

ARE ALL WORDS INTERESTING?

ANIL

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In the February '77 Word Ways (77-8), Dmitri Borgmann proposed as the keystone of logology that all words are logologically interesting, illustrating with twenty random words. Pamela Brang provided seventeen more examples by the same method (77-163). But thirty-seven out of some half a million words is not proof. Like scientific theories, such a postulate can be disproved--by a single exception!--but can't be proved (short of proving it for every word in the language, which I don't have room for here). Ross Eckler pseudofeverishly proposed PSEUDOFEVERISHLY as a possible exception. Borgmann had to struggle but managed to prove it interesting (77-76). (Is UNINTERESTING an interesting word? Yes, otherwise it would be self-truthful--or a paradoxical contronym!--and both types of words are especially interesting to logologists.)

I thought another round of random words might turn up an exception, or at least add a little more evidence to support the dogma. I've picked the first bold entry on every 100th page of Macquarie Dictionary, Revised Third Edition (2001), excluding abbreviations and all but the first word of phrases, for a list of twenty-one words. Here they are, with interest. DA = definitive anagram.

ANTHROSCOPIC [of an invasive surgical procedure for examining joints internally] This one has a vaguely DA **ortho-pic scan** (direct view), is a phonetic charade ("Ann throws cop pick."--Ann is the nurse, Doc is the cop, the pick is the anthroscope.) and a phonetic 'letteral' **rebus** ("A inta-ye age are. O, is sea o' pee I see."--the anthroscopy caused profuse urination as a side effect.)

BLEARY [vision-impaired] A sandwich word [_B^{LEAR}_Y]; a cognate anagram "barely" (how the bleary-eyed see); two 'poetic' synonyms, a transaddition **ray-blue** and a transsubstitution **bar eye**; and an antonym **clear** by word stool (one-step ladder) plus curtailment.

CARPAL [hand/wrist part] A doubly symmetrical pattern word (in its letters **xAxxAx** and in their occurrence in the first v. second half of the alphabet **112211**); its reduced alphanumeric sum is the same as its number of letters (its A=1...Z=26 value is 51, reducing to 6); it has a weak and imperfect DA **a clap'r**; and it's a letteral **rebus** ("See a harpy ail.").

COMPO [worker's compensation insurance, Oz colloq.] An asymmetrically balanced word (com- has the same value as -po, 31) with a cognate anagram "Mop Co.!" best explained by an anecdote I heard recently. A Yank, a Pom (English) and an Ocker (Aussie) met a healer. The skeptical Yank asked him to cure his cirrhosis, which he did. The Pom said, "I can't see any difference. Cure this big goiter on my neck!" Which he did. The amazed Ocker immediately made the sign of the cross and said, "Keep away from me, you devil, I'm on compo!"

DECORATOR DAs **act o' order** and **Art o' decor trod core.**; cognates ("order a cot", re-door act, "Red coat, or...?"); its value 99 reduces to its number of letters.

ECONOMIST Typewriter symmetry **LLRRRRRLL**; a DA **I'm one Scot.**; a poly DA **Coin** [Write] **tomes to incomes, t' Co. monies.**; and a polyanagram opinion ("Cost? I'm one! Coins to me." [ie, most con!])

FINANCE A cognate poly "Can fine 'n ace fin." [\$5]; same symmetry for letters and alphabet-half (**xxNxNxx, 1121211**); its value 52 reduces to its number of letters.

GLEN Balanced word, each half totalling 19; typing hand and odd-v-evenness of letters both alternate; no transposals, but two-letter or 50% transsubstitutions give *three synonyms*, **dale, dell, vale**; nine single transsubstitutions tell a sad little story about a gentleman from a long line of lean men who was blown away in a storm in narrow Gale Valley: "Glen lane, gale. Lone lean-gene-line gent long gone!" (rebus: "Gee, 'll 'e end?")

HIPBATH [washtub or sit-up bath (two words in Web-3)] Symmetric pattern word **HxxxxxH**; definitive transsubstitution of a **hip tub**; and a rebus, "Age I pee be a tea age." (You shouldn't drink tea in the hipbath, it's a diuretic! [Compare anthroposcopic and pat.]

IRON Three irrelevant transposals (noir, inro, Rion); a weak antigram, **in Or--in gold**, not iron. (but iron pyrite is called fool's gold, or "inOr"); the palindrome "Iron? Nor I!!" means "I'm not Iron Man!" or "I'm not your laundry!"; a vague rebus, "I are owin'."; and like most short words it easily made a word square:

I R O N
R E D O
O D D S
N O S E

(This could be read as a golf story:

"Good iron shot, redo odds, nose ahead." or "I redo an iron shot badly and my odds nosedive.")

