Tetraphones in the MWPD

The well-known group RITE, RIGHT, WRIGHT, WRITE has the property that all four words have identical pronunciations, but differ in meaning and in spelling. WRIGHT does not appear as a main entry in the New Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary. The group CERE, SEAR, SEER, SERE has the same property with all but CERE in the MWPD. Groups of four homophones are rare enough to make it a safe bet that you can't produce one with all four members in MWPD. But we're not betting you won't find the one we serendipitously turned up the other day. It wasn't AI, AYE, EYE, I (AI is not in MWPD). What was it? We'll give you the simple substitution cipher equivalents of the four words, with the words arranged in alphabetical order:

1 2 3 2 4 1 2 3 5 4 1 2 3 3 6 4 7 2 3 2 4

If you solve the crypt and find the MWPD Tetraphone, you get the Gold Bug Award. If you fail, see Answers and Solutions. Are there any other MWPD tetraphones?

Hybrids

It may have been the Great Doodles Weaver who invented The Hybrid Game many years ago. He crossed a bee with a doorbell and got a humdinger. He crossed an owl with a goat and got a hootnanny. What do you suppose he got when he crossed a sponge with an electric eel? A shock absorber, that's what. Our favorite Weaver hybrids were the result of crossing

1. an abalone and a crocodile
   (an abadille and a crock o' baloney)
2. a rooster and a porcupine
   (an angry rooster)
3. a parrot and a boa constrictor
   (Weaver didn't know exactly what the offspring was, but when it talked, he listened!)
We crossed a peccary with an armadillo and got an armory and a peccadillo. We crossed this result with a postage stamp and sent it to Rochester. Mary Youngquist crossed the inspiration with a fertile brain and produced several dozen additional hybrids. A bittern plus an inch produces an intern and a bitch. From a forgiving mistress emerges a misgiving fortress. Cross a morass with a jackal and get a jackass and a moral. Some more of Mary's hybrids are disguised with synonyms in the quiz below:

Cross a With a And get a And a

1. blue dye apex dizziness pointing finger
2. conveyance textile decaying flesh type of cheese
3. university guardian ward hobbyist
4. stingingness bowling lane divorce award garnish
5. soporific song bet mursupial pistol
6. Frankenstein helix old maid lesson
7. Pope resin big dog Black Sea
8. vine large house tapered axle stretching
9. dagger splash Iberian ceramicist
10. pantry howitzer tinning factory clothes fastener

This is definitely an open-dictionary quiz. If you get half of them right, you are entitled to a pair of wings and a nanny-goat. That way you can fabricate your own flying buttress.

We put all this together in Indian Territory where we crossed a Shawnee and a Kickapoo. We got just what we deserved: a puny kickshaw.

Infinity Equals Three Department

Noted in a recent column by Bert Bacharach: "Nighttime driving is infinitely more dangerous than auto travel during the day. The highway fatality rate is three times greater after dark, says the Nat'l Safety Council."

The Indefinite Gender

We've been using the coined word "hirm" in this department as the objective pronoun in contexts such as "each reader should consider this challenge as if it were directed exclusively to hirm ... " We feel it is preferable to the cumbersome "him or her", the male-porcine "him", the neuter "it", or the illogical and ungrammatical "them".

We're not the only self-appointed word-coiner, we're happy to say. Don Rickter of Arlington, Massachusetts has sent us further suggestions for eliminating some of the communication roadblocks that arise from the failure of our language to evolve indefinite pronominal inflections; some of these suggestions are incorporated in his letter to the editor of the Unitarian Universalist World Magazine of May 1, 1973. He proposes "xe" (pronounced zee) for the indefinite "he or she", "xem" for
the objective case (superior to our "hirm" which does not permit similar forms for the other two cases), and "xes" (pronounced zex) for the possessive.

