

## PUNS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

**Norova Aziza Avlakulovna**

O‘zDJTU magistranti

[norovaaziza5@gmail.com](mailto:norovaaziza5@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

One of the most fascinating aspects of English literature is using puns. These units can take history of puns, definition of puns and their types of using in English literature.

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### INTRODUCTION

Puns, also known as paronomasia, is a form of word play that exploits multiple meanings of a term. Puns involve expressions with multiple interpretations. They can be regarded as in-jokes or idiomatic constructions, especially as their usage and meaning are usually specific to particular language. Firstly, puns were found in ancient Egypt . population used them for the development of myths and interpretation of dreams. In ancient Mesopotamia around 2500 BC , punning was used by scribes to represent words in cuneiform. In Japan, “ graphomania” was one type of pun. More commonly , wordplay in modern Japan is known as dajare. Puns is strong in print media and oral conversation in jokes so it can be assumed that paronomasia is strong in movies as well. The pun or to use more erudite, and perhaps more precise term – paronomasia, reigns over poetic art, poetry by definition is untranslatable. Creating a pun is therefore very much an exercise in style, often consisting in combining several cultural references and linguistic variations. An interesting example of particularly skilful pun can be found in an article from the New York Times entitled “Pun for the

Ages” (Joseph Tartakovsky, 28th March, 2009), which reports that Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin between 1831 and 1863, once said: “Why can a man never starve in the Great Desert? Because he can eat the sand which is there. But what brought the sandwiches there? Why, Noah sent Ham, and his descendants mustered and bred.” This compound pun is comprised of four separate puns based on the correlations between sand which is there/sandwiches there, Ham/ham, mustered/mustard, and bred/bread. Such a pun plays on several levels and the three homophonic puns constituting the punchline of the joke can only be understood if the introductory one – sand which is there/sandwiches there – is. The use of pun dates back to ancient days. It’s one of the earliest figures of speech in English. Puns in English have experienced a long history. As early as 2,000 years ago, Aristotle declared that the use of puns was acceptable in certain styles in his famous works Rhetoric. As what William Shakespeare says that pun is “the noblest art”, the pun has first become a new fashion in the field of literature. It is estimated that Shakespeare used more than 3,000 puns in his works. And since his time the use of puns in the literature works becomes superior and artistic. Later in the works of Dickens,

Mark Twain, puns were also employed for many times. Since puns can make use of the polysemous words in English by which they are able to be used to create humor and irony, this is what any other language phenomenon cannot achieve. Nowadays, puns are generally employed in both oral and written expressions and communications.

## **TYPES OF PUNS**

Puns can be different types in using. For example , professors Ying Wu and Qi Pan counted five different types of puns and gave them definition and examples in their article named “ Strategies on translation of English Puns”

1. Homophonic pun. It’s a pun making use of words with the same pronunciation but with different spellings and meanings:

e.g. Bassanio: Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?

Shylock: To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there.

Gratiano: Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew...

-----Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. Here “sole” and “soul” are of the same sound, but of the totally different meanings. They make up a pair of homophones, and produce a satiric effect.

2. Paronomasia. It’s a pun making use of two words, which are similar in pronunciation but different in meanings.

e.g. Oh, Wellington! (Or “Villainton”—for Fame

Sounds the heroic syllables both ways;

France could not even conquer your great name,

But punned it down to this facetious phrase—

Beating or beaten she will laugh the same,)...

-----George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan*

Here “Wellington” and “Villainton” are similar in pronunciation. Wellington was a famous English general who had beaten Napoleon in Waterloo in 1815. After that, he was called Villainton by French newspapers and magazines, because either “Villain” in English or “Vilain” in French is an abusive word that means rascal.

3. Antalaclasis. It’s a pun in which a word is used twice or more, but each time with a different meaning.

e.g. If we don’t hang together, we shall assuredly hang separately.

----- Peter Stone and Sherman Edwards. Here, the authors make use of the two different meanings of the word “hang”. The former means “unite”, while the latter means “put or be put to death by hanging with a rope around the neck”.

#### 4. Sylleptic pun

It is similar to antalaclasis, but the word used as a pun occurs only once. This is the most frequently employed device of pun.

e.g.: An ambassador is an honest man who lies abroad for the good of his country.

Here, “lies” can either be comprehended as “locates, stays” or “makes a statement that one knows to be untrue”.

5. Asteismus. It’s a pun usually used in dialogue, referring to one’s casual or deliberate misunderstanding of the meaning of a word.

e.g.: The clerk: ... Can you see a female?

Augustus: Of course I can see a female as easily as a man. Do you suppose I’m blind?

-----George Bernard Shaw, *Augustus Does His Bit* . Here, “see” has two meanings as “interview somebody” or “have a look”. Augustus misunderstands the meaning of the clerk in “interview a female” as “have a look of a female”, that makes the ambiguity.

## DISCUSSION OF USING PUNS

There exist subtle differences between paronomasia and other literary techniques, such as the double entendre. While puns are often simple wordplay for comedic or rhetorical effect, a double entendre alludes to a second meaning that is not contained within the statement or phrase itself, often one that purposefully disguises the second meaning. As both exploit the use of intentional double meanings, puns can sometimes be double entendres, and vice versa. Puns also bear similarities with paraprosoodian, syllepsis, and eggcorns. In addition, homographic puns are sometimes compared to the stylistic device antanacrisis, and homophonic puns to polyptoton. Puns can be used as a type of mnemonic device to enhance comprehension in an educational setting. Used discreetly, puns can effectively reinforce content and aid in the retention of material. Some linguists have encouraged the creation of neologisms to decrease the instances of confusion caused by puns.

## CONCLUSION

The object of the present article was to give whole definition of puns , determine its origin and types. As given here, puns have a long history of use and we can see

that they are mainly used for the interpretation of myths and dreams. Today their use has become more popular not only in literature, but also in movies, jokes and broadcasts. And while using them, it is advisable to know their types well and use them depending on the content of the conversation.

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2. Strategies on Translation of English Puns

Ying Wu

Zhenjiang Watercraft College, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, 212003, China

Email: [wycherry@sina.com](mailto:wycherry@sina.com)

Qi Pan

Zhenjiang Watercraft College, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, 212003, China

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