KICKSHAWS

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

What's The Connection?

Two very interesting word lists appear in different places in Dmitri Borgmann's Beyond Language (Scribner's, 1967). The lists, which are given below columnwise, in upper-case and lower-case, respectively, are antithetical. Can you determine in what sense?

1. BOUQUET aisle
2. PEIPING subtle
3. SEALING indict
4. TAOISM handsome
5. QUAY twitched
6. ROUGH neufchatel
7. JANITORIAL gnome
8. NAVAJO myrrh
9. BUSY heifer
10. GESTICULATORY marijuana
11. CHORUS knight
12. W-SHAPED talkathon
13. GRANDPA mnemonic
14. COMPTROLLER autumn
15. TABLEAU leopard
16. HICCOUGH psychotic
17. CUE cinq-cents
18. COLONEL atelier
19. CENTURY viscount
20. PASSED hautboy
21. EWE plaque
22. OF fivepence
23. ONE writhe
24. WRECKS billet-doux
25. WISE prayerful
26. XYLOPHONE rendezvous

Read on only if you've given up. There are 26 words in each list -- suggestive of the alphabet. The fact that the nth word of the second list contains the nth letter of the alphabet should strike you as more than a coincidence. Also the fact that the nth word of the first list never contains the nth letter of the alphabet is more than mere coincidence can account for. In fact, the two lists are referred to, respectively (and respectfully), by Borgmann as " The Invisible Alphabet" and " The Silent Host". For instance, the letter A is silent in aisle, but speaks when it is not spoken to in bouquet. And so on through the alphabet: truly a Borgmannish piece of research.

Puzzle Corner

J.A. Lindon of Weybridge, Surrey, England sends in the following minicrossword with a somewhat unusual twist:

Across 1. enable you to cotton on
    2. take the waters
    3. relief
Down 1. in the public estimation
    2. the end of every armistice
    3. I'd back Cecil to make it plain

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      1 2 3
    1 _ _ _
    2 _ _ _
    3 _ _ _
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We Love Ten

Although this numerical curiosity appeared earlier in Language on Vacation, Ernst Theimer of Rumson, New Jersey independently discovered it:

"If I have eleven matches in one hand and two in the other," said the Red Queen, "and I transfer one of the two, I now have twelve and one. 11 + 2 = 12 + 1. That's arithmetic."

"And if I have ELEVEN in one hand and TWO in the other," retorted Alice, "and I transfer the EN and the TW, I now have TWELVE and ONE. That's logology."

The Plural Project

For several months now, with the help of Murray Pearce and Walter Penney, I've been trying to gather a list of 26 plurals, all ending in different letters. Up to the deadline for this issue of Kickshaws, the three of us had put together 23 of the 26 but lacked plurals ending in J, Q or V. The day of the deadline, I received a letter from Darryl H. Francis, whom I had half-heartedly designated as the anchor man on the project, knowing that he would find it impossible to fill the three gaps. But he found them, all right -- how, I can't imagine. Webster's Third is not set up for "back-checking". He actually found four J-plurals: GAJ and KHAWARIJ (Webster's Second), BHUMIJ (Third), and FUNJ (Second and Third). And he did it all in less than a week! Here is the complete list: MEDIA, CHUB, CULS-DE-SAC, SQUID, SWINE, RIFF, HOG, FISH, RADII, FUNJ, ELK, COURTS-MARTIAL, CHERUBIM, WOMEN, BUFFALO, SHEEP, QARAQALPAQ, DEER, KICKSHAWS, TROUT, GNU, PSHAV, MOTHERS-IN-LAW, BEAUX, OFFICERS-OF-THE-DAY, and PINCE-NEZ.

For Those Owners of Web II Who Refuse to Acknowledge Web III

I believe Nero Wolfe, Rex Stout's fat, erudite detective, had his assistant Archie burn the newly received Third Edition of Webster's because it listed as one meaning of INFER, "to imply". Now most of us, I'm sure, agree with Mr. Wolfe in feeling that when the word is used this way, the speaker (nearly always il- or semi-literate) is perverting the language. "Are you inferring you can beat me in chess?" grates on my ears in the same way as does irregardless, this criteria, a savings, to whomever wants it, etc., ad nauseam. The point is, people are talking that way, and dictionaries and grammars are obliged to reflect that fact. Language cannot be governed by institutions (such as the French Academy) or by men of letters (such as Swift, who violently objected to such vulgarities as the word MOB). It is subject to the will of the people who use it, and those of us who are interested enough in language to observe violent linguistic changes in our own lifetimes must like it or lump it.

