

TEACHING LEXICOGRAPHY AND LEXICOLOGY AMONG THE ALITERATES

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As I pondered how to frame the topic announced in the title of this paper, I realized that first of all I had to embark on a journey of intellectual archaeology. In the nine different courses I regularly teach, in composition, literature, and linguistics courses alike, I emphasize the use of a desk dictionary as a curricular survival tool, especially in this current mania of standardized testing. When exactly did I begin to have my deep, abiding passion for dictionaries and how did that influence the development of my career as a professor of English and applied English Linguistics? For the past twenty years in my English 201 Composition II course, I have required my students to write a "Literacy Narrative" as a first paper in which they tell the story of how they first learned how to read. They increasingly have an initial negative reaction to this topic, but, once they start to do the reflection needed, positive attitudes emerge as they recover the happy details of grandparents, parents, or siblings reading to them. Likewise for me in this paper, I began to trace back the arcs of development which have culminated in my current teaching roles as a pedagogical bricoleur who teaches rhetoric, applied linguistics, lexicology, General Semantics, and the literature of science fiction. And this enabled me to recover warm feelings not only about texts well-read and still valued 45 years later but also about wise mentors who led me on the word-filled journey for the last half century.

According to some of my rural students my office has more books (especially dictionaries) than their school libraries, and I can personally verify that, for example, my office does contain more books than the Bison, SD High School library. As one of the early groups of boomers born in 1947, I learned how to read before my family had a TV set rooted in the living room. I cannot imagine a day going by without reading a newspaper, reading a slick magazine, reading a book, or reading a cereal box, etc. Thus, as I encounter the "Millennials" or the "Echo Boomers," the current labels given to recently matriculated college students, I have had to adjust to the new generation's characteristic lack of interest in reading (Quinion *Echo Boomer* 2009). In particular, based on the authoritatively robust research published in the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Research Report #47 To Read or not to Read: A Question of National Consequence Nov. 2007, we now know that the age group that used to read the most—Americans between 15 and 34 years of age-- now reads the least. The technical label for such behavior consists of the word *aliterate*, which Microsoft Word unfortunately autocorrects to *alliterate*. Likewise, I have to repeatedly warn my students about dealing with the aliterates in Seattle who have built stemming software that automatically turns the name of the university building in which

I now write these words—Scobey Hall—into *Scooby Doo Hall*. Concerning myself with such matters qualifies me as a *lexicologist*. And I use such technical terms during the first day in every one of my classes.

Tom McArthur has a cogent definition of *lexicology* in his *Oxford Companion to the English Language*:

An area of language study concerned with the nature, meaning, history, and use of words and word elements and often also with the critical description of lexicography. Although formerly a branch of philology, lexicology is increasingly treated as a brand of linguistics, associated with such terms as *lexeme*, *lexical field*., *lexical item*, *lexicon*, *lexis* . . .

My explications of the course syllabi, especially in my 100 and 200 level composition classes, often work as negative pep talks, when my use of Greek and Latin metalanguage such as *lexicology*, *aliteracy*, and *rhetoric* frightens the truly hardcore aliterates. They decide to drop the classes because I name the frame that, whatever else writing consists of, it involves words and that we will explore the territory of all manners of word behaviors. In a Division I Land Grant university, the academic curriculum has names for those things. It shocks them when I say we will move beyond the reductionistically simplistic American School Grammar of *Grammar Rock* and its catchy vapidities such as "Conjunction Junction" and "Unpack your Adjectives." In fact, to model contemporary American English and gonzostyle acronymizing, I explain that, if they expect my Composition II class to resemble their high school AP English course or their required Freshman Composition I class, they have fallen into the trap of the SOS attitude, merely expecting the "Same Old Shit" year after year. This SOS curriculum perpetuates those snoozers in which interjections "Words that express strong emotion" get pathetically exemplified as "Wow" and "Oh." Upon hearing the SOS label, the students' eyes dart to and fro, "Did he just say what I thought he said?" An English prof saying "shit" and naming a truth? Mrs. Grundy and Miss Fidditch would never approve.

