

Language Learning through ‘Literary’ Puns and Word Play

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Abstract:

Pun is a joke or type of wordplay in which similar senses or sounds of two words or phrases, or different senses of the same word, are deliberately confused. Students fail to enjoy the beauty of the second language as it is made a part of academics and taught under the thorough supervision of an instructor. This process of learning makes the language fit into a frame of rules spoiling pleasure of learning. The language if taught with a strict adherence to rules the aesthetic part of it remains ignored restricting the language to mere communication. Communication is important but if it is done with better spirit the impact will be at desired level. In the literary texts like **The Importance of Being Earnest** pun, a literary device, is used by the characters to generate fun and make their conversations witty. The texts of this sort can be introduced to the students as self-study material with required assistance from the instructor. An ELS classroom can be made lively and interesting by promoting such texts which give scope to improve the language as well make the learning fascinating. The material should be graded keeping in mind the scope for protecting the space that is to be allotted for humour and the beauty of the language.

The present paper is a humble attempt to make English language learning interesting by introducing the activities related to puns in a ESL classroom to make language learning more interesting.

Key words: Pun, ESL classroom, word play, activities

A pun is a form of wordplay that generates humour using a word or sequence of words that sound the identical but that have two or more probable meanings. Puns often make use of homophones – words that sound the same, and are sometimes spelt the same, but have a different meaning. The joviality arises from realizing that a single phrase can have several

versions. These expressions help in expanding and activating the brain beyond normal limits. Usage of pun in conversation is a fantastic way to lighten the temper, keep the conversation moving and they also serve as a good source to generate ideas. Certain well-known puns can be easily understood, while others could take some explanation. In the beginning it is difficult to grasp some words since they can be rather abstract or difficult to understand. With enough commitment and passion, we can get proficiency in the art of English wordplay.

A good pun needs to be told at the right time as with any comedy. If you can come up with one instantly, people will find you funny (however it won't look as good if you take a few minutes to come up with one, by which time the conversation changes to another topic). For instance, your acquaintance may mention to you that they had boiled eggs for morning while you are talking about what you had for breakfast. Then, you may respond, "Were they extraordinarily extraordinary?" along with a sly smile to admit the awful joke, of course. More nuanced and complicated puns use homophones instead of changing words in this way. To cook fish for a dinner party, for instance, one would ask, "Do you think we should scale back on the number of guests?" (playing on the metaphor of a fish's scales and the verb "scale back," which implies to decrease).

Joseph Addison the playwright apparently said that puns were, "the lowest form of wit"; the usual response is to say this is because they are the foundation of all humour. They prove useful in ESL classroom as they break the ice. A bad pun removes coldness in the classroom and make it warm enough that the learners feel comfortable, creating a congenial ambience between the teacher and the learner. Homonyms and homophones can be taught to the students effectively by employing apt and relevant puns. It helps the learner to involve in learning and facilitates in remembering the meanings of the homophones and homonyms. 'Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by this son/sun of York.' (Shakespeare, 51)

Other wordplay in the English language:

Puns are not the only kind but are among the most common forms of English wordplay. There are some additional wordplays that we come across in our daily speech, newspapers, English-language literary works and some other sources through which we learn the language.

Acronyms: Acronyms are words produced by combining the initial letters of several other words. Wordplay of this kind is common in business names.

Spoonerisms:

A spoonerism is the name given to a man named Reverend Spooner who allegedly committed this slip of the tongue often: it occurs when you swap a few letters between two words. Say "a slight of fairs" rather than "a flight of stairs,"

Internet abbreviations:

These were first created to speed up typing but slowly evolved into a kind of language unto themselves. Some of them have even found their way into spoken English. The most well-known example is probably "lol," which stands for "laughing out loud. "Some people now say "lol" as "loll" when saying it aloud, especially those in the younger generation.

Portmanteau:

A portmanteau is created when you take a portion of one word and its meaning and combine it with another word and its meaning. For instance, the word "brunch" refers to a midday meal and is a portmanteau of the words "breakfast" and "lunch."

Alliteration and Onomatopoeia

Alliteration is when you use two or more words in a row beginning with the same letter or using the same sounds, and it tends to be used for emphasis or to make something more impressive for instance in a brand name – such as the Automobile Association (AA) It is also used in English literature, particularly poetry, as it can be helpful for highlighting a point or creating a particular sound. For instance, a piece of writing about a snake might use words starting with or containing the letter 's', because, when spoken aloud, this echoes the sound a snake makes when it hisses: "the sly snake slithered stealthily".

