Atmore, Alabama

One afternoon not too long ago, I went with my wife as she bought the week's supply of food. Dodging the precariously placed displays, I turned down the aisle where the spices were shelved. Suddenly, in front of me was a poster advertising a reduced price for a particular spice. The word THYME, which was printed in huge block letters resembling a doctor's eye chart, made an immediate impression upon my logological mind.

I observed to my wife, “Notice the word thyme, which is a one-syllable word. Yet, it is made up of two one-syllable words, thy and me. I wonder how many other one-syllable words there are in English which are composed of two or more one-syllable words.”

At that moment I began the search that has resulted in this article. I set the following restrictions as I compiled my list: no abbreviations, contractions, prefixes, suffixes or chemical symbols were to be allowed. However, I accepted proper names, plurals, foreign words listed, and the three one-letter words a, i and o.

I do not claim that this list is in any way complete, as I have used only one basic reference in my search -- Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second College Edition (World, 1970). However, I have uncovered some interesting facts concerning the grouping of one-syllable words to form other one-syllable words. I hope that you will agree that this research has not been a waste of thyme.

Here is my list of one-syllable words that are composed of two shorter one-syllable words:

age ash bade bared bead been
aid awe badge barge beam beer
ain aye bait barre bean beef
aisle baa barbe barred beat beeves
ape baas barged bash beav bibbed
are babe bare bathe Bede binge
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Some

For instance

are singular

sets of one

rathe (Ra, the)

The noun

They are

singular

verb

syllable

exceptions, when their

It will

ing in ed,

second ele

Ed was not only under

quite as ";

the format.

entry. (Id

unabridged
Some of the words in the preceding list have peculiar properties. For instance, hash, lough, shah, shaw, shay and ~ho~ are each composed of two interjections. The following words, already listed, are singular in that they can be described as being made up of two sets of one-syllable words: bathe (ba, the) (bat, he); lithe (li, the) (lit, he); owed (0, wed) (ow, Ed); rathe (Ra, the) (rat, he); soothe (Soo, the) (soot, he); spathe (spa, the) (spat, he); tithe (tl, the) (tit, he).

The next list of one-syllable words is clearly the least complete. They are words ending in ed that are the past tense of so-called "regular" verbs. Theoretically, there are as many of this type of one-syllable words as there are regular verbs in English. (With two exceptions, of course: verbs that add only d for the past since the verb itself ends in e, as love, loved; and verbs that gain another syllable when their past is formed, as hoard, hoarded.)

It will be noticed that in the first list there are already words ending in ed. However, in dividing these words, one will see that the second element is a word that ends in ed, but not those letters only. Ed was not a separate entry in my source of reference. It was listed only under Edwin, as a diminutive. I feel that the following are not quite as "pure" as the other words because of their relationship to the formation of the verbal past tense, and since Ed was not a primary entry. (Idiosyncrasy, I realize, since Ed is listed in a larger, more unabridged dictionary.)
Here is my sample list of words ending in ed:

- arched
- cowed
- forked
- meed
- reed
- smashed
- armed
- deed
- heed
- mixed
- ringed
- soothed
- bathed
- cared
- cared
- horned
- moped
- rolled
- stacked
- brushed
- fiend
- knoced
- plumed
- sewed
- striped
- cared
- fished
- knocked
- plumed
- sewed
- striped
- celled
- fired
- lied
- pouched
- she'd
- toed
- checked
- fixed
- limbed
- primed
- skilled
- toothed
- cramped
- flanked
- mailed
- psyched
- slaved
- used
- crotched

The use of the diminutive Al for Albert allows yet another word, kraal.

There are several words (or one of the shorter words in their composition) that were not single entries but were parts of foreign phrases widely used in English:

- Bois (Bois de Boulogne)
- eared (eared)
- haired (haired, Ed)
- loathed (loath, Ed)
- Meade (me, Ade)
- Moore (moo, re)
- oared (oar, Ed)
- pained (pain, Ed)
- raised (Ra, is, Ed)
- Reade (re, Ade)
- shade (sh, Ade)
- shamed (sham, Ed)
- shape (sh, ape)
- share (sh, are)
- sheared (shear, Ed)
- sheath (shea, the)

The word pere can also be included, if one disregards the accent.

It can also be said that one plus one plus one equals one. This next list contains one-syllable words that are made up of three shorter one-syllable words. Some of them can be divided into either two or three shorter words:

- aide (ai, de) (a, I, de)
- headed (hair, Ed) (ha, I, red)
- loathe (lo, at, he) (lo, a, the)
- Meade (me, Ade) (me, a, de)
- Moore (moo, re) (mo, I, re)
- oared (oar, Ed) (O, a, red)
- pained (pain, Ed) (pa, I, Ned) (pa, in, Ed)
- raised (Ra, is, Ed)
- Reade (re, Ade) (re, a, de)
- shade (sh, Ade) (sh, a, de)
- shamed (sham, Ed) (sh, am, Ed)
- shape (sh, ape) (sh, a, pe)
- share (sh, are) (sh, a, re)
- sheared (shear, Ed) (shea, red) (sh, ear, Ed) (she, a, red)
- sheath (shea, the) (sh, cat, he) (she, a, the) (she, at, he)

To say that no more so is a shorter word in my last example syllable words.

This is an example of a one-syllable word made up of four (3 + 1) syllables.
To say that one plus one equals one seems paradoxical. Yet, it is no more so than the name of the English poet which I have retained as my last example of a one-syllable word composed of two shorter one-syllable words: Alfred Noyes.

This is the end of this article, but it is not the end of the list of one-syllable words. Are there any one-syllable words that are made up of four (five, even six?) shorter one-syllable words?

**QUERY**

Series of the form I, it, tie, rite, inter, retain, certain, reaction, cremation, importance are familiar to word buffs; Dud- eney’s 300 Best Word Puzzles terms them expanding words, and the National Puzzler’s League calls them transdeletions. For each English-language word, we can define the transdeletion index (TI): the smallest number of letters that must be added to the word before it can be anagrammed into another word. (The TI of each word in the above series is at most one; some, like rite, have a TI of zero.) Some words (especially long ones) have a TI of infinity; there is no way one can add letters and rearrange to form a new word. What is the shortest word having a TI of infinity? To avoid quibbles, let’s insist that the expanded word must be a different one -- not the original word with a prefix or suffix. SYZYGY is a candidate; zygostyle and zygosity almost upset its claim. Darryl Francis proposes WUZZY; if the reduplicative Fuzzy-Wuzzy is disallowed because it has the same root word, then buzzwig comes the closest to upsetting its claim.