

However, the example *Harry chopped off Sue's head and had to clean it up*, referring to the attendant mess, does. There were several other bad (for our proposals) cases, but we are saving those for a review of Roman de Clef's forthcoming book, *Le franglais vivant*, Gallimard, to appear, 1972.

## NOTES

\* This paper consists of an analysis of sentences surreptitiously written down by us while overhearing conversations between Q. P. Dong, the Green Knight, Morgan le Faye, and Lancelot of Benwick. We claim as our modest achievement only the analysis, for we are too clean-minded ever to have thought up examples like the ones we have stolen. The authors would like to thank Miss Hermione Dimwitty for her helpful remarks and criticisms; she will see that we have published the paper anyway.

<sup>1</sup> Rabid generative semanticists may read "semantic representation".

<sup>2</sup> In keeping with standard scientific practice, what we don't at all understand we carefully disregard.

<sup>3</sup> The argument based on the fact that you can't say sentence (i) we are saving for a forthcoming article 'Abstract drecative nouns in English', to appear in *Papers in Linguistics*, volume 18 (1972). The rest we are saving to read at a couple of future conferences.

(i) \*Harry blew Shirley's nose into his (or her) handkerchief.

<sup>4</sup> It is true that (2) could marginally be interpreted as, for example, (ii), and (3) likewise as (iii), but this does not affect the argument here.

(ii) Harry \*\*\*\*s  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{bile.} \\ \text{blood.} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\}$   
 (iii) Harry \*\*\*\*ed  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{bile.} \\ \text{blood.} \\ \dots \end{array} \right\}$

<sup>5</sup> Although (v) is a good transform of (iv), (vi) is not. Therefore (iv) must be ambiguous; in one reading in *Jane's mouth* is a "motive" adverb, in the other locative.

(iv) Harry \*\*\*\* in Jane's mouth.  
 (v) In Jane's mouth, Harry \*\*\*\*.  
 (vi) \*In Jane's mouth Harry \*\*\*\*.

ON FUCKING (WELL)  
 A STUDY OF SOME QUASI-PERFORMATIVE EXPRESSIONS

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In this paper evidence will be presented for treating as members of the same lexical class the words *fucking*, *bloody* and *shitting*, and for considering these to have the predictable variants (in some dialects) *fucking well*, *bloody well*, and *shitting well*.<sup>1 2</sup> Examples of this class are:

- (1) a. You  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{fucking (well)} \\ \text{bloody (well)} \\ \text{?shitting} \end{array} \right\}$  took your time.  
 b.  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Fucking (well)} \\ \text{Bloody (well)} \\ \text{?Shitting} \end{array} \right\}$  make up your mind.
- (2) a. Turn off that  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{fucking} \\ \text{bloody} \\ \text{(shitting)} \end{array} \right\}$  radio.  
 b.  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Some} \\ \text{The} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{fucking} \\ \text{bloody} \\ \text{?shitting} \end{array} \right\}$  idiot left the top off the brandy bottle.  
 c. Bloody idiots, forgetting the blasting caps.  
 d. Fucking sons of bitches, they wrecked my car.  
 e. Shitting cats, always yowling all night.

These expressions have been demonstrated to be related to the 'quasi-verbs' rather than the real verbs *shit* and *fuck* (Quang, 1969:49ff., esp. note 9). The real verbs *shit* and *fuck* will henceforth be designated *shit<sub>v</sub>* and *fuck<sub>v</sub>* as opposed to *shit<sub>q</sub>* and *fuck<sub>q</sub>*. There are no relative clauses containing either *shit<sub>v</sub>* or *fuck<sub>v</sub>*, nor *shit<sub>q</sub>* and *fuck<sub>q</sub>*,<sup>3</sup> and furthermore none with *bloody* as predicate adjective,<sup>4</sup> corresponding to (2).

