SEESAW WORD LADDERS

ANIL ROSS ECKLER
Perth, Australia Basking Ridge, NJ

Seesaw word ladders are ladders that alternate or seesaw between lists of transpositions (anagrams) of just two words (or alphomes) that differ by a single letter (ie, word stools: 02-288). The lists are intercalated into each other in strict alternation. It’s a word ladder but one limited to two alphomes rather than the usual progression through a series of new words. The value or interest of such an arbitrary structure is best illustrated by the following sentential examples.

1. Haste phase heats shape, hates heaps. (haste -t+p -p+t -t+p -p+t -t+p)
a speedy, spirited complete melt leaving no lumps

2. Earth asher/hater hears heart: “Share Earth!” (earth -t+s -s+t -t+s -s+t)
a greenie convert (If repeating a word is cheating, drop either Earth and it still works.)

3. Savoured = nous rave as devour, ravenous. (savoured -d+n -n+d -d+n)
a good definition of the first word savoured (and inspiration for the whole seesaw concept)

But seesaw word ladders needn’t be coherent or meaningful. What is the longest meaningless seesaw? This, from words in M. Curl’s The Anagram Dictionary (Hale, 1996), has 23 words:

23. arets asper aster pares astre parse earst pears rates prase reast presa
resat rapes stare reaps strae spaer tares spare tears speer teras.

Using the AELPS alphone (Bell Labs) + two more AEPRS transpositions yields a longer seesaw.

26: elaps apers lapse asper leaps pares lepas parse pales pears peals prase pleas
presa salep rapes saple reaps sepal spaer slape spare spale spear speal sprae

The extra AEPRS words are from Darryl Francis’ list of twenty (79-172), including a proper noun. Combine his other 19 with 20 OED words from Jeff Grant’s amazing 86 for AERST (06-228) for

39: aerst apers arest après artes asper astre aspre earst pares etars pears raest
prae rates prase reast presa resat rapes serta raspe setar reaps stare repas
strae sarpe tares spare taser spear tears spear trae.

Less than half of the above words were accepted by a spellchecker and by the M-W Pocket Dict.

Allowing phrases and proper nouns a much longer seesaw is possible. Word Ways has run a variety of articles on multi-transposition letter sets or alphomes, including especially three, AEGINRST, ADEINRST and AEINRSTU, which happen to be word stools of each other. Borgmann listed 65 transpositions of AEGINRST and Jeff enlarged the list to 157! (see Making the Alphabet Dance, pp. 126-131). Darryl Francis (99-264) presented 50 for ADEINRST and Rex Gooch (03-277) enlarged Darryl’s 03-157 list for AEINRSTU to 35. These three can pair up for seesaws of 71, 71 and 101. See cited references for the lists. As well, they can all be combined into a three-toothed “seesawseen” word ladder of 107 words (36+36+35) or into an irregular mixed seesaweesesseen of 171 words (86+50+35). But the last two aren’t true seesaws. Any sufficiently long word ladder plus all the anagrams of each word might well create a still longer word ladder ‘seesawing’ thusly.