TAMING THE TAUTONYM

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A tautonym or reduplication is a word or name consisting of two identical parts, one following the other - a term such as OO, KAKA, ELEELE, RAHURAHU, XIQUE-XIQUE, TANGANTANGAN, or KANDIRI-KANDI-RI. The latter, by the way, is a musical bow of the Balese of the Congo, with a tuning loop but no resonator (Sibyl Marcuse, Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary, Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964). The term REDUPLICATION is just as redundant as tautonyms give the impression of being, for its meaning adds exactly nothing to that of the simpler word DUPLICATION.

Most tautonyms, including the examples just cited, are horribly un-English - in etymology, in meaning, and in appearance. They offend the eye and the spirit, and logologists have long since banished them to the outermost periphery of English. There, tautonyms lead a furtive existence, skulking in the sinister shadows of language, always ready to trap an unwary visitor, dragging him down into the quicksands and oblivion.

A second group of tautonyms, one adopting the protective coloration of good English, consists of words each half of which resembles, or actually is, an English word. Examples include GOODIE-GOODIE, PRETTY-PRETTY, TWENTY-TWENTY, BUCKETY-BUCKETY, and BUMPETY-BUMPETY (or BUMPITY-BUMPITY). The members of this tautonym class are invariably hyphenated, also conveying an aura of cheap informality and inferiority - two qualities that offend the logologist's aesthetic sensibilities. He therefore rejects them as resolutely as he does those of the first group.

Tautonyms of the two classes discussed thus far rarely, if ever, exceed fourteen letters in length. A third group of reduplications, one with pretensions to scholarliness, consists of the redundant, scientific genus-and-species or species-and-subspecies names assigned to numerous plants and animals. Such tautonyms are capable of achieving greater lengths. Examples of these include TROGLODYTES TROGLODYTES (a small English wren, not a primitive human who creeps into holes), HEMILEPIDOTUS HEMILEPIDOTUS (the spotted irishlord, a fish of the American Pacific), XANTHOCEPHALUS XANTHOCEPHALUS (the yellow-headed blackbird), and PSEUDOPUNCTIPENNIS PSEUDOPUNCTIPENNIS (a malaria-carrying subspecies of the Anopheles mosquito). Any truly honest appraisal of such tautonyms finds them just as remote from standard English as are the members of the first group considered. Simple decency therefore requires the logologist to reject these reduplications as well.

Left as the sole example of a genuinely English tautonym long enough to command attention is a term in elementary physics - PER SECOND PER SECOND. The equally-long tautonym AVOIDANCE-AVOIDANCE CONFLICT must be rejected on the grounds that it is part of a phrase, unable to stand on its own. A yet longer English tautonym, GENTLEMAN'S GENTLEMAN'S, is marred by two apostrophes and raises the inevitable question: a gentleman's gentleman's what? Its conceptual incompleteness disqualifies it from inclusion in the logologist's tautonym portfolio. The only survivor of a critical appraisal of English tautonyms, PER SECOND PER SECOND, does not warrant establishing and dealing with a class of entities known pompously as tautonyms or reduplications.

After reflecting on this dilemma for some years, I have decided to adopt a new approach to tautonymy. Not all of the shorter tautonyms belong to one of the three rejected classifications. Let us, therefore, survey the field and salvage those specimens worthy of preservation in the Museum of Reduplication. They are sufficiently limited in number to make them logologically valuable. They are, in fact, so few that it becomes necessary to augment the collection with tautonyms trailing additional, extraneous alphabetic letters in their wake - as an unbidden entourage, one might say. To my knowledge, no one has ever before attempted to collect such tautonym specimens.

My initial efforts have addressed the realm of tautonyms six letters in length. Presented below are ten worthwhile specimens falling into that classification - pure specimens:

bonbon	chichi	palpal	testes	un-hunh
cancan	murmur	pom-pom	tyltyl	valval

Varying virtues have qualified these examples. PALPAL, TESTES and VALVAL are derivatives of nontautonymic words - PALPUS, TESTIS, and VALVE. The standard, impersonal mechanisms of English word formation have turned the derivatives into accidental tautonyms. Someone using these words does not automatically sense their tautonymic quality, noticing it only by accident. That's what I call class! BONBON, CANCAN, CHICHI and POM-POM (as an ornamental ball or tuft) are of French origin, not from the language of some primitive African or Pacific Ocean tribe, thereby investing them with the requisite class or sophistication.

MURMUR is a very common English word - according to Helen S. Eaton's An English-French-German-Spanish Word Frequency Dictionary (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1961), it is one of the 2527 most common ones. Those using the word are generally not conscious of its tautonymic character. TYLTYL is the name of the boy in Maurice Maeterlinck's 1909 drama L'Oiseau bleu who, with his little sister Mytyl, goes searching for the Blue Bird of Happiness. The extraordinarily positive associations of this name - Frenchness, happiness, and the five-vowel word OISEAU - make it impossible to exclude TYLTYL from the approved tautonym list. UN-HUNH ("yes"), at first glance, looks like the black sheep of the lot. Its hyphen, which normally earns several demerits, is

needed to prevent the word from reading UNHUNH and consequently fusing with its antithesis UNH-UNH ("no").

A list of ten words and names is an exceedingly short one. To enhance it, I have sought and found 26 tautonymic combinations of six letters which are the first six letters of high-quality English words and names. The following list provides only one example for each of the 26 letter combinations, even though there may be more. In the case of PURPUR-, for instance, just one dictionary - Webster's Second Edition - provides 28 different boldface entries beginning with that letter combination. Since I have identified the letter combinations for which one or more actual examples are available, all the reader needs to do is to look these combinations up in several major dictionaries and other reference works, in order to compile a comprehensive list of words and names starting with the given combinations.

alfalfa	furfuraceous	purpurine
assassinate	Kaskaskia	quaquaversal
barbarian	Kaukauna	reprepare
bonbonnière	Marmara	tartarous
Cincinnati	murmuring	tintinnabulation
coccochromatic	nannander	tritriacontane
conconscious	porporate	uniunivalent
Corcoran	prepreference	unnunned
entente	proprofit	

The two lists combined pinpoint only 34 different starting tautonym letter combinations. Altogether, there are 26x26x26 = 17,576 possible combinations, and each of them needs to be checked in an absolute minimum of 250 different major reference works, if a reasonably comprehensive list of tautonyms is to result. That amounts to 4,394,000 or more individual checks. The task is a stupendous one, far beyond my personal capacities. I therefore invite readers to plunge into the fray, searching for additional tautonymic examples qualifying for inclusion here.

In the meantime, some readers may wish to consider the next phase of the tautonym search, starting a list of worthy English tautonyms eight letters in length. Beyond these, of course, lie the ten reduplications. As the length of the initial letter sequence increases, the number of letter combinations needing to be checked increases alarmingly, while the number of specimens found inevitably decreases - a psychologically unwholesome situation.

Short of feeding the content of 250 or more reference works into a computer, letting it spew out all tautonyms in a trice, the overall task seems hopeless. Moreover, the computer cannot make qualitative or evaluative judgments based on an indefinitely large number of material and psychological factors that may help determine whether or not a given candidate is acceptable. The computer results will, consequently, require a great deal of work on the part of the humans who set the computer to produce tautonym lists.