Some Words About Words

I have a theory that logophiles are drawn to words because words have so much in common with people. Like people, words are born and even die. They may be very old, as MAN and WIFE; they may be quite young, as RADAR and XEROX; they may be newly born and struggling to live, as STAGFLATION; or they may no longer be alive, as LEECH-CRAFT, the Anglo-Saxon word for the practice of medicine, BELLYTIM-BER, which once meant food, or MURFLES, a now defunct word for freckles or pimples.

Our lives are filled with people and words, and in both cases we are bound to be impressed with their vast numbers and infinite variety. Some words, like OK, are famous all over the world; others, like FOO-ZLE and ADZ, are scarcely known, even at home. Like people, there are some words that we probably will never meet, such as MESEMBO-ANTHEMUM, and others that are with us practically every day of our lives, such as THE, OF, AND, TO and A, our five most frequently employed words in writing.

As with people, words have all sorts of shapes, backgrounds, and personalities. They may be large: PNEUMONOLTRAMICROSCOPIC- SILICOVOLCANOCONIOSIS (a lung congestion contracted by readers of Word Ways who inadvertently inhale dust from old dictionaries); they may be small: I. They may be multinational in their heritage, as REMACADAMIZE, which is Latin-Celtic-Hebrew-Greek; they may be of old English stock, as LORD and GOODNESS; or they may be unmistakably American, as STUNT and BASEBALL. Words like REMUNERATIVE and EMOLUMENT are so dignified that they can intimidate us, while others, like BURP and BLUBBER, are distinctly undignified in character. There are words such as ECDYSIAST (Mencken’s name for a stripteaser) that love to put on fancy airs; there are others, like VIDIOET (someone who watches too much television) that are merely playful. Certain words strike us as rather beautiful, such as LUMINOUS and GOSSAMER, others as rather ugly, such as SCHROD and GUZZLE, some as quiet, like DAWN and DUSK, others as noisy -- THUNDER and CRASH.

Also noted,ничтожное количество людей, которые могут изменить наши жизни в долгосрочной перспективе, изменило жизнь человека или пилота на холме, как мы знаем теперь, Мит-Сильвер.

Words? Words

We all "...

Dmitri Borgman's linguists and lexicographers, but all at the same time. Another definition usually regarded to be entries could be:

1) compound
2) small
3) words like

Borgman's etymological dictionary, the word consists of a formation as independent made of a frequent (meaning filler) morpheme alone.

1) FIDDLI
2) words like
3) CRANB
4) UNDE
5) IN CLUST
6) MIT-SIL
Words? Words? Words?

We all "know" what a word is, yet no one can explain what it is. As Dmitri Borgmann showed us in "Words" in the August 1979 issue, linguists and lexicographers have tried to define the concept of what a word is, but all attempts fall in some way. Borgmann presented a representative definition of Mario Pei - "A spoken or written symbol of an idea, usually regarded as the smallest independent sense-unit" - and proceeded to demonstrate that, by such reasoning, a number of dictionary entries could not qualify as words:

1) compounds like LOVEMATE which are clearly factorable into smaller independent sense-units
2) words like JOINTRESS which are less apparently divisible
3) words like JAI ALAI in which the space separating the two parts does not actually signal the existence of two independent sense-units.

Borgmann's examples make it embarrassingly clear that words do not constitute the smallest units of meaning in a language. Instead, linguists posit that words are constructed of smaller parts called morphemes, and these morphemes are in turn identified as the smallest units of indivisible sense meaning. Thus, Borgmann's LOVEMATE is identified as a word consisting of two "free" morphemes (themselves capable of existing as independent words), while JOINTRESS is classified as a word made of a free morpheme, join, and a "bound" morpheme, (t)ress (meaning female), that cannot stand alone. But before we all become morpheme addicts, let us examine some dictionary entries:

1) FIDDLE- FADDLE, NITTY-GRITTY: in reduplicative words like these we identify fiddle and gritty as free morphemes. Faddle and nitty must, therefore, be bound morphemes since they cannot exist as independent words. If this is true, what minimal sense is contained in faddle and nitty?
2) UNDERSTAND, FRIENDSHIP, CLOCKWISE: in each of these words we recognize two morphemes, but how can we define the meanings of under, stand, ship, and wise?
3) CRANBERRY, BOYSENBERRY, HUCKLEBERRY, BILBERRY: in all we recognize the free morpheme berry. But how do we classify cran, boysen, huckle, and bil?
4) In the sentence "The fast food eatery gave out plastic SILVERWARE, how can we possibly state the meaning of the morpheme SILVER?
5) In clusters like CONFER-PREFER-TRANSFER and COMMIT-REMIT-SUBMIT, linguists would identify a series of bound morphemes (here prefixes and roots). But what even vague meanings

Also notable is that the reputations of words, like those of people, may change radically as the years pass. Some words may begin their lives in low station and become elevated, as ANGEL, which in its early life merely a messenger, and GOVERNOR, originally a steersman or pilot. But more commonly the reputations of words slide downhill, as we know from the careers of VULGAR, VILLAIN and, more recently, MICKEY MOUSE.
do fer and mit share in the examples above?

6) In RECEIVE and GROCER we are inclined to spot two morphemes, identifying re- as a prefix meaning "back" or "again" and -er as a suffix meaning "one who." But in the sentence "She received her first tricycle yesterday" re- cannot possibly mean "back" or "again," and -er can't mean "one who" since grocers don't groce any more than doctors doct, chauffers chauff, Ecklers eckle, or Lederers leder.

7) In RADAR (Radio Detecting And Ranging) and SNAFU (Situation Normal, All Fouled Up) how many morphemes are there? Does the number depend on the awareness of the person using or receiving such words?

All of this inquiry draws attention to an exceedingly intriguing part of word study. We "know" what a word is; we can demonstrate this knowledge by listing words, identifying words, breaking up utterances into words; and, if we are logologically inclined, we can take words apart and reglue them. But we still cannot define the concept in a way that accounts for every item identified as a word by users of a given language. Nevertheless, this magazine, called Word Waves, will, I trust, continue to live and flourish -- and this Kickshaw's article will continue to muddle along.

Compound Interest

In "Strange Paradoxes" in the February 1977 issue, Jezebel Q. Xixx offered an array of seeming contradictions latent in our language: "Yesterday's tomorrow is tomorrow's yesterday!" "An inexperienced Communist is a green Red." Because compounds often express ideas that are quite different from the sum of the morphemes (we use the term with appropriate reservations) that make them, they provide a rich source of the strange paradoxes that Xixx explored. We all know what the color black looks like, but we seldom think twice about the fact that BLACKBIRDS, BLACKBERRIES, and BLACKBOARDS are not always black. The blackbird hen is actually brown; blackberries are red before they are ripe; and nowadays many blackboards are green or some other color. The previously-encountered plastic SILVERWARE furnishes another example. Supply the missing compounds in each of the following sentences so that a paradox results (the numbers represent the letters in each constituent). The answers to this and subsequent queries can be found in Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

1) The light can be on in a 4+4
2) A 3+3 can be cold in the refrigerator
3) A 3+5 need not contain cups
4) A student can do 4+4 at school
5) One can take a 4+3 through a valley
6) A 4+4 often contains no bath
7) A 4+4 is actually a near-hit

Related to such compound paradoxes are phrases whose words seem to come in reverse order. Classical rhetoricians dubbed this phenomenon hysterone-proteron. I can think of only three examples in English:

SHOES AND SCOFF
OVER HEELS (must be)
but I find them after (post)
additional examples

In "Particules" of the most familiar language is its parts other parts of compound verbs can they often make:

1) A house
2) When we
3) When we
4) A car sl
5) We add v
6) We chop

More verb-adv:

7) We fill i
8) When we
9) When we
10) We look
11) After we
12) We upho
13) We try t

when and

I collect compound:

When two words are association of one of the word is obviou have you beh

ATONE (which BREAKFAST, HANDKERCHI

Finally, to take in rhyme, (discussed in g

fat cat
jet set
payday
heyday
peg leg
sky high
low blow
"She really meant..." morpheme(s), "She really meant..."

