

Using 'punning schemes' as a template for translating wordplay

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Abstract

This paper details wordplay templates as well as a method I used for translating puns from English into French. This method nicknamed 'punning scheme' stands as a framework to support creativity, accuracy and consistency when translating puns.

Keywords

Wordplay templates, pun, wordplay terminology, Translation strategies, Cooperative principle, Relevance theory,

1. Introduction

During the month of February 2022, the Joker Project¹ held a 'wordplay translation contest'²[1] and received contributions from 45 contestants. They had to translate five hundred sentences over a period of four weeks and would be judged on the number of accurate translations and their creativity. These five hundred puns³ were arranged in a form, one sentence per line, and each sentence contained a single punning word or expression.

The puns came from open resources readily available on the internet. They were written in English and had to be translated into French with no other instructions or limitations. The contestants were free to adopt whichever translation strategy they saw fit. Being in the middle of an internship with the Joker Project, I was not a contestant, but I have first-hand experience of the exercise, having translated over eight hundred puns over the course of the last few months. Although I approached the exercise as a student in translation, not a seasoned professional, the schemes I used could be applied by professionals and students alike.


Admittedly, translating line after line of puns without context is not a common task for any translator. The exercise takes place 'in a vacuum' since, in contrast to a real-world scenario, the translator works without any context and can't rely on common translation strategies given the subject and the way it is presented. As an added contrast to a real-world scenario, where a translator can be caught unaware of an obscure cultural allusion or of the presence of a wordplay, in the case of the contest, the sentences were intentional attempts at humor and every

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¹<https://www.joker-project.com/clef-2022/EN/index>

²<https://www.joker-project.com/pun-translation-contest/>

³We follow the classification of Meri Giorgadze[2] and consider wordplay as an umbrella term denoting a variety of linguistic units, spoonerism, malapropism, wellerism, etc. including puns.

contestant was working on a 'level playing field', fully aware of the presence of ambiguous words or expressions evenly distributed between homonyms and paronyms. Indeed, the quick succession of puns helped to identify repeating patterns in the way the puns were setup. Figure 1 shows a sample of the form with the first five questions out the five hundred. To use Fabio Regattin's terminology[3], this layout encouraged contestants to read beyond the play of the wordplay and helped them identify the rules of the game.

I will give examples of the types of wordplay that 'play by the rules of the game'. These examples are based on the translations invented by the winning contestants as well as my own. Then I will detail what I mean by a 'punning scheme' and how applying a set of rules can help produce, following Jacqueline Henry's terminology[4], as close to an 'isomorphic translation' of the wordplay as possible, a translation that preserves the wordplay both in its 'sense of form' and in its denotation and connotation.

2. Wordplay templates

In her article One-liners and Linguistics: (Re)Interpretation, Context and Meaning Catherine Chauvin writes: 'there are types of one-liners that can be considered to form templates [...] They could be considered to constitute subgenres because of their recurrent characteristics and they form patterns writers have to embrace and play with.'[5] It would be interesting to see which of the contest's puns fit her classification of one liners but I'd rather put the focus on other forms of wordplay encountered during the contest. Wordplay that 'can be considered to form templates'. I will list and name such templates along with some examples. I will also highlight translations strategies applied by the contestants.

2.1. 'Tom Swifties'

'Tom Swifties' are a type of wellerism. There was over sixty 'Tom Swifties' among the five hundred puns. They are all built on a common template, a quote by the titular Tom followed by a verb or adverb that comments with a pun how Tom uttered their line:

I deny everything, said Tom knowingly.
I hate sweet potatoes, Tom yammered.
I like Chinese detective movies, Tom chanted.

One of the main hurdles when translating a pun is to be able to 'get the joke' as some puns are built on particular cultural allusions. 'Tom Swifties' are a good example since they are very foreign to a French ear. The following pun gave me a clue that 'Tom Swifties' were a common type of joke:

S1⁴ : 'Don't you know my name?' asked Tom swiftly.

When I first encountered this pun, I was not aware of 'Tom Swifties' and could not at first pinpoint the wordplay. I did a simple search of the sentence in a web browser and once I got this

⁴I chose to number sources (S) translations (T) and back translations (BT) to avoid confusion. I also format sources in bold characters and translations in italic.

'key'⁵, I could 'unlock' the meaning of a lot of puns I had encountered and failed to translate. I can't say if other contestants were aware of Tom Swifities. Jean-Charles Meunier, winner of the contest gave these two translations of this original pun:

T1.1 : 'Tu ne sais pas comment je m'appelle ?' a demandé Guillaume à Pauline R.

