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Department of English

An Investigation of EFL Students' Difficulties in the Reading Comprehension of Homographic Puns
The case of First-and Third Year Licence Students at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in

didactics of foreign languages

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Declaration of the Candidate Bellah Ferial

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "An Investigation of EFL Students' Difficulties in the Reading Comprehension of Homographic Puns: The Case of EFL First and Third Year Students at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University'' is my own work and all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of references. I also certify that I have not copied or plagiarized the work of other students or researchers partially or fully. In case any material is not documented, I shall be responsible for the consequences.

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Declaration of the Candidate Guendouz Nassima

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "An Investigation of EFL Students' Difficulties in the Reading Comprehension of Homographic Puns: The Case of EFL First and Third Year Students at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University'' is my own work and all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of references. I also certify that I have not copied or plagiarized the work of other students or researchers partially or fully. In case any material is not documented, I shall be responsible for the consequences.

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Dedication

In the name of Allah, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate

To my dear mother whom her prayer was and still is the secret of my success. Thank you for giving me life and making me feel like a one-of-a-kind treasure every day.

To my wise father who spreads hopes throughout the world. You made me a world full of love and for that I am grateful.

To my beloved sister Roumaissa who encouraged me with her priceless advices. Thank you for lending an ear when nobody else would, and for the bond we share.

To my precious brothers; Rami and Siraj Eddine whose presence gave me power. Thank you for being an inspiration to me.

In the memory of my grandfather. You may be gone from my sight but you are never gone from my heart.

To my grandmothers and grandfather. May God prolong their life and clothe them with the garment of health and wellness.

To the owner of the credit that cannot be denied my uncle Abd Elghani. Thank you for lending me your hand and support.

To all my uncles, aunts, and their children. Thank you for always participating in our happiness and always giving pleasure.

To my Soul mate and best friend Marwa. Thank you for being always there for me, for being my rock all the time.

To my colleague Nassima. Thank you so much for your companion.

I dedicate this work

Ferial

Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

The memory of my mother

My dear Father

My sisters and brothers

Thank you

Abstract

The present work attempts to investigate EFL students' difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns. This study was conducted at the department of English at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University. It focuses on identifying the difficulties EFL learners face in the reading comprehension of homographic puns. The research hypothesis assumes that homographic puns are only accessible to advanced learners. To test the validity of this hypothesis, a students test that encompasses 10 homographic puns was designed and submitted with the request to explain the expressions. The sample consisted of 30 first-year stuents and 30 third-year students. The results confirmed the hypothesis, with third-year students whom we judged to be advanced learners, performing better than less experienced first-year students. The results also revealed that EFL learners' difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns are caused by lack of vocabulary, cultural and contextual obstacles, and linguistic and pragmatic competence limitations.

Keywords: reading, reading comprehension, reading comprehension difficulties, humor, homographic puns

List of Abbreviations and Symbols

ALE: Anglais Comme Langue Ètrangère

E.g.: Exempli gratia (for example)

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

Et al.: Et alia (and others)

Etc: Et cetera (and the rest)

FL: Foreign Language

i.e.: id est (that is)

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

LMD: License-Master-Doctorate

No: Number

NS: Native Speakers

P: Page

Para: Paragraph

Pp: Pages

RQ: Research Questions

SL: Source Language

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

TL: Target Language

US: United States

% : Percentage

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General Introsuction

Learning a language has always been a crucial part of the development of any country's education. Acquiring a second language requires communicative competence and an understanding of the cultural fundamentals of the foreign language's society. Humor in general and puns in particular occupy a great position in any given society. The latter refers to language and laughter. People all over the world depend on their language and sense of humor daily to engage in social settings. For an EFL learner willing to get in touch with English speakers, being able to comprehend the different homographic puns of the target language is essential to do so. However, a lack of conception may place learners in unfavorable situations. As a result, this paper is designed for the purpose of investigating EFL students' difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns.

1. **Background of the Study**

Humor studies date back to Plato and Aristotle and encompass almost every discipline of study. There are several studies dedicated to humor, as well as numerous periodicals and book series devoted solely to humor research. Humor is expressed in different forms, but puns have attracted the most attention in linguistic studies. Attardo (1994) indicates that "between playing with an idea or a situation and playing on words, puns are felt to fall squarely into the second category." (p. 27). Mohammadilasari et al. (2014) stated that "Punning is possible in any language insofar as it seems to be a universal feature of language to have words with more than one meaning (polysemy), different words with the same spelling or pronunciation (homographs and homophones)." (p.1). Valkenburg (2004) suggests that "humor has a primarily emotional function, helping the humorist to build confidence and self-esteem."(p. 148). Pun has gained a significant amount of attention in a variety of diverse spheres. There has been a number of research on puns from various fields, including psychology by Valkenburg (2004), teaching by Lems (2013), literary and translational; Delabatista (1994), Mohammadisalari, et al. (2014), and linguistics; Partington (2009), Giorgadze (2014). Of all the types of puns, homographic puns have been the most investigated since they are commonly expressed, especially in literary texts. The challenge of the reading comprehension of homographic puns is a fundamental one that has intrigued the interest of numerous scholars.

There are many different classical theories of humor however three of them recur often. These are the relief theory, the superiority theory, and the incongruity theory.

According to the relief theory, laughing is a mechanism that lowers psychological strain. Thus, humor releases people' tension. This theory sets that humor allows anxious energy to be released. This energy is known as that of improper emotions. The superiority theory, on the other hand, is built upon the assumption that the person experiences what is

called "schadenfreude". Schadenfreude means that the person makes fun of other peoples' tragedies and sufferings. He does so because he wants to feel superior by knowing other peoples' weaknesses. Finally, the incongruity theory which is the most known. According to it, humor is only seen when realizing the discrepancy between a concept present in a scenario and the actual objects assumed to have some connection to the notion.

2. Statement of the Problem

Being able to read different homographic puns and comprehend them is a helpful way to learn the foreign language. However, the processing of humor involves the perception of some sort of incongruity. Incongruity is said to be a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke. According to Deckers (1993), incongruity was considered to be a necessary condition for humor. From this perspective, humor involves the bringing together of two normally disparate ideas, concepts, or situations in a surprising or unexpected manner.

It is assumed that students in the department of English at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University face difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns. As a result, many students may lose their confidence, their motivation, and find problems communicating with the outside English-speaking world.

Humor in general and homographic puns in specific have proved to be an integral part of the English language. Consequently, it directly affects the way EFL learners acquire the language. Our main interest is to investigate the difficulties facing EFL learners in the process of reading and understanding homographic puns. Bringing humor and using homographic puns in EFL classrooms is a sufficient way of facilitating foreign language learning.

3. Aim of the Study

The aim of this research is to test the assumption that homographic puns are only accessible to advanced learners. This study also aims at investigating the difficulties faced by EFL students in understanding homographic puns.

4. Research Questions and Hypothesis

This study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What differences can be detected in the results of the two different test groups?

2. What linguistic features prove difficult for students' reading comprehension of homographic puns?

According to the previously stated questions, it is hypothesised that:

- Homographic puns are better understood by more advanced learners.

5. Research Methodology

In order to ascertain the level of students' reading comprehension and perception of homographic puns, we have chosen to compile a survey consisting of a list of ten homographic puns submitted to two separate sets of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University students. Our sample consists of 30 first-year licence students and 30 third-year licence students. Both parts of the sample are chosen randomly from the whole population to answer the test. The test group two is likely to give better performance since it represents students with higher proficiency in English and greater pragmatic and linguistic competence compared to test group one. The results, therefore, were discussed, analysed, and compared for the sake of conforming or rejecting our hypothesis.

6. The Significance of the Study

Writers make significant use of homographic puns in order to amuse perceptive readers. Homographic puns are employed to make humor or as an unpredicted, concealed joke. They can assist EFL students in enriching their cultural awareness and improving their academic performance by fostering a relaxed environment built upon humor and

entertainment. The findings obtained from the study will help to determine what difficulties EFL students face in the reading comprehension of homographic puns. As a result, future researches may be dedicated to find solutions that might overcome the issues detected from our research and help raise EFL learners' appreciation of homographic puns as they read them. Another interesting point is the fact that this type of puns can be adapted in the EFL classrooms as a strategy to raise students' motivation and to enhance their learning outcomes. In addition, teachers sense of humor is a part of a good teacher. it is very useful for minimizing boredom during the sessions.

7. Structure of the Study

This work is composed of two chapters. The first chapter represents the theoretical part. It is concerned with the background information related to the topic. It is entitled "Reading Comprehension and Homographic Puns." It is composed of two sections. The first section is entitled "Reading and Reading Comprehension." It is about the definition of reading and reading comprehension, as well as reading techniques, skills of reading comprehension, and the difficulties of reading comprehension. The second section is entitled "Humor and Homographic Puns." It deals with humor, types of humor, puns, classification of puns, the facilitative role of puns, and the problematic of homographic puns. The second chapter represents the practical framework. It is entitled "The Field of Study." This chapter is divided into two sections. The first one is dedicated to data collection, consisting of the population and sampling in relation to means of the research and data collection procedures, while the second section is dedicated to data analysis and results. It deals with the method of analysis, the students' test, the description of the students' test, the analysis of the students' test results, and the discussion of the results

Chapter One

Reading Comprehension and Homographic Puns

Introduction

People use language to make sense of their surroundings and put order to it. Learning a language is a lifelong process that starts at birth and continues throughout one's life. The main objective behind learning a foreign language is to communicate effectively and understand one another. In order for this to happen, learners ought to acquire the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A person is only able to react to a subject if he/she has the capacity to comprehend what is being said, heard, read, or written. Academic success requires reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is the ability to comprehend literature, understand its meaning, and integrate it with previous knowledge. Language is inextricably linked to culture. Language enables social connections, whereas culture teaches us how to act and interact with others.

There is humor in every human civilization (Fry, 1994). Humor, in all its forms, especially puns, is very helpful in the process of teaching and learning a language. However, humor and puns present a wide range of cultural ambiguities, causing students to face difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns.

As a result, in this chapter we will look at the difficulties faced by EFL learners in the reading comprehension of homographic puns. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first one is entitled "Reading and Reading Comprehension". The first section will shed light on the definition of reading, reading techniques, reading comprehension, reading comprehension skills, and the difficulties of reading comprehension. The second section is called "Humor and Homographic Puns." In this section, we will give an account about the definition of humor, types of humor, puns, classification of puns, the facilitative role of puns in EFL classrooms, and the problematic of homographic puns.

Section One

Reading and Reading Comprehension:

1. Reading

There are several skills learners should encounter in order to succeed through their educational path. One of these skills is reading. Reading is key to language learning. Leipzig (2001) defines reading as "a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation." (para. 1) Reading is necessary for learning to take place. "Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success will inevitably be lost" (Anderson et al., 1985 p. 1). However, reading can be done for fun. Alderson (2000) has argued that reading is "an enjoyable, intensive, private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived, and in which one can become totally absorbed." (p. 28)

The process of reading is a cognitive one that requires decoding symbols to arrive at meaning. Urquhart and Weir (1998) give the definition that "reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print." (p. 22). The primary purpose of reading is to understand. Comprehension is a more comprehensive concept than reading, and the two should not be equated. (Cutler & Clifton, 1999). Meaningful reading directs information to specific goals. A fundamental objective is connected to every cognitive process that takes place while reading (Gernsbacher, 1990). Reading is based on processing prior information, where the different reading strategies are used to comprehend what is being read. We coordinate quick and automatic word recognition, syntactic parsing, meaning construction, text comprehension building, inferencing, critical evaluation, and links to resources from our prior knowledge as we read (Breznitz, 2006).

2. Reading Techniques

Reading differs from time to time according to the purposes behind it. Some people read for academic purposes, while others read for fun. In order to maintain an acceptable level of coherence, various reading purposes also frequently place a variety of demands on the reader (Linderholm et al., 2004). In order for the right way of reading to take place, we follow certain reading techniques such as skimming and scanning. "Both skimming and scanning are specific reading techniques necessary for quick and efficient reading." (Grellet, 1981, p. 19).

