

## **Pun in English and Arabic**

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### **Abstract :**

The term "pun" is a common literary device that can be defined as "a play on words" (Gray, 1984: 168). This definition is to be understood as "using words in an amusing and tricky manner, make a pun". The words just mentioned above, amusing and tricky, could have the meanings of "humor and ambiguity". This can be supported by considering "pun" as a focus on the alternative meanings or applications of a word or phrase for the purpose of making riddles, which has much to do with "ambiguity", or/and a play upon different words that sound alike for the purpose of making auditory jokes, which has much to do with "humor" (Crystal, 2004:408).

Depending on the aforementioned paragraph, one can conclude that "pun" is a literary device used in literature for different purposes. Moreover, it refers to a word with the same phonological and orthographic representations, but with different meanings, or two or more words that sound alike in pronunciation, but they have different spellings and meanings.

However, the use of "pun" in religion has been a brain storm that attracts the researcher's attention. To investigate the term "pun" in English and Arabic, the researcher has asked a question "is pun used in the Bible and the Holly Quran?" If it is so, then, another question immediately arises for what purposes the words of Allah are used in the Bible and the Holly Quran?

Pun in both languages is going to be investigated with examples from these two sacred books.

### **1. Pun in English**

Pun is defined as "plying with the various meanings of words ". It is considered as a main source of "ambiguity".

Here the ambiguity is brought by one word that has various meanings ( Salzmann , 1998 : 102).

Webster's dictionary defines pun as " the humorous use of a word or words , which are formed or sounded alike but have different meanings , in such a way as to play on two or more of the possible applications".

It has been suggested that pun is an occurrence of one word mentioned once carries either more than one meaning or a recurrence of a word in different meanings. This includes to have either one word with two or more meanings, or two words (identical in spelling and pronunciation) each one has a meaning that differs from the other (ibid).

## **1.2 Categories of Pun**

For each pun , there might be either a single occurrence of a word , or a recurrence of that word ( Salzmann , 1998 : 102).

Accordingly and from a linguistic point of view, pun falls into two broad categories: the implicit and the explicit varieties:

- a.* Implicit pun: when a word is mentioned only once but carries two or more meanings that the reader has to decipher for himself.
- b.* Explicit pun: repeating the same word in a different meaning.

### 1.3 Typology of Pun

Pun is a form of word play that deliberately exploits an ambiguity between similar-sounding words for humorous or rhetorical effects. Such ambiguity may arise from the intentional misuse of homophonic, homonymic, polysemic, or metaphorical language ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)). Consequently and according to its source, pun falls into several types. The following are the major ones.

#### 1.3.1 Homophonic or Phonological Pun

It occurs when words differ in the way they are written, orthographic difference, but pronounced alike (Leach, 1969: 210-11)

I am too sore enpierced with his shaft

To soar with his light feather, and so bound

[Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, I. iv]

This type is regarded as a main source of ambiguity , and pun here is auditory . Both "sore" and "soar" are pronounced as /so:/ in the above example although there is no etymological relationship between the homophonic words. Crystal(2004 : 408 ) shows that phonological puns play upon different words which sound alike. They are auditory jokes in some cases :

- Waiter..waiter..what's this? It's bean soup
- I can see that. But, what is it now?

The trick depends on the homophony of 'it's bean ' and it's been.

### **1.3.2 Homonymic Pun**

This type is resulted from using distinct words spelt and pronounced alike (Leach , 1969 : 209 – 10 ). An example on this pun is taken to extremes in a piece of dialogue from Shakespeare's " Richard II " : -

Surrey thou liest

Dishonorable boy

That lie shall so heave in my sword,

That it shall render vengeance and revenge ,

Till thou the lie – giver and that lie do lie

In earth as quiet as they father's skull [IV. i]

Leach ( ibid) observes that the homonymy of the two words 'lie' ( as in ' lie down ') and 'lie' (as in 'tell lies ') is the cause of pun . The ambiguity in this type of pun is explicit . While when the word is mentioned only once with two meanings , then it is implicit homonymic pun e.g: -

The moping owl does to the moon complain

[ Thomas Gray's Elegy ]

' Moping' is used with two meanings : ' full with hair like a mope' and ' very dull and gloomy ' .

