

Read the following four articles carefully, and in the order they appear (they are arranged chronologically). Work with a partner and figure out what happened here- why the angry letter to the editor on January 17th? Pay attention to changes in language, point of view, and text features.

Press release from the American Dialect Society, Friday, January 5, 2007

(For immediate release)

January 5, 2007

“Plutoed” Voted 2006 Word of the Year

by the American Dialect Society

In its 17th annual words of the year vote, the American Dialect Society voted “plutoed” as the word of the year, in a run-off against climate canary. To pluto is to demote or devalue someone or something, as happened to the former planet Pluto when the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union decided Pluto no longer met its definition of a planet.

Presiding at the Jan. 5 voting session were ADS Executive Secretary Allan Metcalf of McMurray College and Professor Wayne Glowka of Georgia College and State University, chair of the New Words Committee of the American Dialect Society. He conducts the column “Among the New Words” in the society’s quarterly journal American Speech.

“It was good that the society focused on a genuine scientific concern,” Professor Glowka said. “Though I believe the nomination came in from outer space.”

Word of the Year is interpreted in its broader sense as “vocabulary item”—not just words but phrases. The words or phrases do not have to be brand new, but they have to be newly prominent or notable in the past year, in the manner of Time magazine’s Person of the Year. The vote is fully informed by the members’ expertise in the study of words, but it is far from a solemn occasion. Members in the 117-year-old organization include linguists, lexicographers, etymologists, grammarians, historians, researchers, writers, authors, editors, professors, university students, and independent scholars. In conducting the vote, they act in fun and not in any official capacity of inducting words into the English language.

In a companion vote, sibling organization the American Name Society voted Pluto as Name of the Year for 2006 in its third annual name-of-the-year contest. ANS President Cleveland Evans said, “Our members believe the great emotional reaction of the public to the demotion of Pluto shows the importance of Pluto as a name. We may no longer believe in the Roman god Pluto, but we still have a sense of personal connection with the former planet.”

Macaca was runner-up.

http://www.americandialect.org/index.php/amerdiag/plutoed_voted_2006_word_of_the_year/

From the Associated Press, Sunday, January 7, 2007

Jan 7, 8:38 PM EST

Associated Press Website

'Plutoed' Chosen As '06 Word of the Year

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) -- Pluto is finally getting some respect - not from astronomers, but from wordsmiths.

"Plutoed" was chosen 2006's Word of the Year by the American Dialect Society at its annual meeting Friday.

To "pluto" is "to demote or devalue someone or something," much like what happened to the former planet last year when the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union decided Pluto didn't meet its definition of a planet.

"Our members believe the great emotional reaction of the public to the demotion of Pluto shows the importance of Pluto as a name," said society president Cleveland Evans. "We may no longer believe in the Roman god Pluto, but we still have a sense of personal connection with the former planet."

"Plutoed" won in a runoff against "climate canary," defined as "an organism or species whose poor health or declining numbers hint at a larger environmental catastrophe on the horizon."

Other words considered: murse (man's purse), flog (a fake blog that promotes products) and macaca (an American citizen treated as an alien).

Republican former Sen. George Allen was ahead in his re-election campaign when he said "macaca," which some regard as a racial slur, and "welcome to America" in referring to a U.S.-born man of Indian descent who was volunteering for Allen's opponent. Allen lost to Democrat Jim Webb.

The 117-year-old American Dialect Society comprises linguists, grammarians, historians and independent scholars, among others. Members conduct the vote for fun and not in an official capacity to induct words into the English language.

The society chose "truthiness" as its top word last year. The word is credited to Comedy Central satirist Stephen Colbert, who defined it as "truth that comes from the gut, not books."

Last month, an online survey by dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster declared "truthiness" the word of the year for 2006.

From *The Spokesman Review* Monday, January 15, 2007:

Dialect nuts revive Pluto – as a verb

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From *The Spokesman Review* Wednesday, January 17, 2007:

Letters to the editor

Pluto headline unprofessional

Your headline this past Monday, "Dialect nuts revive Pluto – as a verb" (Jan. 8), reveals a fundamental and very provincial disrespect for academic scholarship. The reference is to a meeting of the Linguistic Society of America and to the fact that members of the American Dialect Society and the American Name Society had voted to recognize the use of the word "Pluto" to mean "the demotion or devaluing of something or someone" as the "Word of the Year."

We (I was there and am a past officer) do so with a different word each year, and we are not a bunch of "nuts." Most of us are dictionary makers, busily compiling and in other ways recording how others are mangling our language – especially journalists, many of whom have used "Pluto" with this meaning.

In short, we describe and analyze what other people do with language. We are scientists of language, and your reference to us as "nuts" is a mindless use of a derogatory term. Your apparent need to use such a put-down reveals a lamentable insecurity on the part of your editorial staff and is an embarrassment to any community hoping to attract sophisticated professionals.

Grant W. Smith

Professor of English, Eastern Washington University