

"EVERYBODY LOVES A BABY . . . "

GEORGE J. GRIESHABER
Wyoming, Ohio

I use my 1961 Webster's Third New International Dictionary, backed up by a 1945 Second Edition. I was raised, literally, on an old Funk and Wagnalls which lifted me five inches closer to the dining room table top.

When a good friend asked me to acquire for him a Second Edition, I checked our local used book stores -- and found none. One manager said he gets a copy only when he buys a whole library from an estate. Would he save a copy for me? He has a standing offer from a certain company of \$75 for each Second Edition in good condition. He said that he believed they like the regular letters for pronunciation versus the signs and schwas used in the Third. The next day, I found in a good-will second-hand shop a First Edition dated 1920 for only \$5, so I picked it up for another reference work.

In glancing over my three big Websters, I happened to compare the word "baby" and its compounds or related words. I made a gynecological study of the listings: their beginnings, changes, retentions, and deletions. Here are three columns of words, with some notes on their development through the gestation periods of 25 and 16 years in the three dictionaries. Anyone whose life-span encompasses the full term will recognize some of the reasons and periods for various coinages. (B) means that the word was banished to the limbo of below the line in the earlier volumes (all words in Webster's Third have equal rights).

1920	1945	1961
baby (babe)	baby (babe)	baby (babe)
baby blue	baby blue	baby blue
baby blue eyes	baby blue eyes	baby blue eyes
baby primrose	baby primrose	baby primrose
baby's breath	baby's breath (B)	baby's breath
baby farm	baby farm	baby farm
babyish	babyish	babyish
babish (B)	babish	babish
babyhood (B)	babyhood (B)	babyhood
baby bottle		
baby jumper		
babyolatry (B)		

baby fern (B)	baby fern
baby pin (B)	baby pin
babies' feet (B)	babies' feet (B)
babies' toes (B)	babies' toes (B)
babies' slippers (B)	babies' slippers (B)
baby act	baby act
baby lace	baby lace
babyhouse	babyhouse
babyship (B)	babyship (B)
babeship (B)	babeship
baby ribbon	baby ribbon
babehood (B)	babehood
babyism (B)	babyism (B)
babydom (B)	babydom (B)
baby threader (B)	baby threader

baby heathberry
 baby seal
 baby bunting
 Baby Volstead Act
 babyfied
 babe-faced
 babylike (B)

baby pink	baby pink
baby orchid	baby orchid
baby rambler	baby rambler
baby talk	baby talk
baby eyes	baby eyes
baby tears	baby (baby's) tears
baby bond	baby bond
baby beef	baby beef
baby grand	baby grand

baby buggy (carriage)
 baby carrier (flattop)
 baby coach
 baby face
 baby Louis heel
 baby-minder (sitter)
 baby-pig disease
 baby spot
 baby tooth
 baby walker

It is interesting to note that we men had a "baby blue" way back in 1920, but Women's Libbers had to wait many years to get "baby pink" listed in Webster's Second! Why anyone would drop "baby bottle" in 1945 is hard to understand, because that type of feeding has been increasing since 1920. Possibly the meaning of the two separate words was so obvious that the editors saw no advantage in continuing to list them. This reason may have spelled the demise of several other words as well.

But why did it take until 1961 to recognize "baby tooth" which goes back to Adam (or did he skip them?)? Of course, some word-combinations containing "baby" refer to other things; the seemingly-obvious "baby eyes, feet, toes, slippers, tears, and breath" are all in the flower and plant families. "Baby Volstead Act" was most ephemeral, coming in with the Eighteenth Amendment and going out with the Twenty-First. The writer did "baby-sit" as far back as 1922, but cannot remember what the occupation was then termed. (He does recall, however, that the fee was 50 cents per evening, with snacks allowed from the icebox.) And though the song "Baby Face" was copyrighted in 1926, he had to wait until 1961 for the definition!

In 1945 they dropped "babyolatry", or child worship -- does this mean that there is not as much these days to justify the word? And "baby bunting" went out in 1961. How will today's children learn what mother is singing "bye" to? Does anyone recall what daddy went a-hunting for? The addition of "baby spot" has nothing to do with the onset of measles, but refers to a small spotlight used in stage productions.

"Babyship" and "babeship" do not refer to vessels, but "baby carrier" does. And though "baby buggy" and "baby carriage" are in a sense baby carriers, they are just plain perambulators or prams (from way back, but chiefly British).

Some unfortunate words started lowly below the line, later rose gallantly above the line, but had their hopes and ratings dashed when Noah III gave them the axe. Someone said, "To bring in a new word by the head and shoulders, they leave out the old one". Such is life -- at least, the life of a word.