2.1. Skimming

One of the most sufficient techniques for effective reading is skimming. Skimming means to run the eyes quickly over the written work in order to extract the main idea out of it. "Skimming can be defined as a reading technique which is done at a speed three to four times faster than normal reading" (Yusuf et al., 2007, p.45). "When skimming, we go through the reading material quickly in order to get the gist of it, to know how it is organized, or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of the writer." (Grellet, 1981, p. 19). Nuttall (1996) stated that skimming is the process of rapidly glancing a text to get its main points.

Skimming, also known as gist reading, is the process of examining a text to grasp the essential concept. The reader does not pronounce every word of the text in this case; instead he/she focuses on the major idea or core of the text. Reading periodicals or newspapers and looking up a name in a phone directory are examples of skimming. According to Yan Shen (2009), skimming is "a fast reading skill that does not require reading word by word, but it requires high degree concentration" (p.16).

2.2. Scanning

Scanning is the process of removing, ignoring, or disregarding unnecessary text content in order to find a specific piece of information. At this level, The reader scurries across phrases to get to a specific knowledge. "Scanning is unlike skimming because the readers don't focus on general information of the text but detail. In this technique, the readers

quickly look for specific information such as dates, years, names, places, among others" (Yusuf et al., 2007, p. 46).

Grellet (1981) describes the process of scanning as follows: "when scanning we only try to locate specific information and often we do not even follow the linearity of the passage to do so." (p. 19). Konar (2009) indicates that "scanning involves reading the passage slowly and carefully and looking for some particular information in which you are interested." (p.154)

3. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the reader's ability to grasp written materials. According to Pang (2000), the word comprehension refers to "an active process that produces the meaning for the printed language then concern with new word" (p.14). Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004) state that comprehension is" making sense of what someone reads and connecting the ideas in the text to what he already knows" (p.74).

According to Snow (2002), reading comprehension refers to the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (P, 11). The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences. (Woolley, 2011, p. 15). In the same sense, Maria (1990) defined reading comprehension as "holistic process of constructing meaning from written text through the interaction of (1) the knowledge reader brings to the text, i.e., word recognition ability, word knowledge, and knowledge of linguistic conventions; (2) readers interpretation of the language that the writer used in constructing the text; and (3) the situation in which the text is read" (pp. 14-15). Reading comprehension is also defined as "a thinking process by which a reader selects facts, information, or ideas from printed materials; determines the meanings the author intended to transmit; decides how they relate to previous knowledge; and judges their appropriateness and

worth for meeting the learner's own objectives" (Veeravagu, et al., 2010, p. 206). Comprehension is defined as "intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interaction between text and reader". (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 207)

4. Reading Comprehension Skills

Some people consider reading an easy task to learn, yet it is a complex process that depends on different skills. Reading comprehension skills are some processes that can help, and lead students to make sense of what they are reading. There are six main skills needed for reading comprehension: decoding, fluency, inference making, background knowledge, vocabulary, working memory, and grammar.

4.1. Decoding

Decoding is the process of translating print into speech by rapidly matching a letter or combination of letters (graphemes) to their sounds (phonemes) and recognizing the patterns that make syllables and words. Decoding is "the ability to recognize words in print without conscious effects" (Carrekr, 2011, p. 3). Decoding is a salient reading comprehension skill because it is the foundation on which all other reading instruction is built (Reading Horizons, 2022). Accurate word decoding and recognition are required to be able to comprehend a text. As a result, decoding ability and word recognition skills show a high predictive ability for comprehension (Perfetti & Hart, 2001). However, several studies suggest that the impact of word decoding becomes small in predicting reading comprehension (Ouellette & Beers, 2010).

4.2. Fluency

Reading fluency is an important skill to master as it creates a bridge to reading comprehension. Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression (Rasinski, 2006). According to Samuels (2006), reading fluency refers to comprehending the text when vocalizing. Vilger (2008) explained it as the reading of readers in an appropriate

speed and accurate manner with their natural voice. Allington (2006) also described reading fluency as expressing the meaning in the text with an appropriate voice tone with prozody. Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006); Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, and Jenkins (2009) added to this definition that fluency in reading is the indicator of all other components of reading, including comprehension.

4.3. Background Knowledge or Inference Making

It is also called schemata. It is defined by Nuttal (2005) as a "mental structure. It is abstract because it does not relate to any particular experience, although it derives from all the particular experiences we have had." (p.7). As a part of the reading comprehension process, the term "background knowledge" is used interchangeably with inference-making. Inference making is a method used by learners and readers in which observation and background knowledge are integrated to accomplish an outcome. Inference-making processes occur when the reader combines the ideas communicated in the text with his or her background knowledge to generate information that is not explicitly stated in the text (Graves et al., 2007; Van Den Broek et al., 1995). Good inference making has been demonstrated as a key to text comprehension (Cain, 2010; Cain et al., 2001; Dole et al., 1991; Eason et al., 2012).

4.4. Vocabulary

Another significant component of text comprehension is vocabulary knowledge (Daugaard et al., 2017). Vocabulary is defined by Hatch and Brown (1995) as "a specific set of words a person is familiar with and can use in a language" (p.1). In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000), vocabulary is described as "all words that a person knows or uses". There is a strong relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Hudson (2007) stated that "vocabulary is a considerable factor in reading ability." (p.227). In that concern, Hudson (2007) also added, "it appears that a large vocabulary can facilitate reading comprehension." (p.227). In the EFL context, a positive relationship between vocabulary and

reading comprehension is demonstrated in a number of studies (e.g., Chou, 2011; Hatami & Tavakoli, 2012; Nirattisai, 2014).

4.5. Working Memory

Working memory is defined as a cognitive workspace (e.g., Baddeley & Hitch, 1974; Baddeley, 2007) with a limited pool of attentional resources for temporary storage and processing of information while performing higher-order cognitive tasks such as comprehension, learning, and reasoning (Baddeley & Logie, 1999). Working memory has also been identified as an integral part of reading comprehension. It is defined as an executive function responsible for keeping and updating information in the mind (Rothlisberger, Neuenschwander, Cimeli, & Roebers, 2013).

4.6. Grammar

Grammar is the method by which a set of rules is applied to combine word meaning with sentence structure to create a comprehendible meaning for a reading text (Poulsen & Gravgaard, 2016; Silva & Cain, 2015). Shiotsu and Weir (2007) stated that the learner's level of syntactic knowledge plays a role in their understanding of reading materials. The significance of grammar to text comprehension is clearly evident when lexical information is presented well but the necessary grammatical cues are not. As a result, successful reading comprehension does not occur (Grabe, 2005). Grammatical knowledge provides a predictive role for reading comprehension longitudinally (Muter et al., 20).

5. Reading Comprehension Difficulties

Reading comprehension has long been a critical issue in EFL teaching and learning tasks; according to various studies, most EFL students struggle to grasp English texts due to a variety of reading difficulties. Among those issues we mention: lack of background knowledge, linguistic difficulties, and lack of interest.

5.1. Linguistic Difficulties

According to Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyans (2003), linguistic knowledge is the unconscious knowledge about the linguistic system of sounds, structures, meanings, words, and rules. It is the ability of a reader to create and understand sentences with a set of grammatical rules, including sentences they have never heard of before (as cited in Kasim & Raisha, 2017). Linguistic problems consist of lexical problems, syntactic problems, semantic problems, and phonological problems.

5.1.1. Lexical Problems

Vocabulary knowledge is an essential factor in understanding complex reading materials such as textbooks, particularly those containing technical expressions (Carlisle, 2000; Qian, 2002). This is because students with poor vocabulary knowledge face difficulties in understanding technical words such as superordinate, synonyms, antonyms, or words with multiple connotations (Nuttall, 2000; Carlisle, 2000; Vilenius-Tuohimaa, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2008). Having adequate vocabulary helps students clarify strange words by relating them to the context in which they are used (Dennis, 2008).

5.1.2. Syntactic Problems

Syntax refers to the branch of linguistics that deals with language structure and the application of grammatical rules. In the reading process, syntax focuses on the structure of language rather than its meaning (Frestisia, 2022, p. 236–240). Shiotsu, and Weir (2007) stated that the learner's level of syntactic knowledge plays a role in their understanding of reading materials. In other words, learners with insufficient knowledge might not be able to achieve a higher level of reading ability. Nuttal (2005) stated that complex noun groups, nominalization, co-cordinating conjunctions, and participle phrases tend to be the cause of many problems in reading comprehension.

5.1.3. Semantic Problems

Semantics is a linguistics subfield that is concerned with the study of word's meaning. In order to make sense of what they are reading, students ought to understand the meaning of words, yet; due to the lack of vocabulary knowledge, many students encounter problems in grasping word's meaning (Frestisia, 2021, pp. 236-240).

5.1.4. Phonological Problems

Phonology is a branch of linguistics that is concerned with the organization and use of speech sounds; it is devoted to learning to read the alphabetic written system. Many researchers have found that phonological problems are related to consonant sounds, i.e., in reading comprehension, students face difficulties in the way they read a variety of consonant sounds (Frestisia, 2021, pp. 236-240).

5.2. Lack of Background and Cultural Knowledge

Background knowledge has a critical role in facilitating EFL reading comprehension. Anderson & Pearson (1984) claimed that having background knowledge allows students to make predictions, set certain expectations, infer from the reading, and direct their attention to the most relevant information. EFL students who have no prior knowledge about the topic they are reading about may face difficulties in grasping its meaning.

Another reading comprehension issue EFL students may encounter is cultural knowledge. Alderson (2000) claims that when students read texts that are culturally familiar to them, they read fluently and with greater comprehension than when they read materials that are unfamiliar to them.

5.3. Reading Interest

Dennis (2008) also indicates that interest and motivation are very important in developing the learners' reading comprehension. If the readers find the reading material monotonous, they will have a lot of problems in concentrating on their comprehension.

<center>**Section Two**</center>

<center>**Humor and Homographic Puns**</center>

1. **Definition of Humor**

Humor is a universal behavior adapted by most cultures. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, humor is defined as "that quality which appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous: a funny or amusing quality." It adds that humor represents the mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous. Crawford (1994) defines humor as "any communication that generates a positive cognitive or affective response from listeners." (p. 57). Goebel (1958) defines humor as "surprising incongruity that evokes laughter (or at least bemusement)" (p.2). The term "humor" was first used by the ancient Greeks, who used it to link health and emotion to humor (body fluid). In addition, Romero and Cruthirds (2006) defined humor as "amusing communication that produces positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization" (p. 59). Humor is said to have a specific place and timing in order for amusement to be achieved. Holmes and Marra (2006) stated humor as "one valuable strategic resource in workplace discourse which leaders can choose to use where appropriate" (p. 133). Whereas, Deiter (2000) defines humor as "anything that is perceived to be funny, comical, or amusing." (p. 22)

Linguists believe that humor is a broad term covering all that causes positive emotions, such as laughter. For instance, Raskin (1985) proposes to consider humor in the least restricted sense. (p. 8).

Humor reflects various fields of study. This leads to the emergence of different perspectives and definitions of the word humor. Some scholars view humor as a trait, while others perceive it as a phenomenon. For example, Martin et al. (2003) described the sense of humor as a cognitive ability, an aesthetic response, a habitual behavior pattern, a trait, an

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attitude, a coping strategy, or a defense mechanism. Attardo (1994) remarks that, "Not only has it not been possible to agree on how to divide the category of 'humor' (e.g., 'humor' vs' comic' vs' ridiculous'), but it is even difficult to find a pretheoretical definition of 'humor' in the most general sense." Even though it is almost impossible to define what it is that makes something humorous, we are at least able to identify humor." (p. 3)

Humor is popular by three positions describing its nature. These include the superiority theory, the relief theory, and the incongruity theory.

