

*The
Virupaksha
Monologues.*

*Wherein it is demonstrated,
among many another thing,
that all important questions
were fully discussed in 1991.*

FROM THE ARCHIVES
OF WORDS-L

MILLENNIAL COMMEMORATION EDITION
DECEMBER 1999

The Monologues

I

Wed, 6 Feb 91
18:48:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Forgive my long letter; it is only my first time!

Most esteemed Sirs/Madams,

I, Virupaksha Mokshagundam, have chanced to observe that a list for “English Language Discussion” is existing on this electronic network. I am always very desirous of ascertaining how english is used in the modern world, and most especially how her usage is made by persons who own her as their birth-tongue.

But, Sir (and Madam also) I am coming very very rapidly to the conclusion that the people in the opposite half of the earth are not correctly handling her at all! Contrary to this, people of India, due perhaps to having only a stepchild’s relation to her, hesitate very much to maltreat her! And so it is happening that the only correct english in the world is being used in India!

Before a thousand people dispute this fact, I am demonstrating my statement by giving illustrations. Unfortunately, I am at the moment in possession of very few undeleted messages left from the torrent of missives I kept getting inundated with by the hour, but even that is, I say, amply abounding in shudder-generating solecisms! I am producing parts of it below:

>>From: IN%“WORDS-L@YALEVM.BITNET”
>>“English Language Discussion Group”
>>Subj: Re: Of all the stupid things . . .

>>Sorry to be a little slow replying to this one . . .

Should not, I ask, this be written as “slow in replying”, failing which, should not at least a comma (“;”) be inserted?

Also, it is a bad habit to leave sentences hanging Trishanku-like in midair.

Banish the three dots from ends of sentences, I say, and let there only be one reassuring one!

>>Obviously there may be reason to have statistical
>>information but does it have to be a part of the
>>student’s record?

To your humblest servant, “obviously there may be” is sounding counter to logical faculties! If one is so sure as to say “obviously”, why is one also saying “may be”?

>>tricks to allow information to be kept but not to be
>>linkable.

To allow anything NOT to be linkable also seems to me to be forcing manifestly negative entities to BE! Leave such jobs to poets, I say, who will carry on supplying nomenclature to airy negativities!

>>(legally I hasten to add!).

And what, one wide-eyedly wonders, does one’s very good friend do illegally? The other query which is springing to one’s mouth is: what did he finally add?

>>Not their official ID card but their personal
>>information.

Pray what manner of sentence is this? There no verb in it, I saying in jest!

>>Anyway — hang in there. This *is* a good list!

I am not professing to know the meaning of “hang in there”. However, I am thinking that this is a new phrase minted in recent times, so that all users are not completely familiar with it. But this is most precisely what I am subscribing to this list for! I am still assured (I assure you) that wading through the flood of mail will leave my english prodigiously improved!

But wait! Even as I sit here, offering words to the strange machine, I am getting one more message! What is it?

>>I can but try, Karen; I may watch the Arsenio Show,
>>but I'm not all that hip. [or hype, if you prefer. I
>>think.<sigh>]

>>Dis - Don't you dare dis my old lady! He was dissin'
>>the flag by sewing it to the back of his 501s.

>>Dig?
>>Ruth

No! I am not digging this at all! What is all this, I say? And now that I am saying this, I also ask: Why is everyone attaching “cha” to “bet”? Why are some people being so preoccupied with chilis and crescents? It is astonishing!

I apologise many hundred times for being so impertinent as to write this, but this matter was becoming urgent for me beyond bounds of tolerance. So I am hoping only that no one considers this offensive. I would also be elated to the limit if people provide explanation for this amazing phenomenon, viz. the rightful claimants to english as their speech-carrier manhandle her so badly! Truly,

it must be because familiarity begets contempt, just as in the case of bhilla women of the mountains who chop sandalwood to feed the fire in the stoves.

I take your leave with the greatest respect.

Yours sincerely,
Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

II

Thu, 7 Feb 91
13:45:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
Subject: RE: Re: Kaloo kalay, oh frabjous day!

- 1 O frabjous day, calooh, calay!
- 2 the vorpal BLADE
- 3 the FRUMIOUS bandersnatch

one must be careful when quoting

I remain your most humble servant,
VM

III

Wed, 13 Feb 91
01:26:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: The second letter now, for ending the subject.

This letter I can only describe as “RE: Re: re: The forgivable long letter from TIFRVAX, India, and not from “Galmin/Donut””, ha, ha.

But, seriously speaking, god! what is happening? I have come back after a trip out, to see if my anyone is answering to my letter at all, and what do I see? Filed away by my good friend Tushar (under the kind umbrella of whose computer account I am

writing these letters) I am seeing some thirty-odd replies!

I am really touched by this, I say!

But what is this apology business, I ask? I am not seeing any need for apology, just because people are finding my writing funny! It is only bearing out what my old teacher was always saying: that “good” Kannada or “literary” Marathi will not translate directly into dignified English.

I have read intently and with great care the letters so kindly sent, especially those by Ruth Hanschka, Tony Harminc, Natalie Maynor, and I must say, I am agreeing with them entirely! Indeed, is it not more sensible and rewarding to enquire how people ACTUALLY speak, rather than preach loftily about how they should? It seems, when told, to be the only undertaking worthy of a truly scientific temper. I am sitting here blushing with hot shame at not having realized this elementary point. But disabusement in this manner, it is only the best form of enlightenment.

So if we are insisting on talking about apologies, it is I who must apologise, to each and everyone who is finding the letter irritating, and especially to Mr. Tony Harminc, whose letter I was so impertinently pointing to from the altar. Please accept most contrite apologies, Sir!

I am now trying hard to keep communications short and nonnonsensical, and most especially to suppress the (so natural) urge to allow present progressives to proliferate!

Everyone who sent messages, and spent valuable time explaining trivial points, I am thanking them from the heart. I am indeed finding myself so moved that I am submitting below a variant of the icon:

∴-)

where the extra dot is denoting a tear.
Is it not appropriate?
I remain your respectful servant,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

IV

Sat, 16 Feb 91
01:21:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: MY ramblings on "poetry".

I was intending all this time to "lie low" and observe how english is being spoken but now I am thinking, after seeing a great deal of words exchanged on poetry, that I might as well make my own humble contribution of tallow to the flames!

I am surprised how almost everyone is seeming to give such little importance to rhyme! Actually I am not assigning to it overmuch significance myself. What I really want to say is that the FORM of a poetic work is of prime importance. (no progressive, see?).

The music of the words, the voluptuous pleasures of uttering syllables of human language, are they of no value at all? To me, they are seeming to be the real features which are setting poetry apart from prose. Further, do we not sometimes call even scientific works "sheer poetry", by virtue of their elegance and economy? (Do not take THIS remark very seriously, but it is still of some importance.)

Yes, I say, if it is not titillating one's mind with it's form, it is not poetry; even if it's content is of immense profundity it is at most an academic treatise or literary prose, depending on whether truths or lies are said in it. Respectively, of course.

And now you may ask, if nothing is said in it, what then? It is then called journalism.

Modulo the jokes, I am requesting you to consider my opinion, for I am serious. Take the recent topic of “frumious” vs “frubious”, for instance. It is quite all right to use poetic license and say “frubious”, but then pray what kind of bandersnatch are you speaking of? Fruity, furious, frugal, a very ambiguous creature indeed! (Mathematicians here would call it “frobenius split”!.)

Now a “frumious” bandersnatch, on the other hand, fumes madly in it’s fury, and this, in it’s resolution, is very satisfying, though perhaps not so much for the beamish boy.

Why am I writing this drivel? It is to emphasise that one MUST assume, especially in the case of Lewis Carroll, that he has spent a lot of time constructing the sounds of his poems; fine-tuning and optimising his words, as it were. Since it is a “nonsense” poem this fact is even truer, and it is strengthening my case, since: THIS is true poetry, almost completely freed of the chains of “meaning”, a torrid, pure dance of human sounds which rouses only glimmering ghosts of “meanings” in every mind it chances to encounter.

I am stopping now, since my letter is already intolerably long, but let me say that I am possessing more arguments supporting my point. It is just so happening that I cannot get them together to produce a single focussed argument. I am having a suspicion that it is electronic mail which prevents me from giving sustained thought to things, but I will write about this later.

I remain,
Truly yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

P.S.: I say, I am just now noticing that I am writing about “truer facts” somewhere! I am writing a letter about that and other things in just some time! Please read that also.

V

Sat, 16 Feb 91
02:44:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Four disconnected topics.

Here I am, writing again. I am mentioning my more trivial doubts first.

1) Firstly, I am confused when to say “it’s” and when “its”. My question is: is there a unique one which is the short form of “it is”, and if so, which is it? The other one is: “belonging to it”.

2) Is it really wrong, or I should be saying “unconventional”, to split infinitives? I am submitting a funny sentence I made up once:

-> To make sense of this sentence, you are adviced to pay to not pay attention to split infinitives and to ignore to only read unsplit ones.

3) With reference to e-sleep, I must say that half the people in this institute will not realise there is a joke in this. This is because many north Indians are actually pronouncing sleep and study as e-sleep and e-study from time immemorial! They are making this peculiar pronunciation when an initial ‘s’-sound is followed by another consonant.

Now I am talking a bit about the use of the progressive reflecting the state of my own mind! I am more used to Marathi than Kannada, and in this language at least, what one would say for “now I will talk” or “now I am talking”, in my feeling lies between the direct translations of the two. The

english usage of the progressive is not taught. It only SEEMS natural. But talking about mental states is sounding a little far-fetched, I say! Perhaps Marathi would have been a good language for Mr. Einstein, since people are habitually using the single word “avakaash” to denote both space and time in Marathi since very long ago! Therefore I would say that just looking at me writing “the fact is even truer”, one must not directly conclude that I am having several degrees of truth in my mind! As I said earlier, it is only sounding natural at the time.

(Talking about progressives again, if one was being very strict, almost the only correct usage that could be made is in: “I am typing this very sentence.”!)

I remain most sincerely yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

VI

Tue, 19 Feb 91
02:09:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Ambiguous uncles, ambiguous aunts.

Dear Sirs/Madams,

Before coming to my main query, I want to explain that I am getting your excellent messages after a very big time lag. Therefore I am unable to join any discussion in its high noon. This is no great disadvantage, however, since I am generally having very little of any importance to say.

A propos espy/estop etc., though, I am thinking that it might interest some people to know that the Urdu speakers are regularly using the word “ispanj” to denote a cloud bereft of rain. They are also using it to refer to “sponge”. I do not know

which of the words in quotes is an entailment of the other. Perhaps someone is aware?

But on to this question, for the answer of which I am getting most desperate. It is: Are there english words which are of common usage which distinguish among the various types of uncle, aunt or cousin one might have?

I must explain that I am calling my father's brother a different "sort" of uncle than my mother's brother. This is perhaps only because there exist different words for them in my language. In english, however, a cousin may be female or male, and be related to you through a maternal or paternal uncle or aunt. This is most inconvenient for people like me, since a cousin, read about in english, assumes an eightfold life! "Tom!". No answer. Fine indeed, but Tom's aunt did not merge into unity till very much later in the book! A disconcerting experience!

If there are in english such words as I am describing, no one here is knowing them. I read once about a person who tried to remedy this by inventing words like "mobroson" to denote the cousin who is the mother's brother's son. Alas, these constructions are impractical and ludicrous. Besides, I can see in this system no way to avoid calling my paternal aunts "fasists", and though this is very felicitous and truthful, in my case and Bertie Wooster's, it is not a politic thing to practise.

So to anyone who is being knowledgeable in this matter, I request to kindly inform me as fast as your business permits.

Yours in gratitude,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

P.S. I have received just now a letter enquiring about preoccupation with alliteration. I am submitting a letter about such preoccupations of the Sanskrit poets which will perhaps amuse you.

VII

Tue, 19 Feb 91
03:18:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Ambiguous uncles, ambiguous aunts.

Practically even before I sent my letter, back came a reply from Mr. Gary Cunningham. I am most thankful, but now I have to live in a world where aunts and uncles are forever fuzzy. I will take some time to get used to this, I say! I must add that it is not of very great importance to overspecify one's relatives. Why, the heroes of the Mahabharat most probably did not even consider nephews and sons as different. At least they were using the words interchangeably, regardless of how distant a nephew was, or so I hear.

As for calling elderly friends "uncle", that is not uncommon here, too. In fact do we not all call strangers "brother"? In Bombay the only way men are addressing each other is "bhai", which of course means "brother". How women are addressed is much more complicated, and so I won't needlessly add deadweight to this missive.

Truly yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

VIII

Wed, 20 Feb 91
01:21:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: RE: Re: Ambiguous uncles, ambiguous aunts.

>Just to throw another iron in the fire, Yiddish has a
>term that describes the relationship between the
>respective parents of a married couple. In other
>words, my wife's mother and my parents are
>'makhatunim.'

Yes, there are such terms in most Indian languages also. For instance in Marathi the (son_or_daughter)-in-law's father is "vyahi"; mother, "vihini".

IX

Mon, 25 Feb
91 01:35:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Alliteration.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have read the letter by Ms Nancy S Ellis, talking about the irresistible lure of alliteration. The ancient poets who wrote in Sanskrit called alliteration "Anupraas" and counted it amongst the "baser" figures of speech (as opposed to "nobler" ones like the metaphor). This however did not save them from falling prey to what are perhaps the worst excesses of alliterative verse to be found in any literature of the world! Some of these are truly humorous, but also rather awesome demonstrations of verbal acrobatics.

I am drawing your attention to the epic poem Kiratarjuniya written by the great poet Bharavi. Here, in the midst of truly noble poetry, one will find verses like these:

(To simplify reading, I am splitting words into syllables. But I say, writing this in roman is a difficult task!)

