

COLLOQUY

Chris Cole notes “In my book [*Wordplay: A Curious Dictionary of Language Oddities*] I listed IEIE, the Pacific islands screw pine, as the shortest word with four syllables. This word is in Merriam-Webster’s Third New International Dictionary so it satisfies your criterion for inclusion. There are many other words in the vowel-rich languages that could be on this list. For example, IEIEA means barbed or hooked. This word has five syllables in five letters. Although the editors at Merriam-Webster did not include this word in the Third, I don’t think they thereby intended to make a strong statement that IEIE is an English word and the other words are not. So while you have explicitly made this a criterion for your list, others may argue that it is not a valid criterion. In my book I list W as the shortest word with three syllables, even though I exclude spelled-out acronyms. This is because W is not an acronym; it is the name of the 23rd letter.

“As for the longest words, the situation is even more confusing. Dictionary editors are generally unclear about what constitutes a syllable. Even for one syllable there is ambiguity. If you’re going to say that ten-letter SCRAUNCHED has one syllable, then I suppose you could argue that the eleven-letter SQUIRRELED or BROUGHAMMED have one syllable. The confusion expands as you compound words. Again, dictionary editors do not like to make firm statements as to whether a compound is open or closed. For example, the fifteen-letter STRAIGHTBRUSHED has the issue of whether it is two or three syllables compounded with the issue of whether it is a closed or open compound. Differences in dialectical pronunciation cloud the matter further. As the song goes, ‘in short we have a ghastly mess’.”

Elsewhere in this issue Rex Gooch finds letter banks for 17 more chemical elements. Susan Thorpe found much the same examples, adding only UMHOLI (populated place Guinea Bissau), BINONIUM (OED binomial 1570 quote), and MIVUNDA (populated place Tanzania), for holmium, niobium and vanadium, respectively. Sir Jeremy Morse independently suggested FIRE-MOUTHED for rutherfordium.

Darryl Francis has discovered a pair of 9-letter reversals previously undocumented. The village of DALNATRAT lies at the mouth of Salachan Glen, on the shore of Loch Linnhe, in the county of Argyllshire in Scotland. The village lies on the A828 road, and its approximate geographical position is 56°38’ north, 5°19’ west. From local maps, Darryl says it’s difficult to determine whether this is a village or some kind of smaller place—perhaps just a few dwellings. Anyway, it’s a reversal of TARTAN LAD, which—according to various Internet searches—is the name of various dogs (especially greyhounds for some odd reason!) and is used also as a familiar term for a Scotsman.

Susan Thorpe fills a few gaps in Darryl Francis’s “AEGINRST Transdeleted”: NRST (Strn, populated place in Croatia), GRT (Trg, populated place in Croatia), NRS (Srno Do, a depression in Yugoslavia), NRT (Trn, populated place in Bulgaria), and RST (Babin Srt, a mountain in Macedonia).

Jeff Grant comments on “Vowel Tetragrams Revisited” as follows: “Concerning the Angolan place-name with 9 consecutive vowels, I discovered CAUAIAUAIA while browsing the OSNG for Angola back in 1985, and advised the Guinness Book of Records (it is listed in the 1987 edition) and of course Word Ways (Feb 1986 Colloquy).”

During a recent visit with the editor, Hugo Brandt Corstius revealed a 16-letter pair isogram in the Dutch language: VANITASSTILLEVEN, a vanity still-life, which exceeds the English record-holder, SCINTILLESSENT.

Regarding “Oiliqo, the Looking-Glass Crab”, Jim Puder writes that lower-case L does not remain an L after an inverting rotation because inversion changes it from an ascender to a descender. This is true in the case when a word rotates as a unit, in which there is only one axis of rotation, but not true in the other type of rotation in which the word’s letters rotate individually. In this rotational mode, L would be free to rotate about its individual midpoint, and so could remain the same in the two inverting rotations. Thus there are 61, not 59, instances in which a letter can either remain the same or become another letter when rotated.

Sir Jeremy Morse notes that *a/re/a* and *e/pi/de/mi/o/lo/gy* are one longer without capitals, and *i/di/oc/y* and *strength/less/ness* good alternatives [to *acuity* and *straightforwards*].

Following up on the “Want my baby” message in Shakespeare’s “The Comedy of Errors” (reported in “The Titania Acrostic Revisited” in the August issue of Word Ways), Mike Keith notes that Mel Gibson’s line “GIVE me Back my SON,” shouted into the telephone in the 1996 movie “Ransom,” contains his surname (in capital letters).

Eric Chaikin and Julian Petrillo are pleased to report that their film “Word Wars—Tiles and Tribulations on the Scrabbler Circuit” will premiere at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah January 15-25, 2004. Of more than 500 documentaries submitted, only sixteen were accepted for competition. “While not everyone who appeared before our cameras during our 18 months of shooting appears in the film, my crew and I have really appreciated the enthusiasm, openness and support of the Scrabble community.” (More detail about Sundance can be found at their website www.sundance.org.)