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PUNS IN OSCAR WILDE'S COMEDY 'THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST'

KALAMBŪRI OSKARA VAILDA KOMĒDIJĀ "CIK SVARĪGI BŪT NOPIETNAM"

BACHELOR THESIS

Ieva Nizinska

Matriculation card No. in13024

Adviser: lect. Tatjana Bicjutko

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ANOTĀCIJA

Dramaturģija tiek pētīta lingivistikas kontekstā relatīvi īsu laiku un nav veikti daudz pētījumi par kalambūru izmantojumu Oskara Vailda komēdijā ‘Cik Svarīgi Būt Nopietnam’. Kalambūri ir izteikts komiskā efekta radīšanas instruments lugā, un šis darbs analizē to izmantojumu katram Vailda lugas ‘Cik Svarīgi Būt Nopietnam’ tēlam, kā arī pēta kalambūru radīto efektu saistībā ar tēlu prezentēšanu. Lai identificētu kalabūrus, tie ir uzskatīti par frazeoloģiskām vienībām, līdz ar to Nacisciones frazeoloģisko vienību identificēšanas process ir izmantots pētījumā. Sekojoši, Nash izstrādātā kalambūru taksonomija ir pielāgota un izmantota kalambūru klasificēšanai lugā, ar mērķi salīdzināt dažādus kalambūru veidus un to izmantojumu katram lugas tēlam individuāli. Pētījums atklāja, ka apziņa par kalambūru izmantojumu un tās veids ietekmē izpratni par tēlu humora izjūtu, viņu izrādīto attieksmi pret citiem tēliem un noteiktām sociālām tēmām.

Atslēgvārdi: kalambūri, kalambūru tipoloģija, frazeoloģiskās vienības, FV identificēšanas process, tēlu analīze, Oskars Vailds

ABSTRACT

Drama has become a part of linguistic research only relatively recently and not much research has been done on puns in Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest,* which is a prevalent comic device in the play. Therefore, this paper analyses the usage of puns for each of Wilde's characters and studies the created effect of puns regarding the author's character depiction. In this thesis puns are regarded as phraseological units (PU) and for pun identification, the PU identification process devised by Naciscione is applied. Thereafter, Nash's pun taxonomy is modified and applied for pun classification with the aim to compare various types of puns and their usage for each character individually. The study revealed that the characters' awareness of using puns and the pun type influences the perception of characters' sense of humour, attitudes against others and against certain social topics.

Key words: puns, pun typology, phraseological units, PU identification process, character analysis, Oscar Wilde

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

1. BOOKS ON PUNS, WILDE AND DRAMA 4

1.1. Stylistic Analysis of Drama. 4

1.2. Characterization in Drama 5

1.3. Humour in Drama 8

1.4. The Definition of Pun 10

1.5. Description of Wilde's Plays 13

2. PUN IDENTIFICATION AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE 16

3. LETTING THE PUNS OUT OF THE BAG 19

3.1 The Puns in Acts 19

3.2. Characters under Scrutiny 25

3.3 Let's Talk about the Punny Characters 37

CONCLUSIONS 42

THESES 44

REFERENCES 45

APPENDIX 1 47

APPENDIX 2 48

APPENDIX 3 49

INTRODUCTION

Upon hearing the name Oscar Wilde, many immediately remember his dramatic works full of wit and language play. As Coppa put it, 'everything […] seems to have a double, if not triple or quadruple, meaning' (Coppa, 2016). Pun is the device that exploits the ambiguity of a meaning; hence the present research is devoted to the analysis of puns as used by the characters of Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Coppa writes that 'today it is Wilde who sets our comedic expectations' (2016: xxvi). Oscar Wilde's fame as a dramatist rests on four comedies – *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and the tragedy *Salomé*. as the author of the research has been interested in puns and Oscar Wilde for several years, The present paper continues on the research done in her previous term papers. *The Importance of Being Earnest* was selected for research because it is considered one of Wilde's most successful comedies. F. Coppa writes that '*Earnest* contains an enormous amount of language play', and that nearly every utterance contains a twisted proverb or a 'linguistic cliché' (2016: XXV).

Many researchers have analysed Wilde's manner of achieving comic relief; for example, Gregor argues that what creates the satire and irony in Wilde's works is the dandy figure (1996: 512). Ian Gregor (1996) discusses several of Wilde's works and analyses the peculiarities of each play's themes individually. Pestka (1989) has written a typology of Wilde's comic devices. However, the language of Wilde's drama itself has rarely been a subject to linguistic research due to the insufficient interest of linguists in literature and literary analysis. Moreover, the usage of puns, especially as a means of characterization, has not been widely researched yet in Oscar Wilde's plays; therefore, the present paper focuses on the role of punning for characterisation and aims at defining the most common type of punning for each character.

The main goal of the present research is to study the usage of puns in Oscar Wilde's play 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. **The aim is** to identify the differences in punning strategies of different characters and to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of puns are most frequently used by the characters of the play?
2. How does the type of pun used by the character contribute to their characterisation?

The enabling objectives to answer the raised questions are:

1) To read the play 'The Importance of Being Earnest';
2) To read and analyse the theories of punning devices and characterization;
3) To single out the methodological framework for corpus collection and analysis.

4) To identify all the puns in the play and put the corpus in a table in the order of their appearance in the text;

5) To identify the types of puns using the chosen methodology;

6) To execute the quantitative analysis by selecting out every line of each character to evaluate the number of turns taken and words uttered.

7) To analyse the usage of puns as a means of characterization for each character

8) To draw relevant conclusions.

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used, namely, all the puns are identified, then classified according to pun typology and collected in a corpus for further analysis. Each character's puns and their total number of words uttered are compared and analysed. Afterwards, by using discourse analysis, the interpretation of puns and their usage for each character is discussed. The puns are identified using Naciscione's (2016) devised phraseological unit identification procedure, and for identifying the manner of punning the pun typology devised by Nash (1985) is used.

The thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter introduces scholarly literature on drama, puns, characterization and Wilde's works. Each topic is discussed in its own subchapter. The second chapter introduces the methodology devised from the similar available researches. The third chapter presents the empirical part of the applied methodology and first gathers puns in the order of their appearance. Later they are analysed for each character individually and then they are discussed in the last subchapter.

1. BOOKS ON PUNS, WILDE AND DRAMA

The first chapter introduces research written on drama and a brief history of stylistics. It discusses various characterization elements, humour in literature, and what has been said and written about Oscar Wilde's works in general.

1.1. Stylistic Analysis of Drama.

In comparison to other text types, drama has started being researched by literary critics and stylisticians only recently (Culpeper et al., 2002: 3). It is mostly because dramatic texts are usually meant to be performed orally on stage (Lethbridge, Mildorf, n.d.: 90) while spoken language has been undervalued for any serious research due to its unstable form (Culpeper et al., 2002: 3).

Culpeper et.al.(2002) explain that since 1960's stylistics has begun to grasp other genres than poetry and prose for analysis, and since 1980's many stylisticians have received linguistic tools, such as discourse analysis, conversational analysis and pragmatics, that were originally used for analysing face-to-face interaction (see Burton 1980, Herman 1991, Leech 1992, Short 1989). However, despite the available linguistic frameworks 'stylistics of drama remains relatively unexplored' (Culpeper et.al, 2002:4).

This also accounts for the lack of linguistic research on Oscar Wilde's plays. Regarding stylistics, however, his comic devices have been analysed (see Pestka 1989, who discusses Wilde's use of various stylistic devices for achieving humour; Gregor, 1996).

As Pfister puts it, 'dramatic texts may be distinguished from epic or narrative texts in that they are consistently restricted to the representative mode' (1993:3). According to Lethbridge and Mildorf, 'the language [of a play] can […] assume all the pragmatic functions that can be found in real-life conversations' (n.d.: 122). Even though many argue that a play can only be fully analysed under full performance (Culpeper et al, 2002:6), Short claims that through linguistic analysis of dramatic texts one can discover 'rich indications as to how they should be performed (ibid.:7). Pfister also adds that 'dramatic texts have access to non-verbal codes and channels […] and aspects of the narrative function may be transferred to the internal communication system' (1993: 4).

Because of this double nature of dramatic texts, that is the availability (to the audience) in both written and representative mode, drama can be viewed at two layers: the primary text with

the direct words by all characters; and the secondary text, i.e. 'all the texts "surrounding" or accompanying the main text' (Lethbridge, Mildorf, n.d.: 90). The information to the audience is delivered both linguistically in the characters' speech and non-linguistically (stage props, costumes, the stage set, etc.) (ibid: 91). Pfister also agrees that the interior décor presented on the stage 'is often a bearer of important information that reveals something about the characteristics of the fictional protagonists inhabiting it' (1993: 40), sometimes even giving the audience more information than the protagonists receive themselves via non-verbal clues.

Regarding drama, Short (1989, 1998) states that as performances are too variable, the text rather than the performances should be studied (quoted in Culpeper, 2001:41-42). Culpeper et al. indicate that in order to explain 'the dynamics of a play properly, we need much help from areas of linguistics - notably pragmatics and discourse analysis' (1998: 3). The basic areas for linguistic analysis of drama, as presented by Mick Short (in Culpeper et.al, 2001: 13) are:

- Background information […] often arranged into pre-packaged schemata (e.g. the hotel lobby schema […]- see Weber's contribution);
- Implicature/ inference theory (see Cooper's contribution);
- Turn-taking conventions (see Herman's contribution);
- Speech acts (see Lowe's and Toolan's contributions);
- Sociolinguistic conventions;
- Graphological conventions;
- Sound structure;
- Grammatical structure;
- Lexical patterning.

In sum, stylistic research has been applied to drama texts quite recently and much areas of drama are yet to be studied linguistically. As it will be discussed in the next subchapter, one of the areas for research for any fictional text (including drama) is characterization.

1.2. Characterization in Drama

Lethbridge and Mildorf agree that the characters are one of the main features that can be looked at when analysing not only prose but also drama, the other being the overall structure, time and space, types of utterances and so on (n.d.: 90). George A. (2002) points out that in recent years a number of linguists have been contributing to linguistic techniques of analysis that focus on dramatic dialogues and on the participating characters accordingly. However, these linguistic techniques, namely, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, were originally devised 'to study naturally occurring conversation' (ibid: 373-374, also Burton [1980], Toolan [1985], Short

[1989] and Herman [1995, 1998] and Culpeper [2001]). Such scholars as Chatman (1978: 107-133); Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 59-70); Pfister (1988: ch. 5); Marglin (1989); Bonheim (1990: ch. 17); Fokkema (1991); Nieragden (1995); Schneider (2000); Culpeper (2001) offer a further study on characterization in literature.

Culpeper shortly defines the characterization as 'the textual cues that give rise to information about character' (2001: 163). He argues that a character is constructed and determined in the reader's mind on reading both by the reader's prior knowledge and by textual cues (ibid.34-37). Lakoff R. (1990) points out that 'language is an intrinsic component of personality (ibid: 13), and Peer (1989) indicates that 'the category of character is, for its very formation, dependent on linguistic form' (ibid: 9). Short discusses that by reading dramatic texts, what is written in a play and what is meant sets a chain of reasoning that leads to the play's performance features such as the imagined action, appearance of stage and characters, their speech and so forth (Culpeper et al.,1998:12) According to Jahn (2005) 'the basic [character analysis] question is, who (subject) characterizes whom (object) as being what (as having which properties)'.

Culpeper J. (2001) claims that the image of a particular character is formed both by the reader's former knowledge on characterization and by the elements of the text (George, 2002:373). The author of a play uses language to create the characters, i.e. he considers a number of textual issues that could provide readers with clues (both implicit and explicit, 'such as direct characterization from the characters themselves' [ibid.]) on which they base their impressions of the characters.

Graham states that one of the things the playwrights can begin with is to 'give characters telling or suggestive names' (Graham, 2008:16). Also, Jahn M. agrees that the naming patterns most often fit together with characterization and point of view (2005). He defines the text's system of denomination or naming conventions as 'the specific set of naming strategies used to identify and subsequently to refer to its characters' (ibid). The reader has to consider not only their real names but also how the characters are referred to, for instance, 'by first name, nickname, last name, with or without an (honorific) form of address […] or by a descriptive referring expression' (ibid).

