THE TERMINAL MAN

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The typical unabridged dictionary contains approximately 350,000 words; if inferred forms (for example, adding -S to nouns and -ED or -ING to verbs) are added, the total stockpile of English words and phrases probably exceeds 500,000. Large as this number is, it is easily topped by a less-well-known stockpile of English words and phrases: the surnames of United States residents. As of June 1, 1964, there were nearly 1,100,000 different surnames for which Social Security cards had been issued since the program began 28 years earlier.

Many logologists, of course, do not grant surnames the same legitimacy as dictionary entries. It is hard to exclude surnames on the basis of usage; surely, few more people recognize KISSINGER than FYLGA, yet the latter is recognized by Webster whereas the former is not. In fact, there is some overlap between the two populations; a number of common surnames are enshrined in two-word phrases, and many common surnames were originally derived from English words. Once some surnames are admitted, it becomes hard to draw a rational line and cry that no more shall pass.

Like lepidopterists chasing butterflies across a summer meadow, linguists for centuries have been collecting words and word-usages out of print and common speech. These words have been systematically classified and listed in scholarly dictionaries - the lexical equivalent of the glass-covered museum case - where they can be examined at leisure. Surnames have not been classified and listed; there is no single place a logologist can readily go to study them in detail.

Can a really comprehensive list of United States surnames be assembled? The aforementioned Social Security files are not open to the public. Census records for 1900 and earlier are available to qualified researchers under various conditions, but these are arranged in geographical rather than alphabetical order. Reference works such as Who's Who or American Men of Science yield only a small fraction of the total number of different surnames. Telephone directories are probably the best single source of surnames available to the general public. Although a telephone directory may not be quite as complete as a city directory, there are large suburban or rural areas for which no city directories are available. Good, although not complete, collections of telephone directories can be found in various places such as the main branch of the New York public library.

However, telephone directories suffer from two defects - fragmenta-
tion and ephemeralness. There are thousands of different directories (the New York public library shelves holding them are more than two hundred feet long); often the smaller directories are broken down into alphabetical listings for many separate communities. A search through all directories for a surname is out of the question; the best that can be done is a survey of the larger books (say, cities of 100,000 or more) and a sampling of the smaller ones.

The transitory character of telephone directories is also worrisome to the logologist. If he finds a given surname in only one directory, and that person vanishes from later editions of the directory, it is exceedingly hard for another logologist to verify the claim that that name has appeared in print (where does one go to consult a 1935 telephone directory for Oshkosh, Wisconsin?). For common names this is no problem, but Social Security files reveal an unusual distribution of U. S. surnames: 700,000 of the 1,100,000 different surnames in their records occur nine times or less! The problem of finding a telephone example of a name this rare is far from easy.

The quoted number of 1,100,000 is a low estimate of U. S. surnames for at least three reasons. In the first place, there may be some surnames for which no representatives had enrolled in the Social Security program before 1964. Secondly, new surnames may have been created since 1964. Finally, the Social Security files do not show surnames directly, but instead truncated surnames consisting of the first six letters only; thus, RICHARDS and RICHARDSON count as a single surname. The undercounting caused by this effect can be estimated by sampling names in telephone directories; about 12 per cent more surnames should be added, raising the surname stockpile to more than 1,300,000.

Not surprisingly, the commonest Social Security surname is SMITH with 1,678,815 entries, followed by JOHNSON with 1,263,266, WILLIAM with 1,079,986, BROWN with 951,320, and JONES with 922,913. Nearly 2200 surnames occur 10,000 or more times; these are all listed in a 1964 pamphlet entitled "Report of Distribution of Surnames in the Social Security Account Number File" issued by the Bureau of Data Processing and Accounts of the Social Security Administration.

Although it is impossible to examine the totality of United States surnames, one can get a hint of its riches by studying the latest (and earliest) surnames on a hypothetical master list.

The 1974 edition of the Guinness Book of World Records states that Zachary Zzzzro is the last surname in a local telephone directory. This claim is very likely true; I was unable to locate a later name in an extensive search. However, his name is spelled wrong; the 1973 San Francisco telephone directory gives it as Zzzza. He appeared in the 1974 directory, but not in 1971. (An earlier edition of Guinness cited Zeke Zzypt of Chicago as the latest name; however, he has vanished from the most recent Chicago directory.)

There are a handful of surnames beginning with three Zs in current telephone directories:
Mr. Zzyzydottie apparently has been in the Manhattan directory for a long time, for he is cited on page 92 of John G. Fuller’s Games For Insomniacs (Doubleday, 1966). Two more names with three Zs were noted in older directories but not the most recent ones: Robert Zzyzszitt in the 1972 San Francisco directory, and J. Zzzt in the 1972 Seattle directory. Was the former man discouraged by the appearance of Zachary Zzzza?

