Cambridge Dictionary names 'human' its Word of the Year 2026

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News

Cambridge Dictionary announced on 18 November 2026 that the English word 'human' is its Word of the Year 2026. The dictionary defines it as 'having the qualities, faults and feelings that people have, as opposed to gods, animals or machines'. It said the choice reflects a year of worldwide debate about what it means to be human, as artificial intelligence (AI) spread into many areas of life. Lexicographer Colin McIntosh noted the rise of compounds such as 'human-made', used to show that people, not AI, created something. The shortlist also had 'agent', 'analogue' and 'wholesome'; 'agent' has gained the new sense of an AI system that performs complex tasks without human control. Cambridge's word for 2025 was 'parasocial'; for 2026, Collins Dictionary had announced 'mogging' on 3 November.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Word	human
Announced	18 November 2026
Why	Global debate on being human as AI spreads
Shortlist	agent, analogue, wholesome
New entries 2026	aura farming, looksmaxxing, air jail

Point	Details
Publisher	Cambridge University Press (1534 letters patent – Henry VIII)
Previous year	2025 – parasocial
Other dictionaries	Collins 2026 – mogging; Oxford 2025 – rage bait

Background

- Cambridge Dictionary is published by Cambridge University Press & Assessment. Through Letters Patent granted in 1534 by King Henry VIII of England, the University of Cambridge got the right to print 'all manner of books'; its first book appeared in 1584. Cambridge Dictionaries Online began in 1999.
- The 'Word of the Year' tradition: dictionaries such as Oxford, Collins and Cambridge each pick a word that captures the year's mood. In 2025 Cambridge chose 'parasocial' (a one-sided sense of closeness to a celebrity one does not know), Oxford 'rage bait' and Collins 'vibe coding'. For 2026 Collins chose 'mogging' (outshining others). The steady rise of AI-related words shows technology reshaping language.
- Science background: AI pioneer Geoffrey Hinton shared the 2024 Nobel Prize in Physics with John Hopfield 'for foundational discoveries and inventions that enable machine learning with artificial neural networks'. The same year's Chemistry prize went to Demis Hassabis and John Jumper, for AI that predicts protein structure, and to David Baker.

Tamil Nadu link: A milestone in Tamil lexicography is the 'Tamil Lexicon' published by the University of Madras: its seven volumes, including a supplement, were published from 1924 to 1939 under the editorship of S. Vaiyapuri Pillai. Before it came Veeramamunivar's 'Sathurakarathi' (1732).

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

Cambridge Dictionary announced on 18 November 2026 that the English word 'human' is its Word of the Year 2026. The dictionary defines it as 'having the qualities, faults and feelings that people have, as opposed to gods, animals or machines'.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Word: human; Announced: 18 November 2026; Why: Global debate on being human as AI spreads; Shortlist: agent, analogue, wholesome.

What is the background to this news?

Cambridge Dictionary is published by Cambridge University Press & Assessment. Through Letters Patent granted in 1534 by King Henry VIII of England, the University of Cambridge got the right to print 'all manner of books'; its first book appeared in 1584.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Who proposed, in 1950, a test of whether a machine can show human-like intelligence?

A) John McCarthy

B) Claude Shannon

C) Alan Turing

D) Marvin Minsky

Answer: C – Explanation: Alan Turing (Britain) – 'Computing Machinery and Intelligence' (1950), the 'Turing test'. The term 'AI' was coined by McCarthy (1956).

2. Which king granted the 1534 Letters Patent that let Cambridge University Press, publisher of Cambridge Dictionary, print books?

A) Henry VII

B) Henry VIII

C) Elizabeth I

D) James I

Answer: B – Explanation: Henry VIII – permission to print 'all manner of books'. The Press's first book appeared in 1584.

3. Which word did Collins Dictionary announce as its Word of the Year 2026?

A) Parasocial

B) Rage bait

C) Mogging

D) Vibe coding

Answer: C – Explanation: 'Mogging' (3 Nov 2026) – outshining others. 2025 picks: Cambridge – parasocial; Oxford – rage bait; Collins – vibe coding.

4. The University of Madras' 'Tamil Lexicon', published in seven volumes during 1924–1939, was edited by:

A) S. Vaiyapuri Pillai

B) U.V. Swaminatha Iyer

C) Maraimalai Adigal

D) Devaneya Pavanar

Answer: A – Explanation: S. Vaiyapuri Pillai – seven volumes including a supplement. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer is famed as the editor of Sangam texts.

5. AI pioneer Geoffrey Hinton shared the 2024 Nobel Prize in Physics with whom?

A) Demis Hassabis

B) Yann LeCun

C) Yoshua Bengio

D) John Hopfield

Answer: D – Explanation: John Hopfield – machine learning with artificial neural networks. Hassabis won the 2024 Chemistry Nobel (protein structure).

Sources: News On AIR; CNN via KEYT; LBC (Collins); University of Cambridge; Cambridge University Press timeline; WTOP/AP; University of Madras (Tamil Lexicon). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.