By acknowledging the form of address, one can acknowledge who has the power in a conversational turn-taking, thus distinguishing between the powerful participants and the powerless (Short, Archer, n.d.), which is another characterization element. The characters in

plays can generally be divided into two categories: major characters (the powerful) and minor (the powerless) characters, depending on how important they are for the plot. According to Short and Archer, we can distinguish the speakers' power by answering to such questions as: 'who has the most turns? Who has the longest turns? Who interrupts and who is interrupted?' and the like (Short, Archer, n.d.). Lethbridge and Mildorf (n.d.) state that major characters usually have a lot to say and appear frequently throughout the play, e.g. will get the longest turns in the conversations, will allocate turns to others, control the topic of the talk, initiate and use such speech acts as 'questioning, commanding, demanding, threatening and complaining' (in Short, Archer, n.d.). Meanwhile, the minor or powerless characters have less presence or appear rarely (Lethbridge, Mildorf, n.d.:113), will mostly react to others and will use such speech acts like answering, agreeing, acceding, giving in, and apologizing, or, in other words, will act as standing in a lower power position than others (Short, Archer, n.d.).

Another characterization element attributed to the character's power role often goes hand in hand with the character's complexity: 'major characters are frequently, albeit not exclusively, multi-dimensional and dynamic [meaning that they develop through the story, also known as round characters, see Jahn, 2005] while minor characters often remain mono-dimensional and static [meaning they are a 'stock character', a type, and do not change during the play, known as flat characters, see Jahn, 2005]' (Lethbridge, Mildorf, n.d.:114). Jahn(2005) uses E.M. Forster's distinction between flat characters and round characters where 'a one-dimensional figure […] does not develop in the course of the action and can often be reduced to a type or even a caricature (e.g., "a typical Cockney housewife", "a bureaucrat" etc.)' (ibid.). He claims that flat characters are often used for creating a humorous effect. The round character, on the other hand, is 'characterized by many, often conflicting, properties' and develops his or her character in the course of events (ibid).

Lethbridge and Mildorf name one more character distinction approach: a characterization made by the author or by characters in the play' (n.d.: 113). Jahn defines this distinction as 'altero-characterization' or -how a character is viewed by others- and 'self-characterization' (2005). Graham states that Shakespeare, for instance, 'works through the speech of his characters, implying their behaviour in the words they speak or that others speak of them' (2008:16). Altero-characterization is often determined by 'social hierarchies' and 'strategic aims and tactical considerations' (Pfister 1993: 184, in Jahn, 2005), while self- characterization is often marked by 'subjective distortions', such as wishful thinking or face-saving (ibid). The characters in *The*

Importance of Being Earnest are recognized to be portrayed through self-characterisation; thus, Gregor claims they shape their own lives 'with the same complete confidence as they shape their phrases' (1996: 516).

Pfister also notes that 'there are speeches that have scarcely any novelty value for the fictional listener on stage, but which serve to clarify certain relationships for the audience' (1993:40). On the other hand, Graham mentions that the playwright can also directly 'employ description in the stage directions, giving readers and performers clear guidance as to how to envisage or portray different characters' (Graham, 2008:16). Scholars define this characterization aspect as explicit and implicit characterization (Jahn, 2005, Lethbridge and Mildorf, n.d.), i.e. whether 'the personality traits [are] attributed in words [given directly to the reader by the playwrights description or a character explicitly], or are they implied by somebody's behavior [both verbal and non-verbal behavior; physical appearance, stage setting, etc.]' (Jahn, 2005). The explicit descriptions often refer to external, internal, or habitual traits that, subsequently identify, categorize, individualize, and evaluate a person (ibid). Jahn also introduces a brief list of functionally determined character types (2005):

- confidant - somebody the protagonist can speak to, exchange views with, confide in -- usually a close friend. -- Dr. Watson is Sherlock Holmes' confidant (and also his 'foil', see below). Sam is Frodo's confidant in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.
- foil character –(…) In literature, a minor character highlighting certain features of a major character, usually through contrast. – (…) Sherlock Holmes's cleverness is highlighted by Dr. Watson's dullness.
- chorus character- Originally a convention in drama, an uninvolved character ("man in the street") commenting on characters or events, typically speaking philosophically, sententiously, or in clichés.

All in all, the fictional characters in either prose or drama can be studied from the multiple aspects discussed in the chapter above. Further on, the aspect of humour in drama will be discussed.

1.3. Humour in Drama

'Jokes are certainly not part of a canonical tradition of literature with a capital L, nor are they normally considered to be contexts of language use which may have "literary" applications' (Carter in Chiaro 1992: x). Nevertheless, 'language resources are exploited to create or enhance wit, amusement, laughter' (Nash 1989: ix), and increasingly many scholars attend to researching the language means of achieving humour (Nash,1989; Pestka, 1989; Chairo, 1992; Attardo, 1994, 2001, 2002; Gregor, 1996, Ross,2005)

Nash defines that ‘humour is largely a matter of devising transfers [...] until the happy confusion of a double vision is achieved’ (1985:137). Ross claims that ‘the essence of humour is surprise, innovation and rule-breaking’ (2005: xii-1) and further discusses the element of surprise that focuses on the ‘conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke. That accounts for the most obvious feature of much humour: an ambiguity or double meaning’ (ibid: 8) caused by an ambiguity at some language level (homophonic, semantic, etc.).

Gregor writes that ‘farce in Wilde is always shaped and controlled by precision of language’ (1996: 519). ‘The play with language entertains spectators and at the same time attracts and sustains their attention.’ (Lethbridge S., Mildorf: 129) Indeed, the way information is conveyed to the audience, especially in drama, can influence the audience differently. Lethbridge and Mildorf state that ‘the discrepancy between the audience’s and characters’ knowledge of certain information can, for example, lead to dramatic irony’. (ibid.: 95). This leaves room for ‘duplicities or puns’ (ibid), which can be perceived only by the knowledgeable audience and not by ignorant and lacking sufficient insight characters (ibid.).

In contrast (to giving the audience more information), the lack of information also has a series of various effects, for instance, to create a sense of suspense (ibid.: 96) or as it is often done in comedies ‘to resolve confusions and mixed-up identities’(ibid.). A case in hand is the disclosure of Jack’s identity in the *Importance of Being Earnest:* ‘The fact that the truth about Jack’s real identity is hidden both from Jack and the audience for so long creates confusions right until the end and therefore contributes to numerous misconceptions and comical encounters’ (Lethbridge, Mildorf, n.d.: 97).

Another concept to be mentioned in the context of humour is wit. ‘The idea of wit, which combines humour and intellect, plays a significant role in the so-called comedy of manners’ (Lethbridge, Mildorf, n.d.: 130). They state that wit is conveyed in ‘brief verbal expressions which are intentionally contrived to create a comic surprise’ (ibid.).

A special type of wordplay, that contributes to achieving humour is the so-called pun, which ‘exploits either the possibilities of homophones […] or different senses of the same verbal form’ or the like (Baldick, 2001). For instance, Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest,* ‘centres on the pun on the name Ernest and the adjective “earnest”, which denotes the character trait of being sincere and serious’ (Lethbridge and Mildorf n.d.: 129).

To summarise the subchapter above, one of the core elements of humour among others is the discrepancy in meaning caused by expectancies and actual events in the joke. A pun by

definition is often a linguistic mean for causing the difference in meaning. This will be discussed in detail in the following subchapter.

1.4. The Definition of Pun

This subchapter introduces the definition of pun, gives a detailed description of various types of puns; and deals with the typology of puns as devised by Nash's (1985) in detail.

As mentioned above, ambiguity at some linguistic level (homophonic, semantic, etc.) is often called a pun (Ross, 2005:8). The definition of pun generally does not raise any controversy among scholars (see Nacisc…, Ross, etc.), and only a few differences may be found in wording the core idea that 'a pun or wordplay is broadly characterised as an ambiguity'.

Further, scholars' approaches might differ in a more nuanced way, however; for instance, Chris Baldick (2001) states that puns are 'jokes, subtle or coarse, that exploit either the possibilities of homophones […] or different senses of the same verbal form'. Naciscione (2010: 32) approaches puns as phraseological units which she defines as 'a stable, cohesive combination of words with fully or partially figurative meaning'. She writes that phraseological puns involve the 'use of a polysemous word to suggest two or more meanings, or use of homonyms' (ibid: 91). Attardo remarks that 'the exact wording of the punch line and/or the connector of verbal jokes [puns] is extremely important because it is necessary for a linguistic element to be ambiguous and to connect the two opposed senses in the text' (Attardo, 2002: 177).

In sum, the puns are created by exploiting the ambiguity of meaning; however, they may be created in many ways and as such can be classified. Attardo states that 'much of the linguistic interest in puns has manifested itself in the form of taxonomies' (1994:112). Ross distributes puns in the English language accordingly:

> 'phonology— the sounds that make up the language; graphology— the way the language is represented in written form; morphology— the way words themselves are structured; lexis— the individual words of the language; syntax— the way the words are structured into phrases, clauses and sentences.' (2005:8)

Nash (1985: 137-147) expands on the linguistic approach to puns and details several types of achieving puns. He distinguishes homophonic, mimetic, allusive puns, homonymic puns, syntactic puns, phrasal and idiomatic blendings, pun-metaphors, pseudomorphic, *portmanteaux,* and etymological, bilingual, and finally, graphological puns. This taxonomy is to be used for the

analysis of puns in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and hence is to be discussed in detail in the present chapter.

In homophonic puns, the difference in meaning is reflected in distinctive spelling (Nash, 1985: 139). Phrasal homophony is 'more rare and forced in creation' (ibid.) as it recreates a phrase which has a different meaning than what is pronounced. For instance, 'Where did Humpty Dumpty leave his hat? - Humpty dumped 'is 'at on a wall'. As seen in the example, non-standard pronunciation helps to achieve homophony too.

'[Mimetic puns] are phonetic similitudes, usually rhymes, with the appeal of homophones' (Nash, 1985:1389). For example, 'what do cats read? The Mews of the World' in which the word *mews* mimes the word *news.* Mimetic phrases (ibid: 140), similarly to homophonic phrases, denote that a particular word play is set in a larger discourse and usually mimes well-known phrases (e.g. from the Bible, Shakespeare), otherwise the reader/ listener would not recognise the mimicry. They often go hand in hand with allusive puns, which are made by using allusions or the extra-linguistic knowledge about the world around (Ross, 2005:11).

Homonyms and homonymic phrases play with words with the same spelling and the split of meaning becomes evident after the punchline, for example (1985: 141), 'What runs along every street in town? The pavement'. Sometimes a pun is created not by the difference in the meaning of the word, but the place in the sentence it is used in, causing a grammatical misunderstanding- it is called a syntactical pun. A fine example of syntactic ambiguity pun would be (ibid: 150) 'Would you rather an elephant attacked you or a gorilla? - I'd rather he attacked the gorilla'.

Nash states (ibid: 142) that 'some turns of phrase echo other idioms and take a colour of meaning from them' or, in other words, a sort of blending occurs of the two ideas or two phrases expressed. For instance, the scholar mentions a blend of '*let sleeping dogs lie'* and *'leave it where it lies'* into *'So they decided to leave it where the sleeping dogs lie'.* Thus blending idioms and phrases are also a type of punning.

A similar type to the idiom blend is the pun-metaphor when a cliché/trite metaphor or a well-known phrase is re-invented into a unique combination by being put in a different context, for instance, 'Council *puts brake on* progress of *cycle path* scheme'(ibid: 146). This type of punning is what Naciscione calls 'instantanial use of a phraseological unit'(2016: 252) when a PU has a unique stylistic application in discourse which results in 'significant changes in its form and meaning determined by the thought and the context' (ibid.)

