KICKSHAWS

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Kickshaws is being assembled by a series of guest editors during Dave Silverman's sabbatical in 1976. During this year, all contributions and comments should be sent to the editor in Morristown, N.J.

Warning

The "Journal of Recreational Linguistics" doesn't usually live up to its name, particularly if one excludes the Editor's pieces. This is natural, since linguistics and logology have little in common but language (in the most general sense of this word). Most Word Ways readers are probably more confused than amused by Charles Elliott's delicious pieces, and are not excited by words like Kamchadal qizzenk or Papago hugxxax. But Ross is giving free rein to his Kickshavian-pro-tern, and as a linguistics major I will naturally try an occasional gallop into less-trodden fields -- mostly foreign languages rather than linguistics proper.

Jabberwocky

Introductory linguistics texts usually include a nonsense sentence like this one, from Gleason's Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics:

The ickle squiggs trazed wombly in the harlish goop
to show how much information is conveyed by the little grammatical elements of the language. The introduces a noun phrase; the -s indicates that squiggs is a plural noun, so ickle is probably an adjective; -ish is an adjective suffix; and so on. The sentence could be some obscure dialect version of

The little pigs played happily in the swampish mud

The texts don't weaken their point by mentioning how ambiguous such indicators can be, but it's easy enough to show. Can you find another "translation" of the sentence in which no word (except the and in) is the same part of speech as in the "little pigs" version? One possibility is given in Answers and Solutions.

Short Syllables

There are 26 different one-letter words, since each letter of the
alphabet is a word, and so 25 different one-letter syllables. Ralph Beaman wondered about the less trivial question: can every letter appear as a single syllable in a multisyllable word? A few minutes with Webster's Third got him examples for all, with an isolated W included for completeness: ABC, DMSO, EPN, FBI, OG, HO GAGE, J-BAR, OK, LP GAS, QT, RDX, JOU, V-DAY, W-SHAPED, Y-WORM, BZ. He notes, for the purists, that these are all words; not a single one is given as also being an abbreviation.

Somehow, I doubt that the purists will be mollified. But if one doesn't insist that the syllable be homonymous with the letter's name, Webster's Third still can supply a fairly long list requiring no abbreviation-like spelling-out: able, - , - , even, - , Gho, - , ion, jnana, knaidel, Lwena, ism, hamsocn, open, q'r'i, - , - , tfillin, unit, - , - , yclept, - . Sadr, in Webster's Second, fills a hole; familiar non-Websterian possibilities (if you are willing to overlook the apostrophes) are b'God, Dmitri and box's.

Ausländische Nombres Pravdivye

4 is a truthful number in English, because four has four letters. In Beyond Language, Dmitri Borgmann gave a list of such numbers in other languages, from 1 to 16 (Estonian kuustei stkurnrnend). Darryl Francis turned to the Handbook of American Indian Languages (Franz Boas, ed.) to find further members of what Dave Silverman has called the College of Interesting Cardinals. He came up with examples for 17 (Tlingit), 18 (Siuslawan), 19 (Koryak Kamenskoye), and 22 and 25 (Fox). A check of his results added 28 from Zuñi -- an inferred form, but probably correct.

The Bantu languages tend to use phrases for numbers over 5 (8 is "bend down two", referring to fingers), which makes them good sources for higher members. Examples for 22, 23 and 27 below are from Clement Doke's Textbook of Zulu Grammar; 31 and 33 from E. Jaccotet's A Practical Method to Learn Sesuto; and 38 from Desmond Cole's Introduction to Tswana Grammar.

17 dji'nakat qa daxa'ducu
18 m xE_n u2 x7n°x qta:max
19 ming'i'lik qonya'a cinIn
22 n'i'cwabitaGini'cwinesi\wl, amashumi amabili nambili
23 amashumi amabili nantathu
25 n'i'cwabitaGinya'nanwinesi\wl
27 amashumi amabili nesikhombisa
28 kwilik\na stma ha'elek\ya'ko

Superscript cases -- are decided above, probably best example (from such strictness)
o: kokari?

It should be pery of the abo other work.

