

That's So Bae: Beyond the Noun Uses of Bae



Over the last couple of years, the term *bae* has achieved widespread usage. While the noun form has been around for over 10 years, adjectival and verbal uses, along with other related forms, have more recently started popping up to describe the people and things we love, or at least [like-like](#). Twitter, in particular, is rife with interesting new uses of the term. The popular social media platform has been used to mine [language change for years](#) and has inspired some [recent linguistic scholarly research](#).

Dictionary.com defines the noun *bae* as: “*Slang*. an affectionate term used to address or refer to one’s girlfriend, boyfriend, etc.” Many have debated the etymology of *bae*, some insisting that it derives from the acronym “Before Anyone Else.” The earliest evidence of this connection on Twitter is from a [July 19, 2011, tweet](#), making “Before Anyone Else” a [backronym](#) of *bae*, which first surfaced in [rap music](#) and on [Urban Dictionary](#) in the early-to-mid-2000s. A much more likely etymological explanation is

that *bae* is a shortening of *baby* or *babe*.

When *bae* appears as a noun, its meaning is relatively set: it's a term of endearment. However possibilities abound as *bae* moves into to other parts of speech. These days *bae* has gotten a lot of mileage out of its robust use as an adjective. My guess is that adjectival *bae* (or what I'll call adjectival *bae* for now) at first pointed to the original boyfriend/girlfriend/significant other sense, as in the following examples:

But adjectival *bae* goes beyond literal significant others, and into the realm of fantasy significant others. If you were to call a celebrity *bae*, there's an implicit understanding that this is make-believe; you don't actually know this person (David Beckham) and you probably wouldn't date him if you did (unless you are a former Spice Girl). Additionally *bae* can be used to describe people who are cool or hot or stylish or wonderful, whether or not you have any romantic interest in them.

Things can also be *bae*. In fact, this is so common, it has sparked internet outrage.

Sometimes the actual part of speech of emerging slang can be hard to identify. Just look at the debates among linguists surrounding the part of speech of *because x*. While in the above examples, *bae* resembles an adjective, is *bae* really an adjective? Let's take a closer look at "pizza is bae." The following constructions commonly appear:

- *Pizza is bae.*
- *Pizza is so bae.*
- *Pizza is my bae.*
- *Pizza is the bae.*

All of these examples express the same sentiment: "I love pizza." The second example is clearly an adjective, but part of speech is more murky for the first example. Could there be an omitted-yet-understood possessive pronoun or definite article implied here, as fully spelled out in examples three and four? Is "Pizza is bae," a shortening of either "Pizza is my bae" or "Pizza is the bae"? Could *bae* be part of an implied noun phrase? Returning to Ashley Ford's tweet "Oh, he wants Meg Ryan to be Bae so he

don't want to tell her he's Rich Bookstore Man?" we see that Ford capitalizes *bae*, giving it proper noun treatment. Is this because *bae* is part of the implied noun phrase "his bae?" Or does *bae* stand on its own as an adjective here? We'd have to ask the individual tweeters to know for sure, and then, they might not even have an answer. With just the written source material, part of speech remains ambiguous.

Bae has shown itself to be a very productive new element of English. Not only does it straddle parts of speech, but related forms of *bae* have emerged as well. You can be *baeless* or *baeful*, and you can achieve *baeness* and *baedom*. You can be super-, uber-, or extra-bae.

chiwetel is so bae. super-bae. uber-bae. extra-bae. baeity. baelicious. baeish.

— *January Cheer (@KaburaNganga) November 5, 2014*

Bae can also be used as a phrasal verb, as in "bae it out":

You can even use *baenoculars*.

Bae is used as a verb meaning "to make someone your significant other," as in "to bae or nah to bae." While William Shakespeare gets credit for popularizing countless terms in English, it's safe to say he did not coin the verb use of *bae*.

Bae is sometimes also used as a superlative, as seen above in the pizza examples. People or things can be "the baest" or "the bae."

While some English speakers wish to banish the word *bae*, the Twitterverse and beyond has found *bae* to be an extremely adaptable and productive term, far more flexible than baby or babe. Now that *bae* has achieved high levels of pop-culture saturation, perhaps it will lose its edge ([maybe it's already lost its edge](#)). Or maybe it will further establish itself as a go-to term of endearment and become a fixture of English.

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