I'm not a robot

I was pondering (don't ask) the different meanings of various expressions of animal excrement. For example, in my little corner of the English speaking world (Western USA), we would define them thusly: Bullshit : nonsense "That explanation was a bunch of bullshit." Horseshit: Also nonsense, but a bit more emphatic. "I am so tired of that utter horseshit." Chickenshit: cowardice "That was chickenshit of him to break-up with her by email." Batshit: crazy "His stupid questions were making me batshit." Feel like dogshit: to look or feel poorly. "I felt like dogshit after the red-eye flight." Feel lower than whaleshit: To feel ashamed. "I felt lower than whaleshit after making her cry." So, my questions are: Do these sound familiar or correct to other English speakers? And, respecting that this is the English Only forum, are the other languages that use expressions of animal excrement? They sound normal to med except for batshit and whaleshit. I've never heard those ones before. Don't go apeshit over it, but they all seem fairly ordinary for colloquial speech in AE. I would strongly advise non-native learners of English to avoid all of these in speech in any formal setting, and to avoid them in any written work other than a letter or e-mail or text exchange with a close friend. Good collection there, Pismo. You missed apeshit (good job, Cuchuflete). Batshit I've heard all my life. Whaleshit? That's a first for me. This reminds me of a joke. A certain polititian was campaigning for office and he paid a visit to an Indian community to make a speech. He thought that things were going very well for him because every promise he made to the crowd was greeted with shouts of "Oom-galla! Oom-galla-galla!" After his stirring speech, the polititian remembered that the community was renowned for its cattle, especially its prize bulls. He asked the tribal leader if he could go down to the stock pen and admire some of their prize bulls. "Sure," the leader answered. "Just be careful not to step in the oom-galla." Last edited: Feb 27, 2009 I think I've heard the "whaleshit" on once before. I think "horseshit" sounds more emphatic than "bullshit" because it's less common in AE. In BE, "thick as pigshit" is used to describe a person as very stupid. Good one Bibiolept. We describe someone who is content with the way things are as "happy as a pig in shit". I've heard -ratshit, but only rarely, to describe something very funky. "Dude lives at ratshit ranch". Also, for payday, the eagle shits on Friday. Does a bear shit in the woods? For a firm grasp of the obvious. We have unfairly omitted the human animal. That's babyshit compared to/with.... This is a way to call something small, insignificant, or insubstantial. "horseshit" and "bullshit" are synonymous to me. This is slightly different, but I have heard 'Skunk piss' used in the construction trades to describe the all purpose lubricant WD-40. I've been using bugshit for the past however-many years, as a synonym for your batshit. I've no idea where I picked it up from (pardon the expression). For extra emphasis I add two little words: For gawd's sake turn the radio off ~ that song's driving me blue bloody bugshit! Well, while we're on this little journey, let's not leave out the closely related shit-for-brains (source of said shit not specified, presumably human) which usually means someone is an idiot. By the way, I seem to be familiar with every type of shit mentioned except the 'blue bloody' version. I have often thought about grading the following related terms: Shit He's a right little shit. Shitface Oi, Shitface; get your arse over here. Shitlegs Shitlegs, here's your tea. Shit house He's a complete shit house. Shit bag He's a total shit bag - knows nothing. Shit-hole That restauarant's a shit-hole English is so triple jointed. I once heard that the difference between chickenshitters and bullshitters is that chickenshitters usually sit at their desks producing chickenshit and bullshitters go from desk to desk spreading bullshit. There's also the (British?) expression [bag o' shite] meaning rubbish, worthless, stupid. Besides the repulsiveness of the substance, I think the image of someone putting it in a bag or carrying around the bag, perhaps with misleading labelling, is quite apposite for some situations - emphasising the contrast between external appearances and internal reality. Not exactly animal poo, but I've recently heard a good one which I think will somehow fit in the pattern of this thread: When the shit hits the fan, all the shitheads strip for tan ... Not really sure about the implied meaning ... Could I be one of them then? "He's built like a brick shit-house" is a reasonably common description for a burly (not obese) man in Britain. I think this harks back to the days of outside brick-built lavatories. I don't know if "gnat's piss" is off topic but this is a useful description for beer that is not up to standard, When the shit hits the fan This expression perfectly describes what happened recently in the British MP's expenses scandal. There was "shit" going on behind the scenes for a long time. when this was finally revealed by the Telegraph Group, the shit hit the fan in a big way. All MP's even the honest ones were splattered with the bad publicity. This expression perfectly describes what happened recently in the British MP's expenses scandal. There was "shit" going on behind the scenes for a long time. when this was finally revealed by the Telegraph Group, the shit hit the fan in a big way. All MP's even the honest ones were splattered with the bad publicity. Oh, I'm quite familiar with the "shit hitting the fan" bit, I'm just not so sure about the, to me, new follow-up part, the one about "shitheads stripping for tan". The way I understand it is that when things go rough only an idiot will not duck his/her head. I was wondering if anyone knew the expression and could confirm or correct my understanding of it. I once heard that the difference between chickenshitters and bullshitters is that chickenshitters usually sit at their desks producing