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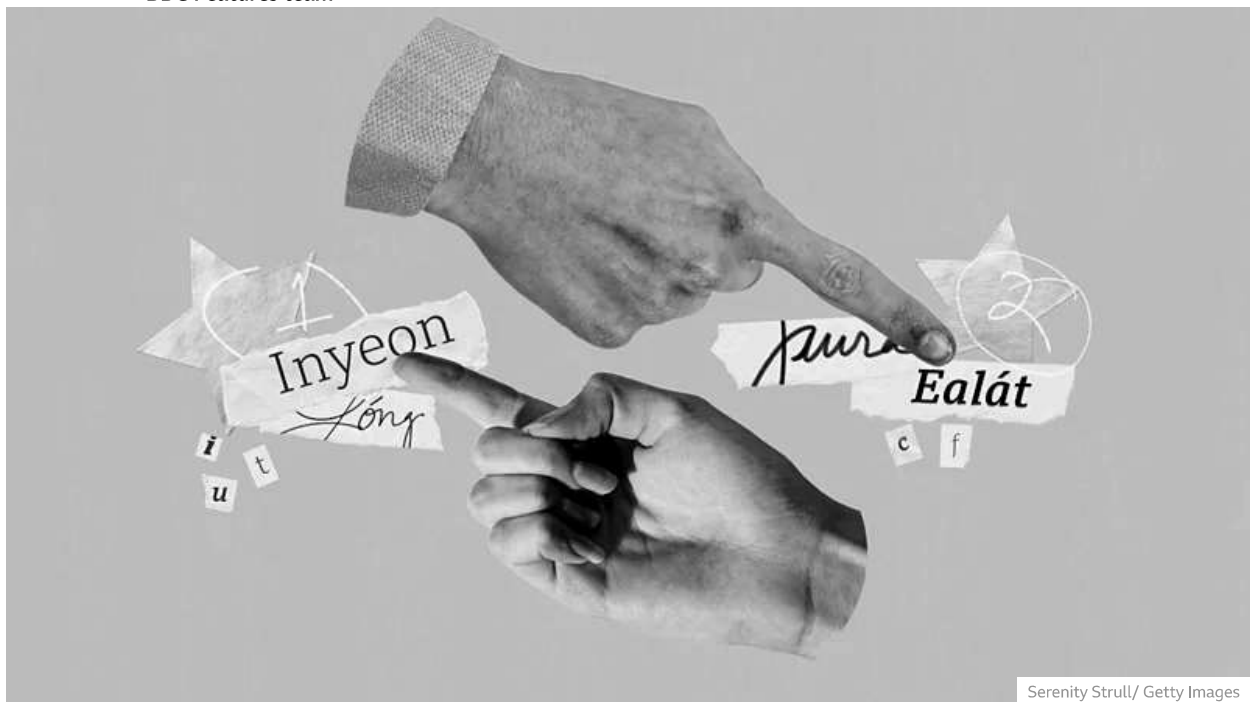
ADVE

'Firkle', 'Glusdich' and more: 10 words we learned in 2024 that will expand your mind

11 hours ago

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BBC Features team



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There are some words that have captured our imaginations at the BBC during our reporting this year (Credit: Serenity Strull/ Getty Images)

Here are some of our favourite words and phrases that the BBC encountered during our reporting this year that helped to unravel the changes taking place in world around us.

From words that capture a reindeer's search for food in the Arctic, to new expressions that convey the nuances of climate change around the world, this year we've explored how languages can help our minds travel and take us deep into other cultures. We've learned about twins inventing secret languages, and researchers discovering long-lost scripts from ancient trade routes. We picked up an Amish word for subtle food cravings, and heard how Antarctic researchers develop their own slang during their long, dark months of isolation.

There are thousands of languages in the world, and new ones keep being discovered, including lost scripts from the ancient past. But according to the Living Tongues

Institute for Endangered Languages, over 3,000 languages are now **endangered** and at risk of disappearing. Learning, speaking and enjoying them can, however, help to keep them alive for ourselves and future generations. Here are some of the most intriguing expressions we learned from languages around the world during our reporting in 2024. They are listed in alphabetical order - click on each word to read the full story behind it:

Ausgeapert (Alpine German)

An old word used in several German-speaking areas of the Alps that refers to bodies or ancient artefacts exposed by melting ice. As the effects of global warming take hold, it is also used to describe the consequences of the dramatic retreat of glaciers, which are revealing lost worlds in the high mountains and changing our understanding of history in the Alps.

Cûme čik t'ê? (Sarkese)

Meaning, "how are you?", this phrase comes from a language on the island of Sark, a British Crown Dependency located close to the French coast. Sarkese only has three native speakers left. It is an old variety of the Norman language, which itself developed when Norse Vikings settled in what is now Normandy in France and their language merged with that of the local population.

“ There is something special about the language of my heritage, the one spoken to me when I was a child – Rose Fisher

Ealát (North Sami)

An near-untranslatable word used by North Sami reindeer herders in the Arctic, referring to favourable conditions that allow reindeer to dig for nutritious lichen under the snow.