Pseudomorphic puns play with seemingly detachable parts of a word (a pseudo-morpheme), for example (1985: 143) 'What do you do with a wombat? –Play *wom'*. The main idea of this type is that the detached morpheme is just an illusion and on its own does not actually make sense. Regarding the creation of neologisms, another strategy is coining a new word from two or more different ones as in '*mimsy'* which is a combination of '*flimsy'* and '*miserable'* (see Nash, ibid.). The word combination, however, has to be recognizable in order to work in the given context. Lewis Carroll introduced the term for pseudomorphic pun which now is more often known as portmanteaux (ibid.)

In etymological puns, the punster is highly aware of the previous or original meaning of the word thus achieving humour. Nash (ibid: 144) gives the following example

> 'Nero made Rome the focus of his artistic attention'. The buried joke here is that *'focus'* in Latin has the meaning '*hearth'* or '*fireplace'*; Nero, fiddling while Rome burned, had the whole city in focus.

Bilingual puns, as the name suggests, are made using a foreign word that happens to carry a meaning in the English language, either because of homophonic similarity or the joke might lie in the literal translation of the word (Nash, 1985:145). To illustrate, a joke with Latin grammar elements: 'The major menaces on highway are drunken driving, uncontrolled thumbing, and indiscriminate spooning. To put briefly: *hic, hike,* and *hug'* (The Hights, 1950: 5). The joke lies in the pronunciation of the words, *'hic, hike and hug'* referring to the grammatical forms of Latin demonstrative pronoun 'this' (hic, haec, hoc)' while in English the *hic* refers to drunkenness (from hiccup), *hike* to thumbing, and *hug* to the indiscriminate spooning.

Nash (ibid: 147) also states that anagrams share a common feature with puns; graphological tricks with the letters of a word that create 'a code that has to be broken' (ibid.) in order to perceive the joke. However, 'The Importance of Being Earnest' was originally created as a play, thus no graphological puns would be perceived by the audience even if there were any.

While mainly used to achieve humorous effect, puns might have various emotional shading, such as, for example, irony, sarcasm (Nash, 1985: 152-154), they may form allusions (ibid: 74), create common ground with the audience (ibid: 79). In the context of observing these emotional or attitudinal shades, it is believed to help to detect some emotion, attitude or moral value of the character who puns.

Regarding puns identification procedures, Naciscione has devised a method for identifying 'a unique stylistic application of a phraseological unit (PU) in discourse' (Naciscione, 2016). Her definition of a PU is that it is a 'stable, cohesive combination of words with fully or partially

figurative meaning' (ibid: 32). This identification procedure was specially devised to meet the challenges of instantanial (creative and original) (ibid.) use of a PU in any kind of discourse, to avoid the identification purely based on intuitive understanding and to provide a reliable and applicable tool for a variety of discourses (ibid: 44). She writes that PUs 'meet discourse needs by means of such patterns as extended metaphors, punning, allusion, or reiteration and their innumerable combinations' (ibid:9). In short, the procedure starts by recognizing phrases from memory that are supported by verification of the base form from which the pun has been devised (ibid.). The main reason for choosing Naciscione's method is that such an approach to pun identification makes results repeatable, the research reproducible and valid per se.

To sum up, Nash identifies the above described punning types: homophonic, mimetic, allusive, homonymic puns, syntactic puns, phrasal blendings, pun-metaphors, pseudomorphic, portmanteaux, etymological, bilingual, and graphological puns. Some pun types are predictably not to be found in the play due to, for instance, the type of the research object being a play and thus, accordingly, restricting the use. The proposed typology will help to identify the various punning devices in Wilde's play and thus contribute to the study of puns in 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. The best approach to pun identification in drama discourse is Naciscione's approach to puns as phraseological units and their identification accordingly.

1.5. **Description of Wilde's Plays**

Oscar Wilde is famous for his witty plays in the late nineteenth-century. His fame as a dramatist rests on four comedies – *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and the tragedy *Salomé*. F. Coppa argues that 'today it is Wilde who sets our comedic expectations' (2016: xxvi) and claims that nearly every utterance in Wilde's comedies contains a twisted proverb or a 'linguistic cliché' (ibid: XXV). The famous retort by Algernon from play under analysis is a case in point:

> The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public.

Here the spectator or reader immediately recognizes the idiom 'to wash one's dirty linen in public', meaning, to discuss in public matters that should be kept private, registers the word 'clean', and laughs at the paradox achieved with the twist of the well-known proverb.

Oscar Wilde's plays have long been an object of literary research and (they) have been analysed from countless perspectives, including philosophy, literary criticisms, gender and

biographical studies. Due to the extravagancy of the playwright's life, the latter approach has been especially popular and a multitude of Wilde's biographies are still being published nowadays (see for example Pearson H, Woodcock G.). Gregor states that at the end of reading *The Importance of Being Earnest* 'we are left thinking more of the dramatist than of his creation' (1996:515) and it is because Wilde's linguistic play 'such as paradox, instantly draws attention to the author as the manipulator' rather than to depict the characters as autonomous (ibid.).

Stylisticians have analysed the plays too; thus, Gregor (1996) and Pestka (1989) have studied Wilde's works in terms of achieving humour. The studies of puns have not been a part of drama research before. The search of previous research on puns in Wilde's works helped to find the only one similar research to the present made by Kroack U. 'Linguistic Paradoxes and Puns in Oscar Wilde´s "The Importance of Being Earnest" (2002), written in German, however.

Coming back to the analysis of Wilde's manner of achieving comic relief, Gregor claims that the main figure that dominates the works of O. Wilde is a *dandy* and that 'the characteristic language of the dandy is the paradox, and the essence of paradox is contradiction' (1996: 502). Thus he confirms that Wilde's comedies are filled with contradictory characters, statements and attitudes (ibid: 513). Pestka writes that 'the irony of reversal is not a prevalent comic device in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, he states that what the audience observes the most is the irony of situation (ibid:176).

According to Pestka, humour is indeed achieved by contradictions both in character's language and their moral values, and it is specifically true for *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where 'such a flippant, light and playful tone is prevalent throughout the whole [play]' (ibid: 177). What creates the comic relief is that 'everything in *The Importance of Being Earnest* seems to have a double, if not triple or quadruple, meaning' (Coppa, 2016).

The comedy *The Importance of being Earnest* is a story of two upper-class bachelors Jack (John Worthing) and Algy (Algernon Moncrieff) who lead double lives in order to escape the real one. The play starts with the scene where Algernon and Jack discover that both of them have been leading double lives, Jack pretending to be Ernest in the city, and Algernon pretending of taking care of his ill friend Bunbury. After an interview with the mother of his beloved Gwendolen, Jack is dismissed from being a marriage candidate due to his family background. The following act opens with Jack's ward Cecily meeting Algernon as Ernest. Both men set up a christening to be renamed Ernests officially in order to claim the hands and hearts of their beloved.

The following characters and their short descriptions are presented in order to conduct the character analysis further on:

- John Worthing is an upper-class Victorian bachelor, who occasionally, named as Ernest, drives from his country house to the city, with an excuse to having to take care of his reckless brother Ernest;
- Algernon Moncrieff is Jack's friend, an upper-class Victorian bachelor who has a scapegoat imaginary friend named Bunbury to which to tend to when real life becomes too unbearable.
- Cecily Cardew is Jack's eighteen-year-old ward who lives in his manor house in the country
- Honourable Gwendolen Fairfax is Algernon's cousin, Lady Bracknell's only daughter and Jack's beloved woman; also an upper-class Victorian girl raised in London;
- Lady Augusta Bracknell is Gwendolen's mother, a stereotypical member of the upper class;
- Rev. Canon Chasuble D.D., addressed as Doctor Chasuble in the play, is a revenant and a close friend of Miss Prism;
- Miss Prism is Cecily's governess;
- Merriman, butler in Jack's Manor house;
- Lane, manservant at Algernon's house.

To sum up, drama is a comparatively new subject of study in both linguistics and stylistics and not much research has been done on puns in plays. Such scholars as Culpeper, Short, Manfred among the rest have been contributing to the linguistic research of fictional discourse in general and dramatic discourse in particular. Likewise, Attardo and Nash have developed theories to analyse humour in fiction. Puns have been chosen as one of the humorous and stylistic devices that are used by the author to create characters. In the next chapter, all the named scholarly information will be attributed into forming a methodology to conducting the empirical part of the present research.

2. PUN IDENTIFICATION AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

In this chapter, the method applied in the research of puns in Oscar Wilde's comedy is described. To answer the research questions concerning the usage of puns in the comedy, a quantitative and qualitative research will be conducted. The before mentioned Naciscione's phraseological identification procedure (2016) is presented in detail and the steps taken to answer the set research questions are explained, step by step.

The comedy under analysis *The Importance of Being Earnest* consists of three acts. For research purposes, a digital edition of the play is used (edited by R. Jackson and the introduction written by F. Coppa, 2016). The format choice eases the selection of puns and characters' lines for analysis that are described in the following paragraphs. In this research, the term *turn* is used referring to the characters' speaking turns in the play. They can vary in length and can contain either only one word or many sentences.

First of all, to identify puns, Naciscione's (2016) procedure of identifying phraseological units (PUs) will be applied. That means that the verification of selected phrases in their base form is supported by various dictionaries, such as *Oxford Online Dictionaries* and *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (2001). The *Oxford Dictionaries* provide a historical background to words, and more importantly, separates British English from, for example, American, which is significant due to the language used in the play. *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (2001) is chosen with regard to the issue that some idioms would not be displayed in the regular dictionary. In the research body, it will be referred to with an abbreviation 'Camb.', while the Oxford Dictionary provided information will be given the abbreviated reference 'Oxf.'.

The first practical step is to compile the identified puns in the order of their appearance in the text. Secondly, each pun is analysed in their context to define the type of the pun. For analysis, Nash's (1985) taxonomy of puns described in the previous subchapter is used and slightly modified. Thus, anagrammed and graphological puns are excluded because it is a play and as such it is 'consistently restricted to the representative mode'. However, there is a chance of finding bilingual puns, as the play is set in the 19th century Victorian society, where knowledge of French or German or Latin was quite common in high society and depicted refined social manners. As a result, the categories that are searched for are homophonic, mimetic, allusive puns, homonymic puns, syntactic puns, phrasal and idiomatic blendings, pun-metaphors, pseudomorphic, portmanteaux, etymological, and bilingual puns.

The quantitative research element of the empirical part comes after all the puns are gathered in a list and their types are determined. The number of puns for each character is to be shown in graph charts in the appendices to easily demonstrate the most frequent punster in each act and in the whole play, as well as to show the most often used types of puns throughout the whole play in general and by each character in particular.

In order to determine the significance of punning for each character, the *pun to speaking turn ratio* is calculated, that is, the number of each character's lines (speaking turns) is compared with the amount of their expressed puns. Consequently, to justly evaluate the character's pun usage, the lengths of the characters' turns are also considered. It is important to note that the *pun to word ratio* is not considered in the analysis and is only shown for reference due to the reason that some puns are lengthier in wording than others and some may require a longer text to execute the joke, thus the particular ratio is deemed imprecise. It is, therefore, more efficient to compare puns per speaking turns/lines and then discuss the length of the lines separately; or, for example, to compare the average number of words per turn; or both. The counting is done by manual selection of each character's lines and consequent use of Microsoft word counter.

After identification, annotation and classification, the punning strategies used by each character individually is scrutinized. Their punning manner is analysed using discourse analysis. Moreover, the used pun types will be considered in regard to their frequency, the character that uses them most, the attained effect both pragmatically and characterization-wise and any additional observations will be made. Further, on the basis of the collected quantitative data, relevant findings for each pun will be discussed in detail, for instance, whether a specific type of punning is connected with some character's features and/or relationships, i.e. whether the puns reveal the character as flat or round, as stock or a developing one. To realise this, the attitudes and values proposed by the character through puns in the beginning are to be compared to the values proposed at the end scenes.

In view of 'altero-characterization' and 'self-characterization' (Jahn, 2005), it is necessary to register which character the pun applies to (if at all) or whether it reveals any trait of the speaker itself. In sum, it will be analysed whether the usage of puns reveals the character's emotions, values, traits or attitude towards other people or topics, and if so, to whom in particular or to what subject, and what it might indicate about characters' relationship and the audience's perception of the character.