chickenshit and bullshitters go from desk to desk spreading bullshit. The way I understand it is that when things go rough only an idiot will not duck his/her head. I was wondering if anyone knew the expression and could confirm or correct my understanding of it. Never heard it before, Marghera, but that's how I'd understand it too. Oh and of course P.S. Devotees of animal byproduct will probably enjoy this thread. When you get really drunk, you are "shitfaced." "I got so shitfaced last night I woke up on the lawn." From the human animal, we have a house nearby that is painted an off yellow/hint of brown colour, known locally as "baby-shit yellow." Oh, I'm quite familiar with the "shit hitting the fan" bit, I'm just not so sure about the, to me, new follow-up part, the one about "shitheads stripping for tan". The way I understand it is that when things go rough only an idiot will not duck his/her head. I was wondering if anyone knew the expression and could confirm or correct my understanding of it. Shithead is an insulting term for a person that is ignorant, narrow minded, cruel, and/or unintelligent. It is generally considered to be a vulgar and profane term. I think "shitheads strip for tan" means more than that. "Tan" obviously refers to getting covered in the brown stuff. My interpretation is that, when things go wrong; mean, narrow minded people revel in the mess and the suffering that others have got themselves into. "I am all pooped out" said the Dung Beetle. "He's built like a brick shit-house" is a reasonably common description for a burly (not obese) man in Britain. I think this harks back to the days of outside brick-built lavatories. Interesting, because I (in the US) have always heard "She's built like . . . " to refer to an exceptionally well-proportioned female. It implies curvaceous and attractive. And lest we forget our bird friends: something that moves very quickly moves "like shit through a goose." Interesting, because I (in the US) have always heard "She's built like . . . " to refer to an exceptionally well-proportioned female. It implies curvaceous and attractive. And lest we forget our bird friends: something that moves very quickly moves "like shit through a goose." "She's built like a brick shit-house" is a complement in American English? Well you live and learn! I'll support grubble in that, in British English, it's usually a term to refer to a big muscly man! I think I've heard the "whaleshit" on once before. I think "horseshit" sounds more emphatic than "bullshit" because it's less common in AE. In BE, "thick as pigshit" is used to describe a person as very stupid. I have heard of whale shit frequently. They used to say to us when we were fresh recruits in military basic training that we were lower than whale shit, and that's at the bottom of the ocean". Not to forget about calling someone a lying sack of shit (despicable for his lying) Among older (40+) New Yorkers: He stepped in dog shit: he had a run of good luck. Explanation: there used to be so much canine excrement on the sidewalks/pavements of New York City, especially in Manhattan, that it was only a matter of time that someone would step in dog feces. This place smells like cat piss: the smell is overpoweringly rancid. Hi all, With Lego (the plastic bricks that can be put together to form different objects), do we say "play Lego" or "play with Lego"? e.g. My favourite pastime is playing (with) Lego. Many thanks. (AE) I've never seen a game called "Lego," but my children played with Legos (plural). (Since Legos fit together, you cannot do much with just one of them) So native speakers think of "Lego" as an individual Lego brick instead of a registered brand? It depends on context. We don't play "Tinker Toy," either, for example. It's common in the U.S. to say play with Legos. I wouldn't normally call them bricks or blocks. It would not surprise me if some people said "Do you want to play Lego?" but I don't know if they do. It sounds like something a parent might say to a very young child. You can say something like "Do you want to play trucks?" Again, that would be with a very small child and not an older child. "Trucks" isn't a game either, but little kids can make a game out of anything. Don't waste your breath persuading John; it's not different from talking to a brick wall. If you teach a dog to speak English; you're talking to a brick wall. Hi, Do both of the above with the idiom "talking to a brick wall" sound right to you? If not, how would you say them right? Thanks. Thanks, vicky and gasman. But why doesn't "It's not different ..." work? Besides, what is the proverbial wall? How could a wall made of proverbial? I have no idea why the term is "it is no different", except that it is a usage. When we talk of the "proverbial wall" it is a pointer to the proverb in its entirety,instead of saying, or writing, "I might as well talk to a brick wall, when you are so stubborn that you refuse advice". I have no idea why the term is "it is no different", except that it is a usage. When we talk of the "proverbial wall" it is a pointer to the proverb in its entirety,instead of saying, or writing, "I might as well talk to a brick wall, when you are so stubborn that you refuse advice". Hi, I had problem understanding the bolded part. Could you shed some light? Thanks. When we talk of the "proverbial wall" It is a reference to a well known saying, commonly used as an abbreviation. Thanks, Gasman. I'm not smart so I still don't get it. Could you give me a couple of illustrations? Thanks again. Dear bamboo: This is a really good question. Usually, I would use "It is no different from/than." I would use "It is not different in." So it must be a question of usage. The proverbial _____ (fill in the blank) is used when we want to refer to a proverb without having to say the entire thing. I take "it is a pointer to" to mean: "we are referring to". A pointer refers us in a direction: figuratively, here, of course. And what it points us to is the proverb as a whole. So we are using a reference to a proverb, rather than spelling the metaphor out