KICKSHAWS

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Readers are encouraged to send their own favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Associate Editor. All answers appear in the Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

The Logophile’s Bookshelf

In the November 1973 Word Ways, Ms. Jezebel Q. Xixx reviewed Palindromes and Anagrams (Dover, 1973) by editor emeritus Howard Bergerson, praising the book with faint damns. Granted, the reviewer admitted the book to be a logological "sine qua non", but she then proceeded to devote three-quarters of the review to carping at the quality of some of the entries and complaining that the proof-reading had been less than perfect. The thrust of the review, as we saw it, was that with only a little more effort this book could have been a masterpiece.

In the words of Martin Gardner’s friend and numerologist, Irving Matrix, we couldn’t possibly fail to disagree with Ms. Xixx less. When an author seeks to assemble as rich a treasury of logological gems as has yet appeared in print, he should be spared the additional burden of meeting the quality criteria of every potential reviewer. At a recent coin convention at the International Hotel in Los Angeles, one of the most popular exhibits was a collection of Russian gold coins dating back to the regime of Ivan IV. The unanimous consensus was that the collection, though far from complete, representing only about half of the 300-odd mintages struck during a period of four centuries, and containing specimens that had been all but effaced by generations of handling, was an unqualified masterpiece. So it is, we feel, with Bergerson’s collection. Had he not gathered it, we would never have had the opportunity to savor palindromes such as ANNE, I STAY A DAY AT SIENNA, or anagrams such as DYNAMITE / I MAY DENT and MOONLIGHT / THIN GLOOM. Though each reader, like Ms. Xixx, will have his own preference, he is certain to give Palindromes and Anagrams a prominent place in his logological bookshelf.

Polyphones

In the November 1973 Kickshaws, we posed the question: are there any other groups of four homophones than CARAT CARET CARROT
KARAT, in the New Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary? Ralph Beauman tried and rightly rejected IDLE IDOL IDYL IDYLL, the latter two being alternate spellings of each other. If MWPD listed the Greek letters as words (it doesn't), NU would complete the group KNEW GNU. If liberties are allowed, such as going to Foreign Words & Phrases and extracting a single word from a phrase, Ralph obtains a group of four with TO TOO TWO TU, the latter from "Et tu, Brute!" (or, as Caesar put it, "You two ruffians!"). Ralph finally found an unassailable quartet in OAR OR ORE O'ER.

The Word Botcher writes "If you don't restrict yourself to MWPD arbitrarily or prohibit inferred inflected forms, I can give you a hexaphone, which I defy you or your readers to surpass or even match with another hexaphone: ISLE, AISLE, I'LL, EYE'LL, AI'LL, AYE'LL.

You say that last one is not a word? Ask a sailor if he'd like a few days liberty and his aye'll be heard from one end of the fo'c'sle to the other." Upon hearing of this, the Word Buff retorted "Hexaphones schmeckaphones!" Word Botcher overlooked the Web III nonaphone GRACE GRAYS GREYS GRAISE GRAZE GREGE GREES GRIEGE.

"Nice try, Word Buff, but it's a near miss: Web III indicates a slight variation in pronunciation of the final sibilant (-s, -z, -zh and -(zh)). If multiple dictionaries and alternate spellings are allowed, the polyphone palm goes to Dmitri Borgmann, who (in his book Beyond Language) proposed the two decaphones OH O WE EAU EAUX AU AUX OE OU OW and ERE AIR EAR E'ER EYRE ARE AYER AYR AYRE HEIR.

Homograms and Homophones

There is confusion between the meanings of "homonym" and "homophone", and rather than try to arbitrate the dispute, we'll simply give our own interpretations. We use homonyms to denote words with similarities of spelling and/or pronunciation. When we want to be specific, as we do now, we don't use the term at all. Homophones we take to mean words with identical sounds, e.g. PAIR PARE PEAR. Words with identical spellings such as SLAVER (ship importing slaves) and SLAVER (drool) we call "homographs" or "homograms".

If we add the undisputed term "synonyms", we have three of the most common classifications for similarity among words. If we consider two words in the abstract, there are eight possible similarity classes into which they might fall. The pair might be dissimilar in all three respects. Alternatively, they might be similar in all three categories (meaning, spelling, pronunciation) but only if they are the same word. Next, there are three cases in which the two words are similar in just one aspect: PAIR PARE - homophones only, TARRY (pitchlike) TARRY (delay) - homographs only, and GNU WILDEBEEST - synonyms only. The remaining three categories involve word pairs satisfying exactly two of the three similarity criteria. Before reading on, can you find examples of each?

