

KICKSHAWS

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Readers are encouraged to send their own favorite linguistic kickshaws to the Associate Editor. All answers appear in the Answers and Solutions at the end of this issue.

Contrapositives

One of the more frequent errors in logic is confusion of the converse with the contrapositive. The converse of the statement "If A, then B" is "If B, then A." Either statement could be true while the other was false; they are not logically related, though they are treated as equivalent by those who should know better. On the other hand, the contrapositive of "If A, then B" is "If not B, then not A" and these two forms are equivalent. "If that's music, I'm a monkey's uncle" carries the same message as "If no monkey is my niece or nephew, that's not music." But a much more vivid and felicitous example was furnished by W.P. Cooke of West Texas State University for his geometry students and written up in the November 1969 issue of the American Mathematical Monthly (p. 1051). The main verse of the Tex Ritter Western classic, Rye Whiskey, goes:

If the ocean was whiskey and I was a duck,
I'd swim to the bottom and never come up.
But the ocean ain't whiskey and I ain't no duck,
So I'll play Jack-O-Diamonds and trust to my luck.
For it's whiskey, Rye whiskey, Rye whiskey I cry.
If I don't get Rye whiskey, I surely will die.

Here is the equivalent verse in contrapositive form by Prof. Cooke:

If I never reach bottom or sometimes come up,
Then the ocean ain't whiskey or I ain't a duck.
But my luck can't be trusted or the cards I'll not buck,
So the ocean is whiskey or I am a duck.
For it's whiskey, Rye whiskey, Rye whiskey I cry.
If my death is uncertain then I get whiskey (Rye).

Which Reminds Me Of

Another classic Western, also in the public domain. This one, *I Got Spurs*, is about a cowboy in the tradition of Hi Jolly, who relied on one of his assistants to remember the names of Hi's various girl friends, as they passed through the townships and settlements of the early Southwest. The main verse goes:

I got spurs that jingle, jangle, jingle,
 As I go riding merrily along.
 And they say, "Oh ain't you glad you're single?"
 And that song ain't so very far from wrong.

Chorus: Oh Lily Belle,
 Oh Lily Belle,
 Though I may have done some foolin',
 This is why I never fell ...

Question: does the singer like being single? Seems likely if you listen only to the "tone." But those spurs asked virtually the same question, and their owner said they weren't far from wrong, which would make them close to wrong, which in turn would imply that he was not glad to be single, which would make the song pointless -- or at least contradictory. I think the explanation is that the cowboy, who normally wouldn't be singing at all, had been stowing away a little too much of that rye whiskey.

The Pedant's Corner

A certain American car manufacturer advertises that its new sub-compact "gets up to 28 miles per gallon" and a foreign competitor promises "up to 30 miles per gallon or more!" What exactly is the commitment in each case? In case you weren't sure, the domestic manufacturer lives up to his claim, provided only that his car does not do better than 28 mpg. I hardly expect to hear of any claims against him for false advertising, at least on that account. The importer has much more leeway; as long as his car produces less than, greater than, or exactly 30 mpg, he has fulfilled his commitment. Even negative mpg, if we can find a reasonable interpretation of such a concept, would satisfy his claim, as it would that of the domestic manufacturer. The only way the foreign car could fail in its commitment is by producing a complex number of miles per gallon. Try to find a practical referent for that!

Granted, Kickshaws is a shade pernicky about this. But we remember some years ago when a certain major league baseball team was in the process of moving its franchise to a certain West Coast

metropolis. As part of the deal, the club wanted the city to throw in a large and valuable tract of land for the price of coffee and doughnuts. To soften the hearts of the city councilmen, who are not notorious for making gifts to Eastern land developers who dabble in sports, the club owner offered a contract with sundry inducements, one of which was embodied in a clause reading "(the club) pledges to spend up to \$500,000 per annum in perpetuity in order to build, staff, and maintain a gymnasium for underprivileged boys." The press praised the club's generosity, but one councilman (and only one) found himself unimpressed. He said, "(The club), by spending fifteen cents a year on their youth center, will satisfy that term of their contract." The clause was duly amended.

