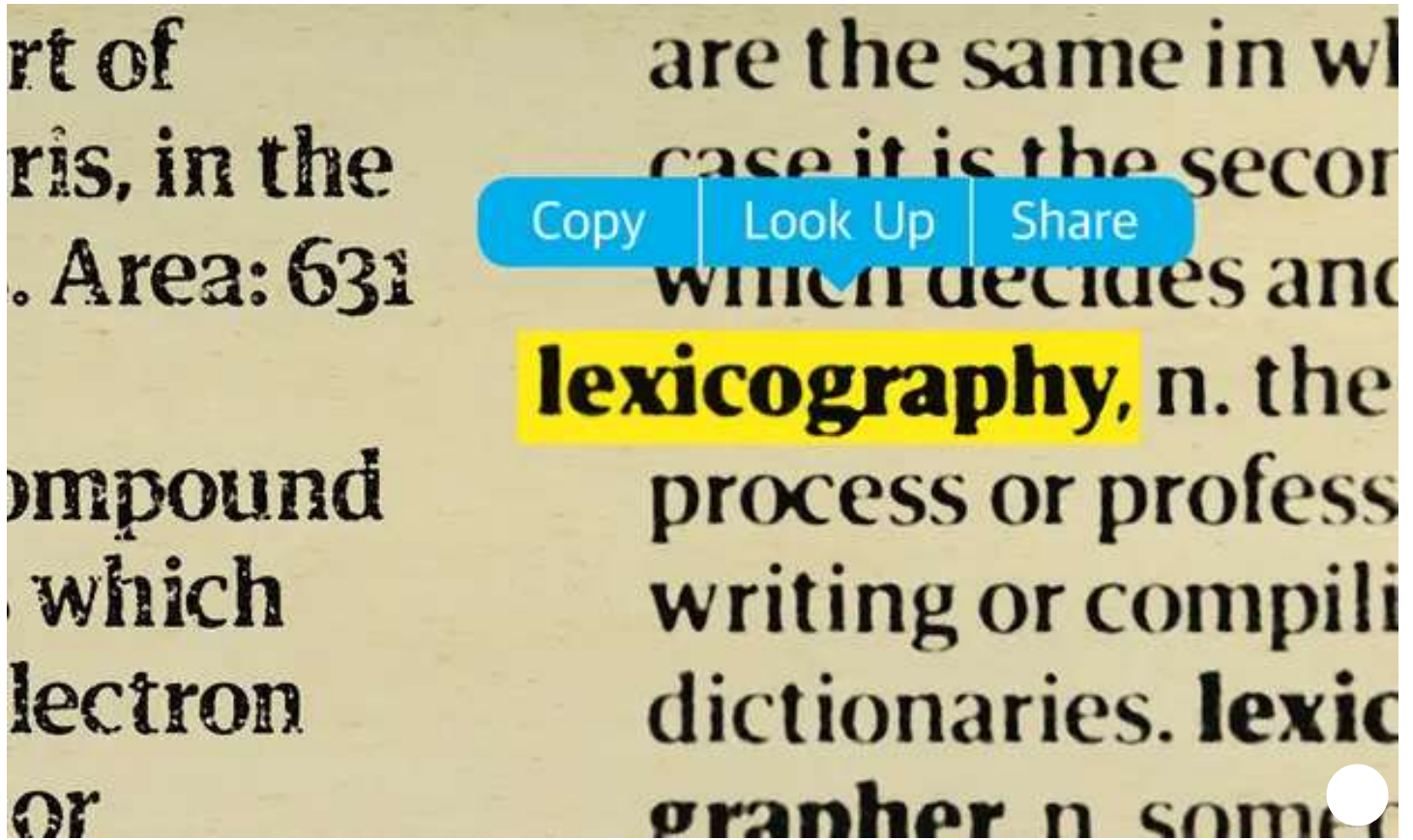


The Guardian



'Misinformation' picked as word of the year by Dictionary.com

Online resource picked the word over 'disinformation' where other dictionaries had opted for 'toxic' and 'single-use'

Associated Press in New York

Mon 26 Nov 2018 14:21 GMT

“Misinformation”, as opposed to disinformation, is Dictionary.com’s word of the year. It followed “toxic”, picked for the same honor by Oxford Dictionaries, and “single-use”, picked by Collins.

Jane Solomon, a linguist-in-residence at Dictionary.com, said the choice of “mis” over “dis” was deliberate, intended to serve as a “call to action” to be vigilant in the battle against fake news, flat earthers and anti-vaxxers, among other conduits.

The Oakland-based company wanted to highlight the idea of intent to mislead, and that misinformation can be spread unwittingly.

“The rampant spread of misinformation is really providing new challenges for navigating life in 2018,” Solomon said. “Misinformation has been around for a long time, but over the last decade or so the rise of social media has really, really changed how information is shared. We believe that understanding the concept of misinformation is vital to identifying misinformation as we encounter it in the wild, and that could ultimately help curb its impact.”

In studying lookups on the site, Dictionary noticed “our relationship with truth is something that came up again and again”, Solomon said.

For example, the word “mainstream” spiked in January as the term “mainstream media”, or MSM, grew to gargantuan proportions, wielded as an insult on the political right. There was a surge in February for “white lie”, after Hope Hicks, then White House communications director, admitted to telling a few for Donald Trump.

The word “Orwellian” surfaced in May, after a statement attributed to White House press secretary, Sarah Sanders, accused the Chinese government of “Orwellian nonsense”.

Misinformation, Solomon said, “frames what we’ve all been through in the last 12 months”. The site, which has 90 million monthly users, has added entries for “filter bubble”, “fake news”, “post-fact”, “post-truth” and “homophily”, among others. Other entries have been freshened to reflect new meanings, including “echo chamber”.

The company’s runners-up include “representation”, driven by the popularity of the movies *Black Panther* and *Crazy Rich Asians* and wins in the US midterm elections for female, Muslim, Native American and LGBT candidates.

But the rise of misinformation, Solomon said, stretches well beyond US borders. The use of Facebook and other social media to incite violence and conflict was documented around the globe in 2018, she said.

“Disinformation would have also been a really, really interesting word of the year this year, but our choice of misinformation was very intentional,” Solomon said.

“Disinformation is a word that kind of looks externally to examine the behavior of others. It’s sort of like pointing at behavior and saying, ‘THIS is disinformation.’ With misinformation, there is still some of that pointing, but also it can look more internally to help us evaluate our own behavior, which is really, really important in the fight against misinformation.

“It’s a word of self-reflection, and in that it can be a call to action. You can still be a good person with no nefarious agenda and still spread misinformation.”

In 2016, Dictionary.com chose “complicit” as its word of the year. In 2016, it was “xenophobia”.

Since you’re here ...

... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading The Guardian’s independent, investigative journalism than ever but advertising revenues across the media are falling fast. And unlike many news organisations, we haven’t put up a paywall - we want to keep our reporting as open as we can. So you can see why we need to ask for your help.

The Guardian is editorially independent, meaning we set our own agenda. Our journalism is free from commercial bias and not influenced by billionaire owners, politicians or shareholders. No one edits our editor. No one steers our opinion. This is important as it enables us to give a voice to those less heard, challenge the powerful and hold them to account. It’s what makes us different to so many others in the media, at a time when factual, honest reporting is critical.

If everyone who reads our reporting, who likes it, helps to support it, our future would be much more secure. **Support The Guardian from as little as £1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support The Guardian



Topics

- Language
- news