There are thousands of homophone-homogram pairs such as TAT-
TOO (drum roll) and TATTOO (body emblem), and quite frequently they illustrate an interesting phenomenon, as in the case of TATTOO, in which two words, derived from different sources, have been made by an unconscious linguistic leveling process to look and sound alike. For homophone-synonym pairs, we need only consult a dictionary for variant spellings: IMPOSTER IMPOSTOR is a good example. Must two words be alternate spellings of each other in order to fall into this double category? Probably, although we can find technical exceptions by allowing the pairs to be practically homophonous and synonymous. AUROCHS and ORYX make such an exception, but not a really good one, and we hope the readers can supply us with a better. As for homogram-synonym pairs such as QUAY (kee) QUAY (kay), not to mention QUAY (kway), any example of variant pronunciations will serve. Again, we invite readers to look for a pair of distinct words which are practically homographic and virtually synonymous (or vice versa).

In the August 1969 Kickshaws we presented a Triphone Quiz, in which definitions of three homophones were given, e.g. flesh, appropriate, measure, and the reader was asked to identify the homophones, in this case MEAT MEET METE. That quiz was easy. Here is another that is much harder:

1. create, corner, wedge
2. obscene, pursue, body
3. palisade, alarms, diction
4. tree trunk, plant capsule, drinking vessel
5. exhibition, diet, lighthouse
6. gladly, temple, pretend
7. platform, tankard, compress
8. pasture, shelter, about 1/3 of a mile
9. dregs, sign, reprisal
10. token, curve, ago

Two right on this one is a fine score, and three or more is incredible, based on the performance of a word-quiz calibration group that we call the Westwood Word Herd. If stumped, turn to Answers and Solutions.

Come Again? Ads

Leon Bankoff of Beverly Hills, California offers some interesting advertisements and we solicit more for other professions as well as an appropriate generic term for such ads:

Bail Bondsman: We'll get you out if it takes ten years
Pharmacist: We dispense with accuracy
Dentist: We spare no pains in treating your dental needs
Investment Counsellor: We'll treat your money as if it's our own

The Great Rip-Off

Rip-off (v.t. & i.) to detach (15th century), to steal (1965), to
We don't intend to go into the area of the slang of the 1960s and 1970s (we'll probably do it some other time). This kickshaw is intended to be a tribute to English and all its Teutonic ancestors, which have used prepositions the way no other language families have done — somewhat the way a good cook uses rice or other grains to stretch out a meatloaf and thereby imparts an even better flavor to it, while serving twice as many people. English and German obtain a much better factor of expansion than two; theoretically they could take a hundred verbs and fifty adverb-prepositions and coin five thousand new verb compounds. In fact, that word "theoretically" could have been omitted from the last sentence. "Cry up" means to puff one's wares, and "cry off", to retreat, and the gap between component words and compounds is as far-fetched as a logophile could desire. There is no rule that says the components should suggest the compound, even vaguely. "Interfice" is based on "interfere" with doing it. "Interfice" is an adverb based on "interfere" which head the verb "face". We have prepositions of these don't we? We have interfered with Webster's. We have interfered with authorities. We have interfered which head the verb "face". We have interfered. (We hope the next line spires them."

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discover accumulate describe preserve impede quit rebuke scrap compile advocate frolic decline rise
We have constructed an unusual quiz in which 15 verbs and 14 adverb-prepositions combine to form 210 compounds (actually, about one-third of these don’t exist). In the table below (stretching over two pages), we have inserted synonyms for about 100 of these compounds, using Webster's, Random House, and the American Heritage Dictionary as authorities. Your task is to determine the 14 adverb-prepositions, which head the columns, and the 15 verbs, which head the rows. If you get the scent, you won’t need to look at the Answers and Solutions. (We hope that some Kickshavians will find that this quiz format inspires them to concoct other “find the headings” quizzes along various other lines.)

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Spoonerism of the Month

The Word Botcher advises that a dining companion who chronically fumbles the dinner check is afflicted with "shell-out falter". He also characterizes pauses in mental activity as "recesses of the brain" and says he heard a Mozart composition introduced over his radio as "I'm Inclined To Knock Music".

Future Anachronisms

It must be difficult to write an historical novel and keep it free of anachronisms. Perhaps impossible, even for obviously painstaking researchers such as Mary Renault, Margaret Yourcenar, or Robert Graves. Every human being is steeped in his own culture; how does he unstep himself during the writing process? Leave that question to the novelists, and consider with us the more intriguing one: what sort of mistakes are the historical novelists of seven or eight centuries from now likely to take, not only with novels set in this century, but in previous centuries as well? It would be worth quick-freezing just to see some of the boners pulled. For example, at a stage of advancement in which it is very likely that harmful micro-organisms will have been extinguished, just how much empathy can a writer muster toward a tuberculosis victim?

Here are some samples culled from possible historical novels of the far future. We hope to receive some much better examples from you:

In the cool desert evenings the Disciples would light their pipes and listen to the teaching of the Master.

Stanley, prior to his fateful meeting with Livingstone, had not acquired the reputation of an explorer. He had never been outside the Solar System. In fact he had not even traveled beyond the moons of Neptune.

Caleb, caught in the web of the Great Depression and still unable to accept the reality of the loss of his livestock and the foreclosure of the mortgage on his five-acre farm, gathered his family together and told them that he had decided that they must pack everything movable and head West in the Model T--against the advice of his psychotherapist.

