Morse Mishaps

Suppose a novice telegraph operator allows no more time interval between letters than he does between dots and dashes in transmitting International Morse Code messages (look under "Morse Code" in Webster's Collegiate). His listeners are due for a lot of confusion, roughly of the same order as that induced by removing all the vowels from a fairly long passage of text. In the latter case, an enormous number of messages can be inferred; in the former an equally enormous number of letter sequences is possible. There are 30 ways of dividing the sequence \ldots into International Morse letters, at least four of which are words (ax, ana, emu, wit). There are more than 100 ways of dividing \ldots yielding leg, run, rig, rep, late, rime, LP and the standard abbreviation EDP (electronic data processing). No doubt other sequences of dots and dashes produce even more Collegiate Dictionary words. However, as the sequence becomes longer it is increasingly difficult to fashion any words at all. We are fascinated by the question: what is the highest possible word-to-symbol ratio, and what stream of dots and dashes provides it?

Look Alikes

This quiz consists of pairs of words that are quite different in meaning but are frequently confused with one another, e.g. LUXURIOUS and LUXURIANT, or PERSPICUOUS and PERSPICACIOUS. If you are able to determine as many as 8 of the 12 word pairs (no time limit), you will have beaten par.

1. a hospital for the treatment of chronic diseases; an institution for the promotion of health
2. to reveal; to depreciate
3. beggary; dishonesty
4. to command solemnly; to renounce
5. to irritate or scrape; to censure or reprimand
6. to rout; to make uneasy
7. corrupt; pardonable
8. to write or compose; to charge with a crime
9. self-pleased; pleasing to others
10. occurring every two years; occurring twice a year
11. swollen; muddled
12. to challenge or assail; to ascribe or attribute

Transmutation by Syllables

As a variant of Lewis Carroll's transmutation game in which one word is changed to another by successive steps, each introducing a new word by changing a letter of the previous one, consider the simpler version in which an entire syllable is changed. To begin with, let's limit attention to six-letter words that divide into pairs of three-letter syllables. For example, we can transmute DOCTOR to LAWYER via CASTOR CASTLE MANTLE MANGER SINGER SINFUL LAWFUL. For a color change, how about YELLOW PILLOW PILFER COFFER COFFIN MUFFIN MUFFLE TRIFLE TRIPLE PURPLE? If our readers can't get from YELLOW to PURPLE in fewer than nine steps, we'll be surprised. Perhaps one of you can transmute SECOND to MINUTE, a task that's proved too tough for us.

Readers who find the challenge involved in syllable transmutation too tame are invited to experiment with a much stricter version in which both the spelling and the sound of the syllable must be preserved. Thus, MANTLE may transmute to MANTIS, but not to MANGER, as above. We doubt not that under this stricter rule most of you will still be able to get from DOCTOR to LAWYER.

Those who find this project interesting are encouraged to experiment with generalizations. It is possible to change the length of the words involved, as in DONKEY WHISKEY WHISTLE. Can anyone out there transmute WHISKEY into VODKA?

Permutated Samples

From two two-letter words a sample letter is taken, and the two sample letters, when printed in the order of the two words, spells AS. Now the order of the two words is reversed, and sample letters are again taken, this time spelling out the word ON. Knowledge of the two sample words AS and ON mathematically determines (up to transposal) the original two words, which must have been AN (or NA) and SO (or OS).

Suppose that we seek to determine three three-letter words by this method (or, in general, n-letter words). Given six sample words made up of letters selected in order from every possible permutation of the three mystery words, we know of no mathematically foolproof method for determining the mystery words, even though the information from the sample words appears to be far more than is necessary to do the job. Readers are invited to use their logical reasoning powers to find the mystery words in the following examples:

1. AIL APT PIG POT SPA TOY
In which one producing a new simpler version, let's limit one-letter syllable to COFFIN via CASUL. For a number, let's limit one-letter syllable can't be surinate, a task is more simple words by this "transposal" in which one letter is moved, or a letter is inserted. Thus, anyone out it is too simple, and the two sample words are given as above, still be able to experiment in eight of the sample words even anyone out

Two Sequences

Here are two different word sequences, courtesy of Mary Youngquist. You are invited to discover the logic behind each of them. Why are the words of each sequence presented in the order in which they appear? Your task has been made easier by having two sequences, since the keys to them are very similar, though not identical. If you give up, consult Answers and Solutions.