Since grocers auf, Ecklers (Situation here? Does it support or refute...)

The intriguing part of these examples is the knowledge into words apart which we can + in a way that acquires... Rust, continue... continue to muddle

Ezebel Q. Xixx

Language: "Yes-experienced Com-plex ideas that... know what... the fact that... not always... are red before... or some other... furnishes another... following sen-..." letters in... stories can be

SHOES AND SOCKS (in practice we put on our socks first). BACK AND FORTH (mustn't we go forth before we can go back?), and falling HEAD OVER HEELS in love (shouldn't that be heels over head, since the head is normally over the heels?). You may find these preposterous, but I find them postpre-erous since something preposterous has the after (post) before the before (pre). At any rate, can readers supply additional examples of hysteron-proteron in English?

In "Particular Particles" in the August 1978 issue, I noted that one of the most flavorful and intriguing characteristics of the English language is its penchant for joining little adverbs like up, in and out to other parts of speech to form compounds. Because adverbs in compound verbs can have extremely diverse meanings or no meaning at all, they often make for lively paradoxes. The adverb up is especially uppity:

1) A house burns up and down at the same time
2) When we walk down a street, we walk up a street
3) When we get up, it's time to come down
4) A car slows up when it slows down
5) We add up a column of figures by adding them down
6) We chop down a tree and then chop it up

More verb-adverb paradoxes:

7) We fill in a form by filling it out
8) When we give out, we usually give in (and up)
9) When we put people on, we put them off (and out)
10) We look over something so as not to overlook something
11) After we set up a table, we can upset it
12) We uphold our tennis partners so as not to hold them up
13) We try to withstand and overcome the enemy so as not to stand with and come over to that enemy

I collect compounds of all types, two of which I shall now present. When two words cleave unto each other to form a compound, the pronunciation of one or both may change in such a way that the compound nature of the word is obscured even when the spelling is retained. How conscious have you been of the compound elements in the following words:

ATONE (which does issue from at one), BACKGROUND, BLACKGUARD, BREAKFAST, CLAPBOARD, COXSWAIN, CUPBOARD, FORECASTLE, HANDKERCHIEF, NECKLACE, VINEYARD, WAISTCOAT?

Finally, to illustrate the instinctive pleasure that English speakers take in rhyme, I present a selection of common rhyming expressions (discussed in great detail by Iris Tiedt in the February 1973 issue):

fat cat
jet set
payday
heyday
peg leg
sky high
low blow
ture blue
May Day
cookbook
boob tube
no go
speed read
prime time
bedspread
redhead
letter sweater
wear and tear
near and dear
rough and tough
lean and mean
huff and puff
fair and square
high and dry
tit or tat
by hook or crook
ants in his pants
lock, stock, barrel
Getting a Fix on Affixing

Along with compounding, which uses words themselves as raw material for new words, the other great process of English word-formation is derivation, the attaching of a so-called bound morpheme -- a prefix or suffix -- to a stem, frequently a word. Derivation seems to be a rather bland, unexciting method of creating new words; but, as I hope the puzzles and observations coming up will show, affixed words are fraught with hidden logological challenges.

Let's start at the beginning, with prefixes. In the August 1969 Kickshaws words such as EPT and DOLENT -- non-existent stems produced by removing a negative prefix -- were christened unnegatives by Dave Silverman. Can you create two unnegatives by shearing away each of the following negative prefixes (a total of eighteen words): IN-, IL-, IM-, IR-, UN-, NON-, DIS-, A-, DE-?

The negative prefix un-, meaning "not," is almost always attached to an adjective like UNHAPPY or a derived adjective like UNFRIENDLY. But there are exceptions -- five that I can think of -- in which un- is prefixed to a noun: two common dictionary entries, one coined by Lewis Carroll, one by George Orwell, and one by an unknown huckster for ginger ale. Can you discover these?

