A Retter

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Dictionary of American Regional English

Fall 2011

DARE: The View from the Letter Z (Part 2)

Joan Houston Hall

Here is the conclusion of a 2010 Dictionaries article written by our Chief Editor. (The first installment appeared in the Spring/Summer 2011 issue of the DARE Newsletter and can be seen at http://dare.wisc.edu.)

Come years ago we heard from forensic linguist Roger Shuy that he regularly uses *DARE* in developing profiles of writers of documents such as threat letters and ransom notes. My favorite of his examples is the story of his helping to identify a child abductor partially on the basis of the man's use of a distinctly regional term in a ransom note. The writer told the parents of the child to leave the money in a diaper bag "on the devil strip at the corner of 18th and Carlson." Where could Roger find out about devil strip? It was not in any of the current standard dictionaries of American English, the historical American dictionaries, or even the OED. But it is in DARE, where it occurs as one of dozens of regional synonyms for the strip of grass between the sidewalk and the street. The citations make it clear that this term is used in a highly circumscribed area: it occurs almost solely in northeastern Ohio, particularly within the triangle outlined by Youngstown, Cleveland, and Akron. The recognition that DARE's work in dialect geography could have implications for forensics and law enforcement was a thrill to all of us on the staff.

Similarly, it is gratifying to hear from physicians that they rely on *DARE* to understand patients who say things like, "I've been riftin' and I've got jags in my leaders," or who complain of having a *bealing*, *dew poison*, *pipjennies*, *pumpknots*, or *salt rheum*. Many such terms have distinctly regional distributions, but others are general folk usages or *Continued on page 2*

Funding Update

Jon E. Sorenson Director of Development

As I thought about writing this update, I instinctively turned to the copies of Volumes I–IV of *DARE* on my desk for ready inspiration. I thought maybe the letter T (in honor of Thanksgiving) might get me going. Then I realized I would not have that option until early 2012, when Volume V (Sl–Z) is published.

The anticipation for Volume V of the *Dictionary* of *American Regional English* is tremendous; it has been building since the publication of Volume I in 1985. Our loyal donors have brought us to this place, and that's why I thought of Thanksgiving as an apt starting point for reflection on where we are and how far we have traveled.

Thank you for your support, thank you for thinking of us every year when you make your annual charitable contributions, and thank you for your patience as we have marched steadily "on to Z." We could not do it without your generosity.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation by check or credit card, please use the coupon that appears on page 6. If you would like information on giving property or appreciated securities,

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View from the Letter ZContinued from page 1 old-fashioned or archaic terms. Because very few of them are included in contemporary standard dictionaries, it is crucial that medical staff have a resource to consult.

While we might have anticipated that kind of medical utility for DARE, it was startling to recognize how important DARE ought to be (but has not yet become) in the creation of medical diagnostic tests. A query from a psychiatrist about the terms false face, tom walkers, harp, and mouth organ alerted us to the pervasive use of a test designed to diagnose aphasia by having patients look at pictures of common household items and name them. While it is doubtless a valuable tool, it has potentially tragic consequences for speakers of regional dialects. Because the answer key fails to recognize more than one "right" answer, the Southerner who calls a mask a *false face*, and a pair of stilts *tom walkers*, and a harmonica a *harp*, or the Northerner who uses mouth organ rather than harmonica, will be marked "wrong." The use of too many regional answers

When I attended the DARE public program last spring in Madison, we were asked to call out any words that we thought might be of regional origin and, therefore, not familiar to everyone who was there. I mentioned the expression 'Vicks up.' A few people (women) who were from my area of Wisconsin and were about my age were familiar with the term. A few weeks later, I was standing in line (not 'on line') and I unexpectedly started coughing. I turned to a woman standing next to me and said, 'Excuse me. I didn't mean to cough in your direction. I hope I'm not coming down with a cold.' She was very nice about it and said to me, 'Go home and Vicks up.' I turned to her and, doing my very best Henry Higgins impersonation, said, 'Let me guess! You are in your mid- to late 50s and you grew up in central Wisconsin!' She looked totally shocked and wanted to know how I knew that. I told her about the *DARE* presentation I had recently been to and how 'Vicks up' seemed to be an expression recognized only by people who matched my description of her—and myself. By the way, she did grow up less than 75 miles from my childhood home.

