

# 'I'm gonna get totally and utterly X'd': Can you really use any English word to mean 'drunk'?

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The English language is famous for the large number of words that express the idea of being drunk in a humorous way—so-called drunkonyms like "pissed," "hammered" or "wasted." British comedian Michael McIntyre even argues in a comedy routine that posh people can use any word to mean "drunk" in English, e.g., "I was utterly gazeboed" or "I'm gonna get totally carparked." With the myriad of possibilities, how can people understand new drunkonyms then?

Two German linguists, Prof. Dr. Christina Sanchez-Stockhammer (Chemnitz University of Technology) and Prof. Dr. Peter Uhrig (FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg & ScaDS.AI Dresden/Leipzig), took Michael McIntyre's claim seriously and tested it in a [linguistic study](#).

"We were curious to find out if the synonyms of 'drunk' are used in similar contexts," explains Sanchez-Stockhammer. If that were the case, new word formations might inherit the meaning 'drunk' automatically from the context.

The study was recently published in the *Yearbook of the German Cognitive Linguistics Association*.

"We found that 'drunk' mainly occurs in the combinations 'too/so/very drunk,' but unexpectedly not with the kinds of adverb used by Michael McIntyre," explains Uhrig. By contrast, the drunkonyms ending in ed (e.g., "blasted" and "loaded") preferably occur with the expected intensifiers "completely" or "totally" (e.g., "completely loaded").

As expected, the combination of "be" + intensifying adverb + word ending in -ed is commonly used to refer to drunkenness, but not often enough to explain how language users understand new drunkonyms. Sanchez-Stockhammer and Uhrig, therefore, provide an additional explanation.

By the time English native speakers reach adulthood, they have most likely experienced so many different words ending in -ed, meaning "drunk" that it allows them to interpret words with unknown meanings ending in -ed (e.g. "pyjamaed") as "drunk" in many contexts. The appendix of the paper alone contains a list of 546 English synonyms for "drunk" compiled from various sources.

Even though [excessive alcohol consumption](#) may come with [negative consequences](#), drunkenness is commonly discussed using a wide range of light-hearted linguistic means in English. Sanchez-Stockhammer observes, "The humorous effect of drunkonyms is often achieved through their indirectness."

What renders McIntyre's examples "gazeboed" or "carparked" funny is that there is no obvious relation between the base (e.g. "gazebo") and the meaning "drunk." Indirectness is also present in other types of playful language, like Cockney rhyming slang, which provides the model for English drunkonyms like "Brahms" or "Schindler's" (short for "Brahms and Liszt" and "Schindler's list," both of which rhyme with the target word "pissed").

"The English language also expresses drunkenness indirectly by shortening phrases like 'blind drunk' and 'nicely drunk' to the corresponding drunkonyms 'blind' and 'nicely.' All this suggests that drunkonyms fit in well with English linguistic and humorous traditions," says Sanchez-Stockhammer.

**More information:** Christina Sanchez-Stockhammer et al, "I'm gonna get totally and utterly X-ed." Constructing drunkenness, *Yearbook of the German Cognitive Linguistics Association* (2024). [DOI: 10.1515/gcla-2023-0007](https://doi.org/10.1515/gcla-2023-0007)

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