ELVIS LIVES

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ELVIS LIVES says the graffiti. You've seen it on tee-shirts, in headlines in the popular press, and on dozens of other items of an ephemeral nature. While the average reader of this particular item of graffiti probably notices that ELVIS and LIVES use the same letters, he or she probably muses over it for no more than a second or two, thinking how appropriate/cute/sad, before dismissing the matter. The serious logologist, however, gives the matter more attention.

The idea for this article was sparked recently while I was re-reading C.C. Bombaugh's Oddities and Curiosities of Words and Literature. The Dover edition, with an introduction and notes by Martin Gardner, has been around since 1961, and can always be relied on to suggest some area of logological activity that needs revisiting. In the first chapter, Alphabetical Whims, Bombaugh offers a piece of verse built round the mutual transposals VEIL, VILE, LEVI, LIVE and EVIL (page 54 in the 1961 Dover edition). In the notes by Martin Gardner (page 339), he offers a further piece of verse, expanded to include the extra transposal IVEL.

Rather than attempting to expand the collection of EVIL transposals, I wondered about the possibilities of an ELVIS collection. Kicking off the collection with ELVIS and LIVES was easy; supplementing it with the -S forms of the EVIL transposals would give the collection quite a boost; but what about the real esoterica - the words and names never before unearthed? This was the subject of my most recent logological research. Put quite simply: what transposals exist for the name ELVIS?

The letters of ELVIS can be arranged in 120 different ways. It was most unlikely that more than just a few of these would exist as genuine transposals.

My collection of genuine ELVIS transposals is given in the first list below. It runs to 17 items. No other previously-published list of anagrams or transposals has even half of this number.

ELVIS Elvis (RHD) a boy's given name
elvis (OED) an obsolete Scots plural of elf (also shown in a 1513 illustrative quotation)
EVILS evils (W3) wicked acts and experiences
ISLEV Islev (TIG) a place in Denmark
IVELS ivels (OED) the plural of ivel, a 12-15th century variant of evil (shown in two illustrative quotations about 1300)
levels (Barth) the plural of the proper name level, a river in both Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire (the plural could be construed as meaning rivers as the River level)

LEIVS leivs (OED) a possible plural or verbal form of leiv, an obsolete spelling of leave (leivs does not appear, even in an illustrative quotation)

LEVIVS Levi's (W3) a trademark used for heavy blue denim pants
Levis (RHD) a trademark used for heavy trousers made of denim or denimlike material
levis (OED) an obsolete plural of leaf

LIVES lives (W3) exists, subsists

SEVIVS Sevil (OED) a 17-18th century variant of Seville, the name of a city and province of Andalusia, Spain

SILVE silve (W2) an obsolete spelling of self

SIVEL Si-vel (Webb Hodge) the name of a Kawia Indian village in Cahuilla valley, southern California

SLIVE slive (W3) to move furtively, to sidle

VEILLs veils (W3) lengths of cloth worn by women for covering the head and shoulders

VELIVS Velis (TIG) a place in Czechoslovakia

VIELLs Viels (DBS) the plural of the surname Viel, which could be construed as members of the Viel family

VILELLs viles (W2) the plural of the noun vile, one who or that which is vile (an obsolete word)

VLEILLs vleis (W3) the plural of vlei, a temporary lake

VLELLs vies (W3) a presumed plural of vly, a temporary lake, although vlys could be inferred from the W3 entry (this is the plural form of vly which is given in Official Scrabble Words)

vleis (OED) the plural of vlie, a variant of vlei, a temporary lake

Of the 120 different sequences of the letters ELVIS, the above list contains transposals for just 17. What about the remaining 103? Even if transposals cannot be found, how about searching for words and names which have some of the missing 103 sequences embedded somewhere in them? For example, Squaresville contains the letters ESVIL. In all, there are 28 ELVIS embeddings in the list below. For some, I have offered more than one example.

