

Turn your heavy baggage into litotes

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
Friday, 09 June 2023 05:43



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It's someone's job to name new medications. Drug Company A approaches Marketing Company B and says, "Hey, we've got this new drug. It makes people happy in the short run, but they'll still have to deal with all their baggage in the long run. And, boy, does it have a ton of side effects!"

Marketing Company B comes back with "Litotes: the medicine that makes your baggage feel lighter. May cause ironic understatements that convey affirmations by negating their opposites. Use as directed."

Do I wish people paid me to come up with new medication names? Yes, I do. Did I just introduce today's English language topic through a funny hypothetical situation? Also yes.

You may be thinking, "Boy, he's not the sharpest tool in the shed." Great — that's a litote! Also, my reply to your retort is, "You're not wrong about that."

Yes, folks, that was another litote. Sometimes you have to be light on your toes to notice them.

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In the above examples, I expressed positive statements by canceling out their opposites. Litotes flip negative meanings around to create a positive statement.

By saying, "He's not the sharpest tool in the shed," you're implying I am dull. And when I reply, "You're not wrong about that," I'm suggesting that you are correct in your rude (albeit astute) accusation.

Litotes are all around us. In my opinion, litotes are brilliant literary devices. In case you don't recall, a literary device is a technique used by writers to enrich their writing and elicit specific responses from the reader. In the case of litotes, a writer (or speaker) is often conveying ironic or sarcastic humor. Not bad at all.

We get the word "litote" from the Greek word "litotes," which means "plainness" or "simplicity." It's not rocket science once you think about it.

When I think of litotes, I hear the voice and tone of David Spade in my head. It's a dry, witty way of actually conveying something positive.

What did you think of the play? Well, I didn't hate it. In fact, it wasn't bad at all. It certainly wasn't the worst play I've seen this week. The lead actor certainly wasn't subtle in his performance, though. Okay, you get the idea at this point.

I'm a fan of litotes. Before using litotes, just make sure to consult your doctor to see if litotes are right for you. When you only want to be a little positive, try litotes.

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