In his syndicated column, Bert Bacharach informs us that by placing the word only in all eight possible positions in the sentence "I hit him in the eye yesterday," eight distinct meanings result. Kickshaws disagrees. "I hit him only in the eye yesterday" and "I hit him in only the eye yesterday" bear the same meaning, unless one is prepared to accept linguistic contortions such as interpreting the first example as "I hit him only in the eye (rather than on, around, or under it) yesterday." Mr. Bacharach could have used a better example: "I helped your son straighten your horse's bridle today." Ten distinct meanings -- depending on where the only is inserted. Readers will have no difficulty in constructing similar sentences with up to twenty distinct meanings or more.

Still More

It's true that on more than one occasion (in fact, twice) Kickshaws has sermonized on the sad fact that language is what people are speaking and writing and that when we hear English used sloppily, we must like it or lump it. This century's slop may be accepted usage in another century (or decade). Still, Kickshaws reserves the right to lump certain locutions that are heard and seen daily, two of which happen to have caused our lip to curl this past week. "All automobiles do not use internal combustion engines" said one car expert. No need to point out what he meant. Would that what he said were true! The other slop-talk was "... is three times more effective than ..." The writer meant "as effective as" but why be logical when you can be illogical and at the same time take up more print? We'd like to advise the writer that the only number that is ten times greater than five is not fifty, but fifty-five. However, as we all know by now, attempting to keep the language from changing, either for better or worse, is an exercise in futility. Nevertheless, we'll keep the Pedant's Corner open for the benefit of readers who would like to play King Canute with us. (Has it ever occurred to you that virtually the only readers of Fowler's Modern English Usage are the ones who don't need it?)

Another Card Game

Leslie Card of Urbana, Illinois hopes someday to find a list of 13 four-letter words which together contain each of the 26 letters exactly twice. Any modern dictionary is permitted. The closest Les has come is lists of 14, of which he has found several. One of them is: BARN, CHIV, DOCK, FLOX, FYND, GIZZ, JAWS, JETH, LAMP, QUAG, QUAX, SKEW, TYMP and VERB. The four extraneous letters are three As and an E. We don't expect anyone to come up with a 13-word list in the near future, but some of the lexicophiles out there may surprise us. Remember, the words may appear in any 20th century dictionary, general or specialized, and not necessarily as a main entry. Inferred inflected forms are OK.

The shortest set of four-letter words that contains every letter three times would consist of twenty words, with two extraneous letters. Les has produced a list of twenty-one words by adding to the previous list the words BIND, CWMS, FLIT, QOPH, JERK, VAUX and ZYGA. There's ample room for generalizations.

Sandwich Crypt

That's a word puzzle in which the hidden message, read horizontally, will produce, when inserted into position, a sequence of common words reading vertically. A sample format (on the left) is:

S L C O K	S L C O K
- - - - -	h e a r n
O V R B E	O V R B E
- - - - -	o e v i l
T R E T L	T R E T L

One solution (I wonder if there are others) is HEAR NO EVIL, which satisfies the rules by producing five vertical words (on the right). I've been told that they're easier than they look, but harder than you think, whatever that means. Would you care to try this one, in which the secret message is a Kickshaws Proverb? The answer can be found in Answers and Solutions.

S S V S L O U M S W P A C O M	
- - - - -	
R A R A T D D N O R A E B E L	
- - - - -	
P E E E E R R H N D S A N T Y	

Autologicians at Play

Long-time Kickshaws readers (August 1969) should have no difficulty determining what the following words (supplied by M.H. Greenblatt) have in common: sesquipedalian, legible, English, polysyllabic, typed, horizontal. That's right -- all are autologs, or self-descriptive words. Howard Bergerson has gone one step further and constructed a self-descriptive sentence:

In this sentence, the word and occurs twice, the word eight occurs twice, the word four occurs twice, the word fourteen occurs four times, the word in occurs twice, the word occurs occurs fourteen times, the word sentence occurs twice, the word seven occurs twice, the word the occurs fourteen times, the word this occurs twice, the word times occurs seven times, the word twice occurs eight times, and the word word occurs fourteen times.

