"I have a split personality," said Tom, being frank: Punning in Tom Swifties

Anna T. Litovkina[1]

Abstract

Tom Swifty might be considered the twentieth century development of the form of folklore called wellerism. What is typical for Tom Swifty? It is a wellerism conventionally based on the punning relationship between the way an adverb describes a speaker while simultaneously referring to the meaning of the speaker's statement. The speaker is traditionally Tom, his statement is usually placed at the beginning of the Tom Swifty, and the adverb at the end of it, e.g., *"I see," said Tom icily* (icily/I see). Since a number of adverbs end with an adverb ending in "–ly", originally this form of folklore was called Tom Swiftly, but nowadays the terms "Tom Swifty/Tom Swiftie" are more frequently used. In the first section, my study starts with a definition and historical background of the Tom Swifties and discusses topics emerging in them. The second section briefly treats definitions of puns. The third section addresses different types of punning employed in Tom Swifties, focusing on paronyms, homonyms and homophones, as well as on puns playing upon personal names, splitting of one word into two, merging of two words into one, linking puns, bilingual puns, double/triple puns, and repetitive puns. It must also be mentioned here that a number of our examples fit several categories simultaneously. Such examples could be discussed in various parts of this study; as a rule, Tom Swifties that fit more than one category will be quoted and discussed only once.

Keywords

Tom Swifties, puns, play upon personal names, paronyms, homonyms

The selection of material

The Tom Swifties for this study come from the Internet, collected from hundreds of websites in spring 2012. Since almost all of them could be found in more than one source, references to their Internet sources are not mentioned here.

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[1]**Anna T. Litovkina**, Ph.D. habil, Department of Philology, University of Information Technology and Management, Rzeszow, Poland.

1. Background of Research and Terminology

Tom Swifty is supposedly named after the fictional character of Tom Swift (or rather, two fictional characters: Tom Swift Sr. and Tom Swift Jr., protagonists of adventure books that were first published in the early 20th century and now total more than 100 volumes (for more on Tom Swifties, see Lippman et al. 2002; Lippman and Tragesser 2005; T. Litovkina 2014a, 2014b). The original books were written by the prolific American writer Edward Stratemeyer (1862–1930), who under the pseudonym Victor Appleton, after having published a number of books in the first Tom Swift series, founded the Stratemeyer Syndicate and later hired ghost writers to write Tom Swift novels. The first novel of the first series, titled *Tom Swift and His Motor-cycle; or Fun and Adventure on the Road,* was published in 1910. Tom Swifty might be considered the 20th century version of the form of folklore called wellerism. Wellerisms, named for Charles Dickens' character Samuel Weller, are normally made up of three parts: 1) a remark, 2) a speaker who makes this remark, and 3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation:

> *"Everyone to his own taste," as the cow said when she rolled in the pig pen.*
> *"Every little bit helps," as the old lady said when she pissed in the ocean to help drown her husband.*
> *"Tit for tat," quoth the wife when she farted at the thunder.* (For more on wellerisms, see Mieder and Kingsbury 1994)

What is typical of Tom Swifty? It is a wellerism conventionally based on the punning relationship between the way an adverb describes a speaker and simultaneously refers to the meaning of the speaker's statement (i.e., a sentence of reported speech). The speaker is traditionally Tom, his statement is usually placed at the beginning of the Tom Swifty, and the adverb at the end of it, e.g.:

> *"Parsley, sage, rosemary," said Tom timelessly.* (timelessly/thyme)[2]
> *"That's the last time I'll ever pet a lion," Tom said, offhandedly.* (offhandedly/without a hand)

Traditionally, Tom (or Tom Swifty, or Tom Swiftly) is the speaker, as in the quoted examples above, but nowadays instead of the name Tom, other personages might be employed:

> *"You are going to fail my class", said the teacher degradingly.* (degradingly/grades)
> *"Don't tell anyone, but I work for the CIA," he whispered secretly.* (secretly/secret agent)
> *"Destroy this Temple and within three days I will raise it up," said Jesus cryptically.* (cryptically/crypt) {Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19)}

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[2] For the reader's convenience, whenever it is needed for better understanding , Tom Swifties in this study are followed by punning words given in () brackets with the required explanation.

