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A **pun** (or **paronomasia**) is a [phrase](#) that deliberately exploits confusion between similar-sounding [words](#) for [humorous](#) or [rhetorical](#) effect.

A pun may also cause confusion between two senses of the same written or spoken word, due to [homophony](#), [homography](#), [homonymy](#), [polysemy](#), or [metaphorical](#) usage. Walter Redfern has said: "To pun is to treat homonyms as [synonyms](#)"^[1]. For example, in the phrase, "There is nothing punny about bad puns", the pun takes place in the deliberate confusion of the implied word "funny" by the substitution of the word "punny", a heterophone of "funny". By definition, puns must be deliberate; an involuntary substitution of similar words is called a [malapropism](#).

Puns are a form of [word play](#), and occur in all [languages](#).

Etymology

The word *pun* itself is thought to be originally a contraction of the (now archaic) *pundigrion*. This Latin term is thought to have originated from *punctilious*, which itself derived from the [Italian](#) *puntiglio* (originally meaning "a fine point"), diminutive of *punto*, "point", from the Latin *punctus*, past participle of *pungere*, "to prick." These etymological sources are reported in the [Oxford English Dictionary](#), which labels them "conjecture." (There is no creditable documentation for the notion that the word is a [backronym](#) for "play upon names"^[2]^{[[citation needed](#)]}.)

Usage

Comedy and jokes

Puns are a common source of [humor](#) in [jokes](#) and [comedy shows](#). They are often used in the [punchline](#) of a joke, where they typically give a humorous meaning to a rather perplexing story. These are also known as [feghoots](#). The following example comes from the movie [Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World](#) (though the punchline is at least five decades^{[[citation needed](#)]} older):

Captain Aubrey: "Do you see those two [weevils](#), Doctor?...Which would you choose?"

Dr. Maturin: "Neither. There's not a scrap of difference between them. They're



the same species of *Curculio*."

Captain Aubrey: "If you had to choose. If you were forced to make a choice. If there were no other option."

Dr. Maturin: "Well, then, if you're going to push me. I would choose the right-hand weevil. It has significant advantage in both length and breadth."

Captain Aubrey: "There, I have you!...Do you not know that in the service one must always choose the lesser of two weevils?"

The last line uses a pun on the stock phrase "[the lesser of two evils](#)".

Puns are particularly admired in Britain^{[[citation needed](#)]}, and form a core element of the British cult comedy show [I'm Sorry, I Haven't A Clue](#) and in times past [My Word](#). The late [Richard Whiteley](#) was famed for his endearingly clumsy use of puns as host of the UK words and numbers game show [Countdown](#). British [stand up comedian Tim Vine](#)'s act is characterised by rapid delivery of unrelated pun-based jokes. British [comedian Dance Drier](#) is also known for his extensive and often many layered [puns](#) woven into his stories. In his own words, "A pun is its own reword."

[Gag names](#) based on puns (such as calling a character who is always almost late *Justin Thyme*) can be found in [Piers Anthony's Xanth novels](#), [The Eyre Affair](#), [Asterix](#), [Hamlet](#), [The Simpsons](#), the [Carmen Sandiego computer games](#), and many works of [Spider Robinson](#), including the [Callahan's Crosstime Saloon](#) series.

Formats for punning

There are numerous pun formats:

- [Bilingual pun](#)

Bilingual pun

A **bilingual pun** is a [pun](#) in which a word in one language is similar to a word in another language. Typically, use of bilingual puns results in [in-jokes](#), since there is often a very small overlap between speakers of the two languages. Occasionally, some puns are more actually [malapropisms](#), since they don't rely on knowing any words in the other language, but how a foreign-speaker would pronounce them, such as:

José had just finished his English class, but to pass the teacher asked him one last question. Use the words "green," "pink," and "yellow" in the same sentence.

José thought for a minute and then replied, "The phone go green, green, green,



green, (ring) I pink (pick) it up, and I say yellow (hello)"

Example

Dutch

The Dutch prime minister is visiting the American president. At some point after dinner the president asks: "Do you have any hobbies?" The prime minister thinks for a moment and says, "Yes, I fok horses". "Pardon?" "Yes, paarden."

(*Breeding* in Dutch is *fokken* (singular *fok*), which sounds like *fuck*; *horses* in Dutch is *paarden*, which sounds like *pardon*.)

Dutch children (just learning English) are known to ask each other what "Ik geef mijn varken een vogel" translates to in English. The correct answer to this, somewhat strange, question, is "I give my pig a bird".

(In Dutch this could be interpreted as "Ik geef mijn pik een beurt" which refers to masturbating ("I give my penis a rubbing").)

[edit] French

A young [Canadian](#) lad buys three [cats](#) and names them *Un*, *Deux* and *Trois* before heading back [home](#) across the [river](#). His [boat](#) capsizes; he arrives home half-frozen but still alive, sadly crying «Maman! Maman! Un, Deux, Trois cats sank!»

(The punchline sounds like the first five numbers in [French](#), *un deux trois quatre cinq*.)

Q - Why do French people only have one egg for breakfast?

A - Because one egg's 'un oeuf'. (one egg's *enough*)

Or this, from the motion picture [Clue: the Movie](#):

Mrs. Peacock: Is there a "little girl's room" in the hall?

Yvette: Oui, oui, madame.

Mrs. Peacock: No, I just need to powder my nose.

(Yvette's "Oui, oui," which means "yes, yes," sounds like "wee-wee," an English-language euphemism for urinating.)

In a first-year French [textbook](#) used in the [United States](#), a section dealing with French [sounds](#) showed the pronunciation of the sound *oe* (a [ligature](#) in French), pronounced like the "u" in "up," and appearing in the French words *oeil*, "eye," and pronounced almost the same as the English word "eye"; and *fauteuil*, "armchair," pronounced *foh-tuh-ee*. Then the textbook instructed the student to pronounce the words over and over: *oeil*, *fauteuil*, *oeil*, *fauteuil*, *oeil*,



fauteuil, oeil, fauteuil, oeil, fauteuil.