Thus it is the job of a new dictionary edition to weed out obsolete forms and catalog new ones. And though Nero Wolfe would not agree -- he will use the archaic form "It is I" rather than the correct form "It's me" until he dies (or until Rex Stout abandons him) -- I think he would have been brought up short by an item that appeared in the New Yorker some months ago under the heading "The Good Old Days": (From Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, 1947) pollutant (po·lut'ant), n. That which pollutes. Rare.

Our Own Little New Yorker

From the Santa Monica Evening Outlook: "...Bystanders said he complained loudly of the food and the service and that after several drinks he became more abusive. While attempting to attack one of the bartenders he slipped and injured his head severely against the footrail. Doctors at the receiving hospital describe him as critical." (Especially of the nurses, no doubt.)

Telephomnemonics

It's an old trick to use a 7-letter word as a device for remembering a telephone number. For numbers containing 1 or 0 this is impossible, as it is, indeed, for most numbers which contain only digits from 2 to 9; generally, one must use a suggestive letter and number combination or even a nonsense word. Few of us are fortunate enough to have an organic chemist friend with the telephone number SNowden 59637; if we had, we could ring him up simply by dialing POLYMER. It was pointed out in Time recently (and about five years ago in The Realist) that the number for Dial-a-Prayer

is HOllywood 33266 so that if one forgets the number, he can get his
minute sermon any time of the day by dialing GODDAMN. I wonder
what the number is for Dial-a-Curse.

What's more interesting is the telephone number that admits two
different decipherments -- we could call them dual telephomnemonics.
A girl used SWINGER to dial her jet-set boyfriend. A family of mid-
gets, mutual friends of both, took over the man's house (and tele-
phone) when he jetted out of town for good. Now, whenever she
wants to call her diminutive friends, she dials (you guessed it)
PYGMIES. Two more pairs: AMOUNTS - CONTOUR and ASTRIDE -
CRUSHED. Of course, it's simple to find pairs like BOATING -
COATING, but not quite so easy to find "non-crashing" pairs.
Care to try?

Amphisbaenics

These are "backward rhymes" such as SCRAM - MARX. Ed-
mund Wilson, who may have invented them, uses them in his poem
"The Pickerel Pond: A Double Pastoral" which begins:

> The lake lies with never a ripple,
> A lymph to lave sores from a leper:
>   The sand white as salt in an air
>   That has filtered and tamed every ray;
>
> Below limpid water, those lissome
> Scrolleries scribbled by mussels;
>   The floating dropped feathers of gulls;
>   A leech like a lengthening slug
>
> That shrinks at a touch, ink and orange;
> A child's wrecked Rio Janeiro,
>   One fortress of which flies a reed;
>   The cleft and quick prints of a deer.

and winds its fantastical way through another 67 stanzas. The poem
can be found in Wilson's Night Thoughts (Farrar, Straus & Cudahy),
a curious collection of anagrams, limericks, clerihews, and whim-
sical excursions that should be on every logophile's bookshelf.
Some more examples:

> An old cob swan his cygnets thus addressed:
> "Stray not too far from the parental nest.
> Remember you can never be as spry as is
> Yon falcon with her eyrie full of eyases!"

Colloquy Between Oneida and Lewis Counties, New York

> Said Walter Edmonds to Edmund Wilson
> " What river you say that old grist mill's on?"
> " Some day you must show me your Indian dead mounds,"
> Said Edmund Wilson to Walter Edmonds.

Metternich's Great Admirer

> Clever Peter Viereck'll
> Seem a bit more of a miracle
> If he'll hold himself in a particle
> And refrain from sending us offprints of his every
>   godblessed article.

Edmund Wilson may not be the most scurrilous clerihewer, but I know of none scurrilouser.

What Is It?

Well, it's a common five-letter word that takes up more than half a page of the big Webster's. A few of its definitions are given below. Can you identify the word?

Adjective: mellow, large, harsh, bold, complete, approximate, vigorous, not dressed (of a fish)
Adverb: indirectly, in turn, to a specified or understood place, to the rear, back to normal condition
Preposition: near, throughout, beyond the projection of
Noun: rung of a ladder, style of vocal arrangement, beat, routine of social activity, piece of sculpture modelled in full form unattached to a background, shot, time cycle, brewer's vessel, cut of beef, type of artist's brush
Verb: to trim hair short, to crop a dog's ear, to encompass, to whisper, to cut, to complete, to approximate, to grow or develop, to betray, to assail.

Brief Conversation

> He: Everyone's familiar with Smoky, but have you ever run
>   across Gladly, the cross-eyed bear?
> She: Never heard of hymn.