In line with the scope and emphasis of the Tom Swift novels promoting the role of science, invention, and technology, conventional Tom Swifties also touch upon technical and academic achievements, adventures, and inventions:

"I haven't developed my photographs yet," said Tom negatively. (negatively/negative)
"All we hear is radio ga-ga," Tom said mercurially. (mercurially/mercury)
"I think I'll use a different font," said Tom boldly. (boldly/bold font)

A number of texts of Tom Swifties are sexually oriented:

"I don't believe in mixed marriages," said Tom gaily. (gaily/gay)
*"I'm impotent," Tom said softly. (*softly/soft (penis)
"Reading this sci-fi magazine cures my erectile dysfunction," said Tom omnipotently. (omnipotently/impotently)

Among the topics frequently appearing in our examples are food and drinks:

"I like my martini with plenty of vermouth," he said sweetly. (sweetly/sweet (martini))
"Would anyone like some Parmesan?" asked Tom gratingly. (gratingly/to grate)

There is hardly a topic Tom Swifties do not address. Among other themes treated in Tom Swifties are women and men, money and love, marriage and divorce, children and parents, professions and occupations, God and religion, and many others.

2. What is the pun?

A pun is defined by Webster (p. 1461) as "the humorous use of a word, or of words which are formed or sounded alike but have different meanings, in such a way as to play on two or more of the possible applications; a play on words." The unforeseen linking of different words, meanings or ideas creates the comic surprise characteristic of puns. Puns may give us much enjoyment and pleasure, probably as a result of what Sigmund Freud called "an economy of expenditure" (1960, p. 25), when we use one word which has two separate meanings, or when we slightly modify it. According to Arthur Koestler (Koestler, 1964), the three types of creativity common to humanity (artistic originality, scientific discovery, and comic inspiration) are all based on bisociative thinking, and require a discovery of a relationship between one object or pattern and another object or pattern. "The logical pattern of the creative process is the same in all three cases; it consists in the discovery of hidden similarities" (Koestler 1964, p. 27). Bisociation is defined by Koestler as "...the perceiving of a situation or idea ... in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference. ... The event ... in which the two intersect, is made to vibrate simultaneously of two different wavelengths, as it were. While this unusual situation lasts, [the event] is not merely linked to one associative context, but bisociated with two" (Koestler 1964, p. 35). In Koestler's

view, "The pun is the bisociation of a single phonetic form with two meanings – two strings of thought tied together by an acoustic knot" (Koestler 1964, pp. 64–65). Don Nilsen calls punning "an aspect of a new scientific field – the science of chaos – a science that finds order in disorder" (Nilsen 1989, pp. 399–400).

G. B. Milner states, "a very large number of phenomena that trigger off laughter can be shown to be due to reversal of one kind or another" (Milner 1972, p. 16). Among items he examines are puns. Milner argues, "within a single situation, and a single linguistic context, two universes collide, and it is this collision that makes many forms of humour possible" (Milner 1972, p. 16). Later he points out:

> Through the device of the pun, that is to say, in the widened sense in which it seems justifiable to use this term, we are suddenly and forcibly made aware either (i) of an analytic relation of differential meaning that separates things previously assumed to be alike, or (ii) of a syncretic relation of different meaning that unites things previously assumed to be discrete. What sparks off laughter in us, that is to say, is a differential gap ..., i.e., an awareness of an identity within the difference or of a difference within the identity. (Milner 1972, p. 18)

Salvatore Attardo, along with many other humour researchers, distinguishes four subcategories of puns: paronyms, homonyms, homographs and homophones:

> Two words are paronyms when their phonemic representations are similar but not identical. Two words are homonyms when their phonemic or graphemic representation is identical, and two words are homographs when their graphemic representation is identical (i.e., they are spelled the same). Two words are homophones when their phonemic representation is identical (i.e., they are pronounced the same). Homographs and homophones are subclasses of homonyms. (Attardo 1994, pp. 110–111)

According to Evan Esar, "the variety of puns must be infinite" (Esar 1952, p. 77). He lists some puns according to category (e.g., repetitive, blending, divisive, additive, linking, etc.). Charles F. Hockett talks about two categories of puns, "perfect" (identical in sound) and "imperfect" (non identical) (see Hockett 1972, p. 157). Thus, according to his definition, homonyms and homophones could be called perfect puns, and paronyms and homographs, imperfect puns.