SA SAA-SIH SAA-SU-SUH SAA-SO
YE-YAA-YE-YAA-YA-YAA-YA-YAH
LA-LAU LEE-LAM LA-LO-LO-LAH
SHA-SHEE SHA-SHI-SHU-SHEE SHA-SHAN

which is to be found in the 15th canto (sarga). This verse is not nonsense. In fact, most critics are saying that it is not even sounding very contrived.

Or take for instance this one:

CHAA-RA-CHUN-CHUSH-CHI-RAA-RE-CHI
CHAN-CHACH-CHEE-RA-RU-CHAA RU-CHA
CHA-CHAA-RA RU-CHI-RASH-CHAA-RU
CHAA-RAI-RAA-CHAA-RA-CHAN-CHU-RA

which uses only two sounds. There exists an even more incredible one:

NA NO-NA-NUN-NO NUN-NO-NO
NAA-NAA NAA-NAA-NA-NAA NA-NU
NUN-NO-NUN-NO NA-NUN-NE-NO
NAA-NE-NAA NUN-NA-NUN-NA-NUT

I have separated syllables as I would pronounce them, and not according to the actual sandhis involved.

As I said, these verses do make perfect sense. But I say, what a performance in its own right! One stares in fascinated horror at what lengths even a poet can go to. Perhaps they did it to satisfy the vulgar tastes of their patrons. But frankly, I say, I am finding myself unable to staunch a flow of admiration.

These three examples are from the 15th sarga of the Kiratarjuniya. There are many more exam-

ples, some extremely intricate, to be found in literature. They play with rhymes, homophones, palindromes, and verses with other symmetries. But the “anupraas” is seeming to be all pervading.

I am having special interest in this perhaps exclusively Indian tendency, for I too am a victim of it. Had my respected grandfather not been so fond of resounding words, I would not have had the misfortune to bear a ridiculous bombastic name all through my life. But now I am stalking furtively the corridors of this institute, reduced to a nervous wreck by trying to keep beyond a dense curtain my secret sorrow: the gale force of my official quadruple-barrelled name, which I have asked very few to brave.

Yours,

Mokshagundam Takshakabhushana
Virupaaksha Kaamaakshivara.

X

Thu, 28 Feb 91
02:33:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: This is not a very serious letter!

Dear Sirs/Madams,

There are some comments I am wanting to make which you may find interesting. They are in response to several different letters I have seen.

1. Some days ago I saw someone writing something to the effect that an empty set is not empty. An empty set IS empty, I say! Pray what else can it be? One is not even needing to know what “empty” means in order to say that an empty set is empty.

2. I am really very amazed to know that “squirrel” is being pronounced the way it is. If any-

one in the United States hears me talking it is going to be found very funny. But what are you thinking of the word “whirring”? Perhaps it is not pronounced with an /ur/?

3. Regarding a-e-i-o-u, I am feeling very sure that I have seen the word “acheirous”, but this may be wrong.

4. I say, I cannot think of a word with three consecutive double letters, but I am thinking of “committee”. Should one not say that there is only an “iota” of a flaw in it?

5. “Nine yards”, I am surmising, more whimsically than with recourse to logic, may refer to the nine yard saree, which is the longest and in some sense the completest garment one wears (if female).

6. Road signs: This is perhaps not what you meant by “funny road signs”, but it is nevertheless humorous. You must understand that signboard painters here are not well versed in english. I have observed a notice on a road in Bombay which says: “Motorists please allow some space for pederastians.”

7. There was some inquiry about whether my name is not unweildy. It is, and I have found it out when I was applying to take the Graduate Records Examination for american schools. I have no obvious way of shortening it. “Virup” sounds ugly, for that is what it means, and “Veeru” is sounding like a denizen of the criminal classes—with whose mental propensities mine would differ to a certain extent.

Allow me to say a few things more. Not wishing to detract from the high merit of most of the contributions, I am still thinking that more restraint would have been desirable when sending. Is it always a good thing, I ask, piping one’s stream

of consciousness unprocessed into the MAIL command? I understand that I am not one entitled to prescribe behaviour, and so I request you to take this not extremely seriously. But perhaps there is some truth in saying that everyone makes much more careful statements when they are harder to broadcast. I sometimes fear that the electronic mail will corrupt whatever thinking faculty I possess, by goading me into sending without hesitation the first thought which is born in my mind.

Do not misunderstand this please! I am enjoying this list very much! In fact I am finding myself becoming more and more like one of you! Indeed the similarities have gone up to such an extent that

...

But oh karma! I will have to end the message I say! There is my pet elephant baby, Kuvalayaapeeda, trumpeting impatiently for its daily walk and the round of plucking and crushing lotuses! After that I must spend a tense ten minutes studying tenses in bambaiya hindi and—oh in the names of the polynomial Vishnu!—I must learn the whole Warli tribal language before 9 a.m. tomorrow, and it is already 11 p.m.! Kindly excuse me!

Taking your leave in great haste,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XI

Tue, 19 Mar 91
17:41:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: E00 A silly query.

E01 Dear Sir/Madam,

E02

E03 God save me from writing at the slightest
provocation,

E04 but I say, this activity is in a large measure
addictive! So

E05 here I am writing about sundry topics I have
seen discussed on this

E06 list, to which I am thinking I could make cer-
tain contributions!

E07

E08 I read communications by some people
which expressed annoyance

E09 at certain usages of the language, and I must
say it relieved me,

E10 since I too am finding some things extremely
irritating when I am

E11 seeing them on a printed page. I am sorry I
cannot enumerate the full

E12 set of these, but I am giving you some exam-
ples.

E13 One is the utilisation of the letter “n” as a
conjunction. It had

E14 mystified me very much when I had seen it
first, but I am not getting

E15 used to it even after knowing that it denotes
“and”.

E16 The other thing I am disliking very much is
this great penchant people

E17 are having for giving to news items headlines
with punning allusions.

- E18 If one reads about “elephantine problem”, to give a recent instance,
E19 one can be sure that the news is about an elephant holding up traffic.
E20 Is it necessary, I ask, to title a cat’s photograph as “purrfect”? I
E21 could ask the same about other usages like “jest in fun”.
E211 I would also like too add, as an afterthought, the peculiar habit
E212 of denoting mathematics by the word “math”. This usage has never failed
E213 to revolt me, and I am feeling that it is succeeding only in emasculating
E214 a glorious body of thought. However, I may be biased in my opinion, since
E215 I learn mathematics in all seriousness. Also I might be shying from it
E216 since it is only something that I am not used to.
E217
E22 There are other faults one can pick. I am reading everyday the
E23 Times of India, but even in a respected publication like it I have
E24 found several very funny statements arising out of misuse of language.
E25 Perhaps I will send you, for your amusement, a list of some I found in
E26 a single paper.
E27
E28
E29 Allow me to ask a question which is troubling me a bit. I was
E30 looking recently at a book which concerned itself with “George

E31 Orwell's English and Ours". I am sorry to be
unable to give precise
E32 references, but I was not reading it too care-
fully—in fact I just
E33 skimmed through it. One statement caught
my eye, however. It was
E34 saying something to the effect of the following:
E35 It is well-known (said the author) that one
can think of a
E36 large family of modern languages, including
several Indian and
E37 European languages, to have arisen substan-
tially from a single source.
E38 A typical word would start from the "primal"
tongue and appear in
E39 different versions in different offshoots of the
language.
E40 I am aware that this account is not sounding
sufficiently
E41 precise. I apologise for that. The statement
which really surprised me
E42 was a passing remark the author made, to the
effect that the reason
E43 for the words changing precisely in the way
they did was "not known",
E44 though it was fairly certain that it had noth-
ing to do with the
E45 anatomy or predilections of the particular
family of speakers.
E46 Now I had always thought that the "sound" of
a language, the
E47 cadences and the syllables peculiar to it, arise
wholly from the
E48 peculiarities of the speakers. Is it not natural
to think that the
E49 word for the number 8 in our ancient lan-
guage (the illustration the

- E50 author gave) has turned to “ashtau” in Sanskrit, because her speakers
- E51 found it the most natural (or, so to say, the least unnatural)? Why,
- E52 can we not say exactly the same thing for the rules of inflection, the
- E53 way consonants change in the sandhis, these being the little things
- E54 which ultimately determine the sound of a language? Do not
- E55 underestimate this property any language has; people can identify a
- E56 language by its sound, without so much as knowing the “ABC’s” of it.
- E57 My opinion is that there are minute differences in people’s
- E58 speech-making equipment which go to make languages sound “guttural” or
- E59 “tipsy” or “lispings” or “sonorous” or “harsh”. They may not affect the
- E60 language sounds in a very crude and obvious manner, but they may
- E61 induce in the language (or dialect) a propensity to sound as it sounds,
- E62 the propensity then being reinforced by constant usage.
- E63 Needless to say, I am possessing no logical arguments in
- E64 favour of this opinion, but had it not been for the book I would have
- E65 gone on believing in it, without so much as realising the essentially
- E66 arbitrary nature of such a belief.
- E67 Can someone having some leads to this question please reply?
- E68 I would be most obliged to have an answer.
- E69

E70 Yours with respect,
E71 Virupaksha Mokshagundam.
E72
E73 P.S. Was there not going to be a discussion on
“semantic fields”?
E74 Please do start it; I can guarantee the pres-
ence of at least one avid
E75 listener!

XII

Tue, 19 Mar 91
17:35:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Now that I am in touch again.

Dear Sir/Madam,

The last few days have been very trying for me, since I was not receiving any mail whatsoever from this excellent list. I, while thinking about it and pondering on the possible events which could have lead to such a disaster, sometimes contemplating such thoughts as to whether I had been removed from the muster of subscribers for being too disgusting and tiresome, ate. I, praying feverishly that communications be restored, regardless of the agonies I undergo while extracting semantic content from so many of the postings which eclipse my friend's personal mail, fitfully slept.

But now all is well, and the joy of it! Truly I cannot describe it on Words! There is only one way I am seeing to celebrate this; it is to satiate my too unmanageable cacoethes scribendi. Therefore I am sending you a letter which I intended sending long ago. I am aware that not many will be interested in it now, but has this merest of objections ever deterred a person possessing such gall as I do?

Before I go away, let me bring to your attention a sentence I observed on this very list. Some of you may be knowing that I am very sensitive to any controversies about using the present progressive in peculiar contexts. But here is the sentence I saw (amongst some others):

>So that's it.

>

>I'm teaching a class right now so I have to go.

>

>Chris

It is “ringing a bell”, is it not? Since I have never chanced upon classrooms with computer terminals in them, perhaps, I found this sentence thoroughly mysterious. But native speakers of English—I have stopped making coherent sense out of their outpourings many months ago.

Please read my other letter also, since I have asked a question in it an answer to which I would really appreciate reading.

With respect,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XIII

Thu, 21 Mar 91
02:19:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: RE: Dialectical term for carbonated beverage

The “Subj:” of this letter is indeed mystifying. “Dialectical word”—I say, this is taking the name “Discussion Group” too seriously!

Yours truly,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XIV

Thu, 21 Mar 91
01:30:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Two tentative prepositions and “thrice”.

Dear friends,

(The line above is an invention of mine.)

I was surprised to learn that the word “amongst” could be thought to be archaic. Why, it is quite a commonly used word! Subscribing to “WORDS-L” has expanded my horizons to a very large extent. Since the subject has come up, may I make a similar query about the word “thrice”? Is it in common use or is it, too, considered a fossil? Everyone around me is using it quite regularly, but rather puzzlingly it is puzzling some fresh imports from the U.S.A..

A propos the topic of prepositions, I have two questions to ask:

1. Can the word “astride” possibly be considered a preposition? I have seen the phrase “astride the horse” somewhere.

2. The same question about “via”. Perhaps it is not considered standard english.

Question 2. above reminds me of a phenomenon which might amuse you. Let me first point out that (north) Indian languages have “postpositions” functioning in the same way as prepositions do in english. Since the civic transport offices here are peopled by more or less total illiterates, this gives rise to completely misleading descriptions of public bus routes in english. For instance, if a bus is to go from A to B (defying Zeno) through C, the vernacular would strictly read “A-from C-via B-to”. In practice it is “A to C-via B”. This is quite correct so far, but imagine the translation! It is : “A to C via B”!

Such subtle phenomena must have probably made thousands of innocent tourists lose their way, and an equal number of natives misunderstand the meaning of “via”. But, “mark the sequel”! Now some kindhearted soul has made the corrections in the english renderings, but the vernacular notices have simultaneously changed! Thus the natives will now wander on foreign strands and the tourists will be confused about Indian postpositions.

There is another thing which is puzzling me. (This is rapidly becoming the most common sentence in my letters, is it not?) It is to do with the phrase “one in the same”. I cannot see how confusion arises in such cases due to HEARING incorrectly. There will be some ambiguity in hearing a phrase, of course, but surely it is by an easy, if not an automatic, process in one’s mind that the sound is correlated with a standard phrase which is frequently appearing in print! In fact, that is the only way any word is finally fixing himself in one’s mind. Ergo, the origin of such constructions as “one in the same” has to be provided with less trivial explanations.

Please let me know about “thrice”, “astride” and “via” as soon as your business permits. It is not very urgent, however.

Sincerely yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

P.S. I am still laughing heartily at the “texting . . . texting” message. Forgive me.

XV

Thu, 21 Mar 91
23:37:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: “three-peat” and “cooking my daughter”. Also
“glittering”.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to make some comments about certain letters I read yesterday.

