SPOONERISTIC VARIATIONS

SUSAN THORPE
Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, England
thorped@hotmail.com

A plethora of spoonerisms has appeared in Word Ways over many years. A spoonerism is the result of exchanging the initial letter(s) of a pair of words to make another pair of words. BASKET CASE - CASKET BASE, MATCHING HAT - HATCHING MAT and FAKE LOG - LAKE FOG are examples. Sometimes the two word pairs are related (MINGY STAN - STINGY MAN). They may even follow on from the other, as do MISSED HOLE - HISSED MOLE. A variation of the basic spoonerism is the homophonic spoonerism. These are less restrictive and include at least one letter/letter group which is replaced by a different letter/letter group having the same sound, as in DOLE QUEUE - COAL DUE (see also Word Ways 2001224). Whatever the type, spoonerisms are pleasing to the ear because the ends of the words have the same sound thus retaining a double rhyme.

A pair of words has four ‘ends’ - two beginnings and two ends. By exchanging different initial and terminal combinations, or their homophonic equivalents, the double rhyme end can be replaced by a single rhyme end, by a single rhyme beginning, and then disappear altogether. Examples of these 3 categories are given below. Those in which the two word pairs are related, or follow on, are italicised.

The exchange combinations are:

1. the end of the 1st word with the beginning of the 2nd word
   The result is slightly stilted but the two 2nd words still rhyme
   CUP TIE SAT DOWN STORM SAIL MOD CONS CHESS CLUB MALE DOVE
   CUT PIE SAD TOWN STORES MAIL MOCK DONS CHECK SLUB MADE LOVE

2. the beginning of the first word with the end of the 2nd word
   Now the result is noticeably more stilted because only the two 1st words rhyme.
   GOT STAN STILL ROOM COACH TRIP THROW BACK LAPSE RATE TOAST RACK
   NOT STAG MILL ROOST POACH TRICK CROW BATH TAPS RAIL COAST RAT

3. the end of the first word with the end of the 2nd word
   All rhyming has now been lost.
   BAY TRAIL CAT FLAP TAX BRAIN TINY SHOE MAY CALLS WE SIGHT
   BAIL TRAY CAP FLAT TRAIN BACKS TOO SHINY MAULS KAY WHITE SEA

SPOONER’S TRIPLETS
Back to spoonerisms proper. Why stop at word pairs? Here, the initial letters/sounds of a word trio are exchanged on a sliding, circular basis, either clockwise or anticlockwise. It’s not easy!

   MAX FELLS TREE WYN SENT MILLY GILL WAITS HERE
   FAX TELLS ME MIN WENT SILLY HILL GATES WEIR
   TAX MEL’S FEE CYN MEANT WILLY WILL HATES GEAR

Can any Word Ways’ reader construct a Spooner’s Quadruplet?