Shaggy Doggerel

In the May 1971 issue, Richard Field of Malibu, California challenged Word Ways readers to produce a well-scanning and rhyming risqué limerick with the imposed pattern: Said he: "-----." / She answered: "-----." / "Then why --- / When --," -- / "We -----!" Truly, I thought the task would prove too formidable and so did Dick, but Mary Youngquist seldom shirks a challenge, and this was no exception. Since no stipulation was made as to who got the last word, Mary has given the last line to "her."

Better Late Than Never

Said he: "Here, I've bought you a ring."
 She answered: "You did the right thing."
 "Then why don't we wed
 When Fall comes?" he said.
 "We better get married this Spring!"

Leigh Mercer sent another interesting limerick, to wit:

When the 'Rose & Crown' signboard fell down
 George, the landlord, remarked with a frown
 "On the one to replace it
 We'll have much more space b't-
 Ween Rose and & and & and Crown."

Outrageous.

Cherchez La Femme

Mary Youngquist invites you to put the GAL in her proper place by finding the words defined below. For example, "pinnacle" would be "topgallant". Compare your results with the Answer section:

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|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. large urban area | 8. electric current | 15. seaweedlike |
| 2. wasteful | 9. storm | 16. follower |
| 3. not wasteful | 10. Indic language | 17. social equality |
| 4. polyphonic song | 11. West African | 18. loose breeches |
| 5. sailing vessel | 12. lordly | 19. entertain |
| 6. festivity | 13. xylophone | 20. sugar |
| 7. abundant | 14. Philippine | |

Lady Moll Boon

Recall that Addison, to underscore his contempt for anagrammarians, told a parable of a swain who spent six months producing an anagram of LADY MOLL BOON, only to find that he'd misspelled her name. Readers were encouraged to seek the anagram that might lurk in those unpromising letters, and seven of them took a crack at it. Everybody got MOLDY BALLOON and there were a few others equally unacceptable, by unromantics such as Murray Pearce and Ross Eckler. Can't you just see that lovesick youth zapping his inamorata with OLD LOONY LAMB! No, gentle Kickshavians, the truth has been revealed to me in the form of a yellowed copy of the Spectator, published over 250 years ago. The original lady of the anagram was none other than Lady Margaret Styrne, daughter of the fourth Earl of Beaulieu-on-Severn. Most of the edition was burned by Addison and Steele in order to mollify the Earl, who had threatened them with a suit for invasion of primacy (he was, at that time, a bishop, or perhaps it was an ape; the records are not clear on this point). All book collections bore the amended fictitious name, but the swain of Addison's parable was not confronted with the impossible letters LADY MOLL BOON. His six months were, in point of fact, spent on a different collection of letters. MARGARET he found too challenging, so he later changed it to PEGGY and still later to MEG. And he couldn't spell his way out of a muslin purse; his anagram, according to report, was based on the words LADY MEG STEARNE. Lord (Styrne) only knows what his anagram was, but after six months of work, it must have been a lulu!

Unsolicited Endorsements

There are many books on Kickshaws' shelves devoted to the weird, sometimes inexplicable properties of language, but none so fresh or delightful as Gary Jennings' Personalities of Language (Crowell Paperbacks, 1965). With the exception of wordplay, this book covers

virtually every facet of language that would interest Word Ways readers. There is (he leered) a chapter on dirty, four-letter, Anglo-Saxon words. Jenning lists eight of these; I thought there were only seven, but he has two that I missed (and I seem to have one that he missed). If you are easily offended, you can skip that chapter -- there is much, much more. The best book of its type you could hope to find.

