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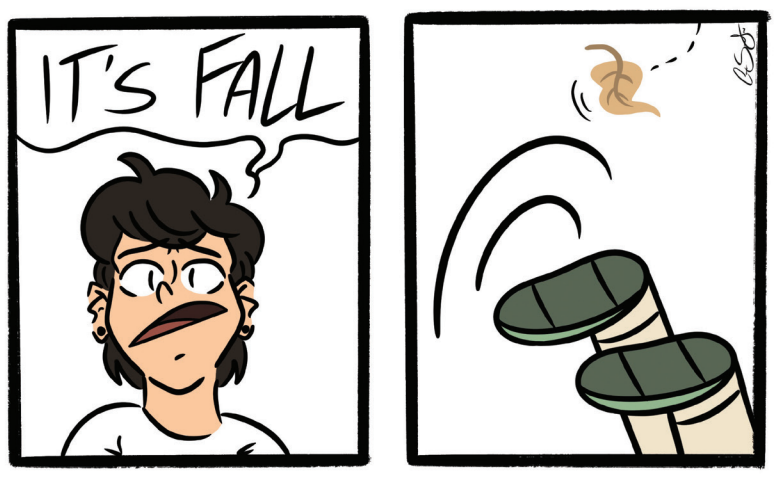
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Daily OPINION

GIRL, UNINTERRUPTED:

Chic is dead and we killed it

FILE LOGO/THE DAILY CAMPUS



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"Kinda chic" of you to read this article. "Kinda chic" of me to write it. Everything is chic nowadays, which means that nothing can be chic at all.

If you've opened TikTok or Instagram in the past three months, you'll have likely seen the word "chic" beat to death. Every other video is overlayed with butter-yellow text reading "kinda chic to [insert genuinely anything here]." British Vogue declared the adjective dead as of May 2025, and over a year later, it's well past six feet under. Anything from the car you drive to the way you part your hair to the way you decide to spend your afternoon has the capacity to be chic. At that point, why use the word at all?

When I was a child, the word "chic" evoked a particular ideal of womanhood. I recall being enamored by the notion of elegant, stylish poets and journalists living in big cities and drinking martinis. As a teenager, my obsessions shifted to twentieth-century runway archives — if you asked me to define "chic" at any point in my life up to a year ago, I'd cite Carrie Bradshaw or the silhouette of a dress from Ralph Lauren's Spring/Summer 1998 collection. Given my longtime aspiration towards "chic", I'm inclined to defend it. Although it means very little now, the death of a singular word symbolizes a greater loss of nuance and increasing linguistic homogenization.

The charm of chic lives in the details: a smudge of red lipstick or a thrifted Dior scarf repurposed as a belt, perhaps. The death-knell-declaring British Vogue article puts it perfectly: "'Chic' in its purest form is subtle — found in the drape of a sleeve or a stray strand of hair." It takes a mosaic of tiny details to make someone or something truly chic, not just a singular product you can buy.

Chic is often misconstrued as a marker of upper-class life (designer brands, overpriced sushi and skincare, whatever the millionaire of the week is buying and/or doing). Announcing that the car you drive or the drink you order at a bar is chic imposes unrealistic standards based on material value. It makes chic a moniker of what you have over what you do and who you are. Consumerist whims cycle in and out as fast as "chic" rose and fell.

Trend cycles are most often considered in a fashion context. Take Lirika Matoshi's strawberry dress from 2020. Everyone wanted one, and once enough people dropped $500 to acquire the dress, it turned overdone and plebian. A beautiful piece of art became a cultural index fossil sent to rot in landfills or live in thrift store purgatory. Now, the same pattern befalls words: beloved, overused, beat-to-death, discarded. With words, however, we have much more at stake.

Thanks to linguistic homogenization and declining media literacy rates, nuance is being outshined by marketability. Social media algorithms favor known trends which appear in templates ("kinda chic to [whatever]"), thus training us to think, speak and present ourselves formulaically. Gone is the subtle beauty and art that lives in fine details and personal touches. Now, everything has to be marketable (i.e. flashy, "trendy" and surface-level) enough to stop scrollers in their tracks. Take a trend, fill in the blanks and you'll be easily promoted to the masses who engage with it. Participating in fun TikTok trends is harmless until formulaic thinking begins to seep into everyday life, particularly our language.