Onomatopoeia:

A wordplay device where a word sounds like what it describes, for instance, most animal sounds are onomatopoeic; for instance, "oink" refers to a pig's sound, "moo" to a cow, "woof" to a dog, and so forth. That Poetry frequently uses this kind of wordplay, which lets the poet to produce distinctive sounds. to give their writing more context; a poem about fireworks, for instance, might make references to the noises produced by fireworks using onomatopoeic terms like "fizz," "crash," and "bang," "whoosh," and so forth.

Double Entendre:

As per Oxford dictionary it is a word or phrase that is open to two interpretations, one of which is usually risqué or indecent. "I used to be Snow White, but I drifted." – the word drift is open for two interpretations it can refer to both a snowbank and a motion verb.

Malaphor:

As per Oxford dictionary two idioms, sayings or colloquialisms are mashed together unintentionally. It is done to create fun while conversing. "Senator McCain suggests that somehow, you know, I'm green behind the ears." - combining the metaphors "wet behind the ears" and "green," which both denote inexperience. (Senator Barack Obama, Oct. 2008)

Malapropism:

As per Oxford dictionary it is the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar sounding one, often with an amusing effect. "Why not? Play captains against each other, create a little dysentery in the ranks." - using "dysentery" instead of the similar-sounding "dissent" to comic effect. (Christopher Moltisanti in The Sopranos)

Paronomasia:

As per Collins dictionary it is the use of a word in different senses or the use of words similar in sound to achieve a specific effect, as humour or a dual meaning.

"Once you are dead you are dead. That last day idea. Knocking them all up out of their graves. Come forth, Lazarus! And he came fifth and lost the job." (James Joyce, Ulysses, 1922)

"I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun

My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;

But swear by Thyself, 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." (John Donne, "A Hymn to God the Father")

Pun related activities in classroom:

Language learning can be made interesting and effective by through participatory learning. The teacher in modern classrooms are facilitators who show the resources and means to learn. Language could be learnt more by their involvement than merely by instruction. The instructor can conduct following some activities that could help in enhancing LSRW skills of the learners.

Picking the pun from the excerpt.

A literary text must be introduced to the students with a lead-in where the instructor will provide the road map for the activity at same time leads to comfortable and accommodative learning. An excerpt from the text can be chosen and given to the students they should underline the tricky words that convey sly remark from that piece of write-up.

Example:

"Ask for me tomorrow, you shall find me a grave man." Romeo and Juliet,.

Tracing the puns verb from the given page:

The literary text is given as the study material to the students at least one week before the scheduled session. The session can be started with an assumption that the students have read the novel and are acquainted with the text. The teacher can give the conversation/ related from and ask the students to identify the page numbers and explain the context.

Example: **Two Gentlemen of Verona**

"Panthino: Away, ass! You'll lose the tide if you tarry any longer.

Launce: It is no matter if the tied were lost; for it is the unkindest tied that ever any man tied.

Panthino: What's the unkindest tide?

Launce: Why, he that's tied here, Crab, my dog."

Sharing the experiences with classmates:

The students will be asked to any conversation that happened recently which they found to some tricky word play. They can even be given a chance to compare such funny words that are used in their native language which convey dual meaning.

Example: The example dialogue can be cited from texts like **Importance of Being Earnest**.

JACK: I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGERNON: I thought you had come up for pleasure.

JACK: I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

Enacting a skit:

An interesting activity which learners would love to participate is enacting a skit. The instructor can choose a context from any literary text and ask the students to prepare a skit translating the pun to their real-life situation. An excerpt from the text can be provided for better understanding. The instructor should narrate the situation to the student's prior hand and instruct them to model the dialogue and context as per the annotated text .

Example: Oscar Wilde's play The Importance of Being Earnest contains a pun in its title. The play's protagonist isn't initially sincere or Ernest, but by the conclusion, he is both:

"I've realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest."

Citing the page numbers of the witty dialogues :

The students will be provided with the page numbers in the text where the word play or pun is employed. The students should locate them in the text, while doing so they need to explain the

context in which these phrases are used in the text. An exercise to find the meanings and the usage of the same in their own sentences can also be added so that students remember them better. This activity can be conducted as a quiz dividing the class into teams. It should be a time bound activity.

Cloze- test:

It is always essential to assess the comprehension of the learners. Cloze test is the one of the suggested ways to assessment. An excerpt from the text can be supplied to students in which the words implying pun are removed. The learners must fill the blanks with the apt words which have dual meaning.

"But outer Space, At least this far,

For all the fuss Of the populace

Stays more ---- (a) Than -----(b)"

Answers: a. popular (b). populous

Class Quiz by students:

Students can be given the task of listing the sentences where there are sly remarks and scope for generating humour. They will be given the opportunity to conduct the quiz. The questions will be prepared by themselves. The class can be divided into A,B,C,D teams. Each team will be given the chance to ask the questions. When team A asks the questions, other three teams will answer the question. If the questions remain unanswered, even after passing among the teams B,C,D, then team A will get the marks. In the other teams will get the chance in turns.

