

KICKSHAWS

DAVE MORICE

Iowa City, Iowa

Readers are encouraged to send their favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Kickshaws editor (drABC26@aol.com). Answers can be found in Answers and Solutions.

The Great 2000 Election Controversy

From the ethereal, anonymous realm of the Web comes the following election update in verse form by an anonymous scop, who writes "In olden times, it could be decades before major events were cast in verse. But The Great 2000 Election Controversy is so big that a bunch of all-star poets have come out of retirement to quickly set the story to rhyme." For starters, history buff Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

Listen, my children, don't dare ignore
The midnight actions of Bush and Gore.
In early November, the year ought-ought,
Hard to believe the mess they wrought.
Two billion bucks of campaign bounty
All came down to Palm Beach County.
What result could have been horridier
Than the situation we found in Florider?

Edgar Allan Poe is his usual gloomy self:

Once upon a campaign dreary, one which left us weak and weary
O'er many a quaint and curious promise of political lore,
While we nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a yapping,
As of some votes overlapping, energy-zapping to the core.
"Tis a mess here," we all muttered, as the network anchors stuttered,
Stuttered over Bush and Gore.
Could there be another election with such a case of misdirection,
One with such a weak selection, yet fraught with tension to the core?
Quoth the ravers, "Nevermore."

Great Britain's Edward Lear's limerick is lighter:

There once was a U.S. election
That called for some expert detection--

How thousands of pollers
 Could become two-holers
 Like outhouses of recollection.

Ditto Ogden Nash:

I regret to admit that all my knowledge is
 What I learned at Electoral Colleges,
 So tell me, please, though I hate to troubya,
 Will the winner be Al, or will it be Dubya?

Joyce Kilmer's media analyst:

I thought that I would never see
 The networks all so up a tree.

Walt Whitman is lyrical as always:

O Captain! My Captain! Our fearful trip's not done;
 The ship has weather'd every rack, but nobody knows who's won.

Alfred Noyes rhythmically rumbles:

And still of an autumn night, they say, with the White House on the line,
 When the campaign's a ghostly galleon and both candidates cry "'Tis mine!"
 When the road is a ribbon of ballots, all within easy reach,
 A highwayman comes riding, riding, riding,
 A highwayman comes riding, and punches two holes in each.

Dr. Seuss takes a look at election officials:

I cannot count them in a box
 I cannot count them with a fox
 I cannot count them by computer
 I will not with a Roto-Rooter
 I cannot count them card by card
 I will not 'cause it's way too hard
 I cannot count them on my fingers
 I will not while suspicion lingers.
 I'll leave the country in a jam--
 I can't count ballots, Sam-I-Am.

Clement Moore adopts a holiday theme:

'Twas the month before Christmas, when all through the courts,
 All the plaintiffs made stirring bad ballot reports.

This leaves us with only one solution.

Perhaps the best way to stop complaints that are raucous is
Start over again, with the Iowa caucuses.

Cool Words

We had a hot time in a cool car. She wore a darling dress with a swell hat and a groovy pair of gloves. She was really good. She was bad. Hot, cool, darling, swell, groovy, good, and bad! Cool. Cool words are words that mean cool. In other words, they signify a positive feeling about something. There must be so many cool words around that they could fill a pocket dictionary. Of course, they don't mean exactly the same thing, but that's cool. When I was in high school, the following joking sentence was going around: "She's a good girl, but I want to meet a nice girl." In this case, nice meant "easy to get in bed," and good meant "well-behaved." But "She was really good" really meant that she was really good in bed.

Every generation has a cornucopia of cool words. It's not easy to know if some words are being used as slang or not. Awesome is a cool word, but is terrific? Great? Some words become cool in a certain context. Cherry used to mean cool in reference to a car, but not in reference to, say, a meal. "That steak is cherry, man" doesn't work. Some words are cool one year and something else the next. Bitch has undergone several changes of meaning: "She's a bitch," "Don't bitch at me," "Son of a bitch." One of the most unusual meanings of bitch, however, was cool in the early 1960s: "That's a bitch car you got, man." Then in the 1970s and later, it evolved to bitchin': "That's a bitchin' car you got, man." Cock also meant cool for awhile in the 1960s: "Cock car, man."

