NEW TYPEWRITER WORDS

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In his *Language on Vacation*, Dmitri Borgmann drew attention to what he called ‘typewriter words’. Dmitri posed various questions about the longest words which could be typed on the different rows of the typewriter keyboard, words which could be typed entirely by the left hand, and words which could be typed entirely by the right hand. As 2015 is the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Language on Vacation*, it’s worth revisiting some of Dmitri’s findings.

Dmitri’s first question was: What are the longest words that can be typed entirely on the top row of letter-keys on the standard typewriter keyboard - QWERTYUIOP? He offered a variety of 10-letter words, including TYPEWRITER, REPETOIRE, PROPRIETOR, PERPETUITY and PIROUETTER. He also offered some 11-letter specimens: PROPRIETORY, PROTEROTYPE and RUPTUREWORT, and a single 12-letter item: PRETTYPRETTY.

I have recently discovered another 10-letter typewriter word, probably not identified by Dmitri as it doesn’t appear in either the 2nd or 3rd editions of Webster’s *New International*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has the excellent 10-letter specimen POURRITUDE, defining it thus: ‘Rottenness, rot, decay; frequently figurative’.

Other 10-letter examples overlooked by Dmitri are PROTOTROPY and REPETITEUR, both in Webster’s *Third*, so no excuses for Dmitri not noting them. The latter word was mentioned in Colloquy in the May 2010 Word Ways.

A new 12-letter specimen has come to light recently, although it’s a word dating back almost 500 years. The *Oxford English Dictionary* has PROPRIETORY (mentioned above) as a main entry. But it also notes that the 12-letter PROPRIETORIE is an obsolete variant spelling from the 15th and 16th centuries. It even offers this illustrative quotation taken from a 1548 English Act of Parliament: “That all and everie person...shall paye their tythes for thincrease of the saide cattell so goinge in the said e waste or common, to the parson vicar proprietorie porcyonarie owner or other their fermors.”

An even more amazing 13-letter specimen has just come to light – TUTTORQORTOOG. According to Wikipedia, Tuttorgortoog Island is located in Tasiussaq Bay, in the north-central part of Upernavik Archipelago. The island is mountainous, with an unnamed peak in the central-western part of the island. The island’s geographical location is 73°39′45″ north, 56°56′45″ west.

Dmitri posed this second question: What are the longest words that can be typed entirely on the second row of letter-keys on the standard typewriter keyboard – using the letters ASDFGHJKL? He offered the 9-letter words FLAGFALLS and GALAGALAS, the 10-letter KHALAKKHA, and even the 11-letter KHALAKKHAS.

I have recently discovered a 13-letter typewriter word which can be typed entirely on the second row of typewriter keys. It is AGHJAGHSHLAGH. According to Wikipedia, this is the name of a town in the Yerevan province of Armenia.

Dmitri also asked: What is the longest word typed entirely with the right hand? The usable keys here are: HIJKLMNOPUY, and punctuation marks such as the hyphen, apostrophe, comma and period, as well as the space bar. His longest examples were the 13-letter PHYLOPHYLLIN and the 14-character JOHNNY-JUMP-UP. Dmitri explained that JOHNNY-JUMP-UP had to be typed entirely using lowercase letters, as otherwise the left hand would be needed to use the shift key to type the hyphen.

However, I have unearthed a longer example of a right-handed term. The availability of the space bar to the right hand allows for multi-word terms to be typed entirely right-handedly. The 16-character LILIUIM POMPONIUM. This is the scientific name for the turban lily, a rare lily now found only in a few isolated places in the limestone gorges of Southern France. The term can only be typed completely right-handedly when it is typed fully in upper case letters. If the term is typed in lowercase letters, the initial L has to be capitalised, and then the shift key would be required to type the remaining letters in lowercase, and this is operated by the left hand.

Any further advances on Dmitri’s typewriter words?