

*The Language Archive (2)*

By Julia Cho

*George: A linguist. A man in his 30s or 40s.*

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GEORGE: I am a linguist. This is my trade. Lots of people ask me if this means I can speak a lot of languages. And I do have a passable acquaintance with Greek, Latin, French, Cantonese, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese and Esperanto. Of these all, I am perhaps most fond of Esperanto, that made-up, utopian dream of a language. Proudly, I say, *“La vivo sen Esperanto estas neimagebla al mi!”* Life without Esperanto is unimaginable to me! So. What is death to a linguist? What is, so to speak, worth mourning? I know this: There are sixty-nine hundred languages in the world. More than half are expected to die within the next century. In fact, it’s estimated that every two weeks, a language dies. I don’t know about you, but this statistic moves me far more than any statistic on how many animals die or people die in a given time, in a given place. Because when we say a language dies, we are talking about a whole world, a whole way of life. It is the death of imagination, of memory. It makes me much sadder than I could ever possibly express. Even with all my languages, there still aren’t the right words.