Note: if this is true it must have been a very bad textbook: "oeil" sounds almost nothing like "eye", the "Ei" in "Eiffel" sounds like neither of them if pronounced correctly, and "teuil" also does not resemble "tower" (or "tour") in the slightest.

In American classrooms there is a short poem commonly used as a means of demonstrating a few phonetic properties of French to beginning students, in a fashion similar to the example above. The reason for this is obvious immediately upon being read out loud.

Un petit d'un petit
S'étonne aux Halles.
Un petit d'un petit
Ah! degrés te fallent.
Indolent qui ne sort cesse;
Indolent qui ne se mène.
Qu'importe un petit d'un petit
Tout Gai de Reguennes.

[edit] [German](#)

Q: According to [Sigmund Freud](#), what comes between fear and sex?

A: *Fünf*.

([German](#) numbers - vier, fünf, sechs = four, five, six.)

Before the Battle of Normandy, two German spies have infiltrated the Allied Headquarters. Before they can retire and radio to Berlin, they have to attend the officers's cocktail. One of the two spies goes to the barman and asks, in perfect English:

"Two [whiskies](#), please."

"Dry?"

"*Nein, zwei!*"

(In German, *drei* (three) is pronounced quite like *dry*.)

In addition, the German word for [team](#) (*Mannschaft*) opens itself up for various bits of humor centered around its sounding like the English words *man shaft*, implying the [penis](#), especially when combined with other sports words (such as [Fussballmannschaft](#)). As well, one of the constructions for fahren, "to drive", is *fahrt* (fart), which also opens up more opportunities for jokes.

A [Wayne and Shuster](#) routine depicts a young [Mozart](#) appearing before an [Emperor](#) who offers him items from a plate of [food](#) and asks how many he would like:



- *Nein*, sir.
- Very well then, give him nine... [musicians](#) are like [actors](#) - they eat like [pigs](#)!

A small indication of big trouble ahead: The tip of the scheissberg. (German *Scheisse* means *shit* and *Berg* means *mountain*)

[edit] [Japanese](#)

As [Japanese](#) has both a large number of English loanwords and a lot of contact with [American](#) culture, English-Japanese bilingual puns are plentiful.

A man buys a [Nissan](#), and wants to name it, but can't decide if he should give it a male or female name. He asks his Japanese friend, who says, "Female."

The man asks why, so the friend responds, "Each Nissan, she go."

(The punchline sounds like the first five numbers in [Japanese](#), *ichi ni san shi go*.)

The theme song to the [anime](#) series [His and Her Circumstances](#) contains the following pun;

-You may dream, *masshiro na...*

(*You may dream, pure white...*)

"You may" sounds like *yume*, the [Japanese](#) word for "[dream](#)".

A popular joke is to say to someone: "Ayu wa sakana", and if they look puzzled, then say, "Well, yes or no?" The phrase sounds like the Japanese sentence which states "An Ayu is a fish", as well as the English question "Are you a sakana". Depending on which they hear, and their answer, you can inform them that they are wrong- an Ayu definitely IS a fish, -or- YOU are definitely not a fish. Puns on the word "Ai", which means "love" in Japanese, and is pronounced like the words / and eye, are quite common. The title of the [manga/anime](#) series [Video Girl Ai](#) is a bilingual pun. Ai means "love" in Japanese, which fits Ai's character. But in English, "AI" means [artificial intelligence](#), which also befits Ai's character. The same pun also fits the title of [Ken Akamatsu](#)'s manga [A.I. Love You](#).

People use Japanese names for puns too, such as Saiko ("psycho").

Another Japanese pun is 「すばら C」 (subara C). This is a joke on the Japanese adjective 「すばらしい」 (subarashii), which means "wonderful."

A **daffynition** ([portmanteau](#) of [daffy](#) and [definition](#)) is a [pun](#) format involving the reinterpretation of an existing word, on the basis that it sounds like another word (or group of words). They are similar to [transpositional puns](#), but often much less complex and easier to create. Some daffynitions may be cheap puns,



but others can be clever, such as "raisins = the wrath of grapes". A subclass of daffynition is the goofinition which relies strictly on literal associations and correct spellings, such as "lobster = a weak tennis player".

Under the name **Uxbridge English Dictionary** making up daffynitions is a popular game on the [BBC Radio 4 comedy quiz show *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*](#).

[\[edit\]](#) Examples

- [abominable](#): A bull that swallowed a bomb. (a-bomb-in-a-bull)
- [alarms](#): What an [octopus](#) is. (all arms)
- [Bangalore](#): No end of an explosion. (bang-galore)
- [bigamist](#): An [Italian](#) fogbank. (big-a-mist)
- [buccaneer](#): too much to pay for corn ([a] buck an ear)
- [burglarize](#): What a crook sees with (burglar eyes)
- [cobra](#): A feminine undergarment made for Siamese twins. (co-bra)
- [crèche](#): An upmarket motor accident. (Crèche/Crash)
- [dandelion](#): A fashionably dressed big cat (dandy lion)
- [decadent](#): Possessing only ten teeth. (deca-dent)
- [dilate](#): live long (die late)
- [dockyard](#): A [physician's](#) [garden](#). (doc yard)
- [dynamite](#): To take a flea out to dinner. (dine-a-mite)
- [garbage](#): Eatables smelled backwards. (smelled-spelled)
- [geometry](#): What the sapling said when it grew up. ("Gee, I'm a tree")
- [hula dance](#): Wild waist show. (Wild West-wild waist)
- Homerphobia: Hatred of [Homer Simpson](#). ([Simpsons](#))
- [impolite](#): A flaming elf. (imp-alight)
- [indistinct](#): where one places dirty dishes (indistinct/in the sink)
- [innuendoes](#): Italian suppositories. (in-you-end-os)
- [oboe](#): An English [tramp](#). (hobo)
- [paradox](#): Two doctors. (pair of docs) OR Where one ties two boats. (Pair of docks)
- [parasites](#): What you see from the top of the Eiffel Tower. (Paris sites)
- [pasteurise](#): Too far to see. (past your eyes)
- [perpetuate](#): The canary you had for breakfast. (poor pet you ate)
- [portent](#): The Millennium Dome. (Poor Tent)
- [pronoun](#): A noun that has lost its amateur status. (pro + noun) (From [Calvin](#)



