STUTTERANCES

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This, I learn, is an old idea, but it is new to me, and readers may not mind some fresh examples. By a stutterance (stammered utterance -- no doubt some more pretentious term already exists) I mean a sentence (ideally) in which each unit of sound is at once repeated. The stutterance will be of the first, second, third, etc. order according as the unit of sound is a monosyllable, disyllable, trisyllable, etc., and of the first, second, etc. degree according as the echo is single, double, etc. Some examples:

Claude clawed
God, free Godfrey
Al, be no albino
Auntie, this is antithesis
(first order)
(second order)
(third order)
(fourth order)

These, though they vary in order, are all of the first degree. Degree is, in fact, mentioned only for completeness. Practically every stutterance will be of the first degree, and (unless otherwise stated) may be assumed so. A single example of a first order second degree stutterance is:

Ha, ha, ha! M' mamma can can-can!

Perceptive readers will already have noted the overlap with homophones, which I discussed at length in an article in the August 1969 Word Ways. There is a parallel here with palindromic writing. Stutterances are akin to ordinary palindromes, homophones to pairs of reversal sentences. Put more clearly: in a homophone there will be only one echo, usually of a fairly high order, which need have no semantic or grammatical connection with the original sound-sequence; in a stutterance there will normally be repeated echoes, usually of a fairly low order, and the whole must knit together into a single meaningful statement.

The distinction between homophones and stutterances is best illustrated by example. Here are a couple of homophones from the earlier article:

Healthy parlourmaid's inconstancy.
Hell, the parlour made sin constant, see!

Aztec Island. Picnickers sup ... Billberries, aired ale.
As tec I land, pick knickers up; Bill buries airedale.
In contrast, here are some first order stutterances:


Four foremen mending dingo go-cart carted Edward's wards to toothy Themis, miss.

Grey Graham's hamster Turner's nurse drowned round his dismal Malden den.

"I died," murmured Edie.

"Lou, Lewis is gaga!" says Cecil. "Ill," murmurs Izzy.

Mimi eyed Ida, a new nudist, distressed, restless lest Otto and Andy Esau saw.

"No, no!" cries Kreisler. "Learners, Nurse, play plainer, Nurse: E-C!"

Tacks tax my Myra's reserve, serve too to pierce Peirce. (One really should tidy up more carefully after laying down lino in the lodger's bedroom.)

War Warsaw saw.

"Well, well," said seduced (Euston on train) trainee Edie, "demob mob!"

Would Woodward ward off offal, Al?

We have to consider here whether or not to allow cyclic stutterances, that is, if the normal form be denoted symbolically by PPQQ.. SS, then the cyclic form will be PQ.. QQSS. I take no sides here, beyond pointing out that, on the one hand, an unrepeated initial sound tends to get forgotten after a succession of echoes, unless it is in some way distinctive; while, on the other, the device may permit a shorter and/or more naturally sounding sentence. Thus, to revert to a previous example, the stutterance

War Warsaw saw  

is hardly so natural as

Warsaw saw war.  

Readers may consider for themselves the merits or demerits of an expanded version:


Here are two more cyclic examples, specially chosen to illustrate certain points. The first shows the value of a distinctive initial sound, here 'Jack', which is not forgotten after a dozen intervening sound-and-echo pairs. The second is reasonably natural and concise: try, if you wish, to straighten it.

Jackson's sons are Arthur (thirsty!), Steven (vender), Dermot (motors), Orson (on air), Errol, Roland and Jack.

Tersely Leigh said, "Sedan! Anne rues roosters."

Jackson's sons are Arthur (thirsty!), Steven (vender), Dermot (motors), Orson (on air), Errol, Roland and Jack.

Tersely Leigh said, "Sedan! Anne rues roosters."
Other qualities than her regret over domestic cock-birds may of course be predicated of the above lady. She may, for instance, have it said of her that she 'twit-titters', or 'Dick, decoys oysters', or 'had had gay gaiters', or 'had had beaux -- boasters!' An intriguing identikit portrait begins to emerge of a rather fast and flamboyant livestock-handler, who certainly had her ups and downs!

The rest of our examples will be straight. Here are some second order stutterances:

Agreed a greedy man, "Demand Patty's patties."
Anne drew Andrew. Her man, Hermann, wrote a rota.
Bella's bell has allowed a loud clang or clangor.
Candy can decode a code -- a double in Dublin, "Caesar," sees her. (Fib by fib I esp'y a spy.)
Hugh let Hewlett inform in Form on slow Onslow.
Jones's Joan says Tommy's Tom is well in Welwyn.
Orange (or angelic, Alec!) are my Army pay-purse papers.
Paul ate Paulette. (Friday, fried.)
Spat her. (Spatter!)
Rhoda rode a pall-free palfrey, has tried astride.
Rosie rows easily, silly! Unfed on tide, with oar we thaw.
Sawney saw knees naked. Snake hid under underwear, just where Justin sighed inside.
Sedley said Leigh abhorred a board, Andy -- and he bowled a boulder!
Whither? With a toucan two can, as you, a show attend at end. Willy will imagine Madge in morning mourning.

Second order stutterances are often more effective, more fun and easier to write than first order ones; there is, for example, a much greater choice of opening sounds, and in consequence little need to consider the cyclic form. Stutterances of the third and higher orders are also fun and effective -- when you can manage them. The difficulty here is 'keeping it up' and finishing your sentence as triumphantly as you began it. Some third order examples:

Barbara's barber has 'bullet in' bulletin -- "Shotter!" Tim shot at him.
Bruno said, "Brew-nosed manual man, you'll abandon a band on your head -- wear your head-wear!"
Evil in Evelyn comma'd his comedies; second, and second-hand, a lad in "Aladdin" mellowed his melodies.
Foraging for aging Cobb, we blessed cobweb lest his spiders espied us.
Harry ate Harriet (Newmarket), knew Mark ate -- Valetta? Val ate her!
Horse-tripper -- or stripper? God, I've a Godiva!
Huguenot Hugh, go not mirador-mirrored, or May Seymour may see more!
Janet (or janitor Anderson) and her son Jocelyn jostle in.
Nigh Towcester knight-ouster Madison made his son Lance-
lot lance a lot.
Placing a play-singer, "Doncaster Don", cast a Portadown porter down.
(Perhaps the self-important fellow demanded a corner seat facing the engine in an otherwise crowded train.
These musical comedy stars think so much of themselves.)
"To mosque ride!" Tomos cried plus forte. "Pew 40! In go -- Inigo, Con, Garbo (con garbo) and Auntie andante!"

Win dough, Saul,
Windows all
Shuttered or
Shut a door!
Have a lock,
Havelock!
Secrecy --
See, Chrissie?

Just a final sprinkling of higher-order examples:

Anna conned an ANACONDA - NOTICE! board as Otis bored us.
"Soup eere or superlor? Go steadily!" Ghost Eddie Lee, a waiter, says. "Await hearsees."
On a mat, adored -- eyes -- honour -- matador dies.
Wee Christopher's freed a weak wrist of hers, Freda.

Do we accept stutterances of mixed order? Presumably we have to, since they exist, but no one need construct examples unless he or she wishes. Just for completeness:

Alexander, Alex and Ernestine nest in a loft aloft.
Maidie may deliver liver andante, and Auntie and her son Anderson (a lone Canadian) alone can aid Ian.
"Will Will Plantagenet plant a genetic ichthyosaurian, Theo?" sore Ian (queer id) queried.

Which is enough and more than enough for one issue.