Punning in Lillooet
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O. 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) ha:y-khan. mu? matq. mu? zuq'-kan, [...] shall-I-also walk-so until die-I
zuq'-kan-kt k' mu zuq'-kan.
starve-Lremote 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 zuq'-kan "to starve", which contains the root zuq- "to die", used twice more in the above sentence, and the suffix -kan "foot, leg", which plays on matq "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 nakhap (coyote), but that Coyote B is merely p'päla? ("another one", literally "one animal", reduplication of pala "one"). Coyote B also claims to be a nakhap, whereas Coyote A walks across a field, and is noticed by people who comment:

(2) Àk kant?ú ti.nakhap.a.
goes around there article.coyote.reinforcing enclitic
"There goes a coyote".

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

go around there article.another one.reinf. enclitic
"And there goes another one".

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

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

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

(6) npi'laq'w "one egg": pun on the author's last name: van Eijk [van ek] resembles "one egg" phonetically; also used as a nickname.

(7) Xiik'-us
pail-face
"pail-face" (white man): playing on homophony of English "pail" ~ "pale" ("pail" is Xiikä 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'qablu] (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 zuq'-kan → zuq'-kan-kt is regular.

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