### 1.3.3 Polysemic or Semantic Pun

This type occurs when one polysemic word (i.e. having various dissimilar senses ) recurs with two dissimilar senses . This type of pun is explicit . As an example the polysemic word 'neck' could have the following dissimilar meanings : part of the body, type of a shirt and part of a bottle ( Leech ,

1969:209 – 14) . This type of pun is also called 'semantic' . Crystal (2004:408) illustrates that this kind of implicit pun focuses on the alternative meanings or applications of a word or phrase that are common in riddles :-

- What has four legs and only one foot ? A bed

### **1.3.4 Parody Pun**

Parody pun is based on the needs expressed in the form of the structure of parody well – known as aphorisms, proverbs or so on ( Chengming , 2004 : 89). This type of pun is an existing social , cultural knowledge – based . Here is an example from James Joyce Finnegans Wake in which he plays on the idiomatic expression " As different as chalk from cheese " :-

- As different as York from Leeds

### **1.3.5 Phonetic Pun**

In spoken language phonetic pun results from the phonetic structure of the sentence . It depends upon the acoustic breath group unit of speech , not the individual word, i.e. two units of two breath–groups as units of speech made

up of different words become phonetically ambiguous , e.g. "near" could be confused with " an ear " , and " an aim " could be confused with 'a name', and, as in the example below, 'an arrow' could be heard as " a narrow " (Ulmann , 1967 : 156 ) :-

- Do you hear about Robin Hood ? He just had an arrow escape.

### **1.3.6 Morphological Pun**

To Crystal (2004 : 408 ) , Morphological pun results from the manipulation of the elements of word structure, such as affixes , or dividing words in unusual places , e.g.

- What do you call a man with a shovel sitting at the bottom of a hole ? Doug .

- And What do you call a man with a shovel sitting at the bottom of a smaller hole ?Douglas[ =Doug- less]

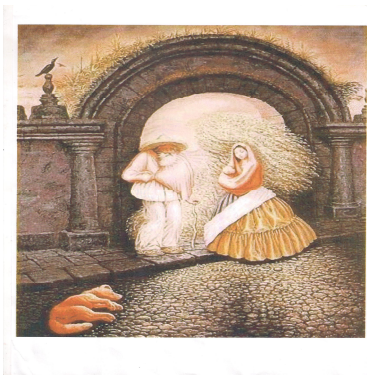
### **1.3.7 Visual Pun**

Visual pun is the use of symbols to suggest two or more meanings or different associations . Visual pun combines two or more symbols (pictures and / or texts) to form a new meaning. The viewer must mentally elaborate on the visual stimulus to interpret the message. It is a creating artwork in which several visual forms which look alike



(thinking by appearance in the right hemisphere ) are connected and combined so as to bring out two or more possible meaningful ideas in a humorous way ([www.princetonol.com](http://www.princetonol.com)).

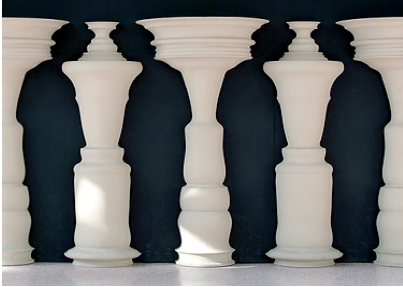
Hammond and Hughes (1978:12) illustrates that a visual pun is made when someone notices that two different things have a similar appearance, and constructs a picture making the similarity evident. The following pictures are very clear examples of visual pun. Usually a picture has a single reading, but each of the following pictures has two readings:



*An old bald man or two persons  
and a sleeping dog?*



*Usual branches or faces?*



*Men or pillar?*



*Trees shadows or women?*

## 1.4

### 1.5 The Usages of Pun

#### 1.5.1 Riddles , Jokes and Humor

As it is mentioned in 1.3.3 pun is used in riddles , especially polysemic pun . Jokes also contain so many types of homonymy including jokes that manipulate the elements of word structure including jokes that focus on the alternative meanings or applications of a word or a phrase , or that result from sound likeness of some different groups of words ( auditory jokes ). Here are some examples taken from Phillips (1998): -

- If a dog lost his **tail**, where would it get another one?  
At the retail store (ibid: 66)
- What has four legs and flies? A picnic table  
(ibid:67)
- Why did Humpty Dumpty have a great **fall**?  
To make up for a terrible summer (ibid:).

Teacher: what is an emperor?

Student: I do not know.

Teacher: An emperor is a **ruler**.

Student: Oh , sure . I used to carry an emperor to school  
with me (ibid : 78).

Brother: " You look **pretty** dirty , Susie. "

Sister : " Thank you . I look pretty when I'm clean , too "  
(ibid :112)

### 1.5.2 Literature

Puns were and are a standard rhetorical or poetic device in English and many other literatures . Puns are very often intended humorously , but not always . Donne , in his *A Hymn to God the Father* , for example , puns elaborately and quiet seriously on his own name (which is pronounced " /d^ n / " , thus :

" When Thou hast **done** , thou hast not **done** / for I have more "

It can be interpreted as " God , when you have forgiven me this much , you are not finished / you don't have John Donne (as finished yet) , for I have more sins to confess ". In the third stanza, having received assurance, counteracting his fears:

- " that at my death thy san / shall shine as he shines now ,  
and heretofore "

Another son/sun pun . Here "**son**" means both Christ and "the **sun**". Then , Donne ends the poem with :

- " And having done that , Thou hast done ; / I fear no more"

Again, the word "done" is a pun on the poet's name  
(Cuddeon,1999:540-541).

Pun has been used by many other famous writers, such as Alexander Pope, Vladimir Nabokov, Robert Bloch, James Joyce and Shakespeare. A famous pun in dramatic literature is Mercutio's laconic crack as he is dying:

- " Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man"

[Romeo & Juliet, III,i ] (ibid)

### 1.5.3 Advertisement

Since the major goal of advertising is not only to inform but also to persuade, so the use of rhetorical figures plays a pivotal role within the advertising process (Thornborrow, 1998:258).Ming (2005:229) adds that the purpose of advertisements is to stimulate people's desire for shopping. Therefore, manufacturers try their best to use puns to create new meanings. The skillful use of puns makes advertising language vivid and humorous, e.g.:

- Make your every hello a real good – buy .

This is a telephone advertisement produced by a clever use of the good – buy and good – bye homophonic pun. It means from the beginning of the call "hello" to the end of the good – bye can be passed to each other faithfully. Moreover the meaning of "good – buy" contains the inexpensiveness, so buying this phone is definitely value for money. The following advertisement makes use of semantic pun:

- Coke refreshes you like no other can

The word ' can ' can be interpreted as a ' model verb ' with the meaning 'can refresh you ' and a ' tin '.

Here is another advertisement that employs the parody pun based on the well –known proverb " where there is a will there is a way :

- Where there is a way , there is a Toyota .

(Chengming , 2004 : 89)

#### **1.4.4 Bible**

Pun as a source of humor is used in the Bible (in both the Old and the New Testament). If we ask about the purpose behind this, we need first to ask why the Bible would contain humor.

In answering this equation. Bilello (1999:4) illustrates that Bible humor is never frivolous; it is usually employed to make an emphatic point. Furthermore, humor is a story – telling device that makes a memorable impact on the listener or reader e.g.: Jesus tells the Pharisees:

- "You, blind guides! You strain out a gnat (galma), but swallow a camel (gama) " .Mathew 23:23.

