

Actus III -- Wholly Orders

In researching puns, I have encountered various schemes for classifying them, based on semiotic, context structure, and other criteria. I have also encountered typologies of ambiguity, most notably in Aristotle. However, none of the typologies of LAUGHS have classed them according to the LAs used to make them, in a manner consistent with modern linguistic knowledge of the reality of different levels of representation. The scheme in this chapter is proposed as consistent with our knowledge of levels of processing in language, and the steps necessary to interpret a set of sounds into coherent speech. It also describes the unities in the various levels, as it is my contention that the contexts on which puns depend operate in much the same way no matter what the level, and that the same or analogous constraints operate. On the other hand, the mechanism of humor can vary to some extent depending on the level of the ambiguity; I will attempt to analyze the source of comic pleasure in each type in terms of the models of humor discussed in the first chapter. My goal here is to show how puns fit on a scale, a spectrum, as it were, based on the size of the unit of the ambiguity.

Consistent with my theory of ambiguity as being dependent on contexts, I will describe each one in terms of sorts of contexts are used to disambiguate them. The processes by which units are made ambiguous and unambiguous are identical; the latter involves creating a context in which they have meaning; the former, simply creating more than one context at once. The disambiguating process is the information the hearer must overlook in order to be tricked, which the careful hearer or the linguistic fascist would not overlook, thus defeating the pun. Also consistent with the relationship of punning and speech errors, I will cite the evidence of studies by Bond and Garnes, concerning both the nature and frequency of speech errors. I will also attempt to show how different types of (humorous) ambiguity are accounted for by various models of speech processing as described in Actus II.

The **locus** of a pun is **the minimum unit or level in which the ambiguity can be isolated, whose form is changed**. It is the minimal unit that must be reinterpreted, leading to the reinterpretation of the entire utterance. The **ground is the usually larger unit, known in advance to the hearer, and alluded to by the pun, whose meaning is actually changed**. There are also the various levels of **contexts**, which are the knowledge required for the pun to be funny. It is my belief that the mechanism of puns is essentially the same no matter how large or small the locus or ground.

If non-linguistic sound is mistaken for speech, the locus of the ambiguity would be in the sound waves themselves. If one sound is mistaken for another, as in the cheer at a

hockey match, "**Get the puck out of there!**" the locus is the phoneme.¹ If the unit is an entire set of sounds forming a word, then this is the locus. (From **HMS Pinafore**, Ralph (who regrets his lowly station): **True, I lack birth**. Boatswain: **You've a berth aboard **this very ship!**) The following is a brief summary of the orders of LAUGHS:**

1st: The locus is the phoneme. Actual sounds are changes and reinterpreted.

2nd: The locus is the morpheme. Parts of words change in meaning.

3rd: The locus is the word as a set of sounds. (Definition (1) in 2.2) Whole words change in meaning.

4th: Syntactic structures must be reanalyzed; words change their roles within the sentence.

5th: The locus is the word in the semantic sense. (Definition (2) in 2.2.) Different senses of the same word are played with.

I will also describe the interplay of contexts necessary to produce each ambiguity. It is important to realize, though, that many puns are not "pure," involving ambiguities of only one order, but composite, whether because one change requires reinterpretations of other units, or because more than one technique has been used by coincidence.

The locus should be distinguished from the ground. In the simplest cases, the ground is a single word, as in the **Pinafore** example. On the other hand, the hockey cheer requires familiarity with an idiomatic expression, one which is learned as a unit and not analyzed. The same ground can be punned upon with a variety of loci; differently sized units can be reinterpreted, as long as the whole ground is recognized as a unit, an item in the lexicon in the way described in the previous chapter. A ground can be a single word (as in a definition) or any familiar phrase, or, the punster may set up a context in a more or less elaborate joke. For instance, in **Drone of Blood**, (Harvard **Independent** headline for a review of a production of the play **Dracula** which the reviewer found boring,) the locus is the sound [d] which is different from the sound / $\hat{\theta}$ /, or even the features [+voice, -fricative] which distinguish the two sounds. The ground is "**Throne of Blood**," the title of an excellent film by Akira Kurosawa; the reviewer is drawing a sort of contrast, though not a very meaningful one. (see Actus IV) As we move to larger units, higher levels, such as "**Thrown of Blood**," (perhaps an article on a pitcher named Blood) the locus becomes the whole set of sounds / $\hat{\theta}$ rown/, (Third Order) or if the article were about the new office of Blood Bank Czar, the headline might be "**Throne of Blood**," with a pun on the sense of the word. (Fifth order) But the ground stays the same. On the other

¹The locus will usually be underlined in examples. This could also be a syntactic pun, as "puck" goes from a direct object to an interjection.

hand, to define a **paradox** as two mallards, (or two piers, or two M.D.s) but two mallards with the sign of Zorro on their beaks as **Zeno's paradox**, require larger and larger grounds without changing the locus and the order of the pun; it is still a Second Order reinterpretation of parts of words with some mutation.

One very popular source of grounds in general is proper names. It is sometimes said that names have denotation but not connotation,² that they refer to the places, people or things with no other descriptive force, so that any meaning of the name is unconnected with the characteristics of the person, place or thing referred to. They are learned as linguistically empty items; we assume that they are just given to us, arbitrarily, or in hope of their fulfillment. Of course, some parts of names can be earned or descriptive (Henry of Monmouth, Cato the Censor, Richard the Lionhearted) but as names are passed down, or to anyone ignorant of the reasons for the giving of the name, they lose any meaning they might have had. (As Professor William Alfred is fond of commenting, his name does not mean that *he* is advised by fairies.) Thus, any descriptive force is usually utterly coincidental, and eminently punnable. Puns on names can be of any order as well as bilingual.³ They can simply be confused with other words or with one another because of similarity of sound.

"Dr. Emilio Lizardo -- didn't he used to be on television?"

"You're thinking of Mr. Wizard. This guy's a top scientist.

"Hey, so was Mr. Wizard. " (The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension, film) Names which have no other meaning in the language can be broken down at the morphemic level or compared to words to which they sound similar. Names rarely have syntax, except for things like Henry's "of." However, in sentences, they can be confused with other words to which they sound similar, or the confusion of vocatives and syntactically more significant words can be played on. Almost anything can be reinterpreted as a name:

Surely you jest. No, and don't call me Shirley. (Film Airplane!)

Please, Reuben, go easy on me. I'm starting to think my first name is

"Dammit." (Robot Policeman Luthor Ironheart in **American Flagg!** comic book, as his partner keeps saying "Dammit, Luthor." Similar is the bumper sticker, **"God's last name is not damn."**)

² I am quoting Searle, **Speech Acts**, p163, but he is quoting John Stuart Mill, **A System of Logic**.

³ As in **Asterix and Cleopatra**, where the Egyptians cheer by invoking the sun god, "Ra, ra!"

Have you heard? The Mets have moved to another city, Hapless. (My father, during a summer when newsmen constantly used the term to refer to the less than amazing team.)

Many names have fairly obvious etymologies; some are even made up of separate words that have independent meaning but lose it in conjunction. The best example of this is the "**Holy Roman Empire**;" everyone knew what it was (its denotation), so no one bothered to analyze the name into the meaning of its parts (its connotation.) When Voltaire pointed out the triple contradiction⁴, he showed an incongruity, an ambiguity, the difference in the free and the bound use of a word, that a word in a fossilized phrase can have a very different meaning than that which it possesses when free. This is a Fifth Order name pun; to say that **Roman Jakobson was not Roman** would be Third Order. A good illustration of the different orders of name puns and of puns in general is my father's comment that there were three towns in Massachusetts named after the late governor Peabody: **Peabody**, of course, (Fifth Order, I think, although it may actually have been named for him and not a relative) **Marblehead** (Second to Third Order) and **Atholl**. (First Order)

Yet another commonly used process in puns is ellipsis. Only a small part of a word or phrase will stand for the entire unit. However, when parts are this small, they will not have a strong activating effect (to go by the cohort model, they would activate too many other words as well.) An acronym uses the first letter or sound to stand for the whole word. My term LAUGH, though a written example, would be rather unlikely to activate "Linguistic Ambiguity Used to Generate Humor" on its own, although once it is explained, it makes sense. Condensation uses parts of words to stand for the whole, and a very common etymological process is the use of one part of a word or a phrase to stand for the whole thing. (E.g. "transistor" for "transistor radio", "auto" for "automobile.") This gives rise to examples such as the following:

The first nudist convention attracted little coverage. (= "news coverage")

I'd like to have my aluminum Can recycled. (Author to bicycle mechanic when he brought in his aluminum frame Cannondale bicycle for a tune-up.)

One penny designed to stay in circulation. (Ad for Bass Weejuns penny loafers. But no one actually calls penny loafers "pennies," so the change must be made as the pun is made; it cannot be based on existing lexical items.)

⁴ That **the Holy Roman Empire was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire.**

3.1 Semilinguistic Ambiguities

To start at the bottom, the first thing heard is a stream of sounds, which may or may not be speech; in the latter case, the hearer's attempt to interpret them as speech would produce an ambiguity, as would the attempt to imitate such sounds with speech. The locus is the sound waves themselves; a certain set of frequencies in the range used for human speech might be taken as human speech if the hearer expected them to be so. Animal speech, formed with some of the same organs that humans use, can resemble human speech more closely than any other sounds save synthesized voices aimed at imitation, and the resemblance is enough that all languages have words within their own phonological systems for the sounds animals make. Deep-seated beliefs that animals can talk, combined with an ethnocentric view that if animals can talk, they can talk our language, lead us to interpret animal noises as human speech. Some examples of ambiguities (which happen to be humorous) based on this confusion:

3.1.1 A man walks into a bar and tells the bartender, "Listen, my dog can talk. You want to hear?" The bartender at first wants no part of it, but is finally convinced to hear the demonstration. The man asks the dog, "What is the thing over our heads?" "**Roof**," the dog answers. The bartender is about to throw them out but the man placates him. "Hey dog, how do you describe sandpaper?" "**Rough**," the dog answers. The bartender flexes his arms, and the man begs for one more chance. "O.K., Dog, who was the greatest baseball player ever?" "**Ruth**," says the dog. At this, the bartender throws them both out violently. As they are sitting on the sidewalk, the dog looks at the man and asks, "Do you think I should have said Dimaggio?"

3.1.2 A cartoon shows two owls sitting on a branch, with one wearing a mortarboard, and saying to the bareheaded other, "**Whom**."

3.1.3 Kellogg's Frosted Flakes cereal spokesman Tony the Tiger's motto, "**They're Grrrrreat!**"

3.1.4 What did the KGB agent say to the clock that would only go "tick -tick - tick?" "**We have ways of making you tock!**"

3.1.5 In the comic strip **Calvin and Hobbes**, Calvin is shown walking through the snow in rubber boots which make the sound "**Galosh, galosh**."

3.1.6 In **L'Odysée d'Astérix** (Uderzo), two wild boars are shown making the French version of pig-noise, "Groïn, groïn." A few panels later, dismissing the other's doubts as to the safety of their grazing location, one says "**Blague dans le groin**," "groin" being the term for a pig's snout, and the whole phrase being a pun on "Blague dans le coin," "no kidding."

In these examples, there is a tendency to lexicalize, to standardize the assumed pronunciation of the animal sound into a fixed unit that every speaker of the language knows to refer to it. Thus **3.1.1** could be seen as a series of puns on /rʌf/ that being an accepted characterization of dog-speech in English; if a very close imitation of a dog barking were offered at the appropriate moments, it is unlikely that any resemblance to the words "roof", "rough", or "Ruth," would be detected. The same applies to **3.1.4**; if the actual sound of a clock were used in the telling of the joke, or a very close imitation thereof, it would not resemble the set of sounds /t ɔ k/ very much, certainly not enough to complete the joke. However, once the hearer made the connection, that is, "translated" the actual mechanical sound into its English equivalent, [t ɔ k], the joke would make sense, and have the effect of a riddle or conundrum.⁵

The processing of these jokes points up the fact that we recognize and differentiate human speech sounds much more finely than those of animals or machines (how many of us can tell one dog's barking from another, or the sound of one motor from another?), which in turn supports the idea in discussed in Pisoni and Luce that "infants are equipped at birth with feature detectors specialized for processing speech stimuli," (p30) and that adults retain these detectors and their effects. However, the authors cite further studies which seem to show that the detectors which distinguish human and non-human sounds are auditory, rather than phonetic, that non-speech sounds are different in the sounds themselves and not just in their organization. The puns above would seem to contradict that view. Furthermore, these are not true linguistic ambiguities, as they compare a linguistic and a nonlinguistic sound; I have therefore left them out of my ordering scheme. The misinterpretation of non-speech sounds for speech should not be confused with confusions between speech sounds due to interference from noise, as in the **Blazing Saddles** example in Chapter 2. Although it may be claimed that components of the bell-ringing sound are mistaken for features of the concurrent speech sound, it seems more likely that the non-speech sounds simply prevent the hearing of certain features of the speech sounds, giving the hearer less information on which to base his interpretation and thus leading to an incorrect one.

⁵This effect, double reinterpretation, can be achieved by leaving out the common pronunciation that connects the two meanings to be associated. Bilingual puns often require this, as can written puns, or obscure etymological ones, but standard verbal puns can accomplish it as well if the maker wants to be obscure. Double reinterpretation, except for one who is totally fluent in both codes and uses them interchangeably, is definitely conscious, intellectual humor.