[and Hobbes\)](#)

- [propaganda](#): A gentlemanly [goose](#). (proper gander)
- [quack doctor](#): One who "ducks" the law.
- [shrewd](#): A rude shrew. (shrew + rude)
- [shrink](#): An ice-skating shrew. (shrew + rink)
- [suitable](#): A cow. (Suit a bull)
- [zebra](#): 25 sizes larger than an A-bra. (Zee bra-zebra) (Z is pronounced "Zed" in English)

- [Feghoot](#)

Feghoot

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A **Feghoot** is a humorous short story or vignette ending in an atrocious [pun](#). The term originated with a long running series of short [science fiction](#) pieces that appeared under the collective title "Through Time and Space with Ferdinand Feghoot", published in various magazines over several decades. They were written by [Reginald Bretnor](#) under the [anagrammatic pseudonym](#) of Grendel Briarton. The usual formulae the stories followed were for the title character to solve a problem bedeviling some manner of being or extricate himself from a dangerous situation. The events could take place all over the galaxy and in various historical periods on Earth and elsewhere. In his adventures, Feghoot worked for the Society for the Aesthetic Re-Arrangement of History and traveled via a device that had no name but was typographically represented as the ")("). The pieces were usually only a few paragraphs long, and always ended with a deliberately terrible pun that was often based on a well-known title or catch-phrase.

"Through Time and Space with Ferdinand Feghoot" was originally published in the magazine [Fantasy and Science Fiction](#) from 1956 to 1973. (In 1973, the magazine ran a contest soliciting readers' Feghoots as entries.) The series also appeared in *Fantasy and Science Fiction's* sister magazine [Venture Science Fiction Magazine](#), and later in [Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine](#), [Amazing Stories](#), and other publications. The individual pieces were identified by Roman numerals rather than titles. The stories have been collected in



several editions, each an expanded version of the previous, the most recent being *The Collected Feghoot* from Pulphouse Press.

Many of the ideas and puns for Bretnor's stories were contributed by others, including [F. M. Busby](#) and [E. Nelson Bridwell](#). Other authors have published Feghoots written on their own, including [Isaac Asimov](#) and [John Brunner](#).

There have been numerous [fan-produced](#) stories as well.

Strictly speaking, a Feghoot has to star Ferdinand Feghoot. In 1962, *Amazing Stories* published "Through Time and Space with Benedict Breadfruit" by Grandall Barretton ([Randall Garrett](#)), which all ended in a pun on the name of a famous SF writer. One example of a Feghoot is the "Forty million Frenchmen" gag ("For DeMille, young fur-henchmen...") on page 559 of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Feghoots are a subset of the [shaggy dog story](#), which is usually much longer.

- [Knock-knock joke](#)

Knock-knock joke

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Knock-knock jokes are well entrenched in certain countries such as the UK, Ireland, France, Australia, the U.S.A., Canada, and South Africa. In other nations, such as Brazil and Germany, they are practically unknown. In French they begin "Toc-Toc" and in Afrikaans "Klop-klop". In Spanish, it may be enough for the punchline to rhyme with the response. Knock-knock jokes were in common usage amongst South African school children in the early 1950s but the exact origin of the format remains uncertain. In India they have recently started off as "Khat-Khat" jokes in [Hindi](#).

The following was in circulation in Cape Town in about 1953:

Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Delores.

Delores who?

Delores my shepherd... (a play on "[the Lord is my shepherd](#)")

Other [meta-jokes](#) omit the pun:



Knock, knock!

Who's there?

Gestapo.

Gestapo who?

[exaggerated German accent] VE VILL ASK ZE KVESTIONS!

In France, the punchline is almost always a pun on the title of a popular song, allowing the last answer to be sung :

Toc Toc! (Knock knock!)

Qui est là? (Who's there?)

Sheila.

Sheila qui? (Sheila who?)

Sheila lutte finale... . (a pun on "c'est la lutte finale" (It's the final struggle), the opening line of [The Internationale](#))

In Shakespear's play Macbeth a comic relief character delivers a 20 line monologue and satire that makes reference to events of that time it follows the pattern of knock knock who's there? but it is done entirely by the character and knocks from off stage. the character is a drunken porter that pretends he is the porter to the gates of hell welcoming sinners of different professions:
(Macbeth ActII, sciii)

Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub?

Here's a farmer that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty.

Come in time, have napkins enough about you, here you'll sweat for 't.

(this is a joke referring to a price drop in crops, as well as a joke about the heat in hell)

Knock, knock! Who's there, in th' other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven. O, come in, equivocator.

(this passage is believed to be a reference to a trial of the Jesuits who were charged with equivocation *speaking unclearly or speaking with double meaning*)



Knock, knock, knock! Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor
come hither for stealing out of a French hose. Come in, tailor.
Here you may roast your goose.

(the tailor is accused of stealing cloth while making breches, this is a joke about
a fashion trend in Shakespearian times, also a pun for roasting the tailor's iron
with the heat of hell)

- [Malapropism](#)

A **malapropism** is the substitution of one word for another, incorrect, word with
a similar sound, usually to comic effect.

[\[edit\]](#) Etymology

The word *malapropos* is an adjective or adverb meaning "inappropriate" or
"inappropriately", derived from the [French](#) phrase *mal à propos* (literally
"ill-suited"). It is believed to have entered English usage around 1660.

