

IMPORTANCE OF WORDPLAY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE (IN THE EXAMPLE OF PUN)

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ABSTRACT

This paper is aims to have a better understanding within the language phenomenon called wordplay, in particular punning, focusing on its analysis, classification and importance in English language.

Keywords: wordplay, humour, pun.

Since the language was originated people have been trying to embellish their speech by several, though interesting, use of the lexis. Wordplay, therefore, is one of such common linguistic features that we can come across every day, either by creating on our own to entertain and make the reader laugh or it might well be found in newspapers where it is used to attract the reader's attention with its underlying meaning.

It is all derived from humour which has always been an integral part of our lives. Humour is extremely influential ranging from "political satire to joking as a way of establishing friendships and excluding others," says the book *The Language of Humour* by Alison Ross. [5, 1] Of all the various forms of humour, plays on words and puns have received the bulk of attention in linguistic studies [4]. Wordplay (also called play-on-words) is the clever and witty use of word meanings. Giorgadze explained that according to its form Using wordplay techniques is based on various aspects of rhetoric, like spelling, phonetics (sound and pronunciation of words), and semantics (meaning of words) as well as ambiguous verbal wit to form amusing and often humorous written and oral expressions. It should be also mentioned that context has a vital importance for the actualization of the wordplay, as its pragmatic role (mainly humorous, satirical, sarcastic, etc.) is fulfilled and actualized in a specific context. [3] that means not only creating, but also understanding play of words could be quite a difficult task. It very much depends on every individual, his or her knowledge of a given language, creativity and

experience which might be helpful when creating or deciphering this language phenomenon.

There are rather fuzzy definitions provided by even well-known dictionaries. For instance, the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary does not precisely states what exactly wordplay is, however, it implies simply that an intelligent way of joking and playing with meanings of words is activated [6]. A bit more expanded definition can be found in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, describing wordplay as both clever and amusing use of polysemantic and homonymic words. [7] Having this in mind, we can have a look at the final and much more accurate definition of wordplay by Dirk Delabastita who stated wordplay as a general name for the different textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) are exploited in order to create a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings. [1, 128] Wordplay's use extends far beyond jokes and humour. It makes language more unique, interesting, witty and amusing than simply using standard words and phrases. It has had an important role in rhetoric going as far back as the classics of literature and philosophy, from Plato to Shakespeare. In addition, it is a huge part of all languages and cultures around the globe, used not only by gifted writers, speakers, and storytellers, but by all people of all ages.

According to James Patterson, a linguist, the author of 19 consecutive No. 1 New York Times bestsellers, there are many types of wordplay as verbal wit in the English language. Below, we are going to study those 9 main types of play-on-words [8].

1. Alliteration – very common in poetry, which is the repetition of consonant sounds. The effect of alliteration might bring about either playful, as in “balls bounced blissfully below the bench,” or menacing tone as in “the snake slithered sneakily and stealthily.”

2. Homographs – words with the exact spelling but different meanings. “He was close to the store when it was about to close” is a perfect example of using wordplay and homographs. “Close” and “close” are written in the same way but mean different things – the first “close” refers to proximity and the second one to shuttering.

3. Homophones are words that sound the same but have different definitions. A pair of homophones can be spelled the same – making them homographs as well, such as “rose” (the flower) and “rose” (the past tense of “rise”) – or they may be spelled identically, like “blue” and “blew.”

Homophones usually represent a phonetic form of wordplay, as in the examples “Jim and I are like Gemini twins.”

4. Idiom – is a group of words (either a phrase or a complete sentence) that is distinct from its literal meaning. “Chip on your shoulder” is an idiom because the use of words means to be upset because of perceived mistreatment. “He’s had a chip on his shoulder ever since he didn’t get the promotion” – it is relied on an “idiomatic” meaning of these words to make sense in this expression.

5. Metaphor is a figure of speech in which you compare, for the sake of exaggeration, comparison, or sometimes clarity, two things. because of its tall buildings and constructions, it is compared that “New York is a concrete jungle”

6. Onomatopoeia – creating words that phonetically imitate or resemble the described sound of the word, many of which refer to animal noises. Such as “bark”, “purr” or “hiss.” Other examples of onomatopoeia are “bam,” “pow,” and “bang”.

