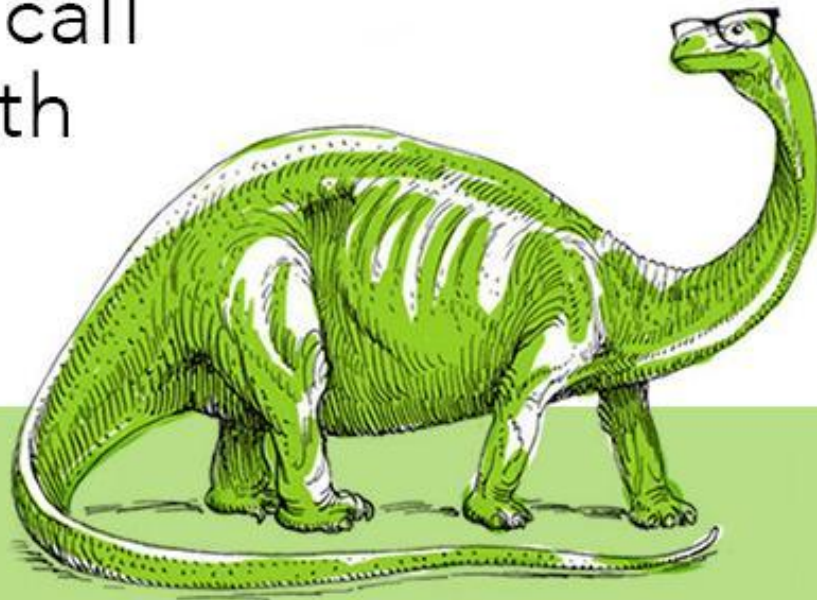


Pun as a stylistic device

What do you call
a dinosaur with
an extensive
vocabulary?

Answer:
A thesaurus.



General definition of pun

A pun (or paronomasia) – is a form of wordplay which suggests two or more interpretations, by exploiting multiple meanings of words or phrases for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect.
(Marriam-Webster dictionary).

Basic classification of puns

I would like to present a classification according to the type of ambiguity, which takes place in a sentence or a phrase and creates the stylistic device itself. According to that principle, one can distinguish *three groups of puns*:

- 1. lexical puns**
- 2. syntactic puns**
- 3. semantical puns**

Lexical puns

Lexical ambiguity of a word or a phrase pertains to its having more than meaning in the language to which it belongs.

Lexical ambiguity may be resulted from:

- (a) **homonyms** – words which are spelt and pronounced in the same way, but have different meanings.
- (b) **homophones** – words which are pronounced in the same way, but have different meanings.
- (c) **homographs** – words which are spelt in the same way, but have different meanings.

Examples of lexical puns

- I like **kids**, but I don't think I could eat a whole one.
- Two silk worms had a race and ended in a **tie**.
- The wedding was so emotional that even the cake was in **tiers**.
- The pun is created by a polysemantic word “kids” as it has two meanings – a child and a baby goat.
- Here the word “tie” could be defined as a result of a battle in which no one had won, or as a piece of clothes which can be made of silk.
- The last word sounds like “tears” – слезы, but in this case it is a plural form of the word “tier” – ярус.

Syntactic puns

Syntactic ambiguity arises when a complex phrase or a sentence can be parsed in more than one way.

examples of structural-syntactic

- How do ~~you~~ **puns** stop a fish from smelling?

- Cut off its nose.

- Here two different grammatical structures are merged in one sentence. In both of them the core importance is the word smelling in its different interpretations – “to stink” and “to smell”.

- Have your eyes ever been checked?

- No, they've always been blue.

- Here same idea is implied, as “checked” may be defined as a verb or as an adjective.

Semantical puns

Semantic ambiguity arises when a word or concept has an inherently diffuse meaning based on its widespread or informal usage. This is often the case, for example, with idiomatic expressions whose definitions are rarely or never well-defined, and are presented in the context of a larger argument that invites a certain conclusion.

Examples of semantical puns

- Did you take a bath?

- No, only towels, is there one missing?

My friend has difficulty sleeping, but I can do it with my eyes closed.

- **To take a bath**, as a fixed phrase means to have a shower, but its direct, word for word translation can be - carry away a bath, to carry it from one place to another. This two-way perception and understanding of one and the same phrase creates ambiguity and causes laughter.

- **With (one's) eyes closed** – originally means *unaware of the risks involved*, when it is used as a regular phrase. But here it can be understood in different way as well. Of course we sleep with our eyes closed. Two-way interpretation creates humorous effect here.

Compound puns

A *compound pun* includes more than one pun.

AN EXAMPLE: 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**.

A COMMENTARY: There are several separate puns, including the pun on **“sand which”** and **“sandwich,”** as well as **“Ham”** and **“ham”** and the homophonic puns on **“mustered”/“mustard”** and **“bred”/“bread.”**

Recursive pun

Recursive pun – a type of pun which requires understanding the first half of the joke to understand the second.

AN EXAMPLE: A Freudian slip is when you say one thing but mean your mother.

A COMMENTARY: The term “Freudian slip” was coined by the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud to refer to a mistake in speaking where one word is replaced with another. Freud proposed that these mistakes hinted at unconscious or repressed desires. He also had several theories about the relationship between children (especially boys) and their mothers. Therefore, this pun requires knowledge of Freud’s theories and recognition that the pun itself is a Freudian slip with the substitution of “your mother” for “another.”

The difference between a pun and a joke

While they share much in common, puns and jokes are not synonymous. The definition of pun is such that it necessitates wordplay. A joke may contain this type of wordplay, but there are a great many jokes that do not have any plays on words. Also, some puns are not humorous and used for rhetorical, rather than humorous, effect.

*Thank you for your
attention*



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