3.2 Bilingual and Dialectal LAUGHS

Once it has been realized that the sounds heard indeed represent speech and an attempt to communicate⁶, it must be determined whether they are of a type the hearer can expect to understand, that is, whether they are his own language or not. The fact that speakers will tend to perceive any other language in terms of their own, its phones, phonemes, morphemes, words, syntax, idioms, and even the ideas and associations underlying their own, leads to the making of interlinguistic, or **bilingual** puns. They can be very rough, and approximate, with complete misunderstanding (globally ambiguous; there is almost no verbal context, only situational context and the hearers simply tries to approximate foreign words to his own as best they can) or they can be much finer, more limited, with localized ambiguities of the various orders. Then they are locally ambiguous, more motivated and fit more closely with actual sound and structure. In Shakespeare's **Henry V**, (Act IV, Sc. iv) Pistol has a French soldier at his mercy; when the captive begs "**Ayez pitie de moi!**" Pistol asks how much money a **moi** is; the Frenchman asks "**Est-il impossible d'échapper la force de ton bras?**" and Pistol is enraged to be offered **brass** rather than gold; and when the Frenchman begs again, "**Pardonnez-moi!**" Pistol asks if that means a **ton of mois**. The context of the first is only Pistol's greed, though for the second and third there is some phonological similarity. The numbered examples in this section will be of the finer type. Bilingual puns can be very easy to make, since most languages tend to use at least a lot of the same sounds, and the sounds that are not the sound will tend to be approximated to sounds in one's own language, and the human capacity for misunderstanding is huge. On the other hand, they require knowledge of both languages in the hearer, something which is not always easy to come by. If the hearer does not know both languages, it is necessary to explain the identity, which runs the risk of previewing the coming pun, spoiling the unexpectedness. Also, if there is too much approximation of foreign sounds to native ones, Hale's Law may come into play; they become too easy. The introduction into the context of the information concerning dialect or foreign language will be discussed in Actus IV. Suffice it to say, at this point, that bilingual puns can be of any order, have any locus, and to show this, I will include them along with the unilingual examples.

⁶The misinterpretation of communicative acts as having some other intention is most often the stuff of science fiction, when the Earthlings and aliens misunderstand each others' attempts to communicate. But these cases are usually ambiguous acts; humans are so used to speech as primarily a method of interpersonal communication it would be hard to interpret speech otherwise, although its meaning might not be known.

Dialectal puns, in which the meaning of a string of sounds may be different because of difference in pronunciation, or the meaning of a word different due to slang use, can behave similarly. As with a foreign language, the dialect simply becomes part of the context; either it is assumed that the hearer knows it, or it is indicated some way in the telling of the pun. However, the mechanism of humor can be slightly different in dialectal and bilingual puns. Consider a popular Australian example: A well-known author was signing copies of his new book at a bookstore. A woman walked up, took a copy of the book, turned to the author, and said, "**Emma Chisit**," so the author took the book and began to write "**to Emma**" in it. But the woman took the book back and repeated herself, "**The proice? Emma chisit?**" (Broad Australian pronunciation for "**How much is it?**") An Australian would recognize the ambiguity more quickly than we do (unless Broad Australian were the only dialect he or she knew, see section 4.2, The Smoketoomuch Constraint.) Once we recognize it, we see not only the sense (that the woman wanted to know the price) but the exact words, which we now see as only distorted versions of our own. On the other hand, had the joke involved a Frenchman who said "combien coute ce livre?", with the author taking that as a name, we would recognize the sense only as familiar. We might laugh at the stupidity of the author in both jokes, or the seeming bizarreness of saying something a different way in both cases. But we would probably laugh harder in the former, since we are rediscovering a familiar form which for some bizarre reason has been distorted, not just a familiar meaning which has been expressed in a completely different way because the speaker comes from another country. The author⁷ seems a little more stupid, we feel a bit more stupid ourselves, for not seeing through the dialectal distortion; for bilingual distortion, we have more of an excuse. We have the same feeling of recognition in dealing with another language only when we suddenly perceive etymological links that tie the foreign words to familiar ones; when studying Anglo-Saxon, for example, one often finds the ancestors of common English words unrecognizable, but experiences great pleasure when the obvious is made clear. A bizarre dialect is more likely to provoke laughter than a foreign language for all but the most ignorant listeners since they can tell that the speaker knows the same language, but just can't seem to speak correctly, unlike the foreigner, who simply seems to have his own way of doing things. (**Monty Python's Flying Circus** makes great use of "silly" accents and dialects, but their foreigners seem ridiculous only when they are speaking English with an accent or using English words in their speech in bizarre ways. The

⁷In the joke; and perhaps "the author" also.

English words give the audience something to hold onto, a place to start an interpretive process which will be made impossible by the rest of what is said.)

Bilingual puns achieve humor in yet another way, also; they tend to be hostile, ethnic jokes. Since they involve foreigners, their content is often intended to mock them, but their form does, also. In bilingual puns, there is an undercurrent of "Aren't these foreigners funny? Why, they can't even talk right!" Makers of bilingual puns are often like the Greeks, dismissing all foreign speech as barbarous babble.⁸ To say "**Du sublime au ridicule n'est qu'un pas -- le Pas de Calais**," "From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step -- the Straits of Dover," (the first part is Napoleon's comment on his retreat from Russia) makes fun of the English or the French. On the other hand, the following variant makes fun of the French language (though not very harshly): "**Du sublime au ridicule n'est qu'un pas -- ce qui est sublime, c'est pas ridicule**." "From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step -- that which is sublime, it ain't ridiculous." ("Pas" is a negative word; to use it without "ne" in a sentence, however, is informal.) Bilingual puns often involve taboo terms, as a way to get around the taboo (see chapter 1): in seventh-grade French, we thought it hilarious to ask our teacher the word for "seal," (the marine mammal), which is "**phoque**." In **Henry V**, (Act III, Sc iv) the Princess of France is learning English from her tutor, but when she is told the words for "pied" and "robe," "**foot**" and "**count**," she breaks off the lesson.

The examples listed below are true bilingual puns, in which an utterance in one language is mistaken for one in another, which should be distinguished from those in which the *translation* of an utterance is punned on. For instance, after Sir Charles Napier succeeded in conquering the Indian province of Sind, he sent back a coded message to the East India Company consisting of one Latin word, "**Peccavi**," "I have **sinned**." But there is no confusion of the sound of Latin word, or even of its translation; the ambiguity is totally in the English words used to translate it. The same is true of the schoolboy's Latin motto **Semper ubi sub ubi**, "**Always wear under wear**." A friend who spent some time in Egypt remembers an Egyptian who used the English expression "**I have envelopes**" to explain why he had not completed a task. It turns out, that the Arabic translation of this sentence can also mean roughly "**There are (mitigating) circumstances**," a standard excuse. ("Circumstances" and "envelopes" are the same word in Arabic, because of their common sense of "surrounding.") But in either case, the actual English or Arabic phrases respectively could have been used, although they would not have been puns unless some

⁸ An etymological pun requiring double reinterpretation, since "barbarous" comes from a Greek word imitating foreign speech.

other circumstance had suggested the inappropriate meaning. (E.g., if Napier had said, "**Forgive me father, for I have Sind**," the first three words would have made the utterance ambiguous.) These are further examples of double reinterpretation, deriving much of their humor from the relatively slow intellectual process needed to understand them, and the recognition of the obvious and familiar at the end.

3.2.1 The Chevrolet "**Nova**" automobile sold very badly in Puerto Rico, as the name means "It doesn't go" ("**No va**") in Spanish. (Second Order)

3.2.2 Pope Gregory, circa 600, (speaking in Latin, seeing and admiring some slaves brought from then-unconverted England.) Who are these people?

They are Angli.

Gregory: **You mean angeli (angels), for I have never seen such fair people.**

What is the name of their land?

Deiri. [One of the kingdoms of the Saxons.]

Gregory: **You mean Dei ira (the wrath of God), for the Lord demands that they be converted** (and so he went ahead and did so.)

3.2.3 According to Suetonius, when the Emperor Domitian was building memorial arches everywhere, someone wrote on one of them, in Greek, "**APKEI**," a transliteration of Latin "**Arci**" ("arches") which means "enough" in Greek. (Ahl, p 60)

3.2.4 A certain son of Crassus was speaking in the Senate, and he bore such a strong resemblance to a certain Axius that the fidelity of Crassus's wife was called into question. When Cicero was asked his opinion on the speech, he replied, in Greek: "**Axios Krassou**." (worthy of Crassus)

3.2.5 Recently, while giving a campus tour in French to a group of Francophone students and their bilingual teacher, I took them around Memorial Hall, in a wide loop, looking at the nearby buildings on the way. The teacher was slightly confused at seeing the building from the other side, and asked, "Is the same building?" to which I responded, "**Oui, c'est le Mem Hall**." "Même" is French for "same." (This actually did happen, 28 March 1989)(Third Order)

3.2.6 A French snail walked into a Nissan dealership and told the dealer that he wanted to buy one of the popular 280Z sports cars, often known as "Z cars." But he insisted that the "Z" on the back be taken off and turned around. When asked why, he replied, "So that when I race down the street, everyone will say, "**Look at that S-car go!**" (Second Order)

3.2.7 At the battle of Yorktown in the American Revolution, the watchword was the name of the French commander, **Rochambeau**, which the Americans pronounced as "**Rush on, boys!**"

3.2.8 Sic transit gloria mundi -- Gloria always gets carsick at the beginning of the week.

The puns for which I have not indicated an order I just class as general, globally ambiguous ones.

How can bilingual puns be disambiguated? The phones of another language will be different from the hearer's, and thus if the foreign language is being spoken with correct pronunciation, there should not be any ambiguity. However, since the detection of phonemes allows for variation, we tend not to pay attention to phones. However, often the teller of a joke involving a bilingual pun will have "translated" the foreign words into his own accent, his own pronunciation anyway, to make the correspondence easier to hear, just as we "translate" animal sounds. (For instance, **there was the singer who wanted to have a street in Paris named after him, Rue de Vallee**. This definitely requires English pronunciation, and probably knowledge of spelling.) Also, although individual foreign words may sound like native ones, it is rare that a whole phrase or sentence will be susceptible to interpretation as the native language. Listening to the surrounding words, and the syntactic structure, will quickly show that an utterance is not interpretable in the native language. So bilingual puns are usually short. On the level of world knowledge, bilingual puns can be disambiguated by knowledge that foreigners speak differently, and how they do so. If there is an overt cue in the set-up of the joke (mention of nationality, of a foreign-sounding place, name, or use of the accent) as in **3.2.6**, then conscious knowledge that a foreigner is concerned will be triggered and kept in mind.

The line dividing bilingual puns from unilingual ones is made fuzzy by the fact of borrowing, since foreign words are constantly entering any language, especially modern English. (Bilingual puns have characteristics similar to some of those of borrowing in general: individual words or phrases are common enough, but as foreign syntactic structures are rarely borrowed and they are rarely punned on, except by such great stylists as Cicero in **3.2.4**.) **3.2.6** puns on a word that has become almost common in English, at least among the set that dine at French restaurants. However, any user will probably know it to be a French word; it has not become a standard English word, a synonym for "snail," the way so many other French words have been borrowed since 1066. (Who is aware that words such as "cadre," e.g., are French in origin?) Also, the word will

probably still be pronounced with some attempt at imitating French pronunciation; although this may not make much difference as its sounds are similar to English ones, still it will fade with use. (Working in one of Harvard Square's many French-style bakeries one summer, I became well aware of the americanization of the pastry called originally a /kʁə sɔ̃/ "to /kʁɔ̃ sɛnt/ or worse. But this word uses more uniquely French sounds, and its spelling is less phonetic than that of "escargot," so it is likely to be deformed more.) Certain puns on foreign words show that the words have been fully borrowed, since their pronunciation has been Anglicized, e.g. **America and Russia should abide by detente commandments.** "Detente" cannot be pronounced the French way, but must be /di ten/.

However, one could also see the word "escargot" as part of the extended, learned, or specialized (to restaurant workers, perhaps) vocabulary of English. If the word is not known to many people, neither are words such as "vicissitude" or "gluon". No native speaker is expected to know every word of his or her language. Thus, use of foreign words in punning could simply be seen as extending the context, the knowledge required, including other languages besides one's own. The danger in carrying this argument too far is of seeing all languages as subsets of a huge master set that is language in general, with each speaker knowing part of it, with no differentiation of whether the part includes most of the rules and lexicon of the native language, or whether it contains a smattering of many. It is true that children raised in bilingual households sometimes speak a linguistic *mélange*, as do those proficient in many languages who use them constantly in daily affairs. When a foreign language is adopted for certain uses, as Greek was among the Romans, French in the courts of Europe, or Latin among scholars, there is the expectation of being able to switch back and forth between languages so quickly that they practically become one. The line between foreign languages and dialects becomes fuzzy; in the Arabic world today, the Classical language is still used in many formal and scholarly situations, (almost like Latin in an earlier age in Europe) with a demotic form used elsewhere, and they differ in sounds, vocabulary, and syntax. Puns are frequently made between the two "languages." ⁹ Those proficient in various Chinese "dialects" make puns between them¹⁰ ; and there are examples of puns between Sanskrit and the Prakrits

⁹An example, for which I am indebted to Michael Cooperson: "kulliyit al-gadab" is the Classical term for "Faculty of Literature." "Gadab" can also mean "good manners," (the two are etymologically linked.) "Gillit" means "lack." Mr. Cooperson once heard a friend refer to the "kulliyit gillit al-gadab," "the faculty of lack of manners," punning on the familiar expression, the departmental name.