1. horse time ring poster finger pack up ball pin strike
2. lady nature rail down column sense heaven note inning rate hour night

In the next problem there are four mystery words of four letters to be discovered; the sample words arise from the 24 possible permutations:

4. ALAS ARAB ATOM BASE CAST COAT CORD CRAB EAST HALT LENT LICE MALT MILE MOTH OATH RATE REAL ROAN SALE TACT THAT TIME TONE

Putting a par number on this exercise is a little silly. Every guinea pig on whom these have been tried has scored either four or zero.

Double Shiftwords

Tom Pulliam has supplied us with enough double shiftwords to satiate even the greediest logologist. A double shiftword, such as ABAC, forms new words as a result of transferring either the initial letter to the right end, as BACA, or the terminal letter to the left end, as CABA. Here is the rest of Tom's list of previously-undiscovered forms; read it and marvel.

abes amel azam etam kana name achar
acop amir dama eten kati nona achen
arad anal dara evel lama noe we alog
adew anam dare even lane obed amass
agar anat data ever lana obel aniss
ager anem doli evil leno oded apast
ahoy arad dora ewer lode oket athar
ahum aram eath eyed lura oman dorea
airm asak ebon eyeer mala omen eared
ajar asar edam hait mana omer egall
alam aser eden bank mara oral emend
alan asin eder hort maro palo etern
alas atap eker heat mela rada ether
alen atar elam heit mina rama lathe
alim ater elef idas mira rami mania
amal athe erin idem mite rane massa
aman avel eris ides mona rice norma
amar aven eros iram nala sana racha
amay aver eser isel nama thea

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Curtailment and Beheadment

Since Ralph Beaman introduced the topic in "Word Torture" in the August 1974 Word Ways, readers have been intrigued with the challenge of finding Websterian words which continue to be Websterian words when a letter is dropped either from the initial or terminal position -- all the way down to the one-letter level. Since the progressive letter deletions can be any mixture of beheadments and curtailments, quite a number of spin-off words must be confirmed in order to establish a word as impervious to beheadment and/or curtailment. For example, using Web 2 as our authority, we may call the word SHAD impervious, since all possible results of fore and aft mutilation, viz. HAD, SHA, AD, HA, SH, S, H, A and D appear therein. Several five-letter and six-letter impervious words have appeared since Ralph's article, but, as Tom Pulliam remarks, "The ultimate pinnacle seems to be a seven-letter combination that is totally Websterian throughout".

Small wonder that no impervious seven-letter word has yet surfaced. Ignoring the one-letter words, qualification of such a word involves confirming 20 shorter words as Websterian. Ralph's GUNITES and ETA-MINE are remarkable in having only two gaps apiece and, as Tom Pulliam points out, Ralph's MORALES is itself not listed in Webster's, only implied. Tom submits his own candidate for the "closest and cleanest" approximation to an impervious seven-letter Websterian word: SHEAVES, missing only the letter-sequence EAV. (Tom wonders how Noah could have overlooked this one.)

If you find the ultimate pinnacle, please let us know.

Rhyme Quiz

Suppose you're translating a poem from a foreign language into English and you want to preserve the rhyme scheme on a word-by-word basis (not very practical, but we had to think of some scenario for this quiz). Suppose, then, four rhyming words had the following meanings in English: sedentary, utensil, grinder, grapple. If you were looking for rhyming synonyms, you could hardly do better than with sessile, vessel, pestle, wrestle. That's the general idea. Par, as achieved by the Word Herd on the twelve offerings following, was ten. For our answers, turn to Answers and Solutions. Alternate solutions (if you find any) get double credit. Each answer group consists of words that rhyme and have the same number of syllables.

