In the August 1972 issue of Word Ways, Darryl H. Francis shook the world of logology to its very foundations by publishing a list of the alphabetically last words and names beginning with each of the 26 letters of the alphabet. This had been a hitherto secret list, jealously guarded by the priests of logology as their Holy of Holies, and passed on from one generation to the next only by word of mouth, with eternal damnation as the inexorable penalty for anyone who violated his oath of silence by divulging that list to the uninitiated.

At the end of his article, the author casually suggested that many of his choices could be improved upon, and invited readers to proceed. As one of those readers, I have made a leisurely examination of the problem posed, taking the view that there can be only one last word beginning with each letter, for if there are two or more, one of them must be further along in the alphabet than the rest. If that champion happens to be a capitalized word, a proper name, so be it. Let the chips fall where they may.

After adopting a set of standards to be used in selecting eligible last words, I was able to produce outright replacements for 16 of the 26 choices in the original article, and to modify, alter, and improve 5 of the others, leaving only 5 of the original choices untouched. Consequently, it appears proper for me to publish the thoroughly revised list at this time, caring not if I incur the same penalty of everlasting hellfire that must surely engulf the author of the first article. Each word or name in the list that follows has a number in parentheses attached to it. That number indicates the source from which it is taken, fully identified in the Bibliography at the end of this article.

Establishing the standards governing word selection was quite difficult, involving the interplay of diverse logological principles pulling in different directions. I finally decided on these guidelines:

1. Each entry in the list must be taken from an English-language reference work, as opposed to a foreign-language work, or to an English book not in the reference category, or to newspapers, magazines, and telephone directories (inherently ephemeral references).

2. Each entry shall be judged on the basis of the alphabetic letter sequence it displays, ignoring word breaks and interpolated punctuation marks such as hyphens, apostrophes and periods.
Each entry must be pronounced like a word or name, not like the individual letters of which it consists. This rule would disqualify an entry such as XYZ CORRESPONDENCE for the letter X, because the first three letters are individually pronounced rather than being pronounced "kizz" or "izzly". This rule also eliminates abbreviations, acronyms, and code-letter-type names.

The form used for each entry must be the exact form in which it is shown in the reference source used (a rule repeatedly violated in the original article).

If more than one reference source includes the entry, it shall be referred to that source which defines it most fully and adequately.

The resulting list is interesting. Not one entry in it is taken from the four leading dictionaries of our time -- Webster's Second Edition, Webster's Third Edition, the Funk & Wagnalls unabridged, and the Random House unabridged. Not one entry in it is taken from any Rand McNally or Hammond atlas published in the last 60 years. Only one entry is taken from the largest single gazetteer ever published in English, The Times Index-Gazetteer of the World. Only two entries are taken from the largest English dictionary ever published, The Oxford English Dictionary.

Only 5 of the entries are not proper nouns -- but they include the first two and the last two. Of the 21 proper names, 14 are those of places, 5 are those of people, and 2 are those of things. Of the 19 person or place names, 12 are Russian, Polish, or Albanian.

A ZZY

A wayward child; a dialectal term used in Yorkshire County, in northern England. In the language of today, we would be likely to call such a child a juvenile delinquent.

B ZZZZ BZZZ

To gossip: a term in American slang (see Sec. 200.3).

CZYZNY

A suburb of Krakow, in Poland, just east of the city.

DZYUBIN, EDUARD GEORGIYEVICH

The real name of Eduard Bagritski, a Russian poet, 1895-1934. (The year of death given in the previous article, 1935, is incorrect.)

EZ ZUNAINA

The name of a town in Jordan about 20 miles northeast of the capital of Amman.

FYZABAD-CUM-AJODHYA

An older form of the name FAIZABAD, a city in east central Uttar Pradesh, India, 75 miles east of Lucknow.

GZOWSKI, SIR CASIMIR STANISLAS

A Russian-Canadian engineer and financier, 1813-1898.

HZIM, WADI AL-

A wadi (dry watercourse) in that part of the Syrian desert extending into western Iraq.
IZZY (2) The diminutive of the masculine first name ISRAEL (see Sec. 184.16).