anew. Or we use it even when referring to an idiomatic expression like "hit the brick wall," which is obviously not a proverb! Dear bamboo: This is a really good question. Usually, I would use "It is no different from/than." I would use "It is not different in." So it must be a question of usage. The proverbial _____ (fill in the blank) is used when we want to refer to a proverb without having to say the entire thing. Thanks, Lucia, for your kindness. But I still don't get the proverbial part. Would you give me an example? I take "it is a pointer to" to mean: "we are referring to". A pointer refers us in a direction: figuratively, here, of course. And what it points us to is the proverb as a whole. So we are using a reference to a proverb, rather than spelling the metaphor out anew. Thanks, MM. I seem to get it now. To make sure, I'd say this: "I might as well talk to a proverbial wall, when you are so stubborn that you refuse advice". rather than this: "I might as well talk to a brick wall, when you are so stubborn that you refuse advice". By the way, is it a more indirect and therefore more polite way of saying the same thing? Moderator note: I have merged the thread "a pointer to the proverb in its entirety" with "Talking to a brick wall" as it does not seem practical to keep the topics separate. The phrase is "the proverbial brick wall". It's not a brick wall made of proverbs, or any old brick wall, it is "that brick wall in the proverb about talking to a brick wall". (It's not strictly a proverb, it's figure of speech, but we still use "proverbial" when referring to the subjects in set figures of speech as well as in true proverbs.) Here's another example. There is an expression in English, "A fool and his money are soon parted." (Someone who is foolish will spend money quickly, and can be easily convinced to spend money.) Recently I heard a story about someone who invested in a start-up company, after reading a glossy advertising brochure. Two weeks later, he lost all his money when the company went bankrupt. I said, "He is like the proverbial fool and his money." Don't waste your breath persuading John; it's not different from talking to a brick wall. If you teach a dog to speak English; you're talking to a brick wall. Hi, Do both of the above with the idiom "talking to a brick wall" sound right to you? If not, how would you say them right? Thanks. I'm finding this thread a bit confusing, so am reverting to the OP. Bamboo, I'd say that your first example is an almost-but-not-quite idiomatic example of the use of the expression "talking to a brick wall" (which is usually, at least in BrE, preceded by [just] like rather than not different from). The idea of the expression is that you can talk and talk to someone (you can talk to them until you are blue in the face) but this will have absolutely no effect. You might just as well be talking to a brick wall - an entity which has no ears. I would modify your first sentence as follows: Don't waste your breath trying to persuade John; it's [just] like talking to a brick wall. I'm not sure, though, how I'd modify your second sentence to make it idiomatic. I think we always use the expression about people who don't want to hear Don't try to teach Loob calculus: it's like talking to a brick wall. Hello. "Manufacturing of Lego bricks occurs at a number of locations around the world. Moulding is done in Billund, Denmark; Nyíregyháza, Hungary; and Monterrey, Mexico. Brick decorations and packaging is done at plants in Denmark, Hungary, Mexico and Kladno in the Czech Republic. The Lego Group estimates that in the course of five decades it has produced some 400 billion Lego blocks.[31] Annual production of Lego bricks averages approximately 36 billion per year, or about 1140 elements per second." Source: Wikipedia: Lego: Manufacture. I wonder which word you normally use when you talk about the cube-shaped Lego pieces which children sometimes get for Christmas. Do you say: 1. I bought my son Lego blocks for Christmas. OR 2. I bought my son Lego bricks for Christmas. In the quotation above both words are used. Actually, the most normal is to say 'I bought my son/daughter some Lego for Christmas.' However, if you needed to specify I think we'd use bricks, although blocks is OK too. Actually, the most normal is to say 'I bought my son/daughter some Lego for Christmas.' In American English, I generally use the plural. I bought some Legos. I like to play with Legos. I don't know how satisfied native English speakers are with "bricks" - at least my Canadian nephew simply called them "Legos". I am curious about that too. The term "bricks" probably came into use because it to almost 100% corresponds with the Danish word for "bricks". (The inventor was a friend and a customer of my dad, by the way). Suppose there is a picture of a girl trying to build a structure using colourful cube-shaped pieces that resemble Legos. I guess you could say the girl is playing with Legos, Lego bricks, Lego blocks, or just blocks. Suppose there is a picture of a girl trying to build a structure using colourful cube-shaped pieces that resemble Legos. I guess you could say the girl is playing with Legos, Lego bricks, Lego blocks, or just blocks. That picture is part of an article about "blocks" in general, with Lego as a kind of block, as far as the editors are concerned. There are many different kinds of blocks out there (this one from Target has the color, size and shape variety the article discusses). The Lego company calls their items "bricks" (on the English site I accessed). The only mention of block on their site is for a "block of ice" piece (or use of black as a verb. Outside of the "official" (i.e. company) name for the product, people will call them what they want When my children were younger, they were Lego blocks, then they became simply Lego (a proper noun and uncountable) then I saw the AE version "Legos" . I wrote a letter to Her Majesty (whose English I speak) but did not hear back: I wish I had had this advice then: people will call them what they want. Thank you very much. ' So, in the