- (3) \*Turn off that radio which is  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{fucking.} \\ \text{shitting.} \\ \text{bloody.} \end{array} \right\}$   
 (4) \*Turn off that radio which  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{fuck.} \\ \text{shit on.} \end{array} \right\}$

To continue the possible tests for determining the syntactic properties of *fucking*, *bloody* and *shitting*, which one would superficially want to compare with adjectives, we note that Ross (1969) demonstrates that (non-stative) adjectives behave like NPs in undergoing pseudo-

clefing:

- (5) a. What John did was be obnoxious.  
b. \*What John did was be tall.

But such sentences are not possible with the class of words under discussion:

- (6) \*What the idiot did was be 

fucking	shitting
	bloody

- (7) \*What the radio was was 

fucking	shitting
	bloody

Likewise *fucking well*, *shitting well* and *bloody well*, as in (1), are superficially similar to adverbs. But most adverbs, other than those like *very*, *extremely* etc. and directional adverbs, can be preposed.

- (8) Quietly  
Deftly , John picked the lock.  
With a curious tool  
For King and country

- (9) \*Fucking  
\*Bloody (well), you took your time.  
\*Shitting

Adverbials not in the verb phrase can be contrasted, and the second occurrence of VP in conjoined sentences can be pronominalized by *do so*.

- (10) John left quickly and Ferd did so quietly.  
(11) a. \*John fucking well paid up and you'd better do so bloody well.  
b. John fucking well paid up and you'd bloody well better do so.  
c. John fucking well paid up and I advise you to 

bloody well	}	fucking well
do so.		

The preposing test and the *do so* test thus yield conflicting results, except when *fucking* etc. are stressed and/or follow *do so*. Note that in (11b) and (11c), *fucking* and *bloody well* are unstressed; the lack of stress on the second occurrence of a member of our hypothetical class may indicate that each of the members has approximately the same meaning or equivalent meaning. This question will be discussed somewhat later in this paper. We will conclude that *fucking* etc. are syntactically unlike the usual types of adjective and adverb, though there are some similarities to be explored shortly, and on the principle established by Quang, we will call them quasi-adjectives and adverbs. It still remains for us, of course, to establish (1) their meaning and (2) the syntactic and other constraints on their use.

Leaving aside the question of meaning for the moment, there are a number of interesting syntactic properties to be noted. Reflexes of

*fuck*<sub>g</sub> and *shit on*<sub>g</sub> turn up as surface quasi-adverbs, quasi-adjectives and nouns.<sup>5</sup> *Fucking* behaves very much like *bloody*, and turns up in the pronominal positions occupied by adjectives:

- (10) I'm a fucking artist, I'm not a fucking P.R. agent.<sup>6</sup>  
(John Lennon, *Rolling Stone* 1-21-1971, p.41)

For some speakers, including Lennon, who may not count here because he speaks a dialect of British English, *fucking* is also possible with verbs<sup>7</sup> and some adverbs.

- (11) I'm not technically good, but I can make it fucking howl and move. (ibid, p.35)  
(12) Everybody was probably thinking they're not going to fucking work on it. (ibid, p.47)  
(13) He fucking went home instead of waiting.  
(14) He can't fucking (well) make it today.  
(15) He fucking (well) can't make it today.  
(16) I'm not going to wait fucking (well) forever.

In the most liberal dialects, the quasi-adjective *fucking* seems to go with any sort of noun, and the number of occurrences in a sentence is not necessarily restricted to one.

- (17) Fucking sincerity will get you nowhere. (abstract noun)  
(18) He was full of fucking arsenic. (mass noun)  
(19) The fucking cats are under the fucking bed. (count nouns)  
(20) (That) fucking Charley refuses to admit he works for the CIA.  
(21) Who did you expect, the fucking Three Musketeers?<sup>8</sup>

The position of *fucking* after the article and number sometimes indicates a difference of emphasis and meaning. For some speakers the following are synonymous:

- (22) Hamlet is a fucking hard part to play.  
(23) Hamlet is a hard fucking part to play.

Others distinguish a meaning in which *fucking* emphasizes *hard*

- (24) That part is fucking hard to play. (as in (22))

from the meaning which associates *fucking* with the whole NP or perhaps just part, as in

- (25) It's hard to play that fucking part right.