ESIVLS silver (W3) to silver again, as a mirror

ESVILS Squaresville (OED Supp) an imaginary town characterized by dullness

EVILLs Tevils (TIG) the plural of the proper name Tevili, a place in the former USSR (the plural could be construed as meaning places such as Tevili)
ILESV Stilesville (TIG) a place in Indiana
ILEVS Milevsko (TIG) a place in Czechoslovakia
ILVES Etlvese (TIG) a place in West Germany
shilves (W2) the presumed plural form of shilf, soft slaty rock (some might argue whether this can have a plural; others would accept a plural form but then argue as to whether it should be shilfs or shilves)
shilves (EDD) the plural of shilf which is given as a variant of shelf
IVLES Divies (TIG) the plural form of the placename Divle, a place in Turkey (the plural could be construed as meaning places such as Divle)
LESIV Plesivec (TIG) a place in Czechoslovakia
LESVI Slesvig (RHD) the Danish name of Schleswig, a former duchy of Denmark
LIVSE Livsey (LTD 1989) a surname listed five times
LSIVE Elsevier (RHD) a style of printing type
LVIES shelviest (W3) the superlative form of the adjective shelvy, sloping or inclining in the manner of a geologic shelf
LVISE pelvises (W3) a plural form of pelvis, a basin-shaped structure in a skeleton
SELIV Selivanovskaya (TIG) a place in the former USSR
SEVI selvidge (OED) a 17-19th century variant of selvedge, a narrow strip at the edge of a piece of cloth (in an illustrative quotation dated as late as 1864)
SEVLI Sevlievo (WGD) a town in Bulgaria
SILEV Silevu (TIG) a mountain in South Africa
SLEIV sleive (OED) a 16th century Scots spelling of sleeve, listed at sleeve
SLEVIE sleiveen (W2) a smooth-tongued schemer
sleeve (EDD) a mountain
SVILE Svilengrad (TIG) a place in Bulgaria
SVLEI Kiekoesvlet (TIG) a place in South Africa
SVLIE Visvliet (TIG) a place in the Netherlands
VESIL sleeve silk (W2) untwisted silk that tangles easily
Vestiluoma (TIG) a place in Finland
VIESL viesly (OED) an obsolete form of wisely
VILSE Vilsen (TIG) a place in West Germany
VISEL viselike (W3) acting like a vise
VISLE Visletto (TIG) a place in Switzerland
These two lists bring the total number of ELVIS sequences up to 45, still leaving a massive 75 to be conquered. I am confident that for quite a few of these real words or names exist; can Word Ways readers help out?

REFERENCES

W3 Webster’s Third Edition
W2 Webster’s Second Edition
RHD Random House Dictionary
OED Oxford English Dictionary
OED Supp Oxford English Dictionary Supplement
EDD English Dialect Dictionary
WGD Webster’s Geographical Dictionary
TIG Times Index Gazetteer
Barth Bartholomew’s Gazetteer of the British Isles
Webb Hodge Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico
LTD London Telephone Directory
DBS A Dictionary of British Surnames, by P.H. Reaney

THE LINGUISTICS OF DNA

In the February 1992 Word Ways, Anthony Sebastian’s tongue-in-cheek article “The Linguistic Genetic Message” suggested that the amino-acid sequences of which proteins are constructed might contain hidden messages. The Nov/Dec 1992 issue of American Scientist contains an article by University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine genetics professor David Searls, in which he applies Chomskyan linguistics theory to the sequence of cytosine-guanine and adenine-thymine links in the DNA double helix. To rephrase the Chomskyan objective in genetic form, can one construct a set of parsing rules which characterize all real-world DNA sequences but forbid impossible ones? Curiously, some DNA sequences are analogous to reversal-pairs such as STRESSED-DESSERTS; others are analogous to interleaved reversal-pairs such as DNA’s loops AND spools. In the Chomskyan hierarchy of language, the DNA language is context-sensitive (not context-free), suggesting that complete parsing rules must be very complex. However, Searls has constructed a simplified parser which is only “slightly” greater than context-free but nevertheless can reconstruct both of the above-mentioned sequences.