

## ***“I see,” said Tom icily:*** **Tom Swifties at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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### Abstract

*This paper gives a definition and historical background of the Tom Swifty, addresses different types of punning employed in Tom Swifties, and discusses topics emerging in them. It also treats the occurrence of proverbs, proverbial phrases, idioms, and aphorisms in Tom Swifties. What is typical for Tom Swifty? It might be considered the twentieth century development of the form of folklore called wellerism. Tom Swifty is a wellerism conventionally based on the punning relationship between the way an adverb describes a speaker and simultaneously refers to the meaning of the speaker's statement. The speaker is traditionally Tom, his statement is usually placed at the beginning of the Tom Swifty, and the adverb at the end of it, e.g. “I see,” said Tom icily (icily vs. I see).*

*Keywords: Tom Swifty; adverb; punning; paronym; homonym; wellerism.*

### **1. The focus of the article**

The second section of this study starts with a definition, historical background and examples of the kind of saying commonly known as Tom Swifty, the third section explores topics emerging in Tom Swifties, and the fourth section discusses the occurrence of proverbs, proverbial phrases, idioms, and aphorisms in them. Finally, the fifth, and the longest, section addresses different types of punning employed in Tom Swifties, focusing on paronyms, homonyms and homophones, as well as on puns playing upon personal names, splitting of one word into two, merging of two words into one, bilingual puns, and double/triple puns.

## 2. Background of research and terminology

The second section of this chapter focuses on the historical background of Tom Swifty, as well as its definition and terminology. The historical background of Tom Swifty would seem to lie in Anglo-American literature. The saying seems to be named after the fictional character of Tom Swift or, rather, two fictional characters: Tom Swift Sr. and Tom Swift Jr., protagonists of adventure books that began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and now total more than 100 volumes. The original books were written by the prolific American writer Edward Stratemeyer (1862–1930), who under the pseudonym Victor Appleton, after having published a number of books in the first Tom Swift series, founded the Stratemeyer Syndicate and later hired ghost writers to write Tom Swift novels. The first novel of the first series, titled *Tom Swift and His Motor-cycle; or Fun and Adventure on the Road*, was published in 1910. Some other titles from the first Tom Swift series (1910–1941):

*Tom Swift Among the Diamond Makers* (1911)

*Tom Swift and His Photo Telephone* (1912)

*Tom Swift and His Electric Locomotive* (1922)

While the first series portray Tom Swift Sr., books after that have depicted his son, Tom Swift Jr. A few titles:

*Tom Swift and his Flying Lab* (1954) (by William Dougherty)

*Tom Swift in the Race to the Moon* (1958) (by James Duncan Lawrence)

In his various incarnations, Tom Swift, usually in his teens, is inventive, science-minded, and adventurous. The following excerpt from the Volume 3 in the first (or original) novel series *Tom Swift and His Airship* (1910) illustrates the style:

"Oh, I'm not a professor," he said quickly. "I'm a professional balloonist, parachute jumper. Give exhibitions at county fairs. Leap for life, and all that sort of thing. I guess you mean my friend. He's smart enough for a professor. Invented a lot of things. How much is the damage?"

"No professor?" cried Miss Perkman indignantly. "Why I understood from Miss Nestor that she called some one professor."

"I was referring to my friend, Mr. Swift," said Mary. "His father's a professor, anyhow, isn't he, Tom? I mean Mr. Swift!"

"I believe he has a degree, but he never uses it," was the lad's answer.

"Ha! Then I have been deceived! There is no professor present!" and the old maid drew herself up as though desirous of punishing some one. "Young ladies, for the last time, I order you to your rooms," and, with a dramatic gesture she pointed to the scuttle through which the procession had come.

"Say something, Tom – I mean Mr. Swift," appealed Mary Nestor, in a whisper, to our hero. "Can't you give some sort of a lecture? The girls are just crazy to hear about the airship, and this ogress won't let us. Say something!"

"I-I don't know what to say," stammered Tom. (Appleton 1910)

In the United States of America, the spread of Tom Swifties was stimulated by a 1963 article which announced a contest for the readers of *TIME Magazine* to submit their own Tom Swifties (see *A Letter From The Publisher*, 1963).