Similar distinctions are, I think, to be found in the use of the adverbial *fucking (well)*. I find it hard to find separate meanings for

- (26) Shut the door and fucking (well) do it quietly.  
(27) Shut the door and do it fucking (well) quietly.  
(28) Fucking well take out the trash now.  
(29) Take out the trash fucking well now.

because of the fact that sentences like the above can have a reading in which the adverbial is asserted (cf. Lakoff 1970, Jackendoff lecture 1968). It is hard for me to assign different readings to (26)-(29) in which the disapproval of the whole proposition is distinct from disapproval associated with the adverbial. But with more than one adverbial, some differences do emerge.

- (30) Fucking (well) empty the trash now in the backyard quietly.  
 (31) Empty the trash fucking (well) now, in the backyard, quietly.  
 (32) Empty the trash now in the fucking backyard, quietly.  
 (33) Empty the trash now in the backyard fucking well quietly.

The appearance of *fucking*, and not *fucking well*, in (32) brings up the point of how the syntactic category, or quasi-category, of *fucking* is determined. Adverbials consisting of a preposition and NP allow only the quasi-adjective form:

- (34) a. The skunk fucking well was in the backyard  
 b. The skunk was fucking well in the backyard.  
 (35) \*Those woodchucks were eating the beams fucking well in the basement.  
 (36) Those woodchucks were eating the beams in the fucking basement.  
 (37) Do it fucking well discreetly.  
 (38) Do it with (some) fucking discretion.

These facts of course concern only those idiolects which distinguish between *fucking*, *bloody* and *fucking well*, *bloody well*.

I have claimed that *fucking well* does not precede preposition + NP combinations, and that in these cases *fucking* precedes the NP. This is not the case in (39) and (40), and in just those cases where the NP is pronominal, either unstressed and anaphoric, or contrastively stressed:

- (39) He can't blow up the Empire State Building singlehandedly  
 so I'll have to {  
   fucking well go with him.  
   go fucking well with him.  
   \*go with fucking him.  
 }  
 (40) Charley was mad  
 when I told him I wouldn't {  
   fucking well go with him.  
   \*go with fucking him.  
   ?\*go fucking well with him.  
 }

Although (41) is grammatical, in general *fucking* can't precede a low or unstressed NP:

- (41) Go with {  
   the fucking bastard.  
   \*fucking him.  
 }  
 (42) Fucking well go with {  
   the bastard.  
   him.  
 }  
 (43) Go fucking well with {  
   the bastard.  
   him.  
 }

*Bastard* has some stress in (41) though it is used anaphorically, and *him* in (40) is contrastively stressed, so restricting *fucking* only to positions before stressed elements does not account for the ungrammaticality

of *fucking* and any personal pronoun.

The alternative explanation which immediately suggests itself is that *fucking* is itself part of the NP replaced by the pronoun. In that case, the pronoun *him* refers to that *fucking Charley* in

- (43) a. That fucking Charley was mad when I told him I wouldn't  
   go with {  
     him.  
     him.  
 }  
 b. \*That fucking Charley was mad when I told fucking him  
   that I wouldn't go with him.  
 c. \*That fucking Charley was mad when I told him I wouldn't  
   go with fucking him.

But is there any justification for deriving (43a) from (43d) rather than (43e)?

- (43) d. That fucking Charley<sub>i</sub> was mad when I told that fucking  
   Charley<sub>i</sub> that I wouldn't go with that fucking Charley<sub>i</sub>.  
 e. That fucking Charley<sub>i</sub> was mad when I told Charley<sub>i</sub> that  
   I wouldn't go with {  
     Charley<sub>i</sub>  
     emph. Charley<sub>i</sub>  
 }.