BT1.1 : 'Don't you know my name?' said Guillaume to Pauline R.

T1.2 : 'Tu ne sais pas comment je m'appelle?' a demandé Raymond à Ron.

BT1.2 : 'Don't you know my name?' said Raymond to Ron.

Both translations keep the template of somebody asking something to someone else. Instead of using a verb or adverb to build the comment phrase, Jean-Charles constructs his puns around two names, Guillaume Apollinaire, the poet, and Raymond Aron, the philosopher. This example is very successful in keeping a sense of cultural allusion but only partly respects the structure of the source material. In the following example, Jean-Charles manages to translate another 'Tom Swifitie' by staying as close as possible to the cultural connotation while matching the traditional template of the wordplay. Goole being a port in England, Jean-Charles uses the name of another port in France, Brest:

S2 : 'I'm from a Humberside port,' said Tom ghoulishly.

T2 : 'Je viens d'un port breton', dit Tom brestement.

BT2 : 'I'm from a Breton port,' said tom 'brestement'.

The name Brest allows Jean-Charles to create a paronym to the French adverb prestement which, funnily enough, translates to swiftly. The following 'Tom Swifities' also lend themselves to isomorphic translations.

S3 : 'I haven't developed my photographs yet,' said Tom negatively.

T3 : 'Je n'ai pas encore développé mes photos', dit Tom d'un ton négatif (Romane Rullier).

BT3 : 'I haven't developed my photographs yet,' said Tom in a negative way.

S4 : 'I'll never give up my hounds!' Tom said doggedly.

T4 : 'Je n'abandonnerai jamais mes chiens! aboya Tom (Michel Delarche).

BT4 : 'I'll never give up my hounds!' barked Tom.

S5 : 'Nice looking glass! said Tom reflectively.

T5.1 : 'Joli miroir!' dit Tom en réfléchissant (Emma Olivier).

BT5.1 : 'Nice looking mirror⁶ !' said Tom reflectively.

T5.2 : 'C'est un beau miroir', fit Tom, plongé dans ses réflexions (Jean-Charles Meunier).

BT5.2 : 'Nice looking mirror!' said Tom, immersed in his reflections.

⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Swifty

⁶Although a glass and a mirror are not the same thing, in my opinion, the frame (pun intended) of reference it activates in the reader is close enough to qualify these as isomorphic translations.

2.2. Riddles and questions

Another good example of wordplay template, there were around eighty riddles and questions among the five hundred puns. The following are good examples of isomorphic translations.

S6 : Who did the ghost take to the prom? A Ghoul-friend!!!!

T6 : Qui est-ce que le fantôme emmène au bal? Sa fi-hantée!!!! (Julien Boccou)

BT6 : Who did the ghost take to the prom? Their haunted fiancée!!!!

S7 : Did you hear about the new piñata? It's a huge hit.

T7 : T'as entendu parler de la nouvelle pinata? Apparemment elle vaut le coup (Noémie Vandenborre et Charlotte Daniel).

BT7 : Did you hear about the new piñata? It appears to be worth a shot.

S8 : Did you hear about the crime that happened in a parking garage? It was wrong on so many levels.

T8 : Tu es au courant du crime dans le parking souterrain? C'est vraiment une sale affaire à tous les niveaux.

BT8 : Did you hear about the crime that happened in a parking garage? It's a bad case on so many levels.

Riddles and questions are a very common form of template for jokes. The question mark acts as a signal, a pivot point to attract the attention to the punning intention. Riddles and questions are such a common wordplay template, that French readers⁷ would readily refer to them as *blagues carambar* after a brand of caramels with jokes written in the wrapping. Resorting to riddles and questions to tell jokes is so natural in fact that most of the contest's translations mirrored the question/answer template.

2.2.1. Headlines

Sometimes, riddles and questions can be construed as newspaper headlines.

Can honeybee abuse lead to a sting operation?

Are evil wildebeests bad gnus?

It's the following example that attracted my attention to the headline template as a valid choice for pun translation:

Dateline London: Eccentric ornithologist travels to foreign land to teach pigeon English.

This led me to use this strategy instead of sticking to the riddle/question template in one case. Compare the strategies for these three translations of the same pun:

⁷I use the word 'reader' throughout this paper since the puns were all set in written form, but most reflections apply to a hearer too. I simply refer to readers for convenience.

S10 : Can honeybee abuse lead to a sting operation?

