

KICKSHAWS

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Kickshaws is currently being assembled by a series of guest editors. All contributions should be sent to the editor in Morristown, New Jersey.

Re: Re

In Dmitri Borgmann's "Untapped Dictionary Word Resources" in the February 1986 Kickshaws, he quotes The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles (Third Edition Revised, 1955) as saying of the prefix RE-, "the number of forms resulting from the use of this prefix in English during the 19th century is infinite." Infinite? Really? At first, one might think that there are only a finite number of verbs and related forms to prefix with RE-. But the possibilities are, literally, infinite. This is because every word in the form of RE-plus-verb is, of course, a verb itself. Thus, a verb such as TRANSMOGRIFY can yield an infinite number of resulting verbs: RETRANSMOGRIFY, RERETRANSMOGRIFY, and so forth.

There are many verbs beginning RERE- in dictionaries, but most do not actually imply an action being done twice. Instead, RE- is usually added to verbs already starting with RE, such as RECORD, RELEASE, or REJECT--verbs that have lost their sense of redoing. Are there any "true" RERE- words in dictionaries?

Yes, surprisingly enough. The OED says, "RE- is occasionally doubled or even trebled (usually with hyphens inserted) to express further repetition of an action, but this practice is rarely adopted in serious writing, although RE- is readily prefixed to words of which it already forms the first element, as RE-RECOVER, RE-REFORM." The OED has RE-REDELVE, RE-REHEARING, and RE-REITERATE (reiterate twice or iterate thrice?) in boldface; RE-RE-PUBLICATION and RE-RE-READ are listed under the prefix RE-. The last example is especially notable because it begins RERERE.

RE-s can get out of control. PREFIX is obviously a verb, so one can write REPREFIX, REREPREFIX, etc. Then there's the act of prefixing the word PREFIX (such as with RE-), which I call METAPREFIXING. Of course there's REMETAPREFIX, REREMETAPREFIX, etc. Then there's the act of prefixing the word METAPREFIX, or METAMETAPREFIXING, which can be prefixed with RE-s. We can give a name for this entire process of META- and RE- prefixing: OMEGAPREFIXING. This leads to the production of such words as REOMEGAPREFIXING, REREOMEGAPREFIXING, etc., an act known as METAOMEGAPREFIXING. So there's OMEGAOMEGAPREFIXING ... but I'll stop for the reader's sake.

The Number of the Beast

Translation of words into numbers has often been exploited in this magazine, most recently in Dmitri Borgmann's "Mathematical Equivalence" in the February 1986 issue. The translation is usually rendered by the traditional method of A=1, B=2, etc. An interesting variation on this is used in War and Peace (Volume III, Part 1, Chapter 19). There the character Pierre uses a different alphanumeric system to derive very interesting results.

The system matches up the 25-letter French alphabet with the numerical values of the Hebrew alphabet: A through I have values 1 through 9, K through Z have values 10 through 160 (counting by tens). Using this system, Pierre found that L'EMPEREUR NAPOLEON sums up to 666, including 5 for the elided E in LE. His nationality, too, LE RUSSE BESUHOF, added up to 666, but this time he had to subtract 5 from it, corresponding to the E in LE again. Astounded by this, he recognized it as prophecies of the Apocalypse.

Chapter 13 of Revelations not only reveals 666 as the number of the Beast, but also tells that the Beast had great powers for 42 months. Pierre applied his system to the French word for 42, QUARANTE-DEUX, and, lo and behold, it is 666. I discovered another coincidence that Pierre never saw: in English, FORTY-TWO also yields 666!

Perhaps this system could be used to further test Borgmann's idea of a "mathematical equivalence" of words. I'll start the ball rolling with an example remarkably apropos of this article: LEO TOLSTOY = WORD WAYS!

A Cinematic Coincidence

Question: What 11-letter word has, for some strange reason, been used in three different movies in the last few years?

Answer: Dangerously. There has been "The Year of Living Dangerously," "Johnny Dangerously," and "Dangerously Close."

VIBGYOR and the Alphabet

Much has been written in Word Ways, mostly by Darryl Francis, involving transposals and near-transposals (transadditions) of short lists of names. These have included elements, months (in different languages), and the planets. To recap, the purpose is to find the shortest words that the names on the lists can be spelled out from.

One relatively short list that has been overlooked is the colors of the spectrum. I have found what are probably the shortest possibilities in Webster's Second and Third. Transposals are marked by asterisks.

VIOLET	olivet*	YELLOW	mellowy
INDIGO	windigo, voiding	ORANGE	onager*
BLUE	lube*, bule*	RED	erd*
GREEN	genre*, negre*, neger*, gener*		

Another list is the letters of the Greek alphabet. In this case,

only Webster's Second is used.

ALPHA	Hapale, Phalea	NU	un*
BETA	bate*, beat*	XI	fix, mix, etc.
GAMMA	magma*	OMICRON	microbion, microdont
DELTA	dealt*, lated*, taled*	PI	tip, sip, etc. (or pi*)
EPSILON	pinoles*	RHO	Hor*
ZETA	teaze	SIGMA	magis*
ETA	ate*, eat*, tea*	TAU	uta*
THETA	theat*	UPSILON	unspoil*
IOTA	ratio, patio, etc.	PHI	hip*
KAPPA	kappland	CHI	hic*
LAMBDA	Lambadi	PSI	sip*
MU	um*	OMEGA	homage

All Tied Up

September 9, 1985 was a good day for homonyms; all you had to do was look at the headlines. On that day, baseball great Pete Rose was able to TIE the record of TY Cobb for most base-hits in a player's lifetime. Also that day, there was a THAl rebellion!

