

COLLOQUY

Webster's Dictionary defines colloquy as mutual discourse. Readers are encouraged to submit additions, corrections and comments about earlier articles appearing in Word Ways. Comments received at least seven weeks prior to publication of an issue will appear in that issue.

According to Leonard Gordon, "Mathematics of Square Construction" reads like it was written by two different authors. The table on page 6 does not agree with the computer results on page 7; the article fails to discuss why the theory underestimates by 25 per cent the number of words needed to construct a square. Letter distributions in real words are so far from the ideal assumed by Long that it is absurd to theorize. All one can say is that the formula $E(\text{squares}) = (\text{words}/\text{constant})^n$ works (for large numbers of squares and words) regardless of theory. Plot data on a log-log graph so that different values of (squares, words) generate a straight line, and use this line to determine the value of the constant when $E(\text{squares}) = 1$. N is ordinarily set equal to the word-length, although there is no reason why it, too, cannot be evaluated from the data.

Using hundreds of computer runs, Gordon has ascertained that when one samples from a set of 1512 common four-letter words, the support is about 129, but when one samples from a set of 7269, the support drops to 91. Why this is so is not yet well understood, but it is likely that it has something to do with the "mix" of different sorts of vowel-consonant patterns in the word sets. Both words beginning with consonants and words beginning with vowels are needed to form a square, and the latter are rarer than the former. When one adds words one at a time until a square is formed, often the word that first makes a square possible is one that starts with a vowel.

Vernon MacLaren, a secret gambler who played roulette and dumb, added to Paul Hellweg's "Zesty Zeugmas" of February 1993:

The vampire ate his sweetheart's neck and his heart out
 The stickup man beat the shopkeeper and a rapid retreat
 The suicide bought an overdose and the farm
 The fastidious diner chewed the tough steak and the chef
 The cabbie drove fast and his passenger crazy
 The careless boater drowned his wife and his sorrows
 The nurse felt the wound and sick
 The active child frayed his clothes and his mother's nerves
 The flirtatious pickpocket pinched her bottom and her wallet
 The con man ran a scam and away

The addict shared a needle and grief
 The dinner guest stained the linen and his reputation
 The philanderer stole her heart and her money
 The ejected pitcher threw a baseball and a fit
 The bean-eating contestant broke the record and wind

Leonard Gordon disagrees with Martin Gardner's "Mathematics and Wordplay" about the similarity of numerical magic squares and word squares. The former yield to certain rules of symmetrical placement, etc., but word squares do not. Combinatorics is a much wider subject than what most people are doing today; the latter might better be called "playing with polyforms". However, he concedes that Gardner is on target in believing that the mentality needed for wordplay and computer usage is similar; it is not the mentality of THEM, The Hypothetical English Major.

Dan Tilque discovered a new longest palindrome terminated with X: XENEJENEX, Inc., a Boston company (Ward's Business Directory). This should be added to Grant's "X-X Word Update" in November 1992 and the Palindromicon.

Sir Jeremy Morse proposes three more non-reduplicative tetragram heads-and-tails words for the November Kickshaws: SINGulariSING, the archaic RESToREST, and the shortened TARAnTARA.

Leonard Gordon writes "I am surprised at Eric Albert's pedantic criticism of Ted Clarke's work." He feels that even newcomers to computing sometimes ask good questions, and that Albert just might be wrong. He suggests the whole contratemp could be settled by a little computer experimentation:

Arrange with anyone who already has a fast 8x8 computer program to test two different word sets. Use my list (37,000 words taken from the OSPD and augmented from Chambers) as one set, and the Air Force Webster's Second list as the other. Run both sets forward and backward and report results. Leave it to the investigator to devise the details of the test, but be sure he gets both support and efficiency data.

Eric Albert, it should be noted, conjectured in my May 1992 article "How Many Words Support a Square?" that for large squares (say, size nine) there actually exist more double squares than single ones - that is, the support values cross over. This conjecture has been experimentally verified for smaller squares by Long's computer runs (suggested by Albert) in "Mathematics of Square Construction".

Peter Newby modestly notes "I am flattered that you credited me with the invention of Competitive Word Squares [November Colloquy] but that is not the case. My source for it is two of Gyles Brandreth's books, one of which gives the 6 points bonus score whilst the other has a simple 5 point score for a 5-letter word. I doubt very much that Gyles invented the game but who originated the

5x5 I have no idea. Certainly the idea of larger squares is mine but I have no wish to take another's credit for the original format."

Why didn't archeologists find a HARPO/OPRAH square in Tucson? Leonard Gordon answered the question by making inquiries in a local saloon. The boys at the bar remembered an Englishman looking for "crying" Jenny Toomes, thought he was a nut, and ran him out of town!

Sir Jeremy Morse augments "Wordplay 101" in the November Kickshaws with a sentence in which each word has a doubled letter: gAllAntly BarBara aCCepts wiDowhood; lEavEs oFF GrievinG; wHole-Heartedly dISmisses JeJune, bacKtracKing, kiLLjoy MeMories; caNNot brOOk PomPous QuinQuagenarians; RediscoverRs inStinctS ThaT UsUally surViVing WidoWed eXecutriXes hYpocritically muZZle. Truly a meRRy WidoW!

Arthur Goodman of Memphis, Tennessee reports that Chemical Engineering News 30:5086 (1952) felt that a good candidate for the ugliest word in English was CHEILOGNATHOURANOSCHISIS, meaning "hare lip combined with cleft palate". Leonard Gordon believes that the word CONJECTURE should have been included in the ugly word list because it is horribly misused; it makes sense in pure mathematics (where something can be proved, disproved or not proved) but not in physical or statistical research, where conjecturing often leads to error.

Darryl Francis wonders whether Republicans made use of the slogan "Vote for the President: BUSH has (the) US at heart" during the recent campaign. This is as clever as the famous "What is missing from CH CH? U R" or "ASSUME makes an ASS out of U and ME."

John Schilke of Oregon City, Oregon writes "Almost 40 years ago my high-school Latin teacher wrote a short ditty on the board and asked the class to translate it ... When after quite a bit of time and much frustration we all gave up, he puckishly suggested we read it aloud ... We all roared at the joke." The ditty? A variant on one of Douglas Greenwood's May 1992 Tricky Limericks: O Sibili, si ergo | Fortibus es in ero | O nobili, demsis trux | Si vats indem | Caus an dux!

Jeff Grant proposes three solutions to Susan Thorpe's query about alphabetic words: 1) FIGHED (the English Dialect Dictionary shows **figh** as a Cheshire dial. form of 'foul' which can be a verb), 2) FEIGH'D (see Kickshaws), and 3) DEFGHI (the unlikely surname of a man in Villa Park IL according to Ripley's Believe It Or Not).

Jeff Grant corrects the source of the ugly word AARRGHH (from the Official Scrabble Players Dictionary), and notes that DUMMKOPFS is worse than the singular form because it's harder to pronounce. The super-ugly GOBBLEDEGOOKITIS is listed in the 'Word Lists' section under **-itis** in Wentworth and Flexner's slang dictionary.