Tom Swifty might be considered the 20<sup>th</sup> century development of the form of folklore called wellerism. Wellerisms, named for Charles Dickens' character Samuel Weller, are normally made up of three parts: (1) a statement, (2) a speaker who makes this remark, and (3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation (for more on wellerisms, see Mieder 1989: 223–238; Mieder & Kingsbury 1994):

*"Every little bit helps," as the old lady said when she pissed in the ocean to help drown her husband.* (Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 76)

*"Tit for tat," quoth the wife when she farted at the thunder.* (Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 140)

*"I see," said the blind man to his deaf dog.* (Mieder & Kingsbury 1994: 114)

*"Everyone makes mistake," said the hedgehog after trying to mount the hairbrush.* (T. Litovkina & Mieder 2006: 10)

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

As it has just been mentioned above, in a true Tom Swifty, the pun is in the adverb:

*"Is your name Frank Lee?" Tom asked frankly* (frankly/Frank Lee). [The Tom Swifties for this study come from the Internet, all of them were collected from dozens of websites in spring 2012; see the Internet sources at the end of the article. Since almost all of them could be found in more than one source, references to their Internet sources are not mentioned here. For the reader's convenience, whenever it is needed for better understanding, Tom Swifties in this study are followed by punning words given in () brackets with some required explanation.]

Some more examples employing "-ly" adverbs:

*"All I want is 20,000 machine guns," said the dictator disarmingly.* (disarmingly/arms)

*"I want this statue to look like the Venus de Milo," said Tom disarmingly.* (disarmingly/without arms)

*"Let's dig up that body," said Tom gravely.* (gravely/grave as a place of burial)

*"I work at a bank," said Tom tellingly.* (tellingly/telling machine)

*"I'm here – with a gift!" said Tom presently* (presently/with a present).

Most frequently, the adverb in Tom Swifty has a homonym or a paronym (see section 5 on puns), either explicitly used in the statement of it or only implicitly implied. The following three examples play on the identical phonemic representation of the adverb *swiftly* and the name (*Tom*) *Swiftly*:

*"Adverbial puns are fun," said Tom swiftly.*

*"Don't you know my name?" asked Tom swiftly.*

*“Quick, what’s my name?” asked Tom swiftly.*

It would appear that, since a number of adverbs in English end with a “-ly,” this form of folklore originally was called ‘Tom Swiftly’, but nowadays the terms ‘Tom Swifty’ or ‘Tom Swiftie’ (plural of both ‘Tom Swifties’) are more frequently used. For instance, on September, 10, 2012, Google returned the following hit counts: “Tom Swifties” (38,300), “Tom Swifty” (12,800), “Tom Swiftie” (4,920), “Tom Swiftly” (3,290), and “Tom Swiftlies” (1,160). In this article I use the term ‘Tom Swifty’.

As we can see from the four examples above, the most frequently used verbs introducing the text of the statement in Tom Swifties is *said*. Nevertheless, there are a number of other verbs employed for this purpose as well, e.g.: *admitted, agreed, asked, bemoaned, considered, consented, cried, debated, decided, discovered, guessed, implied, mused, nagged, pleaded, pretended, professed, queried, recounted, remarked, replied, revealed, reviewed, sang, and yelled*.

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

Let us list here just some examples with puns produced by verbs:

*“Pretend we were in here in the days before railways,” Tom coached. (coached/coach)*

*“This is a dogwood tree!” Tom barked. (barked/bark)*

*“Dawn came too soon,” Tom mourned. (mourned/morning)*

*“I’ve mailed the letter,” Tom assented. (assented/sent)*

*“Can I become a chorister?” Tom inquired. (inquired/choir)*

Tom Swifties employing nouns creating puns are demonstrated in the following example, as well as in the section 5:

*“I love hot dogs,” said Tom with relish. (relish as delight/relish sauce)*

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

*“Have some shampoo,” was Tom’s unconditional offer. (unconditional <adjective> /conditional <noun>)*

In very rare cases Tom’s statement is put at the end of the Tom Swifty, and not at the beginning:

*Tom spoke tirelessly. “And then someone stole my bicycle wheels.” (tirelessly/without tires)*

Traditionally, Tom (or Tom Swifty, or Tom Swiftly) is the speaker, as a number of the quoted examples above have demonstrated, but nowadays, instead of the name Tom, other personages might be also employed. The name of Tom might be substituted by the names of representatives of various professions and occupations:

*“You are going to fail my class”, said the teacher degradingly. (degradingly/grades)*  
*“All right, I will allow the prisoners to wear perfume,” the warden consented. (consented/scent)*  
*“I find you guilty,” said the judge with conviction. (conviction as the act or process of convincing/ conviction as a fixed or strong belief)*

Or simply the personal pronouns “she” or “he” might come into the context:

*“Don't tell anyone, but I work for the CIA,” he whispered secretly. (secretly/secret agent)*  
*“What goes around, comes around,” he said recursively.*

In the following Tom Swifty, although the pronoun “she” is used, the adverb “evilly” refers to the name of Eve from the Bible, which is also supported by introducing the name Adam in the context of the statement:

*“I'll tempt Adam tonight,” she said evilly.*

Characters of well-known poems, novels, tales, dramas, or paintings, such as Hansel and Gretel, or King Lear in the examples below might also substitute the name of Tom (for a detailed discussion of puns on personal names, see section 5):

*“Oh, this house tastes good!” said Hansel and Gretel, gingerly. (gingerly/gingerbread house)*  
*“I find my job painful – every inch of it”, said Lear achingly. (Lear achingly/ Lear a king, the personage from “King Lear” by William Shakespeare)*

One may ask if the examples like the seven last ones, in which the name Tom is not even mentioned, should be considered Tom Swifties or mere wellerisms? The answer might be twofold. Nevertheless, since the genre of wellerisms doesn't require any punning, it might be definitely justified to categorise such wellerisms as Tom Swifties.

### 3. Topics addressed in Tom Swifties

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

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

*“I haven't developed my photographs yet,” said Tom negatively. (negatively/negative)*  
*“All we hear is radio ga-ga,” Tom said mercurially. (mercurially/mercury)*  
*“I lost my job at the nuclear reactor,” she said radiantly. (radiantly/radiation)*  
*“I telephoned John twice,” Tom recalled. (recall as to remember /recall as to call again)*

Some themes treated in Tom Swifities nowadays are especially popular, and a number of Tom Swifities addressing such topics are posted on various websites and come in numerous variants. The difference may lie in the use of an article, conjunction, or punctuation mark, or in the substitution of one more or less synonymous term for another. The following three examples are all sarcastic statements about eating uranium and its consequences on a person doing it:

*"Eating uranium can cause atomic ache," said Tom with a high-pitched voice.*  
*"Eating uranium can cause strange effects," said Tom brightly.*  
*"Eating uranium makes me feel funny," said Tom radiantly.*

Similarly to wellerisms (see Mieder 1982), a number of texts of Tom Swifities are also sexually oriented. A few examples – all referring to various aspects of sexuality (homosexuality, whorehouse, sexual diseases, impotence, erection, or masturbation):

*"I'm experimenting with homosexuality," said Tom half in earnest. (in earnest/honestly)*  
*"Do you think I'm gay?" Tom queried. (queried/queer)*  
*"That's the last time I go to a whorehouse," said Tom crabbily. (crabbily/(slang) infestation by crab lice)*  
*"I'm impotent," Tom said softly. (softly/soft <penis>)*  
*"Reading this sci-fi magazine cures my erectile dysfunction," said Tom omnipotently. (omnipotently/impotently)*

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

*"I'll have a martini," said Tom, drily. (drily/dry (martini))*  
*"I don't want a second helping, thank you," said the cannibal manfully. (in a manful manner/with a man in his mouth)*  
*"I like my martini with plenty of vermouth," he said sweetly. (sweetly/sweet <martini>)*  
*"Eating garbage is a form of recycling, but I can't eat any more" said Tom wastefully. (wastefully/waste)*  
*"Would anyone like some Parmesan?" asked Tom gratingly. (gratingly/to grate)*

Some other topics:

- children and parents: *"Why did I ever want a dozen children?" Tom brooded.*
- love: *"My two favorite 1998 movie trailers featuring an actress playing Queen Elizabeth I are those of Elizabeth and Shakespeare in Love," Tom adjudicated.*
- men and women: *"Mutton makes men macho," bleated Tom sheepishly; "I wouldn't marry you even if you were the only woman on earth!" said Tom evenly.*
- money: *"I've transferred my money back into a German bank account," Tom remarked with interest.*
- dating and marriage: *"I want to date other women," said Tom unsteadily; "Let's get married," said Tom engagingly.*
- professions and occupations: *"Yes doctor, it's a nice day, but I prefer to have my fillings done in the office," Tom said incidentally.*

