

Pun

Pun Definition

A pun is a play on words that produces a humorous effect by using a word that suggests two or more meanings, or by exploiting similar sounding words that have different meanings.

Humorous effects created by puns depend upon the ambiguities the words entail. These ambiguities arise mostly in homophones and homonyms. For instance, in the sentence, “A happy life depends on a liver,” the word *liver* can refer to the bodily organ, or simply a person who lives. Similarly, in the saying “Atheism is a non-prophet institution,” the word “prophet” is used instead of “profit” to produce a humorous effect.

Common Pun Examples

In everyday life, pun examples are found intentionally or accidentally, used in jokes and witty remarks.

The life of a patient of hypertension is always at *steak*.
Why do we still have troops in Germany? To keep the Russians in *Czech*.
A horse is a very *stable*
Time flies *like* an arrow. Fruit flies *like* a banana.
An elephant’s opinion carries a lot of *weight*.
What is the difference between a conductor and a teacher? The conductor *minds the train* and a teacher *trains the mind*.

Examples of Pun in Literature

In literature, puns have been used by famous writers throughout history.

Example #1: William Shakespeare

In constructing puns, William Shakespeare was a master craftsman. We find many examples of puns in his plays. Let us have a look at some of them:

“It is the unkindest tied that ever any man tied.” (*Richard III*)

“Now is the winter of our discontent ... made glorious summer by this sun of York.” (*Richard III*)

“Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes with nimble soles; I have a soul of lead” (*Romeo and Juliet*)

Claudius: “... But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son...”
Hamlet: [aside] “A little more than *kin*, and less than *kind*.”
(*Hamlet*)

Example #2: *A Hymn to God the Father* (By John Donne)

John Donne’s *A Hymn to God the Father* has several examples of pun.

“When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done for I have more.
That at my death Thy Son / Shall shine as he shines now, and
heretofore
And having done that, Thou hast done;
I fear no more.”

He is playing with his name *Donne*, and with the name of his wife Anne *More*. Besides, he uses *Son*, referring to the Christ, instead of the sun.

Example #3: *The Importance of being Earnest* (By Oscar Wilde)

Oscar Wilde employs puns in his play *The Importance of being Earnest*. Jack Earnest tells Aunt Augusta, in Act III:

“On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I’ve now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.”

Similarly, in Act III we see Jack puns his family name again:

“I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn’t I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.”

Here Jack discovers his father’s name, which makes him truly earnest.

Example #4: *Great Expectations* (By Charles Dickens)

Charles Dickens plays around with words in his novel *Great Expectations*. In his opening chapter, Pip says:

“They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to *point* the conversation to me, every now and then, and stick the *point* into me”

Note the pun in the use of the word “point.” We see another interesting example in Chapter 2:

“*Tickler* was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my *tickled* frame.”

The writer puns the word “tickle”.

Example #5: *Lolita* (By Vladimir Nabokov)

We notice a unique use of multilingual puns in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. For example, the name of the [character](#) *Humbert* is a pun in two languages. In French it means “Shadow,” and in Spanish it means “man.” Similarly, Lolita changing her name to “Dolores,” which means “pain” in Latin, and

Function of Pun

Apart from being witty and humorous, puns add profound meanings to texts, and shape the way in which the text is interpreted by the readers. By playing with the words, the writers reveal their cleverness and the cleverness of their characters. Besides, puns in a literary works act as a source of comic relief, or an intentional effort on the part of the writer, to show his or her creative ability in using language.