UK, it's Lego blocks or Lego, uncountable as 'broccoli.' Certainly Lego "bricks" for my children (I had Meccano). Thank you very much. ' So, in the UK, it's Lego blocks or Lego, uncountable as 'broccoli.' My children, nor my grandchildren, have ever come across lego blocks. They are bricks, when another term is required. Otherwise they are lego. As a child who had virtually nothing but Lego as a child (I wouldn't play with anything else), they were bricks or just plain Lego. Like PaulQ, the first time I heard an Americanperson talking about Legos, I fell off my chair. I say bricks too. The children had loads of them when the were growing up. If I heard Legos, I would understand that to mean 'Lego sets'. Very interesting discussion! So for British English, I understand that you would say "Lego brick" if you want to count them (and just "Lego" in American English). But can you also use "Lego brick" for those pieces that don't really look like bricks, like the very thin and flat pieces like those below for instance: What I mean is; could you say the following no matter the shape of the bricks?: "Can you give me the two Lego bricks over there?" "You've forgotten a Lego brick outside the box." "I need the same brick, but in red." Thanks for your help! If you are playing with Lego, why would you say "Lego bricks"? "Please can you pass me two of those round ones." "And a couple of those thin grey bits." But can you also use "Lego brick" for those pieces that don't really look like bricks, like the very thin and flat pieces like those below for instance: I think you've probably already answered your own question. If they're Lego but not bricks, just call them 'Lego pieces'. I'd probably call the round ones "buttons" because that's what they look like. "Pass me two buttons please." I would omit "Lego" entirely because it's obvious from the context that you're discussing Lego. Thanks everyone! This is very helpful. If you are playing with Lego, why would you say "Lego bricks"? Yes, it makes sense. Sometimes, it's just that I realise hours or days later that one of those is lying on the floor and not in the box where it was supposed to be. As there are other toys lying around, I need to find a word to refer to this. In that case, I'd say Lego button, the long grey Lego strip and the long yellow Lego. I probably wouldn't use "brick" because none of those are brick-shaped. Thanks again! So it forces you to be quite specific in British English! In the last case, I couldn't say "Oh, look, there's a long yellow Lego outside the box!", right? Yes, that too sounds fine to me. A long yellow Lego strip / a long yellow Lego piece / a long yellow Lego. Thanks again for your answers! It's all clear to me now. Unlike @Tegs and @CaptainZero, I would never ever refer to a single item of Lego as a Lego. Never. Not ever. It sounds as wrong to me as (e.g.) a tin of pea or a slice of cakes. It sounds wrong to me, too - mainly because the usage doesn't seem to follow any recognisable pattern. For example, nobody would refer to an individual piece or pieces from a Meccano set as "a Meccano" or "Meccanos", would they? Memory Lane time here .... but does anyone remember the somewhat cheaper "Betta Bilda"? That's what I had when I was a kid. No, they wouldn't. "Pieces" is the go-to... Meccano pieces, jigsaw puzzle pieces, chess pieces, Lego pieces. PS... ... does anyone remember the somewhat cheaper "Betta Bilda"? That's what I had when I was a kid. 'Fraid not. 'Twas only Lego for me. Yes in BE (and apparently also Australian English) the word lego is strictly uncountable. (I was lucky enough to have Betta Bilda as well as lego. Betta Bilda was for architectural models only, with separate pieces for things like windows and roof tiles.) Apologies in advance for shocking you further (see nos. 7 and 12 above), but I would say "a Lego" for a Lego piece. In a fit of civilized language I might also say "a Lego piece." Legos roam in packs. You don't often catch them alone. They may be easily startled but they'll be back, and in greater numbers. It's been so many years since I played with Legos that I don't remember what we said about a single piece, besides "hand me that one over there". I don't really remember calling them bricks or blocks much. We just played with them. If I randomly stepped on one I think I would just say I stepped on a piece of Lego. If I randomly stepped on one there would just be a lot of muffled swearing. But seriously, I agree with kentix; when I'm in the middle of playing with them with someone else, I just say "Give me that yellow one, please" not "Give me that yellow Lego, please." On the other hand, "Look what I found under the couch: 32 Lego pieces, three socks, and that wheel from your toy car that you were missing last week. Ms. Mittens* is quite the hoarder." *the cat On the other hand, "Look what I found under the couch: 32 Lego pieces, If they were the regular, old-fashioned, geometric ones, I'd just say 32 Legos (this is the American way of using Lego countably). In the modern sets, you have people, flower petals, wheels, ..., I would probably use the "pieces" (if I can even recognize them as such). Some pieces of the Lego Christmas Wreath: Yeah, my Lego career is decades ago. In isolation, without seeing the little tabs, I wouldn't know some of those pieces were Lego. We also had some small block-like things that I think were called Tog'l. They were cub-shaped, the ones I remember, and one side was a little door you could open. They connected with plastic pegs and holes that were built into the clocks. The holes also allowed you to see if something was inside. They were not large, maybe 3/4" (18 mm) on a side. Tog'l Very interesting discussion! So for British English, I understand that you would say "Lego brick" if you want to count them (and just "Lego" in American English). But can you also use "Lego brick" for those pieces that don't really look like bricks, like the very thin and flat pieces like those below for instance: What I mean is; could you say the following no matter the shape of the bricks?: "Can you give me