The word “three-peat” sounds rather funny, and I congratulate the person who thought of it. I submit that there is a very natural word which does the job of “three-peat”. That word is “reiterate”. It seems that this fact is not generally appreciated, but one only has to reflect for a moment to realise that if one wants to be strictly logical, to reiterate anything would necessitate doing it thrice (three times) at least; for after all, mere iteration requires doing something twice. But alas, there are people who are getting so carried away while speaking, that drunk by their own speech they say “once more I reiterate”, when they are only saying something a second time, falling fully twice short of the minimum quota dictated by logic.

I am thankful that the discussion on “semantic fields” has started; I admit that I was waiting for it more due to being intrigued by the name than anything else, but it is interesting stuff nevertheless. I cannot resist repeating something I read in the letter from Mr. Bobaljik; it struck me as extremely bizarre:

“If it [the letter] comes twice, please erase the other one.”

“The other one”—a mysterious phrase; a shadowy sign, lacking a referent.

I hasten to add that the letter was excellent.

Reading the word “onomatopoeia” brought another question to my mind. Consider the word “glittering”—can it in any sense be decreed as onomatopoeic? Perhaps the question will be more sensible in the context of some foreign languages—“lakh-lakheet” in Marathi for instance, or the Sanskrit “jhalan-jhala” as used by the great poet Muraari in his “Anargharaaghava”, both denoting the same quality as does “shining”, or more properly “glittering”. It seems intuitively clear that these words are “onomatopoeic”, but then all that glitters does not make a sound, still less a sound which could be unhesitatingly associated with glittering objects. What is the answer to this question, then? Perhaps someone knows?

Speaking about postpositions again, I recall to you a letter sent by Mr. Tony Harminc, giving the example of “I am cooking my daughter for lunch”. Although quite humorous, the sentence is unlikely to arise in practice. The crucial point here is that in a sentence like this, the preposition “for” is linked inextricably with “my daughter” in most Indian languages, by virtue of “my daughter” possessing a particular inflection, and “lunch” carrying quite another.

In notices like “from A to B via C”, however, the names can be left uninflected, by convention or otherwise, and this brings to the fore all the deeply hidden uncertainties of English.

The pedagogic exercise finished, I am taking your leave. Please communicate about “glittering”, since this will clear a doubt I have nursed in my mind for a great length of time.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XVI

Tue, 26 Mar 91
03:42:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Mr. Bobaljik exits.

Dear _____,

There are indeed quite a few things that I am yet to learn! In the name of the divine thirty-three-crores, who would have thought that the term “mister” could be anything other than respectful! Yes, I admit I pondered quite at length about the exact terms of address to use when I first started on this mad letter-writing spree, and decided upon “Mr.” unless objected to strenuously. Perhaps it is only sensible to call everyone by the first name. I am afraid this will rather make my postings look like an untidy quilt, a patchwork of violently clashing usages, but then I ask myself: what of english herself? And thus I am at peace.

This brings me to the topic of my own name. I have seen it mangled beyond the wildest reaches of my fancy; the roman script, I am thinking, is capable of such fantastic transformations as no one using scripts based purely on syllables will ever imagine—I am heart and soul in favour of the devanagari, then, for though moderately complex it can mix up the components of words only in very sensible ways, ways comprehensible to the language-speaking mind, and for this boon, I say, the necessarily miserable quality of cryptic crossword puzzles is seeming a ridiculously small price to pay.

Virupuksha, Virsupaksha, Virupushka, I am staring in fascination at these, and waiting in tense apprehension for the next one to arrive. Moksha, Paksha, the green ghostly words have impinged on my eyes many a time, and they have left me with nothing but a startled surprise.

May I, then, try to show how the name is precisely parsed? I am no professional linguist, but I believe that the following is correct.

Virupaksha ((vi + roop) + aksha) one with the ugly eye

“ugly” “eyed” i.e. the god Shiva, with the notorious third eye.

Mokshagundam ((moksha + gunda) + /um/)

name of my ancestral place

do not ask me where it is,
perhaps it does not exist.

Since I have started,

Takshakabhushana

Takshaka + bhushana
one who uses the mythical “ornament”
serpent Takshaka as an ornament i.e. Shiva again,

by relying on a story long forgotten.

Kamakshivara (Kama + akshi) + vara
one who wedded Kamakshi,

“passion” “eyed” “wedder” the sloe-eyed woman,
(female) i.e. the god Shiva, as you have perhaps
guessed.

And thus I go about in the world, Mokshagundam Takshakabhushana Virupaksha Kamakshivara, my name translated to human language saying “shiva shiva shiva”, which is an expression of

the onset of disgust and end of endurance, popular amongst the highest class of brahmin in these parts.

I am admired for bearing any name I am given with equanimity, including “pax”, but admired only by those people who are ignorant about the ordeal I have gone through at the tender age of twelve days. Call me “pax”; it is a product of the language of Bombay and it revolts me, but then there are worse names to call me. Otherwise, Virupaksha is good, for even with all possible permutations of letters it is still recognisable. And of course, the amount of offence taken at any such perturbation is nil.

Yours truly,

vidrupaakarichakshu
muktibhavagramarakshakamandalesh-
waravaasiyam

XVII

Sat, 30 Mar 91
05:11:00 IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Ideas without language?

Dear friends,

I am writing again, now that the things which I am wanting to ask have become a reasonable number. To think that this alone makes a letter worth writing is of course being vain in the extreme, but then quantity has almost always successfully passed for quality.

On to the body of the letter :

1. Regarding plurals of words ending in “o”: Is there a standard convention for writing the plural of “zero”? This is one word for which I—and possibly many others—find a genuine need.

A propos this, what could you suggest as a word analogous to “first” and “second” in the case of “zero”? How can one rephrase “Chapter number 0”?

2. I am reading all the learned discussions with the greatest interest; in fact I can now claim that I am being able to comprehend the texts of as many as 30 letters of the 100 which I am getting daily from the list! But one thing which is irritating me faintly is the consistent use of “inate”. It is making language sound, to my ears, somehow inert and prostrate.

3. Concerning a word I encountered recently : what is the meaning of the word “Svengali”? It is certainly not a mixture of Swahili and Bengali. I am unable as always to provide the precise source of this word, and thus cannot say in what context it was used, while context is all important, is it not?

4. “Coke”: In India, the universal usage is seeming to be “coldrink”. I have observed that this is the word written, be the script roman, devanagari, kannada, or gujarati (and quite possibly bengali, but I cannot vouch for that, my acquaintance with the bengali script being strictly nodding).

5. The very idea of ideas without language—why, it is striking me speechless! One’s language is utterly fundamental. It must be kept very firmly in mind that our senses are not standing independently—the world, after all, is strangely chaotic. It will not organise its amorphous mass for the sake of animals with senses. The only way to make it do so, I am feeling, is to impose our names and words on it. Perhaps I do not express this very well, but I do firmly believe (until someone corrects me) that only through language do we comprehend the world.

6. I was going through some very old messages from the list which have survived with me, and one of them, by Mr.—ah, forgive me, not Mr.—Price Caldwell, proved a revelation, for it contains the word “onomatopoetic”. A conscious neologism? A serendipitous invention? Be it what it may, it left a warm glow in my heart for the rest of the day.

7. The great chain of being: I hold it to be self-evident that elephants are the closest to humans, cats too dreadfully superior, and dogs rather inferior. About dolphins, we have never been introduced, but I am sure I will take some time to overcome my timidity in their august company.

8. As I finish this letter, I am deciding to really make an effort to be less verbose henceforth.

I take your leave with respect,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XVIII

Tue, 9 Apr 91
15:35:29 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Transcendental mnemonics.

Since no one seems to have mentioned the famous mnemonics for pi, I am submitting them. A good sentence to remember was devised by none less than Sir James Jeans:

How I want a drink, alcoholic of course, after the heavy problems involving quantum mechanics.

Reading off the number of letters in each word gives 314159265358979, which are the first few significant digits in the decimal expansion of pi. Perhaps I am repeating a very well known one now, but here is a “poem” which goes to many more digits:

Now I, even I, would celebrate
In rhymes unapt the great
Immortal Syracusan rivaled nevermore
Who in his wondrous lore
Passed on before
Left men his guidance
How to circles mensurate.

I am sorry to say that I do not know the originator of this.

I always remember a verse which gives 32 digits:

gopeebhagyamadhuvraata shrngishodadhisandhiga
khalajeevitakhaataava galahaalaarasandhara

There are 32 “letters” in this, and if assigned numbers according to their position in the devanagari alphabet correctly give the first digits of pi. Ostensibly it is a verse in the praise of a certain Krishna (who is a deified man over here).

I am still remembering myself hearing my grandfather reciting the list of a certain class of Sanskrit verbs, and (in case you are interested) the cryptic name which the immortal Panini chose to give which was “sate”. It was just a string of the relevant verbs, but it was mnemonic too, and I will never forget the beginning:

shakru—pach-muchi-rich-vach-vich—sich-praach-
chhi-tyaj-nijirbhaja-...

I will also remember all my life the entirely useless list of Russian ports on the west coast, their names now long obsolete: Nina, Novograd(-a), Petrograd(-a), Riga, (n-) Odessa. Which form a perfect “Arya” meter when said with the a’s and n’s. It

rings in my ears at odd times and then will not leave me in peace for days on end.

Allow me to describe here a device which helps us remember the correct names for prosodic units. These units are 3 syllables long and any sequence of long and short is written down as a sequence of these units (akin to a binary numeral translated to octal, ha ha). The string to remember is:

Ya Maa Taa Raa Ja BHaa Na Sa (Ya Maa)

Starting with, say, Taa one reads Taa Raa Ja, i.e. long long short, which is what T stands for. It has always impressed me that the descriptions of eight groups of three syllables each can be packed into a string of eight.

“Mississippi” inevitably reminded me of a mnemonic which I heard long ago and which is striking my prudish self as sufficiently improper to withhold even from this list, yet witty enough for it to be criminal not to speak about it at all. I heard it as a lurid tale beginning “Emma comes-a first, I comes-a next, . . .” but this is where I am stopping.

I am thinking that I will fall upon the excuse of sparse mail to send some more letters. Bear with me.

Yours with respect,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XIX

Thu, 11 Apr 91
04:47:51 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Stop these elephant jokes!

Sirs,

The recent exchanges on this list of puerile and by all standards truly tasteless remarks about elephants has left me saddened and pained, and in fact I would have added “beyond words”, if only sadness and pain had existed there.

Am I hearing some groans already? Fear not, this is no schoolboy essay in defence of elephants, and definitely no emotional outpouring here: I am a champion of dignified restraint, and I am practising what I am preaching. Allow me, then, merely to repeat what I said not so long ago to our friend LABBEY, who lives in GTRI01:

“... Kuvalayaapeeda’s natural intelligence has been embellished by a certain grace of manner, which makes his company a pleasant one and a walk with him an especially rewarding experience! He is truly the best possible illustration I can exhibit for my entirely reasonable thesis, which is what I stated before: elephants are our true equals. They are neither looking down upon us, nor are they considering us gods. They are treating us with cheerful good humour, and yet they are not averse to getting angry at us sometimes, and sometimes playing pranks on us.”

It remains my thesis to date.

I am reminded here that mice are popularly believed to be three dimensional projections of certain ten dimensional superintelligent beings. What a thoroughly preposterous notion this is! Let me assert flatly that mice are no such thing; elephants

emphatically are. The number ten, I may add, is also much underestimated.

When I am saying that elephants are noble, I am meaning that they are truly noble. Hiding in cherry trees, leaving pugmarks in butter, why—are all of you thinking that elephants are merely BORN in aristocratic families? An elephant possessed by lunacy, chewing soma greenery, on an oddly bright full moon night might possibly indulge in such inanities, but honest to goodness elephants with their innate biological nobility will never stoop to these low shameful shenanigans. One has to take but one look at their calm humorous eyes to be convinced of the fact beyond dispute. It is not the case that elephants are incapable of producing humour, but to say that they behave in such bizarre manners is truly like accusing great poets of resorting to the crudest forms of slapstick.

Let there be no more stories of elephants, then, with their dubious authenticities.

I am turning now to talk to Bernard, for the first time visage to visage, and what can I say but that I am speechless again! You, Sir, have imparted to me a shock; you have reorganised from the root many opinions which had always been dear to my mind! I had always held—and shame be on me—that tongues of dogs did nothing more than exude fast thick pants, and lick one and all indiscriminately, and on special occasions loll out to drool at the peal of a bell in certain well appointed scientific labs. How was I to know that they could be firm enough to bear the load of a complex language, or sufficiently resilient to dole out weighty words in a measured manner? Forgive me.

My pet elephant Kuvalayaapeeda, though quite a baby, is precocious enough to talk to me like an adult elephant. He is regretting, he says, that he

cannot join this excellent list, since he cannot so much as enter the institute building, let alone getting to a computer terminal. All important services, it seems, were built without keeping him in mind. He would protest, he has told me often, if he could bring together elephants in large enough numbers to constitute a minority. But that will never come to pass; even his sister stays in far away Mysore, and he is rather more relieved about it than anything else. Methinks the real reason is very different: it is to do with the eternal problem of difficulties with english, however hard he may try to conceal it by claiming difficulties with a keyboard. Which in turn reminds me—I congratulate you for possessing extremely fine paws.

Well, it seems that my policy of dignified restraint did finally go to the elephants, despite my bravest attempts, but then, perhaps a voice in support of elephants is also required amidst a clamour of silly jokes.

I remain,
Yours truly,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XX

Fri, 12 Apr 91
14:42:13 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: 5-letter word with 1 consonant.

Dear friends,

As a five letter word with one consonant, I suggest “audio”. The word “adieu”, if common enough, will also do.

Finally what about Aeolia, (possibly) the place where harps are made? This is six letters long, if “ae” is taken to be consisting of two letters.

