2  Immediate context analysis: distinguishing meanings by studying usage

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1  Introduction

The first part of this paper is a short personal and anecdotal record of my earliest experience of doing corpus analysis with John Sinclair. Before moving to Birmingham in June 1983 I had spent ten years editing the first edition of *Collins English Dictionary (CED)*, a task in which introspection played a large part, and then three years studying lexical semantics at the University of Essex. I was dissatisfied with what I felt was excessive reliance on introspection in CED. Accordingly, I had collected and transcribed a small corpus of spoken business English, as a foundation for two ELT textbooks published by Cambridge University Press. However, I had no idea what lay in store for me at Birmingham. The first part of the paper recollects ‘the shock of the new’.

The main part of the paper consists of a commentary on a sorted classification of concordance for the word *lap* and its inflections in the British National Corpus, the concordance lines being presented in the Appendix. The idea was to examine how well Sinclair’s teachings stand up, after 17 years, to analysis of a word in a much larger corpus, and whether the original Birmingham corpus of 7.3 million words is to be regarded as representative or idiosyncratic, in the light of a much larger body of evidence collected with the avowed intention of being ‘representative’.

In addition, I also consider a general issue in corpus analysis: how far can the immediate context of a word in use be used to determine its meaning? Sinclair has said, ‘Every distinction in meaning is associated with a distinction in form.’ Is this true? What counts as a distinction in meaning? What counts as a distinction in form? What is the nature of the association?

2  First exposure to corpus evidence

New recruits to the COBUILD team in the early 1980s – including project managers – were sat down with a concordance or two from the Birmingham Corpus (it had just achieved 7.3 million words, which seemed vast in those days), and invited to discuss their observations with Professor Sinclair. What were the words doing? What useful generalisations could a lexicographer make in the light of the evidence?

My baptism in corpus lexicography took place in letter L. We looked together at the word *lap* and its inflections. ‘There’s not much here about cats lapping up milk,’ I
grumbled. ‘I’m more impressed by all those full stops and commas,’ retorted John. I looked again.

Half an hour later, I knew that things would never be the same. The excitement of using Jem Clear’s concordancing program to see array after array of patterns of language in use, some more delicate than others, previously unreported patterns, and patterns that were far more salient than predicted by any dictionary or grammar, was comparable to opening a chalet door on a winter’s morning and seeing the sun glinting on fresh snow all around. I couldn’t wait to get stuck in.

By the end of the morning, I felt I had formulated a completely new theory of language. Being a master of the silent method in language teaching, John Sinclair allowed me to believe that I had done this all on my own, although I now realise that it would be nearer the truth to say that I was responding to the first of many Sinclairian insights into the nature of language.

To the best of my recollection, we made the following observations:

1. *lap* is used much more frequently to denote the part of the body that you only have when you are sitting down (‘sit on my lap’; ‘his hands clasped in his lap’) than in any of the competing senses (‘the fastest lap’; ‘the final lap’; ‘the sound of little waves lapping against the sea wall’; ‘cats lapping up milk’ etc)

2. When it is used in this ‘bodypart’ sense, it typically occurs with a possessive determiner as part of an adjunct in clause-final position (‘in her lap’; ‘on his lap’).

3. Lexicosyntactic patterns offer typical but not error-proof clues to meaning. For example ‘The cat was lapping up the milk as if it had not been fed for days’ contrasts with ‘It was a lie, but millions of newspaper readers lapped it up’. The lemma *lap up* contrasts with the lemma *lap*, but here *lap up* is subdivided into a literal and a figurative sense, distinguished by who is doing the lapping.

4. Conventional phraseology in natural language is not unduly respectful of logic, although its users may be. We noted that ‘the last lap of a journey’ plays on the ‘once round the track’ sense, although in fact it normally refers to linear progress. This perfectly conventional phrase is a case of a circle functioning as a metaphor for a line. However, it is by no means clear that English speakers think of it as a metaphor at all.

3 ‘Lap’ revisited

In the course of writing this paper, I revisited the lemma *lap*, using evidence from the British National Corpus (BNC), a corpus of 100 million words of contemporary English text collected as a balanced and representative sample of modern English. There are
1820 citations for lap, laps, lapped, lapping, lappings in the BNC. I took a randomly selected sample of 600 lines and sorted them into different sense categories, using syntactic and collocational criteria. The results are given in the Appendix. True to Sinclair’s principles (Sinclair 1991), I classified all uses of the word in the sample, not merely selected uses which happened to suit my purpose.

In summary, the uses of lap can be grouped into six main lexicosyntactic categories:

1 **Noun**
   Structure: lexicosyntactic norm: in/on [POSSDET] lap (300 lines; 50%).
   Meaning: “the flat area of the body of a seated person between the waist and the knee”
   Example: ‘Come and sit on my lap, Margaret.’

2 **Noun**
   Structure: lexicosyntactic norms: [NUMERAL] lap(s); lap [NUMERAL]; on... [ORDINAL] lap (172 lines; 28.66%).
   Meaning: “a circuit of a racetrack”
   Examples: Gary Jess set the pace for eight of the 12 laps
             Prost went out of the race on lap 26
             On the first lap, the Italian veteran was edged into fifth place

3 **Verb**
   Structure: lexicosyntactic norm: [PERSONi] lap [PERSONj] (6 lines; 1%).
   Meaning: “[PERSONi], when in a leading position in a race, completes an extra circuit of the track so as to overtake [PERSONj], who is at the back of the race”
   Example: Erik Comas closed in but spun when trying to lap Gilbert Scott

3.1 **Verb**
   Structure: lexicosyntactic norm: [PERSON] lap [CIRCUIT] (6 lines; 1%).
   Meaning: “[PERSON] go (drive, run, . . .) once round [CIRCUIT]”
   Example: They have lapped the 14-mile Nurburgring circuit

