

An Extra-Large Editorial (Subjectively Speaking)

by Ben Turner, Writing Tutor, Co-Editor, *The Roane State Review*

What does the word "large" mean these days? No, not that, ya pervert! I'm referring to the diminishing use of it in proper context. Ordered a large Coke lately? You probably wound up with the one that was one size smaller than the biggest they had. To me, large means if there are three sizes, it's the biggest one. Apparently there are those in the retail industry who disagree with me. Sometime, without my knowledge, small was renamed as "regular," medium became "large," and large came to be considered "extra large."

I guess sooner or later the word "regular" will be abandoned by the wayside for its mediocre overtones and substituted in its place will be the word "large." Of course, since there has to be a distinction between sizes, the next size up will become "Big 'Un," and the biggest of all will don the name "Behemoth."

Try this--go to a fast food restaurant of your choice and ask for a "large" order of fries. Take notice of what size container is used. I'd just about be willing to bet that the biggest container they have isn't the one they reach for. More than likely, you'll get what's really the mid-size carton of fries. This works with pizza, too. Try and order a medium pizza from Papa John's. The response I get is "we don't have medium, only small, large, and extra large." What's this nonsense? Is it supposed to make me feel better about my purchase of a large as opposed to a medium? I just want a pizza that's not too big, but isn't going to leave me hungry either. To me, that falls under the category of "medium." That's marketing for you. Just gimme a medium-sized pizza, as in, not the smallest, but not one that occupies its own zip code either.

Every restaurant has a different qualifier. Hardee's refers to their combo as a "Jumbo Size." At the Huddle House, it's a "Hearty Helping," and McDonald's calls it "Super Size." How many synonyms for large can we come up with? The English language contains a finite number of words. Sooner or later when every company has trade-marked a variation of big or large, words will start being made up. Wendy's has already started the trend. Last time I checked, "Biggie" isn't in the unabridged dictionary.

I wonder when the trend will stretch to other industries as well. Will the automotive industry start calling the Miata a "regular-sized" car? Does that make everything else "large?" That means the Escort would be called a "large" car, and sport-utilities like Ford's Excursion and the Chevy Suburban will be reclassified as "Extra Extra Extra Large" cars.

Thank God this trend seems to be limited to the commercial sector. I've never heard of anyone calling the direction "extra south." Or maybe "southeast." Picture someone giving you these directions: "Turn extra-left at the first fork, then go the southeast you possibly can for about 3 miles. Turn mega-north and then make an extra-small right."

Maybe that's the trend--everything from here on out will be classified as a grade of large. The terms "small" and "regular" will be phased out, since no one wants to own anything that's small or regular. We can do away with the whole "good, better, best" identification, too, since good is merely average, and better implies that it's inferior to at least one other product. John Wayne-style toilet paper (rough, tough, and, er, you know the rest) will be the "best"; standard Charmin won't be able to handle just being "better," so they'll have to start calling it "more best," or maybe "extra best." Maybe even "galacta-mundo" for the really good stuff. Yeah, I just made that word up, but relax. I'll give you an example so you can be sure you use it correctly: "After that night of drinking Tabasco sauce and eating jalapenos, the extra-best toilet paper wasn't cutting it, so I reached for the galacta-mundo Charmin. That did the trick."

Here are some more usage examples of the upcoming classification system. For instance, a trip to the movies:

"I'd like a large Coke, please"

"Would you like the large or our Bladder-Cup?"

"Umm, bladder-what?"

"It's called a Bladder-Cup sir, we named it that because it's not possible to drink the whole thing without exploding your bladder."

"Just gimme a slightly-larger-than-average-sized Coke. I'm not really big on doing myself bodily harm when consuming beverages."

Or maybe the purchase of a new television set:

"Hi, I'm looking for something in a big screen."

"Big as in 'barn door,' or big as in 'side of a Buick?' "

"I'd say more to the effect of 'side of a Honda.' "

"Right this way, sir, are our assortment of 'bigger' televisions. The big screens are anything up to 36 inches. Bigger screens are 36 to 48 inches, and the eyeball-burners are anything over 48 inches."

I consider myself to be a medium-sized guy. My 165-pound frame fits nicely in medium-sized chairs, cars, and other objects still subjectively classified correctly. But when I buy a T-shirt, I wear an extra large. Not because I like baggy clothes, that just happens to be the size that I fit in without looking like a skinny version of James Dean trying to wear a T-shirt one size too small for me and show off muscles I don't have. I can't imagine why the clothing industry would classify people as being "large" inadvertently. Large by what standard? Is it supposed to make me and other scrawny weaklings feel better about ourselves since we fill out "large" shirts? Ever intimidated anyone by showing them your shirt label? "Hey man, don't mess with me! See this Haynes Beefy Tee? Extra Large, baby! You don't want none of this!" Somehow I doubt they teach that in self-defense class.

Call a spade a spade, for crying out loud! The purpose of having words that distinguish relative size is to be able to have something at the extremes to set the standard. If it's the smallest you make, call it "SMALL." If it's the one that fits the majority, call it "MEDIUM," and if it's the biggest that is possibly available, call it LARGE. I see no need in qualifying things that are the biggest, best, or longest with words like "Extra" or "Mega."

Now if you'll excuse me, my Extra-Grande-Size Mega Coffee Pot is done brewing.

From *The Roane State Review*, February 2000