It may be true that any word, noun or otherwise, can become a cool word. Sick, dope, diabetic and twisted are four recent cool words that join wicked and bad as words with negative connotations doing an about-face. Phat is a unique cool word. It's pronounced exactly like fat. Since it's a slang term, it's usually spoken and not printed, but somehow it acquired a spelling of its own. Speaking of spelling, would Mary Poppins' word supercalifragilisticexpialidocious count as the longest cool word? A list of cool words suitable for a cool evening in the middle of winter appears below, but there must be many, many more. It'd be way cool if you'd send your faves for the next Kickshaws. Cool! Wowie-zowie! Fuckin' A! Twenty-three skidoo!

swift	smooth	slick	outrageous	dandy	fine
fab	keen	far-out	charming	wild	super
keeno	wacky	rockin'	badass	neat	kickin'
hip	divine	radical	neato	swingin'	rasian
A-OK	rad	neato-keano	psychedelic	smokin'	superduper
ace	outasight	shagadelic	A-1	sharp	kickass
funky	freaky	groovin'	sweet	fun	alright
groovalicious	tough	righteous	boss	kooky	happening
chillin'	jake	smashing	fab	switched on	fantabulous

X-Pressions

The letter x has a love-hate relationship with the English-speaking world. Few common words or names begin with x. There are fewer entries under x than any other letter in most dictionaries. However, x is the only consonant that forms a fairly common one-letter word, the only common one-letter word that is a verb, and the only one-letter word that is a contronym (a word having contradictory or opposite meanings). Webster's 10th Collegiate gives these two definitions of x: "to mark with an x" (thus highlighting an item with a single x) and "to cancel or obliterate with a series of x's" (thus removing an item with multiple x's). It also stands out because it has three past-tense spellings, x-ed, x'd and xed, and two gerund spellings, x-ing and x'ing. Although few words begin with x, more words begin with x followed by a hyphen than any other letter followed by a hyphen. The first list shows all the entries from Webster's Collegiate, and the second shows four names and one street sign abbreviation. Here's a challenge: find a word or name beginning with x- or X- followed by each letter of the alphabet. Nine letters are already covered by the words below plus x-ed.

x-axis, x-coordinate, x-height, x-intercept, x-irradiation, x-radiation, X-rated, x-ray, x-section
 X-Acto Knife (artist's knife), X-Concept (toy company), X-Men (comic book characters),
 X-Files (television series), x-ing (crossing)

It? It? Not on Titi!

What in the world is a titi? Is it a female breast? There are two titis in Webster's 10th Collegiate. They have different etymologies, pronunciations, and meanings. The first titi (TIE-tie) is "a tree of the southeastern U.S. with leathery leaves and racemes of fragrant white flowers." The second titi (tih-TEE) is "any of a genus of small South American monkeys having long thick variable colored fur and a tail that is not prehensile." What a strange jungle of a world this is when a monkey and a tree with names spelled the same way can't get together like most monkeys and trees: a titi can't use its tail to hang from a titi! Neither word means "breast," although tittie, a common slang word for "female breast," is defined in the same dictionary only by listing "sister" as a synonym.

Alphabet of Long Heterograms--Going Up!

Eric Chaikin found several words in Webster's Third that improve on those in Sir Jeremy Morse's "Alphabet of Long Heterograms": endolymphatic (13), jacqueminots (12), neuroblastic (12), objurgatively (13), quebrachitols (13) and troublemakings (14) are all one-letter improvements. He also found Schizotrypanum (14), a one-letter improvement that is capitalized.

"Long Time No E"

Eric, whose name begins with an E, writes "It is interesting to note how many words often cited as sesquipedalian (or "really long") manage to eschew use of the letter E. For instance, Webster's Third humuhumunukunukuapuaa (21), Shakespeare's honorificabilitudinitatibus (27) and the OED's floccinaucinihilipilification (29) all fill the bill. Which brings to mind the question: what is the longest consecutive string of letters in an English dictionary word which does not contain an E? Yep, it's longer than these three words."

More AEIOU x 2 Words

Eric has discovered four phrases in Webster's Third in addition to automobile insurance which contain the vowels AEIOU exactly twice: educational quotient, simultaneous reaction, situational neuroses, and sodium sesquicarbonate.

"Y" Not?

In addition to Eric's longest non-E string, it is interesting to note that none of the long dictionary words cited above contains Y, nor does the Mary Poppins word, nor antidisestablishmentarianism or pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis. Nor do many other sesquipedalian words. Why no Y? Is there any sesquipedalian word that has a whole lot of Y's?

Fourth-Level Bibliography

In response to "The Listmaker" in the last issue, Fred Crane writes "What your essay reminded me of was one of my lists. I used to teach Bibliography of Music to University of Iowa graduate students. Of course, we got familiar with many bibliographies, as well as some bibliographies of bibliographies. There are of course a lot of listings of these, for example in the American Association's classic Guide to Reference Books. This is, of course, a bibliography of bibliographies of bibliographies. But I have taken this a step farther. I have a card file of bibliographies of bibliographies of bibliographies, which is therefore a bibliography of bibliographies of bibliographies of bibliographies." A record that will never be broken is a record well kept!