It seems to me that it is a matter of choice on the part of the speaker whether any or all of the tokens of a NP in a sentence has *fucking* etc. associated with it, not a condition that has to be met in order for certain NPs to be identical for some purpose. But it is also true that *fucking* etc. never precede any sort of pronoun, which would be true if *fucking* etc., were just a part of the entire NP which was identical in reference to the pronominalized NP. In the absence of clearer facts about the anaphoric identity of NPs in (43) I will simply assume it to be infelicitous for *fucking* to precede a pronominalized NP, of the ordinary sort. Destressed pronominal nouns may be combined with *fucking* quite freely:

- (43) f. Charley<sub>i</sub> got mad when I told the fucking idiot<sub>i</sub> to  
   fuck off.  
 g. Charley<sub>i</sub> got mad when I told the fucking idiot<sub>j</sub> to  
   fuck off.

So if one of the constituents happens to be an ordinary anaphoric pronoun, *fucking* can be associated only with the whole proposition or with some unpronominalized constituent, and not with the constituent it is semantically associated with. Thus many semantically possible combinations cannot be said grammatically.

The question which naturally arises is what possible explanation or explanations are to be found in the theory of syntax for the manifestation of something which means 'speaker disapproves of x' where x is a proposition or an NP within a proposition. Of course, 'DISAPPROVES' is not sufficient to characterize the meaning of *fucking* in (10), which contains clauses in which *fucking* is used with two different meanings. I do not think that in (10) Lennon disparages artists, but he does, probably, intend to disparage P.R. agents by contrast. Furthermore, (44) is not contradictory:

- (44) On Baile's Strand is a  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{*shitting} \\ \text{fucking} \\ \text{bloody} \end{array} \right\}$  great-assed play.<sup>9</sup>

*Fucking* resembles *bad*, *wicked*, *mean* etc., in having a primary pejorative meaning which is altered in some undefinable contexts to mean the opposite: 'great, fine' and so on.

Assuming that all the meanings of *fucking* can, in the best of all possible worlds, be accounted for satisfactorily, there remains the question of whether *fuck*, *shit on*, *bloody*, *damn* and variants *fucking*, *shitting* have different meanings in their pejorative uses. I myself am inclined to think not. Which one is used seems to me to be just a matter of random choice, a matter of 'euphony' or parallelism, and finally a function of an individual's scale of the shock value which he associates with, for instance, *blasted* vs. *shitting*. I see no semantic difference between (45a) and (45b).

- (45) a. The  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{fucking} \\ \text{dog} \end{array} \right\}$  knocked over the  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{fucking} \\ \text{garbage} \end{array} \right\}$  can.<sup>10</sup>  
       b. The  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{shitting} \\ \text{dog} \end{array} \right\}$  knocked over the  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{fucking} \\ \text{garbage} \end{array} \right\}$  can.  
            $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{bloody} \\ \text{damn} \end{array} \right\}$

The general meaning of such items is to indicate some sort of disapproval connected with a proposition or a constituent of it. This is part of the meaning of the sentence, and must be represented syntactically. I would like to make the guess that the syntactic structure resembles that of a performative which determines, in this case sometimes in conjunction with another performative, the illocutionary force of an utterance.<sup>11</sup> The performatives which associate some feature with a proposition or a part of one are question and possibly also whatever is responsible for contrastive stress. In both cases some constituent is marked. Like Question and Imperative, *fuck* and *shit on* and *damn* may not appear in restrictive or non-restrictive relative clauses (see note 4). In any case, such an analysis with the performative is in accord with Quang's penetrating observation that *fucking* in (46) is attributed to the speaker of the utterance, not the quoted speaker.

- (46) John says that his landlord is a fucking scoutmaster.

I would agree, with the qualification that even if John is being quoted verbatim, the speaker must agree that there is something disagreeable about scoutmasters. DISAPPROVE is compatible with most types of performative (declarative, questions, rude imperatives, promises, etc.). The exception is the polite imperative noted by Lakoff (oral tradition)

- (47) Shut the fucking door,  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{will you?} \\ \text{*won't you?} \end{array} \right\}$

in which the tag question *won't you* indicates an inappropriate sort of politeness or deference.

One final phonological feature should be mentioned. It was mentioned previously that *fucking* etc., cannot precede some constituents with relatively low stress. This is not true just of constituents. It

is possible to permute the *fucking* modifying a constituent between certain parts of the constituent which need not themselves be constituents! Most people are familiar with *abso-fucking-lutely*; *abso* and *lutely* are clearly not constituents. But this permutation is possible only if the primary word-stress follows *fucking*.

