

Wördos? About 20 persons who meet once a month in Minneapolis and talk about our English language. Abbreviations: ST = Minneapolis Star Tribune, PP = St. Paul Pioneer Press, NYT = N.Y. Times, WSJ = Wall St. Journal, unatt = don't know source, undtd = don't know date, nsltr = newsletter, newsrls = news release, AHD = Am. Heritage Dict. III, GMAU = Garner's Mod. Am. Usage, OED = Oxford Dict. Of Eng. Lang. II, Warriner = Warriner's English Grammar & Composition, YFIO = you figure it out., Stringer = contributor. Italics used freely for emphasis. We have a Web page: <http://www.wordos.net>. Our motto: *Claritas super omnia*: clarity above all."

Once again from the Wördos:

*Merry Christmas!*

### White elephant gifts

- "LOUISVILLE POLICE FATALLY SHOOT MAN *WITH GUN*" (Louisville Courier-Journal, 7-14)
- "In 1913 field hands who picked hops, an ingredient for *beer that grows on vines*, lived near Wheatland, north of Sacramento." (Newsphotographer, May issue) Wördo Peg Alnes: "They can come over and plant one of those trees in my back yard."
- "Ferrets attack more people than grizzly bears." (TV commercial, undtd) Wordo Jack Finnegan: "Ferrets just can't bear to attack grizzlies."
- "At the time of arrest, Franklin was found to be carrying a note commanding cash *and a pair of latex gloves*." News release, Minneapolis FBI Field Office, 7- 17, 2009. Wördo Fred Webber: "I'd have demanded a getaway vehicle."
- "She was the *daughter of deceased parents*." (Obit, unatt, undtd, Cremation Society of Minn.)



**Agreement, sad lack of:** "One in three parents *are* (is) unable ..." (ABC, 9-16) "...every doctor for *themselves*." ABC promo for Grey's Anatomy, ABC, 9-24) "Give your child *their* (his or her) opportunity." (TV ad selling a CD for "...acquiring vocabulary and knowledge, undtd) "(He will) divide his fortune *between* (among) his three young daughters." (Bravo Channel, 9-25) "... and everyone has to decide which side *they're* (he, she, or recast) *is* on." (Paul Krugman, NYT, 10-30) "(The) legislative Commission on Planning and Fiscal Policy staff *don't* (doesn't) have windows in *their* (its) basement ... but the group *they serve* (it serves) has tried to shed some daylight on end-of-session deal-making." (Session Weekly, undtd)

**Ambiguous reference:** "Fritz Kenas, an uncle of the victim who lives in Montrose, Mich., said Tuesday ..." (Anthony Lonetree, Paul Walsh, ST, undtd) Wördo Fred Webber: "Who lives in Montrose? I'll guess the uncle, because the victim was dead." A misplaced prepositional phrase can render a sentence clumsy, confusing or even comical ... Prepositional phrases should come as close as possible to the words they describe." (Philip Corbett, NYT, editor of "Times Topics," 9-1) "A misplaced prepositional phrase can render a sentence clumsy, confusing or even comical ... Prepositional phrases should come as close as possible to the words they describe." (Philip Corbett, NYT, editor of "Times Topics," 9-1)

**Bravos!** "She is a *staple* member of the RAC." (Roch. P-B., 9-14) Right. AHD: "*Staple*: principal, main." "FUR FLIES OVER CAT DECLAWING" (ST, 11-8) But should there be a hyphen in *de-clawing*? You decide. "*None* of her letters *has* survived." (David McCullough, "Truman." p. 81)

