

Keep your English up to date

Cell

Professor David Crystal



When mobile phone technology came in a few years ago, the term was immediately shortened. Mobile phones became 'mobiles'. 'I've got my mobile.' 'Have you got your mobile on?' But that was in the UK. In the United States, a different term emerged, 'cell phone', short for cellular phone.

Now, cell phone was tricky because some people spelled it as one word and some people spelled it as two. I did a search on Google the other day, and the one-word spelling got eighteen million hits, and the two-word spelling got a hundred and thirty-five million hits. So it seems you can use both spellings at the moment. But either way, people shortened the phrase to 'cell'. And this usage is growing in the UK.

Somebody the other day said to me, 'Have you got your cell?' 'Call me on your cell!' 'Sync your cell with your company!' - that's synchronise - synchronise your cell with your company - that's the sort of phrase you get these days.

I saw an advertisement, 'Cells have just got coloured!' In other words, mobile phones are now in different colours. It's a new sense of the word 'cell'. So, if somebody invites you to 'use my cell', it doesn't mean that they're asking you to go into their monastery, or indeed, asking you to visit them in prison!



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