The term *malapropism* is generally attributed to the public reaction to [Richard
Brinsley Sheridan](#)'s 1775 play [The Rivals](#), and in particular the character Mrs.
Malaprop. Sheridan presumably named his character Mrs. Malaprop, who
frequently misspoke (to great comic effect), in joking reference to the word
malapropos. The term *malapropism* was coined to designate this specific kind
of mistake that Mrs. Malaprop frequently made.

[\[edit\]](#) Distinguishing features

An instance of mis-speech is called a malapropism when:

1. The word that is used means something different from the word the speaker or
writer intended to use.
2. The word that is used sounds similar to the word that was apparently meant or
intended. Using *obtuse* (wide or dull) instead of *acute* (narrow or sharp) is not
a malapropism; using *obtuse* (stupid or slow-witted) when one means *abstruse*
(esoteric or difficult to understand) would be.
3. The word that is used has a recognized meaning in the speaker's or writer's
language.



These characteristics set malapropisms apart from other speaking or writing mistakes, such as an [eggcorns](#) or [spoonerisms](#).

Simply making up a word, or adding a redundant or ungrammatical prefix (*irregardless* instead of *regardless*) or suffix (*subliminible* instead of *subliminal*) to an existing word, does not qualify as a malapropism.

[\[edit\]](#) Examples

[\[edit\]](#) *The Rivals*

- "She's as headstrong as a *allegory* on the banks of the [Nile](#)." (i.e., *alligator*)
- "He is the very *pineapple* of politeness." (i.e., *pinnacle*)
- "If I *reprehend* any thing in this world, it is the use of my *oracular* tongue, and a nice *derangement* of *epitaphs*!" (i.e., *apprehend*, *vernacular*, *arrangement*, *epithets*)
- "Venus has a *reprobate* orbit." (i.e., [retrograde](#))

Popular culture

- "I might just fade into [Bolivian](#), you know what I mean?" (i.e. *oblivion*) — [Mike Tyson](#)
- "I really dig [Hannibal](#). Hannibal had real guts. He rode elephants into *Cartilage*." (i.e. *Carthage*) — Mike Tyson
- "I am not going to make a *skeptical* out of my boxing career." (i.e. *spectacle*) — Tonya Harding
- "I can shoot with my left hand, I can shoot with my right hand, I'm *amphibious*." (i.e. *ambidextrous*) — [Charles Shackleford](#)
- "Mark Lee's arms went up like two giant *testicles*..." (i.e., *tentacles*) - [Jack Dyer](#) commenting on a [VFL](#) match ([Mark Lee](#) was a former [Richmond](#) ruckman)
- "If it's any *consolidation* ..." (i.e. *consolation*) — Ken James
- "My *nipple*." (i.e. *dimple*) — Malaysian singer [Siti Nurhaliza](#) when asked what her best facial feature was.
- "However, they delineate—quotas, I think, *vulcanize* society." (i.e. [balkanize](#)) - [George W. Bush](#)
- "On the [Day of Atonement](#), I cannot afford to be sick. (i.e. "a tournament") -- [Sam Snead](#), golfer. He said this in a [commercial](#) he made for [Bromo-Seltzer](#). According to the *Book of Sports Lists* by Pepe and Hollandrer, the [Jewish](#) part of his audience understood he was not referring to [Yom Kippur](#) but could not



pronounce "tournament".

- "Oh, you mean the ones with those *disraeli gears*?" (i.e. *derailleur gears*) - [Cream](#) roadie Mick Turner, during a conversation between [Eric Clapton](#) and [Ginger Baker](#) about racing bicycles.^[2]
- "I made a *carnal* sin (i.e., *cardinal*), I forgot my words". — singer Brandon Rogers after being voted off American Idol on [March 14, 2007](#).
- "But beyond crude oil, natural gas and electricity, the Nymex is also a major platform for trading futures and options contracts in all sorts of *precocious* metals." (i.e. *precious metals*)^[3]

[edit] Shakespeare

Malapropisms appear in many works written well before Sheridan created their namesake character; [William Shakespeare](#) used them in several of his comedies.

Constable Dogberry in [Much Ado About Nothing](#):

- "...you shall *comprehend* all *vagrom* men..." (i.e. *apprehend, vagrant*; Act 3, Scene III)
- "Comparisons are *odorous*." (i.e., *odious*; Act 3, Scene V)
- "Our watch, sir, have indeed *comprehended* two *auspicious* persons." (i.e., *apprehended, suspicious*; Act 3, Scene V)

Launcelot in [The Merchant of Venice](#):

- "Certainly [Shylock] is the very devil *incarnal*..." (i.e., *incarnate*; Act 2, Scene II)
- "That is the very *defect* of the matter, sir." (i.e., *effect*; Act 2, Scene II)

Elbow in [Measure for Measure](#)

- "two notorious *benefactors*" (i.e., *malefactors*; Act 2, Scene I)
- "if she has been a woman *cardinally* given"; (i.e., *carnally*, Act 2, Scene I)

[Nick Bottom](#) in [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#) also frequently uses malapropisms, such as: Bottom says he will "aggravate" his voice when he really means he will "moderate" it. Bottom says "Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet!" He said odious which really means repulsive instead of a pleasant odour.



Shaggy dog story

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This article is about the joke. For the television program of the same name, see [Shaggy Dog Story \(TV\)](#).

In its original sense, a **shaggy dog story** is an extremely long-winded tale featuring extensive narration of typically irrelevant incidents, usually resulting in a pointless or absurd punchline. These stories are a special case of **yarns**, coming from the long tradition of campfire yarns.