There are a much larger number of individuals with surnames beginning with two Zs:

- Hero Zzyzzx
- B. Zzyzsk
- Z. Zzyz
- Z. Zzyz
- Zander Z. Zzyzzyzoff
- Zachariah Zzyzoy
- George Zzyzoff
- Walter Zzyzo
- Debgar Zzzly
- Ronald Zzyzkl
- Zora Zzyz
- Zoe Zzyz
- William Zzyynik
- R. L. Zzywut
- Gyorgy Zzyz
- A. J. Zzyrno
- William R. Zzyrk
- James Zzyrene
- J. Zzynot
- Zola Zzyzith
- George Zzykus
- Joseph Zzylich
- Zigfelt K. Zzyeric
- J. C. Zzycred
- Zeb Zzya
- Zane Zzwug
- Zachary Zzwert
- Zoltan Zzup
- Zelda Zzup
- Jay Zzunt
- K. D. C. ZZunk
- Zachery Zzulch
- Zoltan Zzrak
- Harry Zzon
- Marjanovic C. Zzivko
- Richard Zzie

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What is OJ without exception? (Note, however, that it is interesting that the name beginning with two Zs is not in the later editions).

One wonders how they inform the SSS that they change a directory? Or did the bottom dog?

Even if there is no reason to feel the surnames beginning with two Zs last, will the surname with the longest written last, or was it perhaps by the appearance of Zachary Zzzza?

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- Zoltan Zzrak
- Harry Zzon
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- Detroit North 1973
- Boston West 1973
- Miami 1973
- Oakland 1973
- Palo Alto (Cal.) 1973
- Columbus (Ohio) 1973
- Austin 1973
- Cleveland 1973
- Boston 1973
- Queens 1973
- Boston 1973
- Atlanta 1973
- Detroit North 1973
- Boston 1973
- St. Louis 1974
- Hartford (Conn.) 1973
- Queens 1973
- Bergen County (N.J.) 1973
- Detroit 1973
- Brooklyn 1974
- Pittsburgh 1972
- Milwaukee 1972
- Westchester-Fulton (N.Y.) 1972
- Miami 1973
- Kansas City (Mo.) 1973
- Little Rock (Ark.) 1973
- Las Vegas ( Nev.) 1973
- Las Vegas ( Nev.) 1973
- Cincinnati 1973
- Palo Alto (Cal.) 1973
- Houston 1973
- New Brunswick (N.J.) 1973
- San Francisco 1973
- Asheville (N.C.) 1973
- Las Vegas ( Nev.) 1973

One can ask, for its bearer's interest, to pay him a personal visit to the Social Security Administration and find the last six surnames: Zzyz, Zzyz, Zzyz, Zzyz, Zzyz, and Zzyz. Even if the name is not the last, will the surname be pronounced and spelt like the surname of Zachary Zzyz?
What is one to make of this collection of stilted surnames? Almost without exception, they are testaments to human vanity -- the desire of each individual to be listed at the very end of his telephone directory. (Note, however, that several people were frustrated in this endeavor.) It is interesting to note that nearly half of these people also sport a first name beginning with Z, a slight bit of added insurance. A few of these surnames may be printing errors, which might be revealed by checking later editions of the same directory.

One wonders how firmly these individuals are committed to their new surnames. Did they make one up for the telephone book alone, or did they inform their friends, relatives and employers of their new name? Did they go to the trouble of having their name legally changed? Will they change again if they are superseded by someone else as last in the directory? Or will they move to some other city where they can again be bottom dog?

Even if their commitment is firm, will their children and grandchildren feel the same way? Or, less motivated than their progenitor to be last, will the descendants simplify a name which is difficult to pronounce and spell? It seems very hard to believe that a future genealogist will write a book on the Zzyzyzkoff family. (The last family genealogy in the Library of Congress is Zwingly, a variant of Zwingli.)

One can assume that the commitment to a surname is fairly solid if its bearer is willing to apply for a Social Security account which will pay him a pension ten to forty years in the future. The last surname in Social Security records is Zyzo; however, none of the four individuals bearing this surname turned up in the telephone directory survey. The next six surnames are all six-letter truncations of one or more longer surnames: ZYZNOW (7), ZYZNON (6), ZYZNEW (6), ZYZNES (7) and ZYZNAR (22). The surnames of Zyznowski, Zyzniewski, Zyznewski and Zyznewsky were all found in telephone books, as were Zynnar and Zynzomysky. The first four surnames are close variants of each other; it is my belief that these are the last "true" surnames (unmotivated by vanity) in the United States. I found eight individuals bearing these surnames, in such places as Denver, Buffalo, Syracuse, Queens, Manhattan, Philadelphia and Allentown (Pa.).

