THE MONOSYLLABLE MACHINE (PART 2)

HARRY B. PARTRIDGE
Manhattan Beach, California

Now, thrill as I may to the charisma of Zuw bin-Miytbol, the virtuosity of the Salami Staters, and the splendorous sonorities of Wagner, the surfeit of ecstasy represented by a combination of all three seemed to me at the time hardly describable as soothing. I therefore, not without some trepidation, conveyed this sentiment to the philological four-footer and was delighted to hear him suggest that we listen, rather, to The Moldau, The Barcarole, or the Scheherazade Suite.

"But don't opt for any of them," he said, "just choose one."

"Then let's hear the Offenbach -- he is a highly underrated composer who could set a menu to music, and probably has."

My praise of the clever Jacques apparently struck the right note with one so prone to the pleasures of the palate as the portly pundit, whom I also suspected of being an opera bouffe buff.

"Ah, he must have done that in some opera buffet," remarked Dr. Wombat, throwing a switch on a small console on his desk.

We sat a while as the enchanting strains flooded out -- I with mind drifting under thoughts prompted by the music and the doctor with shuttered eyne, his ears gently twitching alternately in 6-8 time. As the last note faded, my host observed that I had chosen a highly logological piece for us to listen to.

"How so?" said I.

"Well, what did you first think of when you heard The Barcarole?"

"Venice, gondolas, night on the Grand Canal."

"Precisely. Now let us take 'gondola.' There was a Giovanni Gondola, an admirable Italianization of his real name, Ivan Gundulich, a seventeenth-century Serbian poet from Ragusa across the Adriatic. Ragusa not only has another name, Dubrovnik, but it has a namesake in Sicily. This suggests two lines of investigation: places with alternate names, like Leghorn/Livorno, Ratisbon/Regensburg, Pressburg/Bratislava/Pozsony, and places with the same name but differently situated, like Iberia (Spain and Portugal) /Iberia (Georgian region of the Caucasus), Alb/Galicia (Spain) /Galicia (Portugal) etc.

"I get it!"

"Ah, yes, too; for in those terms of reference, "of Venice" might be more diphthongal, i.e., TJALK, as in "ultrajal.""

"Are you a 'feeling' anthropo?"

"Not at all, but I do have a 'feeling' for the interplay of language and the human."

Hereupon, etc.
I, the vir­
sues of Wagner,
re, not with­
en, rather,
ated com­pose r
ldit, whom I
marked Dr.
shut­
e. As the
logogical
barcarole?'l
dullich, a
atriotic. Ra­
mesake in
h alternate
burg/Brati­
tly situated,
the Cauca­
, 90266

 sus), Albania (western Balkan Peninsula) / Albania (eastern Caucasus),
 Galicia (Spain) / Galicia (east Central Europe), ...

"I get your point, sir," I said as the good doctor gave no sign of stopping, "but perhaps we should return to the monosyllable machine."

"Ah, yes," sighed the wombat. "But there are lots of other things, too; for instance, is The Barcarole baroque or rococo, and just what do those terms mean? Why did not the two Canalettos, the great depicters of Venice, never do night scenes of that city? Then, again, ...

"The monosyllable machine!" I raised my voice.

My friend reluctantly repaired to the blackboard again and took up anew the task of explaining that preeminently English phenomenon, the monosyllable.

"We have now gone through the English vowels and diphthongs (we have no triphthongs -- at least none felt as such). We have found that most English long vowels are phonetically diphthongs, but not felt as such. (English has always been peculiarly prone to diphthongization.) I will also note that the difference between English long and short vowels is not primarily one of length, but of quality. YYY 'ye' and YUW 'you' might be regarded as triphthongs, but the spirit of the language demands that they be resolved thus: Y + IY (consonant plus long vowel) and YUW (diphthong) -- and that this is so is supported by such exotica as DYAU, TALK, and the dialect form SKEO."

"Are you not," I interjected, "on shaky ground when you speak of 'feeling' and 'spirit' in language?"

"Not at all," came the reply. "After all, those linguists and anthropologists that sally forth to beguery and beguestion poor backward tribes and populations always rely on what their informants 'feel' is right or wrong. I am my own informant, and my feeling interprets to me the spirit of my language, for in a more general sense the spirit of a language is the consensus of all its speakers. For this reason, when 'feeling' and 'spirit' fall together in the very last speaker of a language, that language is really already dead because it has ceased to be subject to the interplay of intellect that held the fabric erect."