JYSSKYJARVI (9) A town in the northern part of European Russia, north of Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega, on the southern shore of Ozero Nizhneye Kuyto (Lower Kuyto Lake), about 75 miles west of the seaport town of Kem.

KZYL-TUU (10) A town in Kazakhstan, in Siberia, about 100 miles south-southwest of Omsk.

LZI (11) A town in European Russia, about 75 miles east of St. Petersburg (now Leningrad).

MZYMTA RIVER (10) A river in the Russian Caucasus, flowing into the Black Sea near the health resort of Sochi.

NZYSHAT (12) A form of the name NSISKET, a village of the Nicola band of the Ntlakyapamuk (Salish) Indians. The village was located near the Nicola River, a few miles from the western end of Nicola Lake, in British Columbia, Canada. The form NZYSHAT occurs in a Canadian Indian Affairs publication issued in 1901.

OZZY (2) A diminutive of the masculine first names OSCAR and OSWALD (see Sec. 184.16).

PZZAZZZ (13) An American trademark name in the class of soaps and detergents, registered May 4, 1971. It is additionally interesting as a 7-letter word spelled with five Z's.

QYTET STALIN (8) A city in south-central Albania. The name, also spelled QYTETI STALIN, means "City of Stalin", and replaced the older name of KUCOVE in 1950.

RZYSTNOWO (3) A town in Poland, north of Szczecin (formerly the German city of Stettin) and east of the Szczecin (Stettin) Lagoon.

SZYWARA (8) A river in Poland, also known by the German name of MILOSLAWER FLIESS, in an area about 25 miles southeast of Poznan.

TZYWVEL, DIETRICH (7) A German mathematician, humanist, and printer, who died in 1544. (The spelling of the surname given in the previous article, TZYWVEL, is incorrect.)

UZZLE (14) A 19th-century dialectal variant spelling of OUZEL, a European thrush such as the blackbird or merle.

VZVOZ (15) A town in the European part of the Soviet Union, in the Arkhangelsk Oblast, about 300 miles southeast of Arkhangelsk (Archangel).
Wzdol Rzadowy (3)  A town in southeastern Poland, south of the city of Skarzysko-Kamienna.

Xzit (13)  An American trademark name in the class of soaps and detergents, registered October 19, 1937. It beats XZENE, a trademark name in the class of chemicals and chemical compounds, registered December 14, 1954.

Yzy (14)  A 14th-century spelling of the verb YSEE, to see or behold.

zzzz (2)  To snore: a term in American slang (see Sec. 251.7).

Since the last Z word is also the unqualifiedly last word, we are tempted to go one step beyond our usual limitations and point out that the present participle of this verb is presumably ZZZZING, and that if this participle is used as a gerund or verbal noun, it acquires the plural ZZZZINGS. That is it -- the very last word in English!

Is the foregoing list a true list of ultimates? No, of course not. Its fragile, tentative character is indicated by the fact that in just one non-English reference work, Ritter's Geographisch-Statistisches Lexikon (edited by Dr. Heinrich Lagai, in two volumes, Seventh Edition published by Verlag von Otto Wigand, Leipzig, Germany, 1883), we were able to find four names surpassing it:

Fyzepoor, a city in the northern part of the Maharashtra region of west-central India, a little northeast of the present town of Bhusawal, about 110 miles south of Indore

Lzovic, a community in Bohemia, in the Kolin district (Kolin is now a Czechoslovakian town 45 miles east of Prague)

Tzypa, a river in the Irkutsk Oblast of Siberia, a tributary of the Vitim, which in turn is a tributary of the Lena in the area north of Lake Baikal

Wzinochow, the name of an estate in Prussia, Germany, in the Posen administrative district

There exist English-language gazetteers that could beat the stuffing out of this list, if someone were only to consult them. In the 1950s and 1960s, the United States Board on Geographic Names issued a series of about 100 gazetteers, each devoted to one foreign nation. These gazetteers eclipse in comprehensiveness any other geographic reference works ever published in any language. A complete search of this set of gazetteers would smash the foregoing list to smithereens.

Readers are invited to do just that.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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