the two Lego bricks over there?" "You've forgotten a Lego brick outside the box." "I need the same brick, but in red." Thanks for your help! Have you checked what the company iself calls them? In principle "Lego" is not an object, but a brand name. In principle, no one cares. In principle "Lego" is not an object, but a brand name. In English, there are many brand names used as nouns, e.g. Hoover Popsicle Xerox Chevrolet (and other car brands) Kleenex Coke etc. Very interesting discussion! So for British English, I understand that you would say "Lego brick" if you want to count them (and just "Lego" in American English). But can you also use "Lego brick" for those pieces that don't really look like bricks, like the very thin and flat pieces like those below for instance: What I mean is; could you say the following no matter the shape of the bricks?: "Can you give me the two Lego bricks over there?" "You've forgotten a Lego brick outside the box." "I need the same brick, but in red." Thanks for your help! I just got home and checked it for you - the ones to the right are simply called "round bricks". Whether you like that or not, that is what the LEGO design department decided to call them. The ones to the left are simply "plates". I didn't look up the middle one - but if you read on, you'll know how to find it. As a professional translator - at least that is what I have studied - from the pre-Internet era how such terminology problems were solved back then. If you really needed some technical word that was not in any dictionary you first picked up the phone and called the author, had him explain what it is. Then you took the phone book from a country with the source language, picked some random company that happened to be in the right business for the subject matter, explained to someone there and simply asked what they call such a thing. Once you had the word, you could then doublecheck via some other source. That was easier than you might expect. Today. Internet. Who knows it better than anyone else? LEGO, of course. The thing is in the webshop. In your building instructions you'll find the article number. That would have saved 5-10 Minutes of searching. But I found it anyway. Thank you everyone for all your answers! As mentioned, I don't intend to provide a technical translation or to speak like a book. I am just interesting in using the word with a child* the way real people would use it in real life: not like a technician in an office who has not played with Lego in decades. (* I'm not even sure that in the TV programme Lego Masters the adults there would use such specific vocabulary.) It doesn't have to be a technical translation to use the right words. I used the right words for it as a child when I played with LEGO and it's wooden, with screws and bolts, counterpart "Bilofix". It was all on the box or the instruction sheets inside. (Probably some of the first things I ever read). But the thread is about what native English speakers call Lego pieces when they are playing with them or finding them under the furniture. I think, like me, they don't care in the slightest about the English translations of the Danish names used by the manufacturers. It seems that I am not alone. In principle, no one cares. The OP explained: I am just interesting in using the word with a child* the way real people would use it in real life: My youngest grandson asks me to pass him bricks, flat bits, "another of those blue ones" or some other identifier that we both understand. @ But the thread is about ... Why "but" - Anglophone children are not any less intelligent than other kids. So reading it from the packaging would be a just as viable solution. And I think, having learned English 3 years earlier in my life wouldn't have changed anything on that point. I struggle to understand what relevance intelligence has to this topic. There's no problem requiring a "viable solution". I have never had a problem communicating with my family's Lego builders - children then grandchildren. We never had a need to know what the company called the pieces. Following the introduction of complicated model kits we just match the piece to the picture - neither my youngest grandson nor I knows what the little red transparent round bit is called, and we don't actually care. You're right, Sepia, here are conversations I can easily imagine with a 2-year-old: Parent: Oh, sweetie, there's a Lego brick outside the box (or "a Lego", as we would say in American English or in French): could you please put it back? Toddler: Father, please be more specific: I fail to see what you are referring to. Parent: Hmm, I can't really see from here. Let me see. (Gets closer and holds the said Lego piece). Well, this yellow Lego brick. Toddler: Father, I am quite appalled that you are unaware that this is no "Lego brick", but a plate. I therefore cannot accede to your request. Now, let me call social services so that they can extract me from such a linguistically poor environment that will inevitably lead to a life of misery. Or a bit more realistically: Toddler, crying: Daddy! Hurt foot! Parent: Oh no! What happened? Toddler: Walked Lego brick (again, we would just say "a Lego" in French). Parent: Which Lego brick? Can you show me? Toddler: This one! Parent, picking up the said Lego piece: You despicable little turd!! This is no Lego brick! This is a Panel 1x2x3 - LEGO® Part 87544, as I've told you a thousand times! Now, go to your room and learn the 248th page of the dictionary! So reading it from the packaging would be a just as viable solution. In the UK: Nowhere on Lego set packaging or in the instructions are the pieces actually named, not even by their part numbers (870/4320 etc.) In the UK: Nowhere on Lego set packaging or in the instructions are the pieces actually named, not even by their part numbers (870/4320 etc.) Today you'd go to the website for that. Easy to find. Today you'd go to the website for that. Easy to find. Why would anybody talking to a child playing with Lego want to go to the Lego website when all the child is asking for is "two more of those 