

International Linguistic Association

Monthly Lecture Series

Co-sponsored by BMCC

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Cordless or cordfree? What's the difference?

What difference is there between the new word *cordfree* and its established rival *cordless*? A group of my students and I show that the new suffix *-free* is used to contrast a value that has a positive connotation with its (sometimes unspoken) connotatively negative opposite, whereas *-less* carries no such connotation. It is better to be *cordfree* than to be *corded*, while being *cordless* carries no connotations of being superior in this way. The suffix *-less* carries no accompanying positive baggage. To be *childfree* or *carefree* is necessarily good; to be *childless* or *careless* is not.

Our conclusions are based on an exhaustive comparison of sample internet citations for all words ending in *-less* listed in the Oxford English Dictionary with those for the corresponding words in *-free*, of which only a small fraction are listed in the dictionary. Our online search reveals that many more of these *-free* words are found online and that their meanings correspond to our predictions.

Overall, we show how modern methods reveal the detailed workings of a living language as it changes in real time.

Saturday, October 5, 2019

11 AM - 12 PM

Borough of Manhattan Community College

Room: S135

199 Chambers Street, (at West Street) New York, NY 10007

NOTE: All attendees will be asked to show some form of ID in order to enter the college.

There will be a meeting of the ILA's Executive Board from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the same day.