In addition, to differentiate between explicit or implicit characterization, it is important to determine whether the pun occurs unintentionally or on purpose. If the pun is made intentionally, that is, to express one's attitude or any other reasoning, it is an instance of explicit self- or altero-characterization. Contrariwise, however, explicit judgements about others sometimes may carry an implicit indication of some self-characteristics as well, of which the speaker may not be aware of, but which can be perceived by audience.

The next – final – chapter presents the detailed analysis of the puns according to the above-described methodology. The results are further discussed and the author sets to answer the set research questions.

3. LETTING THE PUNS OUT OF THE BAG

3.1 The Puns in Acts

This chapter presents the analysis of the puns found in all the acts in O. Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* and analysed according to the previously described methodology. The puns are put in tables for each act in their order of appearance in the play and in full sentences, therefore allowing to depict the discussion of the analysis of each pun comprehensively.

The words formatted in the bold are the phraseological units that indicate the shift of meaning, allusion or any other punning strategy. The initials of the speakers' names are given before each speaking turn and some comments and explanations are given in the adjacent column to elaborate on the context and meaning. The used dictionaries are Oxford Online Dictionaries (abbreviated as 'Oxf.' to avoid clutter) and Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms (2001), abbreviated as 'Camb.'. In addition, in the second column 'explanation', the PUs under discussion are presented in *italics;* and the dictionary provided information is presented in quotation marks. The third column shows what type of punning is used. Afterwards, each analysed act is discussed in detail, the most often used type of pun and the biggest punster is determined. For every act, a summative data is collected and displayed in Appendices.

Table 3.1 **Puns in the First Act**

Pun in Discourse	Explanation	Type of pun
A: As far as the **piano** is concerned, sentiment is my **forte**.	*Forte* - 'a thing at which someone excels' (Oxf.), but also *piano* and *forte* are antonyms in music meaning performing 'softly' or 'loudly' (Oxf.)	homonym
A: Come, old boy, you had much better have the **thing out at once**. J: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a **dentist**.	In Algernon's utterance *the thing* is considered not as the truth being revealed but as an aching tooth being pulled out	Allusion, homonymic phrase
J: It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a **false impression**. A: Well, that is exactly what **dentists** always do.	*Impression*- 'an opinion you get about somebody/something'. Also in dentistry- 'A negative copy of the teeth or mouth made by pressing them into a soft substance' (Oxf.) A continuation on the allusion to dentistry	Allusion homonym
J: That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth **pure and simple.**	*pure and simple* – 'absolutely; without further complication or	pun-metaphor

A: The truth is rarely **pure** and never **simple**.	elaboration' (Camb.), but the components of the phrase are interpreted separately.	
A: The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's **clean linen** in public.	The word *clean* used instead of *dirty* in the idiom 'to wash dirty linen in public- to discuss one's personal affairs in public' (Oxf.)	pun-metaphor
A: In married life **three** is company and **two** is none.	From the idiom 'two is company, three's a crowd- that two lovers should be left alone together' (Oxf.) but the meaning is changed that a *third person* in the relationship is fun while *two people* get bored of each other.	pun-metaphor
L: Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for **pleasure** now. A: I hear her hair has turned quite **gold** from grief.	Usually *hair goes white* with age or from extreme grief or shock (Oxf.) whereas *gold* is associated with being 'precious, beautiful' (Oxf.).	pun-metaphor
G: My ideal has always been to love some one of the name of **Ernest**. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence.	*Ernest* sounds like *earnest*- 'showing sincere and intense conviction'(Oxf.), and thus inspires *absolute confidence*	Homophone
G: I am afraid you have had very little **experience** in how to propose. (…) Yes, but men often propose for practice. (…) What wonderfully **blue eyes** you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue.	*Blue-eyed*- 'innocent, ingenuous' (Oxf.) but taken literally as having blue irises.	pun-metaphor
L: To **lose** one **parent**, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness.	The expected meaning of *lose*- 'be deprived of (a relative or friend) through their death' (Oxf.), but turns out to mean- to mislay, 'become unable to find' (Oxf.), being *careless*.	homonym
J: I am a **Liberal Unionist**. L: Oh, they count as Tories.	*Tories* is a conservative wing however, *Liberal Unionists* had a pact with them, so it appeared to be two things at the same time; an allusion to Jack/Ernest	Allusion
L: To **produce** at any rate one **parent**, of either sex, before the season is quite over.	*Produce*- 'show or provide (something) for consideration, inspection' (Oxf.) but here- to 'create or form (something) as part of a physical, biological, or chemical process'(Oxf.); usually we *produce offsprings*	Homonym

A: I think it is most **ill-natured** of her. J: Oh, Gwendolen is **as right as a trivet**.	*Ill-natured* which means 'bad-tempered (Oxf.)'. *As right as a trivet* [old-fashioned] means 'to be in perfect health' (Oxf.) which plays on the morpheme *ill*	Homonymy
J: I wish to goodness we had a few **fools** left. A: We have. J: I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about? A: The fools? Oh! About the clever people, of course. J: **What fools!**	*Fool*- firstly used in the meaning 'a person who acts unwisely or imprudently'(Oxf.), but later echoes as an exclamation phrase	Homonym
J: If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will **get you into a serious scrape** someday. A: I love **scrapes**. They are the only things that **are never serious**.	*A scrape*- 'an embarrassing or difficult predicament caused by one's own unwise behaviour (Oxf.) The word *serious* – 'characterized by careful consideration or application' (Oxf.) *i*s thus considered unapplicable to *scrapes*	Pun-metaphor (zeugma)

The puns found in the first act reveal that they frequently are made by Algernon, however considering the number of turns the characters get to speak, Lady Bracknell uses the biggest number of puns per turn (See Appendix 3: Figure 3.5). In addition, the most often used punning types in this act are homonymy puns and pun-metaphors (Appendix 2: Figure 3.2). However, only four of the main characters were introduced in this act, so a further collection of data is necessary to draw any decisive conclusions.

Table 3.2 **Puns in the Second Act**

C: It isn't at all a **becoming** language. I know perfectly well that I look quite **plain** after my German lesson.	The expected meaning of *becoming* is 'beautifying intellectually'; however, she uses it as 'beautifying physically' (Oxf.)	homonym
M: The manuscript unfortunately was **abandoned**. I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid.	*Abandoned*- expected to mean 'stopped writing', but she uses it in its basic meaning 'Having been deserted or left' (Oxf.)	homonym

D: Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would **hang upon her lips**. [Miss Prism glares.] I spoke metaphorically. – My metaphor was drawn from bees.	*Hang on*- expected to mean 'to listen closely to someone (Oxf.)', but he reveals that he meant to 'hold tightly (Oxf.)' - to kiss her. The allusion to the idiom *birds and the bees*- 'basic facts about sex and reproduction, as told to a child' (Oxf.)	Allusion homonym
C: I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually **tall** for my age.	*Little*- young; in this context interpreted as 'small in size' (Oxf.)	homonym
A: **I'd sooner die.** C: Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between **this world, the next world**, and Australia.	A comment on Algernon's sarcastic idiom *I'd sooner…,* meaning he would prefer doing anything else. But Cecily translates it literally having to choose between *escaping, dying, or living* in Australia.	pun-metaphor
M: A misanthrope I can understand – a **womanthrope**, never!	*Misanthrope*- 'a person who dislikes humankind and avoids human society' (Oxf). *Woman +misanthrope*- a person who hates and avoids women	Portmanteaux
M: Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are **green**. [DR. CHASUBLE starts.] I spoke **horticulturally**. My metaphor was drawn from fruits.	*Green*- expected to mean 'inexperienced or naïve' (Oxf.), but it is revealed she meant it 'young or unripe' (Oxf.), from horticulture.	Homonym, allusion
J: I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be **childish**.	*Childish*- not in a sense as silly, unserious, but connected to children	homonym
D: What seem to us bitter trials are often **blessings in disguise**. M: This seems to me a **blessing** of an extremely **obvious kind.**	*Blessings in disguise* –'an apparent misfortune that eventually has good results' (Oxf.) Play on the literal meaning of the idiom component *disguise*- 'altering one's appearance to conceal one's identity' (Oxf.)	pun-metaphor
A: What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been **called back** to town at all. J: Yes, you have. A: I haven't heard any one **call me**. J: Your **duty** as a gentleman **calls** you back.	*Call*- cry out to (someone) in order to summon them or attract their attention (Oxf.), also 'order or request the attendance of' (Oxf.). *Duty calls*-moral obligation. 'a visit made for reasons of	Homonym

	obligation rather than for social reasons' (Collins Dictionary)	
C: I delight in **taking down from dictation**. I have reached '**absolute perfection'** (…) A: [Somewhat taken aback.] Ahem! Ahem! C: Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know **how to spell a cough.**	*Absolute perfection*- expected that she mean advanced skills but means -being able to write absolutely every detail	homonym
C: And my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of **Ernest**. There is something in that name that inspires absolute **confidence**.	*Ernest* sounds like *earnest*- 'showing sincere and intense conviction'(Oxf.), and thus inspires *absolute confidence*	homophone
G: Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely **short-sighted**; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through **my glasses**?	*Short-sighted* -expected to mean 'lacking imagination or foresight' (Oxf.), but is used literally 'having short sight' (Oxf.)	homonym
C: When I see a spade, I call it a spade. G: **I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade.** It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.	Idiom *call spade a spade*- 'speak plainly without avoiding unpleasant or embarrassing issues'(Oxf.); but the components of the idiom are taken literally- *to see*-'perceive with the eyes'; a *spade*- a gardening tool, an allusion to countryside social sphere	pun-metaphor, allusion
G: The country always bores me to death. C: Ah! This is what the newspapers call **agricultural depression**, is it not?	Allusion to The Great Depression of British Agriculture, but Cecily translated *depression* as feeling bored in the countryside	Allusion, homonym
A: ALGERNON. *[Looking round]* To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen! C: Yes! **To good heavens, Gwendolen**, I mean to Gwendolen.	*To-good-heavens-Gwendolen* used as a one word, a mockery of Algernon's exclamation	Pseudomorphic
A: Your brother is a little **off colour**, isn't he, dear Jack?	*Off colour*- usually used as meaning slightly ill, but the meaning here is allusion to his death	homonym
J: How can you sit there, **calmly** eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble (…) You seem to me to be perfectly heartless. A: Well, I can't eat muffins in an **agitated** manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs.	Jack was accusing Algernon of being *cold-hearted*, but Algernon elaborated on the word calm literally- 'Without agitation or strong emotion' (Oxf.).	homonym

The puns in the second act (Table 3.2) reveal that the most often used punning category is homonymy pun (see Appendix 2 Figure 3.3). Surprisingly, the highest pun per turn ratio was determined to be for Miss Prism, she, in mere thirty-one turns manages to pun four times. It is noted, moreover, that she has the second lengthiest lines of all, (the first being Gwendolen) (Appendix 1, Figure 3.1), which accounts for her puns to be made often, but in a large context. The highest number of puns in total is made by Cecily; however, she also speaks the most in comparison to anyone else in the whole play - 2451 words in one act (ibid.). As Cecily is introduced in this act for the first time, the author proposes that Cecily's amount of utterances indicates that she is characterised as talkative. However, Gwendolen, as it is seen in the collected statistical data (ibid.), has the longest utterances in the act: approximately twenty-three words per line. Cecily, Jack and Algernon stay behind Doctor Chasuble and Miss Prism in this regard which means that Miss Prism, Doctor Chasuble and Gwendolen express themselves lengthier (using more words) than others. To properly evaluate the characters' punning, the third act is to be analysed further on.