**Huh?** “Obama will have to *convince* (persuade) developing countries to make serious efforts.” (NYT, 7-11) “A report about the loss of on-street parking *due to* (because of) the building of the proposed ... transit line...” (Unatt, undtd) “... part two *cannot* (can not) be done.” (NYT, 9-1) “It’s *alright* (all right) ...” (Salon.com., 9-28) “... *most* (drop the qualifier) *unique* museum.” (Hennepin History Museum website) “Does this *infer* (imply) that Burns was murdered?” (NCIS, 10-6) “She moved to Minneapolis at age 5 and was a *lifelong* (no she wasn’t) resident of North Minneapolis.” (ST obit, 10-18) “(They expressed concerns) about anyone but a veterinarian *floating* a horse’s teeth.” (Veterinary newsltr, undtd) *Floating* a horse’s teeth means to grind them down flat. – Ed. “... *data shows* (show)...” (ST, 8-2) “Kyle Simmons *ar-rowed* this 28-point Iowa megabuck Oct. 16th...” (Caption, North American Whitetail, Jan. issue) “They (Ole Miss’s football team) left with their eight-game *losing* streak gone ...” (ST, 9-25) No: It’s their winning streak that was gone. “Chicago at night burns *bright* (brightly).” (National Geographic, 11-25-08) “(These) *affects* (effects) of the budget...” (S. Croix River News, 9-18) “This is an *interim-party* (inter-party) battle.” (Politician, Almanac, CH2, 7-3) “(They) *sunk* (sank) their team’s chances.” (Mark Craig, ST, 1-12)

**Individuals, persons, people:** “Some *individuals* (persons) at Merrill Lynch even collected bonuses totaling more ...” (ST, 8-10) AHD: “The word *person* ... rather than *individual* will usually do the same semantic job with less affectation.” Erik Wensberg, MAU: “When we say *persons*, we are thinking of *ones*, of individuals with identities; whereas when we say *people* we should have in mind a very large group...”

**Idioms, tortured ones:** “Is that a *red flag* that he’s running for president?” (Almanac, CH2, 7-31) No. A *red flag* indicates that something is radically wrong, or “Stop!” **Mojo**, as in “Is The U.S. Losing Its *Mojo*?” (TV, 10-10-09) AHD: “Personal charm or magnetism.” “His choice of running mate *was an earnest of his intentions*.” (The Economist, 9-12) “**Thrown under the bus**.” (Several Wördos have reported sighting this incoming idiom. (Dali Lama) “Personal charm or magnetism.” “**A died-in-the-heart** (dyed-in-the-wool) romantic.” (Roch. P-B., 9-14)

**Quotes, the “scare” kind:** “(He was eating) at Lansky’s, a ‘classic Jewish deli’ on the West Side.” (New Yorker, 11-16) The quotes around *classic Jewish deli* are meant to convey irony. It’s not a legitimate Jewish deli; it’s a *so-called* Jewish deli. The term *scare quotes* seems to be taking hold; I prefer *ironic quotes*.” – Ed.

**Words we looked up in our (AHD) dictionary.** *Disingenuous*, as in “... whipped up *disingenuous* complaints.” (NYT, 10-30) “*Disingenuous*: Not straightforward or candid, crafty.” **Trove**, as in “That is a *trove* of official exhibits.” (NYT, 10-31) “*Trove*: A collection of valuable items.” “It was disturbing to his calculus.” (New Yorker, 11-11) **Zeitgeist**, as in “... part of the *zeitgeist*.” (Time, 8-31) “*Zeitgeist*: The spirit of a time; the taste and outlook of a period or generation.” **Disputatious**, as in “...his long, happy and *disputatious* life.” (The Economist, 9-26) “*Disputatious*: Inclined to dispute.” **Concupiscence**, as in “The banks’ vicious cycle of greed and *concupiscence*...” (Maureen Dowd, NYT, 11-11) “*Concupiscence*: A strong desire, especially a sexual desire.” **Avatar**, as in “... the *avatar* of real Americans.” (NYT, 11-18) “*Avatar*: An embodiment, as of a quality or a concept.” **Suborn**, as in “I saw ... how conviction can be *suborned* by eloquence.” (Harold Evans, “My Paper Chase,” p.186) “*Suborn*: (1) To induce a person to commit an illegal, or an evil, act.” (2) To induce a person to commit perjury.”

--your humble & obt svt Robert MacGregor Shaw

