

“New” Words

Language Invention and Reinvention  
in Extraordinary Circumstances

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# The Need for New Words

Speakers of all languages - endangered or thriving - make up words for new things all the time.

I am a linguist working in the area of endangered language revitalization.

The language I'm working on has one native speaker left. She's in her 70s. The younger people in the tribe would like to revive or "revitalize" the language.

One problem for them in learning it is that they don't want to learn it like it's a dead language with no one speaking it. They want to speak it, but there are often no words in the language for what they want to speak about.

What can they do?

# Languages change all the time

Languages that are thriving are changing all the time, so why shouldn't languages that are having life breathed back into them?

Just look around at what's happening in the world right now - right where you are - and you'll see new words being created right now - and catching on - or not - as life keeps speeding along.

New circumstances give rise to the need for new words



*Among the new terms are 'social distancing,' 'super-spreader,' and 'index case.'*

# New words and newly popular words for these times

**Covid-19**

**Rona**

**shelter in place**

**social distancing**

**quarantini**

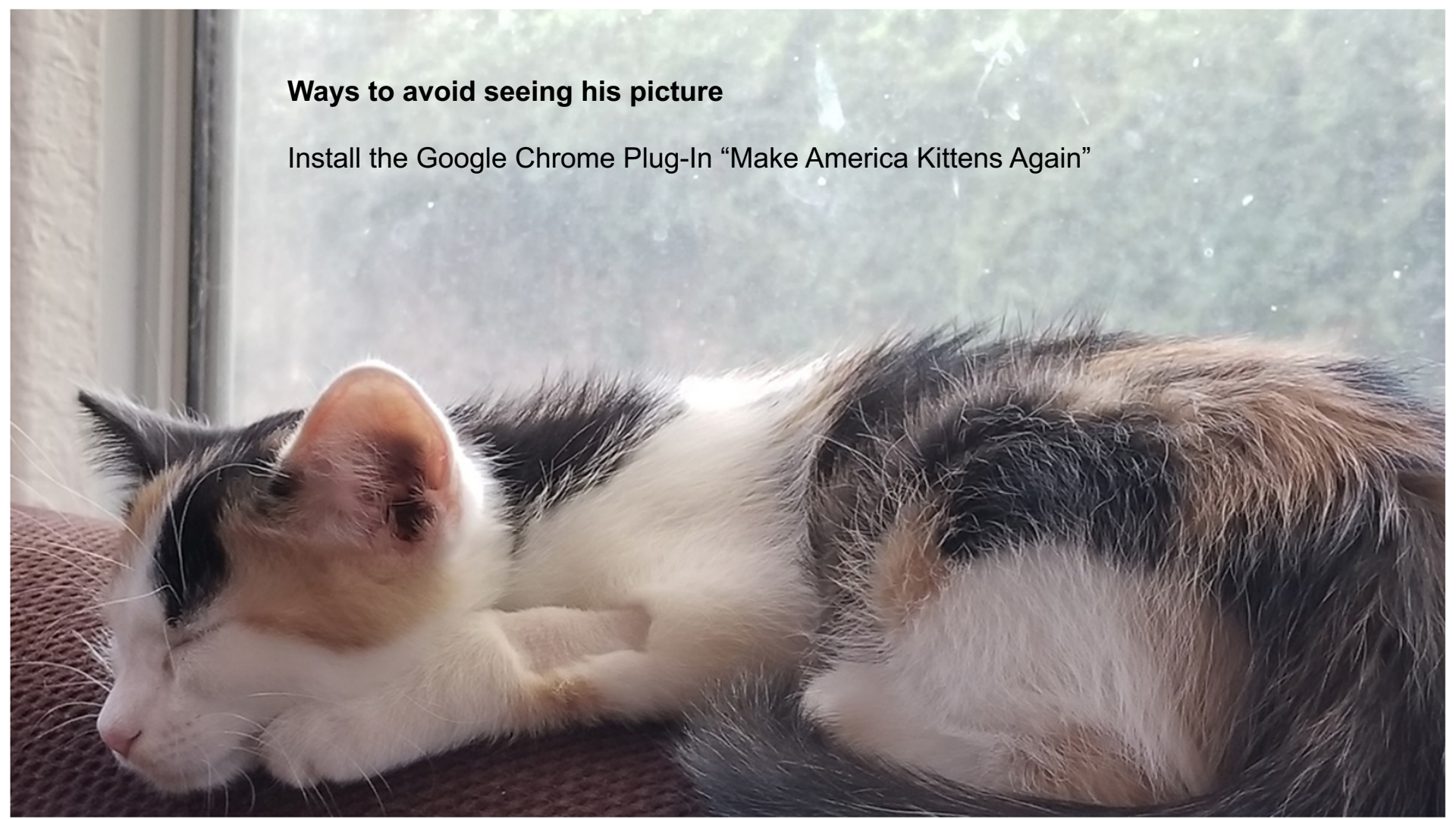
**asymptomatic**

## **Ways to avoid saying his name**

DT, 45, IQ45, The Orange Sociopath, The Orange Cheeto, the Grifter, He Who Shall Not Be Named, You Know Who

## **Ways to avoid seeing his picture**

Install the Google Chrome Plug-In “Make America Kittens Again”



# Issues in Language Revitalization

- Younger generations no longer speaking the language
- Elders - “Kids these days!”
- Committees of elders
  - Arapaho “Facebook”
  - Arapaho “Twitter”
  - Arapaho “rice”



# (1) Borrow a word and just change its pronunciation

You can borrow a word or phrase from another language and pronounce it according to the way you normally pronounce things in your language:

1. English *karaoke*
2. English *moccasin* - *makasin* from Powhatan
3. English *doppelgänger*
4. Japanese *miruku*
5. Japanese *koohii*
6. Xay Tsnu *dáwa*
7. Xay Tsnu *yáwi*
8. Xay Tsnu *wentháno*
9. Xay Tsnu *sáwal*

## (2) Borrow a phrase and use it as a single word

You can “re-analyze” a phrase – or sequence of words – from another language and borrow it into your language as a single word:

1. English *faux pas*
2. English *cul-de-sac*
3. English *à la mode*
4. Japanese *paasukon*
5. Japanese *masukon*
6. Xay Tsnu *lámisa*

### (3) Translate a word or phrase “part by part”

You can borrow an idea – expressed as a word or a phrase – from another language and translate it literally – word for word or part by part – into your language, so most people wouldn’t be able to recognize that it was borrowed from somewhere else:

1. English “brainwashing” from Chinese **xǐ nǎo**
2. English “long time, no see” from Chinese **hǎojiǔ bùjiàn**
3. English “flea market” from French **marché de puces**
4. English “loan word” from German **Lehnwort**
5. Xay Tsnu **yówa-asham** from English “underwear”

*These are called “calques” - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_calques](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_calques)*

## (4) Combine native and borrowed words

1. Dakota **mni** “water” + Greek **polis** “city”
2. English **Bush** + Japanese **suru** “do”
3. Xay Tsnu **Xo** “fire” + English **cart** - **Xo kálitha**

## (5) Use a descriptive phrase to coin a new term

1. Xay Tsnu **úy-q'án-tshim** – eyes-towards/on-hanging.things
2. Arapaho “computer” - **it-knows-everything**

# Today's Committee of Elders

## Nouns:

1. Zoom
2. Smartphone
3. Laptop computer
4. Text message
5. Emojis
6. Gallery view
7. Breakout session

## Verbs:

1. Reboot the computer
2. Unmute yourself
3. Text me
4. Have a Zoom meeting
5. Raise your hand
6. Dial the number