4-pip red ones"? We* don't actually care what Lego A/S calls them. *We as in me and all the other native English speakers I have ever heard playing with a child who is building something with Lego. Page 2 Today you'd go to the website for that. Easy to find. Again, I don't see the relevance and importance of giving the right name if someone (child or adult) walks on Lego for instance, like in my second dialogue. A: My children are driving me crazy: always leaving a mess everywhere! Yesterday, I walked on a Lego brick and that's why I'm limping today. B (colleague): Hmm, that's not very specific. What type of brick? A: I don't know!! It just f*** hurt!! B: Are you sure it really happened? If it had happened to me, I would have identified the specified Lego brick by looking up the name online so that I could give a detailed report to my colleagues. I don't know what difference it would make to them, but naming things is important, don't you think? And that's why B always drank his coffee alone in the office... But the thread is about what are called. I think the thrread starter asked about "what you normally call" Lego bricks. I call them "bits of Lego", as in: You can always tell when the grandchildren have been here. You keep finding bits of Lego all over the place. By becoming a member, you will be able to buy items, view orders you placed, and add items you are looking for to your wanted list. Hi, there I am reading a summary on Open Work, by Umberto Eco and I encountered a sentence with by which. The sentences is as follows: "In Kafka the reader relates to the text on the level of metaphot but without a clear mapping of metaphors. There is no fixed symbolism by which to unlock the meaning of Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis." I would like to know whether I can substitute through which for by which in that sentence. Would it be wrong? What's the difference between them? Thank you in advance. No, it would not be idiomatic. This preposition is being used with the verb "unlock", and we would usually use "by" rather than "through" in your context. To add to Glasuensis: By forms part of phrases (by + noun/noun phrase/pronoun/gerund) that express the instrument or agent through which the verb acts: "He wrote out the letter by hand"; "Knock the nails in by hammer." He was hit by a brick." Importantly, through differs from by in that through implies a duration Through introduces a means (usually, but not always, abstract). "He succeeded through hard work." and Through more readily allows a noun describing an action, as opposed to a gerund. Through is less common than by. To add to Glasuensis: By forms part of phrases (by + noun/noun phrase/pronoun/gerund) that express the instrument or agent through which the verb acts: "He wrote out the letter by hand"; "Knock the nails in by hammer." He was hit by a brick." Importantly, through differs from by in that through implies a duration Through introduces a means (usually, but not always, abstract). "He succeeded through hard work." and Through more readily allows a noun describing an action, as opposed to a gerund. Through is less common than by. If I am talking about a project, for example, should I say "this work/project was carried out by or through a painstaking research? Thank you , PaulQ! Hi, everyone Do you say "through" or "by" the concept? Like: Explaining reflection of light through/by the concept of wavefront"? I think the selection of preposition in English is unpredictable - while there may be something in what PaulQ said about duration, that's certainly not the only factor : there are simply some verbs or expressions which use one or the other. I would say through in your sentence although I would try to avoid your sentence altogether since there is a potential confusion about which verb acts upon it (explaining or reflecting). And what about my post #4, Glasguensis? Many thanks in advance. That would be the usual way of saying it, yes, but "by hammer" is grammatically correct. By becoming a member, you will be able to buy items, view orders you placed, and add items you are looking for to your wanted list. Hello, This is a spin-off from the thread drug, medicine, medication, preparation, ..., so here are some posts to give you some context of the situation: Hello. Am I right to say that the noun medicine behaves like the noun coffee? I drink coffee every day. Two medium coffees a day. I take medicine for high cholesterol. Medicines are usually tested on animals first. You are using "medicine" correctly, but your examples don't follow your rule. Your second "coffee" sentence means you drink two cups of coffee (presumably the same kind of coffee). Your second "medicine" sentence is about different kinds of medicine, not an unspecified number of pills of the same medicine. If you said, "Two medicines a day." we would know that you take two different drugs but we wouldn't know how many pills you take (maybe one pill of the first drug six times a day and two pills of the other drug once a day). Thank you, Myridon, for providing the correct example: "Two medicines a day." The LDOCE explains that medicine is "a substance used for treating illness, especially a liquid you drink." But it can also be "an unspecified number of pills." I couldn't make a general statement and say: Medicine is usually tested on animals first. Text proper of this thread: I'm wondering why. 