The superiority theory arises from feeling superior to something or someone. It was coined by Hobbes but is well known by Descartes and Plato. Bardon (2005) defines it as "the theory that the humor we find in comedy and in life is based on ridicule, wherein we regard the object of amusement as inferior and/or ourselves as superior" (p. 463). This theory is a good reason for the bad reputation of humor, since laughter takes place by dominating a thing over another or a person over another. This theory proposes that "humor appreciation varies inversely with the favorableness of the disposition toward the agent or the entity being disparaged, and varies directly with the favorableness of the disposition toward the agent or the entity disparaging it" (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976, pp. 100–101). Examples of these jokes are fat jokes, blonde jokes, and the most famous ones, racist jokes. Although people are aware of the effect on the person being mocked, many find these jokes amusing. Keith-Spiegel claims that "According to the principle of superiority, mockery, ridicule, and laughter at the foolish actions of others are central to the humor experience." (1972, pp. 5–6)

The relief theory, on the other hand, focuses on the biology of laughter. It was put forward by Sigmund Freud and Herbert Spencer. It takes its name from the fact that the listener feels a tension at the beginning of the joke, wondering what is coming next, and at the punch line of the joke, he gets a sense of relief as he hears and understands the joke. Sully wrote that "the laughter at what is lawless, and still more at the indecent and the profane,

certainly derives a part of its gusto from a sense of relief from restraint, which is a main ingredient in the enjoyment of all licence" (1902, p. 118). According to Raskin (1985), there are two scenarios. First, the laughter may release some pre-existing nervous energy, or second, the humorous stimulus may itself cause the buildup of nervous energy and then relieve it. The most common use of this theory is the knock-knock joke.

The incongruity theory is the most famous theory nowadays. Kant and Schopenhauer are the fathers of this theory. According to it, the beauty of the jokes comes from the listener's expectations being dashed. Raskin (1985) suggests that the incongruity theories claim that humor arises from the perception of an incongruity between a set of expectations and what is actually perceived. The bigger the surprise, the funnier the joke is. As a result, the superiority theory, the relief theory, and incongruity are usually described as the three "classical" approaches to humor and laughter. (Morreall, 1983; Carpino, 1987)

2. Types of Humor

Humor is shown by the use of different types. Among these, we mention the following:

2.1. Jokes

A joke is defined as something said or done to cause laughter or amusement. Shade (1996) defines a joke as "something said or done that provokes laughter" (p.3). It is a part of humor where words are not taken seriously but are supposed to make people laugh. Jokes are narrated in the form of a story. Aarons (2012) assumes that" jokes work by means of a certain mechanism." (p. 8). In terms of non-native speakers, it is said that they need to be fairly proficient to grasp a linguistic joke in the non-native language. "Jokes are self-contained units that give us information about the nature of language and the nature of the mind that processes it". (Aarons, 2012, p. 5)

Although jokes take the form of both written and spoken words, most jokes are usually in the form of spoken ones. A joke is a display of humor in which words are used within a

specific and well-defined narrative structure to make people laugh and is usually not meant to be taken seriously. Aarons (2012) believes that linguistic jokes are part of linguistic knowledge and the human mind. Unlike language play, jokes are used in interaction. "A joke is taken to be only one of the many narrative forms that a humourous text may assume; thus, the same humourous material can be presented as a joke, as an anecdote, as a short story, or as part of a novel." (Attardo, 1994, p. 228)

2.2. Language Play

It is said that language play is what makes people called humans. Humans cannot be called so if they do not acquire the necessary linguistic skills to create various forms of language play. Language play is a phenomenon used interchangeably with word play to refer to the different manipulations that occur in language for the purpose of amusement. "Language play occurs when people manipulate the forms and functions of language as a source of fun for themselves or for the people they are with." (Crystal, 1996, p.328)

Some people believe that language play has no rules. However, Crystal (1996) contends that language play is governed by rules that differ from those of other language uses. Crystal (1996) explains that "there are special ways of speaking and often special facial expressions to show that an utterance in a conversation is intended as a piece of wordplay." (p. 4). Crystal (1996) adds that "the focus of the wordplay is pronounced in a different way from the other parts of the humorous play to allow the audience to make a response." (p.4) In addition, speakers or comedians never repeat a word play in the same humorous speech.

Language play is of great importance. That is why many scholars in cognitive psychology encourage teaching children how to cope with different language play from a young age. "Playfulness is strongly related to cognitive development and emotional well-being. The mechanisms underlying these relationships appear to involve play's role in the development of linguistic and other representational abilities, and its support for the

development of meta-cognitive and self-regulatory abilities." (Whitebread, 2012, p. 5) "Language learning considers the implications of an understanding of language play for language teaching and learning." (Cook, 2000, p. 6)

2.3. Puns

Partington (2009) defines "pun" as "the bisociative play between two sound sequences" (p. 1794). He adds that "the relationship between the different meanings of the two word sequences... will affect its quality, its success, or failure" (Partington, 2009, p. 1794). A pun is a play on words, sometimes on different senses of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words (The Free Dictionary, 2013). Pun is also known as paronomasia. It indicates that a pun is one of the various types of word play. It makes use of the numerous meanings of a term or similar-sounding words for a comedic, hilarious, or rhetorical impact. Attardo (1994) notes that "though couched in different theoretical frameworks, all linguistic (and non-linguistic) analyses agree on the fact that puns involve two senses." (pp. 127–128). A pun combines language and laughter. Puns are said to be part of word play despite the fact that some researchers, such as Delabastita, consider puns and wordplay replaceable (Delabastita, 1996; Gottlieb, 2005).

The study of puns is a complex one as they come in several types, which allow the arising of certain ambiguities. These ambiguities might occur through the deliberate usage of homophonic, homonymic, homographic, and paronymic terms.

Shade (1996) defines "pun" as "the humorous use of a word so as to suggest a different meaning or application; a play on words. Sometimes a pun plays on words with the same or similar sound but different meaning." (p. 3). A pun is a clever use of wordplay for amusement. Not everyone is able to make a pun. "It has been said that it takes an intelligent person to create a pun and a brave one to use one." (Shade, 1996, p. 3) Puns can be used for a

variety of purposes in both writing and everyday speech, such as generating a rhetorical or funny impact in a piece of work or as an icebreaker.

A pun is a phenomenon consisting of the manipulation of strings of undetermined length, which represents a section of an utterance. Such manipulation consists of an exploitation of phonological processes ordinarily involved in language (Attardo, 2017, pp. 25-26). Attardo (1994) indicates that "beyond the attempts at providing taxonomies of puns, the most significant contribution of structuralist linguistics to the study of puns is to describe the relationship between the two senses involved in a pun." (pp. 127–128) The pun is most minimally described as "a type of joke in which one sound sequence (e.g., a word) has two meanings and this similarity in sound creates a relationship for the two meanings from which humor is derived" (Hempelmann, 2014, p. 612).

Attardo (2017) indicates that "the essential requirement for producing and understanding puns is linguistic knowledge, whether conscious or tacit." (p. 142). A pun is only humorous if both ambiguity and incongruity were provided. Hempelmann (2003) claims that in order to create a pun that is humorous, linguistic ambiguity and incongruity are required. A pun is based on at least two linguistic structures resembling each other in form but have different meanings. They are the cause of ambiguity and humor. Delabastita (1996) translates this in terms of "homonymy (identical sounds and spelling), homophony (identical sounds but different spelling), homography (different sounds but identical spelling), and paronymy (slight differences in spelling and sound)". (p. 128)

The imbiguity alone is not enough to create the humor of a pun. Delabastita (1996) argues that the context is required. "Verbal contexts follow from our expectation of grammatical well-formedness" (p. 129)

According to Nordquist (2013), puns demonstrate the arbitrary nature of language because the same sounds can signify such a wide range of meanings. "Punning can also be

viewed as a test of one's power over other participants in the communicative act."
(Delabatista, 1996, p. 140)

3. Defining Puns

In the common sense, "a pun is a joke misusing the different possible meanings of words." (Corbeil, 1996, p. 95) The term's origins can be traced back to the Greco-Roman period, where it was utilized in oratory. Puns were broadly used by the Romans, the Greeks, and pre-Islamic Arabs to convey humor. "A pun can be defined as a humorous verbalization that has (prototypical) two interpretations couched in purposeful ambiguity of a word or a string of words (collocations or idioms), but conveying different meanings" (Dynel, 2009, p. 1289). "The pun, also called paronomasia, is a form of wordplay which suggests two or more meanings by exploiting multiple meanings of words, or similar-sounding words, for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect." (Marriam Webster Online Dictionary). Geobel (1958) defined puns as "a form of humor that plays off the ambiguity created when two potential meanings of the same word complete within a sentence" (p.7). In the Oxford English Dictionary (2016), a pun is the use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect.

For his part, Pham (2014) defined a pun as "an instance in which structurally or phonetically similar words or phrases having two or more meanings are used in such a way as to simultaneously play on their multiple meanings" (p.28). Partington (2006) described puns as "the creative use of language" (p.110). From a phonetic view, Partington (2009) adds that puns are "the bisociative play between two sound sequences" (p.1794). He also maintains that "the relationship between the two words sequences... will affect its quality, its success, or failure" (Partington, 2009, p. 1794). In the same sense, Koestler (1964) defined the term "pun" as "the dissociation of a single phonetic form with two meanings-two strings of thought tied

together by an acoustic knot" (p.65). The word can be defined as "a deliberate communicative strategy, or the result thereof, used with a specific semantic or pragmatic effect in mind" (Delabastita, 1997, p. 2)

Bergson (2009) considered a "pun" as "a sentence or utterance in which "the same sentence appears to offer two independent meanings, but it is only an appearance; in reality there are two different sentences made up of different words, but claiming to be one and the same because both have the same sound". (p.106)

Newmark (1988) defines a pun as "using a word or two words with the same sound (piece/peace), or a group of words with the same sound (personne alitee) in their two possible senses, usually for the purpose of arousing laughter or amusement, and sometimes to concentrate meanings" (p.217). From a morphological view, Nida (1993) defined a pun as "playing on the meaning and formal resemblance of words (punning) is a universal phenomenon, and in some languages this rhetorical device is extensively encouraged and practiced" (p. 87). Lund (1947) described a pun as "a rehetorical device that often relies on the different meanings of a polysemic word, the literal and non-literal meaning of an idiom, or on bringing two homonyms together in the same utterance to produce witticism" (p. 83).

Puns depend mainly on the "confrontation or clash of two meanings." (Delabastita, 1996, p. 138). In that respect, Attardo (2008) states that" puns involve the presence of (minimally) two senses, but need not involve two "words." The two senses can come about via the interpretation of any string that can come about as a result of syntactic, as well as morphological, ambiguity. "(p.105). One should pay attention that puns "result not only from the confrontation of two (or more) different meanings of an identical or similar string of letters or sounds, but also from the clash between the two (or more) domains of human knowledge and experience" (Delabastita, 1996, p. 138).

4. The Classification of Puns

Puns' classification is based on their spellings, sounds, as well as their meanings. It is worth to mention that puns are divided into two categories. The implicit pun refers to the type of pun where the pun word (homophone, homograph, homonym, paronym) occurs just once in the entire sentence as it tackles two or more meanings. Whereas the explicit pun happens when the pun word occurs two times in the pun where the two different meanings are given. Salzman (1998) states that "for each pun word there may exist a single occurrence of a word or a recurrence of that word" (p.102). Many researchers and scholars developed various pun classifications; however, these are the most common types of puns.

4.1. Homophonic Puns

Homophonic puns play on words that have the same sound or pronunciation but different spellings and meanings (homophones). Ross (1998) stated that "The English language exhibits a lot of examples of homophones, because the spelling system is not based on representing each individual sound with a specific symbol" (p. 9). Leech (1969) states that "homophonic puns occur when words differ in the way they are written; orthographic difference but pronounced alike" (p. 209–210). According to this type, the humorous ambiguity is created by homophones, i.e., the mismatch between the surface meaning (what is obviously introduced in the situation) and the deep meaning (the embedded or hidden meaning conveyed by the pun) depends on similar sounding signs. Consequently, homophonic puns deal mainly with the spoken aspect of the language rather than the written one, i.e., in most cases, homophonic puns are spoken wordplays. And this is why homophonic puns can be regarded as unintentional. However, there are a few cases where this type of pun should be written, such as the following example that is used for further illustration.

Did you hear about the guy whose left side was cut off?