"No, Sir Joshua," Boswell said hastily as their sedan chairs passed each other, "I left Dr. Johnson at Albert Hall.

Famine, war, and his own severe hypoglycemia were Pharaoh's principal worries.

"During the Potato Famine," she sneered, "I knew of a family of ten in County Clare who made do on a bucket of coal and 4000 pounds sterling a day!"
How Would I Know? I've Never Kipped

Until we were about fourteen we were under the delusion that there was a verb in English, spelled MISLE, pronounced maizl, and meaning "to deceive". We would have persisted in the belief had not a chemistry teacher heard us use it, and after some amused questioning, pointed out that we had reasoned incorrectly from the verb MISLED. And that, Kickshavians, is what is known to linguists as a back-formation.

Most back-formations are highly personal creations that never attain currency, such as Word Botcher's INKLE (to suspect), an anonymous poet's DARKLE (to cloud up), the Word Herd's RIBBLE (to coarsen) and PIE-BALL (to blotch), or our FLOTTISON (to drop from a boat, by mistake, an object with specific gravity less than that of water). But there are a large number of back-formations that have become respectable words in accordance with the linguistic doctrine that familiarity breeds respect: BURGLE, PEDDLE, EDIT, BEG, and ROVE were all coined by back-formation from words (such as PEDLAR or EDITOR) that originally existed only in operator form. Other common words such as CHERRY, PEA, RIDDLE, EAVE and SKATE were coined as the singular form of words (CHERIES, PEALES, etc.) that were already singular but sounded or appeared plural. Like INKLE (v.t. "to suspect" as opposed to n. "a colored linen tape"), back-formations have been created from pseudo-gerunds: SIDLE from SIDELING (adj. "oblique"), GROVEL from GROVLING (adv. "pronly"), and MAFFICK ("to roister") from Mafeking, South Africa. During the Boer War the English celebrated the lifting of the siege of Mafeking with enough enthusiasm to permit MAFFICK quick access into the language, although it is now obsolete, if not obsolete.

If you've paid attention, you're ready for the Back-Formation Quiz, which is simply this: the title of this kickshaw is the answer to a four-word question. What's the question?

Follow-Ups

The Poetaster has favored us with a British version of Albert Wilansky's "lieutenant - new tenant" couplet:

A rock group lived above our nice lieut.
He moved, and now we're seeking a dieut.

Several new hypocritical bumper stickers have surfaced, including a group forwarded by Jim McHugh of Matawan, New Jersey:

"Quotations are Attempts to Bolster Flagging Wit" (Bacon)
Metaphors are Celery Fibers in the Garbage Disposal Unit of Language
Make Your Life a Frenzied Quest for Total Moderation
Similes are Like Termites in an Abandoned Ant-Hill
Honk If You Hate Noise-Pollution
Avoid Profanity -- Dammit!
I Am A Secret Agent
Support Ladies' Liberation

"Call me an old fogey, if you will, but the fact remains that I was a young fogey, too," writes Sydney Harris in the Rochester News, bewailing popcorn-munchers and other movie pests. For finding this bona fide example of an adolescent fogey, non-smoker Mary Youngquist is hereby awarded one chocolate cigar (Hershey, not Havana).

Canis

Mel Brooks shot down the old canard that "fish are good brain food", declaring, more plausibly, that "brains are good fish food". Similarly, we hold to a more reasonable version of that Old Teacher's Tale of the value of learning Latin. We believe that a knowledge of English is of great help in learning Latin, and in that belief have concocted a quiz that should prove not especially formidable to Word Ways' readers, even if they have never taken a Latin course.

We've taken some well-known lines, associated with celebrities, most of them in the entertainment field, and translated them into the purest Ciceronian Dog-Latin. You are invited to translate them back into English. They won't be quite so easy as "Heus, Abbas!", a bona fide translation of Lou Costello's "Hey, Abbott!", or of the Paratrooper's Watchword "Hieronyme!" (Geronimo!). Some of them will require a bit of concentration, e.g., the Paratrooper's Credo "Si resticulam non extraheram, nihil significatur" (It don't mean a thing if you don't pull that string).

The only ground rule is that those who have had at least a year of Latin are not permitted to use as clues the names of the people associated with the quotation, unless they find it absolutely necessary (these names are listed in the paragraph following the quotations).

1. Numquam dona surculo partitionem aequam.
2. Visum est captum.
3. Anatem emere velis?
4. Ascendito et aliando meam videto.
5. Aut hic vir mortuus est, aut horologiculm meum sttitit!
6. Omnes in lud0 apparet volunt!
7. Pluvia Iberiae plerumque in campo manet.
8. Si non calorem potes tolerare, relinque culinam.
9. Sumexuxorem meam -- mendico!
10. Quam dulcis id est!
11. Quare non facis aliquid meo succurrere?
12. Faciam rem unam lucidissimam.