Outlandish L'

For those who limerick using the translation

This is re Cowan, then thus sub-Espian

A Gramma

English w Chimu, mum
Outlandish Limericks

For those not intrigued by exotic languages, here’s a macaronic limerick using five more familiar ones. Willard Espy, who provided the translation, says that the author wishes to remain anonymous:

Philologos ’onomast Louis
Parla lingue quaranta due.
When he heard tell
De la tour de Babel,
Alt, "Quorum pars magna fui."

Said a polyglot teacher named Lou,
Who of languages spoke forty-two,
"Don’t sneer at the fable
Called Tower of Babel;
For I was straw boss of the crew."

This is reminiscent of one that Morris Bishop did in 1947 on J. M. Cowan, then head of Cornell’s Modern Foreign Languages Department. Polyglots may want to try a translation before checking the sub-Esian version in Answers and Solutions.

Un jeune homme qui s’appelait Cowan,
Er liebte die lustige Frauen.
— Ya lyublyu vas, — skazal,
"Qué más guapa! ¿Qué tal?"
— Which accounts for the state he is now in.

A Gramma Quiz

English words made up wholly of Greek letters are quite rare. This may be a complete list from Webster’s Unabridged: chichi, Chimu, mumu, pichi, Pleta, pinuchi, pipi, Pisan, pita. Even going
by sound, there can't be many more: Cairo, kal-kal, mumuu, pyro, and that repellent term for science fiction, sci-fi.

But if one looks only for partially-Greek words, the list is immense. More than one hundred words begin with phi- alone. R. Robinson Rowe (whose surname can be added to the second list in the paragraph above) presents 34 such words below, with a dash in each replacing either the spelling or the sound of some Greek letter.

There are no proper nouns. Most words are very common, but a few uncommon ones have been added for frustration. And no fair solving by running through the alphabet!

1. __al 10. __ote 18. de__de 27. d__
2. __ance 11. __-pile 19. des__se 28. e__
3. __ber 12. __rate 20. e__late 29. es__
4. __bot 13. __sel 21. e__t 30. kow__
5. __dlum 14. __sic 22. __ln 31. mag__
6. __el 15. __-ology 23. u__de 32. prophere__
7. __ere 16. am__bole 24. alf__ 33. re__
8. __ke 17. ca__p 25. b__ 34. uni__
9. __loss 26. bur__

M-or-e Pro-g-re/s/s-l-ve Word De-le-tio-ns

A progressive word deletion is the removal of a series of words from a longer word, each nested in the next, until all letters are used. An example is pilgr image, from which we can remove rim, then gag, and finally pile. But pil-g:rim=ag-e can also be divided up pl-i= grim=ag-e to give grim, lag, pie, for a two-way triple deletion. Il, grim, page does not qualify because Il is not nested in grim.

Tom Pulliam produced a nonuple deletion and a four-way quadruple in the August 1975 Word Ways, using only basic boldface entries from Webster's Second and Third. These remarkable feats can be considerably extended if we broaden the stock of acceptable words. In what follows appear Websterian names (Eos, Uni), single-letter nouns (only one can be used per deletion, so this doesn't trivialize the problem), abbreviations that are nouns (BM, TD), inflectional forms (ps, vies), and words from multiword terms (dernier cri, tu quoque). Since the restriction to Webster's is more a convenience than a virtue, 101 (a female hormone) is taken from the Funk & Wagnalls Standard and IUD from the 8th Collegiate. The one notably dubious word is Vicil's, the plural of a trade name in Webster's Third, and a mass noun at that. But one can always claim the right to pluralize any word, if only to mean instances of that word ("there are 89 the's in that article").

The following sexdecuple PWD on pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis is probably the maximum obtainable with dictionary words: ps, ni, Eos, Uni, moco, no, on, Uca, lol, TV, ro, amic, cri, oil, sics, cop. This dodecuple may be the most attainable using Webster's Second only: antidisestablishmentarianism: am, na, ti, in, da, Iri, sea, st, tan, be, lim, etc.

As incentive for the list, I am offering a prize for the best word with built-in quadrate.

Bertrand Rust

Self-descriptive" is just as strong as asking which let's see what
pyrrhic
- iamb
- trochee
- spondee
- tribrach
- anapaest
- dactyl
- antibrach
- amphibrach
- cretina

Several of these are enclitics.