In talking to colleagues and students about these matters, I find that I have to enunciate carefully the prefix a- by using a tense vowel with contrastive stress. Reflexively most people tend to hear the lexical item *illiterate* with an [I], rather than *aliterate* with an [e]. On the back of an assignment sheet, I duplicate the usage note for the entry word *literate* from the *American Heritage Dictionary* 4th ed. 2000 (bolding added for emphasis) :

USAGE NOTE: For most of its long history in English, *literate* has meant only “familiar with literature,” or more generally, “well-educated, learned.” Only since the late 19th century has it also come to refer

to the basic ability to read and write. Its antonym *illiterate* has an equally broad range of meanings: an *illiterate* person may be incapable of reading a shopping list or unable to grasp an allusion to Shakespeare or Keats. The term *functional illiterate* is often used to describe a person who can read or write to some degree, but below a minimum level required to function in even a limited social situation or job setting. **An *aliterate* person, by contrast, is one who is capable of reading and writing but who has little interest in doing so, whether out of indifference to learning in general or from a preference for seeking information and entertainment by other means.** •More recently, the meanings of the words *literacy* and *illiteracy* have been extended from their original connection with reading and literature to any body of knowledge. For example, “geographic illiterates” cannot identify the countries on a map, and “computer illiterates” are unable to use a word-processing system. All of these uses of *literacy* and *illiteracy* are acceptable.

When I first read this usage note above, the phrase "indifference to learning" leaped out at me, and I experienced one of those pedagogical epiphanies: "Aha! Exactly. That's the word I need! A semi-neutral label that has the reflected meaning of *illiterate*." Nevertheless, I have since come to appreciate how few psychometricians or educationists use the term *aliterate*, even though the behavior continues to dominate in schools at all levels K-G. Moreover, I began to realize that in order to help answer my students' persistent questions such as "Where is he coming from?" and "What does he want. . . what does he **really** want?" I had to tell my story. This changed the whole tone of all of my courses. I adapted the rhetorical strategies and philosophies outlined in Ken Macrorie's famous 1970 manifesto *Uptaught*. Once I did this, I soon received an Arts & Science Teacher of the Year and Graduate School Teacher of the Year award. As Macrorie would say, I found my voice. By confessing to my obsession with dictionaries and establishing my credentials as a "harmless drudge," as opposed to acting like a disciple of Miss Fidditch, I became less of a schoolmarm and more of an entertaining eccentric (a traditional stereotype of English professors that even *aliterate* students students can tolerate).

Now in every one of my classes, on the first day, I contextualize my syllabus in terms of discussing how my course will aim to teach native speakers about their native tongue, especially by distinguishing between the *American Heritage College Dictionary* 4th ed. and the *Merriam-Webster 11th Collegiate* (hereafter acronymized as *AHC4* and *MW11* respectively). I emphasize that, whatever else standardized tests such as the SAT, ACT, GRE, LSAT, MCAT, etc. contain, at the most basic they all consist of formal written standard English. Then I tell my story.

In 1963, as a sophomore in high school, I had a Social Studies teacher named William Miller

who had a commandingly intense method of teaching, one that had the authority of Abraham Lincoln, whom he resembled. He insisted that we challenge ourselves to become better citizens and one of the best ways to do this, he said, consisted of reading, reading, reading. He urged us to join a *Saturday Review of Literature* program that allowed us to receive a full year's personal subscription for \$5.00 (10 cents an issue). I jumped at the bargain and a year later, having acquired the habit of reading each issue front to back every week, I encountered an article by the David Glixon entitled "Road Map to the Fields of Learning," that year's entry in the series of "SR's Annual Reference Book Roundup."

In the middle of this article, I read two paragraphs of detailed description comparing and contrasting the *Funk & Wagnall's Standard College Dictionary (F&W)* with the *Merriam Webster's Seventh New Collegiate (MW7)*. The encyclopedic functions of the Funk & Wagnall's received Glixon's positive recommendation. I had never thought of a dictionary as a mini-encyclopedia before, so this galvanized my thinking. I knew I needed a good desk dictionary in order to prepare for the SAT and, after investing \$7.50 (with an extra dollar for the thumb-indexing), I started in at the very beginning with the front matter essays that irrevocably changed my life.