North Sami and other Sami languages are intricately tied to the way of life of the Sami indigenous people in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. For example, there are more than 300 Sami words for snow, and many words for different kinds of reindeer (including several specifically for "frightened reindeer"). But the language is changing, as some ancient weather-, wildlife- and snow-related words are no longer relevant in the rapidly changing Arctic climate.

Firkle (Antarctic Research Base English)

A word used by Antarctic researchers, meaning, to sort through something or mess around. Isolated for six months, scientists at the remote the Rothera Research Station on Antarctica's Adelaide Island developed their own accent and slang. Studying these changes helped linguists gain new insights into how human languages and speech patterns evolve. On a grand scale, it also provides clues about how varieties such as British and American English diverged.

"We wanted to replicate, as closely as we could, what happened when the Mayflower went to North America and the people on board were isolated for a length of time," says Jonathan Harrington, professor of phonetics and speech processing at Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich. "Six months isn't very long, so we saw very, very small changes. But we found some of the vowels had shifted."

Gluschiedich (Pennsylvania Dutch)

A word meaning, "I am not hungry but I feel like eating!". Pennsylvania Dutch is a Germanic language that emerged among settlers in the US in the 18th Century and is now mostly used by the Amish and Mennonite religious groups. Despite being so culturally specific, it's also tied to the origins of a well-loved, widely spread American holiday: Groundhog Day, called "Grundsdaag" in Pennsylvania Dutch. Due to the fast growth of the Amish population, the language is actually thriving and growing.

"As a linguist and language enthusiast, I love all languages. But there is something special about the language of my heritage, the one spoken to me when I was a child," says Rose Fisher, a PhD candidate in German linguistics and language science at the Pennsylvania State University, who grew up in the Amish community in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Though she now lives in an English-speaking environment, she adds: "I love to hear Pennsylvania Dutch being spoken around me and hope that someday I will be around it more, and more comfortable speaking it again. For me, it means I am home." She especially likes using words from her home language that just don't quite exist in English – like "gluschied".

Gwaan (Jamaican Patwa)

An expression of jubilation. Jamaican Patwa, also known as Patois or Creole, emerged in Jamaica in the 17th Century as a blend of dialects of English and various African languages. Today, it is also spoken in Jamaican diaspora communities around the world – and younger people are reclaiming it with pride.

"There's joy and excitement when a Creole speaker meets another. They go into this unique space of mutual understanding," says Shawna-Kay Tucker, assistant professor of applied linguistics at the University of Toronto, Canada. Young speakers are also mixing Patwa with other linguistic influences from around the world, adding to its development at hyper speed.



Many of the words we encountered during 2024 reflect the changes taking place in the world around us (Credit: Serenity Strull/ Getty Images)

Inyeon (Korean)

A nuanced word with several meanings, including a kind of predestined relationship. The word takes centre stage in Celine Song's Oscar-nominated film *Past Lives*. As one of the characters says: "It means providence or... fate. But it's specifically about relationships between people. I think it comes from Buddhism and reincarnation. It's an *inyeon* if two strangers even walk by each other on the street and their clothes accidentally brush. Because it means there must have been something between them in their past lives."

Kalo theke aalo (Bengali)

A phrase coined to refer to a just transition towards renewable energy – it literally means, "from darkness to hope". Words related to climate change and the quest to cut emissions can be very hard to translate, as they can often be abstract or metaphorical. But specialised translators are finding creative ways to come up with meaningful terms and help negotiators and communities take action to fight global warming.

Lóng juǎn fēng (Mandarin)

Meaning, tornado – literally, "swirling-dragon wind". Mythical dragons in different cultures, and the words and sayings around them, reveal how humans around the

world have grappled with the natural world, wildlife and awe-inspiring natural phenomena – and made sense of their own place in the universe.
... and for 2025, here's a particularly bright and vibrant phrase from Costa Rica which we hope will set the tone for a very Happy New Year:

Pura vida (Costa Rican Spanish)

Literally, "pure life", referring to a feeling of optimism and a uniquely positive outlook on life. "It's absolutely part of the Costa Rican ethos and identity," says Víctor Sánchez, linguistics professor at the University of Costa Rica. Its meaning has evolved over time, and can convey a sense of gratitude, that even if you are facing difficulties, you are still alive and can look on the bright side of things.

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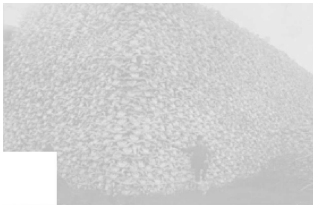
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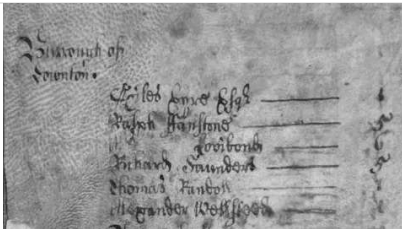


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