In Aramaic , the words for gnat and camel are phonetically related , so we get a lesson plus clever play on words (galma – gama) which makes the idea memorable , and , as with most witty sayings , makes the audience want to tell it again and again to their friends who were not present . Jesus could just as easily have said : The Pharisees are concerned with minor details but ignore the big important principles of the law , but the use of pun made the comment spread rapidly mouth-to-mouth and the Pharisees became the wide – spread object of laughter . Below are some other puns from the Old and New Testament:

- " He hoped for justice (mish pat) , but there is injustice (mispah) for equity (sedaqah) , but there is outcry (se'aqah)" Isaiah 5:7
- " Thou art peter (petros) and upon this rock (petra) I will build my church " Matthew 16:18 (ibid).





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يا سائلي عن حرقتي في الورى      وا ضيعتي فيهم وإفلاسي  
ما حالي من درهم إنفاقه      يؤخذ من أعين الناس

The near meaning for أعين is "giving unwillingly". The far meaning is "people's eyes". The poet intends the later meaning because he is an oculist.

التورية is classified into four types : مبينة , , and مهياة according to what is mentioned with it ' the reference' with which the near or the far meaning goes.

### 2.1.1 التورية المجردة

In this kind we find no reference to the cover (the near meaning ), nor to the covered (the far meaning ) (الهاشمي, 1940 : 377). Or a reference is mentioned for both meanings. The following line of verse is a good example:

أقول وقد شنوا إلى الحرب غارة      دعوني فإنني آكل العيش \_\_\_\_\_

" " has two meanings : near which is "cheese" and its reference is " I'm eating bread العيش . And far which is

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"cowardice" , and its reference is "they raided (فيود ,  
2007 : 144) .

### 2.1.2 التورية المرشحة

In this type there is a reference to the near meaning only. The result is more delusional type of تورية , because the meaning which is not intended is strengthened by a reference , so , ambiguity increases , e.g. : is elegizing

: إبراهيم

يا \_\_\_\_\_

The poet plays on the word " \_\_\_\_\_ " . The two meanings are : " keeper" which is not intended , but supported by what is mentioned after it " \_\_\_\_\_ " , and the other meaning "the poet's name حافظ إبراهيم (ibid: 146).

### 2.1.3 التورية المبينة

This is completely the opposite of التورية المرشحة because it aims at removing the ambiguity by mentioning a reference to the intended meaning:

أرى العقد في ثغرة محكما يرينا \_\_\_\_\_ من الجوهر

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The poet plays on " " which could mean either " a title of a linguistic book " or " perfect" . But it's a very explicit pun , because the poet refers previously to the second meaning using the reference " في ثغرة " in his mouth " to complete his metaphor for his beloved teeth being perfect like pearls.

#### 2.1.4 التورية المهيئة

It is obligatory in this kind to have a preparing word : a word that prepares for تورية and without which there would be no تورية . A good example for that when علي ابن ابي طالب (p.b.u.h) is asked about someone, he answers " انه يحوك الشمال " to mean either he is weaving overgrowth with his right hand or he is crossing the fingers of his right and left hands " " is تورية مهيئة means either " a kind of plants" or "the left hand". اليمين is the preparing word without which the sentence would be " انه يحوك الشمال " " that contains no تورية at all (الهاشمي, 1940:378).

#### 2.2

الجناس اللفظي التام is the similarity between certain utterances in particular formal aspects , with differences in meaning ( , 1914 :103). When utterances are similar in

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letters type , number , order , and manner of the diacritical marks , this is a case of (السيد,1986 : 103).  
is of three types ' ' , ' ' and ' ' .

### 2.2.1

This type occurs when the two words that spelt and pronounced alike are of the same part of speech ( ibid):

لمغيرة لمغيرة

The first "مغيرة" means " the horses " , the second is a proper noun . Both are nouns .

### 2.2.2

This is found when the repeated words are pronounced alike and have different parts of speech (ibid):

ما مات من كرم الزمان فإنه يحيى لدى يحيى بن عبد الله

" يحيى " is a proper noun while " يحيى " is a verb . They are pronounced alike .

