

# The Use of the Meta-Syntactic Variable ‘Foo’

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A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
by  
Michael JasonSmith

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University of Canterbury  
2000



To Spiny Norman.



## Abstract

The uses of the word 'Foo' is discussed with historical context and modern ramifications stemming from its use as a meta-syntactic variable.



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## Acknowledgments

I will like to thank all the hedgehogs, without there help this thesis would not be a reality.



# Chapter I

## Foo in History

The first use of ‘foo’ was during World War II, when unknown aircraft were referred to as ‘Foo Fighters’. Another related term was FUBAR, for Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition. As Eric S. Raymond says in the Jargon File[?]:

The etymology of hackish ‘foo’ is obscure. When used in connection with ‘bar’ it is generally traced to the WWII-era Army slang acronym FUBAR (‘Fucked Up Beyond All Repair’), later bowdlerized to foobar. It has been plausibly suggested that FUBAR was influenced by German ‘furchtbar’ (terrible). It has also been reported out that 1960s computer manuals, in a usage influenced by Fortran’s implicit-declaration feature, frequently used F00 (F followed by two zeros) in examples.

### ***1.1 Foo in Computer Science***

Computer Science<sup>1</sup> has picked up on the use of ‘foo’ to stand for something, any element but no specific element. It sits outside the syntax of any language (including English) and is able to describe the syntax, hence the meta-syntactic nature of the word.

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<sup>1</sup> and computing in general