Don Rickter's etymology is based on the association of X with the unknown. He says he would prefer the pronunciation ksee instead of zee for "xe", but people with whom he has discussed the subject tend to prefer the latter. Don also suggests that the husband of Ms. Jane Smith be referred to as Mr. (pronounced murrer) Jane Smith. This proposal, unlike the coinages of the indefinite pronouns, was not serious, but we submit that it deserves serious consideration, since there are many contexts in which it would be useful, logical, and appropriate, e.g., Mrs. Billie Jean King coached her wife from the bench.

There are other gaps in our pronoun inflections, most notably in the case of the possessive form of the relative pronoun "which". We suggest, instead of introducing the confusing form "which's" which sounds like "which is", or using the ungrammatical "whose", the coinage "whix" (pronounced wix) for both singular and plural. We also recommend that "its" be supplanted by "ix" for the same reason: to avoid confusion with "it's".

To repeat a phrase of Don's, if any reader has ideas for introducing new pronoun endings in cases where they are sorely needed, we would appreciate it if you would take it upon yourselves to send us your ideas.

Name of a Name

After reading the August 1972 Kickshaw, Albert Wilansky of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania sent us another batch of "A Quiz of a Quiz" questions. An example: SYNONYM is an antonym of "antonym". In the quiz, the X word that satisfies the relation X is a Y of "Y" is given, and you are asked to guess the Y. As was true of the original quiz, not all of the entries given below rigorously follow this format; some satisfy the relation X is a Y of Y instead. (For example, FOURTH is half of half, not half of one.) In fairness we should remark also that occasionally the preposition "of" should really be "for" or "from".

1. 1233456
2. 2345678
3. 3456789
4. 1
5. 5
6. 6
7. 7
8. 8
9. 9
10. 10
11. FRANCAIS
12. DEUTSCH
13. SHAPE
14. SAME
15. VERBALIZE
16. PLUS
17. PHOBOPHobia
18. SOLOMON (or XERXES, or DARIUS)
19. FROM GREEK "ETIMOLOGIA"
20. LAURENCE OLIVIER

For answers, consult Answers and Solutions at the end of the issue.
of X with the
thing instead of
the subject tend
of Ms. Jane
Smith. This
was not seri-
ous, since there
was and appropriate,
unusual.

but notably in
which. We
his which
plural. We

for introduc-
ted, we
send us xes

ansky of Beth-
II Quiz" ques-
tion". In the
Y is given,
original quiz,
format; some
FOURTH
remark also
for" or "from".

or DARIUS)
LOGICA"

of the issue.

The Logophile's Bookshelf

Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary (Unabridged Second Edition) was pushed in Kickshaws last August as a $15.95 Publishers Central bargain. Ralph Beaman advises that it can be obtained for only $11.95 postpaid from the 3M Company; check or money order, plus the plaid tab from a roll of "Scotch" brand tape, should be made out and sent to Dictionary Offer, P.O. Box 9990, St. Paul, Minnesota 55177. The latest Publishers Central catalogue offers two more items of logological interest: #27210, Webster's New World Dictionary (elementary edition) for $2.98, and #KO6862, Slang and its Analogues, by J. S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, for $2.98 also. The latter is of little practical use for one who already owns Eric Partridge's masterpieces, but from an historical viewpoint -- well, that's a different matter. Partridge began slang-gathering in the 1930s while Farmer and Henley go back to the 1890s. There's plenty of entries for all your obsolete-slang bluffs. Send money plus 75¢ handling charge (plus N. Y. or N. J. sales tax if you are a resident of either state) to Publishers Central Bureau, Department 345, 33-20 Hunters Point Avenue, Long Island City, New York 11101.