Consider the following list of *F&W* essay titles and authors:

- "A Brief History of the English Language" Albert H. Marckwardt
- "English Grammars and the Grammar of English" Kenneth G. Wilson
- "Regional Variations in American Pronunciation" Charles C. Thomas
- "Pronunciations" James B. McMillan
- "Restrictive Labels" Frederic G. Cassidy
- "Etymologies" Albert H. Marckwardt
- "Synonyms and Antonyms" S. I. Hayakawa (*F&W 1963, viii-xxv*)

I struggled not only with the diction but also with the densely packed tiny font used in these magisterial accounts, but that initial struggle, and the practice of using the dictionary itself to decode the essays, made me value the 2 years of Junior High Latin I had taken. A little learning does have its uses, but learning-how-to-learn makes all the difference. Now, as I look back and read the "Editorial Staff" list carefully, I see the name of Sidney I. Landau with the title of "Managing Editor." The arcs of development converge indeed. For the past 15 years in teaching my Linguistics 420/520—The New English Lexicography course, I have used both editions of Landau's *Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of Lexicography*. In his essay in the new *Oxford History of English Lexicography*, Landau gives a modestly understated elegy for his first managing editor stint: "It [*F&W 1963*] succeeded, barely, in

keeping the name Funk & Wagnall's alive for another decade or so, but, when no new dictionaries were forthcoming, Funk & Wagnall's ceased to play any significant role in the collegiate-dictionary field" (370). Nevertheless, American TV has continued to keep its memory alive with the re-runs of *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* and their leering catch-phrase "Look that up in your Funk & Wagnall's." I still do. And with respect.

My efforts at looking things up in Funk & Wagnall's earned me a National Merit Scholarship to Macalester College and during the next four years my roommates and English major friends perpetuated my nickname as "The Dictionary Reader." I often carried my *F&W* to class. In 1968, our visiting professor from the University of Edinburgh, Prof. John McQueen, editor of the *Oxford Book of Scottish Poetry*, taught a course in "The Scottish Chaucerians." His displays of scholarship and facility with Middle Scots and Middle English dazzled me. Dismissively, he viewed my dictionary habit as the mark of a rude colonial. Nevertheless, I brought that dog-eared *F&W* along when I became a National Defense Education Act Fellow at Indiana University in 1969.

For my very first class at IU, I brought my dictionary as Prof. Robert E. Lewis lectured on Thomas Pyles' *The Origins and Development of the English Language* 1st ed. 1964. That Introduction to Graduate Studies course, as well as Prof. Lewis's course on Middle English, sealed my fate. As my graduate advisor, he encouraged me to enroll in the English Language Program, and I then began a parallel journey through linguistics courses, notably Thomas A. Sebeok's Introduction to Linguistics, which opened the vast world of semiotics for me. Finally, after Prof. Roger Lass's courses instructed me in skepticism regarding the value and limitations of traditional philology, I gave up toting my dictionary to my graduate classes. Yet I persisted in bringing it to my composition classes when I started teaching Freshman Composition at IU and I continue to this day to bring my *AHC4* to all my classes. When the smart classroom Internet platform goes down, as it too often does, I thus have a trusted Plan B when I suddenly cannot access m-w.com or bartleby.com. In short, my students see me using dictionaries, they visit my office stuffed from floor to ceiling with wordbooks of all ilk, and they hear me discuss their native language as they complain sotto voce in the back of the room about having to learn what they never suspected to exist. And, indeed, they write end-of-course evaluations that riff on variations of the basic "I wish Prof. Taylor would talk English."

After finishing my Ph.D. and beginning to teach at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), I had become involved in the design of the Writing Center. Because at IU I had taught summer courses funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity, a curriculum designed for mostly

African-American Hoosiers plus a few Hispanics, I had also taken a graduate course in African-American English taught by Geneva Smitherman and had focused one of my preliminary examinations on dialectology. These experiences created an arc of development along the lines of Basic Writing and Remedial English and placed me firmly in midst of a composition theory paradigm initiated by Mina Shaughnessy and her *Errors and Expectations*.