A misprint, stress mark, can be counted only the two that "pyrrhic". (I heard "iambic"
among the third paeon for what it's
This six-way quadruple on vicissitudes, with a quintuple as lag
niappe, is probably not maximal, as it was obtained from the first
word I worked on seriously:

Vici's, se, stud, I vies, Cid, Su sit
VICES, id, ssu, it vies, ide, situ, s
VES, cissie, TD, U
vs, ie, cud, ist, si

All 29 words are different. In fact, there is still some flexibility left:
s-l-tud in the first deletion can be changed to si-tud.

As incentive to creation of an eight-way triple or quadruple, I offer
a prize for the first submission: a Chadwick Industries word-splitter,
with built-in semantic differential (batteries not included).

Bertrand Russell’s Gift to Logology

Self-descriptive words have provided a continuous supply of Kickshaw fodder. (Incidentally, everyone seems to assume that "self-de
scriptive" is self-descriptive. Anyone who claims it isn’t can make
just as strong a case.) Dave Silverman extends the idea to poetry by
asking which metrical foot designators are self-descriptive. First
let’s see what the feet are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feet</th>
<th>Medieval Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00 pyrrhic</td>
<td>amphibrach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 iamb</td>
<td>dilamb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 trochee</td>
<td>bacchius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 spondee</td>
<td>molossus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 tribach</td>
<td>proceleumatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 anapest</td>
<td>antispast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 dactyl</td>
<td>first paean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 antibacchius</td>
<td>fourth paeon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 amphimacer, cretic</td>
<td>Ionic a majore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0 dispondee</td>
<td>Ionic a minore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several of these have Englished forms: major/minor Ionic, epitrite,
choriamb.

A misprint in Webster’s Third left "spondee" without a primary
stress mark, but it’s clearly a spondee. Since secondary stresses
can be counted as unstressed, "trochee" can be a trochee. These are
the only two that qualify, because it’s presumably not kosher to mutter
"pyrrhic". (I was surprised to find that "iamb" is a trochee. Having
heard "Iambic", which is an amphibrach, but not the root word, I
made it iambic by analogy. Live and learn.)

Among adjectival forms, "dactylic" is dactylic in one pronunciation
and "ditrochean" (why not "ditrochaic"?) is ditrochean. If
"third paecnic" is a usable phrase, it could be third paecnic. And
for what it’s worth, all the vowels of "dispondaic" are full vowels
(not schwas), and so are presumably capable of taking some sort of stress.

The Greeks had a word for some stretches of more than four syllables, and possibly alternate names for some of the above feet. Are any of them self-descriptive?

Our Kind of Charles Bostick Quiz

Below is an incomplete list of words with a common property. It should not be hard to think of the category in which they all belong (there is a clue elsewhere in Kickshaws), but that's not the whole story. Once you have it, you should be able to double the list with no trouble.

Batak     Galla     Luhya     Oriya     Shan
Bemba     Gondi     Makua     Pedi     Tajiki
Bhill     Hakka     Mende     Rundi     Tigrinya
Bikol     Ilocano    Min       Sango     Tswana
Chuvash   Khalkha   Mossi     Santali   Tulu
Fula      Konkani   Oraon     Sepedi

Systèrne Internationale

With the metric system on its way, everyone will know the prefixes that occur in words like kilogram and centimeter, but few besides scientists will know them all from atto- (1 quintillionth) to tera- (1 trillion). The February 1973 Kickshaws listed all the prefixes in Webster's Third, and August 1975 added a few unofficial extensions that even up the large side with the small. Now the March 1976 Scientific American (in "Science and the Citizen") has given a list of all the official prefixes. Too new for the dictionaries are the two biggest, peta- (1 quadrillion) and exa- (1 quintillion). These are much drabber than the ones suggested in Danloux-Dumesnil's The Metric System. Our galaxy ought to be 900 "nebumeraters" in diameter; exameters are more suitable for measuring Alexandrines.

In case you wonder what this has to do with Kickshaws ... back in February 1971, Dave Silverman noted that these prefixes needn't be limited to science and a few slang terms like "megabuck". And, in fact, there are about three billion atoms in an attoboy; a pack of cards contains 5.2 dekacards; a petacoat could be laid out to cover all of Asia; and a full peal on seven bells requires 352.8 hectorings. The Hungarian government could have used these prefixes in the 1946 inflation; that June they were issuing 100-etapengő bills.

I particularly like the extreme prefixes for their link to the macro and micro universes. For example, my height is about 55 attopar ses.

