

The WAGER, Vol. 3(41) - Your cheatin' hearts

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Geneticists collect DNA samples. The Census Bureau collects demographic data. Philatelists collect postage stamps. Linguists collect words. Contrary to popular opinion, the discipline of linguistics involves considerably more than upside-down 'e's and odd-looking 'a's. In actuality, the scope of the linguist may include physiology, literary criticism, history, evolutionary biology, and ethnography. It is the latter method that Thomas Clark employed to gather the 20,000 entries of gambling-related lingo. Through interviews and participant-observation, Clark and colleague Thomas Martinet, who is a boxman in the craps pit at a club in Las Vegas, compiled a sizeable list of "insider" gambling terms. Of the 20,000 entries, Clark estimates that 10% are words or phrases associated with cheating. Selected terms and definitions, taken from the lexicon of dice and card games, are listed below. It should be noted, however, that the entries below were gleaned from research conducted between 1978 and 1986. Jargon is dynamic, and it is entirely possible that some items have either fallen out of popular usage or have been replaced with newer terms. For general readers, the collection provides an entertaining look into the secret world of the corrupt gambler. To linguists, it provides an opportunity to study the transmission of language and identity in a closely-knit subculture to which few are privy.

A Selected Vocabulary of Cheating

High belly strippers (<i>n pl</i>)	Cards (usually face cards) that have been trimmed and sized along the long side in such a fashion that the dealer knows which cards have the highest value.
Check copping (<i>n</i>)	Stealing chips from a stack by holding them to the palm of the hand with a paste.
Glim worker (<i>n</i>)	Cheater who uses a mirror to see the undersides of cards as they are being dealt.
Pin gaff (<i>n</i>)	Small pin or hog bristle embedded in the edge of a die to affect the roll on a blanket or felt.
Pipe salesman (<i>n</i>)	Honest player; a square john, though not necessarily a sucker or pigeon.
Juice-joint (<i>n</i>)	Gambling house that uses electricity to control magnetized dice.
Breastworks (<i>n pl</i>)	Metal contrivance worn under a shirt, vest, or jacket for holding a card or cards until needed
Broad-tossing mob (<i>n</i>)	Confederates who cheat at three-card monte.

Source: Clark, T.L. (1986). Cheating terms in cards and dice. *American Speech*, 61(1), 3-32.

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