

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) hūy-ḱkan.ḱu? māṭq.ḱu? ḱu zúq-xan, [...]
 shall-I_{so} walk_{so} until die-I
 "So I shall walk until I die",
 zuq-xən-ḱkán.kḱ ḱu zúq-xan.
 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) ḱak 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) ḱak mūta? káti? 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) skənkin təs.pəmp
 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 ɛyk] resembles "one egg" phonetically; also used as a nickname.
- (7) ɣlák?-us
 pail-face
 "pale-face" (white man): playing on homophony of English "pail" ~ "pale" ("pail" is ɣláká? 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'səblu] (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-ḱkán.kḱ 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-qəḷ'-q "having no luck" (qəḷ' "bad", prefix n- often co-occurs with -q), qəḷ'-qəḷ'-xən-án-cut "to suffer from lack of help" (qəḷ' "bad", -án transitivizer, -cut reflexive).