Molecular geneticists propose that all living human beings are
descendants of a single woman who lived about 250,000 years ago.
Evolutionary linguists propose that the cladogram of all human
languages follows closely the cladogram of the molecular geneticists.
Does it then follow that all of modern English derives from the
language spoken by our prehistoric mother? And, if so, how is
it that synonyms arise?

One hypothesis is that languages evolve in a way akin to the
game of telephone. Someone hears a word just a little bit off,
and repeats it to the next person as they heard it, not as it
was spoken. After a few repetitions, this process leads to harmless
party amusement. Could the same process, expanded to archaolog­
cal time scales, explain the origin of synonyms?

Since we don't have access to recordings of prehistoric speech,
how do we test this hypothesis? Perhaps we can observe it opera­
ting a little bit over short time periods. Are there words that are
synonyms of one another, but that differ only a little in pronunci­
ation? There are a large number of onomatopoetic words, such as
TOOT and HOOT, or CRUNCH and MUNCH, or even CHEEP, BEEP and
PEEP -- but these might have entered the language independently.
No, what we need is a list of words that clearly evolved from
the same word through a process of meta-telephone. Turning to
Webster's Ninth, we find the following list of 26 such words, one
starting with each letter of the alphabet. Can the reader improve
on these, with longer and/or closer words?

Finally, PECK, PICK, POKE is a set of three telephone synonyms;
can the reader think of a set of four? (Onomatopoetic words are
not allowed by definition.)

A asperity, austerity = rigor
B bulbil, bulblet = small bulb
C careen, career = to go at top speed in a headlong manner
D dribble, drizzle = spray
E expertise, expertism = skill
F funeral, funereal = solemn
G glitter, glimmer = shine
H haggle, higgle = negotiate
I immerse, immerge = submerge
J jointure, juncture = joint
K khaddar, khadi = Indian cloth
L lagan, ligan = goods thrown into sea for later recovery

QUERY

Jeff Gray
New Zealand

(1) Appear for are
don (2) Is cor the as
the as sib do or or exe
beings are years ago. all human geneticists. so from the so, how is akin to the ttle bit off, not as it to harmless archeologic-

or speech, e it operat-

-words that are in pronunci-
ds, such as i, BEEP and dependently.
volved from 

Turning to 

words, one 
der improve

the synonyms; 
c words are

ing manner

recovery

QUERY

Jeff Grant, Waipatu Settlement Road, RD 2, Hastings, New Zealand asks:

(1) Apart from cooee, assegaiing (Chambers) and oooa (solid form only in Mrs. Byrne’s Dictionary as far as I know), are there any other dictionary words with consecutive doubled vowels?

(2) Is there a word (any source) with consecutive doubled consonants? Not counting words where the pairs are the same, such as esssee (OED), or nonce-words such as ppprrpfrpppf in Joyce’s Ulysses, I thought of possibilities like myrrhhead (by analogy with acidhead or pothead), sshh (a variant of shh which I can’t find), or Welsh place-names. Can readers identify a legitimate example?