

INTERSEMIOTIC COMPLEMENTARITY: PICTURE-BASED PUNS

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Abstract: This research seeks to scrutinize what types of pun occur in its picture-based form and how the texts and the pictures simultaneously contribute to the creation of picture-based puns. In this study, some internet memes that were downloaded from 9GAG were analyzed. In order to collect the data, some parameters based on Royce's (2007) theory of intersemiotic complementarity are set resulting in the selection of 50 internet memes as the data of this study. The analysis arrived at 7 (seven) classifications that categorize the data based on what linguistic phenomena that are being played in the creation of the picture-based puns. The classifications are paronymy (16 data, 32%), metaphorical ↔ literal shift (11 data, 22%), homophony (10 data, 20%), homonymy (4 data, 8%), mixed (4 data, 8%), juncture (3 data, 6%), and spelling (2 data, 4%). Some elaborations are made to correlate Royce's theory of intersemiotic complementarity with the data to explain how the texts and the pictures contribute to the creation of picture-based pun.

Keywords: Picture-based puns, 9GAG, internet memes

INTRODUCTION

Pun has been and is one of the linguistic phenomena that draws the interest of the linguists to conduct research on. It is implied by the great amount of research discussing pun (e.g., van Mulken 2004; Partington, 2008; Bader, 2014; Giorgadze, 2014; 2015; Gan, 2015; Hirsch, 2017). However, the study on picture-based pun is still scarce. As pointed out by Royce (2007:63), there are still insignificant number of studies that discuss the nature of the intersemiotic semantic relationships between the visual and verbal modes to provide explanations of what characteristics make multimodal texts, in this case a picture-based puns, logically connected.

It is interesting to analyze picture-based puns, as Giorgadze (2015) did, since it has just become popular lately, widespread on the web. This relatively new classification of pun is often found in the internet memes, which have not received much attention, the consequence of which is that we have not had enough understanding of this phenomenon.

This research focuses on the construction of humor in puns by juxtaposing the pictorial and textual elements. With the background above-mentioned, this research attempts to explore what types of pun occur in its picture-based form, and how the texts and the pictures simultaneously contribute to the creation of picture-based puns.

METHOD

This qualitative research observes the language phenomena which were exploited in the creation of picture-based puns, and how the picture-based puns are relevant to the concept of intersemiotic complementarity. The data of this research were 50 internet memes collected from 9GAG, one of the biggest meme-sharing forums on the web.

Some steps were taken in analyzing the data. The first step was to filter the data which are within the parameters of picture-based puns. The first parameter was that the internet memes

have to contain puns. The second parameter, which was deduced from Royce’s (2007) elaboration about structural coherence in intersemiotic complementarity, was that both the pictorial and textual elements of the internet memes have to be in the same frame. The third parameter was that the sentence and the picture have to work complementary and not disjointed in order to generate the humor.

The second step was to classify the data. Classifications were needed in order to know what linguistic phenomena are being played in the creation of picture-based puns. There were classifications based on the play on lexical ambiguity, such as homonyms, homophones, and paronyms. There were also classifications based on the play on juncture, spelling, and metaphorical meaning.

Last but not least, this research also attempted to correlate Royce’s theory of intersemiotic complementarity with the data to explain how the texts and the pictures contribute to the creation of picture-based puns.

THE CLASSIFICATIONS

The classifications and their comparison in percentage are presented in Table 1.

No.	Type	Frequency	%
1	Paronymy	16	32%
2	Metaphorical ↔ Literal Shift	11	22%
3	Homophony	10	20%
4	Homonymy	4	8%
5	Mixed	4	8%
6	Juncture	3	6%
7	Spelling	2	4%
Total		50	100%

Table 1. Linguistic phenomena played in the creation of picture-based puns.

Table 1 represents the percentage of what linguistic phenomena played in the creation of picture-based puns. It shows that paronym is the most frequent, with the total number of 16 (32%), while the least used is the play with spelling (2 data or 4%).

PICTURE-TEXT COMPLEMENTARITY

The picture-based puns, which take the form of internet memes, consist of two different semiotic systems (texts and pictures) which complement each other. They work simultaneously to convey the humor. Despite of the complementarity of the textual and pictorial elements, not every internet meme has equal portion of texts and pictures in it. Some internet memes have more dominant pictorial element, which means that even if the textual element is detached, the pun can still be successfully expressed. Some examples of this case are in Figures 1, 2, and 3

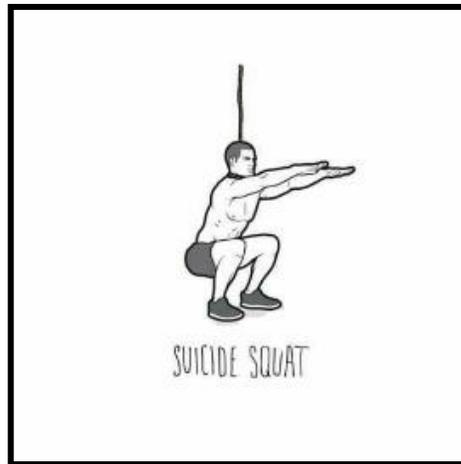


Figure 1: Suicide Squat

In Figure 1, the text suicide squat is juxtaposed to a drawing of a man which is squatting, and he has a rope around his neck. Without the text, the picture will still be able to say suicide squat because of the rope around the neck, which is a symbol of suicide, and the squat position.