Bullish on Spoonerisms

"In the early part of the 20th century," writes Richard Lederer, "bullfight promoters in Madrid became aware that the matadors were winning bullfights too easily. What was sorely needed was some way to make the bulls stronger so that the contests between man and bull would be more interesting. Thus, the bulls were provided with exercise machines consisting of scientifically-constructed pulleys and weights guaranteed to build muscle mass. Not long after this apparatus was installed, President Theodore Roosevelt traveled to Madrid and delivered a rousing speech inside the arena. That's how he started preaching from the pulley bull pit."

Pronunciation-Change Beheadments

Bill Webster sent in this group of beheadments that change their pronunciations as they lose their heads: theater, eastern, hexamine, changed, phoney, bearing, coverall. Bill's list suggested to me the following challenge: find the longest sequence of successive beheadments that add at least one new element of pronunciation with each new word. Here's a three-word successive pronunciation-change beheadment: changer, hanger, anger. In each case, the pronunciation of NG changes.

Handy

Here is a list of HANDY words, courtesy of Bill Webster, who says "The hand also comes in handy for word assemblage as a prefix and suffix: clubhand, thirdhand (how many times have we

wished for one?), freehand, stagehand, forehand, offhand, longhand, shorthand, backhand, deckhand, dockhand, farmhand, unhand, underhand, overhand, firsthand, secondhand, and cowhand.”

The expression “I know it as well as the back of my hand” is an oddity. How well do we really know it? Handle leads to George Frederic Handel, composer (1685-1759). The adjective Handelian was composed, as well. Handselling and handcraftsmanship were among the longer words found.

Bush and Gore

The presidential election was close, as everybody in the known universe knows. The names Gore and Bush suggest such closeness. If you add the alphabetic values of the corresponding letters in the two names and convert the four sums back to letters, the result is an almost-consecutive alphabetic sequence, IJKM, the only gap in the sequence being L. Another coincidence in their names: any four consecutive letters in George can be anagrammed to spell Gore. In addition, George is a kangaroo word with GeORgE as its joey. If, on the other hand, you combine Al with Bush, it's just one alphabetic step away from an ambush!

Numerical Bigrams

All of the number names from ONE through ONE THOUSAND VIGINTILLION (minus one) are spelled using 23 letters of the alphabet, which in turn form 151 different bigrams. The occurrence of the different bigrams is similar to the occurrence of the letters. A large percentage of the first few number names contain one or more first-appearance bigrams. In fact, 35 occur from ONE through THIRTEEN, and the numbers ONE through SIX have all different bigrams. SEVEN is the first with a bigram appearing before (VE in FIVE). FOURTEEN is the first with all bigrams used before. The cumulative number of first-appearance bigrams for every number name from ONE to FORTY-SIX is always greater than the value of the number itself (ONE has 2 bigrams, ONE and TWO have 4 bigrams, and so on). At FORTY, the cumulative total is 47, after which no first-appearance bigrams appear until ONE HUNDRED. Here are the bigrams from TWENTY-NINE to ONE MILLION SIX:

twenty-nine (YN) 46, forty (OR) 47, one hundred (EH,HU,UN,ND,DR,ED) 53,
one hundred one (DO) 54, one hundred two (DT) 55, one hundred four (DF) 56,
one hundred six (DS) 57, one hundred eight (DE) 58, one hundred nine (DN) 59,
two hundred (OH) 60, four hundred (RH) 61, six hundred (XH) 62, seven hundred (NH) 63,
one thousand (HO,US,SA,AN) 67, two thousand (OT) 68,
one million (EM,MI,IL,LL,LI,IO) 74, one million one (NO) 74, one million four (NF) 75,
one million six (NS) 76

By ONE HUNDRED VIGINTILLION the last bigram (DV) has appeared. The letters B and Q begin only one bigram each; on the other hand, T begins 16 bigrams and ends 12 bigrams. Here are the first five and the last five bigrams when all are placed in alphabetic order:

one quadrillion (AD), one thousand (AN), one quattuordecillion (AT), one billion (BI),
one decillion (CI), ... twenty quadrillion (YQ), twenty-six (YS), twenty-two (YT),
twenty undecillion (YU), twenty vigintillion (YV)

Nerveless Breakdown

In Britain, according to Peter Newby, various motoring organizations provide a nationwide breakdown recovery service through these commercial operators leav much to be desired in the romantic wilderness of the mountain moorlands of Mercia. Fortunately, immortals come to the aid of man in this historic region. Though fairies and various others of this ilk provide traditional comfort, modern mechanics is the province of hobs who, flightless, rely upon insects for their transportation.