- (48) It's auto-fucking-matic.  
 (49) \*I ate at the auto-fucking-mat.  
 (50) He's a snob because he's diplo-bloody-matic.  
 (51) \*He's a snob because he's a diplo-bloody-mat.

Compounds with final stress also allow the permutation, and normal initially stressed compounds do not:

- (52) He's the vice-fucking-président.  
 (53) \*He doesn't get to live in the White fucking House.  
 (54) He's the fucking vice-président.

I maintain that (48)-(53) are the result of a permutation rule because I see no difference in meaning between (54) and (52). It seems that just a strong phonological constraint which conspires to produce certain sorts of rhythmic patterns prevents the permutation from applying.

#### NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was read at the Hallowe'en meeting of the Linguistic Circle of Staten Island under the title *\*\*\*\*ing, \*\*\*\*ing and \*\*\*\*\**. I am grateful to Ei. Adelaide Huhn for calling my attention to interesting corresponding forms in Tocharian and Hittite, which it was, however, beyond the scope of this paper to include. I am grateful also to several friends who provided information and judgments of grammaticality; through no fault of theirs one of them is currently being prosecuted by the telephone company for using the telephone for obscene purposes, because of one of our telephone discussions of the material in this paper.

My debt to the great trailblazers in this field, Quang Phuc Dong and his follower V. S. Anantalingam, is of course obvious.

<sup>1</sup> People I have gotten judgments of grammaticality from seem to have very strong conflicting opinions, perhaps even more so than on the usual sort of syntactic data. The cultural prohibitions against this style of speech may have inhibited some people I consulted. I myself, though a graduate of a girls' college, have only a passive command of this style, but even so, I find I have fairly strong notions of what could be said and what could not.

<sup>2</sup> *shitting (well)* may be considerably more restricted than the others for most speakers. For instance Quang (1969) notes that *shitting* is not freely substitutable for *fucking*, though *shit on* and *fuck* are mutually substitutable.

Other restrictions on *shitting* are of an interesting nature.

- (a) He's a shitting prick. (not used anaphorically)  
 (b) He's a fucking ass-hole.

are both grammatical,

- (c) \*He's a shitting ass-hole.  
 (d) \*He's a fucking prick.

are both ungrammatical. I guess this is because of the ambiguity of *fucking* and *shitting* in (c) and (d) with the verbs *fuck* and *shit*, which would seem to refer to the actions of anatomical structures, rather than indicating that an individual, who is either an inept or idiotic person, or someone officious and obnoxious, is disapproved of by the speaker. On the other hand, the existence of a personal pronoun *he* should presuppose that the referent of *prick* and *ass-hole* is human, at least animate.

<sup>3</sup> Quang (1969, footnote 9) notes that there is no sentence corresponding to the structure

- (a) Drown that cat<sub>i</sub> { Fuck that cat<sub>i</sub> }  
                                   { Shit on that cat<sub>i</sub> }

such as

- (b) Drown that cat which { fuck }  
                                   { shit on }

It should be noted that in this respect, *fuck* and *shit on* are not dissimilar from imperative verbs and questions. The following are ungrammatical, though synonymous sentences with different surface structures are acceptable:

- (c) Here's that book, { which I found interesting.  
                           which I promise to give you. (=a promise)  
                           \*which don't read.  
                           which { I advise you not to read }  
                           { I insist that you don't read }  
                           \*which I wonder what you think of.  
                           which I would like to know { what you think of }  
   { your opinion of }  
                           \*which what do you think of (it)? }

Note that the relative clauses in (c) are non-restrictive, in which overt performatives and perhaps declarative sentences have illocutionary force and are grammatical. Commands and questions which have undergone subject deletion and question-word preposing and inversion respectively are not even grammatical. This fact seems closely related to the ungrammaticality of *shit on* and *fuck* in relative clauses. It is an interesting question as to whether restrictive relative clauses are even semantically well-formed, that is, whether the speaker can define something on the basis of his disapproval of it, or whether he can only refer to some definite entity and indicate that he disapproves of it. The only counter-example to the relative clause restriction that I can think of is non-restrictive:

- (d) That's spinach, which the hell with.