Shaggy dog stories play upon the audience's preconceptions of the art of joke telling. The audience listens to the story with certain expectations, which are either simply not met or met in some entirely unexpected manner.^[1]

One such story is "The Encounter with the Horrible Monster," a shaggy dog story that is told as if it were a horror story. The story is a tale of a horrible monster (or an escaped lunatic, or an escaped prisoner, or a gorilla), that pursues a character implacably. After a lengthy exposition describing the pursuit, during which the audience's expectations of a horrendous climax are built up, the monster eventually corners his victim, at which point he touches him saying "[Tag!](#) You're it!"^[2]

Shaggy dog story has come to also mean a [joke](#) where a [pun](#) is finally achieved after a long (and ideally tedious) exposition. This is also called a [feqhoot](#). The humor in the [punch line](#) may be due to the sudden, unexpected recognition of a familiar saying, since the story has nothing to do with the usual context in which the phrase is normally found, yet the listener is surprised to discover it makes sense in both situations. Therefore, if the audience is not already familiar with the phrase used in the punch line, or is not aware of the multiple meanings of the words in the phrase, the surprise ending of the joke cannot be recovered by explaining the joke to the audience.

An example of this type is *The Rarie*, in which a cute pet grows so large (described in many stages) that its owner cannot keep it. He loads the Rarie onto a lorry and drives to a cliff, and is about to tip the animal over the brink when it looks out and says "hey, that's a long way to tip a Rarie"...

A shaggy dog story may not have a pun at all; the humor (if any) is then derived from the fact that the joke-teller held the attention of the listeners for a long time (such jokes can take five minutes or more to tell) for no reason at all (an [anticlimax](#)).^[3]



One joke of this type is "The Purple Flower." In this joke, with much detail and narration, a young boy is expelled from his elementary school and abandoned by his parents because he called a girl a "purple flower." He eventually hears of an old woman who can tell him why the term is so offensive; as he goes to find her, he sees her across the street and runs towards her, getting hit by the bus and dying as he crosses the street. The audience is then told that the moral of the story is that you should look both ways before you cross the street.

A more ribald or scatological version is [The Aristocrats](#).

[Isaac Asimov](#), whose specialties included both [science fiction](#) and humor, wrote a short story called "[Shah Guido G.](#)," referring to the story's Atlantean ruler. The story ends on an anticlimax, and when a reader protested that it was "nothing but a shaggy dog story," Asimov pointed out that the title "Shah Guido G." could also be read as "Shahgui [i.e. shaggy] Dog," indicating this had been his intention.

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[\[edit\]](#) The archetypical shaggy dog story

The commonly believed [archetype](#) of the shaggy dog story is a story that concerns a shaggy dog. The story builds up, repeatedly emphasizing how amazing the dog is. At the climax of the story, someone in the story reacts with, "That dog's not so shaggy." The expectations of the audience that have been built up by the presentation of the story, that the story will end with a punchline, are thus disappointed. Cohen gives the following example of this story:^[1]

“ *A boy owned a dog that was uncommonly shaggy. Many people remarked upon its considerable shagginess. When the boy learned that there are contests for shaggy dogs, he entered his dog. The dog won first prize for shagginess in both the local and the regional competitions. The boy* ”



entered the dog in ever-larger contests, until finally he entered it in the world championship for shaggy dogs. When the judges had inspected all of the competing dogs, they remarked about the boy's dog: "He's not so shaggy."

However, authorities disagree as to whether this particular story is the archetype after which the category is named. [Eric Partridge](#), for example, provides a very different story, as do William and Mary Morris in *The Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*.

According to Partridge and the Morrises, the archetypical shaggy dog story involves an advertisement placed in *The Times* announcing a search for a shaggy dog. In the Partridge story, an aristocratic family living in Park Lane is searching for a lost dog, and an American answers the advertisement with a shaggy dog that he has found and personally brought across the Atlantic, only to be received by the butler at the end of the story who takes one look at the dog and shuts the door in his face saying "But not so shaggy as *that*, sir!" In the Morris story, the advertiser is organizing a competition to find the shaggiest dog in the world, and after a lengthy exposition of the search for such a dog a winner is presented to the aristocratic instigator of the competition, who says "I don't think he's so shaggy."^{[4][5]}

- [Spoonerism](#)

Spoonerism

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A '**spoonerism**' is a [play on words](#) in which corresponding [consonants](#), [vowels](#), or [morphemes](#) are switched (see [metathesis](#)). It is named after the Reverend [William Archibald Spooner](#) (1844–1930), Warden of [New College, Oxford](#), who was notoriously prone to this tendency.

While spoonerisms are commonly heard as slips of the tongue resulting from unintentionally getting one's words in a tangle, they are considered a form of [pun](#) when used purposely as a [play on words](#).



[\[edit\]](#) Examples of spoonerisms

Many of the quotations attributed to Spooner are [apocryphal](#); [The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations](#) (3rd edition, 1979) lists only one substantiated spoonerism: "The weight of rages will press hard upon the employer."

Quotations attributed to Spooner include:

- "The Lord is a shoving leopard" ("loving shepherd")
- "It is kisstomary to cuss the bride" ("customary to kiss")
- "Mardon me, padam, this pie is occupewed. Can I sew you to another sheet?" (Pardon me, madam, this pew is occupied. Can I show you to another seat?)
- To a student: "You have hissed all my mystery lectures, and were caught fighting a liar in the quad. Having tasted two worms, you will leave by the next town drain" ("missed ... history," "lighting a fire," "wasted two terms," "down train")
- To a lady at a college reception: "You'll soon be had as a matter of course" ("mad as a Hatter, of course")
- "Let us glaze our asses to the queer old Dean" ("Let us raise our glasses to the dear old queen")
- "We'll have the hags flung out" ("flags hung")
- "a half-warmed fish" ("half-formed wish")
- "Is the bean dizzy?" ("dean busy")
- "Go and shake a tower" ("take a shower")
- "a well-boiled icicle" ("well-oiled bicycle")

[\[edit\]](#) Modern usage

In modern terms, a spoonerism is any changing of sounds in this manner. While simple enough to do, a clever spoonerism is one that results in a funny phrase or sentence. "Flutterby" is an oft-cited example of a spoonerism that has not lost its original meaning. A well-known example is "I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy" (variously attributed to [W. C. Fields](#), [Tom Waits](#), and most commonly [Dorothy Parker](#)), which not only shifts the beginning sounds of the word lobotomy, but the entire phrase "frontal lobotomy". The preceding phrase was further developed by Dean Martin who said, "I would rather have a FREE bottle in front of me than a PRE-frontal lobotomy.



