

THE "G" SPOT

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This is the spot in your new issue of *Word Ways* devoted to a long-overdue discussion of a peculiar quirk in pronouncing the letter "G." Help me expand that spot into a full-blown article, won't you?

One of the rules governing English states that the alphabetic letter "G" may be either soft or hard in pronunciation if it is followed by one of the three vowels E, I, or Y. Thus, we have GENDER and GETAWAY; GIBLET and GIBBON; GYMNASIUM and GYNECOLOGY ("guy-neck-ology"). If, on the other hand, the letter "G" is followed by one of the three vowels A, O, or U, or by a consonant, then it is always hard in pronunciation: GADABOUT and GALETY; GOBLET and GOLDFINCH; GULLIBLE and GUNSMITH; GLORIOUS and GRUESOME. This rule applies irrespective of whether the "G" in question is the first letter of a word, or some letter in the interior of the word.

The rules of English are, however, meant to be violated. In fact, the only reason for their existence is to permit logologists and others to find exceptions to them. The moment I became aware of this particular rule, I started looking for violations. My search, although a very slow one, with long time lapses between consecutive discoveries, has produced some interesting finds.

The easiest way of breaching the rule enunciated above is with a series of words including JUDGMENT, ABRIDGMENT, ACKNOWLEDGMENT, LODGMENT, GRUDGMENT, and LEDGMENT. Also included in this series are some words not ending with the suffix "-ment": PLEDGOR, WEDGWOOD, HODGKINSONITE, and HODGKIN'S DISEASE, for example. Geographic reference works such as the 1927 Premier Edition of the Rand McNally World Atlas and the 1965 Times Index-Gazetteer of the World provide additional examples of the species: EDGCOTT, EDGMOOR, EDGCOTE, EDGMOND, EDGTON, EDGWARE, EDGWORTH, and others.

At this point, a sophist enters the conversation and advances two arguments. First, all of the words and names cited originally had an E following the G. The eventual deletion of the E from the spelling did not alter the corresponding pronunciation. The examples are, therefore, not real violations of the quoted rule. Second, the rule was intended primarily to govern the pronunciation of G when it is followed by a vowel, and all but one of the cited words and names have the G followed by a consonant. To overcome the sophist's objections, we proceed to examples of a different sort.

Catching our attention are words in which a G is followed by an A, which is then followed by an E. Specimens of this genre include ALGAE, BELGAE, STRIGAE, SOLIFUGAE, EURYPYGAE, GAEA, NESOGAEA, EURYGAEA, PANGAEA, INDOGAEA, NEOGAEA, ANGLOGAEA, AUSTROGAEA, ARCTOGAEA, CAENOGAEA, and others. Our baleful sophist interrupts us again, however, observing that what follows the G in these words and names is not an A but the digraph AE, which should be classed with the vowels E, I, and Y. The terms quoted are, therefore, no exceptions to a purified version of our rule.

Conceding that the sophist has a point - of sorts - we retreat again, seeking examples of violations to which he can have no possible objection. This time, the pickings seem slim, indeed. Giving a virtuoso performance are the loners PRESTO CHANGO and GEORGANN (a feminine first name in the Random House Unabridged). A pair is represented in OLEOMARGARINE and MARGARINE. Coming along in trios are a pair of groups: GAOL, GAOLER, and GAOLBIRD, and VEGAN, VEGANIST, and VEGANISM. The latter threesome, referring to total vegetarianism and to those practicing it, is found in new-words dictionaries and glossaries such as the "Addenda" section in the 1981 edition of Webster's Third Edition and The Second Barnhart Dictionary of New English by Clarence L. Barnhart, Sol Steinmetz, and Robert K. Barnhart (Bronxville, NY: Barnhart/Harper & Row, 1980).

That last group of exceptions is interesting but not impressive. Can readers of Word Ways add to it? Can some of them play the devil's advocate and come to the aid of our sophist, advancing reasons why some of the words in our last group aren't really exceptions to the "G" rule?

COMPUTER-CONSTRUCTED WORD GAMES

Word Ways readers who enjoyed Alan Frank's "Logology by Computer" in November 1983 may want to look up Create Word Puzzles With Your Microcomputer (Hayden: Rochellé, New Jersey; \$14.95 paperback), by Ernest E. Marr. It contains 17 programs that the author has used to create 25 kinds of word puzzles for sale to magazines. He warns in the Introduction that the book is not "how to make money with a computer" since huge data-bases of words may be needed to make puzzles good enough to sell. Rather, the book is a general tutorial on non-numeric data handling, covering matters like creating word lists, sorting, etc. He starts with word search and skeleton (or kriss-kross) puzzles, examines cryptolists and cryptograms, and ends up with double-crossics; crosswords are not discussed. This book ought to be worthwhile to anyone who wants to get right down to character-crunching and doesn't object to Basic (PMC).