Un- is also prefixed to verbs with the meaning "to reverse the action," as in UNTIE and UNPACK. In two instances I can think of, un- does not reverse the action of its verb. What are these examples?

In a limited number of cases, prefixes can be used to alter the part of speech of a base word. Using prefixes, convert each word below according to the instructions given:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>little (adj. to verb)</td>
<td>witch (noun to verb)</td>
<td>knowledge (noun to verb)</td>
<td>body (noun to verb)</td>
<td>able (adj. to verb)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Suffixes are much more likely than prefixes to acquire diverse meanings over time, a phenomenon well illustrated by the many uses of -er in the following line-up:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffixes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WRITER - someone who x's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAWYER - someone who practices x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPUTER - something that x's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWEATER - something that causes x'ing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RETAINER - someone who is x'd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSTER - something that is x'd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PENSIONER - someone who receives x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANQUETER - someone associated with x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIDOWER - a male x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRANGER - one who is x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW YORKER - an inhabitant of x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUSTER - an act of x'ing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE-WHEELER - something possessing x's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMMER - no meaning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words like -er, -ism, -ology or -ology -- are often defined as a verbal synonym, an adjectival synonym, and an adjectival kind of paraphrastic equivalent of a word.

Can you list other words like this? Can you identify a contronym -- a word having two opposite meanings?

Maxey Brokenshire, dotard, socialist, financier, and there are at least two words that one particular linguist is looking up in the random examples can:

Speakers are often one part of speech and two parts of speech or more in the traffic between nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs:

Noun
Verb
Adjective
Adverb
An asterisk in the traffic between nouns, verbs, and adjectives indicates that in some cases the word is more easily regarded as a noun, in others as a verb, and in still others as an adjective. Capital Ideas
Words like SWEATER and BLEACHER, incidentally, show how easily a verbal symbol can lose its metaphorical energy on its way up from slang to standard English. Out of this phenomenon we can create another kind of paradox in expressions such as "indoor bleachers" and "lightweight sweaters."

Can you list eight suffixes that mean "one who is female" and three that mean "one who is small"? Which suffix appears in both lists? Identify a contronymic suffix: one that, in different contexts, possesses two opposing meanings.

Maxey Brooke writes: "Agent forming suffixes include artisan, merchant, dotard, secretary, magistrate, engineer, worker, student, musician, financier, paviour, artist, hireling, actor, songster. I'll bet that there are at least that many more." Mr. Brooke is right. Can you match and even exceed the fifteen items above?

You need only examine the trade names on the packages that line supermarket shelves to see how manufacturers and advertisers have perfected the art of refitting old morphemes into new suffixes. For example, the ending -ine, which goes back to the Greek -inos ("of or relating to") is now attached, with no particular lexical significance, to such brand names as LISTERINE, DENTINE, MURINE, VISINE, and ABSORBINE, JR. Purveyors of pasta dehydrate macaroni to -roni and then reattach the remnant in RICE-A-RONI, BEEFARONI, NOODLE-RONI, and ELBORONI. My sojourns through the world of commerce convince me that one particular suffix outnumbers all others in its penchant for bringing up the rear of trade and company names. What is it and how many examples can you offer?

Speakers and writers of English use suffixes to transfer words from one part of speech to another. The matrix below indicates how free is the traffic between nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Adverb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mountaineer</td>
<td>symbolize</td>
<td>truthful</td>
<td>clockwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journalist</td>
<td>codify</td>
<td>humorous</td>
<td>homeward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defendant</td>
<td>seeing*</td>
<td>sinkable</td>
<td>hurriedly*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depression</td>
<td>roasted*</td>
<td>attractive</td>
<td>sadly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>madness</td>
<td>weaken</td>
<td>reddish</td>
<td>manifold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>fertilize</td>
<td>goodly</td>
<td>backwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overage</td>
<td>fasten</td>
<td>uppy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An asterisk indicates an inflectional rather than derivational suffix.