4 **Verb**
   Meaning: “[WATER] wash against [PLACE] with a gentle rippling sound”
   Example: the sound of little waves lapping against the seashore

5 **Verb**
   Structure: lexicosyntactic norm: [CREATURE] lap up [LIQUID] (5 lines; 0.83%).
   Meaning: “[CREATURE] take up [LIQUID] with the tongue in order to drink”
Immediate context analysis

Example: Soon the three [dogs] were gratefully lapping up cold, life-restoring liquid

6 Verb
Structure: lexicosyntactic norm: [PERSON] lap up [INFORMATION / PRAISE / PLEASURE / EXPERIENCE / BOOK / WRITER] (21 lines; 3.5%).
Meaning: “[PERSON] accept [INFORMATION / PLEASURE / EXPERIENCE PRAISE / BOOK / WRITER] eagerly and with obvious pleasure”
Example: Twelve young boys and girls clustered around him to lap up his words of wisdom

Each category is associated, not only with a word class (part of speech) but also with a lexicosyntactic norm. At a more delicate level, phraseological norms may be observed, often with special idiomatic meanings. As the term implies, norms are patterns of ordinary usage, not necessary conditions for correct usage. They are themes upon which endless grammatical and semantic variations are possible, given the creativity of human language use.

These six norms account for 92.65% of all uses of lap. What about the remaining 7.35%?

14 lines (2.33%) represent a technical term in sedimentology, all from the same text. It would require a specialist corpus of sedimentological texts to resolve the question whether this use is conventional (within its domain) or idiosyncratic.

A further 17 lines (2.8%) are names, acronyms, and other items which have nothing to do with the words under discussion. These are classified as mere noise. Gill’s Lap is a place name in Sussex; Phar Lap was a famous racehorse of the 1930s – so famous, indeed, that a software company is named after it; Chek Lap Kok is an island in Hong Kong, the site of a new airport. LAP is also an acronym for a political party somewhere.

Finally, 12 lines (2%) are unclassified. Four (possibly five) of these represent uses in romantic fiction or soft pornography, but the uses are too diverse to allow a norm to be postulated. A specialist corpus of this genre might reveal the emergence of a norm; alternatively, it might reveal that writing in this genre is mannered and imprecise. Three of the lines involve technical terms in domains as diverse as mechanical engineering and guitar strings. And one of the lines (‘her hands pulling anxiously at the lap of her dress’), ironically enough, represents the ancient meaning which the OED gives as the first sense under homograph 1: ‘a part (of a garment or the like) either hanging down or projecting so as to admit of being folded over; a flap; lappet.’

3.1 Lexical sets

In the above summary, words in capital letters and square brackets stand for lexical sets (paradigmatic groups of words sharing some semantic component, which select roughly the same meaning of the target word). Norms of usage are also sometimes exploited to
create special meanings, particularly ad-hoc metaphors. It is important to distinguish between norms and exploitations, and to identify norms clearly as prototypes of conventional usage, associated with prototypical meanings. Associated with some or all of the categories are a variety of conventional, though rare, idiomatic expressions such as ‘in the lap of the gods’ and ‘on the last lap of our journey’.

3.2 A checklist?

The syntactic patterns identified here look remarkably like a checklist. But Fillmore (1975) argued cogently against simplistic checklist theories of meaning. Can these two viewpoints be reconciled? One way of doing so might be to argue that the categories listed here are indeed a checklist, but not of meanings: they constitute instead a checklist of prototypical norms of usage, associated with norms of belief and meaning, which speakers and writers draw on to create new meanings.

3.3 Validity of analysis of general corpora

Thus, the general observations made in 1983 with the 7.3 million word Birmingham corpus and reflected in the Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary are confirmed by the much larger BNC. This is encouraging: it encourages us to believe, with all due caution, that these corpora really are telling us something about the conventional usage of modern English, not merely about the particular texts in the corpus. There has been a great deal of debate about whether a corpus can really be representative, and sceptics have said, ‘Ah, collect a different corpus and you will get different facts.’ But it is clear from comparative analyses such as this that the differences pale into insignificance compared with the similarities. The value of the larger corpus lies partly in the fact that it increases the confidence of our observations, presents evidence for additional facts about rare words and rare senses, and makes possible a much more delicate analysis of collocation and phraseology.

This may all seem obvious enough, but its value is reinforced when we consult general dictionaries not based on a corpus. Webster’s New World Dictionary, for example, one of the most widely admired (and widely purchased) American popular dictionaries, gives as sense 1 of lap: ‘[Now Rare] the loose lower part of a garment, which may be doubled or folded over; skirt of a coat or gown’, and as sense 2: ‘the front part of the skirt when it is held up to form a hollow place in which things can be carried’. Corpus analysis is necessary, if only as a corrective to the notion that such dictionaries, influenced as they are by historical principles and a focus on unusual usage, give a true account of modern English. But of course corpus analysis can yield a wealth of additional, more delicate information.
3.4 Predictability

This kind of corpus analysis, then, enables us to make predictions – disconfirmable predictions, not self-fulfilling prophecies – about what to expect in unseen texts. And if our analysis is good, it will provide overt criteria for distinguishing one sense from another. This kind of painstaking corpus analysis is worthwhile partly because of its predictive power. It would be possible, though expensive, to draw up a list of lexicosyntactic norms for each word in the language, and to associate a ‘meaning’ (or, rather, a list of legitimate inferences) with each one.

So we can predict that the next random sample of 600 uses of *lap* in general modern English will have the following characteristics at least:

1. Approximately 50% of all occurrences of the lemma will be for the “*seated body part*” sense. Nearly all of these will be uses of the singular noun *lap* in an adverbial in clause-final position. Among them will be a small number of idiomatic uses with special meanings (‘dump something in someone’s lap’; ‘something fell into somebody’s lap’; ‘in the lap of the gods’; ‘in the *lap of luxury*’).