- God and religion: *"You won't live long if you don't believe in God," Tom preached diagnostically; "Practitioners of my religion don't all have to believe the same thing", Tom decreed.*

#### 4. Proverbs, proverbial phrases, idioms, or aphorisms in Tom Swifties

There are some Tom Swifties in which the statement Tom says consists of a proverb, proverbial phrase, idiom, or aphorism. Their meanings are usually distorted by being placed into striking juxtaposition with the third part of the Tom Swifty (most frequently its adverb). The greatest authority in the world on proverbs and wellerisms, Wolfgang Mieder (1989: 225) pointed out in this regard: "In this way a wellerism often parodies the traditional wisdom of proverbs by showing the disparity between the wisdom of the proverb and actual reality". Observe, for example:

*"Time flies," said Tom entomochronometrically. (entomochronometrically combining the scientific words for entomochronometrically/entomological and chronometrical)*  
*"We can't have this and eat it too," said Tom archaically. {You can't have your cake and eat it too}* [For the reader's convenience all Tom Swifties in this section employing proverbs, idioms, aphorisms or proverbial sayings – if they have been transformed – are followed by their original forms, given in {} brackets].  
*"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," said Tom nonjudgementally.*  
*"The customer is always right," Tom said peremptorily.*  
*"There's room for one more," Tom admitted.*

The employment of idioms is demonstrated in the following examples:

*"That certainly took the wind out of my sails!" said Tom disgustedly.*  
*"Don't rest on your laurels", said Tom hardily.*

As it has been pointed out in section 2 above, in some occasional examples the name Tom might be substituted. The following statements containing famous aphorisms from the Bible, in which Jesus and Pontius Pilate appear on the scene, are good illustrations of this:

*"Argh! Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" said Jesus crossly. (crossly/cross) {Then Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:3)}*

*"Destroy this Temple and within three days I will raise it up", said Jesus cryptically. (cryptically/crypt) {Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up (John 2:19)}*

*"I wish you wouldn't crucify him, but I'm washing my hands of the matter", said Pontius Pilate wishy-washily. (washing/wishy-washily) {When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. (Matthew 27:24-25)}.*

The example below parodies Descartes' famous formulation, *Cogito ergo sum* {I think, therefore I am}:

*"I think, therefore I am," the camping gear said existentially. (existentially/exist)*

While, in the numerous Tom Swifties above, the proverbs, proverbial phrases, or aphorisms remain intact, the following examples introduce some changes to the original texts (examples like the following ones could be also called proverb transformations, or anti-proverbs; for more on anti-proverbs, see Mieder 1989: 239–276; T. Litovkina & Mieder 2006; T. Litovkina 2014b):

*"When in Rome, do all the naughty things the Romans do," said Mary romantically. {When in Rome, do as the Romans do} (romantically/Romans/Rome)*

*"Ah, HERE's the silver lining!" said Tom profoundly. {Every cloud has its silver lining}*

*"Rod sure is a spoiled little child," Tom said sparely. {Spare the rod and spoil the child} (sparely/spare; Rod/rod)*

William Shakespeare's famous "To be or not to be" from "Hamlet" is transformed in the following two Tom Swifties:

*"To be a model or not to be," was the question Mary posed. (posed as set forth in words (posed a question)/ posed as placed in a specific position)*

*"To pee or not to pee?" the Miss quoted. (quoted/misquoted)*

To appreciate the ambiguity of the following homonymous pun, we have to backtrack in our interpretation of the text of the well-known proverb *Let the cobbler stick to his last*. This proverb typically means: "Let something happen regardless of the consequences and no matter what happens" (Bertram 1994: 136), in which the word *last* means a block or form shaped like a human foot and used in making or repairing shoes. In the transformation of it below we have to look for another meaning of the word *last*, becoming the part of the idiom "at last" (after a considerable length of time; finally), therefore, a Tom Swiftie in the form of anti-proverb results:

*"Cobblers!" said Tom at last.*

## 5. Types of punning in Tom Swifties

This section addresses different types of punning in Tom Swifties: at first, it introduces paronyms, homonyms and homophones, and, afterwards, it continues with the exploration of puns playing upon personal names, splitting of one word into two, merging of two words into one, bilingual puns, and, last but not least, double/triple puns (for more on punning in Tom Swifties, see Lippman *et al* 2002; Lippman & Tragesser 2005; T. Litovkina 2014a).