Another modern usage of spoonerisms is the children's book [Runny Babbit: A Billy Sook](#), which is the last children's book by Shel Silverstein.

When a [digraph](#) such as 'sh', 'ch', 'ph', etc... is used, both letters are moved to preserve the original verbal sound. For example, "Cheer for Dennis" would be "Deer for Chennis", or "Bloody Rush" would be "Ruddy Blush".

Best described or illustrated to new English speakers would be the transposition of the first [staccato](#) or [plosive](#) in a word pair such as peer dark. In a situation where [profanity](#) is unsuitable, spoonerism is sometimes used to tone down the intensity of the expression. "Bass ackwards", "Nucking Futs", and "Shake a tit" (itself a risqué phrase) are all common examples of these kinds of spoonerisms.

The [Capitol Steps](#), a political satire group, use spoonerisms in a segment of their show called "Lirty Dies and Scicious Vandals".

Zilch the Torysteller is a [Renaissance fair](#) actor who tells [fairy tales](#) completely in Spoonerisms.

The stories I tell have a bit of a twist to them. I spalk in toonerisms.
Ah, I talk in spoonerisms. Citching one's swonsonants fack and
borth Worning your Turds around. It's serfectly pimple. You just
have to tink thaster than you falk

[1]

American Country-Western singer/comedian Archie Campbell is famous for his stories of RinderCella (Cinderella), where the princess "slopped her dripper" (dropped her slipper).

A well-worn insult in speeches of the college debating society type is to describe an opponent as "the sort of person the Rev. Spooner would have described as 'a shining wit'". [\[citation needed\]](#)

[\[edit\]](#) Kniferism and forkerism

[Douglas Hofstadter](#) uses the [nonce terms](#) *kniferism* and *forkerism* to refer to interchanging the [nuclei](#) and [codas](#), respectively, of [syllables](#). (Example: a British TV newsreader who, in a story about a crime scene, referred to the police removing a 'hypodeemic nerdle'.) Spoonerisms exchange the [onsets](#). Another example is an incident that happened to veteran newscaster (and [Timex](#) watch pitchman) [John Cameron Swayze](#). During an interview on [The Mike Douglas Show](#), he stated that on a radio show, he was making reference



to a fellow journalist as a "noted woman columnist" but accidentally said "noted woolen communist".

- [Tom Swifty](#)

Tom Swifty

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A **Tom Swifty** (or **Tom Swiftie**) is a [phrase](#) in which a quoted sentence is linked by a [pun](#) to the manner in which it is attributed. Tom Swifties may be considered a type of [Wellerism](#).

Examples include:

- "Pass me the shellfish," said Tom **crabbily**.
- "Can I go looking for the [Grail](#) again?" Tom **requested**.
- "I unclogged the drain with a vacuum cleaner," Tom said **succinctly**.
- "I might as well be dead," Tom **croaked**.
- "They had to amputate them both at the ankles," Tom said **defeatedly**.
- "Who discovered radium?" asked [Marie, curiously](#).

As the examples illustrate, the standard syntax is for the quoted sentence to be first, followed by the description of the act of speaking. The hypothetical speaker is usually, by convention, called "Tom" (or "he" or "she"), unless some other name is needed for the pun (as in the [Marie Curie](#) example above).

The name comes from the [Tom Swift](#) series of books (1910–1993), similar in many ways to the better-known [Hardy Boys](#) and [Nancy Drew](#) series, and, like them, produced by the [Stratemeyer Syndicate](#). In this series, the young scientist hero, Tom Swift, underwent adventures involving rocket ships, ray-guns and other things he had invented. A stylistic idiosyncrasy of at least some books in this series was that the author [Victor Appleton](#) ([Edward Stratemeyer](#), [Howard Garis](#), or others in Stratemeyer's employ) went to great trouble to avoid repetition of the unadorned word "said", preferring alternative verbs as well as heavy use of adverbs and phrases describing the manner or circumstances of speaking. Since many adverbs end in "ly" this kind of pun was originally called a Tom Swiftly, the prime example being "*We must hurry,*" *said Tom Swiftly*. At some point, this kind of humor was called a *Tom Swifty*, and that name is now more prevalent.



This excerpt (with emphasis added) from the 1910 novel [Tom Swift and His Airship](#) illustrates the style:

"Oh, I'm not a professor," he said **quickly**. "I'm a professional balloonist, parachute jumper. Give exhibitions at county fairs. Leap for life, and all that sort of thing. I guess you mean my friend. He's smart enough for a professor. Invented a lot of things. How much is the damage?"

"No professor?" **cried** Miss Perkman **indignantly**. "Why I understood from Miss Nestor that she called some one professor."

"I was referring to my friend, Mr. Swift," said Mary. "His father's a professor, anyhow, isn't he, Tom? I mean Mr. Swift!"

"I believe he has a degree, but he never uses it," **was the lad's answer**.

"Ha! Then I have been deceived! There is no professor present!" **and the old maid drew herself up as though desirous of punishing some one**. "Young ladies, for the last time, I order you to your rooms," **and, with a dramatic gesture she pointed to the scuttle through which the procession had come**.

"Say something, Tom — I mean Mr. Swift," **appealed** Mary Nestor, **in a whisper**, to our hero. "Can't you give some sort of a lecture? The girls are just crazy to hear about the airship, and this ogress won't let us. Say something!"

"I — I don't know what to say," **stammered** Tom.

The Tom Swifty, then, is a parody of this style with the incorporation of a pun. Some analysts distinguish among sub-types of Tom Swifties. Some call those in which the pun is carried by the verb "Croakers" (after the above listed example in which "Tom croaked"), or insist that only those examples in which the pun is carried by an adverb ending in *-ly* are "true" Tom Swifties (or Swiftlies), or make other distinctions.

