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PUN THERAPY IN LINGUISTIC EDUCATION

*Pun is beneficial fun
if used without abuse.*

L. Bobchynets

*Dear students, I have made puntastic pancakes for you.
Your task is to determine the ingredients.*

L. Bobchynets

Abstract

The research paper explores the concept of pun therapy as a linguistic and educational tool in teaching students specializing in linguistics. The study aims to describe the multifunctional nature of pun therapy in linguistic education and to propose materials for studying pun in translation courses. The research identifies various applications of pun in linguistic education including pun as linguistic studies (examining lexico-semantic and syntactic means of pun creation: such as homonymy, paronymy, polysemy, syllable regrouping, etc.), pun and its translation (distinguishing between translatable and untranslatable pun, and exploring compensatory methods for translating untranslatable pun), pun in literature and advertising, pun as relaxation, wordplay as a method for pronunciation correction, pun as a means of self-presentation.

Pun therapy is represented as a type of wordplay therapy or verbal humour therapy with significant linguistic and educational potential. It contributes to motivation for studies, creates a positive emotional atmosphere in communication and interaction between a teacher and students. The research draws on theoretical issues related to humour and laughter as therapy, humour in education, and practical resources, such as books containing puns which can be used in teaching and studying pun for students of linguistic specialities. The methods employed in the study include lexico-semantic analysis of pun creation and functional analysis of pun in teaching. The study emphasizes the beneficial influence of pun in both teaching and learning contexts.

Keywords: pun therapy, wordplay therapy, humour therapy, laughter therapy.

Анотація

У роботі досліджено каламбуротерапію як лінгводидактичний інструмент у навчанні студентів-лінгвістів. Мета дослідження полягає в розкритті багатфункціонального характеру каламбуротерапії в лінгвістичній освіті і під час вивчення каламбуру в перекладознавчому курсі. Описано різноманітне впровадження каламбуру в лінгводидактиці: каламбур як об'єкт лінгвістичного вивчення (лексико-семантичні та синтаксичні засоби творення каламбуру: омонімія, паронімія, полісемія, перерозподіл складів тощо), каламбур і його переклад (перекладний і непереказаний каламбур, засоби компенсації при відтворенні непереказаного каламбуру), каламбур у літературі й рекламі, каламбур як релаксація, словогра як метод корекції вимови, каламбур як спосіб самопрезентації.

Каламбуротерапія представлена як тип словогральної терапії або терапії вербального гумору зі значним лінгвістичним та освітнім потенціалом. Вона сприяє мотивації до навчання, створює позитивну емоційну атмосферу для спілкування та взаємодії викладача й студентів. Матеріал дослідження містить теоретичні знання з гумору як гуморотерапії й сміхотерапії в освіті, а також практичні джерела: книжки з каламбурами, які можна використовувати в його викладанні студентам філологічних спеціальностей. Методи дослідження охоплюють лексико-семантичний і функціональний аналізи каламбуру. Наголошено на його позитивному впливі на процес викладання й навчання.

Ключові слова: каламбуротерапія, словогральна терапія, гуморотерапія, сміхотерапія.

Introduction. Humour therapy is mainly used in medicine and psychology, particularly with cancer patients and those suffering from depression. Humour is good for health because it increases lung capacity, strengthens abdominal muscles, and increases immunoglobulin A, which is one of the major antibodies produced by the immune system (Martin & Dobbin, 1988). So, humour possesses a healing function. McGhee (1999) described the healing effect of humour. In the educational process, pun therapy can gain practical use not only at the lessons of linguistics, literature, teaching methodology, psychology, but also across various subjects. Laughter therapy, or humour therapy, improves our mood, helps in coping with stress and anxiety. Consequently, before an exam, a test or at the beginning of a lesson a teacher can use humour to cheer up students, to reduce tension and to create a trustful and calm atmosphere.