Learning to characterise:

The students must describe the characters or a real-life situation . The choice of the characters and situations can be left to the discretion of the students. The pun and tricky usage of the language will be used by one of the characters. The teacher can supply the required pun included language relevant for the characters.

Example:

ALGERNON: Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.(A Bunburyist is anyone who conveniently invents a troubled friend or family member requiring frequent support that can easily be invoked by the good helper, the Bunburyist, in order to have a way out of some social obligation the person wishes to avoid.) (Ocsar Wilde,17)

Ask the students the question like who is a Bunburyist? Have you seen anybody like that in your neighbourhood?

Identifying words that generate humour:

The class should be divided into teams, one team will describe the situation from the literary text and the other team should relate apt dialogue that is spoken by the characters in the text making a mention of situation. The students can be encouraged to write a creative dialogue in the same fashion, this is helpful to instil creativity in students.

Example:

When Mercutio is wounded mortally in Romeo and Juliet, he murmurs these words just before he dies. Shakespeare plays on the double meaning of 'grave', which means both 'serious' and 'a hole dug in the ground to receive a coffin'

Mime activity.

Dividing the class into two teams and giving an inappropriate word construction or pun to one team, students can be instructed to enact it so that the other team will identify the lines which include the pun or word play.

Example:

'The Mouse's Tale' in Alice in Wonderland

In Lewis Carroll's story, the Mouse begins his poem by stating, 'Mine is a long and sad tale!' The pun comes from the fact that Alice mistakes the word 'tale' for 'tail' as she responds, 'It is a long tail, certainly, but why do you call it sad?'

Pun associated with other parts of speech .

This activity can also be conducted in teams. One team gives the actual word that is used as pun the other teams should read out the usage of the word and identify the parts of speech of the word.

Sitcom:

Students must be given time to read the text and create a sitcom and enact in the classroom. The situations chosen by the students should reflect real time situations. This is also a team activity, so students feel interested to participate.

Cartoon depiction:

Students can be given time to draw a cartoon to the pun used in the text. The cartoons drawn by the students can be displayed in the classroom.

Different situations in the literary text:

The instructor can ask the students to prepare questions on different situations from the literary text that can be compared to real life situations. The students use the language play to suit the situation chosen by them.

Writing Review:

Students should be taught to write the review on the narrative technique of the author highlighting the usage of humour and word play. This can be used as the writing activity.

Preparing the prompts:

Students should prepare some prompts from the text prescribed for study and exchange them with other teams for presentation. The teams will discuss on the prompts, handed over to them by the other team. The choice of selecting the presenter will be given to the team that prepares the prompt. The instructor along with the rest of the class will be the audience, whose feedback is also given due importance. The choice of speaking keeps scrolling in the teams.

Writing humour generating headlines: The students will be given some news items from the daily newspaper they are expected to write headlines in a creative way by inferring something more than what they mean to convey. The headlines could be ambiguous so that there is a chance for interpretation.

Example:

- Gas Information Leaked
- Wages Frozen for Ice-Cream Sellers
- Barman in Bitter Row with Boss
- Train Drivers' Union Talks Go off the Rails.

Word Play and ESL Classroom:

Word play is an essential part a humorous conversation, if it is employed as a learning tool in a ESL classroom it would be highly motivating for the students as they are given freedom to make sly remarks and informal conversations. It develops domains of word meaning and relatedness as it engages students in practice and rehearsal of words. It also calls on students to reflect metacognitively on words, word parts, and context. Pun in the conversations make students to be active in listening and capitalizes on possibilities for the social construction of meaning.

Vocabulary Building Activity:

The instructor can prescribe text like **Importance of Being Earnest** for intensive reading task and ask students to list out all the new words included in the text and pun generating words can be given more importance. The number of words vary depending on the level of the learner like, beginner, elementary, pre- intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced.

Matching Exercise:

The teacher can design a matching exercise with pun. In section A the sentence which generates humour can be given in section B the meaning of the sentence can be included. The other way would be to mention words included in the sentence for generating humour in section A and the related word in section B. The students can be asked to match section A with section B.

Listening Activities:

The students can be made to listen some dialogues from various plays where pun is used effectively. As the listening audios would be in native accent, they can be played twice or thrice. The students then will try to understand actual pun in the dialogue and explain the same to the class. It also serves as a good source to improve pronunciation and accent.

Conclusion:

Twentieth century is the era of communication and English is considered the lingua franca in many countries. So the students should be equipped with effective communication skills in English which help them to be successful in their profession. The ESL teachers should explore different ways to enhance the communicative abilities of their students. Pun and word play could be chosen as a source for making language learning interesting.

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Research paper

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