

A BILINGUAL PUN IS TWICE THE FUN

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The all-time prize for transmitting the fullest message with the greatest compactness must go to Sir Charles James Napier. In 1843, Napier quelled an uprising in the Indian province of Sind and announced his triumph via telegram to his commanders in London. All he wrote was the one word *Peccavi*.

Instantly the Foreign Office broke into cheers. In an age when all gentlemen studied Latin, Napier never doubted that his superiors would remember the first-person past perfect tense of *peccare* -- and would properly translate his message as "I have sinned."

Punning is a rewording experience. And bilingual puns are twice as rewording as those that stay within the boundaries of a single language. Some of the most pyrotechnic puns have a French twist, into which you can sink your teeth -- *bon molars*, perhaps.

- Why do the French need only one egg to make an omelet? Because in France, one egg is *un oeuf*.
- Have you stayed at the new luxury hotel in town? It's a site for *soirees*.
- Have you heard about the student in Paris who spent too much time sitting in a hard chair studying? She got sore *buns*.
- *Pas de deux*: the father of twins.
- *Jeanne d'Arc*: a bathroom with no light.
- *Coup de grâce*: what a French lawn mower does.
- *Eau de Cologne*: I'll pay for the perfume later.
- A company tried to manufacture prosthetic devices for feline amputees, but found there was no market for the product. You might say that they committed a *faux paw*.
- A feline kept yacking away inappropriately. Finally, his fellow felines tied an anchor around his legs and threw him into a river. The result: *undue twaddle*; *cat sank*.
- "I hate reading Victor Hugo," said Les miserably.
- Motto of the three musketeers: *En garde, we thrust*.
- A class of second graders inadvertently came up with a French pun. After an especially hard day, the teacher sighed aloud, "*C'est la vie*." With one voice the children called out "*La vie!*"
- A snail oozes into an automobile showroom, pulls out \$50,000 in crisp bills and orders a fancy red convertible. "One favor," the snail requests. "Please paint a big S on each of the doors." "Sure," says the salesman, "but why would you want that?" The snail

replies, "So that when my friends see me driving down the street, they can all shout 'Look at the S car go!'"

Here are more polyglot puns that should be understandable, even without much knowledge of a second language:

- At an Italian restaurant I don't know whether I'm antipasto or provolone.
- Have you heard about the liberated Irish woman? Her name was Erin Go Braless
- Have you heard about the Chinese restaurant that stays open 24 hours a day? It's called Wok Around the Clock.
- Have you visited the Jewish section of India's capital city? It's called Kosher Delhi.
- Does that last pun earn a standing ovation?
- No question about it. Adolf Hitler created a terrible führer.
- What do you call a secondhand clothing store in India? Whose Sari Now.
- When Brutus told Julius Caesar that he had eaten a whole squab, Caesar replied "Et tu, Bruté."
- A classics teacher in Maine owns a boat that he's christened Navego, which is Latin for "I sail" and pronounced "now we go."
- Mexican weather report: Chili today, hot tamale.
- A Mexican visiting the United States goes into a store to buy a pair of socks. He speaks no English, and the clerk doesn't know a word of Spanish. Through pantomime the Mexican tries to explain what he needs, without much success. The clerk brings out shoes, then tries sneakers, then slippers, then laces -- all to no avail. Finally he brings out a pair of socks, and the Mexican exclaims "Eso si que es!" Says the exasperated clerk, "Well, for crying out loud. If you could spell it, why didn't you say so in the first place?"
- A tailor asks a Greek tragedian, "Euripides?" Answers the playwright, "Yes, Eumenides?"
- On a Monday morning, Mayor Ed Koch and Governor Hugh Carey gathered reporters and announced the rejuvenation of the ailing New York City transit system. The New York Daily News reporter covering the story must have thought that the situation was too good to be true. The headline for the story read SICK TRANSIT'S GLORIOUS MONDAY.
- Chico Marx once took umbrage upon hearing someone exultantly exclaim "Eureka!" Chagrined, Chico shot back, "You doan smell so good yourself!"
- A teacher at St. Mark's School in Dallas wrote me, "A student wrote quite a good paper for me but lost control of it somewhat. Near the end he wrote in pig Latin, 'Isthay Orystay inkstay.' My one-word comment was 'Outré'."