Literature review. Pun is usually humorous and funny. Humour involves cognitive, emotional, psychophysiological, behavioral, and social aspects (Martin, 2000). Humour is known for its therapeutic effect because humour and laughter are associated with a pleasant emotional feeling (Ruch, 1993). It is especially important to get rid of anxiety and tension during the war or time of crisis, as it is very hard to concentrate on new material if students are anxious and worried. At present numerous studies have examined the role of humour and laughter in education (Fernández, 2019), humour in teaching medical students (Sullivan, 2001), in adult education (Shibinsky & Malissa, 2010), in early childhood education (Chaniotakis & Papazoglou, 2019, Hegstad, 2022), in teaching Spanish as a foreign language (Rivero González, 2011), in online teaching (Erdoğan & Çakıroğlu, 2021), in education in Latin America (Suárez Marrero, 2024). All these studies emphasize beneficial and multifunctional application of humour in educational settings. This paper proposes the integration of pun therapy into linguistic education, combining the study of pun with its therapeutic effect.

According to Pollio and Humphrey (1996), when used appropriately, humour decreases students' anxiety, boosts self-esteem and improves their ability to learn (p. 102). Therapeutic effect of humour was also emphasized by Freud, whose interest in humour and wordplay is reflected in his work *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Freud's analysis places humor within the context of a theory of signs, which is important in understanding wordplay, jokes, and spontaneous humour as part of the therapeutic process.

Puentes and Solís (2010, pp. 369–370) mention ten main functions of humour: motivational function, function of friendship, function of distention, function of entertaining, aggressive function, defensive function, intellectual function, creative function, educational function, transformational function. We agree to all the above-mentioned functions and we are sure that humour can perform additional functions, including curative, therapeutic, aesthetic and self-presentation. When a teacher has a good sense of humour and is able to make students laugh and feel at ease at the lessons, the process of studies will be emotionally positive which will help memorize and learn many new things easily and will provide greater students' engagement in classroom activities.

According to Winnicott (1982), “psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together” (p. 38). If we apply the same approach in teaching, we can state that a teacher and students should use pun together for a better therapeutic effect.

The aim of our research is to describe multifunctional character of pun therapy in linguistic education and to suggest materials or tasks in studying pun in courses on linguistics and translation studies. We will explore possible implementation of pun in linguistic education: pun as a subject of linguistic studies, pun and its translation (translatable and untranslatable pun), pun in literature and advertising, pun as relaxation, pun as a form of

self-presentation. We view pun therapy as a type of wordplay therapy or verbal humour therapy which possesses a great linguistic and educational potential. **The research material** includes theoretical issues on humour as therapy and humour in education, as well as practical resources such as books containing puns which can be recommended for teaching and studying pun to students specializing in linguistics (J. Fletcher, M. García Viñolo, R. O. Shipman, D. Nilsen and A. Nilsen). **The methods** of the study comprise lexicosemantic analysis of pun creation and functional analysis of pun therapy in education.

Results and discussion. Teaching an optional course in Humour Translation at Kyiv National Linguistic University revealed the positive and curative power of humour. Beyond being the object of our studies, it also performs other multiple functions. As Shibinsky and Malissa state, humour in class “is not limited to jokes or humorous stories; rather, it can include props, puns, short stories, anecdotes, riddles, or cartoons. When used correctly, humor should be memorable and capture students’ attention on the subject at hand” (2010, p. 38).

Development of sense of humour is crucial for future linguists and translators, as it enhances their understanding of humour and its value, thereby facilitating effective translation into other languages. Sullivan mentions multiple strategies which help develop a more acute sense of humor. These techniques include learning to belly laugh and tell jokes, laughing at oneself, finding humor in the midst of stress, creating a humor library, and associating with funny people” (2001, p. 4). We consider this approach particularly relevant in studying humour in literary and advertising texts, as well as in surveying students’ understanding of humour, including pun.