1. fasten, tripod, musk, shrub, fulcrum, square of turf
2. carouse, trace, tractable, bump, thrust
3. goblet, royal mansion, animus, unsympathetic
4. short time, harpsichord, featherly, finch
5. Carthaginian, magical, surcoat, castrato
6. rational, inclination, caustic
7. balanced, demon, celebration, incline
8. turning, secretary, devotee, club
9. expensive (of a victory), rhapsodic, tallowish
10. she-ass
11. red, meat
12. carouse

Trade Name

In case you inadvertent relitigating of Dmitri
soft drink
soap TIL
cigarette
magazine
atlas public
sleeping pill
throat lozenges

Since NOVA's a mutual pain, most inadvertent names means due

Dmitri with it has an intricate, but one: the breakeven word meaning.

Certain e there of the name of the (LOG, headache, NOVRAD). BAI
BAID, a brand in 1951, this apc
in the category estab
ished from it. Dmitri, less common that by pure combi
stretch the line to ret
reversal itself in vent
ertent names attrac
tractive, such as this outfit was liberate reveal collection of
stage.

Pilfered Property

No two do attend company carry a g
Trade Name Reversals

In case you thought the last word on trade names that appear to be inadvertent reversals of dictionary words was said in the previous issue, Dmitri Borgmann is here to disabuse you:

- soft drink TAB, TEEM, SPOT
- soap TIDE, LAVA
- cigarette KOLL, SALEM
- magazine TIME, MAD
- atlas publisher CRAM
- sleeping pill DORMIN
- throat lozenge SUCRETS

Since NOVA is also the name of an automobile, AVON and NOVA are a mutual pair of trade name reversals. SUCRETS is probably the most inadvertent trade name reversal in history -- the Latin word Stercus means dung!

Dmitri writes that no logo-list is worth compiling or reading unless it has an interlingual example. By a rare coincidence, he has provided one: the breath freshener SEN-SEN. The reversal, nesnes, is a Welsh word meaning nearer and nearer.

Certain examples must be disqualified because of the obvious advertising of the name-coiners: patent medicine SERUTAN, soft drink NEDLOG, headache remedy DARVON (the same company also manufactures NOVRAD). The most difficult item to classify is the trade name SETEBALD, a brand name for vitamin and mineral products. Registered in 1951, this appeared in numerous editions of the Trademark Register in the category "Medicines and Pharmaceutical Preparations", but vanished from it in 1974. How about it -- advertent or inadvertent?

Dmitri, less skeptical than we are, is willing to allow the possibility that by pure coincidence the trademark was fashioned from some combination like (Vitamin) C + Tab (let) + Aid. We are unwilling to stretch the laws of probability this far; however, we concede that the reversal itself, diabetes, is an argument in favor of inadvertence (advertent names tend to be reversals of words that make the product attractive, such as ANIMATS). Perhaps the first nostrum offered by this outfit was a "cure" for diabetes and the name was coined as a deliberate reversal, but in time was applied to a more heterogeneous collection of patent remedies. Anybody's guess is equally good at this stage.

Pilled Proverbs

No two dandruff flakes are exactly alike. If God had meant us to attend concerts, he would have provided us with tickets. Always carry a grapefruit.  
(Philip M. Cohen)
Every time an idiot dies, your I.Q. goes down. Ant poison is extremely hazardous, especially to ants. Two can live as cheaply as one, but only half as long.  

(Bill Ballance)

There are two sides to every question; on the other hand, there are not two sides to every question.  

(Jack Margolis)

There is an exception to every rule ... except this one. Most people literally can't read. Isn't that incredible? You'd better believe it.  

(Leon Bankoff)

Websterian Curiosa

John Standish of Burial Hill, Plymouth, Mass. (with an assist from Darryl Francis) sends another quiz that will be insultingly easy for any reader who has read Webster's Dictionary from cover to cover a hundred or more times. If you're a normal reader, don't be embarrassed if you score a zero.

1. Lissel is a river in the Netherlands which starts with two capital letters. Give a word, also of six letters, starting with three capitals. (Hint: it's very new.)

2. Where can you find the all-capitalized boldface entry NEL?

3. SUCCESSLESSNESS and POSSESSIONLESSNESS both have four pairs of doubled letters. Give a third word having this property. (Hint: it doesn't have a doubled S.)

