

Punning in Lillooet

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0. Introduction. In this article, I discuss a number of Lillooet puns. Some of these puns were culled from stories, while others were made by Lillooet speakers during conversations that I had with them. Of course, puns form only one aspect of the sense of humor that permeates Lillooet stories and conversations. However, a full analysis of Lillooet verbal humor can only be successful if it is undertaken by a Native speaker of Lillooet.¹

1. Types of puns and examples. I recorded two types of puns in Lillooet: (a) puns that make use of Lillooet words exclusively, (b) puns that rely on deliberately misunderstanding non-Lillooet words, which are then used in Lillooet sentences. One example of type (a) comes from a story about a man who has had no luck in hunting, therefore cannot support his family, and decides to leave his village and wander on until he dies:

- (1) huy'-ikan. x'u? matq. x'u? x'u zúq'-kan, [...]
 shall-I.so walk.so until die-I
 "So I shall walk until I die",
 zuq"xən-ikán.kt̥ x'u zúq'-kan.
 starve-I.remote future until die-I
 "I shall starve until I die".

(From "The Man Who Stayed with the Bear", by Bill Edwards). The pivotal word here is zúq"xən "to starve",² which contains the root zuq" "to die", used twice more in the above sentence, and the suffix -xən "foot, leg", which plays on matq "to walk", used earlier.³

Another play on words (in "The Two Coyotes", also by Bill Edwards) concerns Coyote A who informs Coyote B that he (Coyote A) is a nkýap (coyote), but that Coyote B is merely pəpla? ("another one", literally "one animal", reduplication of pála? "one"). Coyote B also claims to be a nkýap, whereupon Coyote A walks across a field, and is noticed by people who comment:

- (2) xak kənt?ú ti:nkáp.a
 goes around there article.coyote&reinforcing enclitic
 "There goes a coyote".

When Coyote B walks across the field, the people comment:

- (3) xak míta? kāti? ti:pəpəl?..a
 goes and around there article.another one.reinf. enclitic
 "And there goes another one".

QED:

Puns that rely on non-Lillooet material are the following:

- (4) skənkín xəs.pump
 slowly that he is.pump
 "He is pumping slowly".

The word pump is nearly homophonous to Lillooet pəmp [pəmp] "fast, quick".

- (5) nshaw
 "to yawn": pun on the author's first name: Jan [yən] is nearly homophonous to English "yawn"; hence, nshaw is used as a nickname.
 (6) npəpəl?aq"
 "one egg": pun on the author's last name: van Eijk [vən yk] resembles "one egg" phonetically; also used as a nickname.
 (7) xláak?-us
 pail-face
 "pale-face" (white man): playing on homophony of English "pail" ~ "pale" ("pail" is xláka? in Lillooet).

NOTES.

1. An excellent example of an analysis of verbal humor in a certain language by a native speaker of that language is "Poking fun in Lushootseed", by Vi Hilbert [taq"šəblu] (pp. 197-213 of the Working Papers for the 18th International Conference on Salish and Neighboring Languages, 10-12 August 1983, University of Washington, Seattle).

2. The stress-shift zúq"xən → zuq"xən-ikán.kt̥ is regular.

3. The suffixes -xən "foot, leg" and -q id. occur in a few words referring to bad luck; besides zúq"xən we have n-qəł'-q "having no luck" (qəł "bad", prefix n- often co-occurs with -q), qəł-qəł-xn-án-cut "to suffer from lack of help" (qəł "bad", -án transitivizer, -cut reflexive).