Table 3.3. **Puns in the Third Act**

Pun in Discourse	Explanation	Type of pun
A. Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon. L. What did he die of? A. Bunbury? Oh, he was quite **exploded**. L. Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage?	*Explode something*- 'show (a belief or theory) to be false or unfounded' (Oxf.). Lady Bracknell, however, thought he meant Bunbury was literally blown up.	homonymy
L. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. […] (*CECILY presents her profile)* Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your **profile**.	*Profile*- 'a person's face, as seen from one side' (Oxf.); also- 'the extent to which a person […] attracts public notice' (Oxf.). Lady Bracknell praises Cecily's economic status, but presents it as if praising her physical appearance.	homonymy
L. Style largely depends on the way the **chin** is worn. They are worn very **high**, just at present.	From the idiom *to keep one's chin up* – 'remain cheerful in difficult circumstances' (Oxf.), the word *up* in the idiom are taken literally- to hold high physically	pun-metaphor
J. Then a **passionate celibacy** is all that any of us can look forward to.	*Passionate*- 'having, showing, or caused by strong feelings or beliefs' (Oxf.); also 'arising from intense feelings of sexual love' (Oxf.), which comes opposite to the meaning of the	(zeugma, wordplay) pun-metaphor

	word *celibacy* - ‘abstaining from marriage and sexual relations’ (Oxf.)	
G. **If you are not too long**, I will wait here for you **all my life.**	Gwendolen does not use the expression *wait for you all my life* with regard to its literal meaning- to wait all life, thus she misses the irony of the utterance	pun-metaphor
J. Lady Bracknell, I **hate to seem inquisitive**, but would you kindly inform me **who I am?**	*inquisitive* - ‘Unduly curious about the affairs of others;’ but now the word *inquisitive* is use to ask a hard and improper question about oneself, thus breaking the expectancy that everyone knows who one is.	homonymy
J: I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being **Earnest**.	The quality of being *earnest* sounds like his name *Ernest*	Homophony, allusion

Regarding the plot, act three is the climax of the whole play where Jack discovers his true family history and both young couples resolve their issues and receive consent for their marriages, thus all the main characters play in this act, even though some of them do not express any puns.

The analysis of the third act reveals that this part contained the least amount of puns of all. It was noticed that there are many other stylistic devices used accounting for making jokes. Nevertheless, from the small list of puns gathered, the most often types are homonymy puns (Appendix 2, Figure 3.4). The biggest punsters are Jack Worthing and Lady Bracknell with three puns for each (Appendix 1); moreover, Jack has uttered a larger part of puns per lines than other characters (Appendix 3: Figure 3.7), even if Lady Bracknell, for example, had more opportunities to pun considering she has the most frequent and the longest lines in the act.

Also, it was noticed that Algernon’s only expressed pun in the whole act is regarding his biggest lie of which he was very proud in the beginning of the play. Any further observations on the usage of puns, and their relation to character development will be addressed in the following subchapter.

3.2. Characters under Scrutiny

After having listed all the found puns for each act in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in this chapter, the puns are listed for each character individually in order to

alleviate the analysis of their punning manner. The tables show what types of punning Wilde uses for his characters and discusses the conversation topic the pun refers to in the column 'Reference'. It could be a person, a conversation subject, an expressed idea and the like. The phraseological units with the shift of meaning are still presented in bold in the first column. The determined type of pun is repeated again in order to notice any relevance between the punning manner and the reason for punning. From that point onwards it is deduced and discussed whether the pun (or its reference) is related to characterization.

The first character under analysis is Algernon Moncrieff for he appears in the play as the first main character. As Graham mentioned that the playwright can give suggestive character names to the audience (2008:16), the name of Algernon Moncrieff is also studied. Firstly, according to its etymology (from Online Etymology Dictionary), the proper name Algernon comes from Old French (*als gernons*) literally meaning 'with moustaches'. The knowledge of Old French might have been more common in Victorian England, but today the name Algernon could hardly be read in full and suggests only some French origin and foreignness. In the context of the character's naming strategy, however, the meaning raises a curious interest whether moustaches were of some social relevance at that time. After some additional research, it is confirmed that well-groomed moustaches indeed were a part of Victorian etiquette: 'let your hair, beard, and moustache, be always perfectly smooth, well arranged, and scrupulously clean' (Hartley, 1873:120). This means, that Algernon's name is associated with the refined social manners of the Victorian era, indicating that he is a member of high society, a typical Victorian gentleman. However, quite soon in the play, the audience perceives that he defies many of the stereotypical values a Victorian gentleman would have (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4. **Puns Made by Algernon**

Pun in Discourse	Reference	Type of pun
A: As far as the **piano** is concerned, sentiment is my **forte**.	Praises his own traits	homonym
J: It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a **false impression**. A: Well, that is exactly what **dentists** always do.	Reference to dentistry, Algernon's comeback reply to Jack who avoids answering his questions of who is Cecily.	homonym
J: That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth **pure and simple.** A: The truth is rarely **pure** and never **simple**.	Speaks against the normal perception of truth	pun-metaphor
A: The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply	Defies social norms for couples and marriage	pun-metaphor

washing one's **clean linen** in public.		
A: In married life **three** is company and **two** is none.	Defies marriage norms	pun-metaphor
L: Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for **pleasure** now. A: I hear her hair has turned quite **gold** from grief.	Defies marriage norms and ironizes it	pun-metaphor
J: If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will **get you into a serious scrape** someday. A: I love **scrapes**. They are the only things that **are never serious**.	Approves trouble, tries to dismiss Jacks opinion/warning	pun-metaphor
A: Your brother is a little **off colour**, isn't he, dear Jack?	Satirizes against Jack's imaginary scapegoat Ernest who no longer exists	homonym
J: How can you sit there, **calmly** eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble (…) You seem to me to be perfectly heartless. A: Well, I can't eat muffins in an **agitated** manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs.	Manners above emotions; public appearance	homonym
A. Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon. L. What did he die of? A. Bunbury? Oh, he was quite **exploded**. L. Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage?	His lie about Bunbury, or the act of *Bunbuying* under the name of Ernest that was discovered	homonymy

Already on his first appearance on stage, Algernon presents himself as standing above the common crowd: 'I don't play accurately – anyone can play accurately – but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the **piano** is concerned, sentiment is my **forte'.** This pun also shows his self-absorption, in a way, as he talks about what he thinks is his own strong side, his *forte*. The self-absorption is noticeable at the end of the second act, where Algernon drowns his stress in muffins, which 'cannot be eaten in an agitated manner' as it would ruin his cuffs. Thus he values his appearance higher than his emotions or what Jack expects him to do.

Algernon's puns are most often twisted idioms, like, 'in married life three is company and two is none', ' her hair has turned quite gold from grief', and that a publicly displayed affection is 'like washing one's clean linen in public' and so on. If in the original idiom 'to wash dirty linen in public' the word *dirty* means 'one's personal affairs' (Oxf.), then Algernon's use of the word *clean* suggests the opposite meaning- that flirting is for everybody to see and thus his outrage against it. The pun, hence, makes Algernon as someone who defies the traditionally set views; with such language play he may even be considered 'a wit' or a 'dandy'. A widely spread opinion

among literary critics is that Algernon represents the playwright's world view or is an instrument to depict the irony against the Victorian world values, and especially the institute of marriage. As Gregor claimed that 'the *dandy* can exist fully only in a world of idyll, of pure play. And at last, in 'The Importance of Being Earnest' [1895] he finds himself in such a world' (1996: 512). Hence the author's intentions are expressed in a playful and unserious manner, moreover, through one of the most unserious characters in the whole play.

Regarding references in Algernon's puns, he most often sets an ironic attitude towards Jack: 'Your brother is a little **off colour,** isn't he, dear Jack?', and often twists Jack's previously said statements or comments, for instance:

> J: If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into **a serious scrape** someday.
> A: I love **scrapes**. They are the only things that are never **serious**.

In this example, Algernon dismisses Jack's threats by claiming to like the moral value Jack is opposed to. This is also a fine example of Algernon's wit and sense of humour, because he has a remarkable quality of creating puns in most unexpected places. *A scrape* is 'an embarrassing or difficult predicament caused by one's own unwise behaviour (Oxf.). The word *serious, on the other hand, is used as meaning* 'characterized by careful consideration or application' (Oxf.) rather than the expected meaning, i.e. -'substantial in terms of size, number, or quality' (Oxf.). Thus, Algernon considers the word *serious* incompatible with *scrapes.*

Returning to the pun references, Algernon uses puns to reveal his attitude about many socially praised values, such as marriage and merchant relationships, turning an irony towards unhappy couples: 'I hear her hair has turned quite **gold** from grief [talking about a widow]'.

The last reference he makes in his punning regards his habit of Bunburying. After a series of events, Cecily discovers Algernon has been lying about his identity, but she manages to forgive him. To the question where Bunbury has gone Algernon answers that Bunbury has 'quite exploded', meaning to himself that his lie is blown up and cannot continue it any longer while presenting the utterance as Bunbury literally having been blown up: 'L. Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage?'. The author regards this change of punning strategy as a character development, indicating once more that Algernon is not a flat character.

While it is clear that Algernon plays with language the most in comparison to Jack, the latter appears to be the more serious 'Earnest' of the two. Jack's last name Worthing is associated with the word 'worthiness'. John (from Jack), however, in Victorian society was considered plain, according to Gwendolen, 'Jack is a notorious domesticity for John!' and that '[all Johns] without exception, were more than usually plain'. These two names, as a sum, represent Jack's

expected character: a mere plain countryman who is worthy of being in the Victorian prestigious society.

Table 3.5. **Puns made by Jack**

Pun in Discourse	Reference	Type of pun
A: Come, old boy, you had much better have the **thing out at once**. J: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a **dentist**.	A distraction from Algernon's questions; addresses Algernon's inquisitiveness	Allusion, homonymic phrase
A: I think it is most **ill-natured** of her. J: Oh, Gwendolen is **as right as a trivet**.	Gwendolen's perfect nature	Homonymy
J: I wish to goodness we had a few **fools** left. A: We have. J: I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about? A: The fools? Oh! About the clever people, of course. J: **What fools!**	Society, he expresses his anger	Homonym
J: I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be **childish**.	Speaks against being perceived childish in a children christening, thus he speaks about his appearance in public	homonym
A: What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been **called back** to town at all. J: Yes, you have. A: I haven't heard any one **call me**. J: Your **duty** as a gentleman **calls** you back.	Expresses his anger towards Algernon	Homonym

Jack, as opposed to Algernon who expresses himself through puns, uses puns to distance himself from the topic: 'A: Come, old boy, you had much better have the **thing out at once**. -J: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a **dentist**'. In this particular example, he tried to avoid Algernon's insistent questioning. This is also one of the two only cases where Jack's punning is done purposefully, another being when he tries to get rid of Algernon and to send him back to the city: 'A: I haven't heard any one **call me**. J: Your **duty** as a gentleman **calls** you back'. One more observation worth mentioning is that the only person to whom Jack depicts his attitude is Algernon. Through puns he shows a mocking attitude, as in the same examples with the dentist, and sending Algernon away.

Concerning the rest of his puns, most of them seem accidental: 'A: I think it is most **ill-natured** of her. -J: Oh, Gwendolen is **as right as a trivet',** meaning he really thinks so well of Gwendolen that Algernon's negative remark goes unnoticed. An accidental and emotional pun

appears also in the derogative exclamation about society- What do fools talk about? About clever people- 'What **fools**!'.

On the other hand, he is not so much different from Algernon regarding his concern for his appearance in the public: 'J: I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be **childish'**. This trait could be explained as a satiric depiction of a typical upper-class man. However, the emotionally expressive scene with Jack losing his temper in the first act (What fools!) shows a breach of the manners: 'the principal rules of politeness are, to subdue the temper' (Hartley, 1873:245). Consequently, two sides of Jack are presented to the audience: the emotional and the rigid one; - thus, adding to a theme of doublings that is played throughout the whole work.

The Honourable Gwendolen Fairfax, Jack's beloved and future fiancé, seems to be a good match for him, for both of the characters are rather serious, lack a sense of humour and their puns are mostly unintentional (table 3.6).

