KICKSHAWS

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Readers are invited to send their own favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Associate Editor. Correspondents who wish a quick acknowledgment should provide a self-addressed postcard (a stamped card is requested only if the contribution is filled with calumny, hauteur, scorn and invective). Unless questions are posed as Challenges (a euphemism for problems that the Kickshaws Editor was either too lazy or too inept to solve), their resolutions will be found in the Answers and Solutions section at the end of this issue.

Two-Letter Words

Using 21 imposing sources in the November 1974 Word Ways, Darrell Francis made a strong case for labeling 247 of the 276 theoretically pronounceable two-letter combinations "words" in his article "Two-Letter Words". Ross Eckler has previously pointed out the ill-defined nature of the word "word" -- certainly the appearance of a letter sequence as a main entry in some dictionary should not be considered authoritative. Dictionaries not only can, but invariably do, omit speech sounds that have long been current and carry through several editions entries that have long ceased to be so.

Darrell's list effectively doubles the number of two-letter words appearing in Web II and III, and it is a pretty good bet that if you select a ten or even twelve-letter word at random, it will break up into a chain of two-letter links taken from the list. If you confine yourself to Webster's, what is the longest word you can find that is an unlinked chain of two-letter words (example: IN-UN-DA-TI-ON)? How about the longest linked chain (example: EMANATION - EM-MA-AN-NA-AT-TI-IO-ON)?

Careful readers of Word Ways will recognize the close similarity between linked chains and words in which every consecutive sequence of letters is a word (see "Word Torture" in August 1974, and the Colloquy in this issue). Can you think of a good generic name for such words?

More Trade Name Reversals

Adding to our modest list of trade names (BOLS, TUMS) which are unintentional word reversals, Howard Port adds BAN deodorant and DIAL soap as well as a local Detroit beer trade-named STROH'S.
Infinite Regresses

The Logolog sends this curiosum: a mathematician at the University of Toronto some years ago sent an article to a University of Montreal journal that published exclusively in French, a language unknown to the Torontan. When the translation galleys reached him, he checked the equations over and, finding everything all right, and relying on the skill of the translator and the typographer, added a footnote at the end of the article:

*I am grateful to Prof. Chapotard for translating this article from the English. E. C. B.

The University of Montreal rushed back a revised copy of the last page of the galleys to E. C. B. including Prof. Chapotard's French translation of the final footnote. E. C. B. then felt compelled to add a second footnote:

*I am grateful to Prof. Chapotard for translating the above footnote from the English. E. C. B.

Again the University of Montreal rushed to E. C. B. a revised galley including Prof. Chapotard's French translation of the second footnote. They added a plea, however, to the effect that the journal, having a mere finite number of pages, could not accommodate an infinite number of footnotes. Was apprehension on their part justified? Think about it before reading further.

Unless E. C. B. is assumed to be an idiot, he has no further need for Prof. Chapotard's services, so this is not really an infinite regress at all. For his third (and final) footnote, E. C. B. merely repeats verbatim Chapotard's French translation of the second footnote.

Extraterrestrial

Since the Golden Age of science fiction, which ended about the time World War II started, writers have generally succeeded in tempering or even eliminating some of the blatant terramorphisms (such as "Ming, the Merciless, of the planet Mongo"). The Riss of A. E. Van Vogt, the Quilt of Henry Kuttner, and the Prott of Judith Merrill have taken the place of the Amazons of Venus and the Sharkmen of Neptune. Many of the more linguistically-oriented writers, such as Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, and James Blish, have extrapolated from some of the form and functional differences among Earth languages to the weirdest of linguistic themes, usually as the pivot of a short story or novelette. Much attention to linguistic plausibility has also been paid by Isaac Asimov, Philip Jose Farmer, Robert Heinlein, and Robert Sheckley. If ever a field offered itself for an article or series of articles in this journal, none could be more promising than the varied ways in which writers of science fiction have made their imaginative leaps from terrestrial to extraterrestrial linguistics. And who would be more qualified to write such an article or series than Philip M. Cohen, who wrote
the excellent lead article "Language of Science Fiction Fandom" in the February 1975 issue of Word Ways? Nobody can think of.