T10.1 : Est-ce qu'en braconnant des ruches on risque de se faire piquer?

BT10.1 : Does poaching beehives present a risk of being stung?

T10.2 : Est-ce qu'un voleur de homards risque de se faire pincer?

BT10.2 : Does a lobster thief risk being pinched?

T10.3 : Un important coup de filet de la police a mené à l'arrestation du 'gang des sardines'.

BT10.3 : A large-scale sting operation led to the arrest of the 'Sardines Gang'.

T10.1 stays as close as I could to the source by keeping the denotation to bees and sting while the idiom *se faire piquer* has a similar connotation to 'sting operation'. So does the idiom *se faire pincer* which led me to replace bees for lobsters in T10.2. Lobsters leading by association to fish, I faked a newspaper headline in T10.3 by translating 'sting operation' with the closest equivalent in French: *coup de filet*. For an English-speaking reader *filet* can indeed evoke fish but in this case, the French word denotes a net used by fishermen.

Riddles, questions and fake headlines are common wordplay templates. They are a good example of wordplay templates that, contrary to 'Tom Swifities' for instance, translate well from one language to another. Translators aware of this fact can consciously mirror these templates to broaden their translation strategies options.

2.3. Old professionals never die

Over forty wordplays followed the same template: Old professionals never die, they just X.

S11 : Old antenna engineers never die, they just phase away

T11 : Les vieux concepteurs d'antennes ne meurent pas, ils s'éphasent peu à peu (Jean-Charles Meunier).

BT11 : Old antenna engineers never die, they just slowly go out of phase/fade away.

S12 : Old blasting technicians never die, they just lose their spark.

T12 : Les vieux artificiers ne meurent jamais, ils ont simplement perdu l'étincelle. (Noémie Vandendorre et Charlotte Daniel)

BT12 : Old blasting technicians never die, they just have lost the spark.

S13 : Old guitarists never die, they just fret their lives away.

T13 : Un guitariste ne meurt pas, il tire sur la corde (Romane Rullier).

BT13 : A guitarist never dies, he pulls on the string.

These examples are all isomorphic translations but adhering to the structure, denotation and connotation doesn't lead to the only, or most satisfying, translation of a given pun. Sometimes, the result is more interesting when the translator gets more creative. Consider these alternative translations of the same sources.

T11 .2 : Les fabricants d'antennes ne meurent pas, ils disparaissent des radars (Romane Rullier).

BT11.2 : Antenna builders never die, they drop off the radar.

T112.2 : Un artificier ne meurt jamais, seulement, il fait pschitt (Julien Boccou).
BT12.2 : A blasting technician never dies, they just go 'pfft.

T13.2 : Les vieux guitaristes ne meurent jamais, ils continuent de gratter quand la guitare les démange (Noémie Vandeborre et Charlotte Daniel).
BT13.2 : Old guitarists never die, they just keep on scratching when their guitar is itching.

T14.2 and T15.2 are better translations in that they use more 'colorful' images. In the case of T14 specifically, while Jean-Charles found a clever pun to stay close to the source, I find the image of 'dropping off the radar' more vivid as a euphemism for getting old and dying. When it comes to T16, *tirer sur la corde* is a very accurate translation of fretting one life away. The back translation even reveals a possible darker parallel between string and rope. Noémie and Charlotte chose to 'lighten the mood' and playfully quoted a famous French song by Yves Duteil *J'ai la guitare qui me démange*⁸.

2.4. My names is...

There were fifteen puns built around the template 'My name is X. I'm a Y.'

As it turns out, it is much easier to create such puns in English than it is in French. It appears that more English names can double as adjectives, nouns or adverbs.

S14 : My name is Sly. I'm a detective.

S15 : My name is Melody. A musician.

S16 : My name is Sandy, I just hang around the beach.

The contestants came up with contrasting translation strategies:

T14 : Je m'appelle Sylvestre. Je suis bûcheron (Emma Olivier).
BT14 : My name is Sylvestre. I'm a lumberjack.

T15.1 : Je m'appelle Mélodie. Je suis musicienne (Jean-Charles Meunier).
BT15.1 : My name is Mélodie. I'm a musician.

T15.2 : Mon nom est Octave. Je suis musicien (Noémie Vandeborre et Charlotte Daniel).
BT15.2 : My name is Octave. I'm a musician.

T16 : Moi c'est Océane et voici mon mari, Tim (Noémie Vandeborre et Charlotte Daniel).
BT16 : I'm Océane and this is my husband, Tim.

