Punning in Lillooet
Jan P. van Eijk
Mount Currie, B.C.

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. 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) hóx’-hán. á? mítá. á? zúq’-kan, [...] shall-L, so walk-so until die-1
                   zúq’xón-ikán-kš  á? zúq’-kan.
starve-L, remote future until die-1
"So I shall walk until I die",
"I shall starve until I die".

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

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 nKáp (coyote), but that Coyote B is merely púpa? ("another one", literally "one animal", reduplication of púpa? "one"). Coyote B also claims to be a nKáp, whereupon Coyote A walks across a field, and is noticed by people who comment:

(2) kók kont’g ti-núp’á.
astes-1núp’á
 "There goes a coyote".

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

(3) mítá? hóx’-kánt? ut lúp’al?-a
 "he goes and around there article.another one.reinf. enclitic
 "There goes another one".

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

(4) skóxín tas-púmp
slowly that he is-pump
"He is pumping slowly".
The word pump is nearly homophonous to Lillooet púmp [púmp] "fast, quick".

(5) nshaw
"to yawn": pun on the author’s first name: Jan [yem] is nearly homophonous to English "yawn"; hence, nshaw is used as a nickname.

(6) nápúp’al?qw
"one egg": pun on the author’s last name: van Eijk [ván yék] resembles "one egg" phonetically; also used as a nickname.

(7) xík?-us
pail-face
"pale-face" (white "pail" "pale" playing on homophony of English "pail" - "pale" ("pail" is xík? 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 [taqw’ab1u] (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’xón - zúq’xón-ikán-kš is regular.

3. The suffixes -xon "foot, leg" and -q id, occur in a few words referring to bad luck; besides zúq’xón we have n-qq’il?q "having no luck" (qq’il "bad", prefix n- often co-occurs with -q), qq’-qq’il-xón-cut "to suffer from lack of help" (qq’il "bad", -ón transitivizer, -cut reflexive).