Capital Ideas

In English there are over 20,000 eponyms — words, usually uncategorized, that originate from the names of people or places, real or imaginary (see, for example, Willard Espy's O Thou Improper, Thou Uncommon Noun). Here are some puzzles, the answers to which involve
categories that have not, as far as I can tell, appeared in Word Ways. You may not use items that spring from classical mythology or that begin with capital letters. List: 1) four place-name eponyms that denote a confused, noisy situation; 2) ten eponyms that come from the names of people or places that exist only in literature; 3) seven eponyms based on common male first names; 4) nine eponyms that began life as the names of tribes or peoples.

In "The Sinister Seven" in Beyond Language, Dmitri Borgmann lists seven words (I call them capitonyms) whose pronunciation and meaning change when they are capitalized: tangier, salamis, home, chou, lame, polish and singer. Can you find five more such words? (Hint: one is the surname of a well-known present-day politician.)

The King James version of the Bible stands as one of the few great accomplishments performed by a committee. Many commentators have noted the oddity of the apparent fact that among the fifty-four translators chosen the greatest poet of the age, William Shakespeare, was absent. Perhaps, though, he wasn't. In 1610, the year of the translation, Shakespeare was forty-six years old. If you turn to the forty-sixth psalm in the King James Bible and note the forty-sixth word from the beginning and the forty-sixth word from the end (excluding the cadential Selah), you will discover SHAKE SPEAR.

Punifications Upun Puns

A number of Kickshaws guest editors have taken the opportunity to offer small disquisitions on the art of punning. I shall take my place among them.

Scoffing at puns seems to be a conditioned reflex, and throughout literary history there has been a steady barrage of slanderous cannonades aimed at the practice of punning. Nearly three hundred years ago, John Denis wrote, "A pun is the lowest form of wit." Happily, Oscar Levant has added a bit to the proverb: "A pun is the lowest form of humor -- when you don't think of it first." Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth-century self-appointed custodian of the English language, once proclaimed:

To trifle with the vocabulary which is the vehicle of social intercourse is to tamper with the currency of human intelligence. He who would violate the sanctities of his Mother Tongue would invade the recesses of the national till without remorse.

But if language is money and logologists are thieves, then Johnson was a felon, for to him is attributed the quatrain: I should be punished / For every pun I shed: / Do not leave a puny shred / Of my punnish head.

Perhaps it was Edgar Allan Poe -- of all people -- who summed up the situation best when he wrote: "Of puns it has been said that those most dislike who are least able to utter them."

Punning is largely the trick of combining two or more ideas within a single word. Punning challenges us to apply the greatest possible pressure per square syllable of language. Punning surprises us by flouting the law of nature place at the same concise. Thus the triple and even

- Pharaoh's she took a - Charlemagne after the end
- A man gave was a spot - Newton M it well done

Positional Word Pickers think, because your personal favorite

1. YOU JUST
2. PAID I'M WORKED
3. KNEE LOTA
4. ME ME ME A L A L A L

The Glamor of Grammatical Residues

Grammar resides in nineteenth century. As I approach the eighteenth century -- the "will call the academic exercise" -- the more I am convinced that the writer's relief in writing the language of the world and the writer's ease in writing the terminology which is the way to avoid the grammarous in any given writing, even enchantment.
or that be-

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Borgmann

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by flouting

the law of nature which contends that two things cannot occupy the same place at the same time. Punning is an exercise of the mind in being concise. Thus it is that, among the canon of puns, my favorites are triple and even quadruple plays that transpire within little spaces:

- Pharaoh's daughter was like a broker in a bear market because she took a little profit from the rushes on the banks
- Charlemagne mustered his Franks and set out with great relish after the enemy but couldn't catch up
- A man gave his sons a cattle ranch and named it Focus because it was a spot where the sons raise meat
- Newton Minow once compared television to steak: a medium rarely well done

Positional rebuses of the kind that Helen Gunn presented in "Wordy Word Pickers" in the November issue are circulated widely largely, I think, because they are visual-verbal puns. Here are seven of my personal favorites plus several sent in by Robert Funt:

1. YOU JUST ME 5. ASS 10. SUN (movie title)
2. PAID 6. ALL world 11. STREAM
4. ME ME ME 8. 3Tdv 13. MY ICU DREAMS
5. L 9. HE A T E R

The Glamor of Grammar

Grammar and glamor are historically the same word. Back in the eighteenth century one of the meanings of grammar was "magic, enchantment" -- the Scots let slip the r into an 1, and 10, came forth glamour. In the popular mind, grammar is anything but glamorous. Whatever magic resides in the subject is seen to be a sort of black magic, a mysterious cauldron filled with creepy, crawly things.