¹⁰According to Professor Robin D.S. Yates.

that developed from it. ¹¹ The dialect of modern urban French decried by DeGaulle as *Franglais* has led some of its "native speakers" to forget which words are French in origin and which English. Thus, should bilingual puns simply be seen as an extension of the context, no different from other types? The only way to tell, probably, is to examine each situation for the presence of the cue mentioned above. If **3.2.6** were told without any reference to the national origin of the snail, no accent, it would probably not be very funny to most English speakers. "What does *escargot* have to do with it?" they might ask, since the term has not become an accepted synonym for "snail" in English, except in a "French" context. An *a capella* group on campus titled a recent concert "**An Evening With Champignons,**" (punning the title of the annual ice skating exhibition, "An Evening With Champions,") with posters showing a tuxedoed mushroom. I got it, but I wonder how many others did, and it still seemed unmotivated, as though there were something else to get -- were they singing French songs, for example? Motivation, the relevance of puns, will be discussed in the next chapter; but a general rule is that the more out-of-the-way the less-expected interpretation, the stronger contextual motivation required. Foreign words, until they have been fully integrated as borrowings, represent some of the most out-of-the way interpretations possible.

We now enter the realm of linguistic ambiguity based on levels of speech processing.

3.3 First Order LAUGHS (The Phonological Level)

In this type, (1OLs or 1OPs) the sounds themselves are changed. 1OLs depend on the hearer not recognizing certain distinctions until after two different phonemes have been activated, and then forming two different interpretations based on them. The locus is the phoneme; all that is necessary to disambiguate is a careful ear, attention to every sound. However, this is not so easy, since the surrounding sounds, as well as higher level contexts and knowledge, will tend to distract the hearer. The distortions that can be made are closely linked to normal synchronic changes and speech errors. They are usually small, or placed in positions of minimal stress. Changes often borrow features from other parts of the utterance. A sound stands for other sounds close to it within a certain range, determined by what the hearers are willing to accept, dependent on the language and the audience. Since recognition is based on incomplete

¹¹ Hegde (p35) : "Different languages , such as Sanskrit and Paisaci blended, express their meanings if split accordingly as seen in phrases like *naram jetam* which means, if taken for granted as Sanskrit, *to conquer a man* and, if taken for granted as Paisaci prakrit, it means *not to please.*"

information with variability built in, a string of sounds will raise toward activation not only the word it actually represents, but similar words, to varying degrees depending on their similarities, and if context suggests one of the alternate words as well as the actual form, both will be activated. The effect of Hale's Law is that the greater the difference between the pun and the ground, the lower the chances of activation of both words in the hearers' minds and the less effective the pun.

There has been an awareness since at least as far back as the Romans of a difference between puns that change sound and those that match it exactly; the Greek term is **paranomasia** and the Latin, **adnominatio**. The terms are first used by Cicero in **De Oratoribus**¹² and in the anonymous **Rhetorica ad Herennium**, in which *adnominatio* is defined:

"cum ad idem verbum et nomen acceditur commutatione vocum aut litterarum, ut ad res dissimiles similia verba adcommodentur,"

"when to a particular verb or noun there is added (nearby) a word with a slight change of sound or letters, so that similar sounding words are applied to dissimilar things."¹³

At other times, including, perhaps, today, these have been considered the "worst" puns, a sort of lower class of wordplay, unlike the more "dignified" play on words or senses. (The main reason for this is probably that it is much easier to make a First Order Pun than any other kind; while any word has only a few real homophones at the most, it can have an arbitrary number of paronyms, of words of various degrees of closeness. Exactly how close they need to be is up to the suspension of disbelief of the hearers, what they are willing to accept, how inaccurate their speech recognition processes are, how easy it is to activate two words at once for them. Hale's Law would tend to keep the limits narrow, but hearers who really wanted or expected to hear puns (such as undergraduates researching theses on the subject, or the audiences of Hasty Pudding shows) might tend to have wider criteria and easier activation. **The main constraints on 1OLs are the closeness of the paronym to the target word and the motivation and plausibility of the changes in terms of hearers' knowledge of language and of the world.** No matter what the opinion of them, however, First Order Puns still work through the use of contextual information or the ignoring of it, just like any other pun.

Since the number of possibilities for First Order punning is greater than for higher orders, 1OLs can be much more unexpected and achieve more of their humor that way.

¹²Snyder, p63

¹³Snyder, p64

Since they operate on the roughest association of sounds, they break the rules against freely linking sound and meaning more than other types. Furthermore, the attitude of many has created a sort of meta-rule against this type of punning, the breaking of which gives enjoyment. When a person makes a IOP, it is though he is hard of hearing or so stupid that he cannot distinguish sounds, and we laugh at the implication of this. Our own fears of deafness are raised and quieted. On a higher level, we may laugh at the sheer audacity of the distortion, as in the joke made by "the pathological liar" on **Saturday Night Live**, "**I met Donald Trump's wife, Ivana. I haven't seen her naked yet, but I yanna.**"

What those who have criticized paranomasia ignore is that the mutations used are necessary to the getting of the joke. The problem with totally homophonous puns is that they can sometimes slip by unnoticed; IOLs, however, call more attention to themselves and the words they link since the difference will be detected on a lower level of processing although activation of words will already have occurred, making the pun possible. Especially in differentiating condensation (see Actus I) the change which has been made in the sounds, which leads to the change in meaning, is emphasized and for this reason its syllable should receive the word or phrasal accent. When this does not happen, the pun will not work well; the ambiguity will not come to the attention so readily; it will not be understood without conscious thought and search, which will defeat it. Puns which are intended to sound as much like the ground as possible I call **masquerading puns**.

The best IOLs are those that are motivated either by knowledge of language or of the world. Motivation by knowledge of language occurs when the mutation is similar to one actually made synchronically in the language, in morphophonemics or speech errors. It is thus more likely to be able to slip in as variation, causing the activation of two words; it will be less conscious, and its pleasure will be more natural, less intellectual, also harder to pin down. When puns are created with the intellect they only appeal to the intellect; this is the problem of many too-glib headline writers whose puns are forced, unnatural, stretching the rules, and not as pleasurable.

3.3.1 Types of paranomastic changes

a. The minimum change would be the **single feature**, as in the case of the fireplace equipment store which promised "**Everything your little hearth desires**," or the puns on "**puck**" so dear to the hockey game report headline writer's heart. Or, **Van Gogh became sentimental whenever he drank, since absinthe makes the heart grow fonder**.

(assumes stress on first syllable of "absinthe.")

Air condition electrically. Why fry by night? (Monnot)

Rhapsody in Brew. (Beer ad, Monnot.)

The fact that single feature changes are the most obvious is one reason why nine times out of ten, if you ask someone to make a pun of the top of his or her head, he or she will answer with some variant of "I'm sorry, I don't feel very **punny** today." More than one feature can be changed, still keeping the same place of articulation, as in the ad for an Italian restaurant, "This country's going to **pizzas**." (This could be seen as the addition of the phoneme /t/ or the affrication to /ç/.)

b. Several features can be changed. This is most noticeable when it occurs at the beginning of a word, slightly less so at an internal syllable onset, and reduced also in clusters.

When the change is much greater than this, it becomes either a rhyme pun whose value is mostly differential, or very weak:

When miniskirts came into fashion, people said "The thigh's the limit." /sk/ and /th/ are too far apart for real confusion.

The Big Ill. (Boston Phoenix headline for article on hypochondria)

c. Changes in vowels tend to be more noticeable than those in consonants, since they form syllable nuclei and are drawn out longer and heard longer than consonants. "They would not show *Ivanhoe* on television because it had too much **Saxon violence**." (Moger 1)

Individual conservation is the single most important faucet of the anti-draught program. (Moger 1)

Costello Spikes Out (Headline of **Phoenix** review of "Spike," album by Elvis Costello. Based on "speaks out", not "strikes out.")

Did you hear about the show for pickle makers, "Let's Make a Dill?"

Thin girl to fat sister: I'm sorry to make a joke at your expanse. (Hasty Pudding Show, *Saint Misbehavin'*, 1988)

"What do you think of the food, Holmes?"

"Alimentary, my dear Watson!" With the first syllable unstressed, this is practically a homophone. The same applies to:

Thank God I'm a Contra Boy! (Title of song about Nicaraguan rebels by The Capitol Steps)

What tonight is oh so scenic/ Could be cynic by today. (The Fantasticks)

Misperceptions in consonants were the most common hearing error in Bond and Garnes, accounting for more than a fifth of the total corpus. (p122) Vowel alterations were only one fifth as frequent.

d. Phonemes can be added or deleted, especially weak ones like /h/ that are commonly deleted synchronically or diachronically.

It's tough being an anteater. Hunting for those little black insects is really aardyark.

"Jane Fonda to Vets: Sorry I Hanoied You." (Philadelphia Daily News headline)

"Arbor Day? Why, that's when all the ships come sailing into the arbor!"
(Peanuts TV Special)

Female: "I go to B.U."

Male: "Is that what makes you B.U.tiful?" (Insertion of vowel made easier by the semivowel /j/ between /b/ and /u/ in the word, noticed when Gordon MacRae sings the first song from **Oklahoma!**) Another example of motivated insertion is the "**cunning linguist**" joke in Actus I. The [ng] is assimilated to the stressed syllable from the following stressed one.

e. Others rely on the **simplification of consonant clusters**, sometimes through assimilation. This also happens in the clusters formed across word boundaries in fast speech.

Brave New Words. (Phoenix Literary Supplement issue title.)

This camera lens itself to many uses. (Moger I) /nds/ >/ns/

Busboys are dish jockeys. (Moger I) /skj/ assimilates /[^]sj/

There's a vas deferens between having children and not having them. (H&H) /st/>/s/, but the following dental might produce a /t/ at the end of the word anyway.

Get on the Rice side. (Rice Krispies ad, Monnot)

f. Synchronic changes that are commonly made in everyday speech include deletion of final /g/ after /n/, which helps out the following:

During a baseball game, it started to rain. The home-plate official walked out to consult with the other officials to decide whether the game should be called. As he crossed the wet grass of the infield, he slipped and landed heavily. The announcer intoned, "**Ladies and gentlemen, you have just witnessed the fall of the roaming umpire.**" Deletion and insertion of consonants in clusters accounted for 7.4% of Bond's data. (p122)

g. Unstressed syllables can be changed more easily and drastically than stressed ones. "**This toothache is driving me to extraction.**" (Moger 1) When sounds must be eliminated entirely, it is very hard for stressed vowels, easy for unstressed ones. "**We've**

got to get our government to a state of fiscal fitness." "There is a new show on for vandals -- Deface the Nation." Also, the onsets of syllables tend to receive more attention than the rimes, to form the nuclei for processing, so that changes to syllable-initial sounds are more noticeable than those to syllable-final ones. (L. Frazier I, p162)

Hartje Attack (Harvard Independent headline, describing hockey player Tod Hartje.) (Bond's data contained 8.2% syllable deletions. (p123))

h. In fast speech, geminate consonants tend to lose their length and become indistinguishable from simple ones. This is especially neutralizing over word-boundaries. Thus, "**I'm meeting someone for lunch.**" "**So you've taken up cannibalism?**" The difference of "I'm meeting" and "I'm eating" has been neutralized. The distinction of consonant length can be neutralized in the other direction also as in, "**Cutting your food intake fifty percent is a half-fast way to go about dieting.**" Similar consonants can behave very much like geminates. "**What did the audience think of the horror film? Oh, how they loved each shudder!**" (This also includes a change a stress and a change in two features of the medial consonant.) "There is a preference toward assigning consonants to the onset of the following syllable rather than the coda of the previous syllable ... a preference toward assigning consonants to a stressed syllable over an unstressed one." (Church, p60) This seems to include phrasal stress, to extend over word boundaries as well, as in the old song "**I scream, you scream, we all scream, for ice cream,**" or the establishment in Wellfleet, Mass., calling itself "**A Nice Cream Shop.**" (These are examples of ice cream sandhis.) In the following example, the gemination or transference would make the change hard to notice if it were not for the second use of the word, which makes it clear that a change has been made. "**My son is surly to slumber and surly to rise.**" (M1) These sorts of switches are limited by the syllable structure rules of the language, but these often allow variant parsings. (Frazier 1, p165) This technique is especially effective when the second syllable begins with a vowel and the first ends with a semivowel as in, "**In fighting the pests on his cotton plants, the farmer had to decide which was the lesser of two weevils.**" (Moger 1) "**Do you ever yearn?**" "**I yearn my living.**" (W.S. Gilbert, *Patience*, Act I) "**We get our bread from the yeast -- the Leavent!**" The changing of word boundaries is called *synaeresis* or *diaeresis* by Aristotle, and was especially a problem in written Greek, with no word breaks or punctuation.

Some of the best IOP's are those that involve not the changing of phonemes but simply their rearrangement, although this may entail phonetic differences. Transposition, switching of two phonemes, which Hammond and Hughes call **chiasmus**, or **metathesis**, when the phonemes are adjacent. It works because it seems particularly motivated; the

sounds are not just coming out of nowhere, but from somewhere else in the phrase. The mutation can be ascribed to assimilation. Furthermore, there is a savings of psychical energy (see Actus I) from using the same material over again, and this creates comic pleasure. Metathesis is both a common speech error and a common synchronic and diachronic change. Usually, the two switched sounds occupy similar stress positions in their respective words. When they are simply adjacent, and one receives less stress, the metathesis is less likely to be noticed. One has a **masquerading** pun rather than a differentiating one. More complex ones involve the switch of more than one phoneme, "**A woman is only a build in a girdled cage," (Moger 1) can be seen as either a transposition of /l/ and /r/ with the vowel changes conditioned by the new environments, or the vowels can be seen as transposed also. (There is also the insertion of /l/ into "gilded" to give "girdled," which is not matched by any change in "bird," but can perhaps be motivated by the previous presence of the /l/ in the preceding syllable.)**

Pavlovian conditioning is pulling a habit out of a rat.

