

[GEORGE JAVOR]
[UA 97.22]

An Interview with Dr. George Javor
on:
National Public Radio's program:
All Things Considered*
Saturday, Dec. 4, 1977

NPR's interviewer: Ms. Jackie Judd:

Dr. George Javor is interested in words too; what they used to mean and what new meanings they have taken on. Dr. Javor is a professor of Foreign Languages at Northern Michigan University in Marquette. He has just written an article in American Speech Quarterly about the phrase: Mad Money.

Interviewer: Dr. Javor, for most of us mad money has come to mean that it's money we save for something we want to buy, that's frivolous. What was the original meaning of that phrase?

Dr. G.Javor: Well, the phrase was quite different. It meant a carefare that a girl would take along on her date in case she would quarrel with her date or as they used to call it at the time - with her escort. This was usually a dime kept in her purse, and no girl would go out without it. This was her insurance of independence. This meaning, which was the prevalent one and the only one that was mentioned in our major dictionaries up till late in the sixties, has now changed. What has happened is that the word mad money would have become completely obsolescent or even obsolete, had not a new meaning changed it into another one.

Interviewer: But why are we still able to use the phrase mad money and still have some meaning attached to it?

Javor: The reason is quite interesting; it so happened that in mad money the adjective mad lent itself to a new interpretation. Had the expression been angry money - although that is what the expression meant at the time, - then we couldn't have done it. The expression was obfuscated, then forgotten, mad was reinterpreted as foolish, crazy, careless, and people started using it in the sense, well: "that is my mad money; I'm going to splurge it on anything I like

As one of my students explained it, when I was asking for a definition of the word: "Money for books -

* The program is nationwide and parts of it are rebroadcast over the Voice of America to Europe, Asia and Africa.

Interview with Dr. Javor on NPR continued:

-not mad money-

Interviewer in-
terrupts laugh-
ingly:

Definitely not mad money! (Laughter).

Javor:

"Money for booze: mad money. (Laughter).
So, this is what saved it: the flexibility
at the centerpoint of the expression enabled
the expression to be filled, as it were, with
a new contents and survive.

Interviewer:

Does it still only refer to women, though?

Javor:

No; not anymore. It has lost completely the
original idea: that of the fumbling girl angrily
looking for a dime in her purse. Indeed the
person from whom I first heard it in the new sense,
thought he had won a contest and said:
"This is going to be my mad money."
And that is how I started to investigate; because
for me it only meant the old meaning.

Interviewer:

Why did it lose that first meaning? Certainly lots
of girls go out with a date that they would like to
drop rather early in the evening?

Javor:

Yes; and I don't imply that our youth has become
more chivalrous. Simply there are no more street-
cars to be taken - nor would be a dime enough for
a streetcar, let's admit. Indeed one of the
rationalization that came up was that this dime
was for a phone call home. Had I undertaken the
research a little later even that would not have
been valid anymore. A dime does not take a girl
anywhere.

Interviewer:

Dr. George Javor, Professor of Foreign Languages
at Northern Michigan University in Marquette.