Noam Chomsky isn’t dead yet

Everyone dies eventually, and famed linguist Noam Chomsky will be no different — but at the time of this writing, he is alive. And, sadly, his wife is explaining to people that reports of his death are “false,” according to *The Associated Press*.

Chomsky, 95, has been hospitalized in Brazil as he recovers from a stroke he had last year, the *AP* reported earlier this month. He’s having difficulty speaking, and “the right side of his body is affected.” He is being tended to by various specialists. This is not in dispute.

Two publications, *Jacobin* and *The New Statesman,* published what appeared to be obituaries. (*The New Statesman* took its post down; *Jacobin* changed its headline from “We Remember Noam Chomsky” to “Let’s Celebrate Noam Chomsky,” and edited its promotional tweet, though — notably — “obituary” is one of the key words in the article’s URL.) Both *The New Statesman* and *Jacobin* appeared, at first glance, to be reliable sources. Chomsky has written for the former and often given interviews to the latter. But neither appears to have asked anyone who’d know whether Chomsky was alive.

Some of the confusion around Chomsky’s state is preserved on a Wikipedia Talk page, as editors try to confirm reports of his death. Meanwhile, on social media, users posted old videos and other tributes in honor of Chomsky’s supposed death. Some of the reports of Chomsky’s death were retweeted thousands of times.

“Insofar as working people accepted the line fed to them by the media, he [Chomsky] never took it to be because of their docility or their credulousness, but because of the great

effort it took to find alternative avenues of information," wrote Vivek Chibber in *Jacobin,* which is, amusingly, an approving recap of Chomsky's media criticism. Certainly the media is not above critique, but it is unusual for a piece of media criticism to so thoroughly violate a very basic standard: making sure the subject of an obituary is actually dead before its publication.

Publications often prewrite obituaries of notable people. (For instance, one of the writers of Henry Kissinger's obituary in *The New York Times* died before Kissinger himself did.) Occasionally, those obituaries are accidentally published, as with a *Bloomberg* obituary of Steve Jobs in 2008. Typically, these mistakes are retracted, as *The New Statesman* article was.

Reached for comment, Chibber told me via email, "I only wrote the piece. I have no role in its production or publication."

Jacobin has not responded to a request for comment.

https://www.theverge.com/2024/6/18/24181373/noam-chomsky-not-dead-yet