Another arc of development, in complement to doing error analysis in Basic Writing, began when I taught Introduction to English Linguistics courses, which served as feeder courses to Prof. Sidney Greenbaum's graduate courses at UWM. I taught undergraduates who eventually would enroll in Prof. Greenbaum's seminars. Since my IU Ph.D. thesis, entitled *The Linguist and the Literary Text: A Study of the Stylistic Theory and Practice of the London School*, focused on Prof. Greenbaum's friends and colleagues associated with Lord Randolph Quirk at the University of London, Prof. Greenbaum gently nudged me toward doing more with lexicology and lexicography within the paradigm of the London School. One manifestation of his mentoring resulted in our 1984 *Dictionaries* article entitled "The Image of the Dictionary for American College Students." Working with Prof. Greenbaum allowed me to see American undergraduates through the complex perspective of a distinguished British scholar who often marveled at the word-numbness of American students. Prof. Greenbaum represents one of the most cosmopolitan scholars I have ever met, a devout orthodox Jew, a true London Cockney born within the sound of St. Mary Le Bow bells, and an architect of the University College English Usage corpus. As a graduate student working with Lord Quirk as his thesis advisor, Prof. Greenbaum had attended classes with fellow students such as David Crystal and John Wells. Listening to his stories about his graduate education at University College in London gave me great insight as to the massive amounts of erasure that has taken place in the teaching of Language Arts in American Schools. At UWM, I created an undergraduate applied English Linguistics course totally focused on usage and dictionaries. This course proved popular and helpful to many pre-professional majors who experienced severe linguistic insecurity regarding their writing and speaking competencies.

Eventually, I went on to become Coordinator of Composition at South Dakota State University. Because of the political and economic conditions in South Dakota during the 1980's, I had to teach 4 courses a semester and administer the composition program as an overload. I also taught all the linguistics courses. Finally, after burnout took its inevitable toll, I left administrative duties behind and renewed my focus on developing my graduate level linguistics courses. In 1991, I taught the first manifestation of my Linguistics 420/520 *The New English: Lexicography*. It felt like coming home.

Having a non-required course full of advanced undergraduate and graduate students, who knew they had signed up for reading in and reading about dictionaries, along with writing a course project lexicon of their own, revived me from professional burn-out. I now have stabilized this course's required texts as Landau's *Dictionaries*, *AHC4*, and Simon Winchester's *The Professor and the Madman*. This course allows me the freedom to use my other courses as lexicological laboratories for my explorations into aliteracy among American undergraduates.

Since 1996 in my English 201 Composition I course, I have used Julie Bates Dock's anthology entitled *The Press of Ideas*, which stays in print apparently because enough people such as myself find that as the book ages, the essays become even more relevant to talking about the evolution of the digital word environment. Many of the essays actually represent chapters from now classic books such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Birkerts' *The Gutenberg Elegies*, Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, and Crawford & Gorman's *Future Libraries: Dreams, Reality, and Madness*. I require vocabulary quizzes or etymology exercises on many of the essays and three in particular I want to discuss in terms of how my increasingly aliterate students react to such lexicological instruments. Just as Eric Raymond characterizes *J. Random Hacker* as the avatar of the generic hacker in his *The New Hacker's Dictionary* 1996 (522-30), I want to develop a stereotypical avatar named *A. Bartleby* and have his first name of *Aliterate* clipped down to just the common monosyllabic Al. The typical Al, like Melville's Bartleby, prefers not to do the work of reading and copying the words. At the end of my course, I have exercises on Wired style, gonzostyle, and other popomo excursions in digital word innovations.

According to his self-introduction exercise and his literacy narrative in my English 201 Composition class, Al learned to read when his older sister read Dr. Seuss and some Golden Books out loud as she played schoolteacher to Al the young pre-schooler. Al loved Dr. Seuss and he soon graduated to The Berenstain Bears (of course misspelling both with Suess and Bernstein in his literacy narrative paper written 15 years later for my class). In late grade school Al, progressed to R. L. Stine and the Goosebumps series, but in middle school Al started up his dream of varsity sports. His reading for pleasure ceased, except for a rare Scholastic Inc. sports biography or an occasional glance at *Sports Illustrated* or surveying *Sports Afield* during pheasant or deer season. He emphatically notes that reading for English classes in high school re-buried even deeper his dead interest in reading. Al has learned to despise dictionaries because in his grade school, middle school, and high school, miscreant behavior such as chewing gum or smarting off to the teacher resulted in having to copy out a whole page of the dictionary (he cannot remember the names of any of the dictionaries). Dictionaries to Al

symbolize academic punishment.

