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Hated words take the cake

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WAKE up, weathermen and cake bakers everywhere: The words "moist" or "creamy" can get you D-listed.

"Cloudy and moist, with a chance of showers"? — think again. "Creamy?" Oh no, you did not just use the "C" word!

The animosity has grown so strong, it's cropping up on Web sites and Facebook groups, some solely devoted to disdain for the word "moist" and other seemingly innocuous vocabulary entries.

A Google search of the words "moist" and "hate" turns up nearly 1 million entries.

"The word moist makes me throw up in my mouth a little," says Andrea, a member of the Facebook group "I Hate the Word Moist," which boasts nearly 1,000 members. Other terms tagged by people as linguistic losers include: "panties," "fleshy," "chunks," "insert" and "used."

That's just a smattering of vocabulary words singled out as offensive simply because of how they sound.

"Words that evoke emotions, are touchy-feely or extremely physical are very powerful and extremely important aspects of language," says Wolfgang Wolck, a professor emeritus at the University at Buffalo who specializes in social linguistics. He says many of the words that are problematic fall under the category of what researchers call kinesthetic, or the ability to feel physical sensations and movement.

"People are negatively reacting to words that describe things that are touchy-feely," says Wolck.

Other visceral reactions may come from words that just sound plain icky.

"In the English language, there can also sometimes be a backlash against words that are onomatopoeias," says Wolck, using a term that describes words that imitate or suggest the source of the sound they are describing — such as animal noises, like "oink." In these cases, he says, he has seen bias against words such as "slimy," or "slithery."

"The one thing they all seem to have in common is that they have something to do with liquidity," says Wolck. Somewhere, Duncan Hines, with its armada of moisture-rich cake products, has got to be cringing.

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