'medicine' is a common noun that can be both countable or uncountable. It is a concrete noun in both cases too (as opposed to abstract). So Medicines are tested on animals first. -- 'medicines' meaning different types of drugs Medicine is tested on animals first. -- 'medicine' as a generic term meaning substance [Is this sentence really incorrect?] Isn't the word 'brick' used similarly? For example: Brick are used to build houses. Brick is used to build houses. I think that 'coffe' behaves a little different from 'medicine'. I like coffee. -- uncountable noun Coffe is a very popular beverage. -- uncountable noun Can I have a coffee please? -- countable noun [a cup of coffee] I like Brazilian coffees. -- countable noun [a type of coffee] "I take medicine for high cholesterol." -- uncountable noun "Medicines are usually tested on animals first." -- countable noun [different types of medicine] But 'medicine' doesn't work when we mean 'an appropriate unit of'. Why is that? How can it be determined if a noun, like 'medicine', can be converted to a countable one meaning 'an appropriate unit of'? Just to make sure, would the following work: Yesterday, I took two pink medicines, but I didn't take the blue ones. [Would 'medicines' still mean 'different kinds of medicine' or could it possible mean 'two phials of the pink medicine'?] Medicines are tested on animals first. -- 'medicines' meaning different types of drugs Medicine is tested on animals first. -- 'medicine' as a generic term meaning substance [Is this sentence really incorrect?] No - at least not for me. Medicine can be uncountable, but when used as a noun in reference to substances that you take to control symptoms, it is usually countable. If a person takes two different products to control her asthma, for example, we would usually say she takes two medicines, two medications or two drugs. Your second sentence isn't impossible, I guess, but it sounds rather awkward to me. Isn't the word 'brick' used similarly? For example: Brick are used to build houses. Brick is used to build houses. No. Brick is countable when it's used in reference to those square things you use to build walls, and it's uncountable when used to refer generally to the product. Therefore we can have both: Bricks are used to build houses. Brick is used to build houses. But we can't have: Brick are used to build houses. But 'medicine' doesn't work when we mean 'an appropriate unit of'. Why is that? How can it be determined if a noun, like 'medicine', can be converted to a countable one meaning 'an appropriate unit of'? Just to make sure, would the following work: Yesterday, I took two pink medicines, but I didn't take the blue ones. [Would 'medicines' still mean 'different kinds of medicine' or could it possible mean 'two phials of the pink medicine'?] Medicine and medicines are used to refer to different products, but they aren't used to indicate doses. If you want to talk about doses, you have to used whatever is applicable for the individual medicine, such as pills, tablets, milliliters, inhalations, etc. So in the sentence above, you'd need to replace medicines with pills, tablets or whatever it appropriate. Last edited: May 30, 2013 Here are some thoughts: Medicine can be dangerous if you take too much - abstract. Medicine(s) should be kept in a locked cabinet – either all medicine or individual medicines. Aspirin is a useful medicine - one instance of medicine. This medicine will do you good - one instance of medicine. I'd be inclined to say Medicines are tested on animals first. I'd be inclined to say I like Brazilian coffee even if Brazil produces more than one sort of coffee, just as I'd say I like French wine. I'd order two coffees in a restaurant (but two glasses of wine and not two wines). I'd be inclined to say Bricks are used to build houses but This house is made of brick. Perhaps with the first sentence I'm thinking of a pile of bricks before they become a house and with the second I'm thinking of the material. But I don't know that Brick is used... is actually wrong. I'd say The builder used 5,000 bricks and His popularity fell like a ton of bricks. Thank you both for your answers. No - at least not for me. Medicine can be uncountable, but when used as a noun in reference to substances that you take to control symptoms, it is usually countable. If a person takes two different products to control her asthma, for example, we would usually say she takes two medicines, two medications or two drugs. Your second sentence isn't impossible, I guess, but it sounds rather awkward to me. [...] Could you please give some examples of 'medicine' used as an uncountable noun in the function of the subject and object of the verb? What about Medicine's supposed to do you good or He studied medicine at university. Correct me if I'm wrong, but 'medicine' in your sentences has got different meaning (i.e. the science of how to treat people). It's a different type of noun: abstract uncountable one. I'd like to see how 'medicine' can be used as uncountable when treated as a concrete noun. It then means 'substance that you take when you're ill to help you feel better'. The dictionary entry quoted by one of the forum members cited in the original post says: medicine [uncountable and countable] a substance used for treating illness, especially a liquid you drink: Medicines should be kept out of the reach of children. Have you been taking your medicine? a medicine bottle [My bolding.] Kate finds the following sentence isn't natural in English: Medicine is tested on animals first. I'm wondering how you can use 'medicine' as an uncountable noun (as the subject and object of a verb). I take your point about my second sentence, Thomas1, but I think my first sentence treats medicine as an uncountable noun - stuff you take when you're ill; all medicine. Dispensing chemists dispense medicine - stuff to make you better when you're ill; all medicine. Uncountable nouns are strange things. They resemble "Schrödinger's Cat" A noun is neither countable nor uncountable until it is observed in action. As guidance, a noun is never uncountable unless it is used in a context that makes it uncountable. So, when you say, "This noun is uncountable." You should be saying, "In this context, this noun is uncountable." There are nouns that are usually uncountable (e.g. knowledge, milk); are more uncountable than not (sugar); more countable than not (man) and usually countable (knife). Yet even here, there is confusion: a wine lover will speak often of "wines" but the ordinary person will mainly use "wine". There have been many attempts to create criteria that an uncountable noun must follow to be an uncountable noun but, as far as I am aware, these fail as exceptions are found: exceptions that arise through