PEPPERTREE: THE LOGOLOGICAL HOLY GRAIL

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Some words are interesting because they have a unique, outstanding property. Howard Bergerson has noted that TWENTY-NINE is spelled with letters made of lines only--29 of them. (The real magic of this simple fact can be experienced by counting each line along the way.) Dave Morice once observed that AMBIDEXTROUS ("capable of using both hands with equal ease") is alphabetically ambidextrous: its left half, AMBIDE, uses letters from the left half of the alphabet, and its right half, XTROUS, uses letters from the right half of the alphabet. If the letters of OUI (French YES) are each shifted ten steps to the right along the alphabet, they spell YES.

Other words are interesting because they have a large number of logological properties, even though none is uniquely outstanding. Consider GOD. GOD is DOG spelled backwards. The alphabetic values of its letters (A=1, B=2, etc.) add up to 26, the number of letters in the alphabet ("In the beginning was the word..."). GOD is part of the longest series of common words that are mutual lettershifts (GOD-OWL-SAP-WET). GOD is composed of consonants from the first half of the alphabet and vowels from the last half; furthermore, GOD alternates consonants and vowels. GOD relates to the DEVIL in at least two ways: the last letter of GOD is the first letter of DEVIL, and adding O to GOD creates GOOD but removing D from DEVIL creates evil. And so on...

All words, no matter how common or obscure, are interesting, but some are more interesting than others. And out of the some, a few are interesting in more than one way. And out of the few, one word is more interesting in more ways than any other word in the language. It is packed with properties that range from common to unique. It stands out from the outstanding. What is that word? The quest to find it is the ultimate exercise in wordplay—the search for the Logological Holy Grail.

Ironically, the search will never end. There are too many words in English and too many forms of wordplay to consider. There never will be complete agreement on the best of all possible words. The inhabitants of the world of wordplay are too creative and too diverse. Still, the search for the forbidden fruit on the tree of linguistic knowledge can reap magnificent results.

In *Language on Vacation* (Scribner's, 1965), Dmitri Borgmann claimed that the word LOGOLOGY is "the finest word in English ever formed." To back up his claim, he listed six properties of the word:

- Alternation of consonants and vowels: LGLG, OOOY
- Two overlapping palindromes and a one-letter palindrome: LOGOL, GOLOG, Y
- Second-order reduplication: LOGO-LOGY
- Alternation of first-half and last-half letters of the alphabet: LGLG, OOOY
- The sum of the alphabetic values of its letters divided by the number of letters in the word equals 13.5, the numerical midpoint of the alphabet

- None of the five commonest letters in English-language text are present: E,T,A,I,S

Undoubtedly there are other properties concealed within this word. But is it, as he implies, the Grail Word?

Over the course of a recent series of e-missives, we noticed something, then many things, about the word PEPPERTREE, defined in Webster's Tenth Collegiate as "a Peruvian evergreen tree (*Schinus molle*) of the cashew family grown as a shade tree in mild regions." First of all, logologically speaking, PEPPERTREE is a ten-letter pyramid word, a wordplay form that occurs in only a few other words of that length, including SLEEVELESS and TENNESSEE'S. A pyramid word has one of one letter, two of another, three of a third, etc. For that reason alone, PEPPERTREE is remarkable.

But then PEPPERTREE started revealing itself to be an evergreen of the most alphabetic kind. A second property, related to the first, appeared: PEPPERTREE contains two shorter pyramid words, both of which begin with the first P in the host word—possibly a unique case of a pyramid within a pyramid within a pyramid. And then a third property, related to the second, appeared: each pyramid after the first is formed by increasing the number of letters in each row by one and by adding a new letter at the top:

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                                              T
                    R                        R R
   E               E E                      E E E
  P P             P P P                    P P P P
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As words go, PEPPERTREE is neither common nor obscure. It's easy enough to get a general idea of what it means. This article lists 26 ways in which it does something unusual with its letters, pronunciation, and/or meaning. Three of these have already appeared, and the remaining 23 appear below. Together they show the results of our search for the Grail Word:

- Without its first letter, (P)EPPERTREE can be divided into two strings of letters, EPP and ERTREE, both of which form pyramids as above. Together, EPP, ERTREE and PEPPERTREE form a triple pyramid, but in this case the smaller pyramids are letter-strings that don't overlap instead of words, PEP and PEPPER, that do,
- If prefixes are allowed, then PEPPERTREE is not only a pyramid word but also a snowball word: P EP PER TREE (EP appears in the OED as a shortened form of EPI).
- All the letters in PEPPERTREE can be typed on the top row of a typewriter (QWERTY-UIOP).
- Without its *last* letter, PEPPERTRE(E) can be divided into three overlapping palin-dromes, PEP, EPPE, ERTRE. They have increasing lengths of three, four, and five letters. Two letters overlap between the first two palindromes, and one letter between the last two.
- Without its *first* letter, (P)EPPERTREE can be divided into three palindromes, EPPE, RTR, EE. They have decreasing lengths of four, three, and two letters. No letters overlap, and no letters fall between them.
- Its consonants occur in clusters, each separated by the vowel E, to form the basic arithmetic progression 1,2,3: P, PP, RTR.
- All the letters in PEPPERTREE incorporate vertical lines.
- Half of its letters contain curves, and half don't: PPPRR (occurring in alphabetic order), EETEE (occurring in palindromic order).
- Half of its letters have closed spaces, and half don't: PPPRR, EETEE.

- In lowercase, each letter in peppertree has one line and one curve.
- In lowercase, half of its letters have vertical lines and half have horizontal lines: ppprr, cctcc.
- In its three syllables, PEPPERTREE contains three soundings of the letter E--short, schwa, and long
- PEPPERTREE is an EVERGREEN, and each of these words is a univocalic using the letter E four times.
- E, the most commonly appearing letter in PEPPERTREE, is the only letter of the alphabet with three horizontal lines. Just as E's lone vertical line supports its three horizontal lines, so the vowel E supports the three different consonants, PRT, in the word's three syllables.
- E appears the most frequently (four times) and T the least (one time). The alphabetic value of E is 5; adding the values of the four E's gives 20, which is the alphabetic value of T.
- Its vowels are in the first half of the alphabet, and its consonants are in the second half.
- Its vowels occupy odd-numbered positions in the alphabet (E=5), and its consonants occupy even-numbered positions (P=16, R=18, T=20).
- The vowel E is the fifth letter of the alphabet; the consonants PRT occupy a five-letter segment of the alphabet, PQRST.
- Listing each of the four different letters in order of first appearance in PEPPERTREE spells PERT, which means "piquantly stimulating," certainly a quality of the word and probably of the tree, too.
- Similarly, the longest string of different letters in PEPPERTREE appears in the very center and spells PERT.
- Arranging the letters of PEPPERTREE in order of number of occurrences, from greatest to least, results in EEEE PPP RR T. Alphabetizing all the letters results in the exact same arrangement.
- The letter P looks like a leaf. When the P's fall off the PEPPERTREE, the remaining letters form a palindrome, EERTREE, in which the T stands like a tree among the letters that branch out to spell TREE in both directions.
- PEPPERTREE has two different double-letter bigrams (PP,EE) and two of the same non-double-letter bigrams (PE,PE). Either anagrams to PEEP, which has several meanings: "a sandpiper (bird)," "a feeble, shrill sound," and "a brief look," to name three. A baby peep might peep as it peeps out of its nest in the peppertree!