The rules of coronaspeak

Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention. Perhaps boredom is its father, and — in the world of language and its coinage — social media the incubator. The coronavirus pandemic has produced a vast number of new terms to describe the ***predicaments*** of lockdown.

predicament　困境；窘状　　　　　　　　　　　pessimistic　悲观的；厌世的

Start with the coronaverse, which people everywhere now inhabit, or the quarantimes, the era in which they now live. Early fears of the total breakdown of society in a coronapocalypse have proved too ***pessimistic***.

Most of these coronacoinages make sense on their face. But why exactly do they work?

There are various ways to form new words. But the most creative category are portmanteau words. A ***portmanteau*** is a term like ***brunch***, in which two words are combined, usually one or both being shortened.

portmanteau　混成词；多性质的　　　　　　brunch　早午餐

The first rule of a successful new portmanteau is that it points to a thing worth naming. The second rule is that a portmanteau should be transparent; ie, the words that went into it should be obvious. Few English words end in -tini, with the result that if someone invites you for a quarantini, you know what to expect. The more of the original two words you can use, the better.

By contrast, loxit is a dud. Pancession fails for a different reason. Neither of its elements is sufficiently distinctive. Too many words start with pan- or end with -cession for the meaning to jump off the page.

Good coinages are much rarer than failed ones, but pay attention to usefulness and transparency, and your invention may find its way into the panglossary.