

WORD-UNIT PALINDROMES

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A word-unit palindrome is a sentence (or sequence of sentences) which, word for word, reads the same in forward and reverse:

So patient a doctor, to doctor a patient so
Girl, bathing on Bikini, eyeing boy, finds boy eyeing bikini
on bathing girl

As these examples indicate, punctuation is inserted as needed, and does not take part in the palindromicity.

Word-unit palindromes have received surprisingly little attention in logological literature. Dmitri Borgmann does not mention them does not mention them at all in Language on Vacation. Howard Bergerson cites two pages of examples by the late J.A. Lindon in Palindromes and Anagrams. Patrick Hunt has written several word-unit palindromic poems on mythological subjects, appearing in the November 1980 and August 1981 issues of **Word Ways**; James Rambo did the same in November 1975.

The study of word-unit palindromes received a small boost at the 1987 convention of the National Puzzlers' League, when attendees were invited to construct examples as part of an overnight competition. The twenty-six submissions suggested several criteria to guide the construction of word-unit palindromes.

One of the easiest ways to construct a word-unit palindrome is to use the format

(subject A)(verb 1)(object B) and (subject C)(verb 2)(object D)...
which readily reverses to

(subject D)(verb 2)(object C) and (subject B)(verb 1)(object A).
The purest example of this was offered by:

Xaviera diddled everybody, almost, and Gary diddled Donna
and Jim diddled Jessica, then Jessica diddled Jim and Donna
diddled Gary and almost everybody diddled Xaviera

However, word-unit palindromes of intrinsically greater interest occur if the composer attempts to make the two halves as different as possible in syntax and meaning; the object is to use both a different meaning and a different part of speech for the second appearance of a word. This is not possible, of course, for every word; articles, conjunctions, pronouns and many prepositions usually appear in the same role twice. Some examples:

Secretary FEELS boss drunk. (Boss FEELS secretary.)

Odd men in DRAG may DRAG in men. Odd!

CAN the IN-GROUP legitimately GROUP IN the CAN?

STOUT and BITTER PORTER drinks PORTER, BITTER and STOUT.

CASE development: ARRESTED suspect CALLS Doctor Brothers. Doctor CALLS suspect "ARRESTED development CASE".

MISS MAY: BOOBS that APPEAL, sex PROJECTS SUIT her; removing her SUIT PROJECTS sex APPEAL that BOOBS MAY MISS [a comment on the Playmate of the Month for Playboy magazine]

Capitalized word-pairs have retained the part of speech but changed the meaning; the underlined ones have changed both features. Longer examples can be created with these desiderata:

There, many are angels - those not fallen. Be KIND; their MIGHT, unlimited, is LYING open to rebellion. Denying grace and God to return, to CHANCE the consequences, the DAMNED DAMNED the consequences. The CHANGE to return to God and grace, denying rebellion to open LYING, is unlimited. MIGHT their KIND be fallen? Not those - angels are many there.

Remarkably, all changes are in both meaning and syntax in this passage. Note how the great flexibility of English word-order allows this to be read smoothly.

One can also seek heteronyms, word-pairs that differ in pronunciation, forming word-unit palindromes that can be seen but not heard. The three following use polish, lamé, and resumé in this manner:

JAPANESE PLAY: GO POLISH, learn NO lore. NO POLISH learn GO, PLAY JAPANESE

OBJECT: DUCK LAME CAN cover. (CAN LAME DUCK OBJECT?)

PICTURE his RESUME! Tom should LEAD the PLAY. WILL WILL PLAY the LEAD should Tom RESUME his PICTURE?

The author of the last, evidently feeling that the scenario of this palindrome needed explanation, provided a versified amplification of the plot:

The Broadway producer keeps looking at me.
I hope I'm selected - he's down to just three.
There's William, good-looking, perhaps to a fault,
Who blows all his lines, cannot act worth his salt,
While Thomas has credits as long as your arm -
An Oscar, two Emmys, and oodles of charm.
But he's only here 'cause he walked off the set,
A silly dispute which I think he'll regret.
And, if so, my chances of filling the bill
Improve, but a nagging doubt bothers me still...

No doubt the inverse operation - that of using homonyms to create word-unit palindromes that are heard but not seen - is equally feasible. In fact, since homonyms are far more common than heteronyms, this should be somewhat easier to accomplish. (However, contest rules forbade this variation.)

One special feature of the National Puzzlers' League convention, the tradition that members take pseudonyms, or "noms", facilitated the construction of word-unit palindromes having word-pairs with different meanings and parts of speech:

"MY MY," "FIDDLE," and "AJAX," with "MOP," STRIP and FLASH;
ERGO "DITTO," "Mangie," and "Joker" QUIP. "HOT" becomes
INSANE; "Not INSANE" becomes HOT; "QUIP," "Joker," and "Mangie"
DITTO. "ERGO," "FLASH," and "STRIP" MOP with AJAX and FIDDLE.
MY, MY!

"June BUG" - possibly MAY bride? Being bride MAY possibly
BUG June!

HEARTS winning. CARD ACE plays FARO. Result: thousand. ISSUE
 challenge? Challenge: ISSUE thousand. Result: "FARO" plays
ACE CARD, winning HEARTS.

The third example cleverly shifts the subject from a game of cards to a testimonial to "Faro," the editor of the NPL magazine who had (in July 1987) published an expanded 24-page issue #1000.