Table 3.6. **Puns made by Gwendolen**

Pun in Discourse	Reference	Type of pun
G: My ideal has always been to love some one of the name of **Ernest**. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence.	To Ernest as possessing the qualities of being earnest	Homophone
G: I am afraid you have had very little **experience** in how to propose. (…) Yes, but men often propose for practice. (…) What wonderfully **blue eyes** you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue.	To Jack's innocence; also shows that she, in contrast to him, is more experienced	pun-metaphor
G: Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely **short-sighted**; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through **my glasses**?	To her mother's education system; describes herself	homonym
C: When I see a spade, I call it a spade. G: **I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade.** It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.	Derogates country people; depicts her attitude and shows her to be both snobby and ignorant	pun-metaphor
G. **If you are not too long**, I will wait here for you **all my life.**	Refers to staying loyal to Jack	pun-metaphor

Gwedolen's name origin is difficult to define. It could be an allusion to the mythical Breton Queen Gwedolen. The Online Etymological Dictionary states that the first part of the name comes from Breton *gwenn* meaning 'white', thus it, arguably, may not be directly related to her

character. It is more probable, however, that the naming strategy is not used for every character in the play.

An additional challenge was encountered when determining whether her utterances contain puns that comply with the definition of pun. One of such instances was in her statement: '**If you are not too long**, **I will wait here for you all my life'.** It certainly creates an ironic feeling for the audience, but what causes the ambiguity in the meaning is the cliché phrase 'I will wait for you all my life!', which Gwendolen clearly said because of certain romantic obligation. Yet she would not actually do it, because of her first statement 'if you are not too long'. According to Naciscione's pun definition, the pun has a definite phraseological unit that is used in another sense of the meaning than expected (2010). This example agrees with it if the phrase 'I will wait for you all my life!' is considered as a whole, the meaning of commitment having changed to 'I will do it as long as it is convenient'. This makes the pun an idiom twist, without the phrase actually being an idiom, thus the author classified it as a homonymic phrase pun.

Gwendolen's being too serious is what mostly creates the unexpected homonymy puns, for example, when telling Cecily that her mother has brought her up to be extremely **short-sighted.** She had stated before that her mother's views on education are specific, and then leaves the audience to expect, meanwhile, that the short-sightedness will refer to this education issue. But then, however, Gwendolen suddenly asks for the permission **to use glasses instead**. The pun is made unintentionally and for the audience's amusement which also shows Gwendolen's self-characterization. Her remark is made with the intention to tell Cecily about herself- she tells her she is short-sighted, but the result is that the audience receives more information on Gwendolen than expected by noticing the accidental pun.

Also, by trying to insult Cecily's lower status, Gwendolen ends up with an unintentional pun: '**I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade.** It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different'**.** Consequently**,** the disregard of Cecily's idiom of the spade does not compliment Gwendolen intellectually. Like this, through many puns she unintentionally highlights one of her own qualities. One more instance is when calling Jack naïve ('having blue eyes'), she implies that she, in comparison to Jack, is more experienced than him in matters related to a proposal.

Similarly to Cecily, however, her intentions are of loving a man in the name of Ernest; or rather the quality of being very serious and sincere that comes from its homophonic word 'earnest'. This shows her disregard to any other qualities but the first impression that the name

brings. This intention does not change through the course of events in the play and neither does her character.

The same way the author found Jack and Gwendolen a suitable couple for each other, also Algernon and Cecily share a lot of common characteristics. Cecily falls in love with her uncle's 'wicked brother Ernest', although she has never met him before, only heard of him from Jack's stories, 'and of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive'. Many of her qualities agree to those of Algernon, for example, as it will be seen in table 3.7, they both defy the traditional norms and expectations of the norms, for instance, the young girl cleverly avoids any chance of Miss Prism to educate her.

Table 3.7. **Puns made by Cecily**

Pun in Discourse	Reference	Type of pun
C: It isn't at all a **becoming** language. I know perfectly well that I look quite **plain** after my German lesson.	Expresses her dislike for German language; it ruins her appearance	homonym
C: I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually **tall** for my age.	Her appearance and her age	homonym
A: **I'd sooner die.** C: Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between **this world, the next world**, and Australia.	Comments on Algernon's sarcasm, by saying his worlds might come true- a reference to Jack's intentions of killing Algernon	Idiom twist
C: I delight in **taking down from dictation**. I have reached '**absolute perfection'** (…) A: [Somewhat taken aback.] Ahem! Ahem! C: Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know **how to spell a cough.**	Praises her own skills; criticises Algernon's cough.	homonym
C: And my ideal has always been to love someone of the name of **Ernest**. There is something in that name that inspires absolute **confidence**.	Aspires to the name Ernest as someone who possesses the traits of being earnest;	homophone
G: The country always bores me to death. C: Ah! This is what the newspapers call **agricultural depression**, is it not?	Historical event; refers to people in countryside, but possibly satirizes Gwendolen	allusion
A: ALGERNON. *[Looking round.]* To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen! C: Yes! **To good heavens, Gwendolen**, I mean to Gwendolen.	Accuses Algernon of knowing Gwendolen and having proposed to her; shows her jealousy	Pseudomorphic

Cecily's name, according to Etymology Dictionary, comes from the male name Cecil, which is rooted from the Latin *caecus* meaning 'blind, dim-sighted'. Her name as a

characterization strategy is discussable because some of her puns are witty and whimsical for the audience, which is the opposite of what her name denotes.

Cecily appears witty and clever, when her puns appear to be made on purpose, especially, regarding Gwendolen's city-folk snobbism, 'G: The country always bores me to death. C: Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural **depression**, is it not?'. Cecily like Algernon comments on other people's expressions and turns them into puns, for example, 'C: Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia. A: Australia! **I'd sooner die'**, where Algernon's utterance is not meant to be understood literally, rather meaning 'anything but Australia', however, Cecily confirms the literal meaning by stating that Jack would make him choose between escaping, dying or moving to Australia.

On the other hand, it is often unclear throughout the whole play whether Cecily puns on purpose or unintentionally 'C: I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached '**absolute perfection'** […] Oh, don't cough, Ernest. […] I don't know how **to spell a cough**'. Here she literally means being able to write dictation with absolute perfection which the audience could perceive as excessive, illogical. Sometimes she presents herself as being naïve: 'I am not **little**. In fact, I believe I am more than usually **tall** for my age'. Similarly, Cecily complains that German 'isn't at all a **becoming** language', and that it makes her look quite plain after the lessons. The word 'becoming' in the first sentence evokes the meaning 'making one look educated and intellectual' as approved by the Victorian high society, however Cecily's following comment turns the meaning into 'beautifying physically', usually used for clothes and appearance.

In one case her emotions are expressed through an accidental pun, although, she noticed it and corrected herself 'A: Good heavens! Gwendolen! C: Yes! To **good-heavens-Gwendolen**, I mean to Gwendolen'. She created a portmanteau as a result of an angry exclamation. And despite her rivalry with Gwendolen, both girls have a similar aspiration of loving 'someone whose name was **Ernest**. There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute **confidence'**. Likewise, she does not acknowledge that she inspired by the qualities of the homonym word 'earnest'.

The next character under discussion is Gwendolyn's mother Lady Augusta Bracknell. Her name bears a title that creates some expectations about (the type of) her character. She indeed is depicted as a stereotypical Victorian upper-class lady who is powerful, arrogant, conservative, and has an opinion on everything, and all her traits also transpire in her puns (table 3.8).

Table 3.8. **Puns made by Lady Bracknell**

Pun in Discourse	Reference	Type of pun
L: To **lose** one **parent**, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like **carelessness**.	Criticism to not following the social rules i.e. to not having a complete family with prestigious background	Homonym
J: I am a **Liberal Unionist**. L: Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us	Politics; she mentions her association with a political party and her being important enough to let them dine with her	Allusion
L: To **produce** at any rate one **parent**, of either sex, before the season is quite over.	Jack's lack of parents are a disgrace for his status; she sets an impossible task for him	Homonym
L. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. […] (*CECILY presents her profile)* Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your **profile**.	Cecily's economic status, the potential upkeep of her own social status	homonymy
L. Style largely depends on the way the **chin** is worn. They are worn very **high**, just at present.	The attitude and appearance shown in public	Idiom twist

Lady Bracknell uses very few puns in the first act which might indicate her lack of humour. Moreover, it is apparent in the play that Lady Bracknell's views on how life works are quite unconventional for the average listener or reader. It is exemplified through her use of words that become puns for the audience, but not her. In 'Make your best efforts to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over' the incongruency is revealed because parents produce offsprings and not the other way round. She expresses her opinion on the lack of necessity of education for lower classes by twisting the idiom 'ignorance is bliss' to 'ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit' that disappears easily.

She, as a member of the upper class and in contrast to every other character, often refers to politics and society: 'L: What are your politics? J: I am a Liberal Unionist. L: Oh, they count as Tories'. Tories, as mentioned also in the comment column in table 3.1., is a conservative wing, while Liberal Unionists had a pact with them, so historically it is known as the party that appeared to be the two different things at the same time. This double nature of the political party is most certainly an implied allusion to Jack's and Algernon's double nature of Ernest and Bunbury, but the allusion is not made consciously by Lady Bracknell for she knows nothing at the time, but is made by the playwright for the knowledgeable listeners.

Lady Bracknell's snobby character and her inclination to keeping up appearances are visible also through her punning. She tells Cecily that 'style largely depends on the way the **chin is worn**. They are worn very **high**, just at present'. The audience can draw associative links to the idiom, 'to keep one's chin up' that means to try to stay cheerful even though one is in a difficult or unpleasant situation. Lady Bracknell approaches this idiom literally- to keep the chin up physically. This example shows her view that appearances come before anything else if one wants to fit in with other members of the upper class; the similar kind of thinking that was observed also for Jack and Algernon.

Lady Bracknell is portrayed as prioritizing fortune and materialistic values over morality and other principles. She originally prohibits Algernon to marry Cecily, but Lady Bracknell suddenly changes her mind when she discovers the young girl's economic status:

> L. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. […] (*CECILY presents her profile)* Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your **profile**.

The word play on the profile indicates Lady Bracknell's interest in both Cecily's appearance and her financial status.

The last female character in the play is Miss Laetitia Prism, Cecily's governess, a former writer and now a teacher. Her first name brings the opposite connotations of her actual character, which might be a source of irony, for her proper name come from Latin *laetitia* meaning 'gladness' according to Online Etymology Dictionary. However, the audience is not introduced to her first name until the third chapter. Before that, she is addressed as Miss Prism which sounds quite like '*misprision'* that means neglect or wrong performance of an official task. The audience finds out at the end of the play the meaning her name carries as she was given the task to go for a walk with a baby whom she later misplaced in a station.

Table 3.9. **Puns made by Miss Prism**

Pun in Discourse	Reference	Type of pun
M: The manuscript unfortunately was **abandoned**. I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid.	A memory of her manuscript	homonym
M: A misanthrope I can understand – a **womanthrope**, never!	Criticism against Doctor Chasuble's celibacy	Portmanteaux/ Pseudomorphic
M: Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are **green**. *[DR. CHASUBLE starts.]* I spoke **horticulturally**. My metaphor was drawn from fruits.	Reveals sexuality, her hidden desires	Homonym, allusion
D: What seem to us bitter trials are often **blessings in disguise**.	Expresses her derogation towards Ernest and his wicked lifestyle	Pun metaphor

M: This seems to me a **blessing** of an extremely **obvious kind.**		

Miss Prism and Doctor Chasuble both, as they phrase, 'speak metaphorically' whether about 'bees' or 'fruit'. These metaphors occur in topics which might be interpreted as improper or bold; for in the Victorian society sex was not discussed openly, for 'if you can control the tongue, that no improper words are pronounced by it, you will soon be able to control the mind and save it from corruption' (Hartley, 1873: 311).

Miss Prism's puns often refer to her so-called guilty pleasures, as her moral stance does not allow to appear sentimental or passionate, the qualities that are carried by her first name. She recollects her memories about her 'abandoned' manuscript and comments regretfully on doctor Chasubles' celibacy: 'A misanthrope I can understand – a womanthrope, never!'. Through puns Miss Prism also declares her moral values, for example, on the announcement of Ernest's death:

D: What seem to us bitter trials are often **blessings in disguise**.
M: This seems to me a **blessing** of an extremely **obvious kind'.**

By doing so, she makes it clear for everybody around that she does not approve of Ernest's reckless lifestyle (the version she has had the knowledge of); and that her moral values are the opposite of Ernest's.