Justin Fletcher’s jokes, which are based on wordplay are good examples of pun for students studying English. Most of these jokes have a question-answer dialogue structure or a pseudo-definition based on homonymy, paronymy, polysemy or non-existent words, for example:

- *Which are the strongest creatures in the sea?*

- *Mussels.* (Fletcher, 2011, p. 34) (This plays on the homophony between “mussels” and “muscles”)

- *Why do potatoes make good detectives?*

- *Because they keep their eyes peeled.* (Fletcher, 2011, p. 48) (collision of direct and figurative meaning of the word “peel”)

- *What’s a flea’s favourite way to travel?*

- *Itch-hiking.* (Fletcher, 2011, p. 30) (pseudo-definition, non-existent word “itch-hiking, which is paronymic to “hitch-hiking”)

Laughter therapy is particularly useful in dealing with traumatic situations, such as anxiety before exams. Funny stories or jokes may be told about exams to decrease students’ tension and anxiety. Keller believes that “humor’s grasp of the human’s condition is creative” (1984, p. 107). Freud states that “joking becomes a socially acceptable way to handle problems. Rather than falling into pathologic states of neuroses, psychoses, or intoxication, we use humor to handle our difficulties” (Sullivan, 2001, p. 5).

Pun as a strategy of self-presentation may be used by a teacher during a lecture or a practical class, or by students in their presentations or answers. We can give as an example of humour as self-presentation strategy in the research paper by Sullivan (2001) who starts the paper with a pun title “*Hand Therapy: The Healing Touch with a Touch of Humor!*” (p. 3) and also ends it with humour “*Through the use of that basic treatment tenet, “therapeutic use of self”, hand therapists have the power to reach out to others, the*

power to touch, the power to laugh, and the power to heal all at our fingertips. Every pun intended!” (p. 9).

Pun is, on the one hand, an intellectual exercise in understanding ambiguity and developing a sense of humour, and on the other hand, it is an emotional tool for creating the necessary mood and favourable atmosphere in education. We agree with Southam and Barker Schwartz that “humor can nurture the learners creativity, socialization into the profession and even their physical health” (2004, p. 68.) The use of humour and laughter in group brainstorming contributes to collaborative problem-based learning and allows participants to try various ideas and original patterns (Warnock, 1989).

It is advisable to find thematically different puns in accordance with the students’ future professions to form or keep their interest. For linguistic specializations pun may be studied as a separate subject more profoundly, focusing not only on the therapeutic effect but also on understanding the mechanisms of pun creation, its translatability / untranslatability into other languages, examples of bilingual pun, stylistic peculiarities of pun, contexts of its use, etc. Additionally, exercises in pun creation can be used as creative tasks to stimulate students’ creative potential and interest in wordplay in general. This approach allows for the application of pun studies in linguistics, literature, translation studies and pun therapy in teaching such courses. Furthermore, pun therapy can be beneficial for students of non-philological specializations, where the therapeutic function rather than linguistic analysis of pun will be emphasized.

In any case, pun studies and pun therapy, whether employed together or separately, have a positive influence on a teacher’s and students’ mood in the teaching and learning process, which contributes to successful learning and easier perception of new material, increased motivation for studies and establishes trustful relations between students and a teacher. Pun therapy in academic and professional settings may prevent conflict situations, as laughter can help quit from tension and find solutions to problematic situations, which might arise from the interlocutors’ bad mood.

It should be mentioned, however, that pun cannot be equally amusing to all interlocutors. This discrepancy arises not only from a different sense of humour but also from distinct religious, political and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is advisable to avoid sarcastic and ironic offensive jokes which openly criticize people’s drawbacks. Considering that offensive pun is a kind of one-side pun therapy for the offender, respectively, the offended party does not perceive the pun as something funny. A teacher and students should practice polite communication and avoid sarcastic or offensive puns to maintain a respectful and inclusive learning environment.

When is it better to use pun in educational process?

The integration of pun into the educational process depends on the topic and the aim of a lesson. If a study course is focused on humour and pun, these elements can be consistently incorporated as they form the primary subject matter. For other subjects it is more effective to use pun at the beginning of the lesson to establish rapport and to attract students’ attention, or as a transition pause between switching from one topic to another, serving as a form of relaxation. It will be a kind of relaxation pause. Occasional pun used by a teacher or a student should be paid attention to, laughed at, and analyzed linguistically. This practice fosters the students’ interest in words and their meaning, to ambiguity and the ways of its creation will be the object of studies, which, in its turn, evokes interest in lexicology and translation studies, if we discuss translatability or untranslatability of pun into other languages. Thus, pun studies can be part of edutainment (education + entertainment), the blended term which can serve as an example of wordplay in terminology.