2. If the new, unseen corpus contains a similar proportion of newspaper sports reports, then about 30% of all occurrences of the lemma *lap* will denote a single *circuit of a race track*, and will very often be in collocation with an ordinal or cardinal numeral. If the proportion of sports reporting is smaller, this percentage will be smaller.

3. Verb uses will be much rarer than noun uses.

4. Sentences in which a person laps another person will be rare (only about 1% of all uses of *lap*). If found, the meaning will probably (but not certainly) be that the two people are in a race and that person one, in a leading position, has driven or run all the way round the track so as to overtake person two, who is at the back of the race. There will also be uses of this sense in which a person or competitor ‘laps’ the circuit (i.e. drives or runs round it), rather than lapping another competitor. This sense is absent from most dictionaries.

5. The “*animal taking up liquid with the tongue*” sense of *lap up* will be less common than the conventionalised metaphor in which a PERSON *laps up* information, praise, pleasure, a pleasurable experience, or some other stimulus. Sinclair might say that this should be regarded as an established literal sense in its own right, but I prefer to believe that, to count as a paid-up member of the English-speaking community, you must associate the image of a person lapping up information or praise with the image of a cat lapping up milk, and know that the former is a conventionalised metaphor.
4 How reliable is immediate-context analysis?

4.1 Sufficiency and probability

It would be convenient if transitive use with animate subject and animate object were a sufficient condition to select sense 3 of *lap*, but unfortunately natural language does not work like that. As so often, there are exceptions. Line 574 (‘Merciless, he lapped her’), for example, involves one person lapping another, but it has nothing to do with motor racing or athletics. This example might seem at first glance to give the lie to Sinclair’s axiom that ‘every distinction in meaning is associated with a distinction in form’. What is the distinction in form here? The immediate context of 574 is syntactically identical to that of, say, 475 (‘as well as lapping her two female rivals’), but the meaning is very different.

Here is another example of the need for extensive detailed work in establishing relevant criteria for immediate-context analysis. Occurrence as part of a clause-final adverbial is not a sufficient condition for distinguishing sense 1 from sense 2, because (unfortunately) there are many clause final adverbials in sense 2 as well as sense 1. The presence or absence of a cardinal or ordinal numeral in the immediate context is a more effective distinguisher. If present, it points with a very high degree of probability to sense 2. The same is true of the plural form *laps*: *laps* (plural) are common parlance in reports of motor races and athletics, but unusual in speaking of body parts.

Unsupported clues, then, are suggestive but not conclusive. Multiple clues may add up to conclusiveness.

The word ‘fall’ in collocation with ‘POSSDET lap’ raises the likelihood that we are in the presence of the idiom ‘It fell into his lap’ = ‘He obtained it easily’. But then we find:

249 It fell on my legs and lap through the skylight, a lovely slow silver moon.

This is not really metaphorical, although it is not centrally conventional either.

4.2 Anaphora resolution

It is worth mentioning in passing that anaphors need to be resolved before we can classify with confidence, and an essential preliminary for effective natural language processing by machine. In 249 above, it is necessary to know that ‘it’ refers to moonlight, for analysis to proceed.

Another example:

487 for there it was again, grey and dank, lapping at wooden pilings that lined its banks
To understand this clause correctly and to be sure that it is not a metaphor, we need to establish that ‘it’ refers to a river. Or:

520 Look around, there’s a whole sea of it lapping at us everywhere we walk, sit, eat, and pray!

Here, ‘it’ is human greed. Unless we know this, accurate classification is impossible. If ‘it’ had turned out to be mud, we might have classified 520 as a norm, not an exploitation.

4.3 Mutual support

In actual text, immediate-context clues are not unsupported. They are supported by other clues, including the wider collocates. With 574 we find ‘long animal cry’, ‘bra’, ‘damp lace’, ‘coverlet’, ‘sensation’ and ‘Oh God’. Whereas 475 has the wider collocates ‘race’, ‘overtook’, ‘Championships’, and ‘qualifying time’. Thus, even though this is a rare case where the immediate lexicosyntactic context is ambiguous, the wider context is not.

Then there is the matter of the title of the work. Line 475 is from an athletics report in a newspaper; line 574 is from a work of fiction entitled Hunter’s Harem. These facts alone raise certain expectations in the reader.

Genuine ambiguities, then, do not occur. Even ambiguities in the immediate context are rare. They are the exception that prove the rule – for rules there undoubtedly are. Prediction on the basis of immediate-context analysis must nevertheless be approached with caution in the present stage of our knowledge. Careful corpus analysis can greatly improve the probability of our predictions (i.e. the identification of meaning from the immediate context, but a research project is needed which will be very precise about the relevant lexicosyntactic criteria, which must for the time being at least be regarded as probabilities, not certainties. We are a long way from being able to make such predictions with absolute certainty, and indeed there appear to be principled reasons why certainty is impossible. Language, after all, is an analogical system, and mathematical precision may be an inappropriate goal.

4.4 Exploitations of norms

Sense 4 typically involves waves washing gently against a shore. This use occurs in a surprisingly wide variety of syntactic patterns, while in addition metaphorical exploitations (‘a sea of cloud lapping at our feet’, ‘a sea of greed lapping at us’, ‘the carpet lapped at the glass’, ‘melancholy lapping at the lids of her eyes’ etc) are almost as common as the central, conventional meaning. This is unusual.