Figure 2: Baking Soda



Figure 3: Butterfly

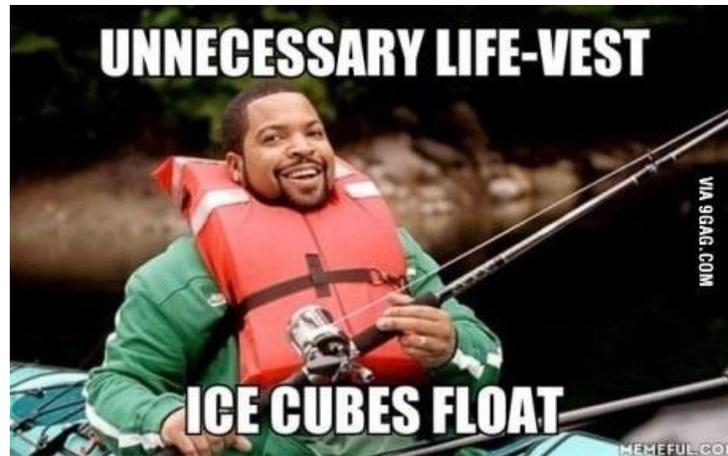


Figure 4: Ice Cube

Stronger pictorial elements can also be seen in Figures 2 and 3. In Figure 2, the picture of some cans of soda in an oven is enough to express the pun baking soda, and in Figure 3, the picture of a fly that is made of a block of butter is adequate to express the pun butterfly.

Nevertheless, having dominant pictorial elements does not necessarily mean that the internet memes are irrelevant to the concept of intersemiotic complementarity because the textual elements are still dependent on the pictorial elements. The textual elements in the aforementioned examples cannot convey the puns if the pictures are removed. In such cases, the pictures complement the text, but not the other way round.

DISCUSSION

In this part, there will be two discussions to deal with the issues raised in the current research. The first discussion is about the classifications of picture-based puns, while the second discussion is about texts and pictures complementarity in picture-based puns. Firstly, it is quite interesting to see that more than half (66%) of the data have phonological classification basis. They are the percentage of paronymy, homonymy, homophony, and juncture combined. It is relevant to an opinion that puns are originally in the form of verbal humor (Attardo's 1994:109).

In addition, the fundamental concepts of exact and near puns by Partington (2009) can also be related to the classifications in this study. Exact puns, in which the sounds of two or more textual elements are identical, happen in homophony, homonymy and metaphorical ↔ literal shift. However, near puns, in which the involved textual elements resemble each other phonologically, happen in the other classifications, such as paronymy, and juncture.

Secondly, the complementarity that happens between the texts and the pictures within a multimodal discourse such as internet memes can be explained with the theory of Intersemiotic Complementarity. Intersemiotic complementarity attempts to observe the proposition that, within a single discourse, both the verbal (texts) and visual (pictures) modes of communication complement each other, so that they convey a particular meaning (Royce, 1998).

This theory is relevant with the fact that the elements in picture-based puns are inseparable. The pictures cannot be detached from the puns since the detachment will make the texts have no context and therefore will be meaningless, and vice versa. For example, the photograph of Ice Cube in Figure 4 lacks context if it stands by itself. Similarly, the text unnecessary live vest, ice cubes float, if isolated from the picture would be nonsensical, since literally 'ice cubes' is an inanimate object, and therefore needs no life-vest. To conclude, in the

case of picture-based puns, the texts and the pictures work simultaneously to create context which then generate the humor within them.

CONCLUSIONS

Some conclusions can be drawn regarding the findings and the discussions of this study. Firstly, the classification of the data shows that they can be categorized into 7 (seven) classifications. Secondly, in picture-based puns, both the texts and the pictures are equally important to establish the context.

There are seven types/classifications of picture-based puns found in this study which include paronymy, metaphorical ↔ literal shift, homophony, homonymy, mixed, juncture, and spelling. Paronymy is the classification with most number of data, while spelling has the least. More than half of the collected data belong to the classifications which have phonological basis. That finding can then be related to the opinion that puns are originally in a form of verbal humor.

By analyzing each data, the research found that there is no exact number of element nor the form of the internet meme. One exact thing is that all the data are multimodal discourses which are formed from texts and pictures. Relevant to the theory of intersemiotic complementarity, the texts and the pictures, which are different semiotic systems, work simultaneously to generate the humor in the picture-based puns.

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