Preposing of a question word is impossible in a sentence containing *fuck* or *shit on*. Instead the same order is used as for echo questions, but with different intonation (falling rather than rising).

- (e) Shit on what?  
 (f) Fuck the man who invented what?  
 (g) \*What shit on?  
 (h) \*What fuck the man who invented?

By the way, I am not going to conclude that the above facts at all contradict Quang's assertions about the syntactic categories of *shit on*, *fuck* etc., but I do think that they indicate that some information is to be found in the murky realm of the performative verb.

<sup>4</sup> British English allows *bloody* as a predicate adjective, but not in those cases where relative clause reduction and adjective preposing could derive Adj N combinations. *Fucking* and *shitting* are never predicate adjectives, in any dialect.

- (a) Don't be bloody.  
 (b) He was bloody to me.  
 (c) Opening night was bloody. (not synonymous with 'disapproved of')  
 (d) The bloody opening finished us off.

compare (c) and (d) with the synonymous

- (e) Opening night was { horrible. }  
                                   { \*blasted. }  
 (f) The { blasted } opening night finished us off.  
                                   { \*horrible }  
                                   { goddamn }

<sup>5</sup> Nouns include *shit*, *fuck*:

- (a) John is a shit.  
 (b) That stupid fuck tried to sell me insurance.

I do not see much difference in meaning between (b) and

- (c) That fucking idiot tried to sell me insurance.

Nouns like *shit* and *fuck* referring to persons generally have full stress, and in this regard are unlike unstressed or low-stressed semi-pronominal nouns like *bastard*, which can be used anaphorically. Such use of *fuck* and *shit* sounds odd to me:

- (d) John called and { the fucking idiot } tried to sell me insurance.  
                                   { ?the stupid fuck }  
                                   { ?the silly shit }  
                                   { the bastard }

if completely destressed. In view of the fact, noted later, that *fucking* etc. cannot precede an unstressed element, it may be that stressed *fuck* and *shit* in contexts like (d) consist of DISAPPROVED + PRONOUN. If so,

then the use of such nouns referring to persons may be an alternative to associating *fucking* with the entire proposition, when the semantic representation associates it with a phonologically unacceptable NP.

<sup>6</sup> Notice here that *fucking* seems to have clear perjorative meaning only in the second clause. This subject will be discussed, or rather evaded, in later sections of the paper.

<sup>7</sup> Compare J. Bltxskrp's insightful remark, 'The mystery and beauty of the English verbal system lies in the fact that the marked member of the opposition has purely privative meaning.' (1938:212).

<sup>8</sup> Normally *fucking* follows numbers, but it precedes names. When a number is an integral part of a name, like the Three Bears, Seven Dwarfs, etc., the whole name includes the number. This also applies to times and sums of money:

- (a) I waited until { *fucking* 4 o'clock in the morning }  
                                   \*4 *fucking* o'clock in the morning }  
 (b) You didn't give me { any *fucking* ten dollars }, but I won't  
                                   ?\*any ten *fucking* dollars }  
       pay ten *fucking* dollars for it.

*Fucking well* versus *fucking* appears with sentences which have *for-to* and *poss-ing* complementizers, with deletion of subjects by Equi-NP-Deletion, showing that S-pruning has not taken place. Plain nominalizations take *fucking*.

<sup>9</sup> Uttered by Mike Kohn in 1961, in you should pardon the word Paris, at a rehearsal of this rather recondite and fey work of W. B. Yeats'. This is probably the genesis of the present work.

<sup>10</sup> See similar copious examples in Jespersen, *Nexus*. pp. 99-101. I am grateful to S. Robbins for bringing this work to my attention.

<sup>11</sup> This conclusion was arrived at somewhat independently of McCawley (1970), where it is presented in very brief form. McCawley is, of course, one of Quang's favorite students.

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