The common, garden-variety logodaedalist demands little in the way of novelty or challenge. Set him in a chair with a pencil, an eraser and any newspaper crossword puzzle, and watch him go. Like a piece of clockwork. He has learned the name of an aromatic shrub found in Celebes and a river in Northumberland with three letters, and these entries he can pencil in without even thinking. The rest of the puzzle is completed in almost as mechanical a fashion. Whether the entry defined by "ire" is ANGER, WRATH or something else depends only upon cross-keying. Yawn.

The British, in several newspapers, have long been using a much trickier type of crossword, but anyone who has worked British-style crosswords knows that the rewards involved in outwitting the puzzlemaker are great. Rebuses, puns, anagrams and other unclassifiable ploys require more skill on the part of the solver, but once he's hooked he generally regards the standard American crosswords as dryas dust exercises in boredom.

The Nation Magazine has for many years printed a British-type crossword puzzle, and since the advent (about 20 years ago) of Frank W. Lewis as their official puzzler, has a good claim to owning the best British-type crossword in the English-speaking world. Better, I assure you, than the puzzles found in the London Times, The Observer, and The Manchester Guardian, and all three of these are first-rate.

Now "The Nation's Best Puzzles" is available in three loose-leaf volumes at a total cost of \$4.75. The supply was dwindling at last look, but readers who are interested in obtaining one or more copies should address their inquiries to Frank W. Lewis, 119 Northway Road, Greenbelt, Maryland 20770.

It's too late to enter the 1971 Dictionary Rally, but all lexicophiles who want to be notified promptly of the 1972 rally should send their names and addresses to Dictionary Rally, Box 42, Annapolis Junction, Maryland 20701. Those who enter will find themselves being conducted on a guided excursion through the New American Webster Handy College Dictionary. And the ones who follow the signposts best will emerge with valuable prizes. The "routes" are devious but scrupulously fair, and dictionary buffs will find the trip rewarding.

For Geographiles Only

Those Kickshavians who have expressed to us their feeling (which we share to some extent) that some expert logomasters devote a disproportionate amount of time to trivia geographica should pass over the following quiz quickly and without a backward glance. The other night a magnificent idea for a quiz appeared to us in a dream. Unfortunately, as with most dreams, all details have been forgotten. In its place we offer the following novel idea: we start with a (capital, country) pair, strike out in pairs letters common to capital and country, and scramble the letters remaining in each component. The task of the reader is to restore the originals. For example, (SIP, FENC) can have arisen only from (Paris, France), and (LIB, GAMY) only from (East Berlin, East Germany).

Those readers who attempt the quiz and obtain a score of up to five or more rate the Kickshaws Cheer, which is given along with the answers in the Answers and Solutions section.

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|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. BU, ERA | 6. MAM, DROJ | 11. L, ROTHAK |
| 2. SHEIK, DANF | 7. BOOM, YEN | 12. UMEJ, I |
| 3. MAM, LENN | 8. M, RIC | 13. DU, GO |
| 4. GT, MILC | 9. OO, AGE | 14. TR, LAB |
| 5. ISA, Z | 10. THE, I | 15. S, A |

Causal Or Coincidental?

Leigh Mercer has called our attention to parallelisms between the "penitential" Psalms (Prayer-Book version) and Shakespeare sonnets:

Psalm 6 My Beauty is worn away ...
Sonnet 6 Let not Winter's hand deface ...

Psalm 32 My bones consumed away ...
Sonnet 32 Death my bones shall cover ...

Psalm 38 I was as one that is dumb ...
Sonnet 38 Who's so dumb that cannot ...

Psalm 51 Do away my offences ...
Sonnet 51 Excuse the slow offence ...

Psalm 102 I am, as it were, a sparrow ...
Sonnet 102 I was wont to greet it with my lays, as Philomel ...

See also Oddities & Curiosities of Words & Literature (Dover, 1960) by C. C. Bombaugh, pages 119-122.