4. Where can you decipher the entry \text{TOON - JEL}?  
   (Hint: you're looking at the answer.)

5. Multiple entries are supposed to be separated by or also. Give a pair separated by a comma.

6. Give a word of the form 121-121-121.

7. TOBIM and TOVIM are legitimate words, yet the there is no entry for either. Why?

8. FO'C'SLE has the combination SL. This should help in finding two words having S'L.

9. No entry has the largest number of words. Why not?

10. Find an entry in the dictionary ending with the word D'.

11. What entry has its pronunciation given as /'(h)wich's\text{ER}/ ?

12. Last chance. Give the two reduplicative reversals having the letter patterns 123123 and 321321.

More Ambiguity

Re the topic of ambiguity, discussed in the May 1975 Kickshaws, the Logolog sends an example which is more likely to befuddle when spoken than when written, since punctuation should make the necessary distinction: JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER (,) JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.

Jack Carney contributed this intentionally ambiguous standard letter that Disraeli used to send to authors who sent him copies of their books: "Thank you for your latest volume. I shall lose no time in reading it."  

A fine solution to the eternal problem of cleaving to the truth without wounding. Say you are cornered by an untalented, unimaginative ac-
quaintance and asked what you think of xes new living room decor / driftwood sculpture / finger painting / antique bootjack / piano playing, etc. Think of the many ways our language offers to get you off the hook. You can reply with any of these zero-information responses:

Wow!  That's really something!
How about that?  Something else!
Incredible!  Way out!
Far out!  Out of sight!

Richard Field gave us another sentence with hidden ambiguity, again orally ambiguous only: The cannibals will eat (G/g) randmother tonight.

With the upper case G, the sentence refers to some individual known as "Grandmother" to the speaker and the listener. With the lower case g, the generic term is being used -- in other words, the cannibals will be eating (somebody's) grandmother, instead of some other staple such as baby or adolescent. Dick asked us what we thought of his little gem and naturally we responded "Wow!!"

A Cryptographic Problem

Walter Penney offers another of his challenging puzzles to Kickshaws readers. The pattern of a word can be represented by a sequence of numbers used in order to represent single and repeated letters; for example, the pattern of BOYCOTT is 1234255 and AFFABLE is 1221345 (note that numbers can represent different letters in different words). The patterns of two ten-letter words, forming a meaningful (but non-dictionary) phrase, each word containing seven different letters, are added with the result 2464870348. What are the words?

Updates

Mary Youngquist, author of "I Was Tossed Out Of Chem. Lab. Because They Didn't Like My Retorts", has supplied us with several additional No-Go Logos:

One man being hanged by an angry mob, two others being speared (Merrill Lynch, Pierce Fenner & Smith)
Whole deer being roasted over a flame (Sears Roebuck)
A four-star army officer lounging in a touring car (General Motors)
A king with a heavy woollen scarf (Midas Mufflers)
A chamber pot being hoisted to a flagpole sitter (Upjohn)

Philip Cohen updates the list of numerical prefixes printed in this department in February 1973. In addition to the prefix TERA- that was given for trillion, Webs 2 and 3 both list TREGA-. The prefix for quadrillion is given in Web 2 as QUEGA-, but ASTRA- is also used. Similarly, the non-dictionary-sanitized term NEBU- is used for quintillion. This brings macro up to date with micro, the old list having contained the entries PICO-, FEMTO- and ATTO-, respectively, for the reciprocals trillionth, quadrillionth, quintillionth.

Murray Pearce adds GRANDAM, GRANDMA to the list of synonym-
mous anagrams. Furthermore, he has finally succeeded in topping Dar­rny Francis's long-standing hyper-hyphenation record, announced in the November 1970 Kickshaws. Darryl found two five-hyphen entries in Web 3: John-go-to-bed-at-noon and Kiss-me-over-the-garden-gate. True, Murray had to go to W. R. Cooper's Archaic Dictionary (1876) to find the seven-hyphen entry Har-U-Pu-Ka-Ka-Sharu-Sha-Bau, a mys­tical deity mentioned in the CLXVth chapter of the Ritual of The Dead. In the preface, the editor remarks that some ancient names are virtual­ly unpronounceable without the aid of hyphens, implying the possibility that the hyphens in Har-U were arbitrarily inserted. Nevertheless, the entry is from a respectable (if venerable) dictionary. Murray writes that it is now up to Darryl to find an eight-hyphen entry. "Dash it all!!" growls the Bloodhound of Hampton.

