More Tingo lingo

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THE Germans have a word for a song that gets stuck in your brain and repeats over and over. It is ohrwurm, or ear worm, and it is a perfect fit. Apparently the Portuguese equivalent is chiclete de ouvido, or ear chewing gum.

I wonder if anyone has a word for a word that gets lodged in your brain? The one that has burrowed into mine is rumspringa, and I came across it in an article about the Amish, the close-knit religious community who live in a strict, old-fashioned world of their own.

When Amish youngsters turn 16 they enter rumspringa, a Dutch word which means "running around". So the boys and girls in rumspringa are free to go out into the world – the "Devil's Playground", as they call it – and savour its so-called delights: dating, parties, drugs, alcohol, shopping malls, cellphones, all the things they are denied in the Amish community.

After a time they have the freedom to choose between joining the Amish church for life and settling for the Devil's Playground, which means banishment from the Amish for ever.

I wonder if some of the Amish moms and dads don’t secretly yearn for a bit of middle-aged rumspringa. And what a lovely word it is, with its image of somebody springing out of the house with a bottle of rum under the arm. No wonder it’s stuck in my brain.

But talking of foreign words I see that there has been a sequel to the book The Meaning of Tingo, which is all about words and phrases from all over the world that have no English equivalent. "Tingo," for example, in the language of Easter Island, means to borrow things from a neighbour’s house, one after the other, until there is nothing left.

The new book is called Toujours Tingo, by Adam Jacot de Boinod. His first book advises us that the Japanese baku-shan is the term for a woman who looks better from behind, and nakhur, from the Farsi, means a camel that won’t give milk until its nostrils are tickled.

In German he found kummerspeck, literally meaning “grief bacon”, weight gained from emotional overeating. Also putzfimmel, a mania for cleaning, and “die bedeidigte leberwurst spielen” – to stick one’s lower lip out in a sulk, or literally to play the insulted liver sausage.

The new book offers us the German word Tantenverführer (literally aunt-seducer), to describe a smarmy young man with suspicious motives. Some other words that you might find useful in lighthearted cocktail party chatter:

Oka-shete – Ndonga language, Namibia. Difficulty urinating caused by eating frogs out of season.

Gwarlingo – Welsh. The rushing sound of a grandfather clock as it limbers up to strike the hour.

Chaponner – French dialect. To investigate digitally a chicken’s rear end to see if an egg is about to be laid.

Pisan zapra – Malay. The time needed to eat a banana.

Defining moments

FROM Eric Hodgson of Durban, some revised definitions:

Tears: The hydraulic force by which masculine will-power is defeated by feminine water-power.

Dictionary: A place where divorce comes before marriage.
Ecstasy: A feeling when you feel you are going to feel a feeling you have never felt before.
Office: A place where you can relax after your strenuous home life.
Etc: A sign to make others believe that you know more than you actually do.
Pessimist: A person who says that O is the last letter in zero, instead of the first letter in the word opportunity.
Father: A banker provided by nature.

Tailpiece
A WHITE-BEARDED Amish man and his son paid their first visit to a shopping mall, and beheld its many wonders in wide-eyed bewilderment.

They watched astonished as an old woman walked slowly into a lift. The doors whooshed closed behind her and she vanished from sight.

"It's like magic," the Amish man said to his son.

After a minute there was a pinging sound from the lift and the doors whooshed open again. Out stepped a young woman, lithe, long-legged and lovely. The Amish man's eyes bulged as she walked past him.

He turned to the boy and said: "Son, go thee home and fetch thy mother."

The bottom line
YAWN: The only time some married men ever get to open their mouths.
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