Ambiguity

- "Smoking volcanoes can be dangerous."
  -- Pliny, the Younger to Pliny, the Elder

There are probably more ways in which speech can be ambiguous than can be catalogued. Probably the variety of meanings that component words might have, at least when the phrase is taken out of context, accounts for most ambiguity, e.g.,

- a mighty curious cat
- a rather suspicious policeman

Have you gotten my Christmas present yet?
We may not use high explosives that close to the refinery

"Curious" can mean strange or inquisitive, "suspicious" can mean filled with or inspiring suspicion, "get" can mean obtain or receive, and the "may" of likelihood must be distinguished in the example above from the permissive "may".

"Desk-size computer" is a frequently-heard ambiguous phrase. It usually means a computer capable of sitting conveniently atop the average sized desk, but it can also mean a computer the size of a desk (there being many such computers, some of them actually styled to look like desks). "The Lee Harvey Oswald assassination" is automatically ambiguous, since there is no language convention that prescribes whether the person named in this context plays the active or the passive role.

Here are three sentences taken out of context, all very ambiguous, and you are asked to give the alternate interpretations in each case. Two are fairly simple; the third is extremely difficult, and very few readers see any possibility of ambiguity even when assured it is there:

1. Left turn from this lane only
2. Macy's sells more expensive merchandise than Gimbel's
3. Each day he finds himself able to eat less and less

The first sentence is frequently found stenciled in the left-most traffic lane at a two-way intersection in various U.S. cities, in spite of the fact that under the "strict interpretation" of criminal statutes doctrine, both possible meanings have been "struck down" in contested traffic court cases (in California and Arizona). In one case, a motorist was cited for continuing forward instead of making a left turn from the lane marked "Left turn from this lane only," said the prosecutor. "Anything else would be illegal." "No," retorted the motorist. "If I had tried to make a left turn from another lane I would have been guilty, but what I did was legal. If the city had meant my failure to turn to be illegal, they should have written 'From this lane, only a left turn.'" Verdict: Not Guilty. In the other case,
A motorist was ticketed for making a left turn from the lane to the right of the one marked "Left turn from this lane only". Said the driver: "The only way I could have been in violation was to have been in the LT FTLO lane and failed to make a left turn. Had the city wanted to make my turn illegal the marking should have been 'Left turn only from this lane.'" Verdict: Not Guilty. Most intersections now use the unambiguous arrows. One good picture is worth ten thousand signs reading "Left turn if and only if from this lane."

Many people find the second sentence completely unambiguous. The ambiguity is in the question: does "more" modify "expensive" or "merchandise"?

Practically nobody finds the third sentence ambiguous. What can it mean other than that the protagonist is wasting away from an incurable disease? Well, for one thing, it could mean that he is successively training for an endurance contest or perhaps merely lowering his intake gradually in order to reach a level of pristine slimness. The combination of the verbs of capability (can, succeeds, is able, etc.) with a negatively-flavored object is intrinsically ambiguous, denoting either the capability of doing something negative or the disability to do something positive. The prototype of this sentence appeared for us in the Wall Street Journal in the mid-sixties and ran something like this:

Most brokerage houses throughout the country have found that they are capable of carrying fewer small (less than $10,000) customer accounts than they handled two years ago.

The context of the short article was the high cost of computer monitoring, clerical and postal service on a monthly basis, even to modest investors who might make one transaction every five years or so. But the meaning of the quoted sentence remained moot. Were the stock and bond houses rejoicing in the fact that after shunning all new accounts involving less than some arbitrary sum brokers use to denote a "middle-sized" account, they were still making substantial net profits (no doubt on a larger profit-per-time basis)? Or were they bewailing the fact that the overhead involved in monthly servicing of small, all-but-dormant accounts was eating away their profit margins? In those days, we repeat, there was ambiguity. Since the advent of the sustained bear market the ambiguity has disappeared. No shunning of new accounts in the past six or seven years has come to our attention, however small or unpromising of commissions.

Do you find ambiguity in Albert Wilansky's sentence: "Monday was rainy and so was the day we stayed home and watched TV."