Given a class that contains a critical mass of AI's, I explain in detail how I will construct my vocabulary and etymology quizzes. A linkage to the topic of dictionaries occurs in reference to their first assigned reading from the first text quizzed: Malcolm X's "A Homemade Education." When Millennials take their required core curriculum composition classes, or at some other juncture in required curricula that mandates instruction in diversity, most of them encounter Malcolm X's autobiographical chapter how he taught himself to read and write by copying a dictionary while incarcerated in the Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts. To AI, who despises dictionaries, this story creates a curious kind of acedia, created by a cognitive dissonance nagging at the back of his mind that tells him that dictionaries can become tools of redemption, rather than punishment, if only he would do his homework in order to keep his wrestling scholarship. In any case, I explain to the students that I intend to use the foreign language method of vocabulary development. I expect them to go through the short reading, underlining and circling the words for which they do not know the denotation. I remind them that the South Dakota Language Arts Standards require by law that English teachers in middle school and high schools teach and apply the concepts of *denotation* and *connotation* beginning in the 8th grade and again in the 11th and 12th grade. I give a practice quiz on the Introduction to their anthology and then I give the first assignment in the course for which they receive an actual grade. In a compressed format, the quiz looks as follows:

TAYLOR 201 VOCABULARY QUIZ--MALCOLM X NAME:
20 points; 2 points each word

For the following words taken from Malcolm X's "A Homemade Education" in PI,
(1) define the word's denotation using phrases, **more** than just one synonym, and without using a form of the word itself, and (2) use the word in an appropriate manner in a sentence. Use EAE.

1. **autobiography**
2. **riffling**
3. **emulate**
4. **feigned**
5. **archaeological**
6. **pillaging**
7. **Faustian**
8. **Occidental**

9. alma mater

10. Socrates

Evaluating those first 50 quizzes (2 classes a semester, 25 students in each) tests my ability as a lexicologist because, even though I say that I use *MW11* and *AHC4* as standards of Edited American English (EAE), I have to keep in mind that my students often use Random House paperback dictionaries from WalMart and dictionary.com (only the first screen, however). Al often has extreme difficulty understanding my definition of EAE. On the first day, I introduce this by reading two crucial paragraphs in my syllabus, but through his acedia it seems only Peanuts-like teacher babbling "Waaaa Humbannums Summbum annnow annnummmmorill duh" The paragraph acts in effect as a defining clause in the contract that the syllabus actually represents in a court of law (according to SD Regental counsel forcefully expressed to us faculty). I quote the two relevant paragraphs below because, unless I read them in class, Al would never read them on his own. Likewise, anything in indention format, invokes Al's metarule for reading, i.e., "Skip it." If you, the reader, feel motivated to skip what at a glance look like mere infodumps, you have thus empathetically entered the Millennial mindset of my aliterate students. Caveat lector:

Strongly Recommended: Use a good collegiate, up-to-date, hardbound **college dictionary** such as *Merriam-Websters 11th Collegiate*, or the *American Heritage College Edition* 4th ed. Your use of college-level Edited American English (**EAE**) will figure prominently in your final grade, hence the strong recommendation that you acquire the habit of using an up-to-date dictionary. You should also familiarize yourself with the Merriam-Webster site <http://www.m-w.com> and the American Heritage word books at <http://www.bartleby.com> . Unless you know how to go deep on dictionary.com, avoid using the dumbed-down simplicities of just reading as little as possible of the first screen of this site (notice that it annoyingly privileges the less-authoritative Random House dictionary).

The acronym **EAE** stands for "**E**dit**E**d **A**merican **E**nglish." The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has used the acronym EAE since the very early 1970's. As an educated person, you must carefully distinguish between varieties of voice on the continuum between informal webspeak (such as used with email, texting, or tweeting, with their down-shifted colloquial slang and argot) and EAE (the formal written Standard English of handbooks, dictionaries, and professionals of all disciplines). In English 201, I expect you to aim toward the EAE varieties, rather than regress to the slapdash fragments, contractions, primer prose, and homophone confusions of writing-like-talking. For

further depth and background on this concept make sure that you read Saint Martin's Handbook Chapter 1 "**Expectations for College Writing**," pp. 14-22 and also section 28 b pp.519-20 on "**Standard Varieties of English.**" Practicing and demonstrating mastery of the academic formal written standard conventions represented by EAE remains a Regentally required central curricular focus for English 201.

