

LISTEN, HEAR!

by Geoff Plant



hearLIFE

Y 👁️ ♥ 2 [U + z] Rebuses in [m + 👁️] Work

(Why I Love to Use Rebuses in My Work)

INTRODUCTION

REBUS [I6c: from French rébus, Latin rebus (ablative plural of res thing) by or with things]. A device that uses letters, numbers, or pictures to represent words: for example MT used to mean empty; B4 to mean before.

I was looking for a good definition of rebus, and came across this one in “The Oxford Companion to the English Language.” The moment I read it, I remembered one of my father’s terrible jokes from my childhood! “ How do you spell ‘hungry horse’ in four letters? Give up? MT GG!” It’s not a very good joke, but it does, at least, serve as a good example of a rebus.

What are Rebuses?

We’re all familiar with rebuses in many different forms, but perhaps the most famous is the bumper sticker or postcard that so many tourists buy when they visit New York for the first time –

I ♥ N Y

The use of a heart to represent love has now become ubiquitous, and we see it all the time being used in advertising slogans, other bumper stickers, etc.

I regard rebuses as part of our cultural literacy, and feel that it is important for children who are deaf to be familiar with these forms of linguistic/phonetic “shorthand.” We encounter them in many forms in everyday life, and children need to be able to recognize them quickly and easily. They also provide good opportunities to introduce and discuss important language elements such as:

- **Homonyms/homophones**

(words that sound the same, but have different meanings such as to, too, two; eight, ate; buy, by, bye, bi),

- **Pictographs**

(the use of a picture to represent a word. Examples include 👁️ for I or eye, ⌚ for time or clock, and 🎵 for music),

- **Letter names**

(U for you or even yew, R for are, Y for why, etc.), and the

- **Sounds of letters**

(In the title I’ve combined the letter name of U and the sound of z for use – [U + z]).

The picture on the right, taken at a hospital shop in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, emphasizes that, no matter where we go, we’ll probably find rebuses. As a result, children need to be familiar with them and to understand how they work.






Y did U txt me? (*Why did you text me?*)


One of the most common current uses of rebuses is in Text Messaging/SMS. This is a very important part of modern communication, and, no matter how some may regret its widespread usage; it's not going to go away! Many people lament the use of the abbreviated words and word substitutes in Text Messaging, and fear that they are symptomatic of a developing *non-literate* or *semi-literate* society. Others take a more positive view, and see this emerging and developing *text language* as a creative force that should be encouraged. I fall into the latter group, and see the use of rebus forms in Text Messaging as an opportunity to explore some interesting and potentially useful language phenomena.

Setting the "Rules"

Although one of the joys of rebuses is the freedom that they give from the conventions of written language, I find it useful, at least at first, to set a few "rules" to aid in understanding. Here are a few that I have found helpful when I am introducing rebuses to older children, teenagers, and young adults.



- **Letter names** are always written in upper case. Thus B is used for be and bee, and C for see and sea.

The **sounds of letters** are written in lower case. If I want to add an z to the pictogram  to form ears, for example, I'll use [ + z]. Similarly, I would use [h + ] for hear or here.


Brackets are used to indicate that all of the elements contained within them form a single word. Examples include: [n + A + m] for name, [l +  + k] for like, [N + E] for any, and [2 + d + A] for today.

• Putting Things Together

Once I've explained to an older child how rebuses work, I can start to introduce a few short sentences to see if s/he understands them. I find sentences are a little easier, so I might start with something like this –

 will [sh + O] U what 2 do [B + 4]  go.
I will show you what to do before I go.

If the child has difficulty, we'll go through the elements one-by-one until we arrive at the meaning. Here's one that I like a lot, and I often use it with "beginners." It's not very complex, and it serves as a good example of the use of homonyms in rebuses.

 I l, but [J + n] I 2, and U I 2 2!

I won one, but Jane won two, and you won two too!

Once the child understands the concept, I can start to use rebuses for training.

A Rebus Listening Game

If a child is having trouble understanding open-set sentence materials, I often use a closed-set task. I write down a number of sentences, go through them with the child, and then explain that I'm going to present each of them in a random order. Her/his task is to tell me which one I said. I stress that I might repeat some of them, not once, but perhaps, several times. I do that to ensure that the child doesn't try to use a card counting technique to arrive at the correct answer.

A variation on this listening game is to present the sentences using rebuses, so that the child has a clue to the form of each sentence. S/he has to work out, what each one means, I don't tell her/him the identity of the sentences, and then s/he has to try to confirm her/his answers by listening to each as it is presented. Here's a sample set that clinicians and teachers might find useful in their work. They are taken from a new book of materials for teenagers that I am currently preparing for the Hearing Rehabilitation Foