HYPERSYLLABIC AND OLIGOSYLLABIC WORDS

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Syllables in Dutch words have an average length of three letters. When a word has 48 letters, like *thoraxchirurgenconcurrentieverhoudingencommissie*, we expect it to have 16 syllables. But logophiles are not interested in averages, they long for extreme cases. How long, and how short, can a Dutch word of seven syllables be? The longest lemma in the *Dictionary of the Nederlandic Language* (1882-1999) is *handboogschuttersmaatschappij* (29 letters). It has the same number of syllables as the 12-letter word *operationele.*

I propose to call a word where the length in letters is more than four times the number of its syllables **oligosyllabic.** Our *handboogschuttersmaatschappij* with 29 letters and 7 syllables is oligosyllabic, as is the English name *Knightsbridge* (13 letters, two syllables). It is easy to see that an oligosyllabic word must contain at least one syllable which is longer than four letters.

A word where the length is less than twice the number of its syllables, on the other hand, I propose to call **hypersyllabic**. The *Asperifoliacea* (14 letters, 8 syllables) is hypersyllabic. It is easy to see that a hypersyllabic word must contain at least one syllable of one letter—in this case, the eleventh and fourteenth letter in *Asperifoliacea.*

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 1    2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9  10  11  12  syllables
 2      |ia
 3      |ode
 4          |oase
 5 |stand   |opera
 6 |strand      |adagia
 7 |strandt     |oasetje
 8 |schreeuw        |intuitie
 9      |draiikont  |ideologie
10      |traanvocht     |idealisere
11      |draagkracht    |individuele
12      |voortschreed       |operationele
13          |roodgestreept  |stearineoliën
14          |bokshandschoen     |Asperifoliacea
15          |bruidsbloempjes    |malariaepidemie
16          |vastgeschroefdst       |teleradioetalage
17              |jeugdwerkloosheid  |teleradioetalages
18              |groepsleerkrachten   |trivialiaideologie
19              |scheepsschoorstenen  |radiostudiopolitici
20              |schoonheidswedstrijd     |urinekanalenestuaria
21                  |schaapscheerderskoude |etalagepanoramacamera
22                  |schoonschrijfschriften    |radiostudioessentialia
23                  |rijksscheepvaartkantoor   |ademanalysatorenetalage
24                  |rijksvoorlichtingsdienst
25                      |schaapscheerderskoudetijd
26                      |rijksvoorlichtingsdiensten
27                      |rijksscheepvaartkantoortjes
28                      |staatsluchtvaartmaatschappij
29                          |handboogschuttersmaatschappij
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