Hereupon Dr. W chalked up another list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSONANTS</th>
<th>(sac = sounded as the consonant in)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B saci BOY</td>
<td>H saci HOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH saci CHEW</td>
<td>J saci JOY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D saci DO</td>
<td>K saci KICK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH saci THOUGH</td>
<td>L saci LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F saci FOE</td>
<td>M saci MEW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G saci GO</td>
<td>N saci NAY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Twenty-four consonants! Two, NG and ZH, cannot begin native English words. Three, H, W, and Y, cannot end such words, although we have seen that W and Y may do so when they are unperceived off-glides. 'But,' say you, 'How about names like NGAIO, NG, ZSA ZSA, ZHUOKOV?' Maori! Asiatic! Hungarian! Slav! Quite normal on their native heaths and more or less pronounceable to us, but not English -- yet! 'Not yet!' because English is an exceedingly hospitable, if not overhospitable, language. Who knows when it now tolerates will be granted citizenship? After all, our ability to have initial J's and V's is said to stem from our post-Conquest contact with French. In every language names are apt to be exempt from many of the sound-laws that govern the rest of the vocabulary. Thus, the cognoscenti pronounce BACH in the German way -- you might say this was a final H. But BAHK is good enough for me and I would no more say BACH a la German than ARHENTYNA a la Spanish."

After some fast figuring I said, "So we have 22 initial consonants, 16 vowels, and 21 final consonants. Right there we have 22x16x21 or 7392 monosyllables of the pattern CVC -- an enormous number."

"Yes, but not all combinations are found: before G we never have A, but only EY, as in 'flag.' Before R the three vowels A, E, EY fall together. Some speakers (not I) do distinguish the three words MARRY MERRY MARY; but leave off the final vowel and who distinguishes MARR' MERR' MARI'? Then again, take IY, OW, UW, AI, AW, OY plus R: are these words one syllable or two? IYR 'ear,' OWR 'oar,' 'ower,' IYUR 'your,' 'ever,' IYR 'eer,' AWR 'hour?' OYR 'oyer' can only be disyllabic. If 'squirrel' has two syllables, does not also 'girl'? That vowel/consonant R causes so much trouble, i.e., creates so many paradoxes in English. L is hardly less troublesome. My own belief is that 'girl' is a two-syllable word, but everyone 'feels' that it is a monosyllable. So be it!

"Suffice it to say, even though 7392 is an enormous number even when ambiguities and impossibilities are eliminated, it pales into insignificance when we consider that we have a total of at least 24 monosyllable patterns in English:

\[
\begin{align*}
C &= \text{consonant, } V = \text{vowel or diphthong, } / = \text{or else} \\
V &= C/CC/CCC/CCCC/CCCCC \\
V + C/CC/CCC/CCCC/CCCCC &= C/CC/CCC + V + C/CC/CCC/CCCC/CCCCC \\
\text{from 'a' to 'scrounged' st.}'
\end{align*}
\]

"You can even add to that," I said happily, "by making up a word like SKRINGKSTST -- the 'scr-' of 'scream,' the '-inx' of 'jinx,' the past ending '-ed,' and the second person singular ending '-st.'"

"Sblood!" quoth the worthy wombat. "Luckily my machine can absorb that pattern too! We've got 28 patterns now with that final CCCCCC."

I could feel a pang of vexation in his chest.

"That's all," I said. "But I had only one pattern to pitch in with English. Perhaps this show of fortitude will be more promising. Therefore presenting the ST of any monosyllable we have:

BL sai ci B
BR sai ci B
DR sai ci D
DW sai ci D
FL sai ci F
FR sai ci F
GL sai ci G
GR sai ci G
HW sai ci W
KL sai ci C
KR sai ci C

"You can add to that," I said happily, "by making up a word like BN sai ci B'
BR sai ci B'
BW sai ci B'
DM sai ci D'
DY sai ci D'
DZ sai ci D'
FTH sai ci F
GD sai ci G

"Now," ant cluster secondarily.

BN sai ci B'
BW sai ci B'
DM sai ci D'
DY sai ci D'
DZ sai ci D'
FTH sai ci F
GD sai ci G
I couldn’t tell through the doctor’s fur whether he was reddening in vexation, but he did clear his throat and drum his fingers against his chest a few times before he continued.