LICKERISH [greedy for choice food] A good DA **rich likes** or **Likes rich.**; a cognate *or* antonym in its homophonic alternative spelling, **liquorish** (it's related to lecher, not liquor, so it's also a coincidental self-affinity or contronym as in 04-45); and a rebus, "Hell I see, 'k?" (He awry? Is sage!), quoting a wise speaker predicting hell (or indigestion!) for the greedy gourmand.

MESSENGER An antigram (**Reneges MS.**); was part of my Greenie pseudonym "Green Mess Messenger" in *up/dn* (p.62); two weak definitives ("Sings me re, signs me re." and "greetness") from transsubstitutions; and a cognate rebus, "Him [the messenger], 'e is essayin? Gee, 'e are!"

NOMARCH [governor of a nome] A good DA **monarch** and a charade (no march).

PAT *Two* DAs, for different meanings of pat, **apt** and **tap**; a rebus, "Pee a tea." [see hipbath].

PREHUMAN An obscure poly DA, **aper 'n' hum near hump** (**Unhamper human rep!**) (Aper's "**ape**" **Mr. Hun.** Hum is speech or humanity. Hump is the threshold apes passed over in becoming humans. [Unhamper is a nonce but hamper and unhampered are in most dictionaries.]); and a rebus expressing in dialect a stereotyped, violent apeman (PR: "'E ate chew! 'E may end!").

REMOTE A core part of the poly DA "**meteor: Remote ore met.**"; definitive transsubstitution **o' there** and word stool +/- add-on **remove[d]**; typewriter-symmetrical, **LLRLL**.

SEA A left-handed, odd-letters word with a reversal (aes); a strong cognate anagram **eas** (Eng. dialect for rivers or streams [in Web-3 singular]--which topologically are part of the sea!); and a self-referential rebus, "A sea, eh?" (Half of the **oceans** are sea's too, to add a con.)

SOUTHERN Three cognate anagrams, "Her Notus" (Mother Nature's south wind in Greek mythology [Random House]) and "other sun ('ours' then)" [$S^O U^T H E R N$ ($S^O U^T H E R N I$)] (we southern

hemispherians see the sun in the northern sky, thus ours is a “different” sun); and two antigrams: ‘**unhoster**’ (a nonce referring to the Southern United States [SUS], self-famous for their hos(t)-pitality. They’re also more “hot re sun”.) and **Use north.** (or a cynicism if SUS is meant).

SWING [vb] A metaphorical DA on swing dance music: “**Sing w. wings.**”; a rebus from a bet-swinging card game: (“...as double you, eyeing ‘G’... ”); and a hasty word square, translatable as “Rastafarian women are reggae rockers imprinted on the Ethiopian emperor and his knowledge.” [-gnosy is a combining form (but with a separate bold listing in Web-3), so read it Negus-gnosy.]

S W I N G
W O M E N
I M A G O
N E G U S
G N O S Y

TREHALOSE [di-glucose] A cognate anagram “heat loser” (like all sugars it gives up its latent heat when metabolised); an arguably definitive double transsubstitution **holo-sweet** (‘holo-’ meaning wholly glucose or “blood sugar”); and an irrelevant rebus about a non-caring non-hero: “Teary? a Che? Yellow ass, he!”.

VISITANT A near-perfect antigram **nativist** matching lickerish, nomarch and pat for elegance.

I found all twenty-one words interesting in their different ways, some more than others of course, and most for multiple reasons. Surprisingly, over half (11) yielded rebuses, mostly cognate, and an equal number had definitive anagrams of varying quality, while 8 more produced antigrams or, after some letter changes, definitives. So only 2 (compo and finance) failed to yield up some approximation of self-definition. Unless you reject one or more of my arguments as less than interesting, it looks like Borgmann’s law has once again escaped disproof and that we’re now a proud sixty 500,000ths of the way toward proving it!

PS. Before we get too smug, it occurred to me after completing this article that if there are going to be any uninteresting words they are likely to be lurking among the very short words, eg, of one or two letters. Can readers save us from a fate worse than misspelling by finding something logologically interesting about a, I, O, at, be, do, id, go, me, of, or, so, to, up *and* we, for example? Have we erred yet again by thinking too large? Are two-squares, or alphabet- or type-writer halves, or odd and even values really interesting at this level? Perhaps we must allow trivial rebuses in order to save the day (eh?, eye, owe, a tee, Be ye?, Deo, “idee”, geo, Emmy, Oh, F...!, oar/ore, Is so., Tea, oh?, You pee., double U-ey [a U-turn, Oz colloq., Macquarie]).