

BUT, NEVERTHELESS. . . . More Amusing Redundancies and “Erroneous Mistakes”

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While planning a trip to Washington, D.C., I found this notice on the website of an important museum, whose presumably erudite staffers should have known better: “There are currently no exhibitions at this time.”

I wrote an article on redundancies for the November 2010 issue of *Word Ways*. It’s time for a sequel, and I hope this one isn’t redundant! That’s unlikely, though, because this particular solecism is committed so frequently that new specimens always abound.

In that article, I cited several reasons tautologies should be eschewed. Perhaps most important: They can make the writer or speaker appear uneducated or illiterate.

Why is this error so common? One explanation is that people unconsciously deploy tautologies for purposes of emphasis. This probably explains the prevalence of, e.g., “ranting and raving,” and similar locutions. And when such phrases enter the language, they’re used without much thought.

Along with the title above (is that redundant?), here are examples of unintentional and amusing redundancies I’ve collected from various sources:

- “One day, acting on a sudden impulse, I bought a new shirt.”
- “Introspect for yourself!”
- “Officials said 75 percent of the island was submerged under water.”
- In a gourmet chocolate catalog: “They are paired together for the subtleties of their flavors. . . .”
- “Harpoon [a naval-warfare simulation game] is still used to this day by Navy instructors to train officer cadets.”
- “I have come to realize that the seeming constancy of the harbor symbolized a false myth about nature.”
- After going public, Netflix adopted a policy of hiring people who “showed initiative without being asked. . . .”
- In an online forum: “Any way to zoom in closer?”
- “Snopes is one of a small handful of sites in the fact-checking business.”

- “In it [a video game], you can choose to control either the resistance or the machines and your mission is to completely annihilate your enemy.”
- “We were struggling with how to do this, since our work is mostly 95 percent observational....”
- In an advice column for, ironically enough, writers: “While you’re not excited about the italic style . . . it *is* the most accepted way to treat a character’s internal thoughts.”

At a conference I attended, a speaker referred to “the little homunculus in the brain.”

I’ve clipped references to both “a larger sea change” and “a massive sea change.” Heard on public radio, a related pleonasm: “A major paradigm shift is under way.”

For some reason, *re-* words are especially susceptible to redundancy. Among those I’ve encountered, some multiple times: “refer back,” “reflect back,” “regress back,” “remand back,” “revert back.” The sense of “back” is baked into many *re-* words, but some people aren’t satisfied and are compelled to gild the lily. Similarly, heard in a podcast: “I’m rereading again. . . .”

Occasionally, the redundant elements are separated and thus perhaps harder to spot, as in this example: “Nothing short of body scans and conducting all security outside the airport is the only way to ensure protection.” (“Nothing short of” and “only” convey the same meaning.)

More funny tautologies can be found via search on various websites. But the definitive compilation is surely Richard Kallan’s *Armed Gunmen, True Facts, and Other Ridiculous Nonsense*. Originally published in 2005, the book is now available in a Kindle edition.

At my request, Rich shared a few specimens he has gleaned since the book was published: *large mansion, personal confession, underlying assumption, wander aimlessly*.

This sort of locution inevitably poses the question: Is there any other possibility? Examples: “as per,” “bisected in two,” “famous celebrity,” “moral and ethical.”

So . . . if people who commit these errors make you “shriek loudly,” you “might possibly” help them elevate the “mental awareness” of their habit.

Finally, in my earlier article, I noted the phenomenon of redundancies intentionally deployed for humorous purposes, such as the puckish question: “Chance—or coincidence?” I named such joking comments *redun-dances*. To my knowledge, in the seven years since, no one else has discussed this phenomenon, or systematically coined or collected examples.

Of course, I can’t be certain of this claim of originality. If anyone can prove me wrong, I will humbly offer both plaudits and encomiums!

Speaking of credit where due, thanks to Fred Cookinham and Richard Kallan for ideas, examples, and other assistance.