"That final ST is what caused Lenny Bloomfield so much trouble. He utterly forgot that it was a normal English ending, not only in verbs, but also in nouns and adjectives. He declares, for example, that we have no final RPST, as the Germans do in HERBST ‘autumn’ (cognate with English ‘harvest’). In our classics, of course, we have an abundance of forms like ‘harp’st,’ I admit, however, that final STST representing ‘-ed’st’ following an S is perhaps too much of a good thing. Therefore there is a key on the monosyllable machine holding the final ST of any final STST in abeyance as desired.

"But let us mush on." Dr. W rapidly scribbled the following table on the board, remarking that it represented the initial consonant clusters admitted by Bloomfield:

```
INITIAL CONSONANT CLUSTERS
(saici = sounded as initial cluster in)

| BL saici BLUE       | KW saici QUELL       | SPL saici SPLAY       |
| BR saici BREW       | PL saici PLY         | SPR saici SPRAY       |
| DR saici DREW       | PR saici PRY         | ST saici STAY         |
| DW saici DWELL      | SF saici SPHERE      | STR saici STRAW       |
| FL saici FLY        | SK saici SKY         | SW saici SWOON        |
| FR saici FRY        | SKR saici SCREAM     | SHR saici SHRIEK      |
| GL saici GLOW       | SL saici SLAY        | TR saici TRY          |
| GR saici GROW       | SM saici SMEW        | TW saici TWEEED       |
| HW saici WHEEL      | SN saici SNOW        | THR saici THROW       |
| KL saici CLAW       | SP saici SPY         | THW saici THWART      |
| KR saici CREW       |                      |                      |
```

"You can easily see that these 31 clusters do not exhaust all the possibilities. Why Lenny excluded the ones below I do not know, unless it was because he felt they were not native English." Here Dr. W also pointed out GW as in GWAG and SKL as in SCLAFF, noting that Lenny wasn’t a miner and always had better things to do than play golf.

"Now," he continued, "we are left with the following initial consonant clusters which are listed in Webster II as being pronounced, at least secondarily, as written in the words indicated.

```
| BN saici B’NAI BRITH | PN saici PNEUMO-    | TS saici TSETSE        |
| BW saici BWANA       | PS saici PSYCHIC    | THL saici THLIPSIS     |
| DM saici DMITRI       | PT saici PTAH       | TY saici TJOBSITE     |
| DY saici DYAUS        | SHH (see below)     | VL saici VLEI          |
| DZ saici DZUNGAR      | STH saici STHENIC   | VR saici VRAIC         |
| FTH saici PHTHISIS   | SY saici SYAGUSH    | ZBL saici SBloOD       |
| GD saici GDANSK       | TL saici TLACO      | ZL saici ZLOTY         |
```

"You didn’t say up a word of ‘jinx,’ not even ‘st.’"
"Bloomfield's nearly forty rules forbid BW, STH, THL, VR, VL, ZBL, and ZL in particular, as well as all the others, many of which I too would rule out -- but not BW, FTH, STH, THL, VL, VR, ZBL, and ZL. SH is a special case, and I would allow SH anywhere S occurs, although it would often sound foreign, as indeed it is; but we are all familiar with words like SHTICK from show biz, SHLOCK from jewelers' jargon, SCHMALTZ from musicians' slang, and so on -- incidentally all of Yiddish origin. My machine has a key which admits or excludes this SH at will. SHR, however, is always admissible, being quite English. I also have a lisp key which permits TH whenever S occurs, not to mention a voice key which changes all voiced consonants into unvoiced ones and vice versa, i.e., ST into ZD. This is just for versatility and unusual sound effects because we can very easily pronounce certain consonant clusters which do not actually occur except onomatopoetically. Then there are strange prohibitions: DH does not freely occur initially except in pronominal words (THE, THIS, THEN, THERE, THITHER, THOU) and conjunctions (THOUGH, THAN). You should read the introductory material to Webster II (pages xxii to lix); it would revolutionize your understanding of English.

"But we must rush on to the final consonant clusters -- a group of rare and impressive complexity -- so numerous that I shall merely list them. Purists may disallow some, and clever wordsters may add others: the mono syllable machine may be adjusted either way. An asterisk following a final consonant cluster means that the flexion -ST may be added; the symbol + indicates that an -S or -Z may be added, depending on whether the final consonant is unvoiced or voiced. These appendages prove to be surprisingly appendable."