Moreover, despite her having the fewest lines in the play, Miss Prism's pun ratio is the highest of all the characters in the second act: 0.13% (Appendix 1). She is the only one who consciously plays with word compounding: 'A misanthrope I can understand – a **womanthrope**, never!' which might be due to her being a teacher and a former writer. The pun 'a **blessing** of an extremely **obvious kind'** is also a consciously made idiom twist that reveals that Miss Prism is aware of the language she uses which adds to her characterisation.

Another secondary character adding some puns to the play is Reverent Canon Chasuble D.D. The clergy was historically the people with high education and it is set true also in this play.

Table 3.10. **Puns Made by Doctor Chasuble**

Pun in Discourse	Reference	Type of pun
D: Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would **hang upon her lips**. [Miss Prism glares.] I spoke metaphorically. – My metaphor was drawn from bees.	Reveals sexuality, his hidden desires	Allusion homonym

Reverend Canon indicates his belonging to Anglican Church while in the play he is addressed as Doctor Chasuble by his degree 'Doctor of Divinity'. The etymology of his first

name Frederick would not be useful for characterization as it is revealed too late for the audience to perceive it: it is exclaimed by Miss Prism in the final scene where everybody shouts out in joy. The name Chasuble, however, implies his connection to church matters as a chasuble is a piece of clothing worn by a priest.

The reverend, like Miss Prism, tries to disguise his flirty remark (see table 3.10) with metaphors. The awkward pause that comes after his statement makes the audience expect an apology and a digression from the implied statement: 'I would **hang upon her lips'**, but he does the opposite - he confirms that it is the sexual remark he intended to express: 'my metaphor was drawn from [the birds and the] bees'. This indicates that although he explicitly states he is a celibate, he implies his desires through a pun. This punning strategy is marked as both an allusion to the birds and the bees, and that the PU 'hang upon her lips' is used in a different sense than expected, making it an homonymic pun.

Regarding other characterization elements this pun could express, it could be said that it directly asserts the attitude of Doctor Chasuble, as well as it indicates an irony to the Victorian manner of abstaining from sensitive topics.

After having discussed the punning of each character in detail, the overall picture and the results of the analysis are presented in the next subchapter. It is set to present the answers to the proposed research questions and finalize the research.

3.3 Let's Talk about the Punny Characters

This subchapter discusses the found puns in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* based on the conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses. It also presents answers to the research questions set in this thesis: firstly, what types of puns are most frequently used by the characters of the play; and how does the type of pun used by the character contribute to their characterisation.

The findings which were determined to be puns according to Nacisicione's PU identification procedure (2010) are presented in tables in chapter three (3.1, 3.2 and 3.3).. It is possible that some of the found puns may not have been intended to be created in the first place, or that some puns were hard to identify and may have gone unnoticed due to the possibility of the language having changed over the course of time. This might be the case for the example found in the third act- being **inquisitive**. In modern day English, indeed, the meaning of the words conveys the annoyance it brings along with asking too many questions: 'I hate to seem

inquisitive, but would you kindly **tell me who I am**?'. It is, however, highly probable the word inquisitive is simply used as meaning being 'Unduly curious about the affairs of others' (Oxf.). The resulting pun, therefore, is created from the breach of expectancy and resulting from the break from the scheme, which is that we all know who we are.

The biggest punster in the first act is, surprisingly, Lady Bracknell (Figure 3.5 in Appendix 3), whereas in the second act Cecily has the highest amount of puns. Cecily also has the highest amount of uttered words (Appendix 1), therefore, after considering the pun to line ratio, it is revealed that Miss Prism surpasses others greatly in punning in the second act (Figure 3.6. in Appendix 3). In the third act, there are only four characters that make any word plays with puns. From them the two most talkative characters are Lady Bracknell and Jack, meaning that they have the most lines in the third act: both characters are trying to unravel and comprehend Jack's history. Lady Bracknell, in addition, has the longest lines with the biggest number of uttered words which indicates that she speaks often and at length. Jack, on the other hand, has the highest ratio of punning (Appendix 1; Appendix 3, Figure 3.7) that depicts him as a more humorous character than Lady Bracknell. Meanwhile, Algernon (with only one pun) has the second highest pun to line ratio due to him having the shortest lines of all and very few speaking turns in the third act (ibid).

Regarding characterization, the quantity of expressed puns alone does not reveal any particular character traits. Both pun to line and pun to word ratio shows more accurately the amount of puns one expresses as regards their whole speech. Therefore, Miss Prism is concluded to be a bigger punster than Cecily (Appendix 1, figure 3.1), and Algernon and Jack more humorous than Lady Bracknell (ibid.). The quantitative results show the characters' inclination to make puns, but not whether the puns are made on purpose or not, so the results of the qualitative analysis will be discussed in the further paragraphs.

The most often used pun type in the whole play is the homonymic pun (Appendix 3). It prevails as the most often used type of pun in all acts. To answer the question of *how* the used types of puns contribute to characterization, the discussion on the observed characterization elements revealed by each pun type in the whole play is further presented.

Homonymic puns play on the polysemy of a word and utilize the effect of defeated expectancy. Some examples of puns, indeed, occur in unexpected places, for instance, 'L: **To lose** one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; **to lose** both looks like carelessness', where the audience expects the meaning of the word 'to lose a parent' to mean being separated by

death, however, Lady Bracknell considers the notion to be a careless misplacement of the parents. By using this type of pun, the characters are able to:

1) Make allusions to create distractions in order to avoid the current conversation topics: 'A: You had much better have the **thing** out at once [the truth] J: My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a **dentist'**;
2) Mock each other: 'A: Your brother is a little **off colour**, isn't he, dear Jack?;
3) express one's attitude towards a topic: 'C: It isn't at all a **becoming** language. I know perfectly well that I **look** quite **plain** after my German lesson';
4) express an attitude about someone not present: 'A: I think it is most **ill-natured** of her. J: Oh, Gwendolen is **as right as a trivet**';
5) express an attitude to oneself: 'C: I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection' (…) I don't know how to spell a cough'.

The allusive puns more often than not, are a part of some other type of pun. They refer to the outside world and make recognizable references to the society contemporary with the play, for example, references to political parties, the Great Depression of British Agriculture and even to the title of the play itself. The allusive puns are used:

- as stated before, to create distractions (the puns about dentistry);
- Vice versa, to draw the audience's attention to a certain topic: 'I would hang upon her lips […]My metaphor was drawn from **bees'**;
- To depict the character's attitude towards historical or political references 'J: I am a Liberal Unionist. L: Oh, they count as **Tories'**;
- To summarize the main theme of the play: 'J: I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest'.

The third most often used type of pun is the pun-metaphor when a cliché metaphor or a well-known phrase is re-invented and put in an unexpected context. It is most often used by Algernon who twists the commonly accepted world views: 'A: I hear her hair has turned quite **gold** from grief' thus also explicitly depicting his attitude towards such idea as marriage, for one more instance: 'A: In married life three is company and two is none'. While for one character this device allows to *explicitly* depict the character's traits, for Gwendolen, for instance, this punning

type shows one of her traits *implicitly*, like how she appears ignorant when she does not recognize an idiom (and thus translates it literally):

> G: I am glad to say that **I have never seen a spade**. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

The one pun that echoes throughout the whole play including the title is the homophonic play on the words Ernest and earnest. This goes hand in hand with the characterization approach discussed in the previous chapter i.e. the naming of the characters; it shows Wilde's tendency for creating telling names of his characters. Thus, the word Ernest is used both as a means of characterization and a pun that echoes throughout the whole play. Both Gwendolen and Cecily admitted their love for someone (anyone) named as Ernest which inspires the qualities of being **earnest**. Upon the discovery that both gentlemen were leading double lives and were not really named so, Jack and Algernon had to prove their love to Gwendolen and Cecily by actually being completely *earnest* to them (read: honest). Fortunately, the third act ends with the discovery that Jack really has originally been christened by birth in the name of Ernest all along and he indeed has a reckless brother in the city as he told everybody- and who turns out to be Algernon in the end. This means he has not been lying about his identity and, ironically, it makes him an honest man in the end.

The last pun type identified in the play is pseudomorphic puns or portmanteaux. There are only two instances in the play: one made consciously by Miss Prism to criticize Doctor Chasubles lifestyle (**a womanthrope**: woman+ misanthrope); the other one made unintentionally by Cecily when she mimicked Algernon's speech: 'Yes! To **good-heavens-Gwendolen**, I mean to Gwendolen'. The latter was made in the heat of emotions and does not depict any character trait apart from her state of mind in the particular situation.

It is deduced, consequently, that all pun types in *The Importance of Being Earnest* are used to indicate the characters' attitude, most often a critical remark about specific people or social values. The characters use attitudinal puns when speaking to other people, for example, Jack directs his puns only at Algernon, whereas the latter usually replies with an even wittier pun. Algernon is more flexible regarding reasons to pun, but also depicts his attitude mostly towards Jack or his servant Lane, along with criticism of such society value as marriage. Jack's pun about Gwendolen was accidental as he did not notice Algernon's criticism about her nature (a play on the word **ill-natured**). Gwendolen competes with Cecily and vice versa in the second act. Miss Prism openly states that Ernest's death is '**a blessing** of the most **obvious kind'** (and therefore his disagreeable values are no longer a threat to her student Cecily).

By depicting one's attitude towards something or someone, the expressed pun implicitly depicts oneself and one's values. By opposing Ernest's wickedness Miss Prism demonstrates her moral chastity and strict compliance to rules and laws. Algernon's disregard to socially set marriage values shows his own noncompliance to those values; he rebels against them in the beginning, but nevertheless, falls in love with Cecily, and admits that his years-long lie - his Bunbury - has '**exploded'**.

Most importantly, the characters' awareness of using puns influences how they are perceived: Algernon is a 'wit' and a 'dandy' because he purposefully twists well-established idioms that depict society's values; Gwendolen seems ignorant by not recognizing well-known idioms; Miss Prism plays on words due to the nature of her occupation while Cecily accidentally creates a new word due to her emotional condition. Both Miss Prism and Doctor Chasuble use puns explicitly to express their feelings. The use of puns also testifies to a characters' sense of humour or the lack of it, like in the case of Lady Bracknell, Jack and Gwendolen, who, although they use a lot of puns, are regarded as serious because they are not aware of their own puns. Cecily is difficult to interpret and it is possible of seeing her either as being clever, witty and only acting naïve in front of others (see discussion on her character in the previous subchapter) or her being indeed naïve and possessing unconventional world views.

The chapter above discussed what significant role puns play in depicting the attitudes of the characters as well as their values and traits both explicitly and implicitly. The conclusions on the conducted research are further presented in the final chapter.

CONCLUSIONS

The present research was devoted to the analysis of the usage of different puns in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Puns were gathered from all three acts and they were analysed for each character separately regarding their use in order to define their role in characterization. The main goal was to contribute to the study of puns in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

In order to identify all the possible puns in the three acts of the comedy under analysis, the first step was to identify all puns using Naciscione' (2016) identification procedure and then to determine the type of each pun using the typology proposed by Nash (1985). Further on, the punning usage for each character was analysed in detail. The characters utterances were manually selected and the found puns were presented in tables for more comprehensive analysis. The quantitative data results are shown in the attached appendices in a summative format.

Homonymic type of pun prevails as the most often used type of pun in all acts of the play. It was deduced from the analysis of the pun use that the characters' awareness of using a pun influences how the characters are perceived. For instance, Algernon who purposefully reinvents well-established idioms about marriage is considered a 'wit' and a 'dandy'. Jack, although he puns often, does not acknowledge it and thus seems more serious than Algernon. Gwendolen, who also does not recognize humour and does not express it, is consequently perceived as serious and even short-sighted. In addition, the use of the same type of pun has different characterization results that depend on whether they are used on purpose or not, like for Miss Prism who plays on words with awareness on her puns and thus shows her occupation nature (being a teacher, educator), while Cecily expresses a pun accidentally and thus depicts herself as emotional. Both Miss Prism and Doctor Chasuble use puns explicitly to express their hidden feelings that are often not associated with their type of occupations. Cecily is an incomprehensible character and it remains a mystery whether she is witty (if she puns on purpose) or her character is naturally naïve and unconventional. Lady Bracknell is portrayed as a stereotypical Victorian upper-class woman by her usage of unintentional puns that depict her arrogance, self-entitlement and materialistic values.

