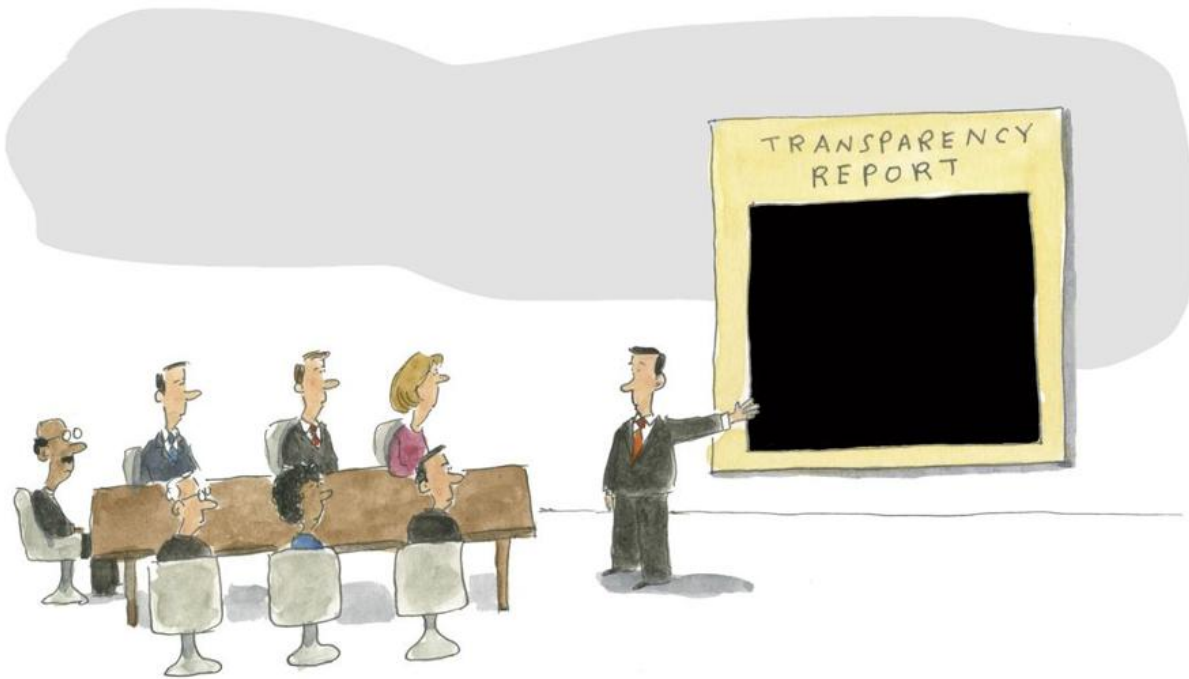


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ALEX BEAM Comments

Words we can live without



GARY CLEMENT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

By Alex Beam | GLOBE COLUMNIST DECEMBER 23, 2016

In with the new, and out with the old . . . vocabulary? Why not? Here is an annotated list of tired words and clichés we wouldn't care if we never heard again until 3017, or later:

Transparency

Remember when John Glenn was orbiting the earth and transparency was an innocent little noun the Kodak company used for “slide”? When the corporate flacks start talking about transparency, you know the shredders are running full blast. Did someone say opaque? That would be the Obama administration, condemned by The Guardian and others for talking the transparency talk and practicing greater institutional secrecy than any previous presidency.



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Yuge/Huge

OK, the “yuge” is a pronunciation issue, just as linguists finally determined that President-elect Donald Trump wasn’t really saying “bigly,” but “big-league,” on the campaign trail. Trump’s linguistic self-confidence (“I know words, I have the best words”) matches his egomania in other pursuits, but he and his speechwriters need to summon Mr. Roget to Trump Tower for a chinwag. The Thesaurus could help put “huge” in the rearview mirror, forever.

Consider “gargantuan,” “cyclopean,” and “elephantine,” just for starters. Come on – “The Huge Seven”? Denzel Washington would have never appeared in *that* movie.



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“ze” and “zir”

Ze and zir are examples of gender neutral pronouns currently fashionable on college campuses. Nonconformist students occasionally sport “Ask Me About My Pronouns” buttons, signifying their gender liberation. One wag at the University of Michigan chose “his majesty” as his personal pronoun. “He” and “she” still pass muster here, as at other newspapers. Ze, zir, or “Latinx” for a Hispanic person of indeterminate gender — let’s clip their wings before they can gain any linguistic altitude.

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The sharing economy

The sharing economy refers to services such as Uber and Airbnb, where drivers and homeowners share their cars and apartments with paying customers. It has a kind of post-dharma ring to it. I guess “mindfulness economy” was already taken.

Cynics have suggested that the sharing economy is actually the old-fashioned taking economy, rebranded. The Nation magazine called it “a grand appellation for gussied-up rental operations.” But loopy feel-good euphemisms are the mother’s milk of the Millennial Economy. Startups don’t fire employees, they “deactivate” them. In his book “Disrupted: My Adventure in the Start-Up Bubble,” Dan Lyons reported that online marketing firm Hubspot used the verb “graduate” instead of “fire.” Yuge!



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Pivot

This is an odious word that long ago wore out its welcome in the business world — failed startups inevitably “pivoted” into new markets. But pivot loomed, well, elephantine, in the 2016 election. “I’m getting a little tired of all this pivoting,” NPR’s [Scott Simon](#) wrote this summer, after seeing headlines such as “E-mails Block Clinton’s Pivot to Positive,” which seems singularly opaque. People change; politicians pivot. A suggested substitute: pirouette.



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We'll talk offline

Or “ping me;” or my absolute favorite, when the rusty links of an e-mail chain start to dissolve into total gibberish: “Let’s go to voice.” I actually used the phrase “F2F” in an e-mail recently. It’s netspeak for “face to face” and is a common transition line used in flirtatious online chat, e.g., let’s get our noses out of our smartphones and actually meet.

FYI, I don’t do F2F, I don’t want to talk offline, and without belaboring the obvious, I don’t “bro-hug” either.

One could go on and on. I’d love to retire the ur-cliché “resilience,” although knowing that the Rockefeller Foundation has thrown \$500 million at resilience-related rubbish whets my appetite for a piece of that particular pecuniary payout. I’ve railed against “eponymous” (“Hey! Look at me! I know what ‘eponymous’ means”!) in the past, to no avail.

I’ve also inveighed against “going forward,” “impactful” and “hardscrabble,” that predictable adjective that writers dredge up to describe the upbringing of people who actually had to work for a living. I noticed that the website Wordnik will allow you to “adopt” a word for \$25. They will print you out a certificate of adoption, and attach your chosen word to your Twitter handle.

Wordnik adoptions last only a year, but perhaps for \$100 I could pay to have the bogus-analytical term “optics” never used again when reporting on political events. I propose to adopt “optics” and gently lay it to rest, forever. That would be logo-euthanasia — a neologism for our linguistically challenged times.

Alex Beam’s column appears regularly in the Globe. Follow him on Twitter