About 97% of uses of lap are conventional, leaving about 3% which are unconventional in various ways.
At its simplest, one particular inflection or syntactic pattern may be perfectly grammatical but rare. Thus, for example, 95% of uses of *lap* in sense 1 are singular; the plural inflection is perfectly grammatical, but rare. Other departures from the norm are more dramatic and more interesting. For example, ‘the lap of the valley’ (line 300) is clearly a metaphor. Valleys don’t have laps. In line 223, the word is used literally within an extended metaphor, involving a metaphorical rather than a literal search.

223 Delia Sutherland searched her lap for the offers, the arguments, the good sense

Even though the word *lap* here is being used in the most literal sense, it could almost be classified as an exploitation (e.g. of ‘she looked down at her lap’), not least because it is so unusual to find *lap* used as the direct object of a transitive verb.

### 4.5 Literal and metaphorical meaning

The same form of words (e.g. ‘the last lap’) can be both literal and metaphorical. Compare:

327 he span off the rain-soaked track on the last lap [literal]
470 The only thing that kept me going on the last lap of the journey was the rhythm of my steps. [Conventional metaphor, metaphoricity signalled by ‘of the journey’]
471 We met together at the station and took the train on the last lap to Cambridge. [Conventional metaphor, metaphoricity less explicitly signalled]

Both conventionality and metaphoricity are multilayered. Bolinger’s description of a dictionary as ‘a nosegay of faded metaphors’ reminds us that there are also unfaded metaphors – fresh metaphors – which do not get into a dictionary.

Sometimes it is hard to say explicitly what aspect of the context is relevant. Quite a lot of inferencing can be called for to assign a meaning to an idiomatic expression. Consider the following dialogue (the wider context of line 468):

‘What are you reading?’
‘Rereading Anna Karenina.’
‘Oh well, that should keep you going for a little while.’
‘You bet.’
‘Funny, I find I’m rereading more books now. Going through my old favourites. Must be entering the last lap.’
‘Don’t be morbid, Charles.’

The context is clearly not motor-racing or athletics, so this must be an exploitation. So far, so good. But what does it mean, and how do we know? In the story (Simon Brett’s *Murder Unlimited* 1984), leading up to this fragment of conversation, the participants
are on a journey, so perhaps Charles is using the expression ‘the last lap’ in its conventional idiomatic sense: the final stage of a journey. This is plausible but wrong. It does not fit with the immediate context. How would reading books be relevant to the final stage of a journey? This point can be clarified if we look at the contexts in which ‘the last lap’ does mean the final stage of a journey, where the journey, distance, or destination is mentioned explicitly: ‘of the journey’, ‘to Cambridge’, ‘a one-kilometre walk’. In contrast to these uses, ‘the last lap’ in 468 almost certainly refers to the final stage of a life approaching its end. This is not made explicit in the immediate context, but it is hinted at strongly in the response ‘Don’t be morbid’.

5 Conclusions

Sinclair’s observations and the Birmingham 7.3 million word corpus are confirmed by the BNC, which provides a much larger set of data for more extensive analysis. By a wide definition of ‘form’ and a loose definition of ‘associated’, it is true that every distinction in meaning is associated with a distinction in form. And even by a narrow definition of ‘form’ (i.e. immediate context), the axiom is true as long as care is taken to identify relevant lexicosyntactic criteria and ignore noise.

The association between meaning and form is by no means straightforward, however. Although quite strong predictions can be made about meanings on the basis of immediate-context analysis, they must, in the present state of our knowledge, be regarded as probabilistic, not certain. A painstaking and systematic corpus-based analysis of the relevant lexicosyntactic criteria for meaning distinctions would be expensive but would greatly improve the ability of computational linguists to process meanings in texts.

It is not clear that competing meanings of a word should be regarded as a checklist of fully formed, competing interpretations in any cognitively realistic sense. But perhaps a dictionary-like checklist does form part of our mental inventory when we construct utterances and participate in discourse: an inventory of prototypes to be exploited, not of meanings to be fired up mindlessly.