### 2.2.3

It occurs when one of the repeated elements is composed of more than one word (ibid : 318) :

ولا تله عن تذكار ذنبك وابكه  
ومثل لعينيك الحمام ووقعه  
بدمع يحاكي الويل حال مصابه  
وروعة ملقاه ومطعم صابه

here lies in the similarity in pronouncing "مصابه" , which is the first element , and the second "مصابه" which we could hear resulting from pronouncing " – " the last letter of " " . and the word "صابه" . This kind of " " is called " " : when one of the elements is composed of one word and a part of another .

If the script of the first element is the same as of the two words of the second element , then we have "

"مركب متشابه"

إذا ملك لم يكن ذا هبة      فدعه فدولته ذاهبة

When one of the elements of repetition is composed of two or more words , with a script different from the other element but they are pronounced alike , then we have

لا تعترضن على الرجال قصيدة      مالم تبالغ في تهذيبها  
غير مهذب      عدوه منك وساوسا تهذي بها

### 2.3 The Usages of Arabic Pun

Below are the usages of both "التورية" and " " in Arabic :

### 2.3.1 Riddles , Jokes and Humor

"التورية" and " " are used in jokes and riddles to arise humor and ambiguity . In the following example حذيفة حذيفة uses التورية that is based on hiding the real intended meaning :

سأل حذيفة بن اليمان كيف أصبحت يا حذيفة ؟ فأجاب : أصبحت أحب الفتنة وأكره الحق ، وأصلي بغير وضوء ، ولي في الأرض ما ليس لله في السما .

Here is the solution of the riddle :

The Unintentional Meaning

The Intended Meaning

" Disturbance "

" Money ,sons and daughters"

" Justice "

" Death"

" Pray to Allah"

" Say : peace be upon our prophet"

" To have what " لي في الأرض ما ليس

" To have a wife or a child "

Allah doesn't have"

Another famous example , once an old woman asked prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) to pray for her to enter heaven . The prophet told her " لا يدخل الجنة عجوز " . Definitely the prophet doesn't mean that this specific old woman doesn't enter heaven. He hints that the age of people in heaven is the age of youth.

The following riddle makes use of                    to arise ambiguity . It is an auditory riddle :

قالت يا إسماعيل صبرا  
قلت لها يا أسما عيل صبري

### 2.3.2 Hiding Truth

"التورية" helps the speaker to hide the facts that he/she fears to declare , at the same time to avoid lying , e.g. when our prophet (p.b.u.h) and some of his companions met some shepherds before the battle of Badir , they have been asked "

" , the prophet said : "من ماء" . "        " is a name of an Arabic tribe , and this is the cover . What the prophet meant is that they are created of ماء water ( فيود , 2007 : 144).

### 2.3.3 Literature

"التورية" and "        " are used in literature as figures of speech that increase the beauty of the speech . It has been proposed that the realization of the intended meaning after

thinking and contemplation has a great effect on the reader .

The following are some examples of 'تورية':

كأن للمجاورة اقتسمنا      فقلبي جارهم والدمع \_\_\_\_\_

The two meanings of 'جار' are 'my neighbor' and 'shedding' .

This example shows how 'التورية' is used seriously .

The following two examples show how 'التورية' is used for humor and pleasantry :

قالت إذا كنت تهوى      وصلي وتخشى نفوري  
صف ورد خدي وإلا      أجور ، ناديت \_\_\_\_\_

The two different meanings of 'أجور' are : ' do me injustice ' as an imperative verb , and " a kind of flowers".

The following line of verse by أحمد شوقي is an interesting humorous example :

فضيعها الإنسان والكلب \_\_\_\_\_

Bantering with him , حافظ إبراهيم , answers :

يقولون أن الشوق نار ولوعة      فما بال \_\_\_\_\_

'Keeper' and 'eagerness' are successively the near meanings for 'شوق' and 'لوعة' , proper nouns of well-known poets ( فيود , 2007 :145-146).