George S. Kaufman, when his daughter eloped from Vassar: "**She put the heart before the course."**

The Tibetan herder, remembering he had left his dinner on the fire too long: **Oh, my baking yak!** (Especially interesting as it requires that the underlying, pre-metathesis form be /j^hekInj/, not just /ekInj/, so that the transfer of the semivowel precedes the metathesis.)

"**What foods these morsels be!"** also redistributes certain segments, if not all exactly: a dental is made voiced by the already present final /z/, and the medial /s/ is unvoiced like the /t/ it replaces. Not all puns involve redistribution of segments, but many of the most enjoyable ones do.

Bond's data were 4.3% metatheses. He notes that metatheses usually take place within one "breath group," instead of crossing phrase boundaries, "suggesting phrases marked by an intonational contour form perceptual units at some level of processing." All the examples above take place within a phrase. Switches in puns seem to work best between the stress peaks within the phrase, the strong syllables followed by unstressed syllables or words, whether the stress is placed there in order to emphasize the switching or because it is best recognized that way. There is probably a tendency in errors to switch from one stress peak to another, even as in the Spoonerisms "**May I sew you to your sheet?"** or the one supposedly made on "**Punts are not for kissing in."**

3.3.2 Puns as Phonological Evidence

Puns have sometimes been used as evidence in phonological reconstruction of languages of which we only have written evidence, but their value is limited by the

possibility of paranomasia. The theory is, if the two words are punned, they must sound the same. This assumes, however, that all puns are homophones (Third Order) and do not include any paranomastic alteration, which, I think it is clear, can suggest two words at once just as well as homophony can. But since paranomasia is so common, we cannot be sure whether it is being used to erase a distinction. Centuries from now, when future linguists read of the comment by Professor Calvert Watkins after the presentation of a paper concerning two Greek scholia, "**What you've just heard is a tale of two ditties,**" they will not conclude that there was no difference of /d/ and /s/ at this point. Kökeritz, in **Shakespeare's Pronunciation**, lists many examples of what she calls "jingles" (collocations of similar sounding words) as well as homophones. She claims that "as a rule, it is not difficult to distinguish between jingles and genuine homonymic puns." (p67) In extreme cases, this may be true, if several sounds have been changed, but where the difference is only in a single sound, it requires a great number of examples and probably some other sort of evidence to be sure of the presence or absence of a phonemic difference.

Similarly, Frederick Ahl lists certain distinctions that he claims were routinely ignored by Latin authors for punning purposes; differences in vowel length as well as the difference of single and geminated consonants; differences of **c** and **g** did not matter, nor did those of **ns** and **s**. **Ae**, he says, was associated with **a** or **e**, **oe** with **u**, **e**, or **i**. (This did happen etymologically). **Au** was treated like **o**, and Greek **y** like **u** or **i** (since it was a sound intermediate between the two) while Greek aspiration did not matter. One cannot be sure if the resulting plays were First or Third Order, whether the words were seen as roughly similar or identical. (p57) It seems much more likely that these were possibilities for 1OLs, sounds that would suggest each other, than identities, distinctions that were neutralized. Another question is whether Ahl's finding of puns led him to these conclusions about phonology, or whether taking the phonology as given allows him to find all the puns. Other authors, however, have also found many paronyms in Latin (see Raebel, p41) so they probably are there, only they should not be overdone; Hale's Law should always be kept in mind.

One would think that French, with its huge number of homophones, would not need to resort to paronomasia (and in doing so make everything a possible pun and violate Hale's Law.) But there are some (from Duchacek)

Votre proposition se fond(e) en raison come le beurre au soleil. "Your argument melts/is based on reason like butter in the sun."

La femme vient du mâle et le mal vient de la femme. "Woman comes from Man and evil comes from Woman." In both these examples, the difference is between final consonants that will barely be pronounced and those that will be fully pronounced.

3.3.3 Contexts in First Order Puns

The contexts required to disambiguate First Order Puns can vary from the actual phonemic to higher level ones of dialectal accent. Pisoni and Luce note that a listener's knowledge of the circumstances under which alveolars palatalize may allow him to recover the representation "did you" from its phonetic representation [dijyu]." (p37) (Woody Allen's protagonist in the film **Annie Hall** fails to make this distinction, however, and paranoidly thinks his co-workers anti-Semitic for asking him, "Jew eat lunch yet?") The rules of combination prohibit certain phonemes before or after others, so that knowing one limits choices as to other ones; if there is an /l/, for instance, the preceding segment must be /f/ and not /v/. (Frazier 1, p167) But these rules form part of our knowledge of language, and are thus largely unconscious; we might know that we know them, but we do not have to. Other puns require conscious knowledge of the real world, of accents and variant pronunciations. For example:

Eleanor Roosevelt once asked a visiting Chinese diplomat "**When did you last have an election?**" to which he replied, with embarrassment, "**Before blekfast.**"

A young man was being interviewed for a job, and when asked where he had learned the skills he claimed, he answered "**Yale.**" "And what was your name again?" "**Yohnny Yohnson.**" In the first case, a general fact about the world that the hearer is expected to know, that the Chinese substitute the sound /l/ for /r/, causes a reinterpretation of certain sounds to find what underlies them. In the second, information supplied by the joke itself serves this purpose.

Similar is the following scene: Groucho Marx (pointing to line in contract): **This is a sanity clause.**

Chico: **Hold it. Every-a body-a knows, there ain't-a no sanity clause.** (**A Night at the Opera**) We know Chico's "Italian" accent causes him to mispronounce things, and thus motivates this misunderstanding. If Chico spoke normally, the pun might still be feasible, only less successful perhaps since it would be unmotivated. In short, "sanity clause" and "Santa Claus" are homophones within a particular dialect, in a particular context, although to most people they involve distortion. Other dialect-dependent examples are found in Gilbert's **The Pirates of Penzance**, in which a confusion between "**orphan**" and "**often**" is done to death, and **Princess Ida**, in which a feminist professor cannot bring herself to recognize males and say "**These are men.**" It would involve saying "**amen**," and the implication is that she is against religion also.

These two examples are incomprehensible, or at least require a much greater stretch of imagination to be funny, unless pronounced with an English accent, or perhaps a Bostonian one. As explained above, however, our tolerance for First Order mutation comes from the necessity of dealing with variation, including that caused by accents. Whether we tolerate particular variations which we have already heard, or are equipped to tolerate variation in general based on the kinds of mutations that are possible, plausible, or probable, I have not been able to tell from my data. "**Where do sheep have their hair cut? At the baa-baa shop.**" (Moger 1) This contains no cue of dialect, but do we assume, even subconsciously, that the speaker has a Boston¹⁴ or English accent, having heard it before? Or is the dropping postvocalic /r/, which seems a common enough change, just so plausible that we accept it no matter what? This could only be tested by experimenting with children who have not yet been exposed to other dialects. But it is clear that puns often correlate well with dialectal properties, and that dialectal changes can still be used as 1st order variation, although, as in the following example, without knowledge of the dialect, the variation might exceed the hearer's tolerance. Some years ago, a mail order clothing company had a contest to come up with new names for specific shades of colors. My father entered the suggestion, "**Enry 'Iggins just you white.**" (A reference to the threat made in Cockney dialect by the heroine of Lerner and Loewe's **My Fair Lady**.) But dialect variation is also somewhat limited, and other dialects would not be intelligible to us if they exceeded our tolerance, so there is no reason not to assume that the two tolerances would be roughly similar. Thus, whether the disambiguation is based on high level world knowledge, whether that knowledge has become internalized to an unconscious memory, or whether the recognition of all dialects is just part of knowledge of language, the three approaches are not incompatible, and different cases could be explained by different ones and even change between them over time, for the individual and for the community as a whole.

In fact, any further application of a rule can serve to establish an idiolect and motivate the main change, as in the "Yonny Yohnson" example.

At IBM, a manager happened to put up one of the ubiquitous "**think**" signs over the washbasin. Some wag put another on the dispenser saying "**thoap.**" In addition, this change actually might be made by those with the common impediment of lisping. The hearer is used to overlooking the lisp, or at least attempting to, in processing the speech of a lisper; in this way speech impediments function like dialects, and the unconscious awareness of their possibility can help motivate puns. In Plautus' **Mostellaria** (ln. 319)

¹⁴A more Bostonian example: **Cape Cod is Boston's Cranberry source.**

there is actually a pun caused by a stuttering drunk: **Ecquid tibi videor ma-m-ma-madere?** "Do I seem to overflow with something?" or as "**mammam adire,**" "to go to a breast." Other puns similar to impediments include:

Whiskey Business (Title of Hasty Pudding show set during Prohibition. said with "Elmer Fudd" voice.) If we are looking for jokes involving impediments, Monty Python is an excellent source. In the film **Life of Brian**, Pontius Pilate speaks with an impediment causing him to change /r/ to /w/; however, there are no specific LAUGHS in his speech; it always requires a certain amount of interpretation, but this is in order just to obtain a single meaning from it, not to disambiguate two. There is also a sketch from the television show involving a character who, it becomes clear, says /b/ for /c/, which does not create the need for reinterpretation until he says "**What a silly bunt!**" Even the bumper sticker that says "**Sorry, but my karma just ran over your dogma,**" or its variant "**Any stigma will do to beat a dogma,**" the assumption is that the speaker for some perverse reason is adding "-ma" to nouns. As long as the speaker does not specifically say "I am making such and such a substitution," but only implies it by making it in other places, it will be perceived less consciously and laughed at less intellectually and more naturally.

When a change is not made universally, it can serve to emphasize it. The speaker must stress it; otherwise it would not be noticed. The other use of the sound would tend to activate the interpretation of the phoneme as identical and deactivate the mutated interpretation, especially if the other use was prominent and stressed. "**Thirst things first,**" from a beer ad, (Monnot) as compared to "**Thirst sign of spring,**" (another beer ad (Monnot)) shows this phenomenon. All the above examples require a certain processing, not just recognition; a rule must be applied.

3.3.4 Semantic conditions

Semantic conditions affect phoneme recognition, it has been shown (see Tannenhaus and Lucas.) Words with certain senses cause "priming" of the recognition device to encounter other words with related senses. (This can also be seen as the assimilation of semantic features, in the same way phonetic features are assimilated.) Frauenfelder and Tyler distinguish between **structural contexts and non-structural ones** which cause this priming. The former demand, or cause an expectation of, a certain unit based on its fitting into a structure, such as a word, phrase, or sentence. The latter merely suggest it through associations of the meanings of the words, what Tannenhaus and Lucas call **conceptually mediated** contexts. (p225) Thus, "**I have some examples from Eskimo, but I'm a bit snowed under by them,**" (a Third Order LAUGH from Martha Forbes) plays on the associative relationship of "Eskimo" and "snow;" we tend to

hear the literal rather than the figurative meaning of "snow" because of the presence of a word representing something associated with it. If the words were associated rather than the meanings, perhaps because of some common phrase in which they are juxtaposed, the way in which one never hears the word "tinker" without thinking "tailor, soldier, sailor" or "to Evers to Chance"¹⁵, then it would be more of a structural context. It would also be a structural context if a word simply sounded like one which formed part of a set phrase, and thus, when inserted in that phrase, it activated the expected word as well as itself. This question of structural contexts will become more important with other types of puns; when dealing with IOP's, it can be applied mainly to examples in the paronyms are very different from the words they suggest, yet still are able to do so.

One such was in an advertisement for HSA Laserwriting services, with the headline, "**Thesis Envy?**" "Thesis" suggests the target word, "penis," in some sounds, but differs in significant ones. Yet the association is very clear, and thus very funny, even despite the phonetic dissimilarity. It is simply that the expression "penis envy" is so well known, and that "envy" forms part of very few other phrases, that placing any word before "envy" triggers "penis." Several years ago, residents of Mather House placed the slogan "**Mather Envy**" on their T-shirts. Even a word that was totally different phonologically could trigger the LAUGH effect, although it was helped by the picture on the front of the shirt of Mather Tower dwarfing the other Houses. It helps, however, if the substituted word is at least metrically similar to the target word, and any similarity of sound can only help also. "**Shoot to thrill**," the title and refrain of some raucous heavy-metal tune, also uses an expression so familiar, with so few possibilities, that the difference of /θr/ and /k/ does not matter. Yet another example is the Phoenix headline describing a flower shop, "**Crocus Maximus**"-- what else goes with "Maximus" besides "circus"? Sometimes these are strongly differential. In Larry Gelbart's play **Mastergate** a secretive Oliver North type figure says "**I always like to call a spade by its code name.**" Puns like this play on our expectations of set phrases and create humor by disappointing them. They can do so even if the change occurs at the beginning of the phrase rather than the end. In **The Far Side**, a picture of Cardboard cut-outs of hillbillies is labeled "**the Fake McCoys.**" A strong differential example occurred in the comic strip **Shoe**, in which all the characters are birds: a politician, promising not to raise taxes, said "**Read my beak**," as opposed to "read my lips," what a human would say. Or they can be condensational: to describe a couple of which the female is much taller than the male as

¹⁵ The name of a famous double-play combination, immortalized in a turn-of-the-century song.

"dancing cheek to neck," gets the feeling of closeness of the ground phrase with the height difference suggested by the substitution.

Yet one wonders about some of these "far-off" puns. In Plautus' **Menaechmi** (ln. 182) there is a passage in which a meal (**prandium**) is described in terms of a battle (**proelium**). Mendelsohn sees this as a play on the word, but Professor Hayden Pelliccia explained it instead as a common metaphor in Roman literature, with the similarity of sound only coincidental.

