

# LETTER-SHIFT WORDS IN THE OSPD

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In the November 1979 *Word Ways*, the editor explored the subject of letter-shift words (words which can be transmuted into each other by constant shifts along the alphabet, as CHEER to JOLLY or PECAN to TIGER). Confining himself to the Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary, he showed that letter-shift words come in 13 varieties, according to the distance shifted along the alphabet. More recently, the topic of letter-shift words was reopened by Dave Morice (who exhibited an analogue device for more quickly finding such pairs) and Anthony Sebastian (who showed how it could be done using a spreadsheet program). About the only thing Sebastian's method for finding letter-shift words can do for a logologist is give him eyestrain. In fact, computer facilities required for the job are less than needed for the spreadsheet. I wrote a program in QUICKBASIC 4.0 which attacked the problem as follows:

- 1) Set up data arrays and read in the list of words to be analyzed for letter-shifts
- 2) Define the letter-pattern of the word (A = first letter, ..., D = fourth letter) by the function  $A(X) = 1024(B-A) + 32(C-A) + (D-A)$  (this can be readily generalized to words of other lengths)
- 3) Sort the list according to pattern-numbers, using a standard BASIC program

To show how readily results can be obtained, I analyzed a somewhat larger corpus: the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, for letter-shift words. For four-letter words, all 13 varieties appear:

- 1 deer-effs, ohms-pint, adds-beet, anna-boob, czar-dabs, gnar-hobs, char-dibs, inks-jolt, star-tubs, knar-lobs, ants-bout, izar-jabs, odor-pops
- 2 slam-unco, wyle-yang, slag-unci, typy-vara, caps-ecru, pyic-rake
- 3 crop-furs, cord-frug, molt-prow, drip-guls, dolt-grow, mold-prog, crap-fuds, perk-shun, drab-gude, cloy-forb, colt-frow, doxy-grab, glib-jole, mola-prod, axal-dado, pixy-slab, peri-shul, cold-frog, baal-eddo, ploy-sorb, cobb-free, olla-rood, milt-plow, pily-slob, folk-iron, proa-surd
- 4 fang-jerk, hark-levo, luna-pyre, sawn-wear, swop-wast, yank-cero, dawn-hear, okeh-soil, pean-tier, lang-perk, punk-tyro, pull-typp, ceil-gimp, open-stir, hewn-liar, heil-limp, pelt-show, lawn-pear, opal-step, lean-pier, capo-gets, dank-hero, salp-wept, puna-tyre, loop-psst, gale-kepi, pele-tipi, pepo-tits, sera-wive, pawn-tear, lane-peri
- 5 fizz-knee, ordo-twit, azon-fets, djin-ions, fido-knit, nidi-snin
- 6 piny-vote, buts-hazy, wits-cozy, fils-lory, ache-gink, limy-rose,

- nils-tory, hymn-nest, guff-mall, boff-hull, foam-lugs, luau-raga,  
 luny-rate, much-sain, loam-rugs, gies-moky, eche-kink, lion-rout,  
 nisi-toyo, dols-jury, oxim-udos, fohn-lunt, quey-wake, fummy-lase,  
 guts-mazy, huic-naoi, oafs-ugly, ails-gory, mumm-sass, sync-yeti,  
 puls-vary, quay-wage, loch-ruin, nill-torr, wolf-curl, bomb-hush,  
 winy-cote, dodo-juju, mule-sark, joey-puke, lowe-ruck, moly-sure,  
 nome-tusk, jiff-poll, liny-rote, buff-hall, gulf-marl, wily-core,  
 wich-coin, muff-sall, john-punt  
 7 aril-hyps, abet-hila, tahr-ahoy, ahem-holt, beer-illy, prex-wyle,  
 link-spur, whee-doll, ling-spun, ibex-pile, whit-dopa, yeti-flap,  
 atma-hath, phew-wold, whir-dopy, lane-shul  
 8 batt-jibb, baff-jinn, cans-kiva, khan-spiv, daff-linn, skua-asci,  
 loaf-twin, calk-kits, weal-emit, dawk-lies, haes-pima, hawk-pies,  
 eses-mama, gowk-owes, kaes-sima, egad-moil, sims-aqua, seas-amia,  
 tall-bitt, task-bias, talk-bits, vans-diva, acts-sulk  
 9 size-brin, drib-mark, elds-numb, ilex-rung, slip-bury, brie-karn,  
 trig-carp, sire-bran, sris-barb, gird-pram, spic-byrl, crib-lark,  
 girl-prau, trek-cant, spiv-byre, silk-brut, berg-knap  
 10 fuji-pets, deed-noon, reed-boon, seed-coon, were-gobo, zebu-jole,  
 feed-poon, idem-snow, meet-wood, semi-cows, cedi-mons, feet-pood,  
 byte-lido, jeed-toon, tout-dyed, redo-bony, cede-mono, etui-odes,  
 huff-repp, whew-grog, weet-good, jehu-tore, duly-nevi, peed-zoon,  
 weed-goon  
 11 spot-daze, haji-slut, path-ales, clad-raps, vats-gled, spit-date,  
 spat-dale, itch-tens, stun-defy, eats-pled, dash-olds, hade-slop,  
 paid-alto, rads-clod, hats-sled, pith-ates, etch-pens, then-espys,  
 pets-aped, rape-clap, hide-stop, hint-stye  
 12 road-damp, soil-eaux, torc-fado, ambo-myna, zips-lube, gobs-sane,  
 goys-sake, hoys-take, jogs-vase, jobs-vane, figs-ruse, pogy-bask,  
 pops-babe, toys-fake, umps-gybe, shog-etas, dogs-pase, hods-tape,  
 koas-wame, fibs-rune, riff-durr, bods-nape, doff-parr, goad-samp,  
 gids-supe, tors-fade, cuss-ogee, rids-dupe, tins-fuze, boas-name,  
 dodo-papa, fogs-rase, goas-same, firs-rude, gift-surf, tons-faze,  
 smog-eyas, ribs-dune, foy-s-rake, fons-raze, hogg-tass, kors-wade,  
 hips-tube, goby-sank, dido-pupa, psst-beef, mott-yaff  
 13 reef-errs, navy-anil, jura-when, ghat-tung, sent-frag, barf-ones,  
 grat-tang, pung-chat, crag-pent, orra-been, ebbs-roof, purs-chef,  
 balk-onyx, urea-hern, rear-erne, rail-envy