In a broader context, puns are only a part of all the characterization means in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and further research on other characterization means would add to the study of Oscar Wilde's play. The elements of characterization in drama are exceedingly complex and attributing many of its aspects to one humour device was a challenging task. The

biggest difficulty encountered in the research was to acknowledge the effect of puns on characterization and not the comic effect of puns. Moreover, it was important to acknowledge all the possible characterization elements for every pun lest some aspect is missed and the analysis therefore not executed fully. Further research on various stylistic devices that contribute to either the creation of humour or characterization or both is recommended. Some comparative analysis could be done to compare the language use of Wilde's male and female characters.

THESES

1. Only recently linguists have turned their attention to dramatic dialogues and presented linguistic techniques of drama analysis.
2. Pun is both a humorous and a stylistic device which among other functions might be used for characterization.
3. Despite the extensive research on Oscar Wilde's comedies regarding literature, psychology, humour, gender and biographical studies, his usage of puns in general and in *The Importance of Being Earnest* has not been properly addressed.
4. Naciscione's phraseological unit identification procedure is a good tool to identifying puns in discourse, whereas Nash's taxonomy is used as base for pun classification in the play *The Importance of Being Earnest.*
5. The used pun types in Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* are homonymic, allusive puns, pun-metaphors, homophonic and portmanteaux puns.
6. The made pun to turn ratio shows the characters' tendency to use puns, but only.
7. Their awareness of puns influences how the characters are perceived by the audience.
8. Characters, who pun intentionally, explicitly express their attitude towards others speaker or about topics, and thus imply their own traits and values, whereas characters who pun unintentionally, implicitly reveal their intellectual level, emotional state or lack of humour.
9. The most often used type of pun in the whole play is homonymic pun, and this type of pun most efficiently utilizes the effect of defeated expectancy to create distractive conversation topics and allow characters to express their attitude against other characters and topics.
10. Wilde shows a tendency of creating telling names for his characters and the word *Ernest* is used both as a homophonic pun in the play and a means of characterization for Jack.

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APPENDIX 1

ACT 1	Number of puns	Number of turns	Words uttered	Words per turn (average)	Pun per turn ratio	Pun per word ratio
Cecily	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	0.00000
Doctor Chasuble	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	0.00000
Miss Prism	0	0	0	0.00	0.0000	0.00000
Jack	3	114	1988	17.44	0.0263	0.00151
Gwendolen	2	33	808	24.48	0.0606	0.00248
Algernon	6	97	2245	23.14	0.0619	0.00267
Lady Bracknell	4	36	1231	34.19	0.1111	0.00325
Act 2						
Lady Bracknell	0	0	0	0.00	0.0000	0.00000
Jack	2	63	998	15.84	0.0317	0.00200
Doctor Chasuble	1	30	607	20.23	0.0333	0.00165
Algernon	3	86	1499	17.43	0.0349	0.00200
Cecily	5	128	2451	19.15	0.0391	0.00204
Gwendolen	2	44	1032	23.45	0.0455	0.00194
Miss Prism	4	31	660	21.29	0.1290	0.00606
Act 3						
Algernon	1	19	191	10.05	0.0526	0.00524
Cecily	0	26	268	10.31	0.0000	0.00000
Doctor Chasuble	0	12	165	13.75	0.0000	0.00000
Miss Prism	0	10	286	28.60	0.0000	0.00000
Jack	3	44	1110	25.23	0.0682	0.00270
Gwendolen	1	24	375	15.63	0.0417	0.00267
Lady Bracknell	2	47	1644	34.98	0.0426	0.00122

Figure 3.1. **Statistical data of Puns in the play**

APPENDIX 2

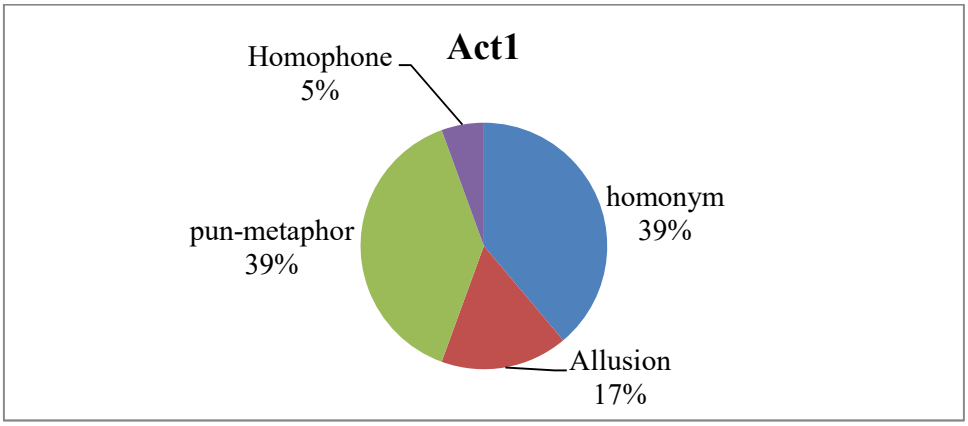

Figure 3.2. **Pun Types in Act 1**

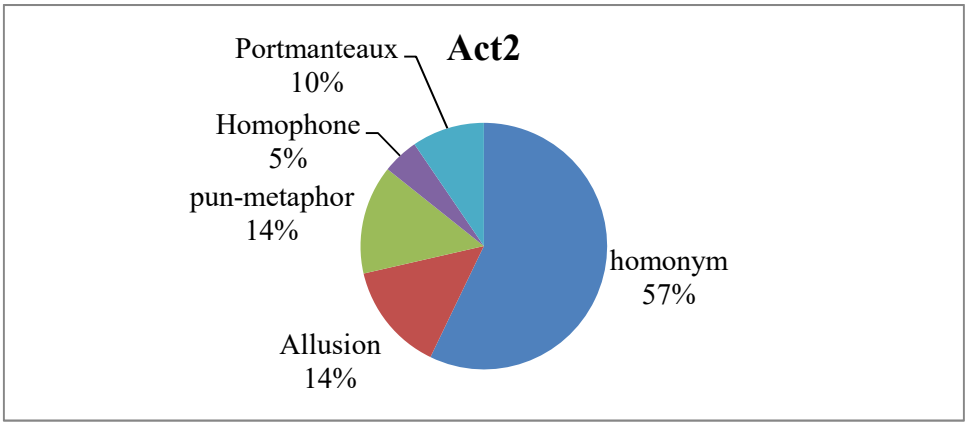

Figure 3.3. **Pun Types in Act 2**

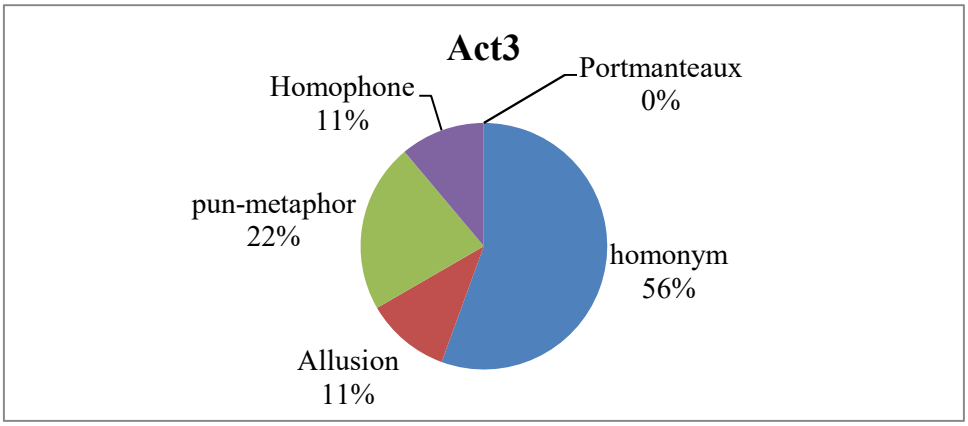

Figure 3.4 **Pun Types in Act 3**

APPENDIX 3

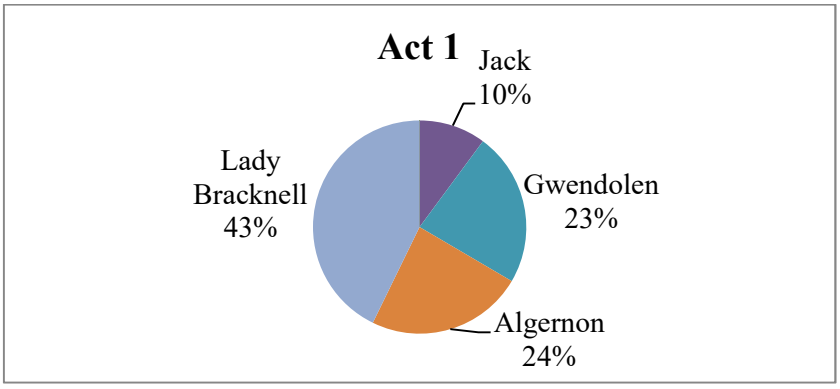

Figure 3.5. **The Pun to Speaking Turn Ratio in Act 1**

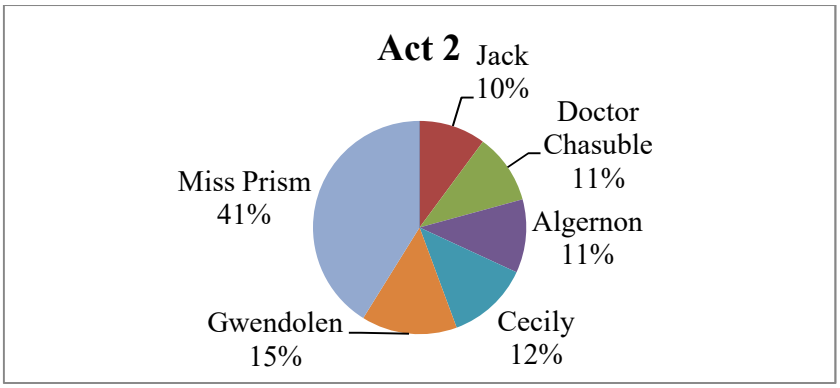

Figure 3.6. **- The Pun to Speaking Turn Ratio in Act 2**

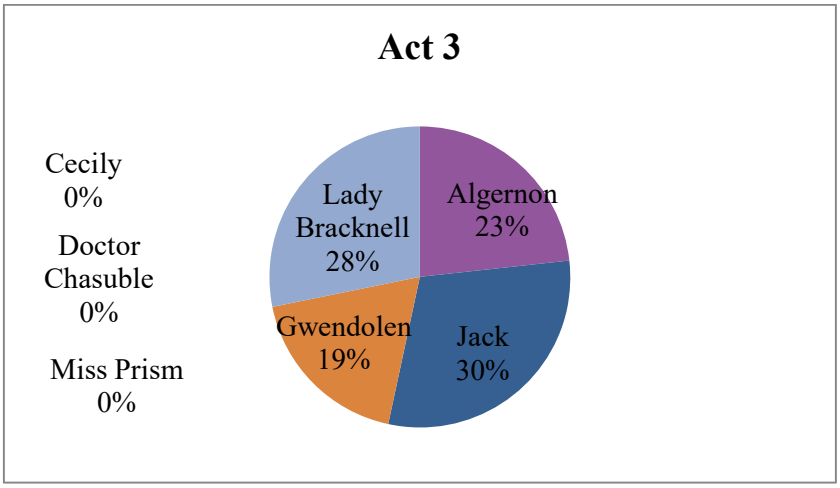

Figure 3.7. **The Pun to Speaking Turn Ratio in Act 3**