

"Tongue twisters"

It's a Minute or Two to Two
(*13h58 ou 13h59*)

Through these trees three fleas* flew
(* *puces*)

Chopsticks* shops stock Chinese chopsticks
(* *baguettes pour manger*)

Betty bought some butter - 'But,' said she, 'this butter's bitter!'

Peter Piper picked a pickled* pepper
(* *macéré dans du vinaigre*)

She sells sea shells* by the sea shore
(* *coquillage*)

Witch* watchers watch witches who George Washington wants watched
(* *sorcière*)

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Tongue twister is an informal term for a word group that's hard to [pronounce](#) properly.

A form of [verbal play](#), tongue twisters rely on a sequence of [phonemes](#) that are similar but distinct, and therefore difficult to articulate clearly and quickly.

Examples and Observations

- "We supply wristwatches for witchwatchers watching witches Washington wishes watched."
(James Thurber, *Lanterns and Lances*. Harper, 1961)
- Top chopsticks shops stock top chopsticks.
- "Chester chooses chestnuts, cheddar cheese with chewy chives. He chews them and he chooses them. He chooses them and he chews them. . . . those chestnuts, cheddar cheese and chives in cheery, charming chunks."
(*Singing in the Rain*, 1952)
- "Just about everything in this world is easier said than done, with the exception of 'systematically assisting Sisyphus's stealthy, cyst-susceptible sister,' which is easier done than said."
(Lemony Snicket, *The Hostile Hospital*. HarperCollins, 2001)
- **Dr. Seuss's Silly Stuff**
"Try to say this, Mr. Knox, please. . . .

"Through three cheese trees three free fleas flew.
While these fleas flew, freezy breeze blew.
Freezy breeze made these three trees freeze.
Freezy trees made these trees' cheese freeze.
That's what made these three free fleas sneeze.

"Stop it! Stop it!
That's enough, sir.
I can't say such silly stuff, sir."
(Dr. Seuss, *Fox in Socks*. Random House, 1965)
- **Betty Botta**
"Betty Botta bought some butter;
'But,' said she, 'this butter's bitter!
If I will put it in my batter,

It will make my batter bitter.
But a bit o' better butter
Will but make my batter better.'
Then she bought a bit o' butter
Better than the bitter butter,
Made her bitter batter better.
So 'twas better Betty Botta
Bought a bit o' better butter."
(Carolyn Wells)

- **The Best Tongue Twister**

"The best **tongue-twister** is not 'Betty beat a bit of butter to make better batter.' No. Nor is it 'Black bugs blood.' Or 'Rubber buggy bumpers.' No. And it's not 'Of all the smells I have ever smelt, I never smelt a smell that smelt like that smell smelt.' No, no, no. The best tongue-twister is 'A peck of pickled pepper Peter Piper picked. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper, where's the peck of pickled pepper Peter Piper picked?' If you can come up with a better tongue-twister than this I will buy you blackberries, buttons, and a box of mixed biscuits."

("Dr Sansom's Extreme Facts." *The Guardian*, November 3, 2007)

- **"Pad Kid Poured Curd Pulled Cold"**

"Forget Peter Piper and his Peck of Pickled Pepper--psychologists have come up with what may be the world's most frustrating **tongue twister**.

"It may not make much sense, but the phrase 'pad kid poured curd pulled cold' completely defeated volunteers taking part in a U.S. speech study.

"Asked to repeat the phrase 10 times at a fast lick, many of the participants clammed up and stopped talking altogether, according to lead researcher Dr Stefanie Shattuck-Hufnagel, from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston. . . .

"The tongue twister study, presented at the annual meeting of the Acoustical Society of America in San Francisco, was conducted to shed light on the brain's speech-planning processes."

("Can YOU Say 'Pad Kid Poured Curd Pulled Cold'?" *The Daily Mail* [UK], December 4, 2013)

- **"At a Minute or Two to Two"**

"What a to-do to die today at a minute or two to two.
'Tis a thing distinctly hard to say, and harder still to do.
For they'll beat a tattoo at twenty-to-two,
A rat-a-tat, tat-a-tat, tat-a-tat, tat-a-tattoo,
And the dragon will come when he hears the drum,
At a minute or two to two today, at a minute or two to two."
(Author unknown)

- **Who Sells Sea Shells by the Seashore?**

"Mary Anning was one of the few women to make a success in paleontology and one

of the fewer still whose success was not linked to that of a paleontologist spouse (or any spouse: she was single). She made five major fossil discoveries from 1811 to her death in 1847, and many lesser ones.

"Why then is she best known as the inspiration for the **tongue twister** 'She sells sea shells by the seashore'?

"The answer lies in her gender, her poverty, her lack of formal education, her regional accent--as it might even today."

(Katherine Bouton, "Tale of an Unsung Fossil Finder, in Fact and Fiction." *The New York Times*, February 1, 2010)

- **Writing 'Rite'**

"A right-handed fellow named Wright,
In writing 'write' always wrote 'rite'
Where he meant to write right.
If he'd written 'write' right
Wright would not have wrought rot writing 'rite.'"
(anonymous)

- **Assimilation**

"[W]e have seen how one sound assimilates to another. As we pronounce words, our tongue moves toward one point in the mouth, but our nervous system has already prepared itself to fire off another impulse for the next sound. In some cases, the impulses pile up and jumble the articulation, as when we try to repeat a **tongue twister** like *rubber baby buggy bumpers* or *she sells sea shells by the sea shore.*"
(Joseph M. Williams, *Origins of the English Language: A Social and Linguistic History*. Simon and Schuster, 1975)