Marjorie Zwickel Madison, Wisconsin

[DARE Ed: Although we didn't include Vicks up in Volume V, we're still collecting evidence of the use of this phrase.]

could badly skew the scoring of the test. I have recently been encouraged by the willingness of the current publisher of the test to consult with *DARE* when the test and answer key are next revised.

DARE's assistance to lawyers has ranged from the mundane to the amusing. In the former category, we have been able to provide essential information to lawyers who needed to know details such as the precise meaning of *publish* in 1927 and the definition of *group* in 1931. (While it would be relatively easy to do this kind of research digitally today, when the questions were asked, *DARE* was one of few places to find dictionaries from the appropriate times and places.)

A query more directly related to DARE's own research came from a New Hampshire Public Defender who wanted to know whether we had evidence that people routinely say such things as, "I could kill him," without ever intending to follow through with any violence. Of course we all know that people say things like that very frequently. But DARE had hard evidence, in the form of responses to half a dozen or so questions in our questionnaire. In answer to prompts such as "He's a whole week late. I'm going to _____." and "He's run off with my hammer again, _____!" many people vowed to "bash his head in," "beat his head in," "blow him up," "fan his ass," "wring his neck," "kill him," "shoot him," or "murder him." And these were in answer to pretty mild provocations! While I did not hear the outcome of the New Hampshire case, it was fascinating to think that DARE's records of the colloquial use of our language might conceivably contribute to the acquittal of an innocent person.

DARE's data have also contributed to various lawsuits concerning infringement or dilution of trademarked terms, sometimes relying on regional pronunciations captured on our audio recordings, other times on our historical collections, and in recent years on the vast array of digital resources available to us.

Perhaps the strangest request came from a lawyer who wondered whether we had evidence to document the term *mud flap* as an endearment. Apparently his client had written about a former girlfriend, referring to her in a poem with that term. The woman was not amused. We checked our own fieldwork and all the slang dictionaries on hand, but came up empty. It wasn't until several years later when I was driving behind a huge semi and

¹ I'm sure that it could also be extremely useful in constructing other kinds of tests of expressive vocabulary, such as those used by educators.

could not miss seeing the curvaceous female outlined in yellow on the black mud flaps, that I made the association. Depending on one's point of view, the term *might* be interpreted as an endearment!

In recent years, digital search engines have made it possible to discover many references to *DARE* that would otherwise have gone unnoticed. A sampling of items from our bibliography suggests the wide variety of contexts in which the Dictionary has proved useful: it is referenced in books and journal articles about Black and White racial and political identity, Muscogee oral traditions, nineteenth-century medical instruments, bioregionalism, human sexuality, midwifery, ethnic bias, labor history, cursing, consumer buying trends, and even computer software; it is cited in home and cooking magazines such as *Good* Housekeeping, Cook's Illustrated, and Food and Wine; and DARE is recommended in books about acting, public speaking, language taboos, research skills, fiction writing, and legal writing.

Printed references are of course only one gauge of the usefulness of a basic work of reference. Correspondence and conversations provide other useful indicators. A letter from the director of an oral history center, for instance, explains that when transcribers of memoirs are "stumped" by words not found in a standard unabridged dictionary, they turn immediately to DARE; a historian at a state museum reports that DARE has been "immensely helpful in a variety of public history projects"; a scholar of indigenous languages of the Americas recommends *DARE* to his colleagues because of the data on local words of Native American origin; the editor of the poetry of John Clare has discovered that many of Clare's dialect words still survive in regional use in the USA, even when they've vanished from use in Great Britain; and the American writer Tom Wolfe found DARE valuable in writing the Blue Ridge Mountains sections of his novel I Am Charlotte Simmons, even remarking that "DARE has become my favorite reading."