**Geographics**

Murray Pearce, a master of innovation as well as a mainstay of the National Puzzlers' League, discovered some geographical surprises in Webster's Third: Chicago is defined as "Michigan" (but Detroit is not defined as "Illinois".), Congo is defined as "Antwerp brown", and gen-
eva is defined as "Holland gin". Can you provide other geographical anomalies?

Noting that many geographical terms also have non-geographical meanings, Murray has assembled the following quiz, in which you are asked to match places with definitions. Most definitions are taken from Webster's Third; a few (asterisked) come from Webster's Second.

Alaska  1. a pullover with short or long sleeves
Baltimore  2. an overwhelming flood or torrent
Bangkok  3. to give a glossy black to (as leather)
Berlin  4. a small canyon
Brazil  5. a ballroom dance of Haitian origin
Canada  6. a straw made from jipajapa
Chad  7. an American breed of white-marked black swine
China  8. a small brown rabbit
Congo  9. coffee
Damascus  10. a single-breasted loose-fitting jacket
Guinea  11. a sixteenth-century rapier*
Havana  12. a form of gin rummy
Holland  13. the center of an activity or interest
Japan  14. sweet orange
Java  15. a slingshot
Jersey  16. small paper disks produced by a tape perforator
Kurdistan  17. a paragon of excellence or beauty
Lima  18. a reversible figured fabric of linen, wool, etc.*
Madeira  19. mahogany
Madras  20. a rug of high color and durability
Mackinaw  21. wean (chiefly Scottish)
Marseilles  22. having the end of each arm forked and recurved
Mecca  23. a fine plain-woven shirting and dress fabric
Moline  24. a long loose overcoat of Irish origin
Niagara  25. a structure on the awning deck of a steamer
Norfolk  26. a horse grooms
Oklahoma  27. a genus of bivalve mollusks
Orient  28. marks the skin with welts
Panama  29. the wood of a South American tree
Paris  30. a lumberman's kit or itinerant worker's pack
Phoenix  31. a pearl of great luster
Poland  32. a smooth glazed or unglazed finish for cotton fabric
Rome  33. a small genus of Eurasian herbs
Shanghai  34. a firm reversible cotton fabric
Spain  35. very friable soft schistose deposits of silica
Sudan  36. a heavy woolen blanket in solid color
Texas  37. to growl, roar, groan (obs.)*
Toledo  38. an eastern North American nymphalid butterfly
Tripoli  39. a finely tempered sword
Turkey  40. a dark greyish-yellow to light olive-brown
Ulster  41. a storm rubber having a rubberized cloth vamp
Verdun  42. a fine butal
Wales  43. a leather boot having a loose top
Wellington  44. a four-wheeled, two-seated covered carriage

Charitable
A charitable hand, a hospitable shaw. (Webster's, finding the letters as given below, and parentheticals.

AEILO eleg
AEILT
AEIOR Ar
AEIOS (Eiga)
AEIOT (pait)
AEIPR (pai)

Furthermore, the 4-3-2-1 single words

GORA
SALE
SELA
SILE
TAIN
TARA

Can anybody same property?

Once More

Dmitri Eckler, and the grammatical table given below, and parentheticals.
Charitable and Hospitable Words

A charitable word, such as SEAT, is one which can give up any of its letters and remain a word: SEA, SET, SAT, EAT. On the other hand, a hospitable word, such as RAP, produces a new word by the addition of an appropriate letter in any position: TRAP, REAP, RASP, RAPT. Although it is not too difficult to find words which are either hospitable or charitable (see the August 1971 and February 1972 Kickshaws), undertaking the task of finding a four-letter word that is both charitable and hospitable is a boggling thought (we commented at the time). Refusing to be boggled, Tom Pulliam of Somer set, N. J. searched Webster's Second for four-letter main entry isograms that are charitable, finding 234 of them. Of these, six proved to be hospitable as well:

**GORA** ora, gra, goa, gor
agora, goora, gotra, gorma, goral

**SALE** ale, sle, sae, sal
asse, scale, sable, salve, salep

**SELA** Ela, sla, sea, sel
osela, shela, sella, selva, selah

**SILE** ile, sle, sie, sil
aside, smile, sicle, Siloe, silex

**TAIN** Ain, tin, tan, tai
stain, train, takin, tainn, taint

**TARA** ara, tra, taa, tar
Atara, tiara, taira, tarfa, taraf

Can anybody find a five-letter isogram (no repeated letters) with the same property? We doubt it.