In Brief

Mangie, who joins us from the National Puzzlers' League, says...
she'd give her right arm to be ambidextrous.

Last August, Harry "Hap" Hazard mentioned cavalier/chivalrous as doublet words that are nearing antonymy. Another such pair is treason/tradition. Shirt/skirt contrast somewhat. Not opposed, but striking, are five/punch, etiquette/sticker. forge/fabric, cannabis/hemp, and ladder/clitoris.

Dave Silverman says that people seem to be increasingly unwilling to put firm opinions on the line. A phrase he has heard quite frequently (and his candidate for the most waffling of them all): "In my opinion, I don't think so." While on this subject, have you noticed how many people try to escape whatever dire consequences saying NO would visit on them by saying "Not really"? Drop Dave in the bootdocks of Madagascar, where all directness of speech is frowned on as impolite, and he'd go mad in days.

The May 1976 Kickshaws requested words other than of in which the letter F has a non-f sound. How about the Welsh word eisteddfod, in which it sounds like v? Dmitri Borgmann adds the Celtic Haigan (one of the rivals for the kingship of Annwn), also found in Webster's Second. George Grieshaber of Lockland, Ohio vaguely recalls the surname Tollifer, pronounced Tolliver.

Darryl Francis notes that Partridge's Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English derives spondulics from the Greek word spondulikos, the adjective of spondulos, a species of shell very popular in prehistoric and early historic commerce. Since cowrie shells have been used as money in ancient Asia and ancient and modern Africa, the derivation is a plausible one. A more immediate inspiration for shell-money was provided by the North American Indian wampum. Darryl improves on the alphabetical money list with X (a ten dollar bill) or X Ray (a ten thousand dollar bill), both in Partridge's Dictionary of the Underworld.

A column on solecisms quotes an Army sergeant as saying, "All right, you guys, line up alphabetically according to height." If he'd said "according to height, alphabetically," they might have managed it.

A well-known tongue-twisting exercise is to say "toy boat" very quickly ten times. When you've mastered that, try it with a ship: "twin-screw steel cruiser". Doesn't this appear somewhere in Webster's Third?

Tom Pulliam produced a 16-letter quaternade last issue. To match it, here's a 16-letter octade (octonade?) discovered by L. D. R. of the National Puzzlers' League: Pennsylvania oils / pa, en, ni, na, so, Yi, 'II, vs. All words can be found in Webster's Second (Yi as part of Yi Ching).

Particularly Useless Information Quiz

I'm not sure what's par on this, but it should be less than one:
1. There are a number of different tons in use: the short ton (2000 lb.), the long ton (2240 lb.), the metric ton (1 Mg, or 2204.6 lb.), and so on. Which is the smallest?

2. Identify this sequence: elm (or fir), birch, hazel, oak, aspen, elder, ivy, whitethorn, ivy (or yew), quicken, vine, ash, broom, dwarf elder, elder, willow, furze, heath (or yew).

3. A fantastic version of the previous question. Give the last element in this sequence: metal, book, lamp, feather, gate, ...

4. The ancient Burmese philosopher Fnu Nmi Lnu was known as "the anonymous sage". Why?


History Twister

Charles Bostick asks this intriguing science-fictional question: how might the world be different if the order of the alphabet were some permutation of what we regard as normal? If the sequence were, say, RAHLWI... what effects would this have?

Classroom arrangements would differ, of course. The Guinness Book of Records would list Benjamin Bbbbel of Los Angeles as the last name in any phone book. And personalities might alter; there is evidence that people with names coming late in alphabetical order get grumpy or neurotic from always waiting longer. What else?

More interestingly, can you think of any specific historical event that was determined by alphabetic ordering? Unable to think of any notables who met because of alphabetical adjacency, I asked E. W. Fox, a Cornell history professor, for ideas. He pointed out that many organizations, such as the U.S. Senate, vote in alphabetical order. If the alphabet had given an early vote to most supporters of a narrowly-defeated motion (say, the impeachment of Andrew Johnson), a bandwagon effect might have developed. (On a crucial vote, members may abstain on the first run-through to see how the wind is blowing, which somewhat lessens this factor.)

Can anyone make a convincing argument for some such case? Or come up with a better example?

Parting Advice From the Notebooks of Magdalen More

Always carry a grapefruit.