References


Appendix: Exhaustive analysis of BNC citations for lap

1 BODYPART WHEN SITTING DOWN

NOUN; SYNTACTIC NORM: in/on POSSDET lap EOC

1. carWar said you were cross because I sat on Hepzibah 's lap ! " " Liar , " Carrie said . " You 're making
2. Oyster e said sitting down and clasping her hands in her lap ,
3. MFraey d Bill Waddy . <p_158> " She could have sat in my lap ,
4. Kirkup tメント Manager and he said , " come and sit on my lap ,
5. SenslF n the evening sun with The Times newspaper on his lap ,
6. AmPrin What a baby I am , a cry-baby . She put it in her lap ,
7. Madeir co . This shows Mary , with the baby Jesus on her lap ,
8. loving lilly-Villie sprawled like a baby on his mother 's lap ,
9. Summer Jacqueline who would run to her , climb on to her lap ,
10. ColSha sit back on her heels , let her hands lie in her lap ,
11. Krooked . " <p_110> Manolo pushed his seatbelt across his lap ,
12. HerLiv through the windscreen , his hands clasped in his lap ,
13. ArchAn sewing close to the fire and a cat rested on her lap ,
14. RingRØ tape-recorder out of his pocket and put it on his lap ,
15. Reluct her , sitting in a corner with some child on her lap ,
16. LitVic orothea Gilberd perched the tray on her mother 's lap ,
17. Whirlp wo ordeals . " <p_51> He clasped his hands in his lap ,
18. CotLan rotting muddle of arms and legs on his towelled lap ,
19. ForNig , madam . " <p_84> The cat jumped on to Mungo 's lap ,
20. NCycle press below . She was kneading the gloves in her lap ,
21. possiss ichair . Her leather hands danced a little in her lap ,
22. GuiltP er testing cold Big Mac to Trippy while straddling his lap ,
23. Butchr . He had other information in his mind and on his lap ,
24. AmnesA behaved in such a bold manner _ sitting on their laps ,
25. KFrost rything . <p_212> Peg sat rigid her basket on her lap ,
26. TAngel shouted Lloyd , and Beeby wriggled more into his lap ,
27. Cwhiten e intimate meditation , I sat with my hands on his lap ,
28. Trail18 d impassive , and Mary-Claude , with Sarah in her lap ,
29. PeaSki lies in their arms and hauled toddler's on to their laps ,
30. FoNig , madam . " <p_84> The cat jumped on to Mungo 's lap ,
31. Ghosts selves from the floor and out of each other 's laps ,
32. Intrrw causes this . Let your legs lie loosely in your lap ,
33. SexTrv d its workings and , as he sat to clean it on his lap ,
34. Scapeg word , lifted the baby out of the pram on to her lap ,
35. GoodHB was very affectionate from the start , sat on her lap ,
36. KFrost p to her throat . Emily sat with her hands in her lap ,
37. HisWom more of one piece and , returning her hand to her lap ,
38. HHeels her putting lips , she sucked . Sliding from his lap ,
39. diVhou ther swim . " She stood up and the records in her lap ,
40. CrwMk , his brown , beringed hands gently folded in his lap ,
41. mSnilie ate with us . She sat with the chicken pot in her lap ,
42. Deliri olls upon the wall , the anaemic cat in people 's laps ,
43. Hunter gently down until she was sitting sideways on his lap ,
44. summer Jacqueline who would run to her , climb on to her lap ,
45. Catlor eap on to the piano and then on to the pianist 's lap ,
46. SaSoci ep a piece of paper judiciously positioned on his lap ,
47. ShW1dA as asleep . i woke and found Lester 's head in my lap ,
48. Spring erful . " .PP He smiled as he lay his head in her lap .
"But what investigation? What's happened"

"Hold it between your knees," she hissed.

"I can't see it. Perhaps if I didn't know"

"It's a nervous thing I have."

"I thought we ought to meet today because"

"I must be laughed at, and that's true"

"Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I prefer t"

"My mother was an innocent young country l"

"Orrible for you, Mrs C. But he always w"

"Right, George. Let's go! I said, c"

"She must have gone somewhere, Mr Spink"

"Thank you, all of you," he says. "Th"

"Thank you," said Jim, "I appreciated"

"There isn't any more." <p_112> <p_116> "And real"

"There's nothing I can do to prolong the"
The nurse left the room. "Can you be gone?" Peg is playing patience on her lap. Smiles at Abberley. We can see bits of jewelry. Place the newspaper on her lap. She picked it up. In the Stop Press column. She moved a little but I couldn't have cared less. She looked at Sarah's face with troubled eyes. She loved to move her money around, a proc with a capital p. She had the skull half hidden in his lap and his little hand stroked the smooth bone, like a dying salmon in his lap. She felt excitement like a dying salmon in his lap and turned her face away towards her heels. She felt excitement like a dying salmon in his lap and turned her face away towards her heels. She flattened the spread comfortably on her lap. She had some trouble finding the right words in the middle of his lap. She had some trouble finding the right words in the middle of his lap. He frowned, pulled the napkin from his lap and laid it on the table as he stood up, shrinking his collar. The nurse sat quietly for a little, her hands in her lap. Then she said: "He left me £80,000. Did you..."

She felt desolate. "Being Irish isn't easy, " she said. She held the newspaper in her lap. She loved to move her money around, a proc with a capital p. She had the skull half hidden in his lap and his little hand stroked the smooth bone, like a dying salmon in his lap. She felt excitement like a dying salmon in his lap and turned her face away towards her heels. She flattened the spread comfortably on her lap. She had some trouble finding the right words in the middle of his lap. She had some trouble finding the right words in the middle of his lap. He frowned, pulled the napkin from his lap and laid it on the table as he stood up, shrinking his collar. The nurse sat quietly for a little, her hands in her lap. Then she said: "He left me £80,000. Did you..."

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AS MODIFIER: lap belt, lap box, lap strap, lap rug

AS MODIFIER: lap play
FDA changes from "lap dog into a watchdog". Starting with PDarkn he forest. You later found the corpse of a small lap dog nearby. You took the collar, sold the j

**Idiomatic Phrases**


- JGould nce of Australia had fallen miraculously into his lap, and that he would be able to publish from t
- AvEvMg 're Novell Authorised . .PP Drop a problem in our lap, and it 's no longer your problem _ it trans
- Whirlp ange and dangerous problem which she dumped in my lap, assured me I was the only man she could tru
- fracas I might invoke a few kilocreds to tumble into my lap, by acquiring a bit of phetam . Perhaps , I
- NewInt e boons of the new colonialism to drop into their laps , inshallah . They are pigmyfied , made remo
- UnPass because Jamie knew it might one day fall into his lap . .PP Twenty-five years ago , Charles had mar
- AcounC et . Basically , the world fell into Airtours '/$ lap . <p_36> But while the company 's management
- JGould nce of Australia had fallen miraculously into his lap , and that he would be able to publish from t
- JGould nce of Australia had fallen miraculously into his lap , and that he would be able to publish from t

**WIDER CONTEXT:** He had given the boy all the evidence , dumped it in his lap without ceremony , and left him to examine all , and act as the prince he was .