According to Evan Esar (1952: 77), "the variety of puns must be infinite". He lists some puns according to category (e.g. repetitive, blending, divisive, additive, linking, etc.). Charles F. Hockett (1972: 157) talks about two categories of puns, "perfect" (identical in sound) and



“imperfect” (non-identical). Thus, according to his definition, homonyms and homophones could be called perfect puns, and paronyms and homographs, imperfect puns.

Paronomastic puns – i.e. puns involving two similar but not identical strings of sounds and graphemes – constitute by far the largest class of puns in Tom Swifties. The authors of Tom Swifties often try to find words phonologically similar to each other (such as *selfishly/shellfish*, or *allowed/loud*, etc.):

*“Would you like to buy some cod?” asked Tom selfishly (selfishly/shellfish).*

*“No, you can’t have any of my oysters,” said Tom shellfishly. (shellfishly/selfishly)*

*“I’ve an urgent appointment,” said Tom in Russian. (in Russian/in rush)*

*“I need an injection,” Tom pleaded in vain. (in vain/in vein)*

Numerous Tom Swifties in our corpus have provided good models for exploiting ambiguity through the use of a single word that is polysemous (i.e. having two meanings) or two words that are homonymous (i.e. having identical graphemic and/or phonemic representation). Puns of this nature are referred to in this chapter as homonymous puns (in our discussion we don’t distinguish between polysemous and homonymous words):

*“I have a split personality,” said Tom, being frank. (frank/Frank)*

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

*“So only one person arrived at the party before I did?” Tom second-guessed. (second-guessed/second guest)*

*“You must be my host,” Tom guessed. (guessed/guest)*

*“I’ve only enough carpet for the hall and landing,” said Tom with a blank stare. (stare/stair)*

*“Boy, I wish the elevator were working,” said a tired Tom, staring up to the top. (to stare//stair)*

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

*“South Korea has a lovely capital city,” said Tom soulfully. (soulfully/Seoul)*

*“Let’s take a vacation in the south of France,” said Tom nicely. (nicely/Nice, the largest city of the French Riviera)*

The first names and/or surnames of famous poets and writers, composers and singers, politicians and scholars, and other famous personalities might be used in order to substitute Tom or are simply hidden in adverbs, or referred to in statements:

*“I wish I’d said that, Oscar,” said Tom wildly. (wildly/Oscar Wilde)*

*"Orlando's by Virginia," said Tom wolfishly. (wolfishly/ Virginia Wolf)*

While in the two examples above both the first names and surnames correspond to each other, some additional Tom Swifties might contain reference to either famous personalities' first names or surnames. The following one, which alludes to one of the most popular American singers of the 20th century, Elvis Presley, and plays upon the similarity of the adverb *expressly* and the surname *Presley*, can be found on a number of various websites and is one of the most frequently posted Tom Swifties:

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

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

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

*"Have I got a story for you," he said grimly. (grimly/brothers Grimm)*

The name of the French-Polish physicist and chemist Maria Skłodowska-Curie, famous for her pioneering research on radioactivity appears in the following example:

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

Characters, or even titles of well-known works of art (i.e. poems, novels, tales, paintings, pieces of music), such as *Mona Lisa*, *Lady Chatterley*, *The Raven*, or *Candide*, might be also in the focus of Tom Swifties, or occasionally might even substitute the character of Tom:

*"I'm tired of smiling," moaned Lisa. (moaned Lisa/Mona Lisa)*

*"I love the novels of D. H. Lawrence," said the lady chattily. (lady chattily/Lady Chatterley)*

*"I have been reading Voltaire," Tom admitted candidly. (candidly/Candid)*

*"I've been listening to the Brandenburg Concertos," Tom barked. (barked/ Sebastian Bach)*

The following two puns are based on phonetic and graphemic similarity of words from two languages – *Les Misérables*, the title of the famous novel by French writer Victor Hugo (the novel was also staged and became one of the most popular musicals) implied in the text, and the name "*Les*" accompanied by an adjective "*miserably*" introduced into the text:

*"Do you call this a musical?" asked Les miserably.*

*"Have you anything by Hugo?" asked Les miserably.*

Puns such as the two demonstrated above, which are based on the intermixture of words from two languages (English and French), may be called bilingual puns. Bilingual puns usually employ words from two languages phonetically similar, or even identical, but different in meaning. One more French-English pun:

*“These Paris streets sure have funny names,” said Tom ruefully. (ruefully/rue: street in French)*

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

*Mama is German,” Tom muttered. (muttered/Mutter: mother in German)*

*“It’s a German song,” Tom lied. (lied/ Lied: song in German)*

Certain puns involve not simply single words but groups of words. One word may be split into two (or three), and vice versa, two (or three) words are merged into one:

*“Eat more fruit” said Tom, with aplomb. (aplomb/a plum)*

*“I am wearing a ring” said Tom with abandon. (abandon/a band on)*

*“There’s no need for silence,” Tom allowed. (allowed/a loud)*

In the Tom Swifty below not only does the word “darkly” stand for two different concepts, but the word “fair” does as well:

*“It’s not fair!” said Tom darkly.*

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

*“The door’s ajar,” said Tom openly. (ajar/a jar and openly/open)*

*“Are you homosexual?” Tom queried gaily. (queried/queer and gaily/gaily).*

The pun below might be called a triple pun: it plays upon the adverb *swiftly*, the name (*Tom*) *Swiftly*, and, last but not least, the name of Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver’s Travels*:

*“Yes, I have read Gulliver’s Travels,” said Tom swiftly.*

Many more types of punning in Tom Swifties could be addressed in this section but I have to put an end on it now.

Puns have been frequently attacked as being “the lowest form of wit”, especially in English-speaking communities. Taking issue with the detractors, Berger (1995: 68) states, “good puns are excellent examples of wit. It is only when the pun stretches too far or is too off base that puns elicit the customary groan from people – a response we all learn as proper when dealing with a pun that doesn’t work”.

The comic nature of the pun rests upon its phonetic identity (or similarity) and multiple meaning. Arthur Asa Berger (1995: 76) points out that ambivalence is the basis of good puns. Bier (1968: 18) stresses, “The very lowest form of sound-effect punning is that in which only one of two terms has any truth at all”. According to Salvatore Attardo (1994: 138), “the best

puns are those in which either the two senses coexist in a difficult balance, or in which the connotating sense brings a meaningful contribution to the global senses of the text". Albert Rapp (1951: 87) emphasises, "The essential feature of the pun lies precisely in the existence of two separate meanings; since they provide the opportunity for tricking or double-crossing your listener". According to Victor Raskin (1985: 116):

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

Victor Raskin (1985: 116) also points out, "If the trigger is there but the scripts and the oppositeness relation are not, the pun remains an artificial low-quality product". We are, however, sometimes struck by the absurdity of some situations portrayed in Tom Swifities, especially when they rely purely upon linguistic tricks employed for the sole purpose of generating play forms and of making punning possible. Punsters, and authors of numerous Tom Swifities discussed above, however, more often than not play in unsophisticated ways with the sounds of words but not with their meanings. Indeed, Tom Swifities very frequently lend themselves to manipulation exclusively for the sake of manipulation. In many cases in our corpus, the choice of a word for punning (be it a paronyms, homophone or homonym) is obvious or largely predictable. For example:

to *lie* (deceive)/to *lie* (to be found, exist):

*"I lied" he lied.*

*"I always lie," Tom said falsely.*

*"Go ahead, it's perfectly safe to drink," Tom lied.*

*weakly/weekly:*

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

*"I visit my parents every Sunday," said Tom weakly.*

*"Fifty-two episodes can fill a year," Blake said, weakly.*

*Aren't five cups of tea too many from one bag?" asked Tom weakly.*

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has focused on Tom Swifities, the twentieth century development of the form of folklore called wellerism conventionally based on the punning relationship between the way an adverb (or, most recently, other word class, such as a verb, a noun or even an adjective) describes a speaker (most frequently, Tom) and simultaneously refers to the meaning of the speaker's statement (i.e. a sentence of reported speech). In the second section of the study the background of Tom Swifty research and terminology were reviewed; in the third section topics addressed in Tom Swifities were demonstrated, and in the fourth section the use of

proverbs, idioms, aphorisms, and proverbial phrases in Tom Swifties was touched upon. Last but not least, the fifth and longest section of the chapter addressed various types of punning in Tom Swifties, focusing on paronyms, homonyms, homophones, as well as on puns playing upon personal names, splitting of one word into two, merging of two words into one, bilingual puns, and double/triple puns.

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