Recommended out-of-printers for the more serious logophile: Words and Their Ways in English Speech (Beacon, 1962), by Greenough and Kittredge; Our Language (Pelican, 1954), by Potter; The Story of Our Language (Dolphin, 1962), by Alexander; and Growth and Structure of the English Language (Doubleday Anchor, 1956), by Jesperson. Though each has its unique treasures, these four paperbacks cover a lot of common ground. Best historical perspective on the language, from Beowulf to the BBC, is found in Jesperson. Lightest and most entertaining is the Alexander book. Mario Pei, who has the knowledge and analytic ability, should only have the flair for presentation of Henry Alexander, or, even better, of Gary Jennings, whose Personalities of Language was reviewed in the November 1971 Kickshaws. Pei's The Story of Language is a better soporific than Sleepeze, and while reading his more recent What's in a Word (Award Books, 1968) we discovered the remarkable fact that one can actually hear oneself begin to snore.

Next time, we'll review the two-volume paperback collection of essays on The English Language from 1490 (William Caxton) to 1964 (Anthony Burgess), published by Cambridge University Press.

For some time now we've been pushing the idea of writing an article entitled "The Compleat Logophile's Bookshelf". Actually, it could be a continuing series of articles, somewhat like "My Most Unforgettable Character" of Reader's Digest fame. We'd like to see an annotated list of some of the rarer books of logological interest to be found on the shelves of such Grand Bibliologophiles as Dmitri Borgmann of Dayton, Washington (who had amassed a library of 600 reference works as far back as 1964) and Warren Cordell of Highland Park, Illinois (who has acquired over the years more than 5000 old dictionaries, books on words, English language and its history).
Shaggy Doggerel

Two more spoonerhymes from Mary Youngquist, the Genesee Bard:

Ode to Los Angeles

Poor city!
Sore pity --
Fell smog
Smell. Fog.

Sequel to "Three Little Kittens"

Keen mittens,
Mean kittens.
Saw pie ....
Pause ... (Sigh!)

Albert Wilansky of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania adapted a standard limergimick to the couplet form:

There lived in our abode a nice lieut.
He moved, and now we're seeking a nieut.

Kickshaw Updates

In response to our solicitation to some reader to enlarge on the Fractured French concept, producing a compendium of Tortured Tongues, Phil Cohen gave us an off-the-top-of-the-head example of Lacerated Latin that is the best we've seen yet: CAVEAT EMPTOR -- spelunker.

Dmitri Borgmann, whose Language on Vacation and Beyond Language are mandatory items on the Compleat Logophyle's Bookshelf, has now doubled our stock of straight flush words. As discussed in the August 1973 Kickshaws, a straight flush word is one with five distinct letters from the same half of the alphabet and proceeding in alphabetical or reverse-alphabetical order. We had one of each type (ACHIM, NORUZ, YUPON, LIFED) which led us to the statistical conclusion, based on the a priori rarity of such forms, that there must be approximately 2,880,000 five-letter English words. Now that we have eight straight flush words as the result of Dmitri’s discoveries, this estimate must be increased to 5,760,000:

- ABD-EL - one of the names of Abd-el Krim (N. Y. Times Obituary Index) who died in 1908
- DEFIL - "to be or become stupid" (a 16th-century word from the Oxford English Dictionary)
- LIGED - "told lies" (see lige in Webster’s Second Edition)
- MIGDA - typographical error for Migdal, an Israeli town (Times Index-Gazetteer); the terminal L was printed on a longitude line on the map and omitted from the name

Two more Variety Headlines for you to decode:

1. Detective Rapped For Mainlining
2. Beauty Contest Judge Bribery By Winner

The second will be recognized immediately as a Parisian melodrama
that degenerated into a bit of horseplay, but few readers will latch on to the first (see Answers and Solutions).

In the August 1972 Kickshaws we showed how Broadway hits could be abridged for TV by combining pairs of songs. Drawing upon her record collection, Mary Youngquist points out several possibilities that we overlooked:

My Fair Lady: Wouldn't it be lovely - without you. Why can't the English show me?
Brigadoon: Jeannie's packing up the heather on the hill.
The Sound of Music: An ordinary couple - Maria and the lonely goatherd.
Mr. President: I've got to be around the First Lady. I'm gonna get him in our hide-away. Don't be afraid of romance -- you need a hobby.
Mary Poppins: A man has dreams -- the perfect nanny.
Captain January: The right somebody to love at the codfish ball.