Now you know what Al has ignored as he completes his first vocabulary quiz. Characteristic patterns of error emerge as I grade the classes' Malcolm X vocabulary quizzes. First of all, Al rushes into the quiz immediately after I distribute it, failing to put his name at the top. For *autobiography*, he defines two thirds of the morphemes by using a phrase such as "telling a story about someone's life." The prefixed *auto-* goes undefined. In my orally delivered directions before the quiz, I tell them that I will not subtract points for spelling, unless the word they misspell consists of the correctly spelled quizzed word right under their noses on the instrument itself. This, of course, means a point reduction for Al, who as an accomplished hunter, next reads *riffling* as *rifling*, and thus defines *riffling* as "the grooves in the barrel of a deer gun." Al usually does well with *emulate* because he has learned from my directions that I will often select these polysyllabic Latinate words, and plus (as he would say) the word appeared circled in red in his used textbook because some alert non-aliterate student who had my class previously had annotated the book after we went over the quizzes in class. *Feigned* he leaves blank and *archaeological* undergoes syncopation in spelling and receives the definition of "the study of dinosaur fossils." *Jurassic Park* and Disney curricula live on. *Pillaging* Al understands from war stories and knowing something about Vikings, a word he likes because of his enthusiasm for football. *Faustian* Al takes as the name of an old English writer; he does not identify the morpheme *-ian* as an adjectival suffix. *Occidental* characterizes what happens in car pile-ups on Interstate 29 from Sioux Falls to Brookings. *Alma mater* he accurately characterizes because he did, in fact, graduate from high school. And finally *Socrates* means, dead-level abstractly, "a writer," pure and simple. Al does not realize that Socrates, like Jesus, wrote nothing.

Because Al writes sentences that use the word in the correct part of speech and thus, in a composition course I want to reward even the merest of efforts, Al achieves a score of 9 out of 20. Scores on my quizzes, over decades never fail to amaze me at how, in aggregate, semester-after-semester, bell-shaped curves emerge with the main means and modes hovering between 9 and 15. Rarely do students score less than 5 or more than 18. This 20 scale, as I discuss in class derives from the curricula developed in the British and French universities since the late 18th century. My students

know nothing about the history of grading systems in American schools and I try to interest them in the evaluation metrics of reliability and validity and why it matters to listen to my definitions of such matters in class. These discussions eventually lead up to my etymology exercise on Mark Durm's 1993 essay "An A is not an A: A History of Grading."

After I return the graded, annotated, and elaborately deconstructed first quiz, Al recruits some classmates and they demand that I give a list of words that will be on subsequent quizzes. They do understand, however, why I do not use matching, true-false, or multiple-choice methods because they realize their vocabularies had not developed as a result of these K-12 methods that prevail for their ease-of-grading qualities, rather than promotion-of-learning efficacy. I ask them, "Well, if I give a list, how many of you would then actually read the essay?" Usually, less than half the class raises their hands. "Ok, class, let's talk about *aliteracy* again."

Unfortunately for Al, the second assignment for a grade in my class consists of a vocabulary quiz on Sven Birkerts' essay "The Paper Chase" (Dock 1996, 21-28). This essay, which has a diction level much more formal than Malcolm X's, appears in a very much shortened version than it originally appeared in *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (33-69). Al, of course, does not read subtitles, nor the footnotes that the editor adds, nor the biosquib of the author that begins the selection, nor the Appendix entry on the illustrious history of the publisher Faber and Faber, etc. Nor does he read the dictionary in preparation for the quiz. He prefers to guess his way through this text, rhyming and chiming in an Alice In Wonderland adventure in semantics.

201 VOCABULARY QUIZ NAME:
20 pts.

For the following words taken from Sven Birkerts' "The Paper Chase" (1) define the word using phrases, **more** than one synonym, and **without using a form of the word itself** and (2) use the word in an appropriate manner in a sentence. Use EAE.

