

ABCDE IN DUTCH

HUGO BRANDT CORSTIUS

Paris, France

Susan Thorpe (Word Ways, Feb 1999) asks which of the 120 permutations of ABCDE occur in words. In the context of Word Ways I thought this meant "English word (or name)" so I was surprised to see the German verb *abdecken* and the Polish word *abecadto* in her list. Surely, if all languages are welcome, there must be more fitting words, like the French verb *abcéder* (suppurate).

The Dutch language has a bad name among logophiles. Dmitri Borgmann called many Dutch word wonders "coined"--in Holland one would say *bedacht* (bethought, imagined). He refused *nepapen* (fake monkeys), but accepted *parterretrap* (ground floor stairs). The fun of Dutch word-play lies exactly in the fuzzy border between acceptable and unacceptable words. We coin words all the time--no dictionary contains all the words in one issue of a Dutch newspaper!

The list of the following dozen Dutch words contains one unacceptable word and you will never guess which:

| | | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------|
| ABC-DEfensiewapens | CD-BEAat | goeDBEACht |
| DECABrist | nuanCEBAD | suBDECAnaat |
| inCABED | goEDBACK | BEDCAMEra |
| CDA-BEstuur | BECADreren | horeCADEButante |

I restrict myself to words in the Dictionary of the Netherlandic Language which was started 150 years ago and finished recently. With its forty voluminous volumes it is the greatest dictionary I know of. (It is available in the New York Public Library and at Columbia University.)

As our freedom to compose words is greater than yours, it is to be expected that there are more words with certain letter sequences in Dutch than in English. The letter C is not indigenous in Dutch which makes the permutations of ABCDE harder to get. A complete search of the CD of the 40-volume dictionary gave seven permutations:

blADBECijferingen "page sums" with a quote from 1910
 BEDACht at least one hundred other words contain this word
 affgeCABDE 1699 spelling of *afgekapte* ("cut off")--notice ABCDEFG!
 horeCABEDrijven "restaurant businesses"
 arCADEBoog occurring in a 1937 sentence, meaning "arcade arch"
 tanDABCEss an abscess in a tooth
 pasteiDEBACker old spelling of "pastry baker" (also, DEBACle)