When one word can mean everything, does it not also mean nothing? Our very fabric of communication and expression is losing meaning. In chic's wake came the epidemic of "whimsy", which, despite its complete opposite definition, has come to mean the same thing — that is to say, everything and nothing. Not to get all "1984," but this should warrant some concern.

Chic began with dirty martinis and kitten heels; she slowly asphyxiated under the weight of countless brand-coopts and word salad. As we leave "chic" crushed under the boot of capitalism and reaching out a twitching hand for her good friend "whimsy," I retain a blind faith that both will slowly crawl their ways back into our vernacular — this time, I hope, correctly.

Linguistic literacy is more important than ever

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During my time as a Linguistics and Philosophy major in UConn's linguistics department, I've realized just how misunderstood language is by most people. The most common way I've seen this is linguistic discrimination, which is held up by misconceptions about the fundamentals of language that pervade everyday life, to the point that many well-meaning people are completely unaware of how they may be perpetuating linguistic discrimination. Most people know that you shouldn't harbor bias against people who speak a certain language or shame people for having a non-American accent. Yet even some of my most progressive peers won't question using a Southern accent as a shorthand for stupidity. They feel the need to point out and shame people when they say "melk." They still fall into the trap of thinking younger generations are deteriorating the English language. Language isn't a frivolous thing to be made fun of. The most important thing I've learned in the linguistics department is that language is a fundamental tool for both oppression and resistance.

While that may seem like a massive overreaction to the examples I listed — who doesn't make fun of their friends sometimes? — they're symptoms of an attitude that promotes and justifies oppression at a wider scale. In a time where the Supreme Court has given ICE the legal ability to racially profile people on the basis of speaking Spanish or speaking English with an accent, understanding and valuing linguistic diversity is necessary for resistance. Resources for combatting ICE must be provided in Spanish, and concerted efforts must be made not to judge, other or exclude people who speak with Latin-American accents. Without efforts like these, the most vulnerable groups in our society will only be pushed into further vulnerability.

This doesn't just apply to Spanish. Appalachian accents, for example, are also heavily discriminated against in other parts of America. According to an article in the Appalachian Journal of Law, speakers with Appalachian accents are seen as unintelligent, lazy and incestuous, and are also subject to high levels of employment discrimination. As we lead up to the 2026 midterms and Republican approval rating of Donald Trump is lower than ever, progressives should not hold "sounding Republican" against people who want to oppose conservative control at a federal level. Thinking everyone with a Southern accent is ignorant and hateful is bigotry, despite how common that kind of bigotry is in New England and other urban liberal populations.

Perhaps the most prominent example of a social justice movement focusing on a battle for language is the fight for transgender rights. Trans people argue that the language around gender has been used to police and oppress everybody, keeping us in boxes according to linguistic labels. This doesn't include only trans people; cisgender, straight men and women are affected as well as anyone who isn't fully cis and straight.

Trans people ask to be referred to with certain gendered pronouns, names and words, or invent new words entirely. Meanwhile, anti-trans advocates argue that trans people cannot change language just as they cannot change their innate gender. Here, language is being used as a proxy and stepping-stone towards tearing down the system of gender roles. If we stop being so rigid with gender roles, we will naturally stop being so rigid with gendered language. "He" could refer to a woman. We could find words that don't put people into the boxes of man or woman at all, like "they" to refer to one person or other, new gender-neutral words like "nibling." Speaking in such a free state of gender now communicates alliance with these ideals as well as a continuous fight towards them.

On the other side of the coin, the alt-right rely on control of language as a way to control their public perception. They use "radicals" as a synonym for leftists of any kind to stigmatize societal change and to enforce their own extremist goals as normal and acceptable in comparison. Even the term "alt-right" has its origins in white supremacy as a euphemistic label for right-wing extremism. By using the word "alternative" instead of "extremist" and by characterizing white supremacy as a generic right-wing movement, the alt-right's association with white supremacy becomes obfuscated.

It is important for every social movement to have an in-depth understanding of language and how it can influence or be influenced by people for political purposes. During my time in linguistics courses, I've realized how esoteric the issues I've discussed can be without more in-depth education on language. I urge anyone who is interested in this topic to take a linguistics course during their time in college. Learn about language's interplay with power and keep linguistics in mind when engaging in political action.