Once More, The Big Challenge

Dmitri Borgmann rose to our Big Challenge in the last issue (dividing the letters AEILNOPRST into all possible five-letter groups and anagramming these into words), filling in 22 of the 49 gaps left by Faith Eckler, and completing 11 of the missing 36 pairs. His additions are given below; asterisked words are from Webster's Pocket Dictionary, and parenthesized words from non-Websterian reference works:

- AEILLO elaios
- AEILT (porns) AENOR (roane)
- AEIIO Areoi AENOS aeons*tripl-
- AEIIOI (Eiaos) AEPST (lorin)
- AEIOT athio- AINOS aions
- AEIPR (paire) (lonts)

Furthermore, he pointed out an error in the February 1975 list (SNIRL should not have an asterisk) and an improvement (ALTIN to LATIN*).

In our description of The Big Challenge, we neglected to state that the 4-3-2-1 scoring of words was allowed only for completed pairs, not single words. This caused some confusion in the minds of those who...
checked our arithmetic and found that the score was 729, not 645 -- our apologies! Using the original scoring system, Dmitri has attained 689 points; if single words are also scored, he has reached 790.

**Biblical Heteroliterality**

A word sequence is homoliteral if every pair of adjacent words has at least one letter in common, and heteroliteral if no pair of adjacent words has one or more letters in common. In this department in February 1974, Andrew Griscom started the ball rolling by finding a 58-word homoliteral sequence and a 14-word heteroliteral sequence in the King James Version of the Bible. Brother Griscom’s homoliteral passage from Matthew 1:11-16 still stands as the record, and is likely never to be topped:

... to Babylon: and after they were brought to Babylon, Jechnias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; and Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; and Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthew and Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the husband ...

But, after more than a year, Tom Pulliam of Somerset, N.J. has bettered the heteroliterary record with sequences of length 16 (beginning with "therefore" in Psalms 34:2) and 18, from Psalms 62:1:

... my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be ...

Rest in peace -- at least until another reader tops one of these.

**Euphemisms**

Charles Suhor of New Orleans writes that in our quest for euphemistic synonyms of "goddamn" we should take note that this is itself a euphemism for the more terrifying phrase "God damn". Some reader ought to tabulate an article-length list of common euphemisms for some of the more or less taboo words. Sometimes a euphemism carries a euphemism, e.g., "tumor" for "cancer" and "growth" for "tumor". Or, consider the increasingly-acceptable sequence: bowels, guts, intestines, viscera. Backward children are not called that anymore, and "retarded" has given way to "exceptional". Some other euphemistic sequences: madhouse, insane asylum, mental hospital, psychiatric hospital, sanitarium. Or lunacy, insanity, psychosis, emotional illness, disturbance. Some euphemisms are plain lies, e.g., "life insurance" is really "death insurance", though it wouldn't sell as well if it were styled so. Using insurance company lingo, we should call "fire insurance" non-fire insurance. A beggar is a solicitor, and he receives not alms but a gift, donation, or contribution.

Whoever undertakes an article on taboo words and their euphemisms will find himself working almost entirely in the areas of sex, elimina-
thought, illness, politics and diplomacy. Think of all the euphemisms you can for copulation, laboratory, heart disease, bribery, and invasion.

Those Inscrutable Websterians

Logologists believe that there are no out-of-order entries in Webster's Third Unabridged (but see Explanatory Notes in Section 1.2 for deliberate exceptions). Merriam-Webster evidently didn't consider that "alphabetical order" is not enough to determine uniquely the position of an entry. Consider the same letters arranged as two words, a hyphenated word, or a single word. In the short span of GRAY- to HIGH-, Ralph Beaman noted the following inconsistencies: GRIGRI before GRI-GRI but HIGH-DRIED before HIGHL DRIED, GRAYOUT before GRAY OUT but GREEN STONE before GREENSTONE, HARD-FIBER before HARD FIBER but HALF COCK before HALF-COCK.

