THE FLATMATES

Language point:
Vague language

BBC WORLD SERVICE
LEARNING ENGLISH
The Flatmates – Vague language

You can see this language point online at:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/flatmates/episode82/languagepoint.shtml

<table>
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<th>Background:</th>
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<td>We use vague language when we do not want to be (or cannot be) exact, accurate and precise.</td>
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<th>Talking about similarities:</th>
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<td>There are some phrases that are useful when we want to say that something is similar to something else, but it is not exactly the same. We often use these phrases because we can’t find the exact word that we need.</td>
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**kind of** and **sort of**:

We can use these phrases before nouns and adjectives:

A paramedic is a **kind of** doctor, or perhaps it is a **sort of** nurse. I’m not sure, but they help injured people.

I’m **kind of happy** that school has finished, but I’ll miss my friends.

We can also use **kind of** and **sort of** before ‘like’ or ‘similar to’:

Australian Rules Football is **kind of like** soccer and rugby combined.

New Zealand is **sort of similar** to Britain.

**-ish**:

We can add ‘**ish**’ to adjectives and numbers to mean 'approximately'.

How old is he? I’m not sure, perhaps **fortyish**.

And he’s got **blueish** eyes, or are they **greenish**? I’m not so sure.

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<th>What’s the word?</th>
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<td>All of the following words can be used to represent a noun when we do not know the real word or when we can’t remember it.</td>
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**a whatsit**

**a whatsitcalled**

**a thingummy**

**a thingummyjig**

You need one of those...oh, you know, you need **a whatsit** to open that bottle

*You mean a corkscrew?*

That’s it!

**Thingummy** can be used to mean someone’s name.

Have you seen, erm, **thingummy**, you know, the guy with glasses?
### Stuff and thing:

**Thing** refers to single countable objects (e.g. a car, a mouse)

**Things** refers to plural countable objects (e.g. clothes, spiders, pens)

**Stuff** refers to uncountable objects (e.g. oil, information) or a collection of countable objects (like things) e.g. a lot of clothes, shopping items

We often use these words when both the speaker and the listener know which objects are being discussed, or when we don’t know the exact word, or even when there isn’t an exact word.

Where do you keep all the cleaning stuff?

*the cleaning stuff* means all the different things that are used to clean a house: mops, brushes, creams and polishes

I can’t clean your bedroom floor, there’s **loads of stuff/things** all over it.

*loads of stuff/things* probably means toys, socks, papers etc.

I need a **thing** to stop my washing machine from leaking, you know, a round rubber **thing** that goes on the main pipe.

### Approximately

All of the following phrases have a similar meaning to *approximately* but they are less formal.

- **about**: It’ll take you **about** 20 minutes to drive there.
- **roughly**: There were **roughly** 50 people at the lecture.
- **more or less**: There’s twenty minutes till the end of the game, **more or less**.

### Further stuff:

When there are more examples that you can give, but you don’t need to, you can use ‘etcetera’ and ‘and all that sort of thing’. It is possible to shorten ‘and all that sort of thing’ to ‘and all that’

We had a great time in Egypt. We saw the Nile, Cairo, the pyramids **etcetera**.

In my office job, I have to do the filing, manage the scheduling, answer the phones and **all that sort of thing**.

David’s a great team captain. He’s decisive, determined **and all that**.
Vocabulary

everybody chips in
everybody helps or contributes to doing a task

we all do our bit
we all contribute fairly to doing a task

pricey
expensive

I’m afraid
I regret to say/ I’m sorry to say (a polite expression used when saying ‘no’)

It isn’t up to me
It’s not my choice. I can’t/don’t decide this

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