context. Some of the claims are that The noun must be abstract or express "the concept of ."but 'sugar' in "Do you take sugar?" is quite concrete. That the noun must cover a homogenous group but 'jewellery' in "Have you seen my jewellery." is neither homogenous nor well defined. There is, of course, the claim that uncountable nouns are singular; this is helpful until you reach "trousers" and "scissors". A close approximation, can be obtained by using the obsolete construction, originating in the French/Norman "of " in which "of sugar" in "Do you take of sugar?" expresses an indefinite quantity of . Yet this indefinite quantity is different from "some sugar": Whereas "some sugar" expresses that the amount of sugar taken will reduce the quantity of sugar immediately available, "of sugar" expresses the idea of sugar taken from a supply that never diminishes. This is convenient because concrete nouns fit well into being unquantifiable as do abstract nouns. Remember - this is guidance, not a rule. I have scoured Google and a variety of dictionaries for an unequivocal definition of which of these terms, sill or ledge, refers to the inner or outer part of a window frame support with no success. Entering "sill" in images brings up both interior and exterior views of windows, as does entering "ledge". I know that there is a difference in construction terminology, but which is which? If there are any civil engineers/construction experts out there who know the answer, I would be extremely grateful. I'm pretty sure that sill is the inner and ledge is the outer. I'd make the same distinction (UK english) Thanks to you both. That now makes three of us of the same opinion. It must be the rest of the world that's confused. Thanks to you both. That now makes three of us of the same opinion. It must be the rest of the world that's confused. I'm not confused. I had the same answer as you all before I even opened your original post. From thefreedictionary.com: ledge = A horizontal projection forming a narrow shelf on a wall. However, windowsill and window ledge are showed as being synonyms on allwords.com: 1. The interior or exterior ledge that runs along the bottom of a window. I always think of the window ledge as being on the outside of the building... that makes 3 4 of us! My late father was an architect - his drawings had sills on the outside of the buildings. Both Chambers and the Oxford Concise dictionaries just say that a sill is at the bottom of a door or window and do not mention whither it points. Collins says "inside a room". Chambers has the single word windowsill as inside or outside, (and it gives windowsill as the definition of window ledge) the OCD has it as two words window sill and doesn't mention in or out (and it too says window sill is the definition of window ledge). I delight in being the odd one out! My mum would say window sill is 'posh', whereas window ledge is 'common'! Actually Chambers gives the definition of window ledge as 'a windowsill', but windowsill is defined as 'an interior or exterior ledge running along the bottom of a window.' Thus I'd say sill is correct, ledge isn't. Hi, new member. I was wrestling with this, checked a few sources and here are my thoughts from a combination of observation and research. Window sill is the most commonly used term for the interior. It is a ledge, yes, but while one might say "Oh, you put your drink on the ledge by the window," window ledge is rarely used for the interior. The outer piece can be called either, though I think window ledge is better, but with many prehung windows the interior piece and the exterior piece appear to be all one. I would imagine this is in part why people use the word sill. But! If the exterior part is stone or brick then the word ledge is a better usage. That said, the O.E.D. simply defines sill as the horizontal bottom part of a window opening, made of either wood or stone. As far as I know, window ledge is not a standard architectural term. The internal ledge is commonly called a sill, whether it be timber or tiles or some other material. It is not normally an integral part of the window. The outer member is also called a sill and is commonly "weathered", i.e. it has an upper surface which slopes away to shed water. It is usually an integral part of the window. Yes, the modern pre-hung window has the bottom part as an integral part of the assembled window. (They didn't make them like that in your day, Giordano. Good to know hell has the internet, you heretic.) But what if that window is set in a wall that is so thick that the weathered outer sill does not reach the outer face of the wall, let alone project from it slightly as is the custom in modern house construction? What would you call the stone, brick, or even metal shelf that extends beyond the pre-hung window? What would you call the piece of granite I'm looking at that sits upon the top of the brick facing of a thick apartment building wall and extends well beyond the sill but is most definitely part of the "window opening," i. e. the hole in the wall awaiting a window? I say window ledge. Being a language person and not an architect, I suggest that it is from such forms of construction that the socially constructed distinction originates. Yes, the interior "sill" is not in fact part of the window at all and therefore more of a ledge than a sill, but if everyone calls it a sill and it's made to look aesthetically as if it were, and maybe it once was, before pre-hung windows--(Do you still remember that far back? Do you remember how you died?)--then it's a sill just the same. But trying to get people to stop calling it a sill would be like trying to get people to stop saying "cement" sidewalk, when it is in fact concrete. That's how language changes. Ciao! Greetings Barnaby, Well of course, we don't have any windows down here, but I am reliably informed that in modern cavity wall construction, the lower part of the window sits on a weathered brick sill which does in fact project beyond the face of the wall. By the way, I'm with you all the way on cement buildings and footpaths. A lot