

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."

## Contestants stumble on *weird, lain, implied, and an antecedent.*

Thirty-six persons took the Wördos's grammar-spelling-style test Jan. 27-28-29 at the annual convention of the Minnesota Newspaper Association in Minneapolis.

Top winners, missing only one of the test's ten questions, were Joel Stottrup, Princeton Union Eagle; Jane Howard, Cook News-Herald; Rob Passons, Mille Lacs Messenger; and Craig Kotasek, Gaylord Hub. There was only one prize – a book, "Origins of the Specious" by Patricia O'Conner. Mr. Kotasek, in a drawing, got the book.

Contestants had the most trouble with a test question about an antecedent: "*In the sentence 'Neither of the houses has its furnishings yet' the antecedent of the pronoun its is house. (correct, incorrect)*" Eighteen circled *correct*, which was incorrect. The antecedent of *its* is *neither*, subject of the sentence.

Spelling also caused trouble. In the test question: "*Circle the word or words correctly spelled: accomodate, existance, presede, seperate, and wierd*", sixteen contestants circled the (incorrectly spelled) "wierd." All five words in the test question were misspelled.

Two other stumbling-blocks involved *lain* and *implied*. In the sentence "*He had (laid, lain) there 24 hours before they found him,*" 16 incorrectly circled *laid*. In the test question "*The mayor said he would not rule out a tax increase, the mayor (inferred, implied) taxes would be raised,*" 11 contestants incorrectly circled *inferred*. – Ed.

## Bloopers

"A day before burying his wife, a thief robbed Arnold Jacobson of \$300." (CH5, 12-31-'09) Wördo Fred Webber: "It was Jacobson, not the thief, whose wife was buried. And, being entirely too literal, neither one of them did the burying."

"The (stimulus) money is being directed to local government or semi-governmental *intuitions*." (ST, 12-18-'09)

"(Her mother) committed suicide *when she was four*." (Kerri Miller, MPR, 1-14)

Wordsmith-Columnist James Kilpatrick writes: "My files include a 2-year-old who was naked from the *waste* down, a teen-ager who tangled with bees and suffered red *whelps* on her arms and legs, and the driver of a tow truck whose vehicle was equipped with *wenches*."

## Good work!

"He wanted to *wreak* (not *wreck*) some havoc." (NYT, 12-26-'09)

"Candid Cameras Catch Cook With Cash At Cub" (ST, 1-13) Wordo Marlene Reuber: "Great alliteration!"

"First Families Are Famous For Fawning Over Their Fauna." (ST, 1-24) More of the same.

"Please *lie* (not *lay*) down." Wördo Helen Beggs says that a therapist actually said that to her recently. Employees in clinics and hospitals generally almost always say *lay* down. – Ed.



**Agreement, sad lack of:** “Neither Martin nor the 9-year-old child *were* (was) injured.” (Katie Humphrey, ST, 9-29-’09) “The condition of the victims *are* (is) not known.” (NPR, 1-7) “... luring two men to their *death* (deaths)...” (ST, 1-20) “One in seven parents ... *say* (says)...” (ST, 11-25-’09) “*Her* (she) and her employer ...” (Tom Crann, MPR, 11-19-’09)

**Ambiguous reference:** “The 21-year-old boyfriend of an aspiring chef from Eagan found dead last week in a ditch near Owatonna ...” (Abby Simons, ST, 12-6-’09) Hold on: who died – boyfriend or chef? “At least two other Minnesota women have been killed despite obtaining orders for protection *in recent months*.” (Heron Estrada, ST, 1-18) No. They were killed in recent months, not obtaining orders in recent months. “LSU is investigating ... violations involving an assistant football coach and a member of the team *that* (who) *has not played this season*.” (ST, 12-1-’09) Apart from the *that-who* blooper, this says that the team, not the coach and a team member, has not played this season. The presence of *has*, though, suggests that a single human did the non-playing.

