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## liar, *n.*

**Pronunciation:** Brit. /'lʌɪə/, U.S. /'laɪ(ə)r/

**Forms:** OE **léogere**, *Northumb. légere*, ME **li(h)ȝere**, ME **lieȝer**, **liare**, ME **leier**, ME **lyere**, ME–15 **lier**, (ME **ly(e)ȝere**, **lyȝer**, **liȝer**, **leeȝer**, **leigher**, **liere**, **liyher**), ME **legher(e)**, **ligher**, **lygher**, **lyare**, ME–15 *Sc. lear*, ME–16 *lyer*, ME–17 *lyar*, (16 *lyarr*), 16– **liar**.

**Frequency (in current use):**

**Etymology:** Old English *léogere* (= Old High German *liugari*, Icelandic *ljúgari*), agent-noun < *léogan* LIE *v.*<sup>2</sup> See **-AR suffix**<sup>3</sup>, **-ER suffix**<sup>1</sup> 2.

**a.** One who lies or tells a falsehood; an untruthful person. ***I'm a liar***, (in trivial use) I am mistaken.

c950 *Lindisf. Gosp.* Matt. vi. 5 Mið ðy gie gebiddas ne wosas ge suæ **legeras** [*other versions* liceteras; L. *hypocritæ*].

a1023 *WULFSTAN Homilies* 79 Up arisað lease **leogeras**.

c1175 *Lamb. Hom.* 13 Ne beo þu lihȝere ne for eye ne for luue.

c1290 *S. Eng. Leg.* I. 333/362 A strong **liare** and man of false lawe.

1340 *Ayenbite* (1866) 62 Þe lyeȝere is ylich þe dyeule þet is his uader.

c1374 *CHAUCER Troilus & Criseyde* III. 260 (309) Auautoure and a **lyere** al is on.

1413 *Pilgr. Sowle* (1859) I. xvii. 18 He..hath ben found an open **lyer**.

1470–85 *MALORY Morte d'Arthur* xx. xiv They that told yow the tales were **lyers**.

c1480 (►a1400) *St. Peter* 422 in W. M. Metcalfe *Legends Saints Sc. Dial.* (1896) I. 19 Quhedir he a lele man or a **lear** be.

c1540 (►a1400) *Destr. Troy* 12590 Thus lytherly bo **lyghers** lappit þere tales.

1552 ABP. J. HAMILTON *Catech.* Prol. f. 2<sup>v</sup> He is ane **lear**, and in him yair is na verite.

a1586 SIR P. SIDNEY *Apol. Poetrie* (1595) sig. G4<sup>v</sup> Of all Writers vnder the sunne, the Poet is the least **lier**.

1614 W. RALEIGH *Hist. World* I. II. xxii. §6. 547 Poets are **liers**, and for verses sake Will make the Gods of humane crimes partake.

a1764 R. LLOYD *Fam. Epist. to J. B. in Poet. Wks.* (1774) I. 96 Who are known **lyars** by profession.

1782 V. KNOX *Ess.* (1819) I. ii. 12 An habitual **liar**..must possess a poor and pusillanimous heart.

1864 DICKENS *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) I. I. xiv. 130 ‘Now tell me I'm a **liar**!’ said the honest man.

1875 B. JOWETT tr. Plato *Dialogues* (ed. 2) I. 359 You are a **liar**, Meletus, not believed even by yourself.

1940 *Sunday Express* 31 Mar. 3/5 ‘That's not my brother Sid you met in here last Thursday. Or was it Friday?’ We said we didn't remember... ‘I'm a **liar**. It was Wednesday.’

1972 W. GARNER *Ditto, Brother Rat!* xv. 105 Last winter, was it? No, I'm a **liar**. The spring. That's

right.

*Proverbs.*

c1250 *Ten Abuses* in *Old Eng. Misc.* 184 Old mon lechur, ȝunch mon lieȝer [2nd text lyere].

1539 R. TAVERNER tr. Erasmus *Prouerbes* sig. E.ijj<sup>v</sup> A lyer ought not to be forgetfull.

a1555 H. LATIMER in N. Ridley & H. Latimer *Certein Conf.* (1556) f. 10 Lyars hadde nede to haue goode memories.

a1607 H. CHETTLE *Trag. Hoffman* (1631) sig. I2<sup>v</sup> Lyer, lyer, licke dish.

**b. the liar (Logic):** the name of the paradox involved in a speaker's statement that he is lying or is a (habitual) liar; so **liar paradox**, **paradox of the liar**.

1871 T. M. LINDSAY tr. F. Ueberweg *Syst. Logic* v. §77. 245 This case happens when, and only when, the *truth of the judgment* is itself the *object of the judgment*, or belongs to the object of the judgment. The ancients have empirically discovered this case, without..giving an account of its logical nature. What is called '*The Liar*' represents it. Epimenides, the Cretan, says, all the Cretans are liars.

1906 J. N. KEYNES *Stud. & Exerc. Formal Logic* (ed. 4) App. B. 457 The sophism known as Ψευδόμενος or *The Liar*.

1908 B. RUSSELL in *Amer. Jnl. Math.* XXX. 240 Hence his statement is false, and yet its falsehood does not imply, as that of 'I am lying' appeared to do, that he is making a true statement. This solves the liar.

1940 B. RUSSELL *Inq. into Meaning & Truth* iv. 62 The inference from the paradox of the liar is.. as follows.

1959 E. W. BETH *Found. Math.* vi. xvii. 485 The natural first reaction to the liar paradox is to ascribe the contradiction to the fact that the statement involved refers to itself.

1967 *Encycl. Philos.* V. 46/1 But one, the Liar,..is still of great interest to us.

1970 R. L. MARTIN (title) The paradox of the liar.

1971 *Philosophy* 46 133 (heading) Tarski, Frege, and the liar paradox.

## COMPOUNDS

### C1. attrib. or adj. Lying, deceitful.

a1400 (►a1325) *Cursor Mundi* (Vesp.) l. 6819 Tak þou noght wit tung leier.

### C2.

**liar dice** *n.* a gambling game resembling poker dice, in which the thrower conceals the dice thrown and sometimes declares a false score; also *ellipt.* (in *pl.*).

- 1946 J. SCARNE *On Dice* (ed. 2) xvii. 386 Liar or Doubting Dice. A popular game on transpacific liners and in the Far East, it is now gaining rapidly in popularity in the United States.
- 1956 M. McMENNIES *Flying Fox* I. iv. 55 Everybody was round the bar playing liar dice.
- 1959 R. KIRKBRIDE *Tamiko* v. 37 ‘Which do you play, Balin?’ ‘Which?’ ‘Liars, Horses, Cameroon—.’ ‘I don’t play dice.’
- 1966 O. NORTON *School of Liars* i. 2 I spent two months in graduating from the empty lounge to the bar, two more in..reaching the inner group, the liar-dice school.
- 1966 O. NORTON *School of Liars* ii. 23 We sat there playing liars until twenty past two.
- 1971 C. BONINGTON *Annapurna South Face* ix. 107 After the meal we played liar dice or Scrabble, with our tape-recorder blasting out music in the background.

**liar's bench** *n.* (see quot. 1859).

- 1859 *Nares's Gloss.* Liars'-bench, a place in St. Paul's Cathedral in the sixteenth century, so called because it was stated that the disaffected made appointments there.

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