodgman:** Oh, wow!

(They chuckle.)

Alright. Emily, you're not watching cartoons. What's the next project for you over there at Merriam-Webster? You gonna find another word?

[01:05:23] **Emily Brewster:** Yes. Finding words all the time. Yes. I took care of yeet. Felt good about yeet. That's old. What else have I been working on? I don't know. You know. New word, new day. New day, new word. All the words.

[01:05:34] **John Hodgman:** I love it. We need more of them. The answer is always—is more words and more speech. And we'll all enjoy talking to each other. Monte, is the docket clear?

[01:05:46] **Monte Belmonte:** The docket is clear, Judge John Hodgman! That's it for another episode of *Judge John Hodgman*. *Judge John Hodgman* was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman.

[01:05:55] **John Hodgman:** That's me!

[01:05:56] **Monte Belmonte:** Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. We're on Instagram [@JudgeJohnHodgman](#). Follow us there for evidence and other photos from the show and check out the Maximum Fun subreddit to discuss this episode at [MaximumFun.Reddit.com](#).

[01:06:10] **John Hodgman:** And it is officially summer here in the court of *Judge John Hodgman*. You can hear it—you can hear it in the sound of the rollicking docket. We are looking for your summertime disputes. Have any disputes regarding summer camp or going to the beach? What beach do you like to go to? What side of the—what side of the peninsula do you prefer to beach on? What's the best beach in Virginia?

[01:06:34] **Joel Mann:** Virginia Beach.

[01:06:35] **John Hodgman:** Virginia Beach. It's right there in the name.

(They laugh.)

Do you have any disputes about summer school—either summer school the concept, or the movie *Summer School*, starring Mark Harmon. What about summer rolls? Or *Midsommar*? The movie *Midsommar*. A dispute over that? Donna Summer! Indisputably, one of the greatest, Donna Summer.

But if you're Gabriel out there and you wanna take a swing at onomatopoeia and Donna Summer—two of the greatest things in the world—by all means send it in. Everything gets a fair hearing. MaximumFun.org/jjho. Summertime disputes are on the docket. And of course, we're eager to hear about all of your disputes on any subject.

No case is too small. No case is too big. Some cases are too medium. But you know what? Why don't you let me decide? Send it in, and I always enjoy receiving your letters. So, send them all in to MaximumFun.org/jjho.

Monte, Emily, Joel, thank you very much. We'll talk to you all again soon—and you too, listener—on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[01:07:34] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[01:07:37] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[01:07:38] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[01:07:39] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[01:07:40] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[01:07:42] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[01:07:43] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[01:07:44] **Speaker 6:** —by you.