1. **Latvia**
2. **vicariously**
3. **acceding**
4. **syntactical**
5. **cusp**
6. **empathic**
7. **ciphering**
8. **perquisites**
9. **pasteurized**

10. *disinterested*

Al and his friends have put *Latvia* on every continent except Antarctica, although South America remains the most popular. The dead-level abstract answer of "a country" frequently occurs as a wrong answer as well. *Vicariously* has definitions that cluster around "energetic activity" in vaguely homophonous and word shapely confusion with *vigorously*. Al likes to work out in our new Student Wellness Center. *Acceding* happens when you drive too fast on the highway or in town. *Syntactical* goes blank. *Cusp* means "to hold very tightly." *Empathic* means "to feel bad about something or someone." *Ciphering*, one of my favorites, means "to drain gasoline out of one tank and put it into another." Sometimes three quarters of a class will define *perquisites* as "something you have to take before you take something else." *Pasteurized* means "clean milk." (Would you give credit for that?) And, ironically and sadly, for the vast majority of my students, often all but one in a class, *disinterested* means "bored." Of course, in the "Glossary of Usage" in the *St. Martin's Handbook*, this shibboleth receives a succinct treatment: "*Disinterested* means 'unbiased.' *Uninterested* means 'indifferent'" (Lunsford 2008, 933).

In general, as a lexicologist doing error analysis among the aliterate Millennials, I find both accurate and useful that *St. Martin's Handbook* list of "The Top Twenty" most common errors commonly marked on papers written by college students (Lunsford 2008, 3). This list provides an easy to apply mapping of shibboleths ranked by frequency. The number one error marked on papers consists of ww (wrong word). Of course, this overlaps with number 4 on the list, given as "Spelling (including homonyms)." Al transcribes the way he talks; he does not know prefixes, suffixes, and roots; and he decodes words in texts by guessing at the gestalt created by the word shape on the page, not by the constituent morphemes.

The NCTE texts that I use to teach English Education majors recommend the use of "authentic

texts." The Assembly of Teachers of English Grammar (ATEG), in particular, recommends using real texts and text-types that provide relevance for students. I do this in my Linguistics 203 English Grammar course, aimed primarily at English Education majors planning to teach middle school and high school English. These students come into my class expecting endless worksheets—a clear symptom of the SOS curriculum. I give them authentic texts by requiring them to parse headlines from our student-run university weekly newspaper entitled *The Collegian*. I also have them consider an exercise I do with my Composition II class when I ask them to write out "The Pledge of Allegiance" on a sheet of paper. The only way they cannot garner participation points happens if they leave the paper blank. The use of the pledge gives me insight into one of the last vestiges of purely oral learning left in American education. Many of my students complain that they never before had to write the pledge out and thus they cannot do it. Nevertheless, the fascinating variants that his assignment elicits reflect the patterns of aliteracy that appear in the vocabulary quizzes. Most students chunk the pledge into breath group fragments indicated by periods, even though the actual pledge represents a complete and grammatical single sentence. Some students complain their high school teachers characterized the 31 word sentence as a *run-on* and that they should avoid writing such sentences.

Anyone familiar with the writing of Millennials could predict where the most lexical variance would occur. Just to refresh the memory of those readers who have not recited the Pledge of Allegiance recently, the version here cited comes from US Code Title 4 > Chapter 1 > Section 4 § 4. Pledge of allegiance to the flag; manner of delivery:

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Besides misspelling allegiance and indivisible, usually by syncope of unstressed syllables from the

middle of the word or by misinterpreting the source of sibilance at the end, or the inability to recover the spelling of the schwa [ə] e.g., *allegance*, *allegiens*, or *indivisible*. Many students leave off the adjective indivisible, even though they leave an empty space when they write their first draft of the sentence or more commonly, sentence fragments. They know some word fits there but they cannot recover even the vague syllabic shapes. The word *indivisible*, when attempted, creates a wide variety of fascinating malapropisms and neologisms. I list recurrent variants in order from most common to least common: *individual*, *indevisable*, *indivincible*, and *indivincable*. The projection of American values of individualism and militarism clearly come to the fore in these common variants. Usually at least one student in every class tacks on an *Amen* at the end, thus transforming the pledge into a prayer. According to AI, some teachers in SD actually teach the pledge as a prayer, although those teachers neglect to mention that its author, the Baptist Rev. Francis Bellamy held deep convictions as a Christian Socialist.