T14 finds a similarity of sound between 'sly' and 'syl' and develops the idea of the name Sylvestre in French which also means sylvan. That is why the detective becomes a lumberjack. The template is preserved but not the meaning, a homomorphic translation according to Jacqueline Henry's classification.

⁸The first line of the lyrics is: *J'ai la guitare qui me démange alors je gratte un petit peu (My guitar is itching me so I scratch a little bit)*

T15.1 is isomorphic. Melody translates directly into French both as name and a noun and indeed almost all contestants chose this option. Noémie and Charlotte explained their oblique choice in T15.2: they found *Mélodie* too obvious. This is not the only case where a contestant chose a solution more creative than the obvious and accurate one. It seems to be both a personal bias and a consequence of the context since the contest encouraged creativity as well as the quantity of successful translations.

T16 shows another common characteristic among answers from the contestants: why translate only one pun when you can add more?⁹ And the sandy beaches of the source give birth to a maritime ocean.

2.5. And the list goes on

I chose to give examples of the most common templates encountered during the contest. A keen eye could find a few more, most notably puns built around the setup ‘She was only a [professional] daughter but she could really X.’ I chose to leave these particular examples aside because they were few and mostly offensive. It occurred to me that when a ‘joke’ needs to specify a gender, origin, sexual orientation, or disability in its setup, it is often a red flag that the wordplay will be sexist, racist or ableist.

Catherine Chauvin gives other examples of one-liners: ‘stupid blonde jokes’ and ‘yo-mamma jokes’. These can be considered to form what I would call ‘offensive templates’, templates that are meant to build offensive jokes and puns.

One of the goals of the Joker project, automatic detection and translation of wordplay, also implies automatic detection of offensive contents. Trained with a set of wordplay templates, AI could help translators identifying ‘problematic’ sentences when there is a ‘red flag’ word in the setup part of a wordplay. Even without computer assistance, translators aware of this can more easily avoid overlooking an implied offensive content. It helped me be more cautious, maybe too much so and I’ll let you judge the following wordplay and the associated comment.

Source: She was only a Blacksmith’s daughter, but she knew how to forge ahead

Comment: Possibly offensive can’t know for sure with these ‘she was...’ setups

3. ‘punning schemes’

Scheme has an ambiguous meaning: it can be both a figure of speech and a plan. A ‘punning scheme’ is indeed both a ‘figure of speech’, a deliberate turn of phrase, and a plan, a wordplay template designed with a purpose: help in translating puns more efficiently and keep a strong

⁹The most striking examples of over-translations were penned by Jean-Charles. I’ll let the French reader parse these because I feel explaining them is beyond the scope of this article:

S: It’s between my sole and my heel, said Tom archly

T: Achille Talon, ça m’envoute! Surtout quand il semelle des affaires de son voisin et lui casse les pieds.

S: When it got stuck in the mud my car had to be toad.

T: Mon cat cat était tellement embourbé, j’ai vu qu’y fallait l’treuil pour l’dégager... Écrevisse et le treuil, c’est ‘core plus dur sangsue porc, surtout quand tes passagers ont des QIs de grenouille! Ça, cette rainette!

sense of structure and context to support creativity by helping the translator focus on the ‘moving parts’ of the scheme they created.

3.1. Tell the joke efficiently

In *The Violation of Grice’s Maxims in Jokes*[6], Salvatore Attardo, following Victor Raskin, applies Paul Grice maxims to joking, stating that ‘joking involves a different kind of “communication mode”, governed by a different set of maxims’ that define on ‘non bona fide’ mode of humor that one adheres to when they notice a violation of Grice’s Maxims. Grice’s fourth maxim, the maxim of manner, instructs to be clear and orderly but wordplay thrives by playfully subverting the rules of this game. That is why Victor Raskin’s version of the maxim of manner instructs to ‘tell the joke efficiently’.

In my view, using culturally shared ‘punning structures’, such as ‘Tom Swifties’ allow for more efficient joking. That is also why I made the choice to replace the name Tom by Toto. Toto is a popular character in French jokes and while Tom tries to be witty, Toto is more of a dunce involved in silly situations. To translate the joke efficiently, I chose to localize the name Tom. Toto appeared to me as a nice fit since the names are very close and, more importantly, any French speaker that hears the name Toto will expect a joke: ‘The hearer will backtrack, after realizing he/she has been misled, and will reinterpret the information provided in the text on the basis of the “humor” maxims, switch to the non bona fide mode of humor, and react accordingly (i.e., laughing, smiling, etc.)’[6].