**Huh?** “It cost *nearly* 300 lives.” (Pres. Obama, commenting on passengers who might have died on Flight 253 to Denver.) No. It cost no lives. It *nearly* cost 300 lives. “(She died) peacefully and *unexpectedly surrounded* by her family.” (ST obit, 12-29-’09) Did she die unexpectedly or was she unexpectedly surrounded? A comma after unexpectedly would have helped. “He (Jesus Christ) *literally* took the keys from Satan’s hand.” (PTL-CH, 12-20-’09). “...*lot’s* (lots) of excitement ...” (Paul Douglas, MinnPost.com 12-23-’09) “... a *touristy* (NCF) park.” Chris Riemenschneider, ST 12-22-’09) “... floods, ice storms, *draughts* (droughts)...” (Paul Douglas, Minnpost, 12-31-’09) No. Wördo Fred Webber: “AHD 4<sup>th</sup> ed says *draught* is a British variant of *draft*.” “...the piece is *available only* (only available) ...” (David Brauer, MinnPost, 1-4) “She *sites* (cites) no legal authority.” (PP, 1-4. Thanks, Holly Wenzel) “You hate to say it or you’ll jinx it – like *Hamlet*.” (Robyne Robinson, KMSP, 1-11, re Vikings chances to go to the Super Bowl.) Holly Wenzel: “No. Methinks she was referring to the theater superstition about saying “The Scottish Play” instead of “Macbeth.” “... kids are *alright* (all right).” (WSJ, 1-12) “... boxes of *unknown* (unidentified) items.” (ST caption, undtd) “Money to *Loan* (lend), Locally Owned” (Ad for Waukon, IA, bank, unatt, undtd) “... last, but *hardly* not least...” (Pat Ruff, ST, 9-14) YFIO. “Healthy Big Unit Set For 500<sup>th</sup> Career Win.” (ST, 2-16)

**TV people, oh how they talk!** “... that dramatic *of* (take *of* out, redundant) a step.” (Mark Albert, CH5, 12-25-’09) “Has this *sediment* (sentiment) shared ...” (Joe Soucheray, CH5-AM, undtd) “A driver can get behind the wheel, but *they’re* (he’s) not going anywhere.” (Tim Sherno, CH5, 12-26-’09) “Either of the last several days.” (CH4, 1-6) YFIO. “The U.S. is *lagging* (behind) European countries.” (MPR, 1-20) It’d be nice if someone *rung* (rang) a bell.” (Renee Tessman, CH11, 12-29) “... went *further* (farther) west.” (Eric Perkins, CH4, 11-28-’09) “If it *would’ve* (had) hit the house ...” (CH11, 8-8-’09)

**Words we love to hate:** Wördo Mark Warner: “ ‘*The reason why*’ for me is a major annoyance, but here’s a lesser one – a radio ad challenging us to ‘Compare Our Prices! There’s No *Comparison!*’ And one more: sportswriters are promoting the word *plated* as a synonym for *scored*, as in ‘Matt Tolbert *plated* (scored) Cuddyer after that triple in the 10<sup>th</sup>’. This strikes me as desperately colorful.” An unidentified Wördo is bothered by *thusly*, as in “One account describes the amendment *thusly*...” (ST, 1-14) Wördo Robert Shaw hates the sugary word **Mom**, as in “*Mom, Boyfriend Held* (P-P, undtd). “It’s baby-talk: short for ‘mommie,’ as in ‘Mommie - man I go out and play?’” Wördo Helen Beggs: “I don’t like **going forward**. Whatever became of ‘in the future?’”

**Words we had to look up** in AHD, our favorite dictionary: **Arrant**, as in “... the V.P.’s *arrant* candor.” (Joe Klein, Time, 12-28-’09) AHD: “*Arrant*: Completely such, thoroughgoing.”  
– *yr obt svt, Robert MacGregor Shaw.*