Singing Phrases

In the February 1984 Colloquy, Charles Suhor told of poems that could be sung to the tune of famous songs, e.g., "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening" can be sung to Hernando's Hide-away. This idea can degenerate into utter silliness by singing phrases over and over again to famous songs. Here are examples mentioned in The Next Whole Earth Catalogue (1980), p. 59:

1. "The Abraham Lincoln Memorial" (the Mexican Hat Dance)
2. "Lloyd George knew my father, Father knew Lloyd George" (Onward Christian Soldiers)
3. "Happy Anniversary" (the William Tell Overture)
4. "We gather together to gather together" (We Gather Together)
5. "George Washington Bridge" (the song played at circuses for the trapeze act)
6. "Purple violets" (Purple Violets)
7. "The Pentagon" (O Tannenbaum)
8. Absolutely anything (Lead On, O King Eternal)

Rock 'N' Rollogology

In my November 1985 Kickshaws, I bemoaned the dearth of logology in today's musical industry, citing only two examples of wordplay. In the February 1986 Colloquy, Eric Albert added another example from the musical "Hair." Since then, I have found several more instances of rock wordplay:

The rock group Abba, whose name is an acronym of the performers' given names (Agnetha, Benny, Bjorn, Anni-Frid)
 The album title "Aoxomoxoa" by the Grateful Dead
 Another palindromic album title, "Ole ELO", by Elo
 Atlantic Records founder Ahmet Ertegun reversed his surname to arrive at his pseudonym, "Nugetre"

Reflexive Relativity

David Morice's double reflexive grandfather's in "Time Travel Lovers" in the November 1987 Kickshaws reminds me of the old song "I'm My Own Grandpaw" by Dwight Latham and Moe Jaffe:

Many, many years ago when I was twenty-three
I was married to a widow who was pretty as could be
This widow had a grown-up daughter who had hair of red
My father fell in love with her and soon they too were wed.

This made my dad my son-in-law and changed my very life
For my daughter was my mother 'cause she was my father's wife
To complicate the matter even though it brought me joy
I soon became the father of a bouncing baby boy.

My little baby then became a brother-in-law to dad
And so became my uncle though it made me very sad
For if he was my uncle then that also made him brother
Of the widow's grown-up daughter who, of course, was my
stepmother.

Father's wife then had a son who kept them on the run
And he became my grandchild for he was my daughter's son
My wife is now my mother's mother and it makes me blue
Because although she is my wife she's my grandmother too.

If my wife is my grandmother then I'm her grandchild
And every time I think of it, it nearly drives me wild
For now I have become the strangest case you ever saw
As husband of my grandmother I am my own grandpaw.

Greek mythology contains an abundance of examples of irregular genealogy, the result of heavy intermixing. For instance, nearly everyone could claim to be a descendant of Zeus, who took numerous mates. Also, cousins often married, such as Alcestis and Admetus, second cousins, and Penelope and Odysseus, who were something like third cousins twice removed.

The most notorious example of anomalomythogenicenealogy is, of course, Oedipus, the husband and son of Jocasta. Oedipus was his own son and his own father-in-law. We can imagine the daughters of Oedipus, Antigone and Ismene, puzzling out their ancestry. Antigone, who enjoyed belittling her younger sister, could say "You can't talk back to me! I'm your mother! It's plain to see...not only am I your father's mother's husband's daughter, but I'm also your mother's husband's mother's daughter!" Poor confused Ismene.

Jabberwocky Revisited

Intrigued by Philip Cohen's spelling-checked "Jabberwocky" in the August Kickshaws, Charlie Bostick tried the Lewis Carroll poem out on the Frame-Maker Spell check of the SUN system and came up with a somewhat different version:

'Was broiled, and the slushy moves
 Did gore and gamble in the wage,
 All mimes were the operatives,
 And the mode rates utterable.

Beware the Jabbered, my son!
 The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
 Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
 The farmhouse Ponderousness!

He took his verbal sword in hand,
 Long time the nomadism foe he sought--
 So rested he by the Tom-Tom tree,
 And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in offish thought he stood,
 The Jabbered, with eyes of flame,
 Came whiffling through the tillage wood,
 And burbled as it came.

One, two! One, two! And through and through
 The verbal blade went snicker-snack!
 He left it dead, and with its head,
 He went galumphing back.

And hast thou slain the Jabbered?
 Come to my arms my blemish boy!
 Do fireboats day! Callow! Calla!
 He chortled in his joy...

One is struck by the differences between the two checkers. The SUN checker seems to have the larger vocabulary, for it, unlike IBM, leaves galumphing, whiffling, and Jubjub (amazing!) alone. The SUN checker delights in really far-out substitutes, such as operatives for borogoves, ponderousness for bandersnatch, and utterable for outgrabe (IBM's choices were the more prosaic boroughs, bantering, and outraged). On the other hand, SUN seems to capture Callooh! Callay! better with Callow! Calla! than IBM does with its weird Calculi! Canary! A final oddity: SUN uses farmhouse for frumious, but IBM uses farmhouse for frabjous.