As I approach the end of my second decade as an English teacher, I am convinced more than ever that the study need not be an arcane, academic exercise. "Every self-respecting mechanic," said John Dewey, "will call the parts of an automobile by their right names because that is the way to distinguish them." Thus it is with grammatical concepts and the writer. If Alexander Pope is correct in advising us that "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance," a knowledge of structural terminology will, I believe, reduce the chance and enhance the art, even if the names are one day forgotten. Ultimately, though, my primary rationale is that, in the words of Paul Roberts, "the best reason for studying grammar is that grammar is interesting." It may not be glamorous in any glittery Hollywood sense, but grammar can be very interesting, even enchanting. In the next section I give two examples of this enchantment.
Irregular Verbs and Supersentences

English verbs are traditionally divided into two great classes depending on how they form their past and perfect tenses. First are regular verbs, which take dental endings (d, ed, or t) in their past and perfect tenses: love-loved-loved, roast-roasted-roasted, creep-crept-crept. Second are irregular verbs, which change tense not by adding dental endings in past and perfect but by changing vowels, adding an n or en, or some other method: write-wrote-written, run-ran-run. One challenge I set for students is to list the sixteen different types of irregular verbs and then to arrange them in such a way that they move from let-let-let (the most homogeneous) to go-went-gone (the most anomalous) by changing only one of the three morphological relationships at a time. One solution is given below; the underlines connect the unchanged relationships in a ratio format (for example, read "let is to run as let is to run" or "take is to taken as beat is to beaten").

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>let</th>
<th>let</th>
<th>let</th>
<th>begin</th>
<th>began</th>
<th>begun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>run</td>
<td>ran</td>
<td>run</td>
<td>wear</td>
<td>wore</td>
<td>worn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spin</td>
<td>spun</td>
<td>spun</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>did</td>
<td>done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>took</td>
<td>taken</td>
<td>fly</td>
<td>flew</td>
<td>flown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beat</td>
<td>beat</td>
<td>beaten</td>
<td>blow</td>
<td>blew</td>
<td>blown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>break</td>
<td>broke</td>
<td>broken</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>showed</td>
<td>shown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child</td>
<td>chided</td>
<td>childen</td>
<td>be</td>
<td>was</td>
<td>been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>wrote</td>
<td>written</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>gone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the table, it is assumed the pronunciation of been is British: ben.

After my scholars have completed their study of descriptive English grammar, I often assign them the writing of a "supersentence" -- a single sentence that includes at least one example of each of the seven phrases and subordinate clauses that are identified in English grammar: 1) adverb clause, 2) adjective clause, 3) infinitive phrase, 4) noun clause, 5) gerund phrase, 6) participial phrase, 7) prepositional phrase. These structures may occur in any order in the sentence.

Recently, while grading a batch of supersentences, I decided to try writing one myself, using the fewest words possible. (Before continuing, some readers may wish to try it, too.) An hour of industry produced the following (superscripts identify the clauses given above):

1) When people 2 who swing want 3 to see 4 what's happening, they try 5 attending parties given 6 by hipsters (16 words)

I proudly presented my concoction to my departmental colleagues and to my students. A few days later, when I entered my tenth grade classroom, I found written on the board:

Fred, wanting 3 to win 7 by 5 playing hard, practiced 1 more than I, who knew 4 to be stank (15 words)

Among the triumphantly glowing faces ringing the table was that of Bruce Monrad, a positive whip of a young linguist who, as a sophomore,
was already taking advanced Latin and French. Bruce, it turned out, was the author of the fifteen-word supersentence -- a creation that not only contains an elliptical adverb clause, "than I (practiced)," and a hidden noun clause, "(that) he stank," but one in which the four phrases are compacted into the subordinate part of the sentence and the three clauses into the main part. Not to be outdone, I labored for a few days and came up with:

6Stung 7 by 4 what happened, Lederer began 5 trying 3 to write 1 better than Monrad, 2 who fainted (14 words)

Next morning, I marched into the classroom and triumphantly engraved my new sentence on the blackboard, only to be instantly one-upped by my young rival, who stepped forward and inscribed:

6Helping 3 win 7 by 5 scoring 1 more than I, 2 who thought 4 he stank, Fred overcame (13 words)

Here Bruce's brilliant excision of one word is accomplished in his second phrase, the infinitive, in which he leaves out the to: "Helping (to) win by scoring..."

Now I was growing desperate. Word of the contest had spread throughout the school. How could I ever again face my colleague and my students if I were to be defeated by a mere stripling? The whole affair was beginning to give the lie to William Cobbett's cynical pronouncement, "the study of grammar is dry... it engages not the passions."

Resolving not to give up, I closeted myself for the entire weekend and finally emerged from my study with eureka! on my lips, for I had written:

6Helping 3 win 7 by 5 overcoming 4 what threatened, Lederer, 2 who persisted 1 when challenged, triumphed (12 words)

In addition to being eminently readable, my supersentence is characterized by two clever strokes: a clause within a phrase within a phrase, and the distillation of the adverb clause into a two-word combination, "when (he was) challenged," instead of the previous three words, "more than I." Not only are all the structures as concise as they can be, but with the exception of the subject, Lederer, all nouns, adjectives and adverbs are now replaced by phrases and clauses. The sentence seems to be traveling at the speed of light. It can become no smaller.

Or so I thought.

On Monday morning I strutted into class and hubristically presented my "ultimate" supersentence, delivering a learned lecture proving that we had indeed reached the end of the road supersentencewise. "Not so fast, Mr. Lederer," Bruce giggled, and proceeded to explain that he, too, that very morning, had discovered the formula for the two-word adverb clause while reciting a prayer "For Special Persons" in school Chapel ("comfort him when discouraged or sorrowful...") and that,
moreover, he had been able to replace all nouns, adjectives, and adverbs with phrases and clauses. He then chalked up:

4Whoever rebels, 6daring 3oppose 7by 5fighting 1when oppressed, 2which overcomes, conquers (11 words)

Alas, there is no possible ten-word supersentence. Like two boys choosing sides for a baseball game, Bruce and I have run our hands up the bat, and there isn't any wood left. Actually, of course, we've both won.

A Logologist's Dictionary of Unfamiliar Quotations

The first meaning of KICKSHAWS listed in the OED is "a fancy dish in cookery" and the first quotation is from Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part II: "A joint of mutton and any pretty little tiny Kick-Shawes." For the dessert of this meal I supplement Darryl Francis's "Quotable Quotes" with an assortment that strike me as especially apt:

- By words the mind is excited and the spirit elated (Aristophanes)
- There is no material with which human beings work which has so much potential energy as words (Ernest Calkins)
- "When I make a word do a lot of work like that," said Humpty Dumpty, "I always pay it extra" (Lewis Carroll)
- For words, like Nature, half reveal / And half conceal the soul within (Alfred, Lord Tennyson)
- All our intellectual and most of our emotional discriminations keep their order and clarity through words (I.A. Richards)
- First, verily, are words produced, and the mind runs after them (Vedic Commentary)
- After all, there is no such literature as a Dictionary (William Osler)
- A language long employed by a delicate and critical society is a treasure of dexterous felicities (Walter Bagehot)
- A good word makes the heart glad (Book of Proverbs)
- But words are things, and a small drop of ink, Falling like dew upon a thought produces That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think (Lord Byron)
- Stability in language is synonymous with rigor mortis (Ernest Weekly)
- A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanging. It is the skin of living thought (Oliver W. Holmes)
- Words strain, Crack and sometimes break under the burden, Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, Will not stay still (T.S. Eliot)

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