Letter-shift triples include: lane-shul-peri, dodo-juju-papa, flap-sync-yeti, aped-fuji-pets, eaux-okeh-soil, psst-loop-beef. Some pairs are rather evocative: cold-frog, jehu-tore, grab-doxy, ugly-oafs, pens-etch, hush-bomb, rape-clap, jerk-fang, pops-babe, and the commentary on the Exxon Valdez disaster, errs-reef.

For five-letter words, one can also find examples of all 13 letter-shifts:

- 1 sneer-toffs, adder-beefs, steer-tuffs, sheer-tiffs
- 2 osmic-quake
- 3 teloi-whorl
- 4 banjo-ferns, pecan-tiger, lutea-pyxie, danio-herms, alkyd-epoch,  
ratan-vexer, bejan-finer, ganja-kerne
- 5 fizzy-kneed

- 6 butyl-hazer, wombs-cushy, gunny-matte, viola-bourg, golly-murre,  
ahull-gnarr, johns-punty, eches-kinky, wolfs-curly, gummy-masse,  
bolls-hurry, munch-satin, pulpy-varve, molas-surgy, jinni-potto,  
linum-rotas, bulls-harry, gulfs-marly, mumms-sassy, mocha-suing,  
jinns-potty, mills-sorry, buffi-hallo, mulch-sarin, nutty-tazze,  
ginny-motte, jimmy-posse, gulls-marry, wiles-corky, luffs-rally,  
muffs-sally, nulls-tarry, chain-ingot, fills-lorry, noggs-tummy
- 7 oter-vealy, latex-shale, wheel-dolls, later-shaly, cheer-jolly,  
timer-aptly, tenet-alula
- 8 tsars-baiza, setal-ambit
- 9 jerky-snath, sleep-bunny, xeric-gnarl, river-arena, wiver-frena
- 10 uredo-ebony, secco-commo, sewed-cogon, ruddi-benny, cubed-melon
- 11 trips-ectad, hints-styed, spots-dazed, spits-dated, drips-octad,  
raphe-clasp
- 12 touch-fagot, dirum-pudgy, gassy-smeeek, hoggs-tasse, didos-pupae,  
torus-fadge
- 13 frere-serer, craal-penny, green-terra, creel-perry

One can find only a few six-letter letter-shift pairs: anteed-bouffe, bombyx-hushed, dawted-splits, fusion-layout, inkier-purply, steeds-tuffet, thumbs-manful, lallan-pepper, and weewee-muumuu.

There are only two seven-letter examples: abjurer-nowhere and sulphur-primero. Both of these were noted by Dmitri Borgmann in his 1965 book, Language on Vacation.

### KIND WORDS: A THESAURUS OF EUPHEMISMS

*This is the title of a book compiled by Yeshiva University English professors Judith Neaman and Carol Silver, and published (for \$22.95) by Facts on File in December 1989. The second edition of a book originally published in 1983, it contains more than 4000 euphemisms, arranged by subject-matter with citations and etymologies when known. The authors also provide a capsule history of the development of euphemisms from Greek times onward (the Greek furies were called "the kindly ones" to tame them and divert their attention). Today, of course, euphemisms are more often used to spare the feelings of the genteel listener than to propitiate the gods. As one might expect, the field is ill-defined; this book errs on the side of comprehensiveness, including many terms that would be regarded as jargon or cant. The subject matter is organized around the topics of body parts and secretions, the seven deadly sins (plus drunkenness), sickness and death, crime and punishment, sex, war, and the marketplace.*

*Euphemisms relating to death can be highly specialized. Did you know that GORGING OUT is not an euphemism for overeating, but for committing suicide by jumping off a bridge in one of the glens adjacent to Ithaca, New York? Or that OLD NEWTON TOOK HIM refers to a death in a military airplane crash? Léonard Ashley will be glad to have these euphemisms for being fired: to be given the burlap, to be excessed, to be outplaced, to be made redundant, to be given the gate (or the mitt), to be riffed, or to be relieved of one's duties.*