“causal” and “casual” impressed me very much. If such a thing amuses you, I would like to mention a certain puzzle which occurred to me. Can you give two “big” words, one got from the other by a permutation, so that they are (approximately) opposite in sense? How long a word can be given? I am knowing an example with eight.

Truly yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXI

Sun, 14 Apr 91
14:55:54 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: V's A to V's Q.

My intention is to give the answer I had in mind for the “metathesis question”, (for some reason also called a “challenge”), but before that I with some perverse logic shall also appoint myself an arbiter, giving as a pretext the fact that I asked the question. The answer “CREATION” and “REACTION” is quite fanciful and indeed the one I most admire. It is, as one would say, quite creative. “CONSERVING” and “CONVERSING” is also good, but taxes one’s imagination. The others, however, mystify me. Perhaps I have not understood them. Can you explain, I am asking a person whom I can only describe as [[t[g]]i[t[gs]]] ?

And now to my answer, which is in no way poetic and in fact quite mundane, but has a certain advantage in that it is (IMO with an inevitable H wedged in) more transparent.

The words I had in mind are “INSECURE” and “SINECURE”. Is this not a satisfactory answer?

Truly yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXII

Tue, 30 Apr 91
00:20:47 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: 1 as a platonic form.

Dear Sirs/Madams,

I would like to suggest some answers to some questions posed by Chris. They are as follows:

- >How would these philosophers handle the question
- >as to the perfect form of the concept "one"?

I would say that the question is a settled one. One merely has to give the mathematical definition of the number. The number one (and hence the ideal form of the number one) is: the set of all sets of exactly one element.

Unfortunately I have stated this in such a way as to look like a circular definition. This is not so. But let us not lose ourselves in that morass here.

Is it not true that this definition encompasses all instances of the number one? Although the definition was not arrived at with a platonic view in mind, it fits the bill quite well. And then, one would call Mr. Bertrand Russell a philosopher too, would one not?

Turning to the question of small number of syllables, I am afraid I would suggest a much more mundane explanation, viz. the most common words tend to get shorter in length, if they were ever long. Certainly the long Sanskrit names for numbers have short counterparts in the modern languages of India.

- >Sorry this is so rambling but I can't see that
- >words are merely symbolic, even given phenomena
- >like onomatopoeia which has some definite
- >representational aspects.

>
>Chris

This is indeed most puzzling. On whose side are you, sir? Do phenomena like onomatopoeia strengthen your case or weaken it?

Another thought is striking me at this point. However, I think I will write about it later, if I can at all follow it through to any fruitful notion. Until then, I take your leave.

Yours most sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

(Why did Virupaksha Mokshagundam cross the road? To manoeuver his nameplate inside his house.)

XXIII

Tue, 30 Apr 91
00:21:58 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Chutneymakers crossing roads.

Dear Sirs/Madams,

Before I forget, let me at the outset blurt out some examples of “paired words”, viz. “here and anon”, “few and far between”, “present and correct”.

However, I was going to talk about a small point which troubles me. Is it being found necessary to append a “:-)” to every small jest which is made, especially at my expense? I am of course referring to a recent posting by Michel, concerning chutneys. (By the way, fancy chutneys being a fashionable food! The ways of the fashionable are truly unfathomable.) It was rather laughable to see a buddha who is miraculously both laughing and

reclining, being employed just to assure me that a joke is being made. Wretched is the man who has to explain his joke! And I say, this holds also for Michel's joke, despite the fact that it was the poorest I have come across for a long time and thoroughly non-humorous. (I presume no icons are needed here.)

Is anyone thinking, by the merest chance, that jokes involving Indians will perhaps offend a certain subscriber? If it is coming out of a gut feeling of not joking about minorities, please let the thought fail, and immediately. To describe the Indian population as a minority is to be guilty of a certain terminological inexactitude, not to mention perpetrating a most wildly funny joke, the second funniest in this genre.

It is high time now that I am considered an "old member" of the list. I am sure I am worthy of it, although I have not explicitly abused anyone in public postings, nor used any profane language.

In parting, I would also like to set correct one of the postings. It says (I regret to say I have deleted it): "Chatni" is a Hindu word. There is no such thing as a Hindu word. The language intended is probably Hindi. The word also exists in practically every other Indian language.

The mistake is very probably inadvertent. I am mentioning it lest someone be misinformed.

Yours most sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXIV

Tue, 30 Apr 91
00:20:33 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Three topics which are probably obsolete.

These are several topics I was intending to write about but could not due to a great isolation which befell me. The machine took ill for four days and even now it shows the slowness of a convalescer. The probable outdatedness of a letter has never stopped me from pandering to my urge to talk, however, and so here is the letter for whatever it is worth:

ONE : Something mohur about money.

I was most disappointed not to see an Indian currency in the recent perpetration by Paul Barfoot. In my own feeble way, then, I shall say that I do not care a damn.

A propos “case quarters”, I think it may interest you to know that the native words for “solid coin” and “loose change” are (translations of) the words “bound” and “free” (as used, say, for prisoners).

My mother was telling me of another coinage in this context. It seems that all along the Pune-Bangalore railway line and aboard the trains, hawkers are regularly using the word “dollar” to denote a single coin of a high denomination (as opposed to “chillar”, which denotes small change). We have at last obtained the holy grail of financial dependence on the U.S.A., it seems.

TWO: fUrther - uni, fArther - ambi.

Matthew Beams writes: “What is the differentiation between farther and further?”. Forgive me for this, but why say “differentiation”? To my mind, what is required is the difference. This is reminding me of a school friend who quite without compunc-

tion spoke words like “choosement” and “eatification”, due to genuine ignorance or an attempt at jest I was never able to ascertain. I was once deceived by a book with the title “Analysis of differential groups”. Far from being the expected mathematics text, it was a sociological study. But let me not be frivolous.

I am thinking that both “further” and “farther” are used for denoting essentially the same thing, but the former is generally restricted to those cases where a one-dimensional extent is involved, the latter being used when there is greater degree of freedom. Thus, for instance, “further” is preferred for extent in time, while “farther” would be a natural choice in a forest. Their sounds are also suggesting such a notion to me.

This brings me to another topic on which I will write separately. It is about Chris’ letter about words as symbols vs. representations.

THREE : A puzzle of sorts.

Regarding “pairs of words”, I am reminded inevitably of “each and every”, the catch phrase of clerks in government offices from far away in the mists of time. Whence such locutions come I do not know.

But I say, it is not only Indians who are guilty of letting the language gain flab! There exist a lot of phrases which can be considered as one word, for all practical purposes. For instance one thinks of “for all practical purposes”. It is not of Indian origin, I think.

My question is: what is the longest phrase which has become almost one word?

Clearly the question is not precisely posed. I may further explain what I am meaning by saying that I have in mind a phrase of seven words which

can be predicted from its first word in almost all cases. Can anyone identify it or suggest a longer?

I hasten to add that I have not lengthened it by using present progressives!

FOUR: The surprise ending.

I remain,

Yours truly,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXV

Mon, 13 May

91 06:04:04

EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET

SUBJECT: a WORDS-L posting

On Diens, 16 Mar 91 00:00:00.01 QST I don't care what my userid is I am what I bloody well am and let there not be even a residual doubt about it said:

>> could have been nice but unfortunately I was not in
>> a position to get the thing going inside the allotted
>> time . . .

> I wouldnt DREAM of doing such a thing!
>

Now *this* is what I call a really great idea! :-)

Virupaksha

<laughing his head off but putting a helmet on
it>

XXVI

Tue, 14 May 91
09:17:13 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: New subscriber.

Dear Sirs/Madams,

I fear I have taken certain liberties with the subscribers of this excellent list, by being indirectly responsible for introducing to it a new subscriber. I quite casually mentioned the list to him and he at once pounced upon the idea of subscribing to it. I have a notion that his intentions may not be entirely innocent. However, I am refraining from prejudicing you in this matter and leaving it for you to observe and decide.

To give certain information about him, his name is Vatsyayan Mahalingam, which has quite dangerous cadences, resembling my own name, and a few other dangerous characteristics besides. He, like me, is parasitic on someone else's computer-account.

I write this only in order to give you some advance intimation and also to declare that I am not to be held responsible for what he says. (I might add that this may not be quite as lurid as it is sounding.)

Yours most sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXVII

Tue, 14 May 91
17:20:54 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Re: reply to Re:RE: reply to re: rE: RE: Re:

The following is a letter I received some time ago:

>Nay, nay! Let's not wish Galmin upon ourselves! That
>reminds me. Where is Virupaksha? We haven't
>heard from him lately.
> --Natalie (nm1@ra.msstate.edu)

Madam, Virupaksha is very much existing. There were reasons—inevitably unavoidable ones—which were preventing me from writing. In desperation, I sent the following message:

> On Diens, 16 Mar 91 00:00:00.01 QST I don't care
> what my userid is I am what I bloody well am and let
> there not be even a residual doubt about it said:
>
>> could have been nice but unfortunately I was not
>> in a position to get the thing going inside the
>> allotted time . . .
>>
>> I wouldnt DREAM of doing such a thing!
>>
>
> Now *this* is what I call a really great idea! :-)
>
> Virupaksha
> <laughing his head off but putting a helmet on it>

My intentions, I hope, are clear. The above is “a WORDS-L posting”; it is, in my opinion, sufficiently

typical to go unremarked. It could be about anything at all, but THIS one certainly means absolutely nothing. Thus am I attempting to keep in touch, to be “with it”, to “belong!”, without having the faintest idea of what is proceeding on the list now.

The last line is in some sense the only one which is not entirely fictitious; I am finding such a posting quite humorous.

Due to the slowness of my computer-system perhaps, I am at all times temporally isolated from the list. I am unable to join any discussion and the quickest repartee from me is likely to be greeted by a bewildered “what is this about?”. I am, in this manner, forced to refrain from talking at all, and undoubtedly the list is very much the healthier for it.

It is this elephant gait of the computer which makes me loath to write.

Even now I perch against the strange machine
For it to stutter all it ever feigned to claim
As answer to my vermin-ridden undivine
Commands, it must needs do to its eternal shame

Now if this doggerel is making me a poet, remember that I am also finishing my “undergraduate years” now. I need warn you no further.

Or perhaps I should, about the fact that I am writing a succession of letters in a short time from now.

Yours most apologetically,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXVIII

Tue, 14 May 91
17:40:01 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Why worry about PC?

Dear Sirs/Madams,

I am hereby going on record as asserting that Tom Lee is talking bilge, on the sole count that he is being meta-meta-PC. So easy are the ways of going up the meta ladder.

In a feeble attempt to please everyone, I am disagreeing violently with Bill Sjostrom. What is all this brouhaha about “PC”? Is the incidence of such imbecile notions so great as to worry about them? If some cranks are insisting upon presenting some damn-fool arguments against certain usages, ignore them I say! The way it is going on, one would think that fully half of the world is evaluating logical arguments merely on the strength of what labels they carry. This, I say, is difficult to believe, especially of the academic world. Are there a lot of people like that?

Another thing which struck me as odd was a letter—I regret to say I have forgotten which—saying “the CNN is trying to alter our consciousness by using the word ““international”” . . .”. Pray how? I confess I am most puzzled by this. If labels of things are arbitrary—surely no one will challenge that—how can a different label alter one’s view of the world ?

Expecting answers,
I remain,
Yours truly,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXIX

Tue, 14 May 91
17:51:09 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Galmin.

Who is Mr. Galmin Stound? What did he do, and when? Why is he called “donut”? What are some of the properties which I share with him?

Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXX

Wed, 15 May
91 03:07:16
EDT

FROM: KIRTI <ORION@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Re: New subscriber.

Virupaksha Mokshagundum deserves to be unsubscribed from this list. He has some gall, to go about maligning innocents like me, Vatsyayan Mahalingam, when I seriously try to join this list out of genuine interest.

I say, this chappie has gone to absurd limits this time, first he uses my computer-project-account and takes charge of it, makes it his own, and says I’m parasitic on some one else’s account! ORION is my OWN account, the name being chosen due to a personal idiosyncrasy. Needless to say after this that TUSHAR is my computer-project-account name, named after my friend Tushar Samant, who is now in California. Anyway, the point is that this blighter Virupaksha might just be taking you innocent listers for a big ride.

Agreed that Virupaksha and I don’t see eye to eye on certain matters, but this fellow is now washing the dirty linen in public. I went out of my way

by letting him pile on to my project-account. And now he does this to me, is this friendship I say?

What I want to tell you all is that be careful of this man Virupaksha, he is not a very bad sort but—I shall refrain from further mud slinging.

In friendship,

Vatsyayan Mahalingam.

(e-mail: ORION@tifrvax.bitnet)

XXXI

Fri, 17 May 91
04:11:12 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Re: Ropes on ships

>>I (seriously) wouldn't be surprised if people haven't
>>started writing little command-files for their PC
>>word processors to globally change things like
>>"mankind" to "humankind" throughout their
>>document should a nasty habit have slipped by
>>their personal proofreading.

>>

>> MacPhil

>

>I tried it and it went into a loop and started printing
humanmanmnamnaman

>manmanmna.....

>:-)

>

>Don Pirot, | BITNET: DPIROT@UALTAVM

This, I regret to say, is entirely a figment of Don Pirot's imagination. I do not know whether machines are sufficiently idiotic to entangle themselves in such trivial loops, but in any case a machine replacing "man" by "human" will produce "... huhuhuhuhuhuhuhuhuman".

Mr. Pirot must be lynched on the count of rampant sexism; he has evidently attempted replacing “man” by “manman”.