It came to pass that a poor troubadour of Iowa had reason to be grateful for the kindness of the technically-gifted hob. Driving a vintage Morris of dubious roadworthiness, the Iowan found himself stranded near the estate of Dame Bebe Mad, a wise woman whose honey is famed the length and breadth of the Isles of Albion. Young Mad Eric Ovid, for it is he, sat on the car's running board and, counting the few pennies still to his credit, cried aloud "Will some kind power come to my aid?"

Lo and behold, no sooner had the poetic youth uttered his supplication than a bee buzzed into view ridden by a hob. Repairing the car, the immortal assured the youth "Whosoever shall find himself within the domains of Mad has naught to fear if he looks kindly upon the small beast which bringeth sweetness unto life and agrees to pay one penny of good coin as a tribute to Goodwife Bebe, who hereafter will care greatly for the creature now the property of the Bard of the Mississippi." Then, noticing the youth's reluctance to yield one of his few coins for the rare honor of sponsoring a Mercian bee, the hob made the following observation:

"He who hath given greatly of his purse with a charitable heart feareth not to discover that, in truth, one is soon upon one's bee, mends"

Peter Poses Prose Posers

Can a PIG VAN deliver crazy PAVING?
Who first discovered the OCEAN-going CANOE?
Will MARIE RAG regret her mixed MARRIAGE?

Poe's Crypt

The British company F.C. promotes itself as FCUK, believe it or not!

Riddle-Me-Ree

Peter posed this question, which has a red herring in it:

Q: A Scots lass was so poor that she could afford only two tops. A blue blouse she wore on days with an odd-numbered date and a white blouse she wore on days of an even-numbered date. She never went to Hogmanay parties. Why?

A: Whilst it is intended to provoke such retorts as "She would have had to change her blouse at midnight" to which the questioner can reply with superiority that the 1st of January follows the

31st of December, thus negating such a possibility, the real reason was that no one asked her!

Dis Is Dissed

Here is Jay Ames' contribution to the never-ending DIS-CUSS-ION about the meaning of words beginning with DIS:

DISADVANTAGED too short for your tonnage
 DISALLOWED too noisy to suit
 DISBARRED tossed outta all the waterin' holes in town
 DISPURSED bag snatched
 DISCARDED credit cards cancelled
 DISCOVERED strip searched
 DISDAINED tossed outta Denmark
 DISENFRANCHISED France 'n' Belgium too
 DISGORGED not welcome in the Grand Canyon
 DISGRUNTLED never ever grunted
 DISGUSTED at odds with Augustus and Theodore
 DISTRESSED scalped, a skinhead
 DISCOMBOBULATED anyone ever the other?

Vitamin Letters

The wise old logologist's saying goes "Out of vitamin letters grow healthy words." Vitamins have been assigned letter or letter-and-number symbols to represent them. Vitamin C is the most well-known vitamin, although it's hard to forget Vitamins A and B. The original alphabetical classification includes letters ornamented with subscripts, superscripted subscripts, and alphabetic subscripts, and it also uses double letters and full names. To simplify matters, vitamin letters are simply the single-letter symbols without ornaments. In order of appearance in the chemistry dictionary, they are ADBCEFGHJKLP.

So what are some healthy words? HEAL is, but HEALTHY certainly isn't. CABBAGE-HEADED is probably the longest healthy word, but its fame is already established as the longest spelled with letters from the first half of the alphabet. What is the longest healthy word that uses P? BACK-PADDLED, the past tense of "paddling a canoe in reverse to avoid going over a falls," is a good one (it certainly is an advisable action to preserve one's health), but it doesn't seem to exist. A palace may be PALACE-FLAGGED, a blackboard CHALK-PADDED, a diver may be KELP-FACED, and in winter a person may be CHEEK-CHAPPED, but do any of these exist? Got any suggestions to put in the BACKPACK?

The Invariant Football Pass

In the following poem, each line ends with a word containing a different letter that occupies the same position in the alphabet as its position in the word. In the unabridged Merriam-Webster, words can be found with 21 different invariant letters (all but QVWXZ). Those used below appear

in alphabetic order by invariant letters instead of by initial letters. The list appears on p 170 of *Making the Alphabet Dance*.

A

sea may eBb,
go baCk
and forth, and banD
with those who writE
of their relieF
in restinG,

but to retrenchH
his personallty
after counterobJection,
the quarterbackK
said he could throw a hierarchiaL
leathery parallelograM
faster than a sesquipedaliaN.

His pronunciamientO
revealed a lack of acquaintanceshiP
with the thermogalvanometeR
of interchangeablenesS,
that a football's noninterventionalisT
tradition of pseudomonocotyledonoUs
flight would show immunoelectrophoreticallyY.