The name Toto puts the accent on the same kind of child play that is involved in Tom Swifties but *les blagues de Toto* don’t have much other aspects in common with Tom Swifties. Tom Swifties are a type of wellerisms named after sayings of Sam Weller in Charles Dickens’s novel *The Pickwick Papers*¹⁰. The closest French equivalent I could find to this type of joke is the *amphigouri*. Had I wanted to be clever I could have localized Tom with a ‘samweleresque’ character: le Maire de Champignac. He’s the character of a *bande-dessinée*, Spirou, created by Franquin and Henri Gillain. This character is still famous enough that a prize bears his name, *Le Grand prix du Maire de Champignac*¹¹, but is not as good a name as Toto when it comes to localize jokes efficiently.

Tell the joke efficiently is a ‘reader oriented’ approach and the translator, after all, starts as a reader. As a translator, I found that using ‘punning schemes’ helped me produce translations more efficiently and accurately. I do not have precise examples to back this point because I started by translating one pun after the other and they were not grouped in any fashion. It is only after I had translated a few dozen that I started to recognize different templates and had the idea to come up with schemes to apply on each of these templates. I then revised my previous translations in that new light, effectively erasing the translation process. I do remember that I came up with my first scheme when translating ‘An old professional never dies’ wordplay. It could have been the following one:

S17 : Old quilters never die, they just go under cover.

¹⁰<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellerism>

¹¹https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_prix_du_maire_de_Champignac

*T17 : Un couvreur ne meurt jamais, seulement, il a besoin d'une nouvelle couverture.*¹²

BT17 : a roofer never dies, she just needs a new cover story.

A 'punning scheme' articulates a predetermined turn of phrase and 'moving parts', the only parts changing from one translation to another. In the following examples, the 'moving parts' of the scheme are highlighted in bold characters in the translations.

S18 : Old hikers never die, they just get the boot.

T18 : Un randonneur ne meurt jamais, seulement, il s'égare.

BT18 : A hiker never dies, but he gets lost.

S19 : Old key punch operators never die they just punch out.

T19 : Un poinçonneur ne meurt jamais, seulement, à la fin, il n'y a plus qu'un petit trou.

BT19 : A key punch operator never dies but, in the end, there's only a little hole.

S20 : Old locomotive engineers never die, they just get derailed.

T20 : Une conductrice de train ne meurt jamais, seulement, plus ça va, plus elle déraille.

BT20 : A locomotive engineer never dies, but she gradually becomes subject to derailment.

In these punning schemes, about half of the words are already set which helps to focus on the moving parts. It works similarly as a translation memory in a CAT tool and makes for more efficient and imaginative translations. Just as focusing only on the moving parts can help with creativity and efficiency, it also encourages to pay attention to the way the wordplay is set up. Once the ambiguous 'punning expression' is identified, most of the translation work consists of setting up this expression, building the right context for the wordplay to work in.

3.2. Context is key

Punning schemes help reinforce the context of the pun through repetition of easily identifiable templates. Clearly identifying the scheme, on the one hand and the moving parts, on the other hand, the reader, expecting an ambiguity can switch more easily to the 'non bona fide' mode of communication.

It helps the reader, but it also makes the task easier for the translator. It helps in building adequate context and structure, guiding the translator in processing the source text to come up with a target wordplay.

Translating a pun means translating an ambiguous expression and translating a context. This context needs to be set up in such a way to allow the reader to swing dynamically back and forth between two possible interpretations once they have identified the ambiguous expression and revealed its diverse meanings. It is a mechanism that I compare to a seesaw, The context needs to be ambiguous enough to support the pun but not so obscure that the reader can't understand it, leading them to assume that either the expression does not make any sense or that there is not any pun.

Riddles and questions are a good example of the dynamic seesaw articulation between context and pun. Take S6:

¹²From this point on, the translations are my own.

S6: Who did the ghost take to the prom? A Ghoul-friend!!!!

T6: Qui est-ce que le fantôme emmène au bal? Sa fi-hantée!!!!

BT6: Who did the ghost take to the prom? Their haunted fiancée!!!!

The context clues the reader with the expressions 'ghost' and 'prom', activating two frames, the party and the supernatural. Those two frames are not obviously linked and it is the pun 'ghoul-friend' that allows the reader to swing dynamically back and forth between the different possible interpretations.