The inadequacy of the 1972-3 Who's Who and the 1971 American Men of Science as a comprehensive source of surnames can now be documented -- the last surname in the former work is Zygmund, and the last surname in the latter is Zytkus.

It is interesting to compare United States last surnames with those found in a variety of foreign telephone directories. I am indebted to Darryl Francis, and especially to Charles Bostick of Ashton, Maryland and Walter Penney of Greenbelt, Maryland for supplying me with the necessary information. In general, foreign surnames appear to be free

Phil Zzer  Denver 1973
Howard P. Zeitlen  District of Columbia 1973
Rudolph Zapito  Kansas City (Mo.) 1973
from the competitive urge to be last. Only three surnames beginning with two Zs were discovered: Zeke Zzypt in the 1973 Montreal directory, B. Zzimula in the 1973 Nairobi directory, and Maria Zzabo in the 1971 Sao Paulo directory. A sampling of terminal men in other foreign cities is presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tatiana Zyzykin</td>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth Zynarski</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Zywicynski</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Zywica</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. A. Zyx</td>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Zywaczewski</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Zyskowski</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Zyre</td>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalia Zyma</td>
<td>Mexico City</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. J. Zylestra</td>
<td>Porto</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazsiella Zyberman</td>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Victor Zygadio</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Zych</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raffaele Zvab</td>
<td>Naples</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel S. Zuzarte</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. C. Zuzarte</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. M. Zutshi</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis Zurita</td>
<td>Casablanca</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soares Zurique</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Zupanovic</td>
<td>Karachi</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The problem of finding the first surname in the United States is considerably simpler. Strange as it may seem, there are 21 people with the surname A who applied for a Social Security number prior to 1964. (In fact, there are a total of 163 people with single-letter surnames in Social Security files; all letters but Q are represented.) Finding such a person in the telephone directory is an extraordinarily difficult task because of the penchant of commercial organizations to use names beginning with one or more As. A person with the surname A is effectively buried in a mass of such entries, and there is little incentive to change one's name to be first. (This incentive may be restored if the practice of listing residential and commercial telephones separately on each telephone book page becomes more widespread.) Two such people were found in telephone directories: Alfa A in Los Angeles 1970, and Geraldo A in Brooklyn 1973.

The second earliest surname, of course, is Aa; there are 18 of these people in Social Security accounts. I was able to locate only one of them, Peter J. Aa, in the Plainfield-Somerville (N.J.) 1974 directory. The third earliest possible surname, Aaa, was not found, but Jack Aaab was discovered in Detroit 1973.

The earliest surname borne by a substantial group of individuals is undoubtedly Aab; it is the third Social Security name, with 157 individuals represented. Twenty-one different Aab surnames showed up in
telephone directories, in places as varied as Manhattan, Queens, Hicksville, Wantagh, and Rochester, New York; Los Angeles and Riverside, California; Phoenix, Arizona; St. Louis, Missouri; Lima, Ohio; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Midland, Texas; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Birmingham, Alabama.

The next few names found in telephone directories were Aabacas, Aabakken, Aabaph, Aabay, Abdollah, Aabel, and Aaberg. The first five names appeared once each, Aabel appeared eight times, and Aaberg sixty-six. The earliest names found in British directories were A. Aabensen of Liverpool, A. N. Aadahl of Manchester, and Freddie Aal of London.

TRYSTORIUM, HYPOBULIA, FAIRY MONEY, DYSPHEMISM

Do you know that these four words mean: a place where male and female can meet, neurotic haste in decision-making, "cents-off" coupons used in grocery stores and the like, and the deliberate use of a four-letter word for shock value? If you don't, or if you are a top-level manager mystified by the technical jargon of your underlings, Robert K. Mueller's new book Buzzwords: A Guide to the Language of Leadership (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1974, $7.95) may well be of value to you. Written by a top executive of Arthur D. Little (and a Word Ways subscriber), this book gives brief definitions of more than 600 neologisms from finance, operations research, computing, government procurement, management science, marketing and allied fields. It can be regarded as a breezy and updated version of the considerably more comprehensive A Dictionary of New English (see the February 1974 Word Ways). A minor quibble: Word Ways is cited as the source of two words, flake off and jet (a person who has a high opinion of himself), but its location is incorrectly given as Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana (home base for the author from whose article these words were taken). Mr. Mueller invites Word Ways readers to send in additional words for a possible sequel.