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Fun and games in a logological family. From time immemorial we have deliberately mispronounced words. An example of this is the word agenda where we always emphasize the first syllable and use a hard “g.” We use this word often as in “What’s today’s agenda?” In other words, what are the planned activities for today? I have to remember to pronounce the word correctly when I’m in the real world, lest I be thought ignorant.

We also like to create similar-sounding, but humorous and often apt, names for businesses and institutions. We buy our groceries at Ship Rot (Shop Rite) or the Big Onion (Grand Union). We read our newspaper The Daily Wretched (The Daily Record), and I volunteer at a local nursing home, Morbid View (Morris View). We buy our hardware at Home Despot (Home Depot), and our daughter graduated from Fairly Ridiculous (Fairleigh-Dickinson) University.

We deliberately transpose syllables. We sometimes go to Merhiker (Herkimer) which is adjacent to I Lion (Ilion). We attend the Episcopalian Church, and thereby hangs a tale. My family always said that we were Episcopalian and I mistakenly thought that was simply a case of putting the emphasis on the wrong syllable. (Remember the old song?) When filling out my application to Swarthmore College, I carefully spelled out Episcopalian where it asked for religion. At the very last moment I realized my mistake and had to erase the offending word – no mean task when applications were filled out in pen and ink. It left not only a smudge, but a small hole in the paper. Nonetheless, I was accepted to Swarthmore.

Sensitized to wordplay, our children often come up with accidental examples. At about the age of eight, our daughter Susan went walking with us on a local footpath. Before starting out she cautioned that we could not walk there; a sign said Presbyterians Only. In fact it said Pedestrians Only. Another time I fell downstairs and banged my knee which rapidly swelled and became quite painful. The doctor opined that I had torn a ligament. With a straight face Susan asked whether, if I had injured my elbow, it would have been a torn armament. Embarrassed to think that she had made such a faux pas, she insists to this day that she was only being funny.

Another daughter learned to speak at a very young age and rarely used baby talk. However, the two words she consistently mispronounced have become a lasting part of the family vocabulary: hankerfish (handkerchief) and fidgevator (refrigerator). Another daughter, less articulate at an early age, always wanted to ride the ahdeticker (escalator).

Once in a while, we actually coin a new word. One evening when my children were quite small I served for dinner a dish composed of macaroni, hamburger, tomatoes, onions, green peppers, cheese and maybe a few other ingredients. When asked what it was called, I immediately said slab glub and the word continues to be used in our family for any dish which contains a varied assortment of ingredients.