L. G. Heller points out that many different patterns of punning are characterized by "a single manifesting mark" which "signals more than one conceptual function" (Heller 1974, p. 271). To illustrate this, Heller offers the following verse that ends with a pun:

> The doctor fell into the *well*
> And broke his collar bone.
> He should have tended to the sick
> And left the *well* alone. (Heller 1974, p. 271)

The pun above occurs in a transformation of the proverb *Leave well enough alone* and plays on the ambiguity of the word "well" – a manifesting mark – which stands simultaneously for two concepts: (1) "a place for collecting water" and (2) "people who are healthy." Among various types of puns, Heller differentiates (Heller 1974, p. 271) the following two – "disambiguational" (in which "although both potential meanings … are seen, one of them is rejected by virtue of the context") and "nondisambiguational" (in which "two or more correlations can be perceived"). In order to understand ambivalent (or nondisambiguational) puns one needs an ability to view one situation from two or sometimes more than two different perspectives. Let us observe some examples in which two meanings coexist. The following wellerism is a good example of nondisambiguational punning, in which "see" is either literal "see" or its reinterpretation as "understand" and "saw" can be either the past tense form of "see" or the name of a carpenter's tool:

> "I see," said the blind man, as he picked up his hammer and *saw*. (Mieder and Kingsbury
>   1994, p. 117)

3. Which word class provides the pun in Tom Swifties?

As it has been mentioned above, in a true Tom Swifty, the pun is in the **adverb.** Since a number of adverbs end with a "–ly," originally this form of folklore was called Tom Swiftly, but nowadays Tom Swifty or Tom Swiftie are more frequently used. For instance, on Sept, 23, 2014 Google returned the following hit counts: "Tom Swifties" (18,600), "Tom Swifty" (9,990), "Tom Swiftie' (3,860), "Tom Swiftly" [3](10,800), and "Tom Swiftlies" (1,280).[4]

The following three examples play on the name (Tom) Swiftly and adverb "swiftly":

> *"Adverbial puns are fun," said Tom swiftly.*
> *"Don't you know my name?" asked Tom swiftly.*
> *"Quick, what's my name?" asked Tom swiftly.*

Most frequently the adverb in Tom Swifty has a homonym or a paronym, either explicitly used in the statement (or only implicitly implied):

> *"Carnivals are noisy and useless," griped Tom unfairly.* (unfairly/fair)
> *"Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I sleep in a wigwam; Tuesdays, Thursdays, and weekends I sleep in a teepee," said Tom very attentively.* (attentively/in a tent)
> *"I mailed it twice," said Tom resentfully.* (resentfully/resent)

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[3] The "Tom Swiftly", however, was frequently used as part of Tom Swifty and not as a term.
[4] For comparison, on Sept, 10, 2012, when the author of this article was mainly collecting Tom Swifties from various websites, Google returned the following hit counts: "Tom Swifties" (38,300), "Tom Swifty" (12,800), "Tom Swiftie' (4,920), "Tom Swiftly" (3,290), and "Tom Swiftlies" (1,160).

> *"Let's dig up that body," said Tom gravely.* (gravely/grave as a place of burial)
> *"I work at a bank," said Tom tellingly.* (tellingly/telling machine)
> *"I'm Irish," said Tom wryly.* (in a wry manner/rye Whiskey)

The following Tom Swifties play on paronyms "disarmingly" and "arms" (only implied, which has two possible readings, guns in the first example, and body part in the second one):

> *"All I want is 20,000 machine guns," said the dictator disarmingly.* (disarmingly/arms)
> *"I want this statue to look like the Venus de Milo," said Tom disarmingly.* (disarmingly/without arms)

Not only adverbs can produce Tom Swifties, but also verbs, nouns, and even adjectives. In fact, in a number of Tom Swifties found posted on various websites, there are no adverbs at all. Strictly speaking, such puns are not to be called Tom Swifties, but as the existence of numerous examples posted under the term *Tom Swifties* on various websites has proven, nowadays they are also generally classified as Tom Swifties. Let us list here some examples with puns produced by **verbs**:

> *"I've mailed the letter," Tom assented.* (assented/sent)
> *"I teach at a university," Tom professed.* (professed/professor)
> *"You must be my host," Tom guessed.* (guessed/guest)
> *"May I join the chorale?" Tom inquired.* (inquired/choir)
> *"I'm your mother's brother's father-in-law's son," Tom related.* (related/relation)

Very frequently these verbs contain a prefix "re", as in the verbs "revealed", "recounted" and "recalled" below:

> *"I'll have another piece of meat," Tom revealed.* (revealed/veal)
> *"I couldn't believe there were 527,986 bees in the swarm!" Tom recounted.* (recounted as enumerated/narrated)
> *"I telephoned John twice," Tom recalled.* (*recalled* as remembered/called twice)

Let us observe the Tom Swifties below, all of which play upon various meanings of the word *remarked.* In these examples, the word *remarked* is opposed to the word *mark* (or grade):

> *"That's the third time my teacher changed my grade," Tom remarked.*
> *"I've passed the exam this time," Tom remarked.*
> *"This student appealed his grade, so I have to score his exam again," Tom remarked.*

The German currency *mark,* which has been substituted by the Euro, is implied in in the following examples:

> *"I'm investing in German currency once again," Tom remarked.*
> *"I've transferred my money back into a German bank account," Tom remarked with interest.*

Some additional meanings of the verb *remarked* are also played on:

> *"I'm in the process of documenting my BASIC program," Tom remarked.*
> *"I'm rereading the second Gospel," Tom remarked.*
> *"That is remarkable," remarked Tom.*

Two examples of **nouns** producing puns in Tom Swifties:

> *"I love hot dogs," said Tom with relish.* (relish as delight/relish sauce)
> *"I find you guilty," said the judge with conviction.* (the act or process of convincing/a fixed or strong belief) (for more on puns in nouns, see our discussion below addressing playing names)

A pun below is an extremely rare example of a pun produced by an **adjective**:

> *"Have some shampoo," was Tom's unconditional offer.* (unconditional (adjective) /conditional (noun))

4. Types of punning in Tom Swifties

While at first this section introduces paronyms, homographs and homophones (the latter two subclasses of homonyms), it continues with certain words becoming favourite for punning in our examples, and also makes an attempt to explore puns playing upon personal names, splitting of one word into two, merging of two words into one, linking puns, bilingual puns, double puns, and, last but not least, repetitive puns.

Paronomastic puns—i.e., puns involving two similar but not identical strings of sounds and graphemes—constitute by far the largest class of puns in Tom Swifties. The authors of Tom Swifties often try to find (or create) words phonologically similar to each other:

> *"Would you like to buy some cod?" asked Tom selfishly* (selfishly/shellfish).
> *"No, you can't have any of my oysters," said Tom shellfishly.* (shellfishly/selfishly)
> *"There's no need for silence," Tom allowed.* (allowed/loud)
> *"I've an urgent appointment," said Tom in Russian* (in Russian/in rush).
> *"I need an injection," Tom pleaded in vain.* (in vain/in vein)

Numerous Tom Swifties in our material have provided good models for exploiting ambiguity through the use of a single word that is polysemous (i.e., having two meanings) or two words that are homonymous (i.e., having identical graphemic and/or phonemic representation). Puns of this

nature are referred to in our study as **homonymous puns** (in our discussion we do not distinguish between polysemous and homonymous words):

> *"I have a split personality," said Tom, being frank.* (frank/Frank)
> *"I do not have a multiple personality disorder," said Tom, trying to be frank.* (frank/Frank)
> *"I'm here—with a gift!" said Tom presently.* (presently /with a present)

Thus, using Heller's terminology, the "manifesting marks" in the previous examples, as well as the following Tom Swifties are the adverbs *presently, wryly, gravely, dryly* (which adopt here another meaning):

> *"I'll have the dark bread," said Tom wryly. (*wryly as in a wry manner/rye bread)
> *"I'll try to dig up a couple of friends," said Tom gravely.* (gravely/grave)
> *"Bartender, I'll have another martini," Tom said dryly.* (dryly/dry Martini)