Yours most sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXXII

Fri, 17 May 91
15:02:14 EDT

FROM: KIRTI <ORION@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: aSTOUNDing galminophobia

Good heavens! How in the world can I be Mr. Galmin Stound? Ms. Ruth, rest assured that if I were to bump into him in some street (remote as the chance may be), I wouldn't know him from Adam or whoever the primogenitor of humanity may be. Furthermore, let me hasten to add that though Mr. Galmin Stound might possibly be the kindest soul on this green Earth, he might even have the milk of human kindness sloshing inside him, yet the fact remains: I have nothing whatsoever to do with him, nor am I in any way whatsoever related to him.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I get this feeling that a large number of the subscribers of this list have been struck down by a new disease: Galminophobia. Otherwise there would not have been this urge, among fellow-listers to classify any new subscriber with an unfamiliar name and from sufficiently remote a place, as the latest avatar of Galministic origins.

I believe somebody has compared Virupaksha Mokshagundam with Mr. Galmin Stound, to him/her I have one conjecture to offer: it is quite likely that there never was a Mr. Galmin Stound, except as a manifestation of Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

And as you all may have noted, Virupaksha does have a Galminesque sense of humour. No doubt this may bring some disappointment to the Galminophiles amongst us, and to them I offer my sincere regrets.

Oh by the way Ms. Ruth, thanks for the welcoming words.

In friendship,

Vatsyayan Mahalingam.

XXXIII

Mon, 20 May
91 08:13:53
EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: about "punny"

T. Halkowski asks: "Was the pun intended?". This is amazing. Most certainly it was intended.

The list is well known for sic puns.
Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXXIV

Mon, 20 May
91 06:23:45
EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: "personally" and hyphening.

Dear Sirs/Madams,

I would like to bring up three points which have suggested themselves to me in the recent past.

1. Consider the a statement on the following lines: "Personally speaking, my opinion is . . .". Is it at all necessary to say "personally speaking"? If one is submitting one's own opinion, it IS personal I say! Is there a difference being made between private opinion and a "public opinion"? In that case, how is

an opinion remaining private if it is told to another person?

2. My second doubt is concerning a satisfactory way of hyphenating in some cases. One example where a problem is arising would be: "A proof based on a symmetric equation". If one writes this as "a symmetric equation-based proof", one binds words to each other in an unintended way.

Saying "symmetric_equation" etc. is certainly not acceptable. On the other hand, a space has always had weaker preference than a hyphen. How does one resolve this, or does one just exclaim "dash it all"?

3. The final point is a mere quibble. Stephen Karlson writes: "Ten minutes is an interval of time, which consists of an uncountable infinity of points".

This is certainly a rather elaborate structure imposed on time! I would say that "points in time" are always discrete, i.e. the number of "points in time" inside a bounded interval is always finite. One example of a bounded interval is one between two named events in the past. Ergo, it follows that ten minutes will definitely not contain even countably infinite points, not to speak of an uncountable infinity!

Yours &Co,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXXV

Mon, 20 May
91 06:27:15
EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Mokshagundam counters Mahalingam.

IMPORTANT LETTER: PLEASE READ

Sirs,

Far be it from me to use this list as a duelling-ground, but I am feeling myself compelled to challenge the extraordinary letter by Mr. Vatsyayan Mahalingam.

Apart from the fact that Mr. Mahalingam is not possessing the slightest bit of common decency, he is also guilty, if I may say so, of a certain amount of terminological inexactitude. He is stating brazenly that Mr. Tushar Samant is currently residing in California. This is, to put it quite plainly, false. Mr. Samant has been a good friend of mine for the past seven months; he has not left the city of Bombay, by his own account, for the last six years.

It is appalling me, and causing me not a little grief that Mr. Mahalingam should have resorted to this cowardly way of making mischief, when things could have been settled in a so much more gentlemanly manner inside the institute itself. Instead, Mr. Mahalingam has chosen to write to this excellent list, and make amazing claims to compound a felony. This, I feel, is in no sense cricket.

I iterate here that I am the last person to suggest that a list is a suitable place to conduct personal vendettas, but I **MUST DRAW ATTENTION** to one statement of Mr. Mahalingam which is exceeding all bounds of acceptable taste. He is going so far as to suggest that I, Virupaksha Mokshagundam, am impersonating a certain Galmin Stound. There is no need to counter this, I trust.

However—and HERE IS WHERE MANY ON THE LIST MAY GET INTERESTED—I myself have a suggestion to make which will perhaps sound far-fetched at first. Vatsyayan Mahalingam is an exceedingly improbable name, a fact which has set me thinking. The name “mahalingam” parses as follows:

MAHALINGAM = MAHA + LINGAM

This is common enough; the prefix “maha” is one of amplification. In short, MAHA-X means “big X” or “the great X”.

This takes care of the first four letters. Now, you are urged to stare CAREFULLY at the last six: L,I,N,G,A,M.

*****THE GREAT X, where X = { L,I,N,G,A,M }!*****

Does this suggest anything to you? Does it send a shiver down your spines? I assume that my warning has registered. If it has not, well, juggle the letters further. I am speaking no more.

With the best intentions at heart,
Sincerely yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXXVI

Tue, 21 May 91
03:05:56 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: infinitely many moments?

I would like to continue on a question which Norman Hill took up. He writes :

>>I would say that “points in time” are always discrete,
>>i.e. the number of “points in time” inside a
>>bounded interval is always finite.

>I would think that in saying this you would
>provoke much argument from many physicists,
>mathematicians, and others. For instance let
> T_0 = midnight, and let T_1 = 10 minutes after
>midnight. Are you claiming that there are only a
>finite number of distinct moments between T_0
>and T_1 . I THINK NOT. (No i am not Descartes—
>I am not vanishing—sorry :))

I do most seriously think that there “are” only a finite number of moments in such an interval.

>Let's suppose that $T_0 < T_2 < T_1$.
>Then $T_2 = T_0 + X$ where X = any real number
>between 0 and $T_1 - T_0$
>
>I say that there are indeed uncountably many real
>numbers that satisfy this equation.

This is correct. However, the question is not that of REAL NUMBERS at all. Real numbers are imaginary constructions. They were constructed by mathematicians, with certain ulterior motives, but none of them, I think, was to model time in the real world. Any definition of the real numbers, I claim,

is too elaborate to have an obvious and immediate physical acceptability.

- >Now, I will agree that the number of measurable
- >moments might not be as large, but just because
- >something can't be measured mean it doesn't exist?

Yes. All possible clocks in the world, running on time or awry, in phase or out of it, and of any period whatsoever, will make together a FINITE number of ticks in ten minutes.

If it were possible “in principle” to subdivide time with arbitrary fineness, one would still have to take back the finiteness statement, but is such subdivision possible? It is not obvious to me.

(By the by, also notice that an arbitrarily fine subdivision would still imply only a COUNTABLE infinity, and not an uncountable one!)

That something does not exist if it cannot be measured seems to me to be an entirely reasonable restriction on the definition of the word “exist”. After all, if one started interpreting such words more and more liberally, a time may come (in finitely many ticks) when they cease to carry any information at all.

To impose on our familiar time the structure of real numbers—so remote to the intuition—is no doubt poetic (and also mathematically convenient), but the word “exist” ought to be reserved for different notions: e.g. the fact that I am finding it hard to imagine that I have passed through infinitely many moments (since I started typing) should be relevant here.

These are of course some suggestions I am finding reasonable.

- >Norman Hill

Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

P.S. Mr. McPhil has probably found juggling with six ascii letters too trivial for one with his juggling abilities. However, let us not ignore the dark clouds gathering over the horizon.

XXXVII

Wed, 29 May
91 14:00:30
EDT

FROM: KIRTI <ORION@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Et tu, Virupaksha?

Ha! This man Virupaksha is appalling. His zeal to reduce my name to MUD (or to GALMIN) will put the missionaries of the bygone times to shame. I went away for a small holiday and here I am back and much to my trepidation, I find that this snake in the grass Virupaksha has struck again. I say, this blighter has become an absolute pain in the posteriors. The last six letters of my last name contain the letters forming GALMIN. So what? Are two chappies whose names are identical upto a permutation identical? Only a fool would believe this Virupakshique logic. If he had accused me of being, say, The President of United States—or to stress my point, accused me of being even the Vice President—I might have just about tolerated the insinuation. But this fiend in human shape has gone far beyond normal levels of decency and accused me of being Mr. Galmin Stound. I shall not take this lying down. We Mahalingams have our pride.

Virupaksha is loopy to the tonsils and has about as many gray cells in his brain as an amoeba has. The man obviously needs to see a therapist soon. He is only one step from a loony bin.

I'm convinced that he isn't Mr. Galmin Stound, for after Mr. Quinn remarked in one of his messages that the works of the Mr. Stound are available at some place by "ftp", Virupaksha immediately jumped up. Since then he has pestered a whole bunch of people over here asking them to ftp Mr. Stound's works from the appropriate place. No doubt he will succeed in his endeavours. Since Galminophobia is quite rampant on the list, I thought this information might come in handy. I think you might soon have Virupaksha's Galminized letters in your mailboxes and from what I have heard of Galmin, you might have a full scale disaster on your hands.

Gentle souls like me do not like to threaten anybody but another accusation that I'm Mr. Galmin Stound would precipitate an irreversible identity crisis, and several weeks of therapy sessions for me. But I have no doubt that as soon as I get back, such vitriol will flow into the list from my cursor as never before and even the likes of Mr. Stound will pale into insignificance before its onslaught. I would like to point out that I'm not trying to start a duel on the list nor do I have a personal vendetta to settle. This whole business, if you care to recall, was sparked off by this blighter's letter styled "New Subscriber", which no doubt you all must have read with horror. My motives for replying, I hope, are completely clear.

In, and only in, friendship,

Vatsyayan Mahalingam.

XXXVIII

Fri, 31 May 91
20:37:39 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Re: Et tu, Virupaksha?

Sirs,

I write this letter numbed with shock, as anyone will be, after reading the subversive rot coming from the pen of a certain Vatsyayan Mahalingam. It is indeed unfortunate that I should waste the valuable time of the list subscribers by writing letters like the present one, but I am thinking that one is justified in writing practically anything if provoked so extremely as by the remarkable letter of Mr. Mahalingam.

Locking horns is in many ways a pleasant pastime, if the warring is done in a witty and dignified manner. Indeed, I would have most eagerly jumped in the fray if a matter of principle were being discussed. Mr. Mahalingam, however, is neither witty nor dignified, and as for having any principle at stake, I would be surprised if such novel ideas have ever so much as touched his mind—if I may speak of such a thing as his mind without undue distortion of reality. A lively discussion or a constructive criticism of one's foibles will always be appreciated by any right-thinking individual; I am hardly hesitant on that point—nor, I suppose, is anyone else. Stooping to vulgar abuse, however, is far from this and smacks of the worst possible taste and, if I may say so, a faulty upbringing.

If there are existing schools of etiquette for humans, on the lines of obedience schools usually conducted for the benefit of canines, Mr. Mahalingam would do well to join one of them. In fact, for lack of them, he he may even enroll with our best friends, so desperate is the need. However incom-

petent he may be to perceive this particular point at present, it would benefit him enormously to be a less crude approximation of a human being. He is strangely forgetting what the agreed upon bounds of decency are. Small wonder, then, that he is transcending them so shamelessly and so often.

HIS warning the list of a “full-scale disaster” is really striking me, with its most exquisite irony. If there were only some way of stopping this outrage, then upon my word I would use it. One wishes this were the U.S.A., where one could have indulged in litigation, charging the man Mahalingam of resorting to mental torture, and ending up vastly richer in the process. Alas, in the unsophisticated society in which we live, this cannot be done.

I can do nothing more than express a fervent wish that this turns out the last letter of this unsavoury exchange.

Yours &co,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XXXIX

Fri, 31 May 91
20:39:17 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET

SUBJECT: swastika, ghostly words, group possessives.

A long period has passed since I wrote a letter to the list. I am thinking that I might just write about certain points which have struck me in the recent past.

1 SWASTIKA

I could not uncover a usage of the word “swastika” as denoting the number 10 000. It is used much more commonly to denote an auspicious agent, generally either a poet singing auspicious songs or “an auspicious sign”, which is the one we

are seeing everywhere. This is the meaning logically following the verb “swasti”. I have never seen the ends of the fylfot going round in a counterclockwise fashion. The sign can be seen everywhere, and is too well established to possess any evil associations brought on by the recent past. The current conjecture, I may add, is that it is a symbol for the sun.

2 TWO GHOSTLY WORDS

I recently heard someone using the verb “misle” in all seriousness. This was intended as a verb with past tense “mised”. It is reminding me of another ghostly verb which exists only in the dusty corridors of the Indian administrative offices. The verb is “to bonafy”. An applicant, for instance, has to bonafy oneself if he wishes to be a “bonafied” applicant.

It puts me in mind of another query recently made by Mr. Akio Tanaka, about a suitable word for “beltway mentality”. I suggest “centrimentality”, so that one can talk of centrimental persons.

3 FRIEND OF JOHN’S BIKE

In phrases like “friend of John’s bike”, I—alongwith most people around me—am using the rule that “X’s Y” always has greater precedence than “Y of X”. (No one is invoking this rule consciously, of course.) Thus the above phrase in my opinion is referring to the friend of the bicycle.

I would say that the “X’s Y” relation has binding stronger than almost every other relation. This is ruling out “group possessives” totally. Is it significant here that an Indian language such as Urdu, under the influence of Persian and Arabic, makes “Y of X” into practically one word? (e.g. bazmemehfil for what should be two words joined by a conjunction: bazm-e-mehfil.)

4 I CLOSE WITH A QUOTE

I close with a quote. (What indescribable glee engulfs the person who can say this! This is the first time I am doing this and I am feeling quite elated and “learned”.) It is from a play by Mr. Tom Stoppard, named “The Real Thing”. Henry, the successful (“established”) playwright, is talking about a certain play written by Brodie, a youth who vandalised a national shrine. I need explain the context no further.

