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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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## *The tongue has no heart*

"Words influence the perception of reality but not reality itself," says philosopher Álex Grijelmo.



I imagine what Karen Abudinen will suffer every morning when she scrutinizes in the *Dictionary of the Spanish Language (DLE)* the words abudabí (native of Abu Dhabi) and step-grandfather (adoptive grandfather). It is assumed that the space between the two corresponds to the verb abudinar, invented in Colombia by some perverse who requested its registration in the official archives of the language. The former minister can breathe easy and dedicate her time to defend herself against the serious charges of diversion of funds that besiege her, because the verb that unhinges her does not appear in the DLE and will surely never appear. But not because lexicographers have cowered at their demand to repudiate the term, but because dictionaries have no heart: they record what people welcome, however cruel, and disdain what speakers do not use, however beautiful it may seem.

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In order to comfort Abudinen, three years ago a man surnamed Chapero threatened to sue the Academy if it did not erase the definition of the common noun chapero: "male homosexual who practices prostitution". Although the Spanish Ombudsman's Office supported it, the term persists in the Dictionary because, simply, people continue to use it. Bad. But he's not the only one. Several surnames of Colombian politicians appear in the Dictionary. Duke is a noble title; lleras is synonymous with stony and pastrana means a thing "crude or badly done" and also "fabulous lie" (I swear it's true).

Abudinar will not achieve so much honor or so much indignity because it is nothing more than an artificial invention and, I would bet, ephemeral. The tongue is a lazy, veleidosus and inclement river whose current is not easy to amend or modify. More than a thousand years of life has Spanish and there are words that inhabit since then in its deposits. Cheese is written for the first time 1,040 years ago and dog (word of unknown origin) since the twelfth century. The word vallenato took more than a century to enter the Dictionary, but there it has been since 2017 and there it stays. Words only abide by speakers, not lobbying offices, churches, NGOs, the Ombudsman's Office, letters of protest, and not even the tastes of academics. That's why his life is strange and fascinating. Esculcar (to register, to search), a normal verb in the Highlands of Cundiboyacense, disappeared from Spain around 1650. The Academy's first dictionary defined it in 1732 as "ancient and unused voice". Old, yes. But not in disuse, because in Colombia we continue to combine it.



The RAE has already documented the words 'abudinar' and 'abudinear' as stealing or defrauding in Colombia

The delusional times of social networks, lies, populist sentimentality, delirium and other herbs have brought an unhealthy relationship with reality. Some prefer to deny it: Trump insists there was no riot on Capitol Hill in Washington. Others, exaggerate it: there are those who consider sexual violence any negative comment about the physical appearance of a person; to claim that she is fat or freckled would be almost a crime. Many camouflage reality with soft words: prepaid. Everyone tries to alter the language naively believing that this modifies the situations described, as if not mentioning the chaperos in the Dictionary made male prostitution disappear.

The most dramatic thing in this flight from reality is the so-called extreme inclusive language, which twists the millenary structure of Spanish to embed the feminine gender in the sentences. It has been shown that, in almost all languages, when, for example, citizens or peasants are spoken of, citizens and peasants are tacitly included. Expressing it in duplicate is excessive, boring and overwhelming. In any case, even if the solution was to destroy the language to change it, it would not affect reality, which is still stubborn, unjust and cruel. That is why a historic report by the Spanish Academy affirms: "Situations of equality or inequality in men and women are independent of grammatical choices". Do not confuse the ideal with the real, nor language solutions with social remedies. "Words influence the perception of reality but not reality itself," says philosopher Álex Grijelmo. Victims do not lose their status as victims, whether they know of false positives or massacres.

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Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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[Royal Spanish Academy: 'Abudinear' or 'abudinar': a term pits a Colombian politician against the RAE for its surname](#)

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