There can also be very large scale paronyms, or parodies. Entire lines can be suggested with a few similar sounds placed in stressed positions. Lewis Carroll and others have produced parodies of others' poems; the changes are extensive, but there is enough of the original left to suggest it and activate it if it is known to the hearer. They should be differentiated, however, from romans à clef and allegories, which suggest another work by conceptual similarities.

According to T&L, syntactic factors do not affect lexical processing. It is relatively easy to determine if a phoneme belongs to a word, as each word contains only a finite number; there is an almost unlimited number of words per syntactic category. A word activates all its phonemes; a syntactic category activates only one of its members. (p225) It is not unreasonable, however, to imagine that syntax can affect morpheme recognition, especially in highly inflected languages, since the morphemes mark the syntactic categories. Morpheme expectations could then create phonemic expectations, but this filtering down of levels would require a lot of processing time and thus slow down pun comprehension, and reduce humor content except on an intellectual level.

Suprasegmental factors such as stress and pitch, **prosodia** in Aristotle's formulation, can also be punned on; they can be used to disambiguate or ignored to ambiguate. The classic example is, of course, from the **Odyssey**, when Odysseus tells the Cyclops his name is **Οὔτις** (circumflex accent), which, when the Cyclops screams it out to his fellows, comes out as **Ούτις** (acute accent, "no-one".) However, changes of stress often cause phonetic changes as well, which can affect the quality of the ambiguity. Titling a book on cloning "**Duet Yourself**," falls into this trap. (Moger 1) As does "**A girl is like a mirror when she is a good looking lass**," especially as the transference of the /g/ to the next word is dependent on "lass" receiving the stress, which it would not if "looking-glass" is given its meaning of "mirror."

When the Persians conquered Babylonia, they left a lot of ziggurats smoking.

We moved our corporate headquarters to St. Louis because Missouri loves company.

Both examples change stress, which I think reduces their effectiveness. The importance of stress and intonation should never be underestimated; it can be used to disambiguate all kinds of ambiguities, especially syntactic ones. In most of Pritchett's examples of Garden Path sentences, the local syntactic ambiguity which makes them difficult to process would never be noticed if they were read aloud with some intonation.

3.4 The Second Order Pun: (The morphological)

In the "pure" form of this type, all the sounds of the string remain the same, but in many examples, there is some paranomastic change which makes the morphemes equivalent in sound, or the words have been redivided, according to the ways that sounds can cross word and morpheme boundaries, as outlined in the previous section. The units reinterpreted are instead composed of several phonemes; they are syllables or morphemes. What puns of this variety show is that the word is not the only unit of meanings, that we sometimes look at parts of words, though we tend to do so only when we do not recognize the word straight off. Also, what is not reinterpreted can be as important as what is, although often the entire word is reinterpreted. In one installment of the comic strip **Calvin and Hobbes**, Calvin (or Spaceman Spiff, in his fantasy) says: **"Our hero is being taken away by evil Zorks to be debriefed! Little do they know, our hero never wears briefs!"** "De-" and "-ed" retain their meanings -- only "brief" is reinterpreted. This takes some delay in processing, as the word has to be divided up and reanalysed. Unlike phonemes, which seem to activate the similar phonemes, morphemes in combination do not seem to activate their other meanings. When we hear a relatively familiar lexical item such as "debriefed," most of us hear it as simply one unit, not as "de + brief + ed," with each unit having meaning and the whole being the sum of the parts.¹⁶ Less familiar words, especially ones coined by the speaker, would have to be analyzed, with each morpheme activating its cohort and the possible range of meanings. Thus, they would not require *reanalysis* so much as *analysis* in the first place. Also, there will probably be a difference in processing inflexional and derivational morphemes. The former are part of knowledge of the language and will be handled during syntactic processing (and thus puns on them will belong also to the Fourth Order, see below) while the latter tend to be more diachronic. Even when they are productive, they are not necessarily known to speakers and knowing them is not necessary to speaking the language, though it helps in the recognition of new words which otherwise would depend on explanation by others and context alone. Of course, through experience of the language (or courses in historical linguistics) a speaker will acquire a certain knowledge

¹⁶ Although it probably would be analyzed as "debrief + ed".

of, or certain beliefs about, morphology, both productive and non-, but there is no way of knowing whether the beliefs will be correct or simply folk etymological, formed by sound associations in the first place. Speakers of English, which has very simple inflexional morphology and often opaque derivational morphology, are much less aware of this level than speakers of an inflected language. There is some argument over whether we actually represent inflexional morphemes in the lexicon or only the full paradigm of every word. (Fromkin, p 131) Speech error evidence seems to suggest that inflexional morphemes are represented, along with a few derivational morphemes. Only these can be punned on with ease, with no intellectual reanalysis. One wonders about Latin speakers; it seems inconceivable that they might have had every inflected form separately listed in the lexicon, and more so for Greek speakers. Not surprisingly, Latin abounds with morphological puns.

3.4.1 Types of 2OLs

On one end, some 2OLs can seem like extended 1OLs. If the same morpheme is used in two different words in close collocation, then the two can seem like paronyms in which all the sounds have been changed except the common morpheme. An example from Ahl would be, (Metamorphoses 4.232, p39) "**at Virgo quam VIs inopino territa Visu,**" "and the young woman, terrified by the unexpected sight." However, this analysis would ignore the awareness that a certain unit of meaning was being reinterpreted exactly, which is a more motivated change. Instead of comparing two words and calling them homophones, we should in analyzing localize (in the literal sense of "find the locus" also) the ambiguity to the changed morphemes, ignoring the old information, which does not change. If two words have homophonous stems but the same ending, then the pun is in the stems only. Similarly, when two inflectional morphemes, such as Latin endings, are identical, but attached to a stem whose meaning stays constant, then the pun can be localized to them. For instance, St. Augustine noticed the confusion between **solī**, "the sun (dative)" and **solī** "to that one alone," in the injunction to worship no one but the Lord, "**nisi Domino solī.**" The ending is the same; only the stems are homophonous. In contrast, in the **Pseudolus** (ln. 709) someone says, **salutem te salutem**; "I would wish greet you when you are healthy," the first use is the accusative of a noun, a direct object (the stem being *salu-*) and the second a 1st person singular present active subjunctive. It simply happens that the derivational and inflexional morphemes would have coincided to make these two forms built off the same stem identical. Similar is **Cur eam rem tam studiose curas quae tibi multas dabit curas?** "Why do you care so much about that affair which gives you so many cares?" (Auctor ad Herennium, IV, 14, 21) Landheer calls these **paradigmatic** puns; they belong to the same paradigm, only the endings are

different. Examples from French often involve stems that undergo some morphophonemic change or have undergone some historical change that makes them vary somewhat. These are harder to classify as having one morpheme remaining constant while the other changes, but since the homophony can be explained on levels lower than that of the word, they are still 2OPs. **En quoi un coiffeur et Degas ressemblent-ils? Ils peignent tous les deux.** "How are a hairdresser and Degas alike? They both comb/paint." The stems of "peindre" and "peigner" are identical in this particular form.

Here are some examples of morphological puns involving resegmentation (i.e., what was not interpreted as a separate morpheme before is now taken as one, or vice versa. In some of them, the new morpheme is free, and forms a word unto itself. Of course, some of what we see as single words actually do have a derivational morphology, but as the morphemes are no longer productive, we are not aware of them.)

1st Woman: **I was born abroad.**

2nd Woman: **Yes, I could tell that you've always been one.** (The morpheme "a" is changed from a bound morpheme that is no longer a productive prefix [at least in the meaning of "on, at"] to a word in itself, the indefinite article.)

Headline on the birth of a son to Prince Charles, the next King of England, "**The Heir -- a Parent!**"

Some people keep their sight to a very old age. Their eyes dilate [die late.]
(Moger 1)

A credit card is a buy pass.

The hotel would only hire people who were inn-experienced.

Alas, a lass is what I lack! Alas, a lass, alack, a lack! (song from musical **Once Upon a Mattress**.)

A man saw the birds flying south and said: Migratious! (Moger 1)

Does your girdle make you look thin? Of corset does!

The cookie was sad since its mother had been a wafer so long.

An oracle once told a king about to go to war, "**Dominestes**." He took it as "**Domine stes**": "Do not stay at home," but it was meant as "**Domine, stes**," "My Lord, stay."

In French, where words tend to be run together by liaison, resegmentation of words is very common. (Examples from Duchacek)

Assuerus fut un amant discret: il sut aimer Esther/ et se taire. "Ahasuerus was a discrete lover. He knew to love Esther/ and keep quiet."

Combien vaut une Francaise? un franc, huit centimes -- la moitié de deux Francaises/ deux francs seize. "How much is a Frenchwoman worth?" "One franc, eight centimes -- half of two Frenchwomen/ two francs, sixteen centimes." The cliticized

articles, linked to their nouns by liaison, often are reanalyzed as part of the word. The difference between them and the examples of the "I'm meeting" type is that these require complete reanalysis of the word, instead of only local changes.

A poem from Scientific American describing a hypothetical meeting of Dr. Edward Teller and his anti-matter equivalent, Dr. Edward Anti-Teller, uses several words with "anti-" prefixed to denote the anti-matter opposites of conventional things, as is done in science (anti-proton, anti-electron, anti-particle.) But there is also a reference to "**macassars on his chairs.**" We cover our chairs with "anti-macassars" (originally, protectors against macassar hair oil) so anti-chairs would be covered with "macassars." But the prefix "anti-" has changed in meaning from "protecting from, against" to "physically opposite in a way explained by modern theories." However, this example is similar to the "abroad" example in that "antimacassar," at least today, is etymologically opaque, since no one uses macassar oil anymore. In the film **The Way We Were**, a student makes fun of a radical classmate, saying she will go from "**Undergrad to Leningrad.**" Here, the issue of whether "grad" is a morpheme in the second word is more fuzzy. To many hearers, the word is simply the name of a city, but to others, who have heard of Lenin (and thus know that "Lenin" is a morpheme) or have heard of other Soviet cities, "grad" will be a separate morpheme with the meaning "Soviet city."

Some 2OLs explain the entire word, some only part. Bishop William Warburton once remarked to Lord Sandwich (sometime in the 18th century) that "**Orthodoxy is my doxy, heterodoxy is another man's doxy.**" He explains only the "doxy" morpheme (although some connection may be made between "hetero" and "another man's", it is not parallel with "ortho" and "my.") On the other hand the explanation that a "**paradox**" is **two mallards (or two piers)** explains the whole word, although the former possibility involves some First Order deformation. Similar is "**Sir Lancelot had a terrible dream about his horse. It was a knight mare.**" (M1) A bilingual example is the motto of the Radcliffe Choral Society, **Laudate No-men.**

Another common type of morphological pun is the Tom Swiftie, in which an adverb becomes oddly descriptive of the situation.

"I'll never pat another lion," said Tom offhandedly.

"You look I like the Venus de Milo," said Tom disarmingly.

"I'm all out of yellow flowers," said Tom lackadaisically. In these, everything is being punned on except the morpheme "-ly" which retains its adverbial meaning. Just the opposite occurs in scene from Sherman Edwards' musical **1776**, in which a rambunctious Richard Henry Lee, proud of his family and the influence of the various "Lees of old Virginia," refers to "**Fraternal-Lee, External-Lee, Internal-Lee, Eternal-Lee!**"

There are even spoonerisms of syllable or morphemes, in which the same ones are simply rearranged.

What's the difference between a camera and the whooping-cough? One makes facsimiles, the other makes sick families. (H&H)

Roy Rogers bought a new pair of boots, and left them by the door one night so as not to track dirt into the house. The next morning, they had been severely damaged with teeth marks, and the pet Siamese was the leading suspect. Roy and Dale spent all day hunting for him, and finally Dale said, "**Pardon me Roy, is that the cat who chewed your new shoes?**" (This is too complex to figure out exactly how much paronomasia is required, but it seems that syllabic reshuffling is the main mechanism.)

Paying your ex to keep her happy and quiet is carp to carp walleting. This illustrates the interchangeability of words and bound and unbound morphemes. And of course, **I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy.** In these cases, the difference of the resulting and original word is emphasized. However, it seems in this case that not morphemes, but syllables are being shifted. The similarity of the two words and phrases is being played on, but a new meaning is not being assigned to the morphemes.

When a word has become just a unit, not usually analyzable morphologically, breaking it down can have an explanatory, etymological function. We expect a sequence of sounds to represent the same morpheme every time it occurs and we analyze it as such, and the rest of the word based on it. Some people believe that there is a word "gruntled" meaning "content" (a meaning which is hard to obtain due to the association with "grunt"; who grunts when content?) Some radical feminists refuse to use "sexist" terms like "**history**," "**human**," and "**person**," substituting "**herstory**," "**huperson**," or "**perchild**." The same process is used in many ancient, folk, and child etymologies. The Romans changed the name of the city of **Maleventum**, from Greek μαλοεντον, "the place full of apples" to **Beneventum**, "well-arrived" instead of "badly-arrived." Anyone who knows better finds these etymologies amusing to read, but to those who created them, they were a serious business and sometimes represented the actual beliefs about the word's origin.