(I may add here that the ellipsis is part of the speech; I have deleted nothing.)

“Leave me out of it. They [the conditions in which he wrote the play] don’t count. Maybe Brodie got a raw deal, maybe he didn’t. I don’t know. It doesn’t count. He’s a lout with language. I can’t help somebody who thinks, or thinks that he thinks, that editing a newspaper is censorship, or that throwing bricks is a demonstration while building tower blocks is social violence, or that unpalatable statement is provocation while disrupting the speaker is the exercise of free speech . . . Words don’t deserve that kind of malarkey. They’re innocent, neutral, precise, standing for this, describing that, meaning the other, so if you can look after them you can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos. But when they get their corners knocked off, they’re no good anymore, and Brodie knocks corners off without knowing he’s doing it. So everything he builds is jerry-built. It’s rubbish. An intelligent child could push it over. I don’t think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you are dead.”

Sincerely yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XL

Mon, 3 Jun 91
15:17:20 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Why "quote"?

A. Conn, residing at Tufts, writes that the sentence "I close with a quote" should be "I close with a quotation". This is sounding particularly pertinent, until one sees that "quote" is also "(colloq.)" for "quotation".

Now the point which may arise is that a word may well have a colloq. meaning, and that in itself is never in doubt, while what IS really germane is whether any paranoid worth his salt should use this colloq. meaning so completely without compunction.

This too is a powerful argument and I cannot do but give my explanation; it is admittedly lame and the only thing I can say in its defence is that it is true.

I have acted on the rule of thumb that it is somehow or the other more "poetic" to use the verb for the noun. One can hear his say, read his writ; why not also accept his quote?

Besides, one can have a hearty laugh at the expense of the primitive notions of poeticity which still reside in the mind of the babu who has probably never read any english poetry after Tennyson.

The verb for the noun; it is reminding me of another extract from the same play (The Real Thing), a drunk husband talking to his wife:

"I'm showing an interest in your work. I thought you liked me showing an interest in your work. MY showing. Save the gerund and screw the whale. Yes, I'm sure you do. . . ."

Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XLI

Tue, 4 Jun 91
16:54:36 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Afterthought about “possessives”.

Very recently, Virupaksha Mokshagundam wrote the following:

>I would say that the “X’s Y” relation has binding
>stronger than almost every other relation. This is
>ruling out “group possessives” totally.

He would like to take back the statement. “group possessives” are not being ruled out totally, I say. The example which is coming to mind (now!) is: “The Mysore king’s palace”. This certainly denotes the palace of the king of Mysore. Thus, mere juxtaposition is taking precedence over “X’s Y”.

Ironically, this counterexample is coming from a relation which denotes possession, i.e. one which has the same meaning as “X’s Y”.

Allow me to sum this up, then. In the—shall I say—“dialect” of people with whom I am talking in english daily, the three main constructs denoting possession are:

- 1 X Y
- 2 X’s Y
- 3 Y of X

where,

1 precedes 2, which precedes 3. (A taste of the Haryana typhoon's bowling, for instance). All of these may not be valid for a given example, so that

these “rules” apply only to constructs occurring “naturally”.

I am also thinking that the relations associate with themselves in particular ways :

1 associates to the left, e.g. “Haryana typhoon magic” denotes the magic of the typhoon from Haryana.

2 associates to the left, e.g. “John’s friend’s bike”.

3 associates to the right.

Now the associativities of 2 and 3 are in my opinion entailing each other; they are just a result of a reversal of order in 2 as contrasted with 3. Thus, if one can make a firm statement about the associativity of either, the other statement will follow.

The case of 1 is not so clear to me. Is “X Y Z” always equivalent to “(X’s Y)’s Z”? I am bringing up this question since examples such as the following are suggesting themselves: “Agra murder mystery”. It is not clear what is really meant: mystery of the Agra murder, or the murder mystery of Agra. In fact, that exactly one of these is meant also seems a fairly bold claim to me. What is actually the case, then?

I may add here that by “possession” one is not meaning possession in the narrowest sense, i.e. as materially belonging. I am aware that saying this is largely unnecessary.

My questions, then, are:

1. Are the precedences I have given correct?
2. Can one make a firm statement about the left associativity of “X’s Y” (or equivalently, the right associativity of “Y of X”)?
3. Is there such a thing as an unambiguous resolution of “X Y Z”, and if so what is it?

I scarcely need say that all answers are relative to a particular manner of speaking, i.e. a dialect.

Apologising for sounding like a school test paper, I take your leave. (It is important for me to know. For is it ((school test) paper) or (school (test paper))?) I must know what I am sounding like at least!)

Yours sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XLII

Fri, 7 Jun 91
18:13:31 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET

SUBJECT: Another new word, "Yf", and a puzzling letter.

Dear Sirs/Madams,

Some more questions have come to my mind. I am starting with a word I had encountered, and which all the talk about ignoring reminded me. The word seems to me to be extremely bizarre. It is: "ignoral".

Presumably it is to be used in a sentence like "All my requests were met with complete ignoral". Is there such a word?

While reading a posting about "blue moon", another doubt came to me. The relevant line is: "Yf they saye the mone is blewe". Now, is the first word "Yf" or is it "Ys"? This I am asking since "Yf", in my own guess, would refer to women, and for some mysterious reasons, our ancestors were never well known for giving any great respect to women's opinions. The sayings of "wise" men, however, were apt to get accepted unconditionally.

On the other hand, I may be completely wrong.

I end with an extremely puzzling letter. To understand the context I am first quoting the message which prompted it:

>>But I do believe that Japanese is inherently less
>>precise than English.

>>On the other hand, that is from my perspective as a native speaker of English.

To this, MacPhil replied:

>You are not the only one to feel that way.
>I have heard knowledgeable people say that the
>cultures of these languages and what they have
>developed/contributed are the same way. Look at
>things like some of the religions, etc. How many
English-based koans are there?

I do not comprehend at all! It is not that I am disagreeing with the points being made—my difficulty is much more fundamental: I am not understanding what it is that is being said! I should perhaps make this clearer. I am not asking who “knowledgeable people” are. I am merely asking, e.g., the following questions:

- 1 What are “cultures of these languages”?
- 2 What is one referring to by saying “what they have developed/contributed”?
- 3 In fact, what is the precise meaning of “they are the same way”?
- 4 Further, I cannot see what is meant by “look at things like some of the religions, etc.”. What is it?
- 5 What are “English-based koans”?
- 6 Finally, how is all this relevant to the matter at hand?

Of course, the last question will be answered once the earlier ones are, but till then, I confess, my mind will remain in a whirl and I will still entertain some ungentlemanly doubts about whether english is to be considered a precise language after all.

Yours Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XLIII

Fri, 7 Jun 91
19:01:02 EDT

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: "rabbit-the-cat.gif"

A propos the "gif" file requisitioned by Mr. Tanaka, I do not see how any question can arise. True, it requires a practised eye to see the picture, but it is not so extremely difficult. I merely had to stand a little far from the screen of the computer to see hundreds of rabbits and cats in the most realistic detail. Intrigued, I borrowed infrared binoculars from the astronomy laboratories to look at it, and staring at me was a grave simurgh. Going upwards in the ultraviolet range, I could discern the architectural plans of the sun temple at Konarak. There was nothing which could stop me then. I turned the file on its side and found the recipe for the elixir of life, which resolved itself into new ways when I put it under a microscope, to reveal the frightening countenance of the great Kapalika, Aghorhanta.

To those who are still possessing a copy, I say: do not discard this file, it is too valuable for that ! Why, one only has to reflect it in a parabolic mirror to see the musical score for a melody so ravishing that we in this institute had to stop playing it after some three professors became insane in their mad delight. One can view it through an icosahedral

crystal to perceive the full text of a program for the computer which turned the machine into a superbly articulate scholar, who, to our surprise, settled for ever the question of mind versus matter. Those who lack icosahedral crystals need not despair, for this great breakthrough in human thought will be made available by anonymous ftp. I could extoll the extraordinary virtues of this document endlessly; the holy and the profaner texts, the mathematical theorems, the profound poems, the draft drawings of fantastic machines, the genetic sequences of humans, the pictures of nuclear bomb explosions, the weaving patterns for flying carpets, a master dictionary of all languages, predictions of all future stock exchange happenings—but then, I am thinking, why not leave the joy of discovery to everyone?

If there are any new findings, communicate with us; we are planning to start a newsletter concerning precisely this.

Yours &co,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XLIV

Mon, 17 Jun
1991 11:51:19
TZONE

FROM: KIRTI <ORION@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: some general remarks on words-l, Virupaksha
etc.

General Digression on Words-L, Virupaksha and other topics

Of all the four classical humours the one which my friend Virupaksha seems to have in abundance is the Choleric humour. God, when he was forging Virupaksha Mokshagundam in heaven must have been very careless in his work and

dipped him for a bit too long in a cauldron full of Cholera. How else can one explain his imbecilities and a complete lack of understanding of my letters? I'm at a loss to explain this phenomenon and the only explanation I could come up with is the one I've expounded above. It seems to go very well with the general principle that there are people in this world, who have absolutely no sense of humour. Take the example of many of the famous Russian authors. I've always been amazed at the dry humourless writings of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and many others. Let there be no doubt that I have a lot of respect for these Gentlemen of yore and have read a lot their writings. But every time I read these the-hero-hangs-himself-in-the-first-chapter or hero-freezes-to-death-with-his-beloved-in-Siberia type of novels, I have had to reach out for a stiff restorative and a vintage Wodehouse (in that order) to calm myself down. If my friend Virupaksha (God forbid such things) was to write a novel or whatever other bilge he might be capable of writing, I'm convinced that it will be the most humourless work ever thrust upon humanity. If there is any alternate theory any of you have to offer I'm all ears (or eyes in this case).

I don't think there is any point in adding that this bachelor's offspring Virupaksha is the most vile human being on this green Earth. That his letters, full of insane insinuations, are too boring and furthermore they lack originality and inventiveness, will be clear to all who have endured his malicious onslaught. Why he is still allowed to be on this list is a mystery to me. Anyway, that brings me to another topic.

When I signed on this list, I was under the impression that it is supposed to be "English Language Discussion Group". I now realise that this list

has nothing—absolutely nothing whatsoever—to do with English or any other language. For months on there was this endless and rather trivial discussion on “grading and suing of and by students in the United States” and what this might have had to do with English Language is still beyond me. And later there was this blighter Virupaksha who has no understanding of English Grammar writing very pretentious letters about diverse topics, and passing off his idiotic English as a common practice in India. Why has he gone uncorrected so far? His English is absolutely intolerable. Please correct it, criticise it, till he gets his tenses and participles and so on right.

And now there is this latest FAD on the list! The GIF files! What has your picture (or mine) got to do with English language? Why is so much effort spent on this complete triviality? If you want to see Virupaksha for instance all you have to do is see a picture of a Snake in the Grass, because that’s what he is. If you wanted to see my picture then look at anything that you might consider a blot on the horizon—that’s all.

The idea of having “bios” however is not so bad. I am going to contribute a rather long memoir styled “Virupaksha for the Compleat Idiot” to it soon. This memoir has been compiled with Virupaksha’s help (though he will refuse to admit it now) and speaks the truth and only the truth about Virupaksha Mokskagundam.

In friendship,

Vatsyayan Mahalingam

XLV

Fri, 28 Jun 1991
15:40:55
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: A concise history of "words-l"?

Dear Sirs/Madams,

It is after a long time that I am writing a letter to the list, and not so much for being taken up by sundry matters which are the lot of the academic student at this time of the year (albeit I am to a certain extent) as having found nothing of any consequence to say. I am reading the postings every day, of course. It may not be improper here to add that the list to me is seeming to have changed considerably in character since the occasion of my joining it. It perhaps depends on the changing membership. It remains as interesting as ever.

This longish preamble now brings me to my topic, which is a rather childish request. Could anyone supply me certain facts about "words-l", especially when it was instituted, by whom, and are there extant members from the first day, et cetera? If anyone can, please do so. The list is ripe enough to enter the stage of self-awareness. (One only has to take care not to allow it to degrade to dandyishness.)

The mention of collective nouns brought to my mind several suggestions, which I submit:

a pandora of malaprops
a sperm of swoonerists
an ellipse of eccentrics
a bounty of tyrants
a prflbzxxx of earwickers
a puerility of collective noun coiners

In our institute, collective nouns for mathematicians are popular, some being: a category of

logicians, a sequence of analysts, a group (or a complex) of algebraists, a sheaf of geometers (with the variant “a variety of algebraic geometers”), a bundle of topologists etc.

I will end my letter here, but before that I warn everyone of an impending letter from the animal Kuvalayapeeda. My respect for elephants is considerable, but I am passing on this letter more because of a threat from the nonhuman rights branch in Bombay. One can always delete the letter, of course, if one thinks it below one’s dignity to read such letters.

Apologising in advance,
Yours truly,

a verbiage of Mokshagundams.

XLVI

Fri, 28 Jun 1991
15:49:15
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Re: 21st Century

Mr. Mark Susskind has said:

>I have heard people refer to the 1990s as “the turn of
>the century.”
>Has it started already? I thought that it first begins
>in 1999 or 2000.

I would like to mention that the 21st century begins in the year 2001.

Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XLVII

Sat, 29 Jun
1991 18:01:20
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Regarding "E-mail"

Forgive me for being so impertinent as to write the following, but I could not contain myself after reading an astonishingly immature letter by Mr. Macphil. I am not having anything to say about the contents, of course, but content myself with citing two examples which have been extremely puzzling for me as regards the usage of the english language therein.

Example 1:

>If so, you should be aware of them. Together, they
>comprise 30% of the top 10 dailies . . . that's not why I
>read them, but . . .

