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Many, possibly most, of the words in the dictionary stand there as representatives of a whole family of forms. Not even the timidest of the linguistically timid will run to the dictionary for encouragement when, for instance, they want to refer to a spell of "hiccuping," provided they are certain that Webster does know "to hiccup."

All the tense forms, the participles, the gerunds are assumed to be authorized by implication the moment the infinitive is known to exist. The plurals of nouns are similarly taken for granted, and the forms of comparison and the adverbial forms of adjectives.

This phenomenon is generally covered by the assertion that a dictionary is not a grammar and that each individual entry in a dictionary stands simultaneously for all its grammatically possible forms. (For details, consult your grammar.)

But is a gerund a grammatical form? Or is it a suffix-derived noun?

I am not really looking for an answer. I ask those questions to suggest that the dividing line between grammatical form and derived neologism is both hard to define and artificial. If I distinguish—among men—the "hunting" from the "hunted," I have done no more than form (grammatically) two nouns from two adjectives which are forms (grammatically) implied in the existence of "to hunt." But if "hunting" is implied, why not "hunter"? Why not "huntee" and "hunnable" and "huntabilize"?

The question of when a new word is a new word and when it is merely an "implied" form of a conventional term is indeed more complex than is grossly apparent. Take "dehairability" as an example. Can I claim the word is implied in the existence of "hair," or must I assume the responsibility for having spawned a monster?

Or take "unequivocably," which indeed was the starting point of all this reasoning and wondering, for it was spotted as a bold neologism in *JAMA* in the sentence, "Research at the Public Health Service Hospital at Lexington, Ky, has unequivocally proven that methadone has all of the euphoric properties of morphine. . . ."

Now, clearly, the adverb "unequivocably" is grammatically implied in the adjective "unequivocable," and this in turn is implied—grammatically of semi-grammatically or otherwise—in "equivocable." If we grant further that formations in "-able" of "-ible" are likewise legitimate without special dispensation, we shall conclude that "unequivocably" is in no sense a bold departure since "to equivocate" is a firmly established, standard English word.

But there is a hitch and a flaw in the argument. "To equivocate" means "to use ambiguous language" and (by extension) "to render ambiguous." Hence, "equivocable" can only suggest the trait of "being apt or able to be made ambiguous," and that, I fear, was not intended. Which means, by (nongrammatical) implication, that the discrepancy between the obviously intended meaning of "unequivocably" and its structurally supported significance was the cause of the unpleasant jolt experienced by the spotting reader.

PS.—It is of course possible, and even likely, that "unequivocably" was just a typo for "equivocally."

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