Challenge

I came across an unusual two-word formation in Webster's Third. Translated by one-to-one encipherment into its numerical

equivalent, it reads: 1 2 3 1 2 1 1 4   3 2 4. I sent the latter to
Walt Penney, who solved it with the aid of John Ferguson. He re-
marked in deadpan style: "I don't think there's another solution."
I'm sure there isn't and will send a copy of Webster's Third to any-
one who finds more than the one known solution. See if you can find
that first. How do you know the one you find is the same as mine?
No problem; I'll publish all solutions contributed an issue or two
hence. Good hunting.

Reader Contributions

Nearly all of the invitations and challenges appearing in this de-
partment in the February and May issues of 1970 have been met.
Ralph G. Beaman has made the old list of nine-letter, one-syllable
words as obsolete as scabbards for peaceful saber-toothed tigers.
He earns four encomia for adding SCRUNCHED, SPLATCHED,
SQUINCHED and STRAIGHTS to the list, a full measure of kudos
for BROUGHAMS, the only known non-S niner (pronunciation a
sort of compromise between brims and brooms), and a triumph for
the only known tenner, SCROONCHED. All of his words appear in
Webster's Third and, using that as authority, readers are invited
to seek (1) other tenners, (2) a non-S tenner, (3) an elevener.
Rotsaruck.

Murray Pearce came up with a four-by-four
minipuzzle using sixteen different letters (at the
right). Not all of the eight words appear as en-
tries in Webster's Third, but you can't have
everything, to coin a phrase. Murray also com-
posed the following spoonerhyme:

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G  R  E  W
L  O  X  A
U  P  I  S
M  Y  T  H
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On The Critical Comment Following Tom Thumb's
Vocal Recital

Some things
Thumb sings
Seem dumb,
Deem some.

He adds two very good entries to Walter Penney's "Literal Words"
list: MSRE and RABN. Josefa Byrne sent a big list of these, ask-
ing me to weed out the "patently outrageous" ones such as FMNAC
(a very unmanly way of pronouncing effeminacy). That still leaves
quite a few excellent entries: DVS, FEZN, GODC, NVS, OGN
(Augean), OPM, TDS and XUVL.

The Richmond Riddler Revisited

Murray Pearce conjectures that the mysterious Riddler of Richmond in the May 1970 Kickshaws may have been a long-time fellow-member of the National Puzzler's League who died last March. His nom-de-plume was OEDIPUS. If it was indeed he, then we may never know the answers to riddles I and III. Several readers commented on the riddles, but none came up with completely acceptable solutions. There was some comment on the obvious word-play in the second stanza of III (Dilemma -- ill, Emma) but it led nowhere. The only Emmas that come to mind are Madame Bovary and the heroine of Jane Austen's novel of that name, but neither seems to fit. Several candidates were advanced for I: a tear ("the heart would it disclose"), dew, sunlight, the quality of mercy, even chlorophyll -- but they just don't explain the details of the poem. Anyone know of a substance that undergoes exactly thirteen distillations? Scotch whiskey, perhaps? I give up. But I do claim the solution to II: The Sea, what else? The sea has always been styled " The Widow-Maker" at least since men first used ships. " The owner of a world" who "desired twain" was Xerxes, ruler of Asia Minor and receiver of tribute from much of Asia, including India. In Book VII of Herodotus' Histories , his initial campaign against the Greeks and the entire Mediterranean World is described. To enable his enormous army to cross over to Europe, he erected a bridge of flax and papyrus cables across the Hellespont. After the work was finished a violent storm arose, and the seas carried the entire bridge away. He gave orders that the Hellespont be punished by receiving 300 lashes and a load of iron chains to let it know who was master. As the Riddler says: " His feeble blows she did not feel." Possibly, but his second attempt, this time with the cables supported by hundreds of anchored ships, proved successful.

More Reader Contributions

Murray Pearce, like Ralph Beaman, Darryl Francis, Walter Penney and other prolific contributors, seems to have enough good material to fill an issue or two of Word Ways. He adds several fine entries to the list of " Pseudo-Opposites": UNDERGO - OVERCOME, HEREAFTER - THEREFORE, DOWNSTAIRS - UPLIFTS (if you're an Englishman), DROPOUT - RAISIN, SPEAKING LESSON - DUMB MORON, WRITE AHEAD - LEFT BEHIND, LIVING QUARTERS - BURIED TREASURE, PIECE WORK - WAR GAMES, RARE COINS - COMMON SENSE, CARGO - BUS STOP. Les Card offers some beauties of his own: UNDERTOW - OVERHAUL, HOT MILK - COLD CREAM, HOTHEADS - COLD FEET and one that's hard to beat: CREEPING THYME - WALKING SPACE. (Les also invited the readers to try pronouncing some unusual

four-letter words and then checking their efforts against a big dic-
tionary. Try these on your Funk & Wagnalls: ARGH, BADB, BURH,
CUIT, YHTE and YIGH.)