If "30%" in this sentence is referring to 3 out of 10, then I daresay that there are very few persons incapable of divining it. On the other hand, what may be being mentioned is something in the manner of sales, readership, etc. In this case, it must be so mentioned explicitly. Whichever way, the sentence carries very little information and one wonders why it was made.

Example 2 :

>>the article is relevant to mention at all, isn't it
>>relevant enough to give a short summary?
>
>no!

This leaves me short of breath. All I can say at the moment is that it must be an extraordinarily

bizarre article. Perhaps it is due to the fact that I have never come across an article for which was not relevant to give a summary of contents, yet mentioning which was quite relevant. To my no doubt impoverished mind, it is seeming like a contradiction in terms. Of course, I may just not be knowing what the word “relevant” means.

At the risk of sounding like a pompous pulpiteer, I must say that words are in a certain sense sacred, and to use them vaguely or illogically is in that sense blasphemy.

Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XLVIII

Sun, 30 Jun
1991 15:26:15
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: leap years

>I'm not sure how the 365.24 (?) days/year really
>enters into the determination.
>
>The sole factor of 28/29 days in February is whether
>it is/not a leap year.

The peculiar and seemingly arbitrary rules (“factors”) for leap years have been arrived at in order to take into account the fact that the year is slightly less than 365.25 days. Whether Gregory’s astronomers made use of the now-standard continued fraction approximation to the actual number of days is not known to me. $365 + 1/4 - 1/400$ does approximate the number of days in an year rather beautifully, however.

Strangely enough, the next finer correction seems to be to declare every 40000th year as a leap

year, overruling the 400 rule. We have accidentally hit upon a pleasant pattern.

In all honesty, I cannot guarantee the existence of a 40000 rule. I apologise in advance if it is found wrong. I am only recalling having read it somewhere.

Yours Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

XLIX

Fri, 19 Jul 1991
16:48:58
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: was re nothing, is re 8 topics

Dear Sir/Madam,

How strange it feels to write a letter again after such a lengthy interval! Truly, I feel almost a stranger! I have just managed to surf over a wave of two hundred odd letters, and the one thing which affords me much pleasure is the thought of a certain Mr. Mahalingam who has been absent from the network for much longer than I have been. You must of course excuse the tenses in my last clause.

But then, let me turn to more palatable, if trivial topics. Before I start, I must apologise for not having sent a letter by the animal Kunalayapeeda. I was strong enough to reject it on the grounds that it was too pompous, even when compared to myself. I have stood up to the nonhuman rights activists in this matter and I am feeling most virtuous. But lest someone should still be intrigued, I quote the beginning of it:

>A hearty greeting to all! Although I am not familiar
>to subscribers to the list, the converse is far from
>>true, since I have been "lurking" on the list for a

- >long time, in spite of lurking being so difficult and
- >unnatural an activity for an elephant.
- >I ask your indulgence on one point . . .

The letter gets much more sickening afterwards.

Now to some points I would like to bring up concerning some of the communications to this list.

1 Why oh why is the strange incantation “myxyzptlk” being used? I did not inquire about it on the certainty that it will feature in gleanings(n) for some n, and yet where is it? I demand that it be appended to the gleanings list immediately!

my yearly xaminations yield zero progress towards lending knowledge?

many young xtraterrestrial yetis zap poor trekkers like kamikaze?

My head whirls, wild and weary.

2 Animal Idioms brings to my mind the strange coincidence that most Indian languages also use “bathe like a crow” to denote a hasty bath. It may or may not sound counterintuitive to english speakers that “sleep like a dog” denotes a very cautious sleep.

3 This in turn puts me in mind of a possibly unusual phenomenon; that of Number Idioms. We say “the number 36” to mean a very bitter disagreement; this is because in the devanagari and related scripts, 36 looks like two persons standing back to back. Apart from 69, which is sounding to me as arising more out of the need for euphemism than a fancy for a picturesque symbol, is there any such phrase in the english language?

The other example I have in mind is even funnier and involves the number 420. Almost everywhere in the country, or at least in the region of the aryan languages, 420 (char-so-bees in Hindi, say)

denotes a person who is untrustworthy and who will cheat you at the first opportunity. Why such an idiom should exist is beyond me, although it is true—and is the only explanation I have heard - that clause number 420 of the Indian Penal Code deals with swindling.

I would like to know examples of idioms involving numbers, although of course not “one”, “two” or “three”, which are words, if I may say so.

4 I must take up again the question of hyphenating. I asked about constructs such as “symmetric equation based” and was advised not to introduce hyphens at all. Now I have run up against “non zero divisor”. It is seeming to me that a hyphen must follow “non”. But I am intending to talk about something which is not a zero divisor and not about a divisor which is non-zero, in which case writing “non-zero divisor” is very much misleading. I am unable to think of anything except saying “non-(zero divisor)”! What are you suggesting?

5 It struck me forcefully the other day that if one has to speak strictly, then one cannot say “my watch is fast”. One can only say it is ahead. Yet there are people all round me who will say the watch is fast or slow when they are speaking english, while in their native languages they will still say it is ahead or behind. It is most puzzling.

6 Mr. Akio Tanuki writes:

>And, I'm not sure whether it is a bad thing or not,
>but Tanuki is rumored to have extremely large
>te***cles. :) I don't remember the American
>motorcycle racer's name.

What, I ask, is so improper about tentacles?

7 About the following letter,

>In balance, all French speakers know an English
>word that is not English: smoking. Smoking is the
>French (and German too) word for a dinner jacket
>
>Tony H.

I am thinking that Germans ALSO have such a word.

8 The fox who would have been the craftiest but who turned out to be the most faux was of course the gunpowder fawkes. I am most tempted at this moment to go on about foxtrots and guys and the hounding of poor Mr. Ykins, but then one must be really Ruthless on such occasions.

Yours Most Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

L

Fri, 19 Jul 1991
18:33:12
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Re: was re nothing, is re 8 topics

>> I am thinking that Germans ALSO have such
>> a word.
>
>I miss the point. Is it that the phrase with “too”
>is inelegant?
>I am thinking that I don't understand the problem.
>
>
>Tony H.

I must apologise for these feeble jests. I merely wanted to point out that the German word “also” is such a word.

Horror of all horrors! Could it be that all my little jokes upto now have escaped in the guise of

ununderstandable problems? In the name of the thirty-three crores (330 millions)! I am prepared to rewrite all those which I can recall!

Yours &Co,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

LI

Fri, 26 Jul 1991
17:56:46
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: synthetic/analytic (short)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing the following letter out of curiosity. A while ago, if you recall it, a letter titled “synthetic/analytic” had appeared on this excellent list. It was forwarded, I think, by Natalie. It has in it a statement saying that “highly synthetic” languages have are different from the “highly analytic” ones even in ways involving speech timing, meters, rhyme etc.

This led me to reflect on what the relevant characteristics are for some languages I have been exposed to, and it seems that all the North Indian (aryan) languages have properties different from english! Now I would never have noticed this unless I had read the letter above. But to turn to the subject at hand, consider the following, where, as an example of an “Indian” language, I have taken the language Sanskrit in order to avoid controversies:

| | Sanskrit | English |
|------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| word order | o-v, postpositional | v-o, prepositional |

| | Sanskrit | English |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| word accent | initial | final or penultimate |
| word tendency | polysyllabic | monosyllabic |
| speech timing | “iso-moric” | stress-timed |
| syllables | short/long | stressed/ unstressed |
| clusters | simple | complex |
| meters | quantitative | accentual |
| rhymes | front rhyme | end rhyme |
| music | monody | polyphony |

I am, of course, no expert, and I have interpreted all the words involved in the best way I can (i.e. I am guessing their meanings). But it is surprising to see so many predicted properties appearing consistently in one language. Of course, what I have just put down above applies to most modern aryan languages as well as Sanskrit. My question then is : do the experts consider Sanskrit and modern aryan languages as “synthetic”? In that case, are our languages at a stage of lesser development? Finally, how is it that languages so strongly related as the two above exhibit such totally different properties?

Are the long Sanskrit compounds which were the most dreadful part of our school an example of “complex morphology” or “complex syntax”? I do not really know the meanings of these words, but are these compounds to be called one word or several?

I am aware that my questions are probably possessing wildly differing levels of naiveness, but please understand that I am a layman only.

My final question is: This letter originated in something called “sci.lang”. Is this a list? If so, how helpful is it for a total imbecile whose only pretext for subscribing it is an interest in language? If it is helpful, how does one subscribe to it?

And now that the “scholarly” part of the letter is over, I might mention a phenomenon arising in the writing of Indian names which may have a connection with confusing “morphology” with “syntax”. On the other hand, it may not, since mine is only a blind guess.

When a name such as, say, Ramlal is to be written, in the roman script it is always written as “Ram Lal”. In fact, it is a single name, and Lal is not a second name, father’s name, or place name. To be geographically correct I will also submit the northern name Rajendra Prasad and the southern name Anantha Murthy, which in reality are Rajendraprasad and Ananthamurthy.

This tendency, originally started, I suspect, by the British, becomes most ridiculous when initials are determined by it. To be politically unbiased, I am giving two names:

Atalbehari Vajpayee written as “A.B.Vajpayee”
Harkishanlal Bhagat written as “H.K.L.Bhagat”

But then, long names do pose problems. I am an authority on the subject.

Yours Sincerely,

V. M. Gundam.

Mokshagundam Takshakabhushana Virupaaksha
Kaamaakshivara

parasitic bitnet address:
TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
current postal address:
TATA INSTITUTE, BOMBAY.

| "If a four letter man
| marries a five letter
| woman, what number of
| letters would their
| children be?"
| Hemingway

LII

Fri, 26 Jul 1991
18:11:14
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: Cannot stimulate replies, will simulate them.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I do not know how to apologise for this letter, except saying that it is human nature to expect people to reply to one's communications. I am lacking any real point to make and I cannot expect anyone to take notice of me, but then wading through two hundred odd messages I am getting today, I am feeling that I should also contribute. To save everyone the trouble I am writing several replies myself, and hoping that they are accurate representations of reality. I cannot be held guilty for this; after all, that a letter has really been written by the person it is reportedly from hardly makes it more probable to be true to reality, like the ancient notion of advaita, where "i" and "another" dissolve into one and in fact the distinction becomes nonsensical. At least, it becomes nonsensical if the distinction between sense and nonsense has survived.

Well, I have had my say. Why, I ask, shirk from attaching the replies to it too?

Price:

Virupaksha, this letter is very beautiful and moving. The notion of advaita, shall I say, is striking me as very poetic.

Ruth:

Hey Viru, it won't do for all netters to become one. For one, shooting peanuts at such short range won't be so much fun. What say, Don, and how's the new super-duper-no-overheads-energy-efficient-peashooter-canon, or did it get classified by M? <disappearing with great haste into nuclear shelter, yet sporting most annoying grin on face>

Adam C.:

My dearest Virile Pasha, how about postponing for the moment all the bullshit about advaita and paying whatever attention you can to the name of the list?

Michel:

Bonjour, Viral Pox. Has your laser third eye tripped a fuse or are you just being in your ground state insanity ? :-)

Natalie:

>of me, but then wading through two hundred odd messages I am getting I just checked, and the average daily traffic is only coming upto 51.342 messages. This of course may be because the T zone computers are out of commission in entirety!

Bernard:

Oh, Natalie has goofed again, I say! I am checking at this very moment, and the daily traffic is averaging only 51.337! What an unpardonable crime to report differently!

Macphil:

By the way, did you know that the average of list postings across time differs significantly from the average across the spectrum of lists? This appeared in the Journal of Networkers, May 87. Could this sort of phenomenon imply a factor involving different mental propensities of different listers and so on?

Bill:

>and in fact the distinction becomes nonsensical. At
>least, it becomes nonsensical if the distinction
>between sense and nonsense has survived.

Are you knowledgeable of the fact that it has NOT survived in certain universities I have been in? At the University of Jungenjinnanuke, two professors were forced to eat vegetarian food for a week when they tried to state that certain assignments by students were nonsensical. If you don't smell the coming of a movement against sensism, how will you ever survive in the academic world ?

Last, and hence by necessity not the least,

Nancy Ellis:

What subversive tripe is all this! Ignore such bilge which is issuing from Virpashka, I say!

Nancy Ellis, after 2 minutes:

I say, this is perhaps a mildly funny letter, although essentially stupid. Only it is making one react a bit initially.

Yours &Co,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

LIII

Sat, 27 Jul 1991
17:50:47
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: "push starts"

A propos the following letter concerning "forehead dots":

>The spot on the forehead (I did forget to ask what it is
>called) is indeed a designation of marriage when
>worn by a female (it is not worn by men).

>It does not matter what caste, etc. It is not, however,
>as popular as it once was and occasionally is worn by
>a woman unmarried, just as some unmarried people
>here wear rings.

>
>Mac "I used to juggle five, but they found out about
each other" Phil

The one fact to be mentioned here, of course, is that all the above is only in the context of HINDU (married) women. Yet, I have observed many Muslim, Christian and Sikh women also wearing them and a few married Hindu women not wearing them. Jains and Buddhists follow the Hindu tradition in this matter. The Zoroastrians (Parsis) are seeming to be the only real exceptions.

Another thing I am observing is that the exact hue, position, and shape of the “dot” IS depending on caste to quite an extent. Instead of launching into intricacies of caste, I will content myself by saying that I have seen colours from almost purple to almost saffron, positions anywhere between the join of the eyebrows to practically the parting of hair, sizes ranging between a tiny dot and a rupee sized disc, and several departures from the circular shape, for instance a crescent. The variations do seem to me to be correlated to caste and class.

The “norm” could be formulated as a bright red pea-sized circular disc on the center of the forehead.