In translation studies, pun is taught as a special subject of investigation. For instance, in teaching our special course on Translation of Spanish Humour into Ukrainian we use exercises in pun identification, and its linguistic analysis (homonymy and its types (homographs, homophones), homonymy based on manipulation with proper names and common names, polysemy, synonymy, paronymy, non-existent words, ambiguous syntax, syllable regrouping, collision of direct-indirect meaning, idiom breaking, graphic manipulations with capitalization and bold text, pseudo-definitions or pseudo-etymology, popular etymology, etc.). Syllable regrouping as a pun creation technique is popular in Spanish jokes (Bobchynets, 2022, p. 26). We can recommend Miguel García Viñolo's book *Chistes Lingüísticos de Componente Cultural Para la Enseñanza del Español* (2019) for its comprehensive analysis of linguistic humor and wordplay, complete with funny illustrations to accompany pun-based jokes and the valuable data for linguistic analysis of pun: the explanation of its creation, such as homonymy, paronymy, polysemy, etc.

Teaching bilingual or multilingual students offers the opportunity to study bilingual pun or conduct comparative analyses across languages. Even studying monolingual pun includes enriching vocabulary and contributes to the correct use of synonyms. For example, the two synonyms "clean" and "cleanse" which are also paronyms, are demonstrated in a context which differentiates their use in Robert Oliver Shipman's book *A Pun My Word: "Clean means to get rid of dirt, impurities or extraneous matter. Cleanse also means to get rid of dirt. In its figurative sense it means to make oneself or to be made spiritually and morally pure. For example: "Even Luke Warm knows that one uses soap to clean the body and prayer to cleanse the soul" (p. 37). Similarly, in Ukrainian we have paronyms (translated as чистити, очищати), which we could demonstrate as follows: "Відомо, що слід чистити взуття кремом, а душу очищати молитвою". Thus, Shipman's book is highly recommended for students to improve their pun perception and acquire some additional knowledge about lexico-semantic pun creation techniques. Wordplay based on homonymy (pun) or paronymy (paronomasia) can be approached as a humorous means or translational aim. If pun is based on the use of internationalisms, or on the ambiguity formed by the similar direct and figurative meaning, both in the source and target languages, the wordplay in this case is translatable. The books, as well as research papers exploring pun, can be studied by students as theoretic approaches to pun. We would like to mention multiple presentations on humour (Humor and Gender, Hispanic Humor, Irish Humor, Humor and Semantics, Humor and Sociology, Humor and Psychology, Ethnic Humor, Ambiguity and Puns, etc.) created by Don and Alleen Nilsen, co-founders of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS).*

Analyzing the translations of famous literary works and the ways the translator coped with pun are valuable exercises. For example, Ukrainian students studying English and Spanish as foreign languages, can analyze the Ukrainian and Spanish translations of wordplay in *Alice in Wonderland* to reveal the used translational techniques and seek better alternatives. Studying the linguistic and translation peculiarities of pun, students will not only enjoy wordplay as part of humour therapy but it will also stimulate their interest to create their own puns or become more attentive to occasional puns which they may encounter in everyday life. The study of pun as a linguistic and aesthetic value may be complemented by translational approaches, such as the studies of translatability and untranslatability of pun. Pun is not always translatable. According to the studies by Salystiowati in the translation of Lewis Carroll's work into Bahasa, in 44,74 % of the cases wordplay was translated into the target language without wordplay (p. 375). Wordplay is untranslatable if there are no homonymic, polysemic or phraseological equivalents in the target language (Delabastita, 1994, p. 223). It is important to analyze the humorous effect

of the original and translated texts. If a reader laughs at a translated pun, it means that its value is comparable to that of the original one.