While homonyms spelled the same but pronounced differently (i.e., homographs) haven't been found in our corpus, homonyms pronounced the same but spelled differently (i.e. homophones) are relatively rare in our corpus:

> *"I won't finish in fifth place," Tom held forth.* (forth/fourth)

English has many examples of words with the same form used in both nominal and verbal functions. **Extension of the use of some noun to a verbal capacity, or vice versa, shifting of verbs** to **nominal use** is shown in the following homophones. What is more, some words employed or alluded to in our examples (such as *stairing, second-guessed,* etc.) do not even exist in the English language at all; they are simply created:

> *"So only one person arrived at the party before I did?" Tom second-guessed.* (second-guessed/second guest)
> *"You must be my host," Tom guessed.* (guessed/guest)
> *"I've only enough carpet for the hall and landing," said Tom with a blank stare.* (stare/stair)
> *"Boy, I wish the elevator were working," said a tired Tom, staring up to the top.* (to stare//stair)

Certain words have become real favorites of punsters in our material. In many cases in our corpus, the choice (or a creation) of a word for punning (be it a paronym, a homophone or a homograph) is obvious or largely predictable. For example:

> *weak(ly)/week(ly):*

> *"I'm always exhausted by Friday," said Tom weakly.*

"I visit my parents every Sunday," said Tom weakly.
"Fifty-two episodes can fill a year," Blake said, weakly.
Aren't five cups of tea too many from one bag?" asked Tom weakly.

weakness/weekness

"Every second feels like it lasts for seven days," said Tom in a moment of weakness.

readily/redily:

"I'm covered in blood," Tom said readily.
"I'm embarrassed," Tom admitted readily.

Puns in Tom Swifties might play upon, or allude to **proper names**. The example below plays upon the "at random" and The Random Publishing House (or Random), one of a very few publishing houses which has published a dictionary containing the definition of Tom Swifty[5]:

"We publish one of the few dictionaries that define 'Tom Swifty'," said Tom at random.

Puns in Tom Swifties might also play upon, or allude to geographical names and places. The two examples below have at least two things in common: while the names of countries are used in the statements, the names of cities are referred to in the adverbs:

"South Korea has a lovely capital city," said Tom soulfully. (soulfully/Seoul)
"Let's take a vacation in the south of France," said Tom nicely. (nicely/Nice, the largest city of the French Riviera)

Similarly to the two examples above, each of the two Tom Swifties below also uses two geographical names; while in their statement either the name of a capital city (or a country) occurs, the adverb (or the noun phrase) refers to the name of a river:

"Don't let me drown in Paris!" pleaded Tom insanely. (insanely/in the Seine)
"Don't let me drown in Egypt!" pleaded Tom, deep in denial. (in denial/in the Nile)

Sometimes, in cases when the pun of Tom Swifty lies in the name of the speaker, the conventional Tom is substituted by either a fictitious or real person:

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[5] *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* 1st edition (1966) contains this definition: "Tom Swiftie, a play on words that follows an unvarying pattern and relies for its humor on a punning relationship between the way an adverb describes a speaker and at the same time refers significantly to the import of the speaker's statement."

> *"My extreme emotional instability arises from a psychoneurosis,"* hissed Eric. (hissed Eric/hysteric)

The first names and/or surnames of **famous poets and writers, composers and singers, politicians and scholars, and other famous personalities** might be used in order to substitute Tom, or they are simply hidden in the adverbs, or referred to in the statement. Most frequently, names are referred to in the adverb. While in a number of our examples both the names and surnames correspond to each other, some additional examples contain reference to the first names or surnames of famous personalities (i.e., poets and writers, composers and singers, politicians and scholars).