Finally, after some vocabulary quizzes in my Comp. II class, we do some actual overt dictionary work by means of an etymology exercise. I distribute handout of one piece of paper, with text on both sides, which contains the full text of Mark Durm's "An A is Not an A is not an A: A History of Grading." The etymology exercise, in compressed format looks like this:

TAYLOR 201 **ETYMOLOGY EXERCISE** on Durm NAME:
20 pts.
Due: At the **beginning** of class on Friday 15 September

For the following words taken from Durm's "An A is not an A. . .," write out **in full** the **ETYMOLOGIES** for the following words. Do **not** use abbreviations: look up the full form of the abbreviations in the front matter of your **desk dictionary**. For example, do not write **IE** but rather **Indo-European**. **If the word in Durm derives from multiple morphemes (q.v.), give the etymological derivation of the root(s) plus affixes, i.e., prefixes and suffixes.** You will thus acquire an operational awareness of morphology and etymology. As discussed in class, the South Dakota Department of Education and mandates such knowledge for grades 9-12 in the Language Arts standards for reading and writing.

In accordance with formal written standard usage, **underline** all words used as examples or in italics in your dictionary (see *St. Martin's Handbook* 54 b p. 773 for this standard convention used in almost all documentation systems). Example:

ing grade [French from Latin gradus step, degree, from Latin gradi to step, go; akin to Lithuanian gridyti to go, wander 1796]
-ing [Middle English from Old English -ung, -ing suffix forming nouns from verbs; akin to Old High German -ung suffix forming nouns from verbs]

Following the colon in this sentence, write out the full title(s) and publication date(s) of the dictionary or dictionaries you used to do this exercise:

1. academe
2. uncalibrated
3. valedictorian
4. average
5. examination
6. inducement
7. psychophysiology
8. alphabetically
9. skeptical
10. replete

Basically AI has three major problems in unpacking the morphemes in these words. If he goes to the Gutenberg technology, the actual dictionary books, he will not find words such as *uncalibrated* or *psychophysiology* given as entry forms, or if they do appear they do not have etymologies. He has to look up actual prefixes, suffixes, and roots. If he does realize that polysyllabic words have prefixes, suffixes, and roots, he then has to watch out for hypercorrecting so that he does not derive *average* from *aver* (v.) + -age (suffix) . This hypercorrection derives from his not actually reading the etymologies that he copies. This happens even more if AI derives his work from bartleby.com and m-w.com because cutting and pasting with careful reading becomes so easy. For example, he does not notice that *vale* (n) and *vale-* (prefix) constitute totally different lexemes with radically different meanings: "wooded valley" vs. "farewell." Likewise with *psycho* (n)vs. *psycho-* (prefix), meaning "criminally insane person" vs. "mind." This also happens with *inducement*, when AI looks up the root morpheme as *duce* (n) not *-duce-* (bound root), the difference between "Italian leader" and "to lead." Even though AI views my

lexicological excursions and exhortations toward greater lexicographical literacy as nit-picking and an overly time-consuming distraction from his devotion to *World of Warcraft*, he often grudgingly admits that words can have interesting histories that have fascinatingly ironic twists. Consider the grade named by the word *average* and its standard etymology in m-w.com:

¹av·er·age

Etymology:

from earlier *average* proportionally distributed charge for damage at sea, modification of Middle French *avarie* damage to ship or cargo, from Old Italian *avaria*, from Arabic *awārīya* damaged merchandise

Date: 1732

Yes, a C as "damaged goods." Al often considers dropping a course because of such damaged goods because he needs the Lake Wobegon B in order to balance all the "D for Done" grades. He will take Composition II online next summer and maybe he can avoid having to taking someone like Taylor. Implicit in universities' promotion of online, digitized curriculum designed for, and increasingly by, aliterates, the demotion of dictionaries and Gutenberg technology proceeds apace.

Thus, to sum up what arcing into the teaching of lexicology and lexicography among the aliterates feels like in the new millennium, I appeal to the words of the great Hoosier philosopher, the late Kurt Vonnegut Jr., "So it goes. . . ."

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