**PHRASEOLOGICAL NORM:** living in the lap of luxury

- MaNews y the pool of the villa: He lowered himself down on to the wide lap of the stone stair and drew her down beside h
- Plato's a vocabulary of blackness <l> no sunlight in the lap of the valley <l> holds at bay . </poem> <pag

**Exploitations**

- Flowrn . " <p_46> He lowered himself down on to the wide lap of the stone stair and drew her down beside h
- Plato's a vocabulary of blackness <l> no sunlight in the lap of the valley <l> holds at bay . </poem> <pag

**2 ONCE ROUND A TRACK**

**NOUN:** SYNTACTIC NORMS: NUMERAL[ORDINAL/CARDINAL] lap; on lap

**NUMERAL[CARDINAL]**

- TbSpor ardi ) two laps , 10 G Morbidelli ( Minardi ) two laps , 11 N Larini ( Ferrari ) two laps , 12 J La
- TbSpor en ( Ligier ) one lap , 6 S Modena ( Jordan ) one lap , 7 M Hakkinen ( Lotus ) one lap , 8 A Suzuki
- EsquID head . I was nuts . <p_117> At the end of my five laps , I wheedled and wangled for another session
- BelfsA tacks but all were chased down . .PP On the final lap , Mark Smyth ( O'Rourke's Coal ) opened a smal
- AaLeis tripped up during the pursuit on the penultimate lap , McKean opened daylight over the rest of his
- BcLeis and led by eight seconds at the end of the first lap , an advantage he increased to 15 seconds bef
- BelfsB ian Reid slotted into second place on the opening lap , and like Moodie , never looked like losing
- BelfsB ian Reid slotted into second place on the opening lap , and like Moodie , never looked like losing
- LcLeis closed within four seconds at Ramsey on the final lap , but the 37 year-old Reid put the power down
- CntNeJ e in the calendar . .PP The challenge ahead ... 5 laps , each more than 6 miles long , of the most
- Formul e in the calendar . .PP The challenge ahead ... 5 laps , each more than 6 miles long , of the most

24
As the race headed towards the final 10 laps, he was in second place, but under serious pressure. AcroB's engine was running at its limit, and he knew he would have to go flat out and to hell with any immediate concerns. In the final round at Thruxton next week to win his first Grand Prix, he would have to be at his best.

In the lead at the Curva Dolo on the sixth lap, AcroB was in fourth place, having lost the lead on lap three. He had been overtaken by the Italian veteran, who had every reason to be proud of his efforts. The Italian was edged into fifth place, leaving his team-mate in second.

"After that, I didn't have so many chances," he said. 

During the practice session, AcroB was able to make his way through the pack as the pace lap began. When the racers rounded the hairpin, Strega jumped to the front of the pack, and the rest of the field fell into line behind him.

It took him 14 more laps before he could squeeze alongside Brundle, who was then in second place. Strega moved into the lead for the next two laps before Joey hit back and took the lead back. A lap later, AcroB was up to second, and the race became a battle for the win.

"I didn't have so many chances," he said. 

With Berger having retired after only four laps, the double retirement with electrical problems out of the race left the field wide open.

In many ways, this moment was infinitely more important than winning the race itself. AcroB was in control of this race leading from the second lap and after that it just wasn't a race. He ended the day with a stunning 105.89mph lap record, which was only 0.06mph slower than the fastest lap of the day.

"I'm really happy with the lap," he said. "I've been working hard on my driving, and it paid off today."

AcroB was in medal territory if a championship is to be held it has to be on a lap course. This would involve completing fifteen laps of the circuit, and the race would be won or lost on the basis of the fastest lap.

"I think it's a great format," he said. "It rewards consistency and speed, and it's a great spectacle for the spectators."
Niall Mackenzie retired after five laps when his Yamaha developed engine trouble, a

Audi for a point after a tense battle in the final laps when he spun off the rain-soaked track on the

Canoe served his penance quickly and the order after one lap was Goodchild, Fenwick, Powles, Nelson, M

Lauda was involved in an accident on lap two of the 1976 race that nearly killed him.

Belfs b ) 107.75 . .PP Record Lap _ Moodie 110.57mph on lap two .

AutocB Sunday, Senna having produced his usual stunning lap to take pole , Prost following through in the

GiSport again he eked out his resources across the two laps to set a new best of 1min 48.4sec . .PP That

TbSpor e Aussies have made the mistake of attempting one lap too far without a pit-stop . .PP Dwyer,

FalImp . One evening after she 'd completed a couple of laps of the pool she was surprised to see David M

BfLeis  to walk away . Prost clocked a record qualifying lap time of one minute 21.179 seconds to eclipse

BelfsA seven minutes . .PP By the end of the fifth of seven laps the first two groups had come together and a

MikeAs till do , but I 've learnt now to keep them in my lap so that the sweat coming off the hands soaks

NaLeis " Hardy , who ran the fastest intermediate ladies lap in the Northern relay championships at Derby

LgLeis was quicker and I was pushing hard until about 10 laps from the finish when I thought the engine so

MbSpor  great all day and I was really relaxed until six laps from the end . .PP " But after that , I suff

AutocB the Ford HB V8 had brought his race to a halt six laps from the end . .PP The old order may not have

LeLeis it started in 1936 . .PP A women 's race over one lap looks set for a local victory by British cham

WisdeD hands with the England team before starting on a

LcLeis gan younger Gridley can produce one impressive lap of the Olympic Stadium in the Golden Gaia mee

GiSpor st four-minute mile . But by the end of the third lap the pace had slouched to 3min 7.2sec . .PP In

Nais the time , tagged the wall in turn nine with nine laps to go . It was the first crash in an Ind

Formul hough Master James were standing still . With ten laps to go , he fell back with a puncture and And
Immediate context analysis

460 EsquiDol 's Escort XRi 's under his instruction , three laps with him driving and five laps in a single - s
461 NonScA Most of us set ourselves personal targets : four laps within six minutes , for example . As time w
462 NMeXPD ns , these ugly ducklings have started the second lap with their feathers unruffled and their rhyt
463 living If it is 2/3km around a running track , how many laps would a runner have to make to do 12km ? <pa
464 Formul at only those drivers who had completed the first lap would be allowed to re - start . At the time