Indeed, introducing the first name of a personality (or referring to it) into the context of Tom Swifties frequently helps us to perceive the pun. Let us here turn to the realm of literature. Oscar Wilde is one of the most popular writers to be brought up in our Tom Swifties:

> *"I wish I'd said that, Oscar,"* said Tom wildly. (wildly/Oscar Wilde)
> *"Dorian Gray's by Oscar,"* said Tom wildly. (wildly/Oscar Wilde)

The names (or surnames) of William Shakespeare, Virginia Wolf and James Joyce are alluded to in the following examples:

> *"I've read all Shakespeare's works,"* said Tom wilfully. (wilfully/William Shakespeare)
> *"Orlando's by Virginia,"* said Tom wolfishly. (wolfishly/Virginia Wolf)

The first names and/or surnames of famous personalities (hidden or referred to in adverbs or statements) might also constitute the base of puns:

> *"My next novel will be the greatest thing since Finnegans Wake,"* Tom rejoiced. (rejoiced/(James Joyce)

Reference to the German folklorists and writers the Brothers Grimm, among the most well-known collectors of tales such as "Cindarella" or "Hansel and Gretel" is to be found in a number of Tom Swifties posted on various websites. In some examples the punning adverb is *grimly,* in some other ones a neologism *grimmly* is created:

> *"Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess,"* said Tom grimly.
> *"I collect fairy tales,"* said Tom grimly.
> *"Have I got a story for you,"* he said grimmly.

Composers, musicians, singers, and film directors may also be the butt of humor in Tom Swifties. The items below refer to the composers Franz Liszt, Johann Sebastian Bach, and George Bizet:

> *"I never play any music by Hungarian composers," said Tom listlessly.* (listlessly/Franz Liszt)
> *"I've been listening to the Brandenburg Concertos," Tom barked.* (barked/Johann Sebastian Bach)
> *"Carmen is my favorite opera," said Tom busily.* (busily/George Bizet)
> *"Yes, I wrote 'Pictures at an Exhibition', but only the piano version," said the composer modestly.* (modestly/Modest Mussorgsky)

The following Tom Swifty, which alludes to one of the most popular American singers of the 20th century, Elvis Presley, and plays upon the similarity of the words *expressly* and *Presley*, is one of the most frequently posted Tom Swifties and can be found on a number of various websites:

> *"Elvis is dead," Tom said expressly.*

While the first example below alludes to the name of the Spanish tenor and conductor Plácido Domingo, the second brings the name of the film director Wes Craven into its context:

> *"Who's your favorite operatic tenor?" Tom asked placidly.* (placidly/Plácido Domingo)
> *"Why, yes, I directed 'A Nightmare on Elm Street'," said Wes cravenly.* (Wes cravenly/Wes Craven)

An interesting pun and play on a personal name is an example below:

> *"I was the first to climb Mount Everest," said Tom hilariously.*

Although the name "Tom" is preserved in the last Tom Swifty, the use of the adverb *hilariously* introduces the surname of the famous mountain-climber Edmund Hillary, the conquer of Mount Everest, into the context of the Tom Swifty. The name of the French-Polish physicist and chemist Maria Skłodowska-Curie, famous for her pioneering research on radioactivity, appears in the following example:

> *"I wonder why uranium is fluorescent," said Mary curiously.* (Mary curiously/Marie Curie)

Characters, or even titles of well-known poems, novels, tales, or paintings, such as *Mona Lisa, Lady Chatterley*, *The Raven*, or *Candide,* might also be in the focus of Tom Swifties, or occasionally might even substitute the character of Tom. Even the *Whale,* or Moby-Dick, the character from "Moby-Dick; or, The Whale", a novel by Herman Melville is played upon:

> *"I'm tired of smiling," moaned Lisa.* (moaned Lisa/Mona Lisa)
> *"I've caught Moby Dick!" Tom wailed.* (wailed/Whale)
> *"I've been chased by Moby Dick!," she wailed.* (wailed/Whale)

The introduction of the names of the writers in the contexts of the statements might help us to understand the hidden message of the following Tom Swifties:

> *"I love the novels of D. H. Lawrence," said the lady chattily.* (lady chattily/Lady Chatterley)
> *"I have been reading Voltaire," Tom admitted candidly.* (candidly/Candid)
> *"I really like the work of Edgar Allan Poe," said Tom ravenously.* (ravenously/The Raven)
> *"This is George Bernard Shaw's major work," Tom said barbarously.* (barbarously/Major Barbara)