Occasionally, the reanalysis of a word is produced by juxtaposition, analogy, or comparison with another word in which morphemes have different meaning. Thus, the Gryphon in Alice in Wonderland explains what the fish **whiting** does by mentioning blacking for the shoes. Abraham Lincoln, on receiving a message from General McClellan from his "headquarters in the saddle," remarked that "**his headquarters are where his hindquarters ought to be.**"

3.4.2 *Figurae Etymologicae*

Ancient texts especially contain a large number of ***figurae etymologicae***, of close collocations of words from the same root, or repetition of root or stem morphemes. *Figurae etymologicae* are not puns; they are just the opposite, since if there is an implication of similarity of sense based on similarity of sound, it is by the nature of the words, and true, not coincidental and misleading as with puns. Puns involve a different units with different senses but the same sound, or the same units with different senses, but FEs use the same units with the same senses. Scholars have, unfortunately, tended to sort *figurae etymologicae* based on their own knowledge of word origins, not the ancients'. They classify as FEs multiple uses of the same stem even when that stem would have undergone morphophonemic changes in sound as well as changes in meaning. Although the hearers may still have made the connection of the two stems because the underlying form would have been the same, it would seem very hard to do in these cases. A *figura etymologica* truly occurs if, and only if, the speaker and hearer believe the words linked, and a pun is made when the two words are perceived as different and linked by sense only coincidentally. The problem is that the ancients, and we today, actually do tend to hear words with similar sounds as linked and to make up even the wildest etymologies to justify the shared sounds. Puns tend to have an etymological effect, to suggest, whether strongly or not, that the words sound the same for a reason, that there is a causal relationship. Therefore, a pun must find some unexpected way of linking words by sound, one that has not been thought of before, or some incongruous link, one that has not been thought of because there is no reason to associate the two words outside of an incredibly rare and specialized context or interaction of contexts. We can never quite know how funny the Romans would have found the puns of Plautus if we do not know their etymological beliefs, but ours influence our sense of humor also. *Figurae etymologicae* can still be funny, since there is something silly and nonsensical about repeating the same words. A slight pause before the second use of the word can create a sort of tension, a wondering of "what is he going to use next to complete the thought?" and when the most obvious, related word is used, there is a release of tension and a recognition of the obvious and familiar. Also, as soon as a unit is used in different contexts (for a morpheme, this means different words, for a word, different expressions) its meaning starts to change under the influence of the connotation of the larger whole,¹

¹⁷ E.g., *Menaechmi*, (I, 2, 27ln 136) "Menaechmus: **perii! in insidias deveni!** Peniculus: **immo in praesidium.**" "I'm lost! I've fallen into an ambush! No, rather, into protection." The two words have such

so that there is continuum from FEs to the use of different senses of the same morphemes. Using a stem with two different prefixes can accomplish this. A morpheme may have a general meaning, but as soon as it is placed in combination, this gets obscured. Thus there will be a delay in recognizing even what one knows to be the same morpheme, and a recognition of the familiar after that delay.

In this respect, second order puns show characteristics I have divided between Third and Fifth order puns when it comes to words. However, as I explained in Actus II, there is little difference between the role of morphemes in a word and that of words within a fixed phrase, which is further obscured by the ability of morphemes to function as bound or unbound, the ability of words to form compounds, and the identity of sound of bound and unbound morphemes with different meanings. These can be some of the funniest examples, since they are so unexpected but so obvious later, such as the First Lord of the Admiralty's admission in **HMS Pinafore**, "**That junior partnership, I ween / Was the only ship I ever had seen.**"

Both words and the phrases are recognized as single units, not analyzed; there meanings are not the sum of their parts. They undergo diachronic changes which separate them from their etymologies and make them opaque and empty. Whether two senses or two words are being played with depends on the speakers' and the hearer's etymological beliefs.

3.4.3 Name formation

Names are often used for morphological division, whether this has an explanatory function or not. This says something about the bearers of the name, about their origins or his destinies, as when John of Gaunt, in **Richard II**, (Act II, sc. i) says "**O how that name befits my composition! Old Gaunt indeed and gaunt in being old...**" In the **Iliad**, there seems to be a connection between the name of the hero **Ἀχιλλεύς** and the **ἄχος** ("pain, suffering") he caused, supported by a collocation of the two at one point. Names have a certain morphology, certain conventions by which they are formed, in each language which the speakers of that language will know unconsciously and foreigners may know consciously. In the **Astérix** comic books of Goscinny and Uderzo, translated into many languages, there are certain conventions of naming, with some basis in reality: Roman names all end in -us, Gaulish ones in -ix (historically, this was -rix, so that some resegmentation has been done), Gothic ones in -ic, Egyptian in -is.¹⁸ The authors or

different senses that even though the same morpheme is used, it will not be seen as the same. This is again an example of an opposition being set up.

¹⁸ These endings are generalized from endings that were common, but not the only ones possible.

translators then take common words in their own language which end in the same sounds (or close enough to suggest them) and the ending serves double duty, as both "name ending" and whatever the morpheme means in the original word, if anything. In English, the Gauls are **Asterix** (paronym of "asterisk"), **Obelix** (from "obelisk"), **Getafix**, **Vitalstatistix**, **Cacofonix** (also a paronym, since we do not add "s" to adjectives) and **Dogmatix**. In the original French, they are **Asterix**, **Obelix**, **Panoramix**, **Abraracourcix** (from "à bras raccourcis," "with rolled-up sleeves") **Assurancetourix** (from "Assurance tous risques," "no-fault insurance") and **Idéfix** (which exactly matches "idée fixe," "obsession.") Usually, the similarity of the name ending to the nominal morpheme is completely coincidental, having been produced by centuries of sound change. (A few Romans in the English editions have names formed from adjectives ending in "-ous." But the translators seem to be careful of this; for it could become too easy just to use adjectives, violate Hale's Law and be unsatisfying.) However, occasionally Latin words which have survived unchanged are sometimes used, whether their Latin origin is clear (Legionary **Gluteus Maximus**) or probably forgotten (the Roman camp of **Aquarium**.) In any case, the final morpheme must be given two meanings; if it is not, then the utterance is not a LAUGH or at least not a 2OL. In **Life of Brian**, there is a reference to a Roman with the name "**Bigus Dickus**." The ending "-us" is not ambiguous, although the whole name might be if the hearer did not see the incredibly obvious smutty interpretation.

In modern English, we have almost no constraints on last names (especially in the American melting pot) but a limited number of first names, or, at least, a limited number of things people will accept as first names. (Of course, there are people named "Zowie," "Moon Unit," and "Dweezil," [children of rock stars David Bowie and Frank Zappa] but these would never be believed in a punning situation unless the hearer had actually heard of them before.) Thus, for instance, in formulating the traditional pun names for the Hasty Pudding Show, the first name is usually a common enough one, and the last just coined to match it. This produces names like **Barry Tone**¹⁹, **Herb Avore**²⁰, **Xavier Lyfe**, and **Juana Dance**. Names which are more exotic, but can be since they are known, include opera singers **Kiri On Luggage** (from Kiri Te Kanawa) and **Aida Lottapasta**. These are made more appropriate by the semantic context (i.e., Aida is obese, Italian, an opera singer, etc., and if she were just an ordinary person with no motivation for either of the names, they would be less funny.) Last names can also be punned on, if they are

¹⁹"Bye Bye Verdi," 1987.

²⁰"Saint Misbehavin'," 1988

familiar or plausible; if they are common, known to belong to some individual (i.e., having heard of John Cheever, we will laugh at the idea of him having a brother **Under A**, or at the following: **A bookish young man asks a flirtatious young woman, "Do you like Kipling?" and she responds, "I don't know, you naughty boy -- I've never kippled!"**) Or, if the names have morphemes common to name formation (O', Mc, -son, or for foreigners, -sky, -berg, -ani, -ian, -opolous) so that the words themselves are not morphemes but are divided up. However, these morphemes usually suggest national origins that should be included in the set-up to motivate the pun.

What's Irish and spends a lot of time outdoors? Patty O' Furniture.

Did you ever here of the Greek comedian whose works are still popular today - Johncleese? (This is not particularly faithful to the stress - in order to sound like "Pericles" or "Sophocles" the stress must be on "John" when the Tallest of the Pythons actually stresses his first and last names equally.)

Salman Rushdie's last name comes from ancient Indian words meaning "one who is in a rush to die."(Saturday Night Live. This is sort of visual, but also works orally, I think.)

Ronald's Ray-gun. (Description of Strategic Defense Initiative laser weapons.)

Darling it hurts / To see you down in Darlinghurst tonight. (song by Paul Kelly, "Darlinghurst" being the red-light section of Sydney. The etymological source, the causal implication, is particularly strong here. It hurts because you are in Darlinghurst...)

Very few things are worse, however, than the use of a complicated, unusual, unmotivated name to set up a pun, such as one in Moger I, about a sheik with a lawyer named Regardway, who on his death wills his harem to his lawyer with the words **"Give My Broads to Regardway."** If we laugh at this type, it is usually at the stupidity of the maker.

Writers create names for their characters that are puns, which may say something about the character. Real people may do the same thing, in naming themselves, giving nicknames, or naming their children. Anyone with the surname "Rhodes" usually picks up the nickname "Dusty," and people named "Waters" naturally become "Muddy." There is the baseball player **Al Kaline**, the daughter of a Texas politician **Imah Hogg**. A folk-rock singer calls herself **Michelle Shocked**. The origin of the name **Soupy Sales**, a man who changed his to reflect his occupation as spokesman for a soup company, on the other hand, is obvious, neither half is motivated in any way by rules of English formation. The name Dick Deadeye, the hideous, evil sailor in HMS Pinafore, may seem similar, just a descriptive name ("Dead-eye") but it is actually a nautical term for a pulley on rigging. It is thus ambiguous and a pun.

When a name is chosen to be meaningful in the first place, it is harder to pun on, as there seems to be less coincidence. However, if the name has been used repeatedly to the point where it has become accepted, or if it seems highly motivated, then it can still be affected. Thus, in **Asterix and the Banquet**, (in English) our heroes meet a Roman driver of a breakdown tow chariot, and his name is **Nervus Illnus**, which is decently motivated by coincidence of morphemes. After he knocks him out to steal his chariot, Obelix remarks "**Poor Nervus had a breakdown**," which is motivated by the character's job; if he were just a legionary, it would not be so good. In **Bye Bye Verdi**, a character named **Willie Neverstop** promises his love to someone with the words "**I will never stop loving you**." But by this point, the very end of the show, we have accepted this name so well that the coincidence still seems fresh, and, well coincidental.

3.4.4 Latin syllabic puns?

Languages more heavily inflected than English would logically be expected to have more plays on the identity of the suffixes and endings identifying grammatical categories. Unfortunately, I have found some, but not a huge number. Perhaps the speakers of inflected languages take their morphology very seriously because they do not have anything else to rely on, whereas of we lucky English speakers can get along without or crude inflexions using only analytical processes, on which we make relatively few puns, I have found.

Latin poetry and comedy contribute a great number of examples 2OLs, at least according to some authors. Frederick Ahl, using his very loose rules of what sounds the same, finds large numbers of repetitions of syllabic morphemes throughout Latin literature, and sees the morpheme as the basic unit of punning in it. "Varro's puns are more complex than most English puns, which generally demand that the sound of one word offer two or more meanings. Most notably, they are based on syllables rather than on whole words." (Ahl, p 35) The same syllable, the same sequence of three or four sounds, will be used repeatedly in a short space. It is almost always the root which is repeated (although there are examples of plays between endings and stems.) Since two morphemes of identical pronunciation, but different origin and meaning are being compared, it is Second Order. There are also examples in which the roots are the same morpheme, but the suffixes or endings are also identical, even though the words are different parts of speech. In this case, as described above, the ambiguity has been transferred to the inflexional morphology, but it is still Second Order.

However, Ahl sometimes finds links between stem and suffix morphemes, and I have a hard time believing these are puns as he calls them. He finds a connection in Catullus's "Viv**am**us, atque **am**emus," but if this connection exists, then it should exist

also between "amemus" and every other 1st person plural 3rd conjugation subjunctive as well as any other form that had that syllable.²¹ On the other hand the two words with the common syllable are very closely collocated, and perhaps the repetition would strike the ear. But it seems too natural, too likely to be a pun. Perhaps this is because it, and many of Ahl's other examples, were not intended to be puns in my sense, for if they were, they would be Hale's Law violations. If puns are as omnipresent as Ahl claims, then they would not have been funny, which is not surprising, considering the at least semi-serious nature of much of the corpus. Puns usually make the hearer stop and take notice; if every word were a pun, then the reader would never get through the poem or be too busy laughing to hear the next line. Puns for the Latin poet were thus probably intended not to amuse but simply to tie the poem together through a network of associations, and to be perceived only semiconsciously. They would not have provoked uproarious laughter. Puns in comedy, however, would have been a quite different matter.

When Plautus collocates **malim** and **mala**, "I would prefer," and "evils," (**Bacchides**, ln. 875), or **Minus** and **minas**, "less" and a unit of money, (**Trinummus**, ln. 402/3) or **eas**, "may you go," **easque res** "those things (acc.)" (**Rudens**, ln. 519) or **inter deos** "among the gods" and **interdius** "during the day," (**Rudens**, prologue) he is playing on chance similarities which would probably have had not etymological significance even for the Romans. Other examples include **inveniet veniam**, "he will find pardon," (**Rudens**, ln.27) and **auribus perhaurienda**²² **sunt, ne dentes dentiant**, "these things are to be drunk up by the ears, lest the teeth teethe," (**Miles Gloriosus**, ln. 33/4) of which the first part is a pun and the second a FE. "**Viri freti virtute et viribus**" (**Amphitryon**) "men relying on their virtue and powers" plays on two words that may have been connected in the minds of the hearers although they are not etymologically, since *men* had *powers*, as well as two words that are connected, **vir** and **virtus**.

3.5 The Third Order Pun: (The Lexical Level)

²¹Snyder classes as a pun **maternum nomen**, (*De Rerum Natura*, 2, 991 --1.003) in which the "num" is composed of a derivational morpheme "-n-" and ending "-um"; this would be a bit more coincidental than Ahl's example.

²²Raebel, from whom most of these examples are taken, gives "perhaurienda." The Oxford Classical Texts edition has "peraudienda," which would be very weak, as it would be based only on the repetition of "au."