Basing herself on relevance theory Agnieszka Solska emphasizes the fundamental role of context:

'What governs the choice of the contextual subset of assumptions at any given moment is relevance, the key notion in the theory, understood as a trade-off between the cognitive gain achieved by processing the incoming input and the processing effort needed to achieve that gain. In keeping with the communicative principle of relevance, an assumption is judged as relevant if it brings in cognitive effects which the hearer perceives as adequate in the view of the effort he has expended to derive them.' [7]

The reader needs to feel rewarded for their effort. They pulled their cognitive weight and the reward of this effort is the fun ambiguity of the pun that lifts their spirits, so to speak, just like in a metaphorical game of seesaw. Indeed, the reader can feel cheated if the pun is not properly set up and they do not stand a chance to 'get the joke'. This can especially be the case when a pun involves a cultural reference:

A man walks into a bar and raises two fingers and says to the bartender... 'Five beers, please.'

I deliberately altered the context to make the pun more confusing. One can judge that the alteration was very minor compared to the original:

A Roman walks into a bar and raises two fingers and says to the bartender... 'Five beers, please.'

Once the reader has an opportunity to understand the use of Roman numerals, they can feel rewarded by a smile or a laugh.

Sometimes, one can use context to toy with the reader and subvert their expectation of a satisfying reward to their cognitive effort.

What do you call a boomerang that doesn't come back? A stick.

Instead of a pun, the reader is cheated of the resolution and get a matter-of-fact answer instead. I chose this example because it was a rare case in the set of puns I had to translate where there was no wordplay. It was also fairly easy to translate: there was no ambiguity to carry from source to target. That said, it is a kind of dry humor that can be fun in its own way and I'll let you remember this time you told a riddle and never revealed the answer.

4. Conclusion

We have explored a few wordplay templates that appeared in the contest and we have seen how ‘punning schemes’ can be built with a purpose in mind to help both the reader and the translator in processing puns. In the example that follows, I chose to translate a surname in English with a pair of name and surname in French. This combination broadened my options and would have, I hoped, evoked the popular French wordplay template: *Monsieur et Madame ont un fils/une fille*. The goal of this game is to tell Mr. and Mrs. X’s name and let another person guess the name of their children to create a pun.

S21: My name is Manuel, I write instruction books.

T21.1: *Je me présente : Monsieur Seigne. Jean Seigne. J’écris des manuels scolaires.*

BT21.1 : let me introduce myself: Mr. Seigne. Jean Seigne. I write instruction books.

T21.2: *Je m’appelle Manuel, j’écris des notices d’utilisation*

BT21.2: My name is Manuel. I write instruction books.

Systems tend to exert a fascination and this last example illustrates one caveat of adhering to rigid structures. Manuel, as a name, works perfectly in French and is also a homonym to *un manuel*, a book that gives instructions. As it turns out, I had already found a satisfying translation in T21.2 but seeing that French names did not necessarily lend themselves to this kind of wordplay, I had designed a scheme and I could not help but apply it in T21.1.

This issue, and the ‘punning schemes’ strategy, is probably only relevant in the rare cases where one must translate hundreds of puns, one after the other. Outside the special case of translating wordplay, this method finds much less use. It does have one application that I can imagine in translating song lyrics and, to a lesser extent, poetry. I have little experience with translating song lyrics, even less with poetry so I’ll let other translators be judge.

It is a common belief that applying a system can feel dull and get in the way of creativity but, in my experience, these ‘rigid’ strategies help to sustain creativity. I must admit that the translations I enjoyed the most did not fit in these templates. I did not study more ‘free form wordplay’ in this paper so as to stay on topic but also because, since they don’t follow any template, ‘punning schemes’ aren’t a good strategy.

‘punning schemes’ can find use in automatic wordplay generation. I experimented with AI21¹³ and, perhaps unsurprisingly, AI generated more consistent puns when the prompt was formatted in such a way that the different expressions submitted as a ‘seed’ followed the same template.

But, just like AI generated wordplay, while ‘punning schemes’ can be convenient, they’re only useful when they foster creativity not when they rigidly structure imagination.

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¹³<https://www.ai21.com/studio>

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1-100

1:

"I'm halfway up a mountain," Tom alleged.

Votre réponse

2:

They hid from the gunman in a sauna where they could sweat it out.

Votre réponse

3:

I'd like to be a Chinese laborer, said Tom coolly.

Votre réponse

4:

Wal - Mart isn't the only saving place !

Votre réponse

5:

Dentists don't like a hard day at the orifice.

Votre réponse

Figure 1: a screen capture of the form for the 'wordplay translation contest' showing the first 5 questions.