

New Score

Think of a word you can remember learning. Make a prediction of how many times you will use it in your life, and when you will stop using it.

When I was three, my grandfather read "*Rikki-tikki-tavi*" to me from Kipling's *Jungle Book*. I liked it so much I taught myself to read using the next story, "*The White Seal*". I don't remember *learning* new words, but I'll never forget how much trouble I had with *spelling* them, especially the one that gave me the most trouble: "**the**". I had learned the *sounds* of all the letters, but no one had told me about *diphthongs*, and I'd never heard anyone say, "tuh,huh,eh". Having two letters make one sound seemed like a dirty trick and made me mad, but I got over it... sort of.

Since then I reckon I've used that word in nearly every sentence I've spoken or written, except this one. Well, on average. Let's say about once in every dozen words, like in the above paragraph. How many words have I spoken or written in the past 73 years (I don't count the first 3)? Hmmmm. A page of typed text is about 360 characters; my words average about 6 characters each, so that makes about 60 words/page, for about 5 "the"s per page. I have around 400 publications, averaging around 20 typewritten pages each, and they were all rewritten several times, so "CV-related" writing adds up to some 16,000 pages. "Other" writing is probably at least 4 times as voluminous, so let's say a total of 80,000 pages or 400,000 "the"s *written*.

Surely I talk as much as I write, maybe more. (??) So I'm going to round up to about a **million** "the"s so far. Plus or minus an order of magnitude, I reckon. Since I doubt I will live long enough to double that number, the difference between "so far" and "in my whole life" is within the uncertainty. :-(

More recent examples would be "**narrative**" or "**text**" as expropriated by postmodern sociologist-philosophers. Let's not go there. I use those words all the time with their original meanings, but *never* that way. Grrr...