If we make the division between words and morphemes, the next level is the lexical. Traditionally called **homophony**, (or sometimes **homonymy**²³) the Third Order Pun involves ambiguity at the word level. It may seem uncertain sometimes whether a change in one morpheme changes the entire word; let us agree therefore to try always to isolate the ambiguity as much as possible so that if the other morphemes of a word retain their meaning, the pun will be classed as Second rather than Third Order. Because of the many languages and sets of rules that were mixed to make it, English is a language rich in homophones. French is also, because of the deletion of so much of the ends of words and other historical developments. **Homophones must be coincidental convergences of sound changes or appear to be so; words that come from the same root can function like homophones if there is no longer any perception of their connections.** There is a continuum of gradually increasing awareness of connections, until the source of the humor changes as it does in Fifth Order Puns. One bicycle courier to another: "**I tend to have accidents in bunches, after going weeks without trouble. My accidents happen in cycles, as well as on them.**" There is probably some connection in the mind; one calls one's vehicle a "cycle" because it has wheels that go round and round, and one goes round and round on a "cycle" of accidents. The contrast might be more in the two prepositional phrases rather than the words. In contrast, one night, as I rode along the street with a miner's-type headlamp on my helmet in the middle of my forehead, a somewhat inebriated pedestrian shouted out, "**look, a cyclops!**" Whether he meant the pun or not is another story, but the connection of a single, wheel-like eye in the middle of a giant's forehead and the wheel of a bike has been lost to such an extent that the term seems coincidental, and thus funny.

a. In all the following examples, the convergence is coincidental,

A duck grows down as it grows up. (M1)

The pitcher with a sore arm was in the throws of agony. (M1)

The head of a mafia family was being grilled by FBI interrogators. He held out all night without revealing anything, but when morning came, the don broke.

Some friends are doing very well in their candy company. They are making a mint. (M1)

²³ Aristotle used the term **homonymia** to refer to either the Third or Fifth Order (Stanford, p7); Hammond and Hughes differentiate them, so that homonymy is strictly fifth order, and I have adopted this convention.

One of Cicero's favorite puns was the homophony of **ius**, "law, right" and **ius**, "soup, sauce." Plautus uses it in the **Poenulus** (ln. 1349): **Leno, in ius eas**, "Pimp, you shall go before the law" which the pimp takes as an invitation to dinner.

"What's the Boston University alma mater?" "It had to B.U., of course." (Or, for more modern tastes, **"Why Can't I Be You?"**)

b. In these examples, the common origin of the words is no longer visible:

Catatonic State University (Sweatshirt slogan)

When I saw the headline in TIME, the Weekly Newsmagazine, of an article concerning Senator Sam Nunn, **Smart, Dull, and Powerful**. I was confused. Was it intended to be a punning oxymoron?²⁴ (in the most literal sense?) Has "dull" completely lost its sense of "stupid," to have only that of "boring?"

c. Latin is sometimes described as lacking in homophones, but Plautus has a few examples of homophone puns:

Mihi quoque adsunt testes. (**Amphitryon**, ln 824, when Alcmena is insisting she has not been unfaithful to her husband. But **testes** means not only "witnesses," but exactly what you think it means. This may be almost a 5OP, since some saw the testes as "witnesses to manhood.")

Quid igitur vis? Esse ut ventum gaudeam. (**Curculio**, ln. 316) "What do you desire? That things may be in such a state so that I may rejoice at my coming" or "To eat so that I may rejoice at my coming." **Esse** is both the infinitive "to be" and "to eat." The same thing is done with a compound form in **Mostellaria**, Act II, "**comesse quemquam ut quisquam absentem possiet**." "For someone who is not present to be present/ eat up."

Some French examples: **Il a des ennuis avec la police parce qu'il n'en a pas.** "He has trouble with the police because he doesn't have any." **Police** can also mean "insurance policy", but the connection is not a synchronic one.

d. Some 3OPs on names:

No bucks, no Buck Rogers. (Space program aphorism from the film **The Right Stuff**, showing that spectacular space travel was dependent on funding.)

Defoliate the White House. (Democratic slogan in 1988 against George "**Bush**.")

Now the undertaker will urn a lively Hood. (Thomas Hood, before his death. This also includes a 3OP on "urn.")

Sometimes it is enough to simply rearrange the words in relationship to one another in order to set up new contexts and give new meanings. This is not only more elegant,

²⁴Another etymological pun.

but, like metathesis, it seems more motivated, more natural, and to save psychological energy. Some examples:

Champagne to your real friends. Real pain to your sham friends. (some elements of a 2OP in here also.)

One horse to another: "So your owner gave you extra feed after you won him thousands in the race? Hay, that ain't money." The words of a phrase can simply be rearranged to create a change in meaning; this only matters in analytic languages, much less in inflected ones with free word order. (In inflected languages, morphemes would have to be switched to change categories.)

A cat has its claws at the end of its paws, and a sentence has a pause at the end of its clause. (Moger 1)

Marx spots the ex. (Groucho, on noticing his divorced wife in a restaurant.)

Beware of the man who makes friends fast but never makes fast friends. (I see the two uses of "fast" as different, although they are the same root.)

One problem with 3OPs is that there is no signal other than semantic or situational context to indicate that a pun has been made in the first place; they are easily missed, unlike paronyms, which catch attention because they sound different than the words they parody. In print, spelling can serve to differentiate, but not in speech; usually the word must be repeated to show that it is being used in two meanings. In French, "**Entre deux mots (maux) il faut choisir le moindre,**" "Among two words (evils), one must choose the lesser" would give the hearer no way to know the real meaning, without a discourse context; "Les grands mots entraînent toujours des grands maux," (Anatole France, in Landheer, p 94) "Great words always lead to great evils" is a little better but still hard to get, especially since French has just so many homophones. Paronyms approach 3OP's; if the mutation can be in some way motivated by the semantic or situational context, then the difference vanishes. After all, the string /wait/ can equally well be "a color (in standard English) or "to delay" (in Cockney). 3OP's sometimes get a little more respect than 1OP's since they do not distort sound, but others still denigrate them since they are still based on similarity of sound.

Hale's Law applies slightly differently to 3OPs than 1OPs. Since the main motivating context is a semantic one, that is, the meanings and associations suggested by the other words, if the surrounding words do not suggest the intended meaning very strongly, the pun will fail. But if a meaning of a word can be activated by associations that are too distant, then everything becomes a pun and nothing is.

3.6 Fourth Order LAUGHs (The syntactic)

Called **amphibologies** by Aristotle, Fourth Order Puns depend on differences of syntactic structure. The same words are used with the same pronunciation, only they take on completely different meanings, and more importantly, as this is what separates 4OLs from 3OLs, **they take on new syntactic roles and or parts of speech**,²⁵ either due to changes of word order, or simply to identical surface structures from the same deep structure. The different meanings are well illustrated using tree diagrams showing the underlying base forms of each interpretation, which yield identical surface structures. An example (from Theam) is "**I asked her if I could see her home, and she showed me a picture of her house.**" The ambiguity is in the phrase "see her home." The verb "see" involves a Fifth Order Pun (literal versus figurative meaning), but "her" changes from a direct object of "see" to a possessive adjective modifying "home," and "home" changes from an adverb to the direct object. The most famous example of syntactic ambiguity is the oracle to Pyrrhus before he attacked Rome. (see 2.1) This is **structural ambiguity**; the construction itself is always ambiguous because there must be two nouns in the accusative, either of which can be the subject or object. It is not simply a product of a coincidental similarity of forms, that words of two different cases, or even more distantly related, can be interchanged, as in the Theam example. French has a structural ambiguity in its factitive verb construction; "Faites-le voir" means "Make it/him to see" or "to be seen." Most 4OL's, however, are non-structural and are usually caused by the reinterpretation of a single First, Second, Third, or Fifth Order LAUGH, or several at once.

English, with rather few inflexional morphemes, has fewer possibilities for Fourth Order Puns. "**If you think raining cats and dogs is bad, it's better than hailing taxicabs,**" (Moger 1) involves a 3OL on "hail-" a 2OL on "-ing" and the net effect is to change the syntactic role of "hailing" and the rest of the sentence. **The first illuminated golf-course was opened for people who like swinging nightclubs.** (Just like Chomsky's classic "Flying planes can be dangerous.")

²⁵ Pritchett notes that lexical substitutions within the same category do not cause the GP effect. 4OPs are processed very differently from 3OPs. According to Landheer, substitutions can be made between "homocategorical" homophones, but not ones of different categories. (p87)

Latin has a few examples, which could equally well go under Second Order, since in Latin, morphology practically was syntax.

(**Amphitryon**, ln 123) Mercurius says to Sosia: **Verbero**, which he means as a vocative noun, "scoundrel," but which Sosia takes as verb, "I beat (you)" and so responds, "No, you're not." In the **Poenulus** (ln 279) when a character announces **assum** "here I am," it is taken as **assum** "roasted," so that another character offers the speaker ointment.

Nam amari iucundum sit, si curetur nequid insit amari. It is fun to be loved, if care be taken lest there be anything of bitterness in it.

Veniam ad vos si mihi senatus dat veniam. I will come to you if the Senate grants me pardon. (Both from the Auctor ad Herennium IV, 14 21 (Stanford, p30))

Money can be lost in more ways than won. (Moger 1) The third order similarity of "one" and "won" requires two completely different structures. However, since most of the phrase is elided, only one word requires reanalysis.

Going without sleep for seven days to work on one's thesis makes one weak.

"Marry, fool, whither away?" "In truth, as I have eaten naught these two days, I do wither away!" (Gilbert, **The Yeomen of the Guard**)

I knew she needed help, but how could I be her brother and assist her too?
(M1)

Lady to Salesgirl: I'd like to buy a fur coat.

Salesgirl: What fur?

Lady: To keep me warm, of course.

Another type involves the retention of specific meaning but change in function within the sentence by reattachment. This often happens with strings of objects or prepositional phrases. Groucho Marx remarks in **Animal Crackers**, "**I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got in there I'll never know.**" The adjectival prepositional phrase "In my pajamas" is thus transferred from "I" to "an elephant," and becomes adverbial. Going through the L.L. Bean mail order catalogue, my father would notice items such as "**Corduroy Duck Hunting Pants**," and remark that he had never had the opportunity of hunting a corduroy duck. Here, because English allows any noun to function as an attributive, ambiguity can be created between adjectives and attributives. This is structural ambiguity, since there is no way to disambiguate it except by knowing the situation.

There are mistakes of subcategorization, when a word is taken for another sense that operates differently:

Curate: **I will have the much pleasure in marrying [you] myself...**

Adoring maiden: **Oh, my heart!**

Curate: **To some strapping young fellow...** (Gilbert, **The Sorcerer**, Act I) The difference of "marry" as a reflexive verb and as a transitive is confused. This could be a Fifth Order change of sense, but the change of syntactic nature should be emphasized. The use of it does not create an expectation of a certain meaning, but of a certain syntactic category.

Another type of syntactic ambiguity involves the reference of pronouns and other anaphoric words, which is usually syntactically determined (or situationally determined.) Much of what is considered "vague" can be filed under this rubric. The classic example is that of poor Croesus. (see 2.1)

"We've just had a report from the hospital.

The hospital?? What is it?

It's a big building with patients in it, but that's not important right now. (Film **Airplane!**)

I'd like your opinion on my book. It's not worth anything. I'd like it anyway.

Others bring into question the reference of clauses, the relevance of information in them, which is usually handled by discourse analysis.

I thought I was wrong, but I was mistaken. (About what??? (M1))

When I said I was a comedian, everyone laughed at me.

Syntactic ambiguities are perhaps the hardest to get. As Pritchett showed, syntactic reprocessing is incredibly difficult; most people would rather give up on the sentence entirely than attempt to perform it. When a pun requires it, it usually requires conscious intellectual effort, which takes time and reduces humor value. The few syntactic puns that one finds in English usually involve analysis of a phrase that would normally not be analyzed ("see her home" is a pretty set phrase) rather than reanalysis of a phrase that has already been analyzed. Recognition of familiar items, words, phrases, morphemes, is much easier to do, and to redo, than the complicated operations of parsing sentence structures. The rareness of 4OPs shows this.

3.7 Fifth Order LAUGHS (The Semantic Level)

Ambiguities of the Fifth Order, also known as homonyms, or **polysemia**, **plays on words**, (as opposed to plays on sounds) and **double-entendres**, rely on multiple senses of the same semantic word, the same lexical item. In this way, they are not really puns at all; they play on associations of ideas rather than of sounds. This is why many people accept

them as a higher form of humor, as having an "erudite, rational form" (Hammond and Hughes); those who believe this are often the same as those who denigrate 1OPs as "the lowest form of humor." They can often be disambiguated only by knowledge of the situation, not by any linguistic environment. Often, the synonyms of a word will have the same senses, and thus the pun can still be made even if a different word is used.

Translating them into other languages is a quite different task than for other types of puns. With sound-plays, it is a matter of finding some word or set of words that by chance has the same meanings, although one must usually allow some paranomastic alteration for this. For 5OPs, it is more a cultural matter; does the target language make the same associations of concepts? 5OPs show ongoing, synchronic conceptually motivated semantic change: imagery, metonymy, metaphor, etc. Thus, it can be difficult to distinguish a linguistic joke from a visual or other sensory one. For instance, when Ballio says to Harpax (**Pseudolus**, ln 1181): **Conveniebatne in vaginam tuam machaera militis?** "Did the sword of the soldier fit well in your sheath?" "Vagina" had its anatomic meaning also, but was the use of "machaera" as a phallic term so common that it was just another meaning, or did the joke actually depend on the hearer conceiving of what a sword resembled in appearance and function? In *Amphitryon*, ln 664, Sosia, seeing Alcmena in front of the house, warns that she looks "**saturam**", "full-bellied," either "pregnant" or "having just eaten." Again, there is no way to know if these are both standard senses of the word, or if a visual ambiguity is involved.