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- [Transpositional pun](#)

Transpositional pun

A **transpositional pun** is a complicated [pun](#) format with two aspects. It involves transposing the words in a well-known phrase or saying to get a [daffynition](#)-like clever redefinition of a well-known word unrelated to the original phrase. The redefinition is thus the first aspect, the transposition the second aspect.

As a result, transpositional puns are considered among the most difficult to create, and commonly the most challenging to comprehend, particularly for non-native speakers of the language in which they're given (most commonly [English](#)).



[[edit](#)] Examples

| Pun | Original reference |
|---|---|
| Alimony : The bounty of mutiny. | The Mutiny on the Bounty . |
| Dieting : A waist is a terrible thing to mind. | "A mind is a terrible thing to waste", the motto of the United Negro College Fund . |
| Hangovers : The wrath of grapes. | The Grapes of Wrath |
| Olympic officials: The souls that time men's tries. | Thomas Paine 's saying "These are the times that try men's souls". |
| The Oboe : An ill wind nobody blows good. | "'tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good". |
| Feudalism : It's your count that votes! | "It's your vote that counts!" |
| Candidiasis : The wicked itch of the yeast | "the wicked witch of the east" from The Wizard of Oz |
| Tumours : All swell that end swell | "All's well that ends well" |
| Screaming : Words speak louder than actions | "Actions speak louder than words" |
| Soldiers of fortune : Give Chance some peace | "Give peace a chance" |

•



Punny quotations

- "A pun is its own reword." — [Dance Drier](#), British [comedian](#)
- "A pun is the lowest form of humor, unless you thought of it yourself." — [Doug Larson](#)
- "A pun is the shortest distance between two straight lines." — original source unknown
- "As different as York from Leeds" — James Joyce in [Finnegans Wake](#), a play on "As different as chalk from cheese".
- "Blunt and I made atrocious puns. I believe, indeed, that Miss Blunt herself made a little punkin, as I called it" — [Henry James](#)
- "Congratulations you have one, it's a year's subscription of bad puns" — [Kurt Cobain](#), "[Opinion](#)"
- "Hanging is too good for a man who makes puns; he should be drawn and quoted." — [Fred Allen](#)
- "Heralds don't pun; they cant." [SCA](#) heralds' expression
- "If puns are the lowest form of humor, are buns the lowest form of bread?" — Piers Anthony, [Author](#)
- "Immanuel doesn't pun; he Kant." — [Oscar Wilde](#)
- "In the beginning was the pun." — [Samuel Beckett](#), [Murphy](#)
- "Paris of Troy was so named because his mother had a considerable amount of gaul and married a Frenchman." — Original Source Unknown.
- "*Pun* (*n.*): the lowest form of humour" — Samuel Johnson, [lexicographer](#)
- "Puns are the last refuge of the witless." — another way of stating the above
- "The goodness of the true pun is in the direct ratio of its intolerability." — [Edgar Allan Poe](#), [Marginalia](#), 1849
- "'The man', says Johnson, 'that would make / A pun, would pick a pocket!'" . — [Lewis Carroll](#), "Phantasmagoria", 1869
- "The pun is mightier than the word." — original source unknown
- "You can tune a guitar, but you can't tuna fish. Unless of course, you play bass." — [Douglas Adams](#)
- Baloo (a bear): "look for the bare necessities, the simple bare necessities....". — [The Jungle Book \(1967 film\)](#)
- Explorer: Then one afternoon I bagged six tigers. Six of the biggest tigers I ever saw.
Hostess: You captured six tigers?
Explorer: I bagged them. I bagged them and bagged them to go away, but they hung around all afternoon. They were the most persistant tigers I ever



saw. —[Groucho Marx](#) and [Margaret Dumont](#), [Animal Crackers](#)

- Max: I like your nurse's uniform, Guy.
Peter: Actually these are O.R. scrubs.
Max: Oh, are they? —[Rushmore](#)
- Scholar 1 [to scholar 2]; "Have you read Marx?"
Scholar 2; "Indeed I have my good sir, I believe they are from these cane chairs."

[\[edit\]](#) More puns

- A backward poet writes inverse.
- A bicycle can't stand on its own because it is two tired.
- A boiled egg in the morning is hard to beat.
- A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion.
- A dyslexic man walks into a bra.
- A Freudian slip is when you say one thing but mean your mother.
- A gossip is someone with a great sense of rumour.
- A hangover is the wrath of grapes.
- A lot of money is tainted - It taint yours and it taint mine.
- A man drowned in a bowl of muesli. A strong currant pulled him in.
- A man needs a mistress just to break the monogamy.
- A man's home is his castle, in a manor of speaking.
- A pessimist's blood type is always b-negative
- A plateau is a high form of flattery.
- A successful diet is the triumph of mind over platter.
- Acupuncture is a jab well done.
- Alarms: What an octopus is.
- An invisible man marries an invisible woman. The kids were nothing to look at either.
- Bakers trade bread recipes on a knead-to-know basis.
- Condoms should be used on every conceivable occasion.
- Corduroy pillows are making headlines.
- Crick: The sound that a Japanese camera makes
- Dancing cheek-to-cheek is really a form of floor play.
- Dijon vu - the same mustard as before.
- Do you want some cheese to go with your whine?
- Dockyard: A physician's garden.
- Does the name Pavlov ring a bell?