Most Sincerely Yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

P.S. This is reminding me of an incident I was witness to wherein a car with a license plate MCP was towing another with license plate MRS. MCP striding ahead with Mrs in tow struck me as a rather felicitous description of the traditional Indian couple.

LIV

Fri, 2 Aug 1991
17:41:39
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: RE bring/take

Dear Sir/Madam,

Let me say at the outset that seeing everyday as I do the costly and beautiful teeth of an elephant, I am finding all discussion of the teeth of cats and dogs utterly trivial and insignificant. Similar remarks apply to the evolutionary scale. To speak frankly, trying to distinguish cats from dogs on the

majestic span of the evolutionary scale is hair-splitting to a degree comparable to sensing individual people from satellites of geocentric heights.

Concerning “bring” versus “take”, I may mention one turn of phrase which I have noticed some correspondents using, which is not directly relevant but yet, I feel, may add to the confusion. It is: “unsubscribing to a list”. I am always using “bring from” and “take to”, and “unsubscribing to” also seems very strange to me, much more than just the word “unsubscribing” standing alone.

Regarding “anymore”, the usage given by “X happens anymore” is extremely unusual. Now if one took “X does not happen anymore” as correct, and if one wanted to coin a new term, then logically one would be compelled to say “X happens every-more”.

Yours Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

LV

Fri, 2 Aug 1991
17:46:07
TZONE

FROM: TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET
SUBJECT: idiotic subscribers

from - TUSHAR “Virupaksha Mokshagundam”
to - ‘Vatsyayan Mahalingam’ <ORION@TIFRVAX>
subj -

Dear Moby Dick,

Do you with your immense repository of knowledge about the USA know anything about “Peewee X” where X may stand for anything? The oafs subscribing to WORDS-L are not seeming to stop it from fevering their practically unfunctioning brains. With all the enmity I have with you I am

still admitting grudgingly that you are not the stupidest nor the most pompous subscriber to that list.

Please answer me about “Peewee”, but be wary of what are being termed as “e-oops”es. Even your most civilized reply will precipitate a catastrophe if it gets known to the uncivilized barbarians who are peopling the WORDS-L list. I am still thinking over the theory that they are robotic simulacra of vice presidents, but seem to prefer the simpler explanation that they are all irremediably drunk when they face the computer. In either case do not “reply” without discrimination. To look at endless inanities on an innocuous statement one makes is an unpleasant experience, especially so if perpetrated by silly asses possessing no intellectual substance whatsoever.

I stand by all my accusations against you, of course.

-V.M.

LVI

Sun, 18 Aug
1991 02:03:00
IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: I take your leave.

Dear Sir/Madam,

This is my last letter to WORDS-L. I now have to return to a village where there are no computers and no electronic network. A propos list-servers, I think that there are some differences between discussions on lists and ordinary verbal discussions. They are:

- 1 At the time of sending a letter, one does not have any knowledge of what the others are sending.

This results in several people sending identical replies to a question.

2 People in the same geographical area are logged into their computers at the same time, and hence can achieve something resembling a conversation. People who can consult the machine infrequently and at odd times always have to see a discussion which has been completed, or a series of remarks which have gone stale with time.

Realising this, I always attempted to send things which were necessary, relatively independent of topicalities, and likely to be new. I also habitually collected several points in one letter which I sent (or to be precise, asked my friend to send).

I am naturally grieved to leave this excellent list, since I gained enormous benefit from it. It has managed, in an almost unnoticeable manner, to smoothen the rough edges of my english, in which present progressives proliferate no more, which is much less awkwardnessful, and whose “quaint charm”, I am happy to say, is to a greater or lesser extent a thing of the past.

I am still recalling my first letter to WORDS-L, and I compare it often with my second. I am thinking I may well lay claim to being the fastest convert from the “prescriptivist” to the “descriptivist” fashion of thinking.

It is in such ways, and many more, that WORDS-L helped me. It sobered me from a grammar-drunkenness and intoxicated me with a very different, and heightened, sense of language. This has been due to the fact that WORDS-L is a list of people who talk about their topics, and not of academics who discuss theirs. This, I feel, is one strength of such a list. I will certainly not forget WORDS-L ever.

I hope that my own contributions, if they were inconsequential, at least did no great damage to the list. I take the opportunity to apologise now if I hurt anyone with my occasional clowning. It was not meant to be serious. And—if I may start a sentence with an and—if my writing struck you as stilted, formal, boring or dull, then I can always take shelter behind the argument that the list was actually enriched by another variety of english!

Goodbye.

Yours Sincerely,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

LVII

Mon, 12 Aug
1991 22:16:00
IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Macphil's defective palindromes.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have been thinking about Mcphil's queries about near-perfect palindromes, which I will take the liberty of naming "merodromes", thus making the name describe itself. Allow me to recall that what was required was a word whose former and latter halves were identical upto a permutation, yet not reverses of each other.

The most satisfying example I have of this is the word "reappear". Apart from this, one can possibly coin the word "neotone". Stretching the imagination further, one can have "gel-algae" and also "brassbars". Please note that we have used a reasonable definition for words with an odd number of letters, and one which was suggested by Macphil.

If one knows a palindromic word where the central letter or pair of letters is "s" (or "ss"), then one could possibly add an "s" at the end of it ; how-

ever, I am not able to think of a good example at this moment. One can of course think of sonons, the quanta of sound.

I trust I have been of some help.

Sincerely Yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

LVIII

Wed, 28 Aug
1991 16:40:00
IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: Virupaksha : the truth.

Dear wordslrs,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam is dead. More accurately, Virupaksha the playshape has stopped its jactitations. We think that we should explain the whole business fully and clearly.

We are graduate students visiting TIFR, two of us in the computer science department, one in the department of communication systems, and one in mathematics. When we arrived at the institute, we took over the account belonging to Tushar Samant, who was then leaving the institute. He had the habit of listserving for fun, and we asked him not to unsubscribe from any of the lists he had subscribed to.

By far the most interesting list for us was WORDS-L. When we saw some postings to it the idea of VM began to form.

In TIFR there has been going on for the past six years a huge and ambitious knowledge-base-and-natural-language project, Vagvilasini. We saw some of the output produced and were quite impressed by the connectedness of its "discourse". And so we thought of piping its babble into WORDS-L.

For some reasons of our own we named our “subscriber” as Virupaksha. Having done that, the name Mokshagundam, (as also the names Takshak-abhushana and Kamakshivara) seemed inevitable. (Later, we had begun calling TIFRVAX as the FAKEVM node.)

Getting proper output from Virupaksha was not easy. We had to make a lot of decisions about his “default settings”. Finally we decided that the safest bet would be to give him a traditional brahmin “upbringing” and a “register” straight from the babu’s mouth. We hoped that any anomalies which might have ordinarily looked very peculiar would go unnoticed among the “alien” turns of phrase and especially the present progressives.

It is difficult to explain the technicalities, but each letter by Virupaksha was prepared as follows : We decided on the subject of the letter and gave the system (in “Virupaksha settings”) a “general idea” of what was to be written. Then we let Virupaksha go on on his own. After he had “written” the letter, we occasionally retouched it at some spots if it sounded too weird. The formatting, uploading and sending was done totally by us.

Initially our intention was merely to produce one letter, but it turned out so much funnier than we expected that we thought VM was worth a some more letters.

Public interface with the Vagvilasini system seems to be a strange mixture of hush-hush and openness, so we are not at all sure whether what we have done is illegal. Secondly, we suppose that we have committed a SVONE (serious violation of net ethics). We only hope that VM will be taken as a joke. If he was a donut he was a benign donut. We hope.

A lot of “strange” things about VM should get clearer now—his inability to give on-the-spot replies, his tendency to initiate discussions rather than continue them or write letters on new topics and not follow up, his dubious grammar and unusual imagery, hints of stock phrases, an outpouring of data in preference to argumentation, and a whole lot of other minor things.

Let us clear up one possible misunderstanding. There was no ALGORITHM which cranked out the VM letters (that day is far off!). We had to work with the system in different ways for different letters. Virupaksha seemed quite incapable of keeping up a “correspondence”: he was fine for a single piece of discourse, but was hopeless with a sequence of letters. In short, we worked quite a bit ourselves, and with all modesty we think that we have handled quite a complex knowledge database for something more than a toy example.

Apart from giving general directives the letters were genuinely VM’s. Of course we had to retouch at some points, but those were very few. We rejected some letters. Also, two letters were written entirely by one of us (conforming AMAP to VM’s style). For the “cannot stimulate, will simulate” letter, the batter was provided by VM and the raisins were put in by us.

Our big embarrassments were:

1 “lest” was not balanced by “should”—hardly something to expect from a wren-&-martin cram-artist.

2 The constant use of “english” as an adjective (or maybe some other perplexing bug) which resulted, if you have noticed, in VM never capitalising “English”.

We did not touch these “mistakes”, since they weren’t mistakes.

Although we are sorry to perpetrate VM on the list, we are also sorry to pack him off. It was necessary to kill him, since we are going away in different directions, and he would have soon developed into a high-caliber bore anyway. But then, WORDS-L can be called the richest list of around; between Galmin and VM we have seen them all, haven't we?

We might as well explain here three shadowy figures connected with VM:

1 Tushar Samant: Any letter signed by him was written by one of us. The real Tushar has left TIFR.

2 Kuvalayapeeda: An attempt to create another character, which bombed. The idea was to have a style chock-full of textbook Indianisms; the end effect was unpalatable.

3 Vatsyayan Mahalingam: This is a genuine human being, as can be checked. When he was joining the list, we tried to talk him into signing on as "Garett Leighman" (juggle 'em, Macphil!), but old Moby Dick refused.

We really hope that VM has been more entertaining than irritating. It started purely as a practical joke, but we learned a lot from it. We might even write up the whole thing to produce a more-data-less-crunching (read all-data-no-crunching) paper. And we have had our fill of wild-grad-pranks in the bargain.

If you are not totally pissed off at this stage (we do apologise—sincerely) you are urged to answer these questions:

1 Did you ever suspect anything funny about VM? Did you suspect an AI system was involved?

2 The "retouching" was done by one of us earlier and by another of us in the later letters. Did this

show through? Were the earlier letters significantly different from the later ones?

3 Do you remember any letters which were really different? Any letter which you would now guess was written manually?

4 VM evolved, rather than burst fullfledged on the list. (e.g. present progressive got scarcer as time passed) Do you think VM had a coherent “personality”? If so, what sort of anthropomorphic adjectives would you use to describe him?

Please send replies to TUSHAR@TIFR-VAX.BITNET if you think they will crowd WORDS-L. If you have any other comments to make PLEASE do so.

This seems to be a complete enough account of VM, so we—what else but—

Most Respectfully Take Your Leave,

Vinayak Prasad
Rustom Mehr-Homji
Pandurang M V Kallianpur
Akshay Ganguly
(TIFR, Bombay)

LIX

Sat, 31 Aug
1991 11:33:00
IST

FROM: TUSHAR SAMANT <TUSHAR@TIFRVAX.BITNET>
SUBJECT: ITMA!

Here is a Virupaksha letter which was sent but somehow never reached. It will sound totally topical now, but was clearly important for him.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Although the following will only sound like raking up past and forgotten things, I cannot rest until I have dealt with the matter. It is to do with a

letter which I had sent to the list, titled “idiotic subscribers”. When I read a reply such as the following:

>Subj: RE: idiotic subscribers
>
>From all of us “uncivilized barbarians,”
>Thank you. We like you, too.
>
>Evelyn

could you blame me if a flush of shame is heating my face?

Truly, I have made an attempt at humour which went beyond tolerable limits. Ever since Natalie said that every “e-mailer” has, once at least, committed an “e-oops”, I was resolved to commit one myself. Hence I wrote the letter, ostensibly to my “friend” Vatsyayan Mahalingam, which contained some extremely unpleasant remarks about subscribers to this excellent list. I do not believe that you are all silly asses without any intellectual substance. The only thing I can do now, and this is what I do do now, is to apologise in a most humble, if not absolutely grovelling manner, yet tinged with sufficient sincerity. I will not attempt to make such jokes on the list again.

If my apology is sounding ridiculous, I assure you that the fault lies entirely with my english.

Regarding “sensing individual people from geocentric heights”, I must concede that its essential fogginess is unparalleled on the list. I address this specifically to Don. I must have been irremediably drunk when I faced the computer the day I wrote this. We brahmans get intoxicated even with the smell of garlic. Forgive me.

On to some other topics :

>From: Jarmila Pankova <PANKOVA@CSPGAS11.BITNET>
>Hi y'al,
> I'm new here on words-l. What are you talking
>usually about?
~~~~~

Someone in my own tradition, I see. I am having a suspicion that if one conducts a survey encompassing the world, the construction above will be by far the most favoured. In the interests of preventing native-english-ism, I propose that the grammar books should make present progressives the only legal tenses in such cases as above.

About "WOG": A question coming to my mind is : What is a "golliwog"? Does it have any connection with "WOG"? I am recalling faintly that there is some relation between "golliwog" and "black-skinned". That is the reason for which I ask.

Regarding pronunciations: What is anomalous about "cloven/oven" and "mauve/gauze"? Are not the vowels sounded identically in both cases? This gives rise to another question. Can one be said to know a language if he can read and write it fluently, yet having a very nebulous notion of the way it is pronounced? I may be having such an ability with english.

Finally, I should perhaps mention that this is amongst my last letters to the list "WORDS-L". Before the month is over, I will leave the institute and the network world for ever, and go back to teach mathematics in the Mokshagundam municipal school. However, please do not jump up in joy that this IS my last letter; given my liking for pomp and ceremony, I am not above devoting an entire letter to a farewell.

Sincerely Yours,

Virupaksha Mokshagundam.

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Shades of Aziz?