 He's all right now

In this example, the homophonic pun plays on the similarity in sound between the word "Alright" [ɔːlˈraɪt] and the expression "all right" [ˌɔːl] [raɪt] as both have nearly the same pronunciation. however, different connotations; The surface meaning can relate to the word "alright", which means he's fine or okay. However, the intended or deep sense can refer to that he has no left side, just the right one.

4.2. Homonymic Puns

Homonymic puns are considered homonym manipulations. They are words that sound and are spelled the same but have different meanings. Leech (1969) defined homonymic puns as "distinct words which are spelled and pronounced alike" (p. 209–210). According to Klein and Murphy (2001), "homonyms are two different word meanings coverage on the same phonological representation. Or in which a single word diverges into very different meanings "(p. 259). Klein and Murphy use the word "bank" to explain the situation. The word "bank" refers to a financial institution and the sides of the rivers as well. The two homonyms have the same sound and spelling but different meanings. An example of a homonymic pun is to be mentioned:

E.g. Where do fish learn to swim?

They learned from a school.

The ambiguity here is homonym-based. The word "school" has two different meanings; the first one refers to an institution where children are being educated and the second meaning refers to a class of fish.

4.3.Homographic Puns

This type of pun exploits homographs, which are words that are spelled the same but, have different sounds and meanings. In most cases, homographic puns are written rather than spoken, and since they play on the same spelled words, they mislead readers' comprehension as they read the wrong sound. Gottlieb (1997) stated that "the central feature at play is

graphemic ambiguity." (p. 210). A grapheme is a letter or a group of the possible letters that can represent a phoneme. For instance, the phoneme (k) can be written in five ways, which are c, k, ck, qu, ch. Here is an example that was set by Dellabastita where graphemic manipulation is required.

E.g: How the **US** put **US** to shame.

The first US used by Delabastita refers to the United States abbreviation, whereas the second refers to the personal pronoun US. Doubtlessly, the two words have the same spelling but different sounds. That is, the United States abbreviation is pronounced as [Ju:es], whereas the personal pronoun US sounds like [ΛS].

5. The Facilitative Role of Puns in EFL Classrooms

Over the past several decades, researchers and academicians have highlighted the efficacy of the use of humor, in general, and pun, in particular, in EFL classrooms and their function in facilitating the teaching/learning task. The publications of Nancy D. Bell (2007; 2009; 2011; 2017); and Chairo (1992), which have presented arguments for including humor in ESL classrooms, sparked a great demand for puns in EFL classrooms. Teachers, trainers, and even learners have overwhelmingly welcomed the idea of puns' involvement in the EFL classroom for many reasons. Among those reasons:

Research has shown that puns in the classroom can serve as a powerful tool for the teacher to establish a sense of community with learners, improve their attitudes towards the subject, engage students in classroom discussions, and increase their desire for classroom interaction and participation. Moreover, getting students involved in activities such as deciphering puns increases their language awareness, allowing them to broaden their abilities and talents as they experiment with new forms and concepts of language (Bell, 2007). A further benefit of puns in the classroom is that they draw attention to form. This causes students to focus on grammar elements such as morphology and phonology, as well as

prosody elements like intonation and stress. Lems (2011) states that "when English learners learn humorus English words and phrases as part of their language study, it can help their metalinguistic awareness, or conscious awareness of the forms of language; this, in turn, is positively associated with literacy development" (p.197). From a psychological view, puns increase comprehension by promoting a motivational, fun, and stress-free environment in the classroom where students are able to detach affective filters such as stress, anxiety, and lack of motivation. Furthermore, pun intervention in the classroom strengthens memory and makes recalling events easier. Naidu (2014) demonstrated that "it is very easy to recall an event in a humorous context. It creates a cooperative atmosphere, enabling students to help each other." (p. 210)

6. The Problematic of Homographic Puns

Puns are based upon ambiguity. The ambiguity of a homographic pun remains a significant difficulty that existing approaches can not adequately solve. This ambiguity arises from the incongruity of homographic puns. Homographic puns have a long history in human writing, appearing frequently in jokes and other humorous works. They are hardly understood while being read since they play on words that are spelled the same way but have a double meaning. Amusement occurs when a contradiction between the two interpretations is revealed. In order to perceive the humor in homographic puns, the perception of incongruity is required. Incongruity is defined as "a mismatch between two ideas" (Attardo, 1994, p. 27). Understanding humorous passages entails detecting and resolving the incongruity. Forabosco (1992) confirms that "incongruity" theorists claim that incongruity alone is sufficient to generate humor, whereas "incongruity resolution" theorists claim that the incongruity in itself is necessary but not sufficient for the perception of humor and that in order for humor to be perceived, one has to "resolve" the incongruity. Homographic puns contain two associative contexts being transmitted from one to the other at the punchline. This process has to take

place effortlessly, otherwise the joke will be lost. Even if the incongruity is observed, deconstructing it may require a great deal of mental effort held by people with advanced linguistic skills. Less proficient people will face difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns, causing negative outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and insecurity.

Pragmatics is another barrier to the comprehension of homographic puns. Pragmatics is, largely, the study of meaning in interaction (Thomas, 1995, p. 22). According to Attardo (1994), any linguistic element can be ambiguous out of context; hearers select the correct sense of a word based on the context where it occurs (p. 112). Homographic puns' comprehension requires metalinguistic understanding, which many EFL learners and even native speakers do not possess.

Conclusion

Reading is a vital skill that facilitates learning, especially in SLA. The understanding individuals gain from reading a text is known as reading comprehension. It is why we read in the first place. Reading comprehension enables readers to acknowledge the author's intended meaning and information. This understanding requires awareness of the cultural foundations of the language being learnt. One of these foundations is humor. Our sense of humor is profoundly founded in our identity, culture, and shared worldview. Puns are considered the most used category of humor. It has been discovered that homographic puns, in particular, are regarded as a positive quality that is linked to positivity and emphasizes the significance of puns, which helps reduce negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, and shyness and prepares a stress-free environment.

<center>**Chapter Two**</center>

<center>**The Field of Study**</center>

Introduction

This chapter is designed to analyze the findings obtained through investigating the comprehension difficulties first and third-year English students at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University come across when reading homographic puns. The practical part of our study is devoted to the explanation of the sample chosen and illustrates the description, administration, and analysis of the students' test. Since students are important to this study, their answers are crucial to testing the stated hypothesis. Our aim in conducting this study is to confirm or disconfirm our hypothesis.

Section One: Data Collection

1. Population and Sampling

The informants to whom the survey was presented consisted of two separate sets of LMD students at the department of English at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University during the academic year of 2021–2022. Test group one consisted of 30 students, first year licence, representing the average learner of English. While Test Group Two consisted of 30 third-year licence students representing advanced learners of English. Unlike test group one, students at this level are supposed to encounter a certain level of linguistic knowledge and comprehension skills. This group thus represented students with greater proficiency in English and greater pragmatic and linguistic competence. When the data had been compiled, the results from the two test groups were compared and analysed, the variable being proficiency. The students' sample was chosen from the whole population. In order to give each member a similar chance of being selected, our sample was randomly selected.

2. Means of the Research

The term "research" refers to a process of gathering facts in order to solve a specific problem that begins with a questioning of reality. Many elements go into producing accurate and valid data, but choosing the right research method is perhaps the most crucial. The test was used as the primary technique for data collection in this study. "A test is a method of measuring person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain." (Brown, 2004, p. 3). Our test is presented in a written form to measure students' reading comprehension of the 10 homographic puns.

3. Data Collection Procedures

This is a qualitative research where 60 participants were asked to explain 10 homographic puns according to their own understanding. It was collected during the exam period. Fortunately, students were kind enough to take their time answering our test.

Section Two : Data Analysis and Results

1. Method of analysis

The test's outcomes were qualitatively examined. The responses were open-ended. The qualitative data focused on words, descriptions, concepts, and ideas of students in order to test their reading comprehension of the ten homographic puns submitted. The grounded theory was used to analyze the self-collected primary data. This theory is a productive technique for qualitative analysis where the goal is to develop a new hypothesis or theories from the available data through a sequence of experiments and modifications. The survey was direct. It included areas for comments and thoughts concerning the ten expressions. However, it omitted inquiries into the students' educational and cultural backgrounds as well as their perceptions of whether or not they found the terms humorous.

2. Students' test

2.1. Description of the students' test

The students test is made up of ten expressions. An example of homographic puns is represented by each expression. The order of the ten homographic puns is random. They look into what the students have understood from the ten expressions. The fact that these expressions are homographic puns and are meant to be humorous is not mentioned to the students.

2.2. The analysis of the students' test results

We concider first-year licence students as group A and third-year licence as group B.

Expression No 01

" I used to be a banker but i lost interest"

**Figure 01: Data Collected From Expression One**
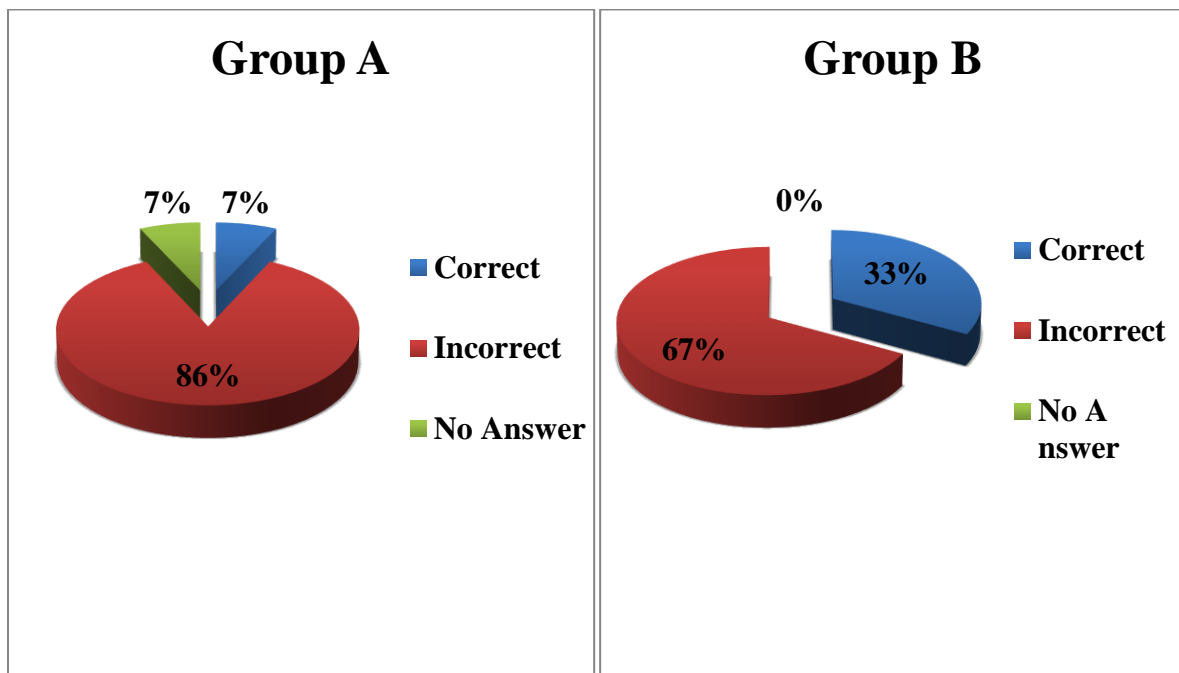
This example is a homographic pun that transposes the word " interest". The first meaning of this word refers to the act of caring about someone or something, while the second meaning evokes the extra money a person gets for leaving his/her money in the bank (bonus). The two meanings can be understood from the context. The first meaning can be easily

captured as a student reads the word. However, the second meaning can only be understood if the student makes a link between the word "interest" and the context where it is used, which, in this case, is the bank. The ambiguity in this example is caused by the incongruous meanings of the term "interest". If the incongruity was not captured, the homographic pun would not be comprehended and the humor would be lost.

This expression was the only one that received an answer from all members of group B. According to the results of Group B, a large number of students (67%) did not understand that the example has two meanings and only explained it in terms of the first. While 33% of students explained the example closely to the original explanation, which combines the two meanings. Group A, on the other hand, showed little appreciation for the expression; only 7% of students understood the homographic pun, and 86% of others did not. In addition, 7% of respondents chose not to respond. This group was less amused than group B.

Expression No 02

"If you burn the candle from both the ends, you are not as bright as you think."

Figure 02: Data Collected From Expression Two
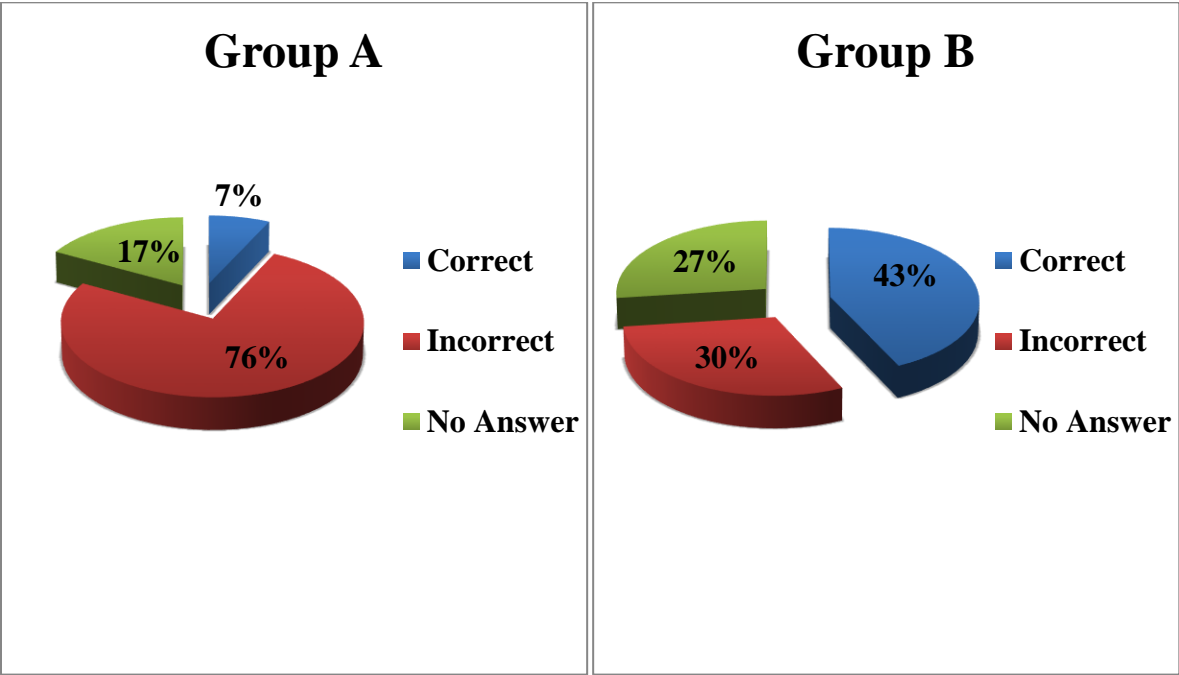
This homographic pun plays on the word " bright". The level of ambiguity is low since almost everyone is aware that the term "bright" has two meanings. The first meaning describes a person's level of intelligence or smartness, but the second alludes to anything being more shiny. Unfortunately, the majority of students were unable to comprehend the incongruity in the statement. Maybe, this is due to the fact that they concentrated on the commonly used idiom "burn the candle from both ends". Nearly all participants explained it as giving your full attention to two activities at once or completing multiple tasks at a time. Others said it means exerting yourself without taking a break. Another explanation was that this person lacks intelligence since the candle will be completed or finished sooner than usual.

Students from group B were lucky enough to comprehend the statement. 43% explained the homographic pun with respect to both meanings. 30% did not understand it. while 27% remained neutral. On the other hand, group A displayed limited comprehension, with a percentage of only 7% appearing to understand the homographic pun and a high percentage of 76% not getting it. While 17% kept from answering.

Expression No 03

"Always trust a glue salesman. They tend to stick to their words."

Figure 03: Data Collected From Expression Three

Group A | **Group B**

Group A: 7% Correct, 56% Incorrect, 37% No Answer

Group B: 23% Correct, 50% Incorrect, 27% No Answer
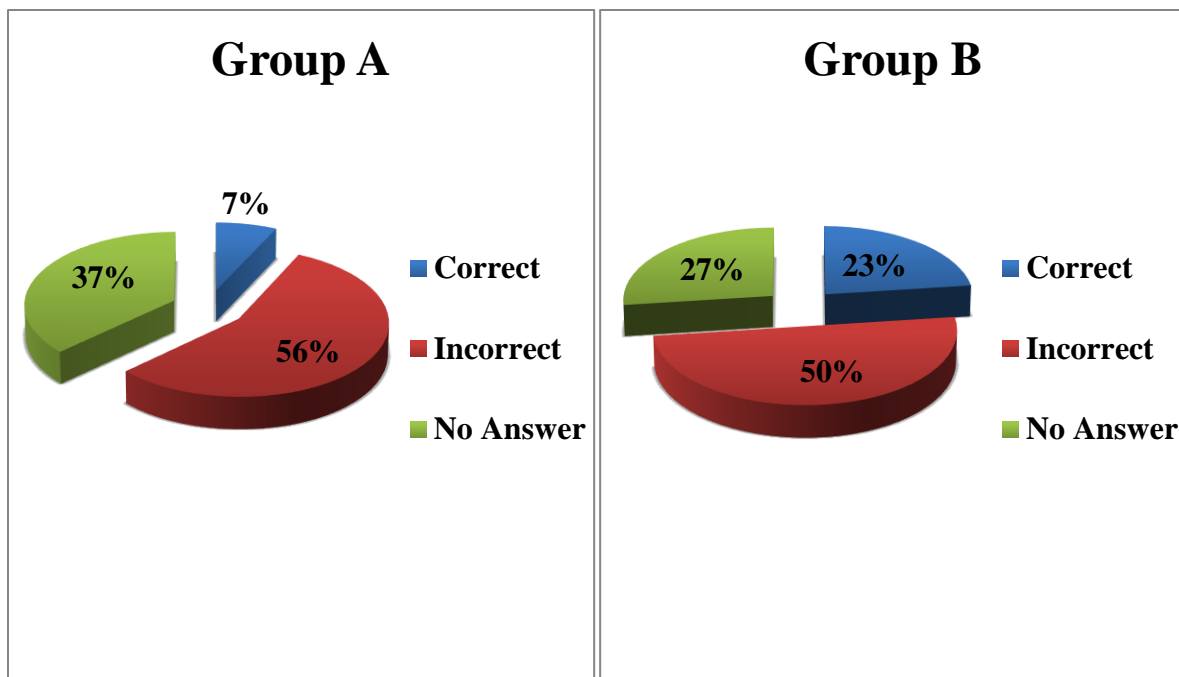
This homographic pun plays on the word " stick". The effect of this pun is realised through the two incongruous features. The previous term should be linked to the glue salesman in order for the pun to be comrehended and for the humor to be felt. Two concepts can be extracted here. The first meaning held by the expression "stick to their words" refers to a glue salesperson always keeping his/her words, decisions, principles, and not changing what has been previously said or decided. The second meaning allows us to think of words as physical objects a person can stick to or be linked to. It implies that glue salesmen actually stick while selling glue, making reference to the nature of their job.

This expression is one of the simplest homographic puns to understand. However, this example received little attention from learners, especially those in first year. Consequently, it is difficult to pinpoint the precise challenge with this homographic pun. The results obtained from group B illustrate that half of the participants did not get the pun. About 27% of the students did not even attempt to describe it, which led us to believe that they were having trouble understanding the entire pun or certain terms in particular. A little percentage of 23% of third year students were able to get the full idea of the pun. When they examined the pun and realized that the word "stick" had two meanings, they described it in terms of both its

obvious and hidden implications. Group A also did not seem to express much admiration, with only 7% getting both meanings and showing appreciation for the humor. 56% were far from the exact description of the homographic pun. The 37% left declined to respond.

Expression No 04

"My wife claims I'm the cheapest person she's ever met. I'm not buying it."

Figure 04: Data Collected From Expression Four
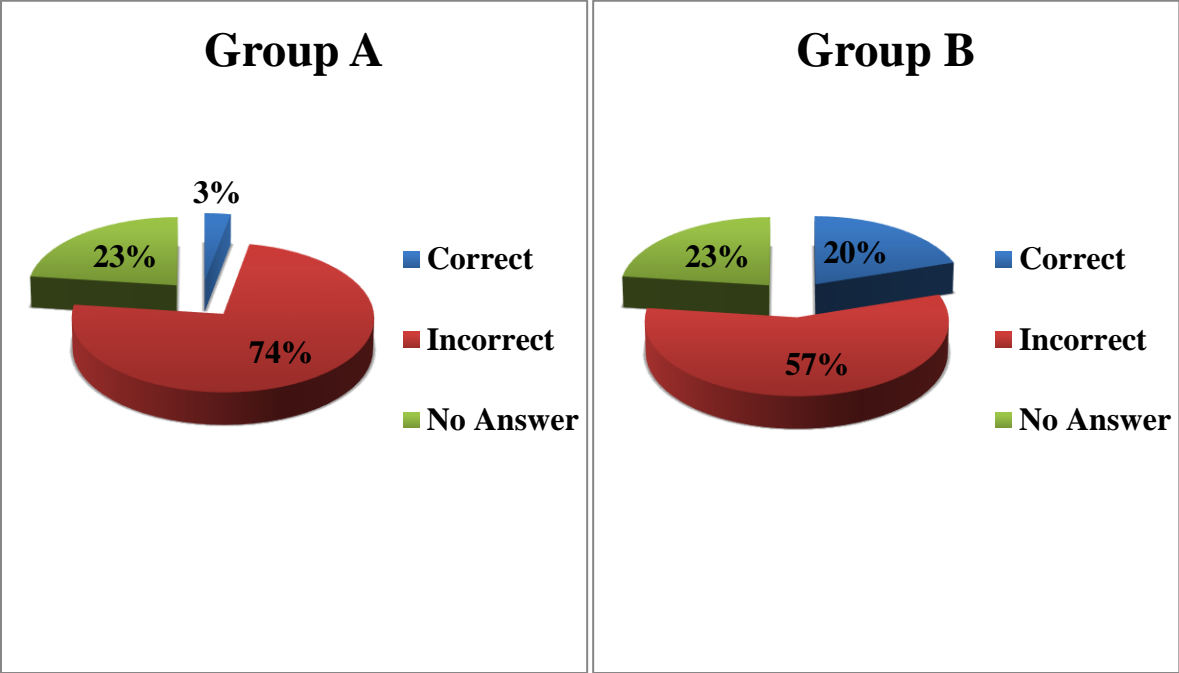
This illustration uses the word "buying" as the basis for a homographic pun. The first indication of the word refers to accepting a particular truth, while the second indication represents the act of purchasing something in exchange for an amount of money. The two features are incongruous and have to be carefully analysed. A few answers among the students' explanations were pretty different from what the expression entails. We recall the following: Some people believe that the woman is thinking that her husband acts in a wrong manner, does not buy what she wants, or makes her feel unvaluable. While others think that the couple are mocking one another. A really interesting answer was that the word "cheap" refers to the man's behaviour towards his wife. This leads us to assume that they realized there was a play of words. In contrast, some examples where participants responded in

accordance with both the surface and the deep meaning were, to a certain extent, good. The ones understanding the deep meaning translated "buying" as the act of obtaining, gaining, or owning something.

Only 20% of the participants of group B seemed to provide answers that appeared to be related to the homographic pun mentioned above, revealing a poor degree of comprehension. The statement's potential explanation triggered 57% of academics, which is a significant number for third-year students. Group A did not perform better. Only 3% of students got the homographic pun. 74% were explaining it emotionally; the woman hates her husband, she could find a better and richer person, etc. The same percentage of 23% for both test groups refused to give the statement a try.

Expression No 05

"Sleeping comes so naturally to me I can do it with my eyes closed."

Figure 05: Data Collected From Expression Five
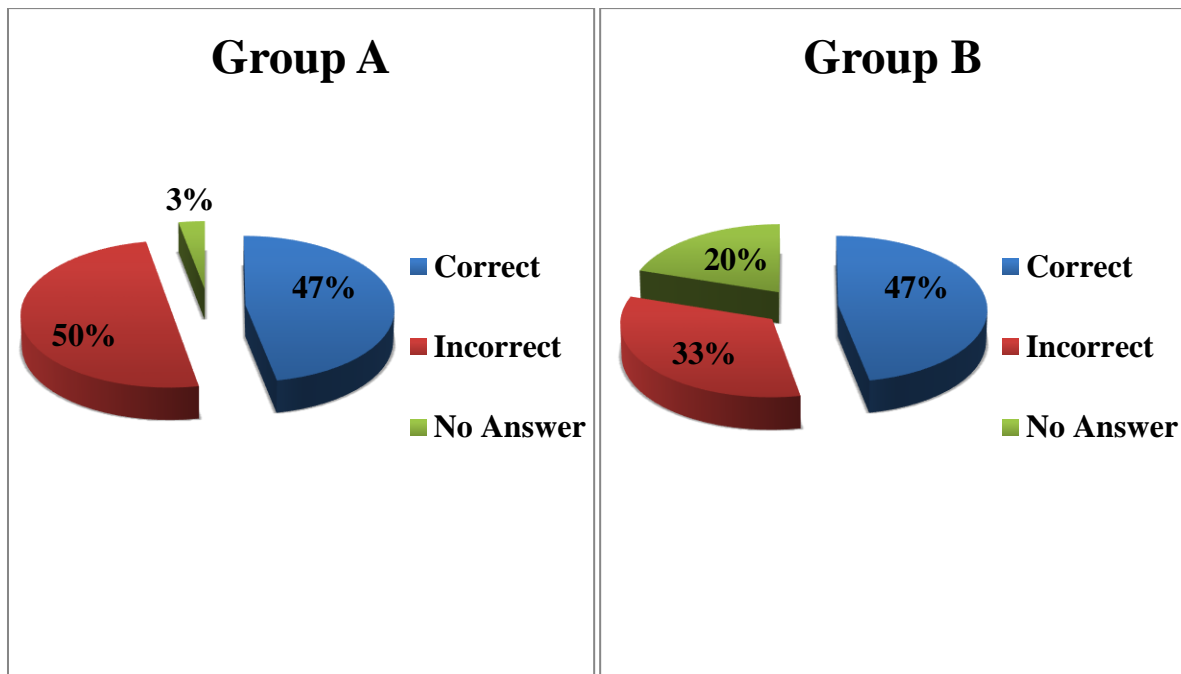
The duality of the current homographic pun is obvious in the use of the phrase "eyes closed". This example was pretty easy for students to comprehend. We have observed that it is hardly possible to distinguish which of the phrase's two meanings is the deep meaning and

which is the surface meaning. That is why the informants did not face difficulties in transcribing the phrase "eyes closed". Everyone goes to sleep at some point. Everybody is aware that sleeping occurs with closed eyes. The act of falling asleep or napping might be interpreted as the first meaning, which is connected to "sleeping". The additional meaning was linked to the term "naturally". It was described as a simple and natural thing to do. Many individuals claim that it connotes the idea that someone is so exhausted that falling asleep happens unintentionally. The incongruity in this case was revealed more easily in comparison to the other expressions.

The sample demonstrated an expected level of appreciation for the homographic pun, which was well-distributed among the two test groups in terms of understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment. 47% of students in group B provided justifications using both concepts. Some of them even commented on how "funny" they found the homographic pun to be. The homographic pun and the amusement it provided could be understood by the same 47% of group A members. 33% of group B participants did not get one of the two meanings but were able to convey a close explanation to the intended one. 20% remained silent. Half the group A volunteers did not get the point of the homographic pun, whereas 3% kept from providing an answer.

Expression No 06

"It does not matter how kind you are Germen children are always kinder".

Figure 06: Data Collected From Expression Six

36

Group A

10%
40%
50%

- Correct
- Incorrect
- No Answer

Group B

10%
33%
57%

- Correct
- Incorrect
- No Answer
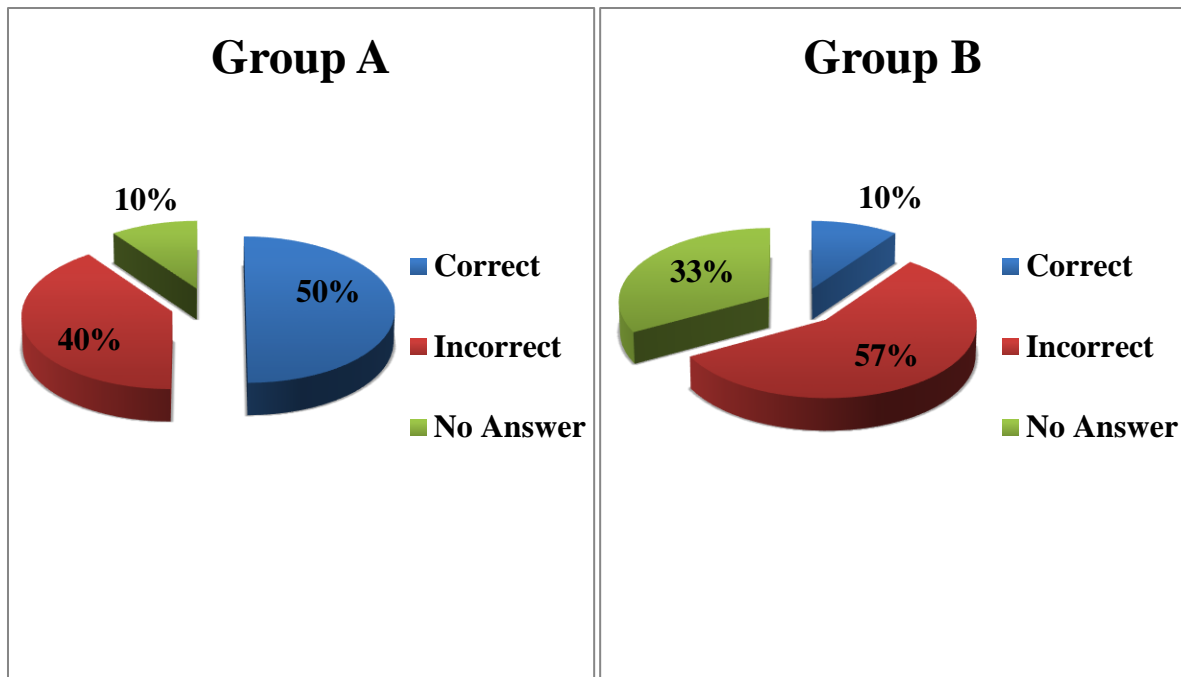
This is a language homographic pun that plays on the meanings' duality of the pun word "kinder" in both the English and German languages. The surface meaning can be related to the English language, where kinder is an adjective that means "having or showing a friendly, generous, sympathetic, or worm-hearted nature" (the Free dictionary). In Deutsch language, "kinder" refers to children, and it represents a deep meaning. Doubtlessly, incongruity is created by the word "kinder," which has the same spelling yet different sounds and meanings. So, it tricks the reader into reading the homographic word in the wrong manner. For the humor to be felt, the pun decipherer should link the term "kinder" to the word "German", put it in its appropriate context, and make an inference.

As it was expected, the results obtained from this example show an acceptable level of comprehension from group A. Out of 50%, which represents half the volunteer number, immediately perceived the two possible senses of this expression. We have also noticed that although some students did not offer relevant explanations, they succeeded in identifying the word "kinder" in the German contextual meaning. Since most of them took classes in German at high school just a year ago, the students' background knowledge was still activated. While 40% of the respondents did not get the right meaning behind this language play and clarified

it according to the literal meaning. 10% prefer silence. On the other hand, the answers of Group B represent that only 10% show some appreciation for this pun. A considerable number of 57% of respondents' answers were irrelevant. 33% did not try to answer.

Expression No 07

What do you get from a pampered cow?

Spoiled milk

Figure 07: Data Collected From Expression Seven
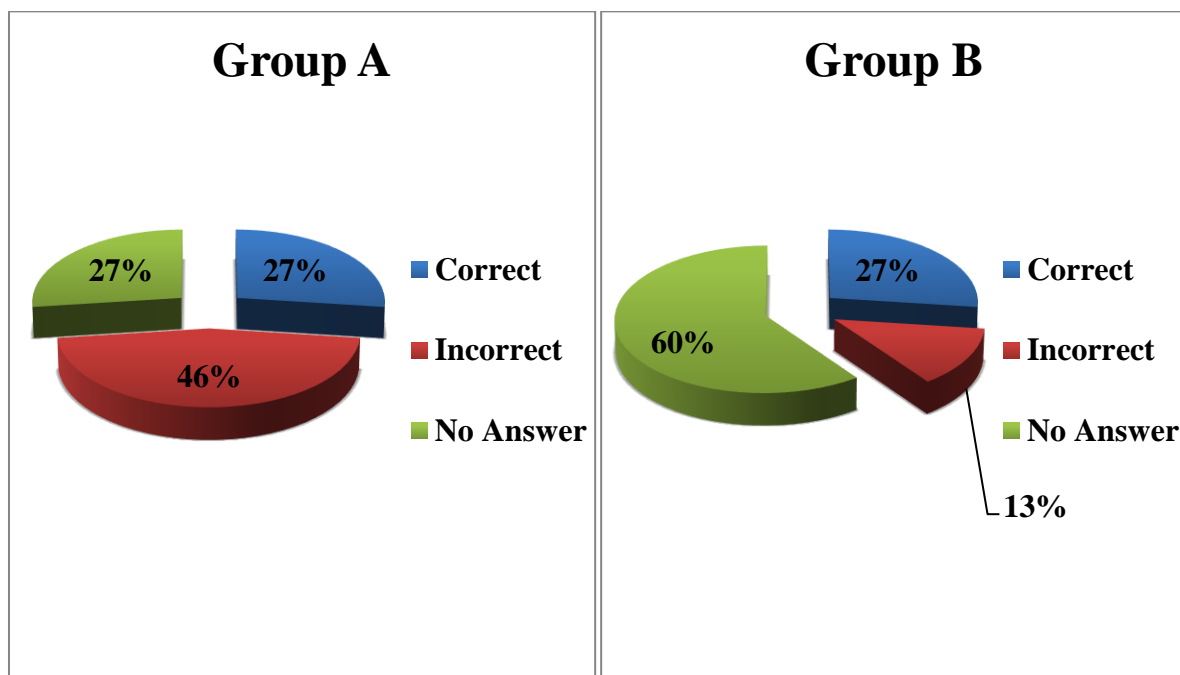
In this homographic pun, incongruity is caused by the two competing senses of the word "spoiled." The most obvious sense of the word can mean to lose freshness or to turn sour, which refers to the first context that is written. However, the second meaning the word "spoiled" conveys is to be harmed in character by being treated too leniently or indulgently. It represents the contextual meaning. In order to perceive incongruity, which is an essential feature in the humor perception of this pun, being able to decipher it is crucial. The reader should grasp the pun word "spoiled" in its different possible meanings and make a connection to the context in which it is being used.

Based on our results, this expression shows a kind of high percentage of group B students not understanding the hidden incongruent meaning behind the text, where 46% focus on explaining the most obvious sense that is presented through written language. 27% of the same group shows appreciation for the intended interpretation of the pun. Whereas the other 27% left it empty. Similarly, Group A shows low comprehension of the expression, with only 27% understanding the meaning behind this expression. 13% of students did not understand the homographic pun. Moreover, the results show a total of 60% of students who choose not to answer.

Expression No 08

What was the reporter doing at the ice cream shop?

He was getting the scoop.

**Figure 08: Data Collected From Expression Eight**
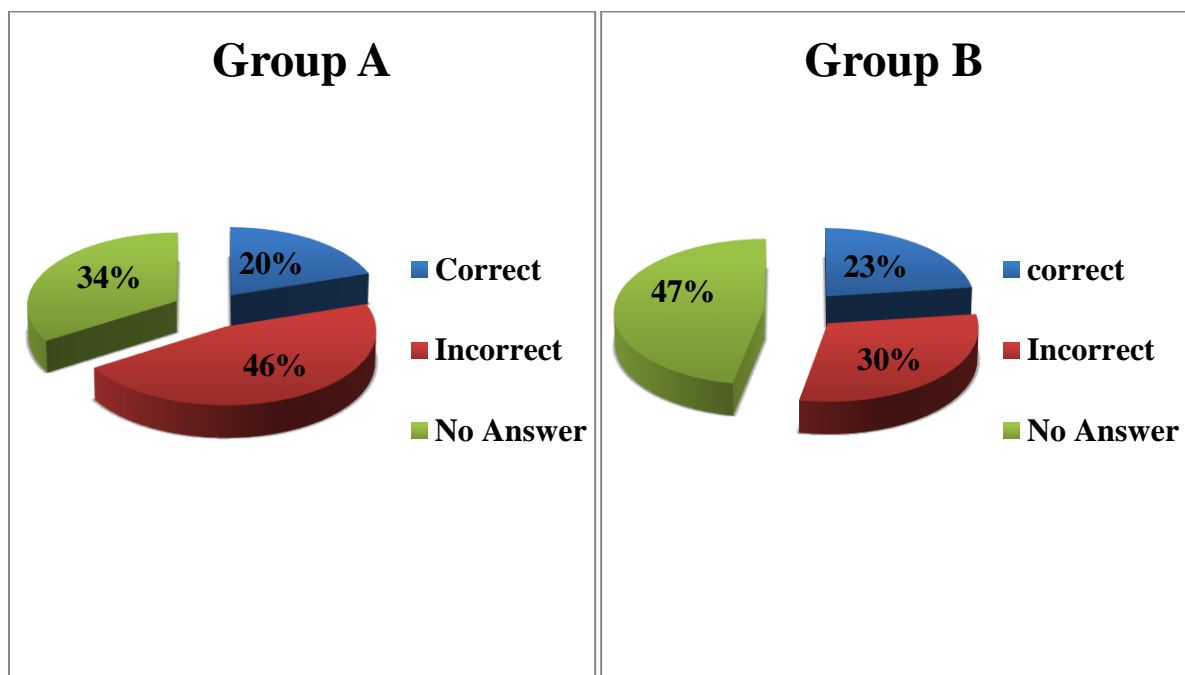
The above homographic pun plays on the two possible meanings of the word "scoop": the breaking news or an object such as a spoon which is used for picking up a quantity of food such as ice cream. The first script of this pun is that the reporter was looking for the latest news in the ice cream shop. The second script, however, is activated when the reader is either

in possession of the word's "scoop" second meaning or when making a link between the word and the situation where it is being used. The contextual meaning of this expression confirms that the reporter went to the ice cream shop to get an ice cream scoop. Consequently, these two possible interpretations of the same phrase can cause incongruity, which is a salient feature in humor perception.

This expression has received approximately similar results by test groups A and B, where 20% of group A students grasp the right meaning of this homographic pun and interpret it according to its pragmatic meaning. On the other hand, 46% did not grasp the intended meaning of the statement. 34% of the participants chose not to respond.

Group B shows a high percentage of respondents not getting the right meaning behind this homographic pun, with 23% of the total number of respondents not getting the joke. 30% of students did not understand the expression, while 47% did not answer at all.

Expression No 09

"I couldn't quite remember how to throw a boomerang but eventually it come back to me".

Figure 09: Data Collected From Expression Nine

Group A | Group B
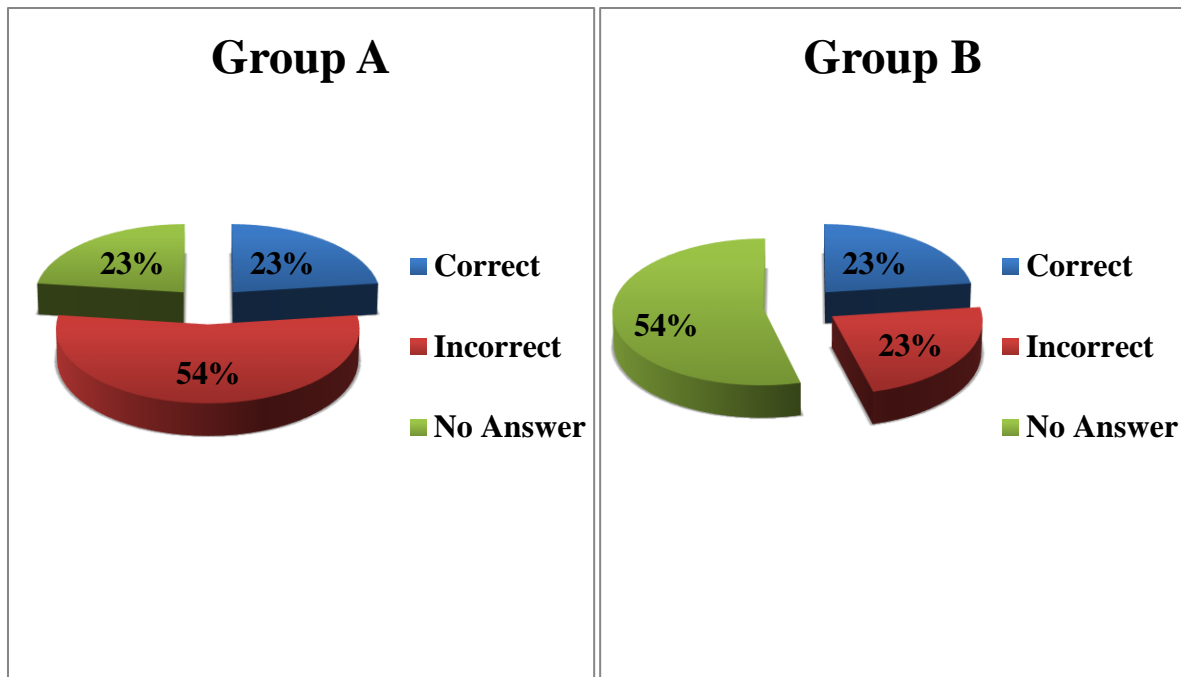
The clue in this homographic pun is the word "comeback," which has two possible meanings. The word "comeback"'s literal meaning in this sentence can be to return, whereas the pragmatic or contextual meaning referred to is to remember. Many of our respondents interpret this pun as it follows: the boomerang comes back quickly, the boomerang always comes back, the boomerang comes and goes. This drives us to think that our participants did not perceive the humor conveyed in the expression since they did not notice the duality of language presented and that what comes back to the thrower is the idea of how to throw a boomerang, not the boomerang itself.

This illustration displayed low comprehension across both test groups. Yet, not to the same extent; 23% of first-year students provide relevant answers that reflect their appreciation of the pun. A total of 54% fail in predicting the intended meaning, while the other 23% choose to not share their thoughts with us. Third-year students were no better than group A, in which only 23% got the meaning. A similar number of 23% got the wrong answer, whereas a large number of 54% did not even try to answer.

Expression No 10

"I am reading a book about anti-gravity. It's impossible to put down"

Figure 10: Data Collected From Expression Ten
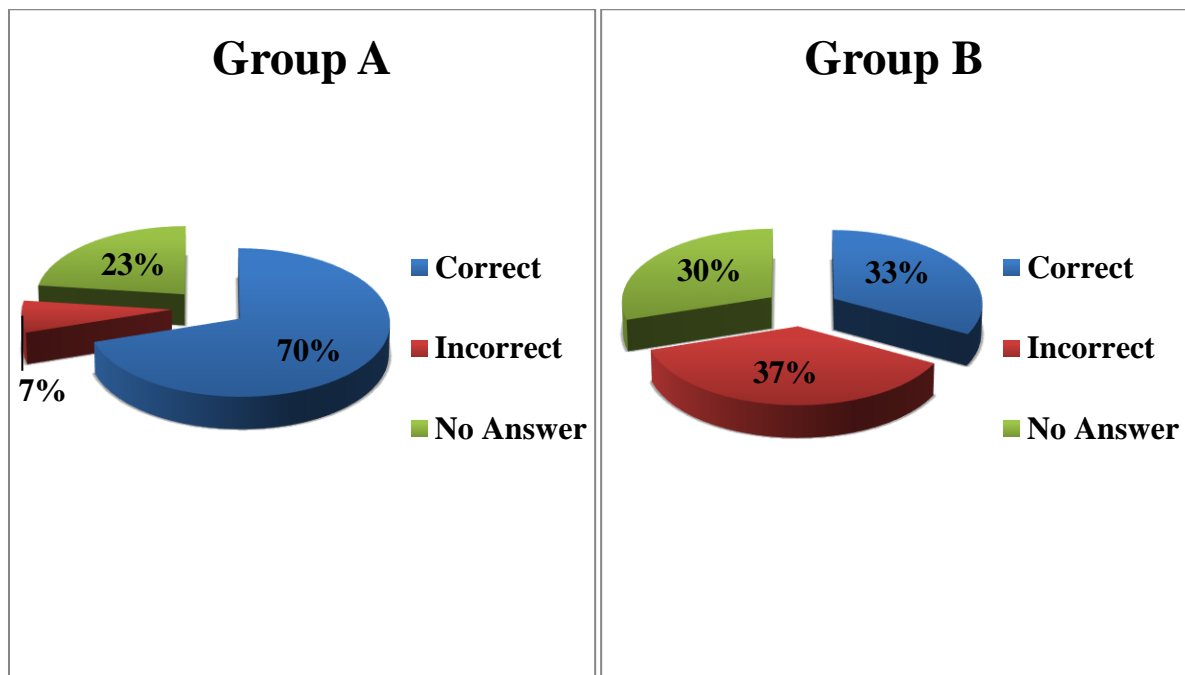
In order to create incongruity, the punster utilizes the expression "impossible to put down" in different interpretations. This pun has two possible senses. The most obvious sense is "I am unable to place it on the surface" (because of anti-gravity), while the hidden incongruent meaning referes to is that "the book is so good that I can't stop reading it. This homographic pun represents one of the easiest puns since the use of words involved is simple and clear.

The results received from our participants were kind of satisfying, especially from group A, where these expression results represent the highest percentage of students' understanding of the whole test. A total of 70% of students explained the expression with regards to both contexts. Some students' answers were worth mentioning, such as this one: I can't stop reading this book because it is so attractive and anti-gravity is the subject of the book. In addition, we get a range of answers that were all acceptable: the book is so interesting that I cannot close it; the reader loves the book; that's why he couldn't put it down from his hands; the book is attractive; etc. A very low number of volunteers (7%) did not get

the right meaning, while 23% kept from answering. The same homographic pun was understood by 33% of Group B students, whereas 37% failed to obtain the contextual meaning. 30% of respondents chose not to answer.

2.3. Discussion of the Students' Test Results

Upon analyzing the data received from the test, the results were kind of disappointing and, at the same time, unexpected. The level of comprehension held by Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University students was clearly lower than it should be, especially third-year students, who are considered advanced learners and were expected to show more appreciation for the expressions provided. After getting a closer look at the answers of both test groups, carefully analysing them and comparing the two groups' responses, it is clear that there are different factors that can influence the perception of homographic puns. The data demonstrated that advanced learners understand homographic puns better, with the exception of examples 6 and 10, where a large number of first-year volunteers recognized the homographic pun, whereas third-year students struggled with the incongruity of the homographic pun. The findings proved what we did not predict. That is, homographic puns are not solely accessible to advanced learners; rather, there are other aspects affecting the process. As a result, we can conclude that reading comprehension difficulties are not limited to pragmatic and linguistic issues. It was discovered that most students failed to resolve the ambiguity in the statements.

After carefully examining the results, we draw the conclusion that the biggest obstacle FL learners encountered is that they were unaware of the aim of our study. They were instructed to explain the expressions without paying attention to their nature (homographic puns). They did not know that they are intended to be humorous. It was presumed that the pun examples would make the students amused and laugh. In contrast, the test increased stress for students since they struggled to understand most expressions and were unsure of how to explain them. This proves the claim that there are levels of linguistic representation that are

largely subconscious unless users are made aware of them. The ability to recognize ambiguity depends on implicit language knowledge. Consequently, learners mostly benefit from these structures in their L1 rather than in L2. That is why English NS acquire better understanding when it comes to homographic puns. This has been confirmed by the primary analysis, which demonstrates that students had trouble understanding both playscripts used in the puns.

Another difficulty is a lack of vocabulary. The majority of student informants questioned the meaning of certain terms and inquired about using technology to look up the definitions of particular words or to check how certain expressions are explained on Google. Obviously, technology plays a significant role in the volunteers' daily lives. Only a limited number of people were lucky enough to discover that each statement had two scripts. The same members consistently understood the incongruity of each homographic pun. Most people could understand the first script, but few could even recognize the second. A considerable number of English department students do not read much. People who understand the hidden message are unable to verbalize it. This is due to a lack of vocabulary.

Translation is another factor affecting homographic puns' detection. Some students requested that the expressions be translated into their native language. This was not beneficial in that puns are frequently rendered untranslatable, at least in terms of faithful translation. In fact, it is fairly difficult to translate a pun into the target language (TL) using the same lexicon as the source language (SL).

Bearing in mind that the test was submitted to learners during the exam period, students had difficulties concentrating on answering the test. This is clearly shown in the results analysed where a significant number of students chose not to give the expressions a try and left the passage empty. Some students were sad because they did not perform well on the exam, while others showed excitement and enjoyed the puns as they comprehended them.

This indicates that psychological well-being plays a fair role in the data collection and the results.

Language is culture and culture is language. Without consideration of its culture, learning a language is essentially impossible. We have previously mentioned that NS understand homographic puns better. This is due to the fact that they make reference to the cultural and contextual usage of the pun and are fully aware of it. In addition, L2 learners are challenged because puns cannot be translated to the L1 keeping the same lexeme and without changing the conveyed meaning. A few volunteers told us that they were interested in American and British culture, both of which are English-speaking countries. They were able to understand and enjoy the puns. Comprehending a certain aspect of a language requires understanding the speech community's culture.

Given that homographic puns are a type of language play in which a word has two meanings, pragmatic knowledge is crucial for spotting them. "Pragmatics is, largely, the study of meaning in interaction." (Thomas, 1995, p. 22). Even for native speakers, pragmatics is reportedly difficult. Many EFL students lack pragmatic knowledge, which is why they are unable to detect both the surface and the deeper meaning.

Another aspect that affects the reading comprehension of homographic puns is the linguistic problems. They are classified into three categories: lexical problems, syntactic problems, and semantic problems. Our informants have lexical issues which are concerned with the understanding of specific words or phrases. Despite only being clearly seen in context, these issues remain regardless of it. They also failed to connect the homographic puns' elements. The structural relationships between words or phrases are at the center of syntactic issues; they are frequently expressed semantically (i.e., in ambiguity). The semantic complexities are raised by the nature of it. It concerns how utterances are perceived, specifically how we interpret combinations of speech sounds (words).

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter represents the practical framework of our study. Our research investigates the students' difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns. The case of first and third-year licence students at the department of English at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University-Jijel. The first section of the practical part dealt with the presentation of the sample and population, the means of the research, and the data collection procedures. The second section was dedicated to the data analysis and results. In this part, we discussed the method of analysis of the survey's outcomes. Next, we gave a deep description of the students' test, which consists of 10 homographic puns. After that, in the analysis of the students' test results, we wanted to fill in any weaknesses and determine the types of challenges those students experienced, so the test data was analyzed, reviewed, and given careful consideration to every detail in each of the ten expressions. This chapter sets out to answer the research questions (RQ) posed at the outset of this project and to confirm or reject the claim that homographic puns are better understood by advanced learners. The discussion of the results took place based on the findings. The test outcomes prove our hypothesis. Indeed, homographic puns were better understood by third-year licence students. Furthermore, as compared to third-year students, first-year students' outcomes weren't all that poor. Finally, the followings show how students have difficulty understanding homographic puns when reading: Students are not exposed to such expressions. Students are held to a restricted list of vocabulary items. They heavily rely on technology and translation. The psychological impact on students as well as the different cultural and contextual barriers are crucial factors in how homographic puns are perceived. It is also crucial to have linguistic and pragmatic understanding.

Recommendations

As going through this study and considering the findings of the research, a number of suggestions may be made regarding the successful reading comprehension of homographic puns by Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University students. First, homographic puns are humorous statements that capitalize on a word's ambiguity and play on its incongruity. If students were exposed to the various language plays such as idioms and proverbs, this ambiguity might be clarified. The use of amusing wordplay in educational contexts may help students learn more effectively and increase their level of reading comprehension. The curriculum would be more enjoyable if students could learn in a relaxed, stress-free environment that is distinguished by language diversity and humanism. Second, reading comprehension of homographic puns can be successfully done if students read a lot. Despite its importance, the curriculum appears to overlook reading. Reading passages could help overcome students' vocabulary weaknesses and enrich their list of terminologies. Reading, of course, should not be random. Students ought to read literature that would improve their understanding of a foreign language. This would increase their cultural awareness. Culture is everywhere; every literary work that reflects many aspects of everyday English life exposes culture. Third, pragmatics should be given much significance. It helps students succeed academically by helping them comprehend the various meanings of utterances, comprehend the forms and functions of language employed in various contexts, and overcome linguistic difficulties. In fact, it would be preferable if pragmatics were taught as a discipline at the university level. Additionally, students can keep up with the most recent and cutting-edge language learning techniques to advance their linguistic abilities.

Limitations of the Study

The present work adds extra insights to the research field, but every study has its limitations. The sample is the first drawback. The sample's profile and attitude were more of a challenge than the sample size in comparison to the entire population. The statistics showed

that the academic level of first- and third-year students were extremely similar. Plus, while some students were incredibly generous and friendly, others behaved rudely. Many students made promises to complete their tests at home without using any cheating methods and return the test papers the following day; however, most of them frequently broke those promises. Ironically, they were escaping when they saw us. Another limitation concerns the data collection procedures. Our data was gathered during an examination period, which had an impact on the informants' responses, marking that a large number refused to answer. Additionally, since the results were obtained using a written test only, we were unable to observe the students' reactions to the test. We could not confirm if they found the homographic puns humorous or not, although a few students mentioned their entertainment while reading them.

General Conclusion

This study was set out to investigate EFL students' difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic puns. Our purposes in this research paper are to test the claim that homographic puns are best reserved for the most advanced students and to investigate the difficulties faced by EFL learners in understanding written homographic puns. Our hypothesis was put to the test via a survey that would either support or refute it.It consists of ten homographic puns that were presented randomly to first-and third-year students in the English department at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University and asked for their interpretations. The data analysis supported our assumption that students in both test groups had significant difficulties understanding the homographic puns that were provided; comprehension levels were mostly lower than anticipated, and the results from the two groups were not considerably different.

This work, formulating a link between reading comprehension and homographic puns, started with a theoretical account of the study where both the study skill of reading and reading comprehension were discussed since reading alone is pointless. It gave insights into the different reading techniques, reading comprehension skills, and difficulties. The second section was dedicated to humor and homographic puns. It tackled humor and its several types, along with the definition and classification of puns. It also looked at the role of puns in EFL classrooms and the issue of homographic puns. The practical framework of the study tend to investigate the hypotheses. The qualitative data were analyzed into pie charts and carefully examined, followed by a description, and then compared between the responses of the two test groups and the original ones.

After the careful analysis and the discussion of findings, the results show that students' difficulties in the reading comprehension of homographic are due to their limited exposure to language play forms, especially homographic puns; lack of vocabulary; reliance on

technology and translation; mental and cognitive effects; cultural and contextual challenges; and linguistic and pragmatic knowledge.

The current study paves the way for additional investigation into the significance of homographic pun reading comprehension for EFL learners. Future studies may therefore focus on identifying remedies to the problems revealed by our study in order to increase EFL learners' appreciation of written homographic puns. Another noteworthy point is that this kind of puns can be used in EFL classrooms as a tactic to improve students' learning outcomes and increase their motivation.

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Appendix

Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia University-Jijel

Department of English

Master 2 Test

Dear students,

This test is a part of research endeavor whose aim is to gather information. The latter will be used to explain the aim of our investigation. You are kindly requested to explain the following statements to the best of your knowledge.

We would be very grateful if you give us the time and energy to answer. Your answers are crucial for the validity of our present research and your cooperation is highly appreciated.

It is important to bear in mind that your answers will be treated anonymously and used just for the purpose of research. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Miss: Bellah Ferial

Miss: Guendouz Nassima

Expression No 01

❖ I used to be a banker but I lost interest.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………..

Expression No 02

❖ If you burn the candle from both the ends you are not as bright as you think.

➢ ……………………………………………………………….......................
....
....

Expression No 03

❖ Always trust a glue salesman. They tend to stick to their words.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………….

Expression No 04

❖ My wife claims I'm the cheapest person she's ever met. I'm not buying it.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………….

Expression No 05

❖ Sleeping comes so naturally to me I could do it with my eyes closed.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………….....

Expression No 06

❖ It doesn't matter how kind you are. German children are always kinder.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………

Expression No 07

❖ What do you get from a pampered cow?

Spoiled milk

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………

Expression No 08

❖ What was the reporter doing at the ice cream shop?

He was getting the scoop.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………….....

Expression No 09

❖ I couldn't quite remember how to throw a boomerang but eventually it came

back to me.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Expression No 10

❖ I'm reading a book about antigravity. It's impossible to put it down.

➢ …………………………………………………………………………………

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…………………………………………………………………………………..

Thank you for your participation.

Résumé

Le travail présent tente d'enquêter les difficultés des étudiants d'ALE lors de la compréhension d'écrit des calembours homographiques. Cette étude a été menée au département d'anglais de l'Université Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia. Il se concentre sur l'identification des difficultés rencontrées par les apprenants d'ALE dans la compréhension d'écrit des calembours homographiques. L'hypothèse de recherche suppose que les calembours homographiques ne sont accessibles qu'aux apprenants avancés. Pour tester la validité de cette hypothèse, un test d'étudiants comprenant 10 calembours homographiques a été conçu et accordé avec la demande d'expliquer les expressions. L'échantillon était composé de 30 étudiants de première année et de 30 étudiants de troisième année. Les résultats ont confirmé l'hypothèse, avec les étudiants de troisième année qu'on a jugée d'être des étudiants avancés du niveau, performent mieux que les étudiants de première année qui ont moins d'expérience. Les résultats ont également révélé que les difficultés des apprenants ALE dans la compréhension d'écrit des calembours homographiques sont causées par les problèmes de vocabulaire, obstacles culturels et contextuels, et les limitations des compétences linguistiques et pragmatiques.

ملخص

يعمل هذا البحث على التحقيق في الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب عند قراءة و فهم التورية المتجانسة. أجريت هذه الدراسة بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة محمد الصديق بن يحيى. ركزنا فيها على تحديد الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في الفهم القرائي للتورية المتجانسة. حسب فرضية البحث التورية المتجانسة لا يمكن فهمها إلا بواسطة الطلاب ذوي المستوى المتقدم. للتحقق من صحة الفرضية تم تصميم اختبار يشمل 10 أمثلة من التورية المتجانسة ومنحهم للطلاب لشرح التعبيرات حيث تكونت العينة من 30 طالب سنة اولى و 30 طالب سنة ثالثة. أكدت النتائج المتحصل عليها صحة الفرضية السابقة حيث قدم طلاب السنة الثالثة، الذين تم اعتبارهم ذوي مستوى أعلى، أداء أفضل من طلاب السنة الأولى الأقل خبرة. كما تم اكتشاف أن الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في فهم قراءة التورية المتجانسة ناتجة عن نقص في الإطار اللغوي، عقبات ثقافية وسياقية و كذا قيود الكفاءة اللغوية والبراغماتية.