DARE's audio recordings, which provided linguistic research data from the start, have also been regularly useful to actors and dialect coaches, who have relied on them to represent the regional dialects of speakers all across the country. For example, Kate Wilson, a dialect coach for the Juilliard School's Drama Division, studied DARE recordings for the 2002 Broadway revival of Oklahoma! She reported that "yours were the best resources available for sounds of turn-of-the-century northeast Oklahoma. The clarity, diversity, and length

A further attestation to what a great dictionary *DARE* is: I happened to be reading a book about Buffalo called *The Last Fine Time*, by Verlyn Klinkenborg, in which he writes 'where all the local bars got their kimmelwecks, pumpernickel and rye,' and never having heard of kimmelwecks before, looked in the *OED*—no luck. Then I tried *DARE*, which had it as 'A caraway roll, used esp for a beef sandwich,' with a note specifying it as 'wNY, esp Buffalo,' with numerous citations. You can't get any better than that. (Of course, if I'd known German, it would have helped.) But it was nice to see *DARE* come through so spectacularly.

Sidney Landau
Author, Dictionaries: The Art and Craft of
Lexicography
New York, New York

of the recordings enabled me to make distinctions among the dialects of nearly forty characters." After using *DARE* recordings for a performance of Gore Vidal's *The Best Man*, she wrote, "An actor playing a character from Wilmington, Delaware came offstage every night to *enormous* exit applause. He would look at me and say, 'It's all about the dialect.'"

Recently a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania has applied the latest acoustic technology to *DARE* recordings in a project to supplement the materials gathered for *The Atlas of North American English* (Labov, Ash, Boberg). William Labov described the work as follows:

The DARE audio recordings offer promise of completing and enriching our view of American English pronunciation. Our Atlas is based on cities of over 50,000 population, and DARE offers the possibility of filling in the data on the great number of smaller communities. I am particularly encouraged by the fact that you were able to supply recordings in the Erie, Pennsylvania, area for my student Keelan Evanini. Keelan has developed methods of automatic vowel measurement that will make it possible to analyze automatically the entire set of DARE recordings of the reading text, "Arthur the Rat". This will short-circuit the usual painstaking problem of transcribing and aligning all of these recordings, and will give us a greatly expanded and more accurate view of regional boundaries.

As this description makes clear, the landscape has changed immeasurably since the beginnings of the *DARE* project. Along with these great strides in techniques of acoustic analysis, the burgeoning of digital libraries and valuable web sites has also revolutionized the ways we work and the ways we can share our findings. The forthcoming electronic version of *DARE* will allow us to update the printed text and to track the ongoing changes in American English. The result will, we trust, confirm the observation by a *New York Times* reviewer that *DARE* is "a work to consult, and a work to savor—a work to last a lifetime" (Gross 1985). ◆

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The DARE Bibliography: A Preview

Volume V of *DARE* will include a bibliography of all sources cited in the five volumes of text. These entries, compiled over a forty-five-year period by four bibliographers and dozens of project assistants, originated as handwritten records on index cards. The final version was produced from a database of nearly 13,000 electronic records in 2011. Here's a sneak peek at what's in this massive document.

We have cited 12,991 discrete sources in Volumes I–V. Among these are 8,957 monographs, 1,519 newspapers, 173 U.S. government documents, 38

dissertations and theses, 25 unpublished collections, 16 audio recordings, eight musical scores, four video recordings/motion pictures, three television programs, one screenplay, and one libretto. Fifteen U.S. Presidents are among those cited. The word *Plant(s)* appears in 219 titles; other words occurring frequently in titles include *Diary* (172 titles), *Dictionary* (157), *Garden(s)* (99), *Letter(s)* (93), *Song(s)* (60), *Cookbook* or *Cook Book* (35), and *Cowboy(s)* (31).

The earliest book cited in *DARE* is *A Briefe and True Relation of the Discouerie of the North Part of Virginia* by John Brereton, published in 1602. Our latest citations, mainly from electronic sources, are dated 2011.

The authors with the largest numbers of titles in the *DARE* bibliography are Bret Harte (29 different works); William Faulkner (27); James Fenimore Cooper and William Dean Howells (25 each); and Mark Twain (24). Our most prolific female authors are Harriet Beecher Stowe (17 different publications); Sarah Orne Jewett (14); Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman and Louisa May Alcott (11 apiece); and Willa Cather (10). (A future issue of this *Newsletter* will include a different kind of ranking: those authors who are actually quoted most frequently in the *DARE* entries.)