- Energizer Bunny arrested: charged with battery.
- Every calendar's days are numbered.
- He drove his expensive car into a tree and found out how the Mercedes bends.
- He had a photographic memory that was never developed.
- He often broke into song because he couldn't find the key.
- I used to work in a blanket factory, but it folded.
- I went to a seafood disco last week... and pulled a muscle.
- I went to buy some camouflage trousers the other day but I couldn't find any.
- If you don't pay your exorcist, you get repossessed.
- In democracy your vote counts. In feudalism your count votes.
- Incongruous: Where bills are passed.
- Khakis: What you need to start the car in Boston.
- Local Area Network in Australia: the LAN down under.
- Once you've seen one shopping center, you've seen a mall.
- Pasteurize: Too far to see.
- Practice safe eating - always use condiments.
- Reading whilst sunbathing makes you well red.
- Santa's helpers are subordinate clauses.
- Sea captains don't like crew cuts.
- She was engaged to a boyfriend with a wooden leg but broke it off!
- Shotgun wedding: A case of wife or death.
- The man who fell into an upholstery machine is fully recovered.
- Those who jump off a bridge in Paris are in Seine.
- Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
- Two peanuts walk into a bar, and one was a salted.
- What do you call a fish with no eyes?... A fsh.
- What happened to the butcher who backed into his meat grinder? He got a little *behind* in his work.
- What's the definition of a will? (It's a dead giveaway.)
- When a clock is hungry, it goes back four seconds.
- When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.
- When you dream in colour, it's a pigment of your imagination.
- Why are ellipses romantic? Because a kiss is a lip tickle.
- With her marriage, she got a new name and a dress.
- Without geometry, life is pointless.
- You feel stuck with your debt if you can't budge it



http://www.multilingualwebmaster.com/library/puns_translation.html

On the relative (un)translatability of Pun By [Alexandra Girard](#)

Puns are ubiquitous items of language that express wit and humour in a concise way. From advertising slogans through to classic literary work and news headlines, you can't escape them. Walter Redfern (in *Puns*, Blackwell, London, 1984) gives a pretty satisfying definition of the beast, saying: "To pun is to treat homonyms as synonyms". When it comes to actually translating the animal, that's another matter: such an enterprise entails high linguistic skills, sharp decision making (too many possible translations kill translation, and in the Internet era, the quickest is the best), creativity (rewriting) and broad cultural knowledge.

Adapt, don't translate

Play on words or puns epitomize what separates two languages and are a tricky mastermind for translators whose options often solely depend on the notion of intertextuality. This consists in attempting to make up for untranslatability through rewriting, and having to rely on other parts of the entire text as reference material to copy. The translator will have to *fish* for characteristics in the author's style throughout the whole text in order to reproduce this style and create text instead of actually just shifting from a language to another. The basic one to one equivalence method being irrelevant here, there is no other choice than to invent. But can this method still be called translation? The decision-making all depends on one's definition: does translation require absolute fidelity to the source text or is it more an adaptation or a *transcreation*, can the translator invent text in the original writer's style (how pretentious!) to make up for the untranslatable bits? (When) does the translator have the right to add or omit anything?

French philosopher and linguist Jacques Derrida* says: "Translation practises the *difference* between signifier and signified" and proposes as an exercise to try and transfer this simple quotation into English: "Oui, oui, vous m'entendez bien, ce sont des mots français". "*Oui, oui*, you are receiving me well, these are French words." Or "yes, yes, [...] these are *not* French words"? Whatever solution, there's always a loss that "derails" translation.

Let's say puns *are* translatable but involve the inevitable loss of information at a certain level (entropy), whether this information is contained in the form or code (signifier) or in the content or message (signified).

* Derrida for beginners, by Collins & Mayblin, 1996, Icon Books.

What is translation?

So what is to be done? When the languages have common roots, whether purely linguistic or cultural, the task can prove difficult though possible. However, imagine translating from Chinese to Arabic. Mission: impossible.

Isn't there a school of thought arguing that any translated work cannot render the subtlety of the



original language, let alone the full message? "*Traduttore traditore*" (translator, traitor) say the Italians. And as another example, newly converted Muslims whose first language is not Arabic are recommended to read the Holy Koran in the original version so that the message of God shall be understood in its entirety. It's because form and content are so intimately linked in the sacred words that there is no way to render this relationship, which actually forms the rhythm of the text, through another language, however good the translation may be.

Following this theory, Shakespeare would have been known only to the English-speaking world but thanks to creative translators who demystified literature as much as the original author, the text could be reworked and Shakespeare's wit rendered in as many languages as possible.

These reflections are also valid for the translation of poetry, which in itself is a play on words and "what gets lost in translation" (according to Robert Frost). This is proven in the highly recommended *Le Ton Beau de Marot* by Douglas F. Hofstadter*, where he enters an ever-open quest for the ideal English translation of a French poem by Marot and finds himself literally lost through a maze of possibilities with more than 88 potential translations. The author elegantly points out that an anagram for *Translation* is *Lost In An Art*.

* 1997, Harpers & Collins.

A good way to verify the acceptability of a translation is perhaps to work it reversibly even if this exercise proves fastidious and not always efficient: translate the text and retranslate it towards the source language, and check the value of your work. Let's look at the first sentence of French writer Raymond Queneau (the champion of puns in French classical literature) in his most famous novel, *Zazie dans le Métro*: - "Keskipudonktan" standing for "Qu'est ce qui pue donc tant?", is cleverly rendered by Barbara Wright as "Howcanaystinksotho" for "how can they stink so though?". Following the reverse translation method however, the English version would have been way different from the creative adaptation that is this official translation. Behind every translator who overcomes the difficulties of puns, there is a potential mini Shakespeare, for their linguistic skills count as much as their talent for writing.

* *Zazie in the Metro*, by Raymond Queneau (1959), translated by Barbara Wright (1960), Penguin Books.

And last but not least, we could open another debate as to **equivalences** with this last example: "How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" for there are lots of similar expressions in French whose interest lies not so much in the meaning but in the form. After all, it is ideas we translate, not words. There is no valid method, or golden rule to translate puns. The best asset for the translator is their faith in the possibility of the task. To conclude, try translating the following joke in as many language pairs as possible, and feel free to send your versions to the email address below:



- "Don't you know the King's English?"
- "No Sir, is he?"