French Orthography

French and English have the crummiest orthographies of any languages on earth. They are so bad that poor spelling is sometimes an indicator of intelligence. You ask two eight-year-olds to spell FEUD; one gets it right, and the other spells it FUDE (by analogy with CUTE). Who is smarter, the one who happened to have committed the spelling to rote memory, or the one who reasoned by analogy? (A tough question, the answer to which requires a much more carefully-designed experiment.) We suspect that many extremely intelligent adults are very poor spellers because they learned early that spelling rules are more ritualistic than useful. Makes sense, doesn't it?

Now we all know that spelling reforms have been attempted many times, without effect. It's understandable, since a new orthography requires the established spellers (the adults) to perform some new learning. Nevertheless, innovations such as almost, nite and do-nut have achieved moderate success in elbowing their way into an ever-growing list of alternate spellings. Albert Wilansky uses what seems a sound modification of English orthography in resolving the unnecessary confusion between READ (v., pres. tense) and READ (v., past tense). He spells them REED and RED, eradicating a pair of ambiguous homophones and creating two unambiguous pairs of homonyms. He has no illusions about the chance of having his improvement adopted generally, but teachers, writers, researchers, and other people who never have enough time to read everything that comes to hand, the types who might make the marginal notation "read this", will find Wilansky's reformed spelling useful.

Children's Candor

Kids, being honest until corrupted, sometimes say embarrassing
things. As they grow into the pre-teens, they temper their frankness in ways that are sometimes amusing. The story is oft-told about the seven-year-old who was given a book about elephants. When asked how he liked it, he said "This book told me more about elephants than I wanted to know."

We heard also of a little girl whose grandmother gave her a pincushion for her birthday. "How did you like my gift?" asked Grandma. Said the little girl: "It's something I've always wanted, but not very much."

A Veterans Day Hero But A Noel Coward

We called on our friend Yul Tydings and found him thoughtfully lining a long list at his Louis XV escritoir. Peering over his narrow shoulder we saw: "... Five surly kids (wait three beats), four-or-dumb in-laws, three cheapunts, two neighbors (loud) (two beats), and the crosspatch who's married to me." "What's that supposed to be?" we asked quizzically. "Just my Christmas fussbudget," replied Yul tidily.

Portmanteau Words

Lewis Carroll popularized portmanteau (blended) words, though he did not invent them. One of his blends is CHORTLE (snort, chuckle). Another is SLITHY (lithe, slimy). A portmanteau he didn't coin: BRUNCH (breakfast, lunch). You are invited to write down the numbers of those words given below which you believe are bona fide portmanteaux with the parent words given in parentheses. Don't guess; if you accept a fake as a portmanteau or reject a real one as an imposter you get a minus on that entry. In other words, your wrong answers will be subtracted from your right ones, and those who score less than four will not qualify for a Waring Blender. The authority is the Oxford Etymological Dictionary.

1. GRASP (grip, clasp) 6. BLURT (blare, spurt)
2. FLAUNT (flout, vaunt) 7. CHUMP (chunk, lump)
3. HARRY (harass, hurry) 8. SPLUTTER (splash, sputter)
4. FLURRY (fly, hurry) 9. TWIRL (twist, whirl)
5. BLOTCH (blot, botch) 10. GRUMBLE (growl, rumble)

The Pedant Predicts

Webster's Fifth Unabridged will have a lot of unpleasant surprises, according to the Pedant, who foresees the inevitable, grudging acceptance of scores of rank mispronunciations. At least they are mispronunciations at this point in time (as opposed to this point in space). In the future we will find that CONSUL is pronounced cown-sell, NUCLEAR nuke-yuh-luhr, BARBITURATE bar-bit-you-ate, COUP-D'E GRACE coo-duh-grah, and the popular pronunciation of SHORT-LIVED will become statutory. Incidentally, how do you pronounce SHORT-LIVED?