More Synonymic Reversals

Mining all three editions of Webster's Unabridged as well as Funk & Wagnalls Unabridged and the Oxford English Dictionary, Tom Pulliam has discovered a number of all-English synonymic reversals:

1. PUT = butt (Web 3); TUP = butt (Web 2)
2. BUT, a var. of butt = cask (Web 2); TUB = cask (Web 2)
3. WAM, a form of womb = belly (OED); MAW = belly (OED)
4. BOG = brag (FW); GOB = brag (FW)
5. MAS is a reformed spelling of mass = collect (Web 2); SAM = collect (Web 2)
6. WAY = movement of a vessel through the water (FW); YAW = movement of a vessel (FW)
7. BIT = girl (Web 3); TIB = girl (Web 3)
8. SUN = knot (Web 3); NUB = knot (FW)
9. TEEM = fill (Web 2); MEET = fill (Web 3)
10. LOOM, variant of loam = any earth (Web 1); MOOL = dry earth (Web 1)
11. BONK, same as bank = hill (Web 1); KNOB = hill (Web 1)

These are to be added to the only previously-known all-English specimens, BOK-KOB, NIP-PIN and TAP-PAT. AIS and SIA are both American Indians listed in Webster's Third -- but not from the same tribe.

Antonym Chains

Words with two distinct opposites, if explored in depth, would make a fine article, or, at worst, a fine Kickshaw. Some examples: OLD (YOUNG, NEW), HARD (SOFT, EASY), RIGHT (LEFT, WRONG), GO (COME, STOP), LOSE (WIN, FIND, GAIN). On the naive theory that two antonyms of the same word must be synonyms, can you find a chain of antonyms that implies "foul" and "heavy" are synonyms? Try it; it's not as hard as you might think.
Miscellaneous Updates

Not an entry has been received for the IMPACT Project ("write a billion poems without straining your muse") unveiled in the last issue. No doubt readers are waiting to see what prizes would be announced in this issue. Here they are: First Prize, the complete 290-volume set comprising Chadwick's Reference Shelf; Second Prize, Lehmer's Table of Factors of Primes Greater Than a Billion; Third Prize, Eaton's Magyar-Tagalog Dictionary (Knopf, 1913).

Between them, Tom Pulliam and Mary Youngquist have discovered three new worthy (uninflected) shiftwords: ELECTRIC - LECTRICE, ATECHNIC - TECHNICA and ESTAMPED - STAMPEDE. As for double shiftwords, Tom offers ESCHEW: SCHEWE, WESCHE, and Mary matches it with TINGES: INGEST, STINGE. Finally, she proposes TRADDLES: STRADDE, RADDLEST which requires a little indulgence on the part of Word Ways' readers (RADDLEST is implied from RADDLE and the -EST ending). Whew!

In February 1972, the Word Buff claimed that the list STAIR HERON GREED CLOSE DITTY POCKET BANAL ANSUS THING crashed all five-letter words (in any dictionary). This ambitious claim has been demolished by Tom Pulliam, who notes that it fails to match Embla, Ishma, Ishvi, lychi and igdlu, all in Webster's Second.

Mary Youngquist has topped our two eleven-letter pronouns with the below-the-line Webster's Second entry WHETHERSOEVER. Darryl Francis is right behind with THAAYRZELVES, a variant of THEIRSELVES, in the English Dialect Dictionary. As a candidate for the longest multiple word deletion, she offers DISPROPORTIONATION which breaks up into eight parts: TI, RO, ON, PA, ROT, PL, SO and DIN.

Progressive Possessives

The area of London known as ST JAMES'S is well-known through its diplomatic associations; ambassadors to Great Britain are officially credited to the Court of St James's. Darryl Francis points out that the name is found in other contexts: for example, there is a well-known firm of wine merchants called GRANT'S OF ST JAMES'S. What, he asks, would the form be if we wished to refer to these wine merchants in the possessive case: ST JAMES'S', or ST JAMES'S' or ST JAMES'? His copy of Bartholomew's Gazetteer of the British Isles lists several other places called ST JAMES'S, as well as two places called ST JAMES'. What is the possessive form of the latter: ST JAMES' or ST JAMES'? or ST JAMES'S or ST JAMES'S'? The last looks the most reasonable, says Darryl, but is probably the least logical choice.