7. Pun is a literary technique that exploits the unique potential meanings of words, and often involves homonyms, words that are identical in sounds and spelling (or at least in one feature). An example is, “If you have to pay to go to the river, we’d better stop at the bank”. Here, the word ‘bank’ carries two meanings: ‘the place where money is stored’ and ‘land along the side of a river’.

8. Simile – a type of wordplay in which two unlike entities joined by “like” or “as” are compared. This figure of speech emphasises a more vivid picture of the subject. In fact, Shakespeare often used them in his dramas. In Romeo and Juliet, he wrote, “Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night, like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear.” Here, Shakespeare is comparing Juliet’s beauty to a “rich jewel.”

9. Spoonerisms are slips of the tongue that deform the intended meaning of a sentence, having been named after the Oxford minister William Archibald Spooner (1844–1930). Basically, many of them are simple mistakes, they may sometimes be wordplays. “Fighting a liar”, for instance, is a spoonerism of “Lighting a fire”.

However, the most wide-used types of a wordplay is, probably, punning. A pun is a type of a wordplay “seem to be particularly characteristic of languages like English,” writes Professor of Italian Studies and linguist in the University of Melbourne’s John Hajek, and lists few reasons for this. Firstly, English grammar less complex than many other languages. Secondly, as a result of borrowings from Latin, German and French, English lexis is full of homonyms [2]. Puns are often used in writing to create a totally unexpected humour. What can entertain and make the reader laugh is its hidden joke. Since pun creates a “jokey” tone in literature, it is one of the most important literary devices. Writers regularly used puns as a source for humour, especially in plays, to

reveal themes and aspects of the plot, and to bond an audience in shared recognition. As a pun is a humorous device, humorous message can give the audience a positive feeling. Furthermore, pun is very common in cinema, television comedy shows and even advertisements to catch attention and make people dwell on the topic. It is also ubiquitous in many newspapers, journalistic and internet articles these days, which is a great thing to show government and people basic daily problems in a humorous way and to make them fully aware of these problems. In addition, pun let us share our cleverness and intelligence, by getting the joke which is called “the pleasure of the text” — the reward and satisfying experience that readers get from figuring out figurative language. This is because it flatters the audience’s intellectual capabilities by showing them that they have the relevant knowledge to solve the “riddle” That is why punning is a common form of witty wordplay widely found in crossword puzzles.

The classification of pun by Delabastita were cited by Giorgadze [3] in which he divides pun into four major categories:

1) Homonymic (identical both in sounds and spelling). It includes the use of lexemes that are both homophones and homographs. For instance, “The tallest building in town is the library — it has thousands of stories!”. A pun occurs with a difference between “stories” in books and stories (floors) in a building. This word is both homographic and homophonic, meaning they have identical spelling and pronunciation, while having two different meanings.

2) Homophonic (identical sounds but different graphic form) – the use of sound alike words. “Atheism is a *non-prophet* institution”. Punning here interchanges the words ‘prophet’ and ‘profit’.

3) Homographic (different pronunciation but identical spelling), plays on lexemes that are spelled the same but differs in a meaning and pronunciation. Look at this example that transposes the word “flies”: “Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana”.

4) Paronymic (there are only slight differences in both graphic and phonetic form). This type of pun is based on the similarity, rather than identity on either phonetic and orthographic points: “He was a great and very popular artist”. A paronymic pun is appeared in the word ‘artist’, meaning an expert in fine arts, that can be replaced with ‘artiste’ – an actor by profession.

In accordance with above, we can conclude that, wordplay is a wonderful rhetorical device that can serve all kinds of purposes across all kinds of genres and styles. It can be used in the media, literature as well as in everyday life to criticize and provide entertainment,



and sometimes to make people laugh. Wordplay never goes out of style and never stops changing and growing, and therefore, it's an essential and important part of the English language for writers and speakers of all ages. Although there are several types of play-on-words, puns seem to be the most common ones, being frequently used by writers and ordinary people alike to create special and interesting speech that is widely aimed for insinuation and irony.

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