Our students also study translation techniques for conveying pun into other languages, if it is possible, or substituting it with another wordplay created by a translator. They learn about the nature of ambiguity and the ways to deal with it in translation. Untranslatable pun can be compensated with other expressive means in the target language, such as rhyme, epithets, alliteration, or graphic wordplay, depending on the creative options available in the language of translation. Monolingual and bilingual pun can also be discussed at the course of humour studies. Another special course in translation studies where wordplay is analyzed is Translation of Advertising Texts. Wordplay is often used in advertising and its translation into other languages requires creativity. Here the Spanglish term “transcreación” (a blend of English *translation* and Spanish *creación*) is applied to translation of advertising texts, including those with wordplay. Lexical blending as wordplay is studied by Renner (2015) who mentions ludic function of blends. It is essential to understand metaphors or implicit humour in advertising. Translators must be aware of difficulties in conveying pun into target languages. There is a risk to lose some humorous effect but the main linguistic and pragmatic analyses are performed to determine the target audience and message of the advertisement.

Before pun is linguistically analyzed and translated, it is perceived as a source of humour. The humorous effect comes first, followed by linguistic analysis. In such a way, pun therapy is integrated into teaching linguistic disciplines.

Pun therapy as a kind of laughter therapy can be applied in psychology and medicine to help patients suffering from depression and anxiety. We consider this method more relevant for adults, because children are not always aware of all the multiple meanings of a polysemic word and frequently perceive the direct or literal meaning of a word instead of the metaphorical one. According to Vallet (1981), for educational purposes, a humor survey of what children find amusing should be made, as “what tickles the funny bone of one person may appear unintelligible, crude, or even repulsive to another” (p. 36). The survey of sense of humour should take the child’s developmental stages, characterized as follows:

1. The early childhood “giggling prankster” stage.
2. The middle childhood “foolish comic” stage.
3. The late childhood “puzzling riddler” stage.
4. The early adolescence “punning wit” stage.
5. The adolescent-adult “satirical critic” stage (ibid., p. 37).

Teenagers are capable of perceiving the ambiguity of pun, as illustrated by the joke.

Joe: Why did you hit the dentist?

Moe: He got on my nerves (ibid., 1981, p. 38).

Considering the fact that perception of pun develops primarily during adolescence (stage 4), it is more appropriate to use wordplay, tongue-twisters, riddles or simple puns with children.

Wordplay in tongue-twisters is an effective means of improving pronunciation in foreign languages and a good exercise in logopedic practice to help overcome speech defects in one’s mother tongue. Thus, a tongue-twister with wordplay contributes to aesthetic education and improvement of pronunciation, serving multiple functions: 1) educational, linguistic and translation analysis of wordplay; 2) aesthetic, consisting in the development of love to wordplay and pun; 3) corrective, revealed in working at eliminating defects of pronunciation in both native and foreign languages; 4) therapeutic, contributing to edutainment (education + entertainment) and creating a relaxed atmosphere in class.

Art therapy, fairy-tale therapy, music therapy, laughter therapy are very popular in psychology. The therapeutic effect of pun is undisputable and we consider the necessity of more profound study and extended application of pun therapy in educational and professional contexts. Therefore, it is advisable to make interdisciplinary psychological, educational and linguistic studies of pun and elaboration of pun therapy as a technique of self-regulation and group-regulation of positive mood.

Conclusion. Pun therapy in linguistic education is multifunctional: it improves mood and decreases anxiety, helping students feel more relaxed and confident. It develops perception of humour, stimulates interest in linguistic techniques of creating pun and explores peculiarities of its translation into other languages. Pun therapy may also serve as a method of self-presentation for teachers and students, making the educational process more pleasant and engaging. By integrating education with entertainment (edutainment), pun and wordplay are beneficial for a more creative and attractive learning environment. As an interdisciplinary method in education, it may motivate students to better understand meanings of words and create a positive and curative atmosphere, where the power of humorous language is recognized as an essential linguistic, aesthetic, psychological and educational value.

Future research on pun therapy or wordplay therapy may focus on comparative practices in education of different specializations to develop improved methodological approaches for using pun therapy in certain educational contexts.

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