"PSEUDOFEVERISHLY"

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In an article in the February 1977 issue of Word Ways, I asserted that all English words and names, without exception, were logologically interesting. In response to that article, I was challenged to find something of logological interest in the word PSEUDOFEVERISHLY.

The choice of that particular word was an extremely astute one, worthy of our editor himself. A sixteen-letter word is not long enough to be interesting for its sheer length. Yet, it is long enough virtually to eliminate consideration from the viewpoint of palindromes, reversals, transposals, letter shifts, rebuses, charades, word squares, diamonds, homonyms, heteronyms, alternades, significant letter patterns, and a score of other logologically interesting phenomena.

In addition, the word posed as a challenge does not include either the second or the third most common letters in English, T and A, increasing the difficulty of many possible word manipulations. Furthermore, the word was taken from a non-Websterian source, to minimize the possibility that any logologist had previously thought about it and made any worthwhile discoveries concerning it.

In spite of these formidable handicaps, a leisurely consideration of the word PSEUDOFEVERISHLY has established the fact that it happens to be one of the most interesting words in the English language. The purpose of this article is to set forth the various aspects of the word that make it a veritable collector's item.

1. The word PSEUDOFEVERISHLY belongs to a curious class of words that has received scant attention from logologists. The word has not appeared in any dictionary ever published, making it a coined word or derived word. Nevertheless, it is an authentic dictionary word. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged, lists the adjective PSEUDOFEVERISH. Following that listing is the notation "-LY, adv." This means that the adverb corresponding to the listed adjective does exist and is formed by adding the letters LY to the adjective.

2. The word PSEUDOFEVERISHLY defies the accepted etiquette of language with its threefold etymology. The prefix PSEUDO- is of Greek origin; the body of the word, FEVER, is ultimately of Latin origin; and the two suffixes, -ISH and -LY, are both of Old English origin. What a hodgepodge!

3. The word is what might be described as a "halfway" word: it uses exactly 13 of the 26 letters of the alphabet, some of them more than once.

4. Turning to conventional logological approaches, it is possible to anagram the word. The scenario for the anagram has a man looking at the word PSEUDOFEVERISHLY and determining its meaning. The man then turns to his wife and conveys that meaning to her, asking for her confirmation of its correctness: FERVIDLY -- EH, SPOUSE? The synonym given in the anagram is an adverb, as is the word being anagrammed. Such grammatical consistency is one of the requirements of a good anagram. Another requirement is that the principal words in an anagram and its base be etymologically unrelated. The anagram just given meets this requirement, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. FEVERISHLY comes from the Latin FOVERE ("to warm"), which comes from the Indo-European root DHEGWH- ("to burn"). FERVIDLY comes from the Latin FERVERE ("to be hot"), which comes from the Indo-European root BHREU- ("to boil").

5. Closely related to the anagram is the anagrammatic sentence, and PSEUDOFEVERISHLY lends itself admirably to the construction of such a sentence: UFO'S?? PYLE SHIVERED pseudofeverishly! The beauty of this sentence lies in the fact that shivering can be caused both by fear and by fever, and in the further fact that UFO's do cause fear among many people (aliens from outer space invading Earth). As for PYLE, it is a well-known British and American surname (Howard Pyle, artist and writer; Ernie Pyle, war correspondent and journalist; Gomer Pyle, TV character). The New York Times Obituaries Index (1858-1968) lists 44 Pyles.

6. Of considerable interest is the extreme antipathy displayed by the word PSEUDOFEVERISHLY toward United States place names. Although it is a sixteen-letter word, the name of not even one of the fifty states can be spelled with it. Much more remarkably, the list of the 750 largest cities and towns in the United States, as that list is given in the 1977 Edition of the Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide, includes only one name that can be taken out of PSEUDOFEVERISHLY -- ERIE, Pennsylvania. That only one of these names should be included in the given word is almost beyond belief. There are, of course, reasons for this paradox. It is an observed fact that the names of most cities and towns in the United States include at least one of the three letters A, N, and T. Our word includes none of these three letters. Moreover, there are large numbers of cities and towns that begin with name elements such as NEW, NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST, MOUNT, FORT, PORT, POINT, SAINT, SAN, and SANTA. None of these word elements is present in PSEUDOFEVERISHLY. Similarly, innumerable cities and towns have names ending in elements such as CITY, TOWN, TON, VILLE, BURG, LAKE, RIVER, LAND, BRIDGE, GROVE, HILL, and VIEW. Once again, all such word elements are absent from PSEUDOFEVERISHLY.

7. In spite of the facts just recited, it is possible to rearrange the let-
   ters of PSEUDOFEVERISHLY to form sets of three names of com-
   munities in the United States. Here are two solutions, with all
   names taken from the earlier-mentioned 1977 Commercial Atlas:

   (a) FIELDS, Louisiana (Beauregard Parish); HOPE, Arkansas
       (Hempstead County); SURVEY, Nebraska (Cherry County)
   (b) FLOYD, Michigan (Midland County); HEISE, Idaho (Jeffer-
       son County); PURVES, Texas (Erath County)

   To appreciate the difficulty of constructing such name sets, one
   need only note that most of the place names that can be formed from
   the letters of PSEUDOFEVERISHLY use at least one liquid conson-
   ant. Since our sixteen-letter word includes only two liquid conson-
   ants, at least one name in each set of three must be that rarity de-
   void of liquid consonants.

8. If we go back just a few years, to the 1964 Edition of the Commer-
   cial Atlas, it is possible to achieve an almost miraculous solution
   to the three-name problem, one in which all three names are taken
   from one state, with two of the three names even from the same
   county of that state:

   (c) FUSEE, Virginia (Scott County); HYSLOP, Virginia (Ac-
       comack County); VERDI, Virginia (Scott County)

   Is a two-name solution to the problem possible? Almost certainly
   not: thus far, only one name of more than seven letters hidden in
   PSEUDOFEVERISHLY has come to light: FREEHOLD, New Jersey,
   a name which uses both of the liquid consonants.

9. PSEUDOFEVERISHLY, if we but look at the word properly, symbol-
   izes eternal male primacy. Divide the word into consecutive letter
   pairs: PS EU DO FE VE RI SH LY. Using the idea of the circular
   alphabet, replace each letter pair with that single letter which rep-
   resents the sum of the two members constituting the pair: I Z S
   K A A A K. Rearrange the resulting eight letters, and you produce
   the combination IZAAK + ASK (Izaak Walton of "The Compleat Ang-
   ler" fame; Ask, the first man in Norse mythology).

10. In my first book, Language on Vacation, I mentioned the special sig-
    nificance of the numbers 22 and 7: briefly, the simplest representa-
    tion of the number pi is the fraction 22/7. PSEUDOFEVERISHLY is
    a living incarnation of the numbers 22 and 7. Replace each letter of
    the word with its numerical position in the alphabet: the total of the
    sixteen numbers is 209, which equals 227 - 18, which in turn equals
    - (7 + 2) - (2 + 7) + 227. The number 227 can be read four times
    in this equation -- twice forwards and twice backwards. In addition,
    its counterpart, the number 722, can also be read in this manner.

    This article has illustrated the resources available to the logologist
in examining the world of words around him. No word and no name is
sufficiently unremarkable to withstand his probing search.