Titles in the bibliography range from the verbose to the pithy, the painfully descriptive to the cryptic, and the mundane to the humorous. As we work with them, we can't help but have some favorites! A few "staff picks" follow:

Burroughs, John Rolfe *Head-First in the Pickle Barrel*

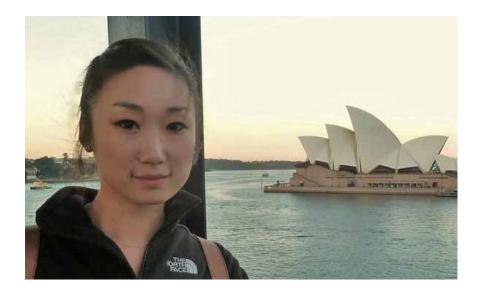
Moore, Ruth *The Dinosaur Bite*Myers, Tamar *Eat*, *Drink*, *and Be Wary*; *The Ming and I*; and *Play It Again*, *Spam*® (all mysteries)

Shepard, Elaine Forgive Us Our Press Passes Smiley, Jack Hash House Lingo

Tougias, Mike There's a Porcupine in My Outhouse: Misadventures of a Mountain Man Wannabe

Other staff favorites may not be funny in their full form, but are amusing in the abbreviated "short-titles" by which they are cited in *Dictionary* text:

Tingle–Moore Spooky TX Tales
Trautman Fishes
Vines Trees SW
Wigglesworth Insects ◆



Staff Member Profile

In this continuing series, Beth Gardner interviews Project Assistant Esther Hong. Esther came to DARE in 2005 as an undergraduate student worker and returned to the Dictionary when she returned to UW–Madison to attend grad school. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in the School of Social Work with a concentration in Child, Youth, and Family Welfare.

Q: How did you first become aware of the *Dictionary of American Regional English?*

A: It was during my freshman year at UW– Madison in an English course. My professor assigned us to write an essay on how a word becomes a word and present our findings to the class. One of my classmates chose to research and present on *DARE*. That was the first time I had ever heard about it. Then, about a year later, I came across a job posting by *DARE* when I was looking for a part-time job the summer of my sophomore year. I remembered hearing about it in my English course and thought it would be interesting to work for *DARE*, so I applied and worked there until I graduated.

Q: What are your current job responsibilities at *DARE*?

A: Currently, my primary responsibility is making corrections to the *Data Summary* [=all the responses collected during the original fieldwork]. However, I am also working on *DARE* maps for Volume VI, making sure that maps made on a plot-

ter twenty-five years ago are as crisp and clear as possible.

Q: What is the most enjoyable aspect of your work at *DARE*?

A: In my opinion, it's the people. Everyone is so friendly and makes you feel like you're a part of a family. This is how I felt when I first began working at *DARE* and again when I returned a couple years later.

Q: What part of your work do you find most challenging?

A: In general, I believe I'm careful and thorough with my work. However, I still think the most challenging part of my work is that it requires a great deal of meticulousness.

Q: What aspect of working on the *DARE* project has been the most surprising to you?

A: I would have to say the amount of proof-reading that one volume requires before it can get printed. The work does not end with choosing the words that will be included in the volume and writing entries for them. I had no idea this much work was put into creating a dictionary.

Q: What do you plan to do after finishing graduate school?

A: After finishing my graduate program, my plan is to work as a social worker doing international adoption. Initially, I plan on staying in Wisconsin. However, I would eventually like to work in South Korea for a few years and then move on to other countries around the world.

Q: When you have a rare moment of spare time away from your studies and your work, what are your interests?

A: Most of my free time is spent with my fiancé. We both enjoy window-shopping, so we often go to various malls and outlets when we have the time. I also spend quite a bit of time with my family, especially since my older sister and her husband recently moved back to Madison from South Korea. Although I've only had one official golf lesson from my father so far, I plan to continue to take lessons and pick it up as a hobby. •

Funding Update Continued from page 1 or including *DARE* in your estate plans, please e-mail me at <jon.sorenson@supportuw.org> or call me at (608) 262-7211. A donation to *DARE* might also be the perfect holiday gift for the person who has everything. ◆

It was definitely my pleasure to donate to *DARE*. As I have said, I've been interested in it for years, following its progress when I could. . . . I'm glad to do what I can to support this extraordinary project. ? ?

