SIMILIE FOR THE CAMERA!

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Similes have a tendency to become entrenched in the language. Though they may originally be an expression of originality, a creative link between two ideas never before formed, they soon are overused and undervalued figures of speech not given a second thought by users, addicted to similes in the way that other users are addicted to methamphetamine. Because a simile has a set meaning belied by its expression, it refers only to one meaning or sense of its base word, like any unambiguous phrase. Relying on and overfrequently drawing from a well of hackneyed similes may lead to such misuses as the following:

ON RELUCTANTLY BUT GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTING THE GIFT OF AN ALMOST CERTAINLY STOLEN GOLD WATCH FROM A DISHONEST PAWNBROKER AND OLD FRIEND ON THE OCCASION OF MY THIRTIETH BIRTHDAY

My first mistake was accepting the word
of a wily member of the local fauna;
though the watch he gave me as free as a bird,
all his wares were as hot as a sauna.

The sheriff invited us later that night o'er for supper; I guessed he'd get violent;
I knew that he knew, and he knew that I knew that he knew, but I sat there silent.

Every bite of the food, of the drink every sip,
proved the chef was clever as a fox:
the cheddar was as sharp as a whip,
the liquor as strong as an ox.

There was something funny, though, about that whiskey, I thought as my lips I moistened;
I woke up that night in a prison cell, and I knew then that I had been poisoned.

Trapped in this airless and windowless coop,
my prospects were certainly frightening.
The chains 'round my wrists were as thick as pea soup;
I was stuck as fast as lightening.

My thoughts turned to flight: perhaps I could return to the embrace of my dear old Hillary;
but how could I manage to evade the cruel grasp of the joggs, the stocks, and the pillory?

I wondered if I could escape this dark cell,
if I could return home: whether
I could get to where windows were clear as a bell,
making rooms as light as a feather.
I worked my hands free, and I cut a long dash through dark: I ran for my life:
“Smile! You’re on Candid Camera!” shouted the sheriff, the pawn broker, and my wife.

My complete astonishment must have shone,
for their smiles were honest and bright.
Their humor was as dry as a bone,
but my spirits as high as a kite.

INTERNAL PALINDROMES AND REGULAR INFLECTION

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An internal palindrome can be observed in a word like DAWNWARD, in which the five letter palindrome sequence AWNWA is embedded within an occurring word. Articles in this journal that have concerned themselves with internal palindromes appeared in February 1974 (by Leslie Card and A. Ross Eckler) and August 1988 (by Bruce Pyne). Two additional examples of internal palindromes are BANANA and AEGEAN. In these items the palindrome is preceded or followed by a single letter at the word edge. In BANANA, that leftover letter is situated at the left edge of the word and in AEGEAN it is at the right edge. I refer henceforth to items like these as Type A and Type B respectively. Some additional tokens are listed here:

TYPE A: ADD, AGOG, BELLE, BANANA, GRAMMAR, IGNITING, DYSPEPSY
TYPE B: EEK, AJAR, ARRAY, AEGERN, NIMMING, SELFLESS, SINONISM, SENSUOUSNESS

It is not difficult to expand the Type B examples with palindromic nouns in the plural (with -S) or palindromic verbs with -S in the third person singular. A few examples are listed here:

TYPE B: AAS, DUDS, PEEPS, KAYAKS, ROTATORS, MALAYALAMS

Many readers of this journal will be unimpressed with this type of example, since similar tokens are very easy to find.

An interesting point with respect to internal palindromes and regular inflection is that Type A examples are quite rare. Here is a list of the eight words I have found so far:

TYPE A: ASKS, ASPS, ISMS, ISTS, PSIS, USES, TSKS, USEES

One might be able to expand this list with examples like ASANAS, OSAKAS and OSAMAS, although none of these items appear in the dictionaries I have consulted.

Clearly, Type A palindromes for inflected English nouns and verbs are elusive because the base word without the inflectional ending is not a palindrome. And since the first letter and the last letter of the palindromic sequence must be s, the range of occurring words like the ones listed above is greatly restricted. Whether or not the list of Type A words ending in -S can be expanded is a question I leave open for readers of this journal.

A final observation concerns internal palindromes ending in the regular past tense ending -(E)D. I provide six Type B examples:

TYPE B: EKED, EXED, EYED, EBED, EGED, ERRED

A question I leave open is whether or not additional items can be added to this puny list. A question I consider to be more interesting is whether or not there are any Type A examples at all. To date, I have found none.