Idiomatic Phrases

PHRASEOLOGICAL NORM: DET lap of honour
465 Cristi ust a Union Jack into my hand and I set off on my lap of honour , the first British sprinter to win
466 MbSpor aped over one arm , revels in the applause on his lap of honour </ct> <h1> CRACKERS ! </h1> .PP BRI
467 WildJu sroom . Harbury was doing what Holly would call a lap of honour , circling the room saying goodbyes

PHRASEOLOGICAL NORM: the last lap [of a journey]
468 MUnpro ugh my old favourites . Must be entering the last lap . " <p_152> " Don't be morbid , Charles
469 NestOf ome , " she said . " I 'm sure we 're on the last lap now . " <p_361> It seemed that she was right
470 HighJy 14> The only thing that kept me going on the last lap of the journey was the rhythm of my steps . I
471 hamish her at the station and took the train on the last lap to Cambridge . There I was to have a long con
472 ClimbA , on the snowfields of the col du Midi . The last lap was a one kilometre walk up the gently inclin

3 DRIVE OR RUN ROUND A CIRCUIT; OVERTAKE SOMEONE WHO IS ON A PREVIOUS LAP

473 VERB TRANSITIVE; SYNTACTIC NORMS: [DRIVER/COMPETITOR] lap [DRIVER/COMPETITOR]; [DRIVER/COMPETITOR] lap [CIRCUIT]

474 Formul ical mistake , which put Niki on Tambay 's tail . Lapping Laffite , Tambay got back easily , but Ni
475 AutocA pion Erik Comas closed in but spun when trying to lap Andrew Gilbert Scott . Comas recovered , alth
476 NLeis s run with the intermediate boys , and as well as lapping her two female rivals Matthew overtook tw
477 DiLeis been tested all over the world . <p_10> They have lapped the 14-mile Nurburgring circuit 40 seconds
478 BcLeis n his Westfield , but when the pair came round to lap the Metro class for the first time , Porter f
479 TaSpor o Ardiles and Ricky Villa , just weeks after they lapped the River Plate Stadium in Buenos Aires as

4 WATER

480 VERB; SYNTACTIC NORM: [WATER] lap [ADVERBIAL OF PLACE]

481 NTMagB each way of low tide . <BLOCKQUOTE> .PP The water lapped about their feet , and they went back to t
482 WCyCle lly he went to sleep to the sound of little waves lapping against the sea - wall . <page=85> <h1> CHA
483 HUdiSt q the tarry , fishy air . The tide was in ; water lapped against the harbour wall . She came to a b
484 PalacS e there . I sit on a rock and listen to the water lap and the boys whistle as they pull their tin b
485 Attenb it hummocks its way closer to the sea . The waves lap around it , the deepening water lifts its bod
486 Coffin river and stood there at the opening , the water lapping at his feet . <p_89> Behind him Place and
487 BirWa e way of coast guard stations , it once had waves lapping at its doorstep . But , over the last hun
488 TalesM tops of my thighs when I got in ; cooler now , it lapped at the dome of my stomach . Two flannels ,
489 CommKg there it [the river] was again , grey and dank , lapping at wooden pilings that lined its banks .
489 PalacS something . There is just the sound of the water lapping gently at the prow , the occasional laugh
490 Heathn e on . <h1> Forty-Six </h1> <p_179> The bathwater lapped gently up around her neck as she slid deep
491 DTrick tumult of adversarial currents , the turbid water lapping high at the trunks of willows and alders
492 LastEn omed , hung with mist , and below them lake water lapped on the flattened shingle . The smell of wa
493 Climbr nd around the great buttresses above , lake - water lapping on the shingle shore where I was standing
494 FloWoa ked against the stone wall and the freezing water lapped over his boots . He remained like that for
495 AdamPa m the spears ; and , stumbling , she felt the sea lapped round her ankles . <p_52> The spears followed
496 MidKrng elted glass . The tide was high but on the turn , lapping sluggishly against the rocks at the river
496 UnPass air . .PP There was a silence . The turquoise sea lapped softly at the hot white sands . .PP Tony s
SYNTACTIC NORM: [PLACE] be lapped by [WAVES]

VERBAL ADJECTIVE

VERBAL NOUN

VERB TRANSITIVE (literal)

VERB WITH ADVERBIAL OF PLACE: METAPHORS AND OTHER EXPLOITATIONS

VERB TRANSITIVE: METAPHORS AND OTHER EXPLOITATIONS

VERB INTRANSITIVE: EXPLOITATION

NOUN

5 ANIMAL DRINKING

VERB; SYNTACTIC NORM: [CREATURE] lap (up) [LIQUID]
Exploitation

355 Slayer d reentered the priest 's house where the boy was lapping a second bowl of soup as hungrily as a st

6 PERSON ABSORBING (AND ENJOYING) INFORMATION, PRAISE, etc

VERB; SYNTACTIC NORM: [PERSON] lap up [INFORMATION/BOOK/WRITER/PLEASURE/PRAISE/EXPERIENCE – PLEASURABLE]

BooksA already so popular with the media that they will lap her up . It is a fun glitzy read , and I hope

TSpice rawling out of the woodwork , eyes like saucers , lapping it all up . It makes me so angry any on

MilWar , apparently . " <p_71> " I am ? But the men are lapping it up _ so are their floozies . Listen to

WhRose aturally , I can resist anything but flattery and lapped it up like a hungry cat does milk . Of cou

LostFr ilk , crouched , shivering , near to the fire . " Lapping it up like a weak kitten , " thought Ferg

Papers ronweiser false letters and die of laughter as he lapped them up . Probably she had some old typing