3.7.1 Fifth vs. Third Order; Transparency of Etymology

On the other end, there is a certain difficulty for typologists in deciding whether they are dealing with two different senses of the same word (a 5OP) or two entirely different words which have happened to converge in pronunciation (a 3OP.) Often in literate cultures, especially in English, this decision is made on the basis of spelling; if the two "words" are spelled the same, they represent the same lexical item. The problem with spelling is that it is not linguistic and that it can be misleading. In languages that are spelled phonetically, phonological convergence will mean orthographical convergence. Even in English, we have words of different origins with identical spellings. However, what we are really trying to get to is what spelling represents, which is etymology. It is a question of transparency, of how visible the connections between words are. But the etymologies of words are assumed to be unknown to speakers of a language who have no access to its earlier stages. Despite the great efforts made by the American Heritage Dictionary at spreading etymological knowledge, most people are still ignorant of it. What is more important than their etymological knowledge, however, are their

etymological beliefs. **A Fifth Order pun is made when the speaker believes (and the hearer agrees) that the same word is being used in two senses.**

Etymological beliefs can be both conscious and unconscious; people may just have feelings about the connections of words, or they may have been told them. But unless they are linguists (in the former case) or their teachers were (in the latter) their etymological beliefs are based almost entirely on similarity of sound, (as shown by false and folk etymologies) which brings us back full circle. There are even a few exceptions to the rule, pairs that have the same etymology and the same sound but completely different meanings, such as "fast" (moving quickly or standing still)²⁶ and "pupil" (part of the eye or part of a class.) In the end, it is impossible to draw a definite line between Third and Fifth Order LAUGHS. As Duchacek puts it,

"Il n'y a pas non plus de limites précises, ni infranchissables entre les deux groupes en question. Quelquefois diverses acceptions d'un mot s'homonymisent (on perd la conscience de leur connexité sémantique et on les conçoit en tant de mots différents.) Par contre certains homonymes se sont "polysemisées", c'est à dire certains traits sémantiques communs les ont fait prendre pour des acceptions d'un seul mot."

"Neither are there precise limits, nor uncrossable ones, between the two groups in question. Sometimes diverse senses of a word become homophones (one loses awareness of their semantic connection and one thinks of them as so many different words.) On the other hand, certain homophones become polysemic, that is, certain common semantic traits have made them to be taken as different senses of the same word."

Whether a pun belongs to one order or the other will depend on the associations and beliefs of the hearer, and can change over time as the semantics of the words involved shift or people begin to see them differently. There is a continuum of how closely hearers believe the words related and how coincidental the links. The humor comes from having forgotten the links between the two senses, forgotten that indeed they are senses of the same word, and then suddenly recognizing that they are. Hammond and Hughes give a nice series of examples:

The best way for a woman to keep her youth is not to introduce him to other women.

Ad for a druggist: We dispense with accuracy.

The meek will inherit the earth only by forging the will.

A schoolmaster can be like a man with one eye -- when he has a vacancy for a pupil.

²⁶ As in Lewis Carroll's White Knight's "I was stuck as fast as lightning!"

In the first case the semantic connection between "youth" the condition and "youth" one possessing it is obvious. In the second the link is less obvious, but still fairly accessible; by the third, people might be beginning to scratch their heads, and in the last, the connection is not made at all and seems completely coincidental.

Likewise, "**We have a 40,000 story building in town-- the library,**" shows no awareness that the two meanings are connected, from the illustrated friezes on each floor.

When there is no reason to have forgotten the connection of the two senses, the pun will not be funny or effective. It is not funny (at least in a punnish way) to contrast the same word in the same sense, or words of very similar sense; then they are just FEs and not puns. Consider the billboard for WGBH-TV (which I see every morning as I ride to class) **The best television on television.** But there is no ambiguity here; "television" has the same meaning in both cases. What else would be on television besides television? Where else is television found besides on television? On the other hand, TV Guide's slogan "**The best thing on television**" is ambiguous; it contrasts the meaning "about television programming" with that of "showing on the air." Frosted Flakes Sugar Coated Kiddie Breakfast Cereal has begun using the slogan "**As good as they are great.**" But isn't everything as "good" as it is "great," since the words are synonymous (or nearly so?) As it turns out, the contrast is between "good for you" and "great tasting" (also, the advertisers assume the audience has been saturated with the "They're Grrrrreat!" slogan mentioned in 3.1) But these meanings are not readily accessible; the joke might be a little funnier if the meanings and contexts had been set up already. An automobile advertisement reads "**Drive Like the well-to-do and still be well-off.**" Again, is there any contrast in sense between the two similar phrases? The change in the words suggests that some difference is meant, but there is none. "**Drive like the rich and still be rich,**" with stresses on "Drive" and "be" would at least work a little better, as the two phrases could be contrasted as not necessarily entailing one another.

3.7.2 Idiomatic Uses

Another way to obscure the connections of a word's two senses is to place it in an idiomatic use, or two separate idiomatic ones, in which it loses its meaning in conjunction with the other words of the formula.

Louis XIV was once told that a certain court wit was so good he could make jokes on any subject. He demanded, therefore, that the man make a joke on His Majesty, but the man refused, since "**le roi n'est pas sujet.**" ("The king is not a subject." This joke is attributed to every other king as well.)

In 1776, as the role is being called for a vote, it is discovered that the Rhode Island representative is out at the rest room, so that when the Secretary intones "**Rhode Island passes,**" the rest of the Congress breaks out in uproarious laughter.

When Marilyn Monroe was asked what she had on when she posed for some calendar shoots, she answered "**the radio and Chanel No. 5.**"(H&H)

The French Revolutionaries won because the aristocracy lost their heads. (H&H)

When jigsaw puzzles were invented, they started a national craze and the whole country went to pieces.

When the first book was written on watchmaking, everyone thought it was about time. (This can also be a 4OP -- is "it" the book or the impersonal?)

The first man to get a music patent got it for a song.

A Wrigley's employee fell into a vat of gum, and his boss chewed him out. (The pun is on "out" as well as "chewed.")

A teenage girl applied for a job taking care of babies. When asked what position she wanted, she said "Sitting."

At nightclubs, tables are reserved but people are not. (M1)

Judges are never satisfied with their verdicts -- they are always returning them. (M1)

From **Duck Soup:**

Minister of War: **You try my patience.**

Firefly: (Groucho Marx) **Don't mind if I do. You should come over and try mine someday.**

Plautus has a few examples of this sub-type: **Meo de studio studia erant vostra omnia.**" (Asinaria, ln 210) **De studio** (in the ablative singular) is a fixed expression meaning "on purpose," while **studia** (nom. pl.) alone means "interests, enthusiasm."

Tu prohibebis et eadem opera tuo sodali operam dabis."You will prevent and by the same effort you will give help to your friend." **Ea opera** (ablative singular) is "by this means," **operam dabis** (accus, sing. and 2nd sing future) "you will help." (**Bacchides**, ln 60)

A special case is that in which the reinterpretation is the literal one, the logical one represented by the expression, which for some reason is not its conventional one. Examples are Yogi Berra's "**A nickel ain't worth a dime any more,**" and "**No one goes to that restaurant any more -- it's too crowded.**" Expressions such as "not worth a dime" and "no one goes to that restaurant" become fossilized, and take on a meaning beyond their literal one, which, however, is still available. Thus, when a context is

created which makes reference to the forgotten literal meaning, the literal meaning is again brought to attention. It is harder to do this with words since their "true" meanings are less readily available to non-linguists, people without etymological knowledge.

3.7.3 Word order puns

As with all other orders (of puns) simply changing the linear order (of units) will change the meaning of the units and produce humor in a most satisfying way due to the savings in psychical energy.

In French, a noun preceded by an adjective usually has some fixed, idiomatic meaning, while one with the adjective following has a more literal meaning. Thus, **Un homme grand n'est pas forcément un grand homme.** "A big man is not necessarily a great one."

Some other examples:

It's not the men in my life, it's the life in my men. (Mae West)

Rich people can afford lots of bathrooms -- they owe their clean living to success.

3.7.4 Name puns

Name puns can tend to the Fifth Order when the name seems to have been adopted for a reason, as in the names of products or descriptive names like 'the Holy Roman Empire.' Names of products often have a reason for having been chosen which is forgotten just enough for the puns made with on them to be effective.

Tide's in, dirt's out. (Detergent ad. It is obvious why the name was chosen, yet somehow advertisers manage to make us believe that the names are natural and coincidental and prove something about the product.)

Italian businessmen drive executive Fiats.

Hope Against Hope (Harvard **Independent** headline, concerning the nomination of a woman named Hope to an administrative post and the slim possibility of progress under her.) In both these examples, I think it would be pretty clear that the same word was being used in two senses.

There can also be Fifth Order name puns in which identical names are confused. (This tends to happen a lot if one does a lot of bicycling in the Boston area. Every town has the same street names, so one can never be sure of what town one is in, and some of the streets are infinitely long, extending through town after town, renumbering as they hit each one, so one can never be sure where a particular address is. Fortunately, streets sometimes, lead to the place of the same name, i.e., Cambridge St. in does lead to

Cambridge and Brookline Ave. to Brookline, and in most towns that have a School St., there is a school on it. Of course, none of this applies in Harvard Square [is Dunster House on Dunster St.? Kirkland House on Kirkland St.?] Similar sounding words work the same way; they can be totally unconnected, connected, or motivated by something else which seems to make sense, or motivated by causes which we can no longer see, so that they do not appear to match up with the phenomena of the world which we experience.) When Elvis Costello came out with his new album, headline writers joked "Elvis is Alive!" Like the Tide example, however, it should be fairly obvious that the name was chosen exactly for that association, yet somehow we overlook it at first.

Beyond Fifth Order Puns lies a misty region of uses of the linguistic material in different contexts at the same time. Again, however, the humor tends to be situational; the incongruity is only in the contrast of the original or usual use and the current one; if the phrase is analyzed it is found to apply perfectly well to the current situation; the joke is that it was not originally intended to. The play on the phrase is that it has just as much meaning from its use as from its analytic meaning. With very large or high level units, the context is almost exclusively based on knowledge of the world and the situation. "As the processing of speech proceeds from phonology through words to comprehension, it thus becomes increasingly dependent on inferences based on the social and physical circumstances of the utterance, on a knowledge of the situation to which it refers, and on general knowledge." (Johnson-Laird, p190)

I am one person who can truly say, **"I got my job through the New York Times."** (John F. Kennedy, who won the Presidency partly because of that paper's endorsement.)

Dave Kingman (Mets outfielder in late '70's known for fielding errors) **is like the Ancient Mariner; he stoppeth one of three.** (My father. This would be almost totally situational if "stoppeth one of three" were not a fixed phrase, a line from the poem.)

Puns of this type can result from syntactic vagueness and ellipsis. Describing to a friend the shower curtain I had improvised out of the large bag in which my mattress was wrapped, I said **"It's huge and perfect."** My friend responded, **"That's what she said."**

The Big Picture (Headline in TIME for article on wide-screen TV)

The NRA says that assault rifles are used in international competitions. Sure, like the Iran-Iraq War. (Boston Phoenix)

Sometimes only in very bizarre circumstances can a phrase have two meanings. When the ordinary Englishman says, "Well, I didn't expect a sort of Spanish Inquisition," he means that he didn't expect to be grilled as to his whereabouts. Even less does he

expect a bunch of robed cardinals, defunct for centuries, to come bursting in, shouting, "**No one expects the Spanish Inquisition!**" Only in this utterly unrealistic situation could this expression be ambiguous.

Similarly, in the science fiction film *Blade Runner*, an android finally comes into the presence of the head of the company that built him, and says, "**It's not an easy thing to meet one's maker.**" "Meet one's maker" means, at least for humans, "die;" only an android in a science fiction setting can meet his maker and live, and make the statement ambiguous. (This is similar to the odd routes that can be taken to make some of the ungrammatical sentences in *Actus II* interpretable, only now, we are seeking two meanings, instead of one.)

Steve Martin has created an entire film, **Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid**, in which clips from classic films noirs are worked into a new narrative, so that Steve Martin's character can talk to, say, Humphrey Bogart playing Sam Spade. The wonderful thing is how Martin sets up new contexts in which the old lines will still be appropriate, or takes advantage of vagueness in the lines.

Other types of situational linguistic ambiguity include irony, codes²⁷, or lying. Given the right situation, any phrase can mean exactly the opposite of what is usually means. These jokes require complicated, unlikely set-ups, however, and reduce linguistics to a lesser role. In **Life of Brian**, a crowd is milling around the unfortunate hero, insisting that he is the Messiah, which he vehemently denies. Suddenly, a woman pipes up, "Is it not written, the true Messiah will deny his identity?" which convinces the crowd even more. So Brian shouts "**All right then, I'm the Messiah!**" in the hope that they will then refuse to believe he is, but the response is only, "He admits it! He's the Messiah!" If, in a certain context, expressions are defined to mean exactly the opposite of their usual meaning, they can be punned on. But it is the ultimate Hale's Law violation; words do not, in general, activate their exact opposites.

Now that all the types of ambiguities, and most of the lower level contexts used to disambiguate them, have been described, it remains only to explain the situational factors that control the humor value of puns.

²⁷ Since all language is an arbitrary code, there is no reason not to use a word in any meaning one wants, except that others are not doing so and will not understand.