Hope Holiner E-mail correspondent

DARE in Humanities

Pare was featured in the September/October 2011 issue of Humanities, the magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Michael Adams's article, "Words of America: A Field Guide," deals with the history of dialect geography and of the DARE project and can be read online at http://www.neh.gov/news/humanities/2011-09/WordsofAmerica.html>. ◆

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During a recent trip to California, Chief Editor Joan Houston Hall had the pleasure of meeting one of DARE's longtime donors, Herrick Jackson, and his wife, Elaine. Herrick has been a supporter of the DARE project since 1994. He has not only contributed from his personal funds but has also directed gifts to DARE from several family foundations: the Connemara Fund, the Grace Jones Richardson Trust, and the Hillsdale Fund, Inc. His interest in DARE even includes using some of its entries in his poetry.

Volume V DARE Quiz

To whet your appetite for Volume V, here's a preview in the form of a quiz. Match the headwords in the left column with the appropriate definitions from the right column and send a copy of your completed quiz to Julie Schnebly, 6127 Helen C. White Hall, 600 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706. Your answers must reach us by January 27. If we receive more than one quiz with all the correct answers (or have a tie for the highest number of correct answers), we'll break the tie with a drawing. The winner will receive a free copy of Volume V! \blacklozenge

1. __ **slow-walk** (chiefly South Atlantic) smart (especially New England) 3. ___ **sneaky** (Pennsylvania German area) **sometimey** (especially South Atlantic) **spa** (Northeast, especially Massachusetts) 6. __ spouting (chiefly Pennsylvania, Ohio, Great Lakes) 7. __ squeeze the apple (West) 8. __ stand in with (chiefly South, South Midland) 9. __ **sulter** (southern Appalachians, Ozarks) tavern (northwestern Iowa, southeastern South Dakota) 11. __ tear the bone out (especially Arkansas) 12. __ tee-nincy (chiefly South, South Midland) 13. ___ thunder egg (chiefly West, especially Oregon) 14. __ thunder pumper (especially western Great Lakes, Upper Midwest) 15. __ uff-da (Norwegian settlement areas, especially Minnesota, Wisconsin) 16. **___ vamoose** (West) 17. __ veiller (Louisiana) 18. __ wedge, wedgie (chiefly southeastern New York) 19. __ whay (especially northern New England, Upstate New York) 20. __ wicked (New England, chiefly Maine, Massachusetts) 21. __ wonder (especially Pennsylvania German area) 22. __ wreck pan (West) 23. __ wrist (Upstate New York) 24. __ X's-and-O's (especially North Central, Pennsylvania, West Virginia) 25. __ you betcha (chiefly North, North Midland, California, Texas; now espe-

cially Upper Midwest, Northwest)

zori (especially Hawaii, West)

- A. Tick-tack-toe.
- B. A roof gutter or downspout.
- C. A geode.
- D. To leave in a hurry.
- E. A bittern.
- F. A receptacle for dirty dishes.
- G. A thonged sandal.
- H. To pursue slowly but persistently.
- I. To pay a visit.
- J. To hold on to the saddle while riding a horse.
- K. A sandwich made with crumbled ground beef.
- L. Fickle, moody, inconsistent.
- M. A small restaurant, tavern, or soda fountain.
- N. Fastidious, particular (about food).
- O. Healthy; chipper, spry.
- P. To make an extraordinary effort.
- Q. Yes, indeed; certainly.
- R. To surprise, amaze.
- S. To side or be in league with.
- T. Very tiny.
- U. To swelter.
- V. An expression of surprise, aversion, disgust, or pain.
- W. An ear of corn whose husks have been pulled back.
- X. A large sandwich.
- Y. Very; extremely; really.
- Z. Go, go on—used as a command to a cow.

Volume V of *DARE* Available for Pre-Order

We are pleased to be able to offer *DARE*Newsletter readers a 20% discount on Volume
V (or any previous volume) of the *Dictionary of*American Regional English. The coupon on page 8 of this issue provides instructions for ordering online or by phone, fax, or mail.

Volumes I–IV are available immediately; as this *Newsletter* goes to press, Volume V is expected to ship sometime in February. ◆

DARE Newsletter

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