TSFrie and the later Yeats ; and I discovered that they lapped this up as if slaking a mental thirst . In

Hunter writhed in an agony of pleasure . Merciless , he lapped her , sucked her , grazed her with his tee

LImage as as swiftly melted into the next as a tiny wave lapped by a faster following . His hands were mov

Sedimt f . The section is then returned to the Precision Lapping Machine with paraffin oil and 600F grit a

Sedimt samples , a hacksaw will produce a face ready for lapping . The surface need not be perfectly flat

Sedimt ee and introduce no dimensional errors into final lapping . <p_94> Mounts must be left to cure unde

Sedimt f . The section is then returned to the Precision Lapping Machine with paraffin oil and 600F grit a

Sedimt etres thick and lapped flat or polished , using a lapping compound with paraffin oil lubricant . <p

Sedimt time is not critical . For critical work , final lapping is done with 0.25 µm diamond paste

Sedimt s also has the advantage of freeing the precision lapping machine for preparing successive batches

Sedimt ion stages . With a properly maintained precision lapping machine , it should easily be possible to

Sedimt face , truing <reg> and conditioning of the lead lap must be done frequently , and care taken to e

Sedimt during this process . After washing and change of lap paper , polishing is continued with 1 µmicro;

Sedimt as lubricant . <p_87> One or more faces are then lapped smooth either by hand or by an automatic l

Sedimt piled to the first face , which is mounted on the lapped surface of the slide . The assembly is the

Sedimt G THE CUT FACE /h4> <p_102> Sawn faces should be lapped to at least 600F Carborundum stage . For g

8 UNCLASSIFIED

Butter s , her inflamed stirrings of the senses _ all be lapped away . A louder shout than usual took her

LImage as as swiftly melted into the next as a tiny wave lapped by a faster following . His hands were mov

Hunter writhed in an agony of pleasure . Merciless , he lapped her , sucked her , grazed her with his tee

Father he street , open his trousers and feel her tongue lapped him and her lips close on him . But the momen

Irelnd tuesque elderly lady in curly grey hair , several laps of necklaces and a sweeping gown that may ha

ChuKuo own bitterly , her hands pulling anxiously at the lap of her dress , then stood angrily . <p_228> " I

JaneJo Francis and Christopher dissolved in laughter , lapped theirs up and declared it very good . Marc

EverbPB now Alex , who is single and lives in London , is lapping up Buddymania from signing sessions outsi

GoodFB liers . <p_17> If you enjoy a whodunnit , you 'll lap up Janet Laurence 's Hotel Morgue ( Macmillan

CnNEf r and now five month old Teka is fighting fit and lapping up all the attention . .PP Teka has tried

DIhouse r way . Le\l'onie hunched on the bedside chair and lapped up comics , while The\l're\lase dozed . <p_9

KylieM married . And viewers on both sides of the globe lapped up every sugary second to the dream story-

ManEnd elve young boys and girls clustered around him to lap up his words of wisdom . <page=246> <p_246> "

SoundedA t , technical matters aside , the whole thing was lapped up keenly by the crowd . Rumoured appearan

MafHeat hut even waiting to be asked " what 's up ? " he laps up the attention . Prompting some to suggest

SoundedA sfomation . Faced with a braying crowd intent on lapping up their heroes ' /$ every command , Chuck

Castie dder over the family heirlooms ? Marc would lap up the opportunity to use it against her . An
Words in Context

581 Guitar is guitar " and a mysterious thing called the Kona lap steel ... .PP " That 's an instrument made by
582 884507 rant to take great care to seal all side and end laps with Rockwell sealing strip using two strips
583 EngDth neged over the last seventy years . <page=85> <hl> Lapped in Lead , Encased in Oak : The Coffin </hl

9 NAMES and NOISE

584 EMysts nd to fall into alignment with others was Gill 's Lap , high on Ashdown Forest . This was movingly
585 EMysts through the medium of sound . On visiting Gill 's Lap pine clump , it seemed to him that the sound
586 GtRace he training bill . <p_82> The colt was named Phar Lap , Sinhalese for " lightning ". He was gelded
587 GtRace > What was established beyond doubt was that Phar Lap , winner of thirty-seven of his fifty-one rac
588 CmpGBO gh C/C ++ 386 compiler and mdb debugger and Phar Lap Software Inc 's 386Link object linker , sourc
589 GtRace as not bothered . One slap from his whip and Phar Lap cruised into the lead again , winning by two
590 GtRace ke a move , and in a matter of a few strides Phar Lap had stormed up from last to first . Coming ro
591 GtRace iford : " He was the best . " <page=84> <ct> Phar Lap relaxes in his private sandbath during his pr
592 GtRace 13--2 , and Reveille Boy was 72--10 . <p_83> Phar Lap was ridden by Bill " Urn " Elliott , who got
593 GtRace _ Phar Lap . <p_82> " The Red Terror ", as Phar Lap was to become known , was a freak of breedin
594 BGSRept Kong , Sir David Wilson , on the geology of Chek Lap Kok , the site of the planned new airport for
595 envd47 ee islands in the world _ Lamma , Lantau and Chek Lap Kok . Discovered in 1953 by Hong Kong herpet
596 envd47 opulation of rare tree frogs on Hong Kong 's Chek Lap Kok island is to be destroyed to make way for
597 Nuke00 P protein could efficiently inhibit the action of LAP [ 27 ] . This was apparently not the case in
598 krw102 Representatives , the NDPL gained 51 seats , the LAP eight , the LUP three and the UP two . <ct> 1
599 dogWhe <p_341> It was necessary to find another name for lap ii/us . Swainson ( 1840 ) had called this ani
600 dogWhe , later , Norwich Crag , the shells are all of N. lap ii/us . The advance and subsequent retreat of

Back to Contents Page