Hereupon the good wombat unveiled the following table:

| BD*+ | LCHT** | LTHT++ | NST** | RJ | RZD++ |
| BZ | LD** | LTHT++ | NT** | RJD++ | SK** |
| CH | LF** | LTTHT++ | NZ | RKP++ | SKT** |
| CHT** | LFT++ | LV++ | NZD++ | RKT++ | SP** |
| DST | LG++ | LVD++ | NGK++ | RL++ | SPT++ |
| DTH+ | LGD++ | L2 | NKG**(4) | RL** | ST++ |
| DZ* (1) | LJ | LLD++ | NGK**(5) | RM++ | SHK** |
| DZD++ | LJ** | MD++ | NKGTH**(6) | RMD++ | SHKT++ |
| DHD** | LK++ | M++ | NGTH**(6) | RN++ | SHP++ |
| DHZ | LKT++ | MP++ | PS | RND++ | SHPT++ |
| FT++ | LM++ | MPT++ | PST**+(8) | RP++ | SHT++ |
| FS | LMD++ | MP**+(2) | PT++ | RPT++ | TS |
| FST | LN++ | MPT**++ | PTH++ | RS | TST**+(7) |
| GD++ | LND++ | MTH++ | RB++ | RST++ | TTH++ |
| GZ | LP++ | MZ | RBD++ | RSH | TTH**+ |
| JD++ | LPT++ | MZD++ | RCH | RSH** | VDP++ |
| KS | LS | ND++ | RCHT | RT++ | VST |
| KST**(3) | LST++ | NCH* | RD++ | RTH++ | VZ |
| KT++ | LSH | NCHT** | RF++ | RTHT++ | ZD++ |
| LB++ | LSHT++ | NJ | RPT++ | RV++ | ZHD++ |
| LBD++ | LT++ | NJD++ | RG++ | RVD++ |
| LCH | LTH++ | NS | RGD++ | RZ |

(1) ads/e/s
(2) slims
of which VR, ZBL, and so on -- which admits possible, TH whenever sliced consonant. This is just very easily occur except OH does not HIS, THEN, (HAN). You (xxii to lix);

- a group of will merely list may add oth. An aster-
on -ST may added, depend-
These append-

RZD*+
SK*+
SKT*+
SP*+
SPT*+
ST*+
SHK*+
SHKT*+
SHP*+
SHPT*+
SHT*+
TS
TST*+(7)
TTH*+
TTHT*+
VD*+
VST
VZ
ZD*+
ZHD*+

(1) adz' st (3) texts (5) banked' st (7) blitzed' st
(2) slimped' st (4) jinxed' st (6) lengths (8) lapsed' st

"This list," observed the diprotodontic doctor, "is, of course, open to discussion, as is everything having to do with such a fluxionary phenomenon as phemic and phatic phonation; and there are many much cleverer than I who will be able to make great critical contributions."

Dr. W paused reflectively, contemplating some inner vista. "By the way," he continued, "have you ever considered the very fruitful field of amphibology?"

"Amphibology!" I echoed blankly.

"Yes, the lack in English of a plural for the relative who or the auxiliary will has just forced me into an amphibology..."

At this moment my friend's fetching housekeeper entered bearing a huge silver tray. The doctor's eyes sparkled as he espied the tray's burden -- a vast cake enameled with emerald marchpane surmounted by tiny cherry-flavored roses and proving, when cut, to be golden and layered in custard and whipped cream.

"Amphibologies can wait!" decreed the master of the house.

And we tucked the vivid viand in, washing it down with draughts of aromatic tea.

COUNTY PLACE NAMES

The American Name Society is sponsoring books on the place-names within US counties, a massive project that, if ever complete, will result in over 3000 books. The thoroughly-researched Columbia County Place Names (Columbia County Historical Society, PO Box 197, Orangeville PA 17859; § 18.75), by Dr. Walter M. Brasch, is typical of the genre, giving the historical evolution of more than 1100 names of rivers, mountains, boroughs, parks, canals, railroads, forts, etc. This central Pennsylvania rural county was at one time the covered bridge capital of the world (28 of 80 still exist), but is nowadays better known for the Centralia mine fire which has smoldered underground for 20 years. Most of the etymologies will interest past or present residents but few others; however, a few gems can be found: The African Ostrich Farm and Feather Company (1909 to 1915), and Noodle Doosey, a settlement with a name derived from the Pennsylvania Dutch "nudel du sie (mo)?", roughly translated as "Your turn now?" spoken according to legend by one lad to another while sharing the sexual favors of the same girl!