### 2.3.4 The Holly Qur'an

The Holly Qur'an dose use "التورية" and " " , but definitely not for humor but for another purposes . They are used seriously as impressive figures that make the speech more eloquent , memorable and have a great effect on readers .

"التورية" الهاشمي (1940 : 378) mentions that it is found in the following ayah: (( حتى يعطوا الجزية عن يد وهم

)) . This is a strengthened type of تورية , because the unmeant meaning , which is "hand" is strengthened by the reference " يعطوا : to give" , because usually giving is connected with hand . The covered intended meaning is "

= humility" .For , the following ayah is a very clear eg

:

((يوم تقوم \_\_\_\_\_ يقسم المجرمون ما لبثوا غير \_\_\_\_\_))

The repetition of the same word with two different meanings is represented by the recurrence of " " . The first " " means " the doomsday" , the second " " means an hour of time (السيد,1986:217).

### 3 . Conclusions

The findings that the researcher arrived at are as follows :

1. Being a play on words , pun in English is compared with two concepts in Arabic : تورية and a specific type of .
2. In both languages pun is either an occurrence of one word mentioned once carries more than one meaning or a recurrence of a word in different meanings and this includes to have either a word with two or more real meanings or one word with two meanings , one is real , the other is metaphoric.

**3.** Pun that results from absolute (complete) homonymy (explicit homonymic pun) is the counterpart of both اللفظي التام المماثل (the repeated words that are spelt and pronounced alike have the same parts of speech and different meanings), and الجناس اللفظي التام المستوفي (the repeated words that are pronounced alike have different parts of speech and different meanings. Compare the following examples :

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Repair your sole before buying expensive sole

مغيرة مغيرة

Sole(n.) and المغيرة (n.)  
(n.)

Sole (n.) and للمغيرة

Give me leave to leave thee [ Shakespeare's The Twelfth  
Night II , V]

يحيا يحيا

ما مات من كرم الزمان فإنه

Leave(n.) and يحيى(n.)

Leave(v.) and يحيا(v.)

4. Implicit type of homonymic pun is similar to "التوريـد"  
i.e. a word that is mentioned only once but has two  
meanings . Deciding which meaning is really intended  
depends on the situation and on the reference. Notice the  
examples below :

- Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man  
.

[ Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet ,

III,i]

"grave" is mentioned once but it carries two meanings : "sedate" and "tomb" , according to the events of the play Mercutio said these words as he was dying , so the second meaning is intended .In the following Arabic example, the existence of the reference determines which meaning is really intended:

كأن للمجاورة اقتسمنا      فقلبي جارهم والدمع \_\_\_\_\_

With the existence of the reference(      ), it becomes clear that the poet intends the second meaning (my neighbor) .

5.Homophonic (phonological) pun has no Arabic counterpart since homophony is impossible in Arabic : there are no two Arabic distinct letters or sequences of letters alike in pronunciation .

6.Polysemic (semantic) pun is found in both languages , we can say the neck of the bottle and equally we can say "      " .

7. is the counterpart of phonetic pun since both result from the phonetic structure and the acoustic breath group unit of speech e.g. a narrow could be heard as " an arrow" just like " هبة " that could be heard as " ذاهب " .

8. From the definitions of pun it is clear that most of the usages of English pun are for humor, still it conveys a point of view. Its counterpart in Arabic is not "play on words", but تورية that comes from the verb to hide something and reveal another, which is used more seriously. That's why English pun is not used for hiding truth which is a serious usage because it does not get the exact meaning of " التورية " . " تورية " ,with this concept, is used only in Arabic , e.g رجل يهديني this was the answer of our prophet's companion when he was asked " who is this person with you ?" He didn't want to reveal the real identity of our prophet Muhammad ( p . b . u . h ) , so he punned upon the word " يهدي " which has two meanings here either " to show me the way " and this is the cover , or " to convert me " which is the covered meaning .

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