Darryl Francis of Hounslow, England, as is obvious from his per-
formance on the "Plural Project", is a researcher nonpareil and a
gifted innovator besides. Using American Indian languages (Tlingit,
Siuslawan, Koryak Kamenskoye, and Algonquian) he has extended
the "College of Interesting Cardinals" to include 16, 18, 19, 22
and 25. Set him loose on the African or the Sino-Tibetan families
and there's no telling how far he might go.

Richard S. Field, Jr. offers an interesting example of a word
whose pig-latin equivalent is also a word (see "Porcus" in the Feb-
ruary issue). The word is ARABLE, the pig-latin equivalent RABE-
LAIS. I wonder: is this really legitimate?

Levy's Lexicography

Sanford Levy of Compton, California offers another of his challen-
ging vocabulary tests. As usual, the reader will note that the task of
assembling such a quiz involves far more than a perfunctory browse
through a set of dictionaries. Over and above a highly efficient re-
search system, a vast vocabulary and almost instant recall are re-
quired. In this area I'll match Sandy's talents against anyone else's.
He's the type of fellow who always scores 20 on the Readers' Digest
vocabulary quizzes, without looking at the alternate definitions!

In this quiz, 20 groups of three words are given, and the reader
is asked to supply the most specific common relationship for each
group. For example, if a triplet consisted of dodo, passenger pigeon
and archeopteryx, the answers animals, bipeds or even birds would
rate a well-earned zero. The correct answer is extinct birds.

1. shamal, simoom, sirocco
2. kob, lechwe, puku
3. import, incense, intimate
4. hame, martingale, terret
5. clew, leach, luff
6. gaskin, pastern, poll
7. felucca, snow, xebec
8. cougar, panther, puma
9. bill, fluke, palm
10. calamus, rachis, vane
11. berlin, brougham, phaeton
12. coypu, jerboa, paca
13. runner, single Spanish
    burton, single whip
14. chief, dexter, sinister
15. kithara, theorbo, vina
16. cassowary, emu, kiwi
17. alabastron, aryballos, askos
18. chiaroscuro, scumble, sfumato
19. remex, scapular, tectrix
20. pampa, savannah, veld

7 = passing; 13 = incredible; 20 = you must be Sanford Levy!

Assorted Contributions

Darryl Francis notes that AEGILOPS is generally taken to be the longest word with its letters arranged in alphabetical order, and invites readers to top WETTISH as the longest word with its letters arranged in typewriter order (QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM). How about reverse typewriter order?

Darryl would like to be advised if any reader knows the origin of the palindrome AOXOMOXOA, the title of a record album by The Grateful Dead. Is it a put-up job?

Ripley's Believe It Or Not noted many years ago that in view of the number of "acceptable" spellings of the two syllables of SHAKES-PEARE (SHACK, SHAK, SHAC, SHEAK, SHAYKE, ... , SPEIR, SPUR, SPR, SPYR, ...) as used by the Bard himself and his contemporaries, the number of acceptable spellings of his name runs into the hundreds. An eight-year-old would have to try very hard to successfully misspell Will's surname; it's virtually impossible. Darryl Francis has gathered 22 different variant spellings of YOGURT (from the OED, F&W New Standard, Webster's 2 and 3). If anyone finds 23, let him come forward.

Darryl also has a list of 24 words containing triple digrams, e.g. INsINuatINg and gERrymandERER. He has three with triple trigrams, strESSlESSnESS, succESSlESSnESS and exprESSionlESSnESS, and two with quadruple digrams, KUKUKUKU and poSSeSSionleSSneSS. Readers are invited to find words with quintuple digrams, quadruple trigrams, or triple tetragrams.

Howard Bergerson provides two "Come Again?" phrases. Rewriting an old saw, he gets Abscess makes the hurt crow flounder. To Donald Drury he dedicates this (per)version of "The Raven": Juan, subpoena mad Knight Drury.

Palindromic Premiers

Dmitri Borgmann wonders why Southeast Asia has a predilection for palindromic premiers. U Nu was Premier of Burma until he was deposed in 1958; he returned to power in 1960 but was again deposed in 1962. However, logologists had their revenge when Lon Nol supplanted Prince Norodom Sihanouk as Premier of Cambodia in the spring of 1970.