Although the list of Tom Swifties playing on personal names could be extended here beyond the limits of patience, I will restrict myself to just two more examples. The following two puns are based on phonetic and graphemic similarity of words from two languages – *Les Misérables,* the title of the famous novel by French writer Victor Hugo (the novel has also been staged and has become one of the most popular musicals), implied to in the text, and the name "*Les*" accompanied by an adjective *"miserably"* is introduced into the text:

> *"Do you call this a musical?" asked Les miserably.*
> *"Have you anything by Hugo?" asked Les miserably.*

Puns such as the two cited above, which are based on the intermixture of words from two languages, may be called **bilingual puns**. Bilingual puns usually employ words from two languages phonetically similar, or even identical but different in meaning. Here are three more French-English puns:

> *"These Paris streets sure have funny names," said Tom ruefully.* (ruefully/rue, a street in French)
> *"King Tut says he uses French perfume," she channeled*. (channeled/Chanel perfume)
> *"Of a French pastry," Tom d'eclaired.* (éclair, a finger-shaped cake of choux pastry, usually filled with cream and covered with chocolate/declared)

The following Tom Swifties, based on phonetic and graphemic similarity of words from English and German, are good examples of an English-German bilingual pun:

> *"Mama is German," Tom muttered.* (muttered/Mutter, mother)
> *"Forward march! Eins, zwei, drei, funf, eins, zwei, drei, funf!" said the German commander fearlessly.* (fearlessly/vier, four)
> *"I like Germany," was Tom's gut reaction.* (English gut: Arousing or involving basic emotions; visceral /German gut: good)
> *"It's a German song," Tom lied.* (lied/German Lied: song)

Certain puns involve not simply single words but **groups of words**. **One word may be split into two (or three)**, and vice versa, **two (or three) words are merged into one**. Most frequently such words are implied (and are not explicitly used in the context):

"I like camping," said Tom intently. (intently/in tent)
"I'm going to end it all," Sue sighed. (Sue sighed/suicide)
"This is the real male goose," said Tom producing the propaganda. (propaganda/proper gander)
"Eat more fruit" said Tom, with aplomb. (aplomb/a plum)
"I am wearing a ring" said Tom with abandon. (abandon/a band on)
"There's no need for silence," Tom allowed. (allowed/a loud)

In the Tom Swifty below, the last word, the adverb *adamantly* is split into two words in its statement (the personal name *Adam* and *aunt*), what's more, the words *Adam* and *aunt* interchange their position:

"My aunt? I don't know her from Adam," said Tom adamantly.

The example below might be called "**linking pun**" (following Esar's terminology, see Esar 1952, p. 78). The first consonant of the second word of the *I screamed* wanders from the beginning of one word (*screamed*) to the ending of the other word (*ice*), coining the following combination (*ice cream*):

"Bring me a large helping of vanilla with chocolate sauce," I screamed. (I screamed/ice cream)

The item below is a good representative of the category of pun called the **repetitive pun**. In the repetitive pun, punning words (or groups of words) are repeated:

"Pete! Pete! Pete! Pete! Pete!" Tom repeated. (repeated/Pete)

Other repetitive puns include:

"Is your name Frank Lee?" Tom asked frankly. (frankly/Frank Lee)
"I see," said Tom icily. (icily/I see)

Both the Tom Swifties above also represent a good example of splitting an adverb into two words in the text of statement. In the Tom Swifty below not only does the word "*darkly*" stand for two different concepts, but the word "*fair*" does as well:

"It's not fair!" said Tom darkly.

In the context established in the example above, the meaning of the word "fair" (i.e., just) emerging from the statement It's *not fair* makes no sense. We have to think of another meaning of this word; a reinterpretation signifying "light-colored hair" renders the humor understandable. This type of pun may be called **a double pun**. According to L. G. Heller, "In theory one may have any number of puns embedded in the same utterance" (Heller 1974, p. 280). In a number of Tom Swifties in our corpus, a double pun appears. The two Tom Swifties below are also double puns:

> *"The door's ajar," said Tom openly.* (ajar/a jar and openly/open)
> *"Are you homosexual?" Tom queried gaily.* (queried/queer and gaily/gaily).

An interesting example alludes to the name of Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver's Travels*:

> *"Yes, I have read Gulliver's Travels," said Tom swiftly.*

Such pun as the one above might be called a **triple pun**: it plays upon the adverb *swiftly*, the name *(Tom) Swiftly,* and, last but not least, the name of the writer *(Jonathan) Swift*.

Many more types of punning in Tom Swifties could be addressed in this study, but one needs to stop at some point. Puns have been frequently attacked as being "the lowest form of wit", especially in English- speaking communities. Taking issue with the detractors, Berger states, "Good puns are excellent examples of wit. It is only when the pun stretches too far or is too off base that puns elicit the customary groan from people – a response we all learn as proper when dealing with a pun that doesn't work" (Berger 1995, p. 68).

The comic nature of the pun rests upon its phonetic identity (or similarity) and the creation of multiple meanings. Arthur Asa Berger points out that ambivalence is the basis of good puns (Berger 1995, p. 76). Bier stresses, "The very lowest form of sound-effect punning is that in which only one of two terms has any truth at all" (Bier 1968, p. 18). According to Salvatore Attardo, "The best puns are those in which either the two senses coexist in a difficult balance, or in which the connotating sense brings a meaningful contribution to the global senses of the text" (Attardo 1994, p. 138). Albert Rapp emphasizes, "The essential feature of the pun lies precisely in the existence of two separate meanings; since they provide the opportunity for tricking or double-crossing your listener" (Rapp 1951, p. 87). According to Victor Raskin:

> For many speakers, the mere exposure to a homonymous or polysemous word or phrase constitutes an irresistible temptation to make a joke. ... It is the easy availability of puns which makes them a cheap and somewhat despicable type of humor for many individuals and social groups. However, the same factor prevents them from disappearing, and every new generation goes through many cycles of discovering the puns, getting tired of them, rejecting them and eventually rediscovering them again. (Raskin 1985, p. 116)

Conclusion

This study has focused on Tom Swifties, the twentieth century development of the form of folklore called wellerism, conventionally based on the punning relationship between the way an adverb (or most recently other word class, such as a verb, a noun or even an adjective) describes a speaker (most frequently Tom) and simultaneously refers to the meaning of the speaker's statement (i.e., a sentence of reported speech). In the first section of the study, I reviewed in a nutshell the background of Tom Swifty research and terminology, and I also demonstrated shortly topics addressed in Tom Swifties. The second section briefly treated some definitions of puns. Last but not least, the third, and longest, section of the study addressed various types of punning in Tom Swifties, focusing on paronyms, homonyms, homophones, as well as on puns playing upon personal names, splitting of one word into two, merging of two words into one, bilingual puns, double/triple puns, linking puns, and repetitive puns.

Victor Raskin points out, "If the trigger is there but the scripts and the oppositeness relation are not, the pun remains an artificial low-quality product" (Raskin 1985, p. 116). We are, however, sometimes struck by the absurdity of some situations portrayed in Tom Swifties, especially when they rely purely upon linguistic tricks employed for the sole purpose of generating play forms and of making punning possible. Punsters, and the authors of numerous Tom Swifties discussed above, however, more often than not play in unsophisticated ways with the sounds of words but not with their meanings. Indeed, Tom Swifties very frequently lend themselves to manipulation exclusively for the sake of manipulation. As it has been shown, in many cases in our corpus, the choice of a word for punning is obvious or largely predictable. The vast majority of Tom Swifties in our material are based on purely phonetic and not semantic relations between words.

Implications for Further Research

Many more crucial questions treating various aspects of Tom Swifties could have been discussed in this article but it would have been exceeded the limits. A very important goal for further humor research would be analyzing the processes of creativity involved in coining Tom Swifties, as well as examining what influences appreciation of humor in Tom Swifties. Another equally exciting goal for future research entails conducting cultural-historical analyses of individual Tom Swifties, and tracing their various appearances. It would also be important to discuss basic attitudes presented in Tom Swifties. It goes without saying that the all-important initial goal for folklorists would be collecting and publishing Tom Swifties in any culture where they flourish. Last but not least, a very exciting task for the future is to identify Tom Swifties with international distribution.

Acknowledgements

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