Etymological Musings

Harry Hazard of Princeton, N. J. calls attention to the interesting doublet CAVALIER and CHIVALROUS. They are cognate and at one time were similar in meaning when the former was used as an adjective. Although they are not quite antonyms yet, cavalier, by the frequent pro­cess of degeneration, seems to be destined one day to mean "unchival­rous". Harry offers also an excellent example of folk etymology: the phrase "Oh, my achin' head" derives from Edmund Akenhead, cross­word editor of the London Times. Always be skeptical of word deriv­ations, even by authorities such as the Oxford Dictionary of English Ety­mology. James Beard may be a fine cook, but you can take his etymol­ogy with a grain of salt, too. From page 276 of his Delights & Prejudi­ces (Simon & Schuster, 1964): "Barbecue cooking was first introduced in America by the French ... on a homemade spit which pierced the an­imal from barbe a la queue -- literally from whiskers to tail!" Very pat and maybe even correct, but Opdyke, the ODEE, Partridge, Stim­pson and Webster disagree with him. They say barbecue comes from the word barbacoa from Taino (XVIIth century), a now-extinct language of Haiti. The word meant "a framework for outdoor roasting".

Quickies

The Word Buff writes that Web 3 gives the reference entry "Mis­prise var of misprize" and the reference entry "Misprize var of mis­prize". He got caught in what appeared to be an infinite loop between these two entries, but managed to extricate himself by first changing the loop into a figure-eight via the similar pair pendant-pendent, and then closing Web 3 abruptly with an audible crack.

Charles Suhor proposes using suffixes to denote degrees of affabil­ity in a Secretary of State: kissing, kissinger, kissingest. R. Robin­son Rowe writes that EARN is one of a limited class of words that re­main words if you add the suffix -EST either once or twice. Can you find words which form new words upon either one or two additions of the suffixes -ED? -ES? -S? -ER?

Pamela H. Brang points out that Web 3 has the entries BLACK...
HORSE and WHITE HORSE, and Web 2 the entry RED HORSE. No big deal -- except for the fact that all three entries refer to fish!

Mary Youngquist writes that EEFGHINNERSTUVWXZ is the smallest letter-list which can be used, in turn, to spell out the digits zero, one, ... , nine. What is the shortest list of words using exactly these letters? The best she could find was VEX UNFROZEN WIGHTS.

Philip Cohen challenges you to a rather difficult disinterment. The trigram YUP is not frequent in English, except in Gary Cooper movies. YUP is buried in the Web 2 word YUPON and the Web 3 word YUPIK. In what Websterian word is YUPON in turn buried?

Several mentions have been made in Word Ways to words having origins unknown. Ralph Beaman notes that Web 3 says SAWDER, meaning "flatter", is origin unknown. But, under SOFT SAWDER, meaning "flattery", they say SAWDER is from ME solder. So it's both known and unknown!

Steven Larsen of Westwood, California directs our attention to the entry UNDIGENOUS (generated by water) in Webster's Vest-Pocket Dictionary, which does not appear in the late st Pocket Dictionary, the 7th Collegiate, or the 3rd Unabridged (but is in the 2nd). This is further confirmation of the fact that the words in a small Webster are not necessarily a subset of the words in the larger Websters.

A Collegiate Quiz

Thomas L. Bernard of Springfield, Massachusetts notes that we become so used to hearing and accepting names, whether they be of people, places, or even colleges, that we seldom stop to consider the derivation or etymological roots from which they have sprung. How many of the following well-known American college names can you identify?

1. By God!
2. A dove
3. Fat man
4. Big hill
5. New town
6. Bold friend
7. Army guard
8. Sacred oak on a hill
9. A leader
10. Fertile upland
11. A servant
12. Elm wood
13. Upper linden tree
14. Chief guardian
15. A place to sit
16. Brave as a bear
17. Birch meadow
18. Dark wasteland
19. From the mound
20. Springs in the meadow