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# COGNITIVE AND STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF PUN AND ZEUGMA IN FUSIONAL AND AGGLUTINATIVE LANGUAGES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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**Abstract**

This article investigates the cognitive and structural differences in the construction and interpretation of pun and zeugma in languages belonging to different morphological types, namely English as a predominantly fusional language and Uzbek as an agglutinative language. While both rhetorical devices rely on semantic ambiguity and the interaction of multiple meanings, their realization is influenced by the morphological and lexical characteristics of the language in which they occur. Drawing on theories from cognitive linguistics, stylistics, and linguistic typology, the study examines how speakers of English and Uzbek process and interpret wordplay based on polysemy, homonymy, and semantic extension. The analysis demonstrates that English puns tend to exploit lexical ambiguity and polysemous structures, whereas Uzbek puns frequently rely on morphological transparency and homonymous forms. Similarly, zeugma in English often benefits from syntactic flexibility and semantic compression, while in Uzbek its realization is shaped by agglutinative morphology and grammatical marking. The findings suggest that language typology significantly influences both the structural formation and cognitive processing of rhetorical devices. The study contributes to comparative linguistics by highlighting the relationship between morphological structure and mechanisms of verbal creativity in English and Uzbek.

**Keywords:** pun, zeugma, cognitive linguistics, fusional language, agglutinative language, English, Uzbek, wordplay, linguistic typology.

## Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a tool for creativity and cognitive expression. Among the various stylistic devices that enrich discourse, pun and zeugma occupy a special place due to their reliance on multiple meanings and semantic complexity. These rhetorical figures are widely used in literature, advertising, humor, and everyday communication, where they contribute to expressiveness, aesthetic effect, and intellectual engagement. The interpretation of such devices requires speakers to activate different layers of linguistic knowledge, making them an important subject of study in cognitive linguistics and stylistics.

A pun is generally understood as a form of wordplay that exploits similarities in sound or form to evoke two or more meanings simultaneously. Zeugma, on the other hand, involves a single lexical element governing multiple words or phrases while establishing different semantic relations with each of them. Although both devices are based on semantic interaction and ambiguity, their structural realization may vary considerably across languages. Such variation is often related to the morphological organization of a language and the cognitive mechanisms involved in meaning construction.

From a typological perspective, Von Humboldt (1999) pioneered morphological classification by distinguishing agglutinative systems, where distinct morphemes are cleanly appended to stable roots, from inflective systems, where roots and markers merge dynamically.

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According to von Humboldt (1999) the structural boundaries of agglutination retain a strict, analytical transparency that fundamentally alters how conceptual categories are assembled in the mind. agglutinative languages construct words by adding a series of affixes to a root, where each affix expresses a particular grammatical function.

Sapir (1921) revolutionized structural typology by introducing quantitative parameters, specifically separating a language's "index of synthesis" (morpheme density per word) from its "index of fusion" (how deeply those morphemic boundaries melt together).

As Sapir (1921) notes, an agglutinative system can be characterized by a high index of synthesis combined with an exceptionally low index of fusion, resulting in long but highly scannable word structures.

For instance, Uzbek, Turkish, Kyrgyz, and Karakalpak display certain variations in their nominal and verbal morphology, they largely share the same morphological principles. In these languages, nouns and verbs are marked by separate groups of affixes that indicate different grammatical categories.

By contrast, English morphology is characterized by affixes that often combine several grammatical functions into a single form (Ismoilova, 2025). English and Uzbek represent two distinct morphological systems. English is commonly classified as a predominantly fusional language, in which grammatical information is often encoded through multifunctional morphemes and lexical ambiguity plays a significant role in communication. Despite the growing body of research on wordplay and rhetorical devices, comparatively little attention has been paid to the influence of morphological typology on their cognitive and structural properties. Most studies focus on individual languages or literary traditions, while cross-linguistic investigations involving typologically different languages remain limited. In particular, the relationship between language structure and the cognitive processing of pun and zeugma has not been sufficiently explored in the context of English and Uzbek.

The present study aims to examine the cognitive and structural differences in the realization of pun and zeugma in English and Uzbek. The research seeks to identify the linguistic mechanisms that underlie these devices and to determine how the typological characteristics of fusional and agglutinative languages affect their construction and interpretation. It is hypothesized that English puns predominantly rely on lexical polysemy and semantic ambiguity, whereas Uzbek puns are more likely to exploit morphological transparency and homonymy. Furthermore, it is assumed that zeugma demonstrates greater syntactic flexibility in English, while its use in Uzbek is influenced by the language's agglutinative structure and grammatical marking.

The findings are expected to enrich research in cognitive linguistics, comparative stylistics, and linguistic typology while providing new insights into the nature of verbal creativity across different language systems.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach to investigate the cognitive and structural characteristics of pun and zeugma in English and Uzbek. The research is based on the assumption that the typological differences between fusional and agglutinative languages influence the formation and interpretation of these rhetorical devices.

The data for the study consist of examples of puns and zeugmatic constructions collected from literary works, folklore, humorous discourse, and other authentic language materials in English and Uzbek. English examples were selected from works by prominent authors known for their use of wordplay, including William Shakespeare and other representatives of English literature. Uzbek

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examples were drawn from classical and contemporary literary texts, folklore, proverbs, and askiya traditions, where linguistic creativity and semantic ambiguity frequently occur.

The analysis combines methods from cognitive linguistics, stylistics, and linguistic typology. First, a descriptive method was used to identify and classify examples of pun and zeugma according to their structural and semantic characteristics. Second, a comparative method was employed to examine similarities and differences between English and Uzbek examples. Special attention was paid to the role of morphological structure, lexical ambiguity, polysemy, homonymy, and syntactic organization in the creation of wordplay.

From a cognitive perspective, the study draws on Conceptual Blending Theory and Relevance Theory to explain how speakers and listeners process multiple meanings within a single linguistic form. The analysis focuses on the mental mechanisms involved in the interpretation of puns and zeugmatic constructions, including semantic activation, conceptual integration, and contextual inference.

The research procedure consisted of three stages. In the first stage, relevant examples were collected and categorized according to rhetorical type. In the second stage, the linguistic structures underlying each example were analyzed with particular attention to morphological and semantic features. In the final stage, the findings were compared across the two languages in order to identify the influence of language typology on the cognitive and structural realization of pun and zeugma.

The results of the analysis were interpreted within a cognitive-typological framework, allowing for a deeper understanding of how morphological organization shapes verbal creativity and semantic processing in English and Uzbek.

Results and Analysis

The analysis revealed significant differences in the linguistic mechanisms used to construct puns in English and Uzbek. English puns rely predominantly on homonymy, homophony, and polysemy, whereas Uzbek puns frequently exploit polysemy, homonymy, derivational morphology, and contextual reinterpretation. These differences can be explained by the typological distinction between English as a predominantly fusional language and Uzbek as an agglutinative language.

One of the most common English mechanisms is lexical ambiguity. For example, in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio says: “Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man”.

The adjective grave simultaneously means “serious” and “dead/buried in a grave”. The humorous and tragic effect emerges from the coexistence of these two meanings. The pun is constructed through semantic ambiguity within a single lexical item.

In contrast, Uzbek wordplay frequently appears in askiya performances where speakers manipulate multiple meanings of a word or phrase through rapid contextual shifts. Askiya performers often exploit homonymous words and culturally familiar expressions, forcing listeners to reinterpret an utterance in real time. The humor is not always located in a single word but often emerges from the interaction between morphology, context, and shared cultural knowledge. This feature reflects the highly productive morphological structure of Uzbek and the central role of oral performance traditions.

For instance, examples can be seen in the uzbek classic literature, especially in Alisher Navoiy’s works. Navoiy demonstrated his remarkable ability to make skillful use of the expressive possibilities of the Uzbek language by creating a number of classical tuyuqs (a traditional Turkic poetic form). In the tuyuq rhymed with the word **“yolabdurur,”** the poet masterfully depicts both the qualities of the beloved and the emotional state of the lover:

Yo rab, ul shahd-u shakar yo labdurur?

Yo magar shahd-u shakar yolabdurur?

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Jonima payvasta novak otqali,
G'amza o'qin qoshig'a yolabdurur.

The entire charm of the tuyuq is hidden within the different meanings conveyed by the word **"yolabdurur."** This word, which serves as the rhyme, appears in three instances and expresses three different meanings:

1. **"Yo labdurur?"** – "Or is it a lip?" (a question)
2. **"Yolabdurur?"** – "Has she licked it?" (an expression of amazement)
3. **"Yolabdurur."** – "Has she placed/set it?" (an expression of wonder)

Thus, the artistic beauty of the poem lies in the poet's use of a single phonetic form to convey several meanings, creating a rich wordplay characteristic of classical Uzbek poetry.

The findings suggest that English puns tend to be lexically centered, while Uzbek puns are more discourse-oriented and context-dependent. This observation supports previous studies indicating that Uzbek verbal humor is strongly influenced by the traditions of askiya and folk wit.

The collected data showed that zeugma occurs more frequently and more explicitly in English literary texts, than in Uzbek literary discourse.

A classic English example appears in Charles Dickens' The Pickwick Papers:

"Miss Bolo rose from the table considerably agitated, and went straight home, in a flood of tears and a sedan-chair."

The phrase "in a flood of tears'' is figurative, whereas "in a sedan-chair" is literal. The same prepositional construction governs both complements, creating a zeugmatic effect.

Another frequently cited example is: "He lost his coat and his temper". The verb lost carries two different meanings simultaneously: a physical loss (coat) and an emotional loss (temper). This semantic shift creates cognitive incongruity and humorous impact.

The English data indicate that zeugma is often realized through a single governing verb whose meaning changes when applied to different objects. This structure is facilitated by the extensive polysemy characteristic of English vocabulary.

In Uzbek, pure zeugma is comparatively less common. Instead, writers and humorists often create similar effects through ellipsis, semantic extension, or parallel constructions. Uzbek rhetorical traditions favor contextual reinterpretation and metaphorical association rather than the abrupt semantic shift typically observed in English zeugma. For example, "u eshikni va suhbatni yopdi"( "she closed the door and the conversation").The verb yopdi is literal with eshik, figurative with suhbat.

The analysis revealed notable cognitive differences between the two figures.

Pun comprehension requires the simultaneous activation of two competing meanings. Readers initially interpret the word according to the most accessible meaning and subsequently recognize an alternative interpretation. The humor emerges from the sudden realization of semantic duality.

For example, in Mercutio's statement "grave man", the listener first interprets grave as "serious" before recognizing the secondary meaning related to death. The cognitive process therefore involves ambiguity resolution and semantic reinterpretation.

.Zeugma, on the other hand, requires readers to apply a single linguistic element to two different semantic domains simultaneously. In the sentence "He lost his coat and his temper", the verb lost must be interpreted literally and metaphorically at the same time. The cognitive challenge lies not in selecting between meanings but in maintaining multiple meanings concurrently.

The data therefore indicate that puns primarily rely on ambiguity, whereas zeugma relies on semantic divergence. Although both figures exploit polysemy, they activate different cognitive mechanisms.

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The results confirm that both English and Uzbek employ pun and zeugma as mechanisms of verbal creativity; however, their realization differs substantially. English favors lexical ambiguity and polysemy-based constructions, while Uzbek relies more extensively on contextual, morphological, and performance-based strategies. These differences reflect broader typological distinctions between fusional and agglutinative languages and demonstrate how language structure shapes the cognitive and stylistic realization of humor.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that both English and Uzbek employ pun and zeugma as effective stylistic devices; however, their construction and cognitive processing differ significantly due to the typological characteristics of the two languages. The analysis revealed that English puns are predominantly based on lexical ambiguity, homonymy, homophony, and polysemy, whereas Uzbek puns frequently depend on contextual reinterpretation, cultural knowledge, and the productive use of morphological structures. This distinction can be attributed to the structural differences between English as a predominantly fusional language and Uzbek as an agglutinative language.

One of the most notable findings is that English provides extensive opportunities for lexical wordplay because of its large number of homonymous and polysemous words. The examples from Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde illustrate how a single lexical item may simultaneously activate two meanings, creating humorous or rhetorical effects. Such findings support the view that ambiguity is one of the primary mechanisms underlying English verbal humor. The results are consistent with studies of linguistic humor that emphasize the role of semantic incongruity and ambiguity resolution in joke comprehension (Attardo, 1994).

In contrast, Uzbek wordplay often extends beyond individual lexical items. The analysis suggests that humor in Uzbek is frequently generated through contextual shifts in meaning, phraseological expressions, and interactive discourse. This tendency is particularly visible in the tradition of askiya, where participants construct humor through rapid semantic reinterpretation and cultural associations. Unlike English literary puns, which are often embedded in a single word or phrase, Uzbek puns frequently emerge from the interaction between speakers and the broader communicative context. Therefore, successful interpretation requires not only linguistic competence but also familiarity with cultural conventions and pragmatic cues.

The findings also indicate that zeugma is more systematically represented in English literary texts than in Uzbek. English authors often employ a single governing verb or adjective that simultaneously applies to semantically different objects, creating a striking stylistic effect. This structure is facilitated by the semantic flexibility of many English lexical items. In Uzbek, comparable constructions exist but occur less frequently. Instead, Uzbek discourse tends to favor parallelism, ellipsis, and metaphorical extension. This observation suggests that the typological characteristics of agglutinative languages may influence the preferred mechanisms of stylistic creativity.

From a cognitive perspective, the study highlights important differences in the processing of pun and zeugma. Pun comprehension requires the activation of competing meanings and the recognition of ambiguity, whereas zeugma requires readers to maintain multiple interpretations of a governing element simultaneously. In both cases, humor arises from incongruity; however, the mental operations involved are not identical. The findings therefore support cognitive theories of humor that view linguistic creativity as the interaction between multiple semantic frameworks.

Another important implication of the study concerns the relationship between language structure and figurative language. The results suggest that linguistic typology influences not only grammar and morphology but also the stylistic resources available to speakers and writers. Fusional languages

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appear to facilitate lexical ambiguity-based humor, while agglutinative languages provide greater opportunities for context-driven and morphologically motivated wordplay. Consequently, the manifestation of humor cannot be fully understood without considering the structural characteristics of the language in which it occurs.

Despite these findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused primarily on selected English literary texts and representative examples of Uzbek verbal humor. A larger corpus including contemporary literature, media discourse, and spontaneous conversational data could provide a more comprehensive picture of the use of pun and zeugma in both languages. Future research may also investigate how bilingual speakers process wordplay across typologically different languages and whether similar cognitive mechanisms operate during translation.

**Conclusion**

This study examined the cognitive and structural differences in the construction of pun and zeugma in English and Uzbek, representing fusional and agglutinative language types respectively. The findings demonstrate that although both languages employ these stylistic devices to create humor, rhetorical impact, and semantic complexity, the mechanisms through which they are realized differ considerably.

The analysis revealed that English puns are predominantly based on lexical ambiguity, homonymy, homophony, and polysemy. The abundance of semantically flexible lexical items in English provides favorable conditions for wordplay that relies on multiple interpretations of a single word or expression. Uzbek, by contrast, tends to construct puns through contextual reinterpretation, cultural references, phraseological expressions, and discourse-based interaction. This tendency is particularly evident in the tradition of askiya, where humor emerges through the dynamic interplay of language, context, and shared cultural knowledge.

The study also found that zeugma is more frequently and systematically employed in English literary discourse than in Uzbek. English authors often exploit the semantic divergence of a single governing word applied to multiple complements, whereas Uzbek stylistic practice more commonly relies on parallelism, ellipsis, and metaphorical extension to achieve comparable expressive effects. These differences reflect the influence of language typology on stylistic and rhetorical choices.

From a cognitive perspective, both pun and zeugma require readers or listeners to process multiple meanings simultaneously. However, they engage different cognitive mechanisms. Pun comprehension primarily depends on ambiguity resolution and the recognition of alternative interpretations, while zeugma requires the concurrent activation of distinct semantic relationships associated with a single lexical element. As a result, both devices contribute to linguistic creativity but through different cognitive pathways.

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