MY VISIT TO GRANT’S TOME

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It started as a simple mathematical problem discovered in the book 365 Exercises for the Mind, by Pierre Berloquin.

Find seven words which appear consecutively in the given word industrialization. The solution to the problem identifies the seven words as in, dust, trial, at, on, rial, and ion.

In mathematical counting problems the usual problem is to find the greatest number of words in any given word, but this problem obviously had a different twist. As any true mathematician would attempt, I decided to find all possible words rather than the seven consecutive words.

Starting at the beginning, I wanted to find all one-letter, two-letter, three-letter, etc. words in any given word. There was only one problem. Even though I have a fairly large vocabulary, I do not know many words which are one-letter words. Ask me to identify three- and four-letter words, and I am at ease. One letter? The only common single letter words are “a” and “I”! However, I was fortunate to hear about a book which could be my saving grace, One Letter Words – A Dictionary, by Craig Conley. I felt my confidence begin to soar because with the help of this dictionary I should easily be able to count all one-letter words in any given word, or could I? Being a bit of a skeptic, I tested my skill with the word “ait”. “I” and “a” are legitimate, but what about “t”? Sure enough, Mr. Conley provides 58 instances in which “t” is used as a word. As an example, “it suits you to a T” uses “t” as a word. Hallelujah! But “ait” is a fairly simple word. What about “Mozambique”? I feel a time-consuming project ahead. Actually, the dictionary is foolproof. There are thirty-five examples using the word “z” and even twenty-seven examples of the word “q”.

Now I can move on to counting the two-letter words. However, once again, I do not know many two-letter words: am, an, be, do, go, he, is me, no, of, so, to, up, and these are the only ones which come to mind quickly. Once again my vocabulary is being tested, but Jeff Grant has compiled The Concise Dictionary of 2 Letter Words, revised edition. This source has made counting words much simpler for me. I now feel that I can tackle just about anything. Let’s start with “ait” again. We have three single-letter words, and we need to investigate the three 2-letter words (ai, it, at, ti, la, and ta).

Looking at each word independently, I found the following information:

1. ai – “any member of one of the four species of three-toed sloths found in tropical America.”
2. it – (this one I can identify) – a pronoun, or “physical allure, especially when accompanied by personal magnetism and charm; sex appeal, particularly female).
3. at – (ah-ha! Another easy one!) – if not a preposition, then at least a subsidiary unit of value in Laos since 1955.
4. ti – identified as “the name of several woody plants of the Cordyline genus.” I thought it was a symbol for the element tin – oh, well, what do I know?
5. ia – another tricky one – “15-16th century Scots form of ‘jay’. A noisy European bird of the crow family with striking plumage.”
6. ta- as in ta-da? Nope – an “Annamese unit of weight equal to 16,000 dong, about 62.4 kg (137.5 lb). Wow, who would have guessed?

So for the word ait, we have three single-letter words, six two-letter words, and one three-letter words for a grand total of 10! Not bad.

What else? I expanded my search to identify all words in a four-letter word, starting with the word main.

I found the following:
1. Four single-letter words – m, a, i, n (all accounted for in the One Letter Words – a Dictionary).
2. Twelve two-letter words – ma, ai, in, mn, na, am, ni, mi, an, nm, im, and i. This is serious! Because I can only account for ma, ai (the two-toed sloth), in, am, an, and ia (the Scottish form for jay) as two-letter words, I hope that Jeff’s dictionary will save me for the other six possible words. Actually, they are all accounted for in the helpful book.
3. Twenty-four three-letter words – mai, man, min, ain, nim, mia, mni, mna, ima, aim, nam, ani, ina, imn, mia, ami, amn, ann, nma, inm, ian, nai, and iam.

In the last listing, acknowledging there are twenty-four arrangements of three-letters does not guarantee that they are all verifiable words. The few I can verify include mai, man, min, aim, nam, mia, and ami. That means I still need to justify the other seventeen permutations of letters as actual words.

I now believe I have a new project for Craig Conley and Jeff Grant. They have successful dictionaries for those of us who want to count one- and two-letter words, but I have exceeded the application of their books and need them to compile a complete dictionary of all three-letter words for me!

I found the two dictionaries to be extremely educational, entertaining, and useful for a novice word counter. Maybe if I never let anyone use these books, I will be able to win all games which include identifying actual words in any given word.

Added by the editor:

Word Ways readers are used to regarding any single letter as a word, but perhaps do not realize that each has multiple definitions.

Jeff Grant’s tour-de-force now lists all 676 two-letter words with legitimate citations for each. The book is written in Jeff’s delightful, playful style and well-illustrated by the artists David Lloyd (see “an ai”) and Debbie Caldwell (see “ro by ro”). For example, a humorous riddle is cited:

Q: What is an Eskimo dwelling with no toilet called?
A: An ig. (Ig is also defined later as to ignore or snub)

Anyone who would like a copy of the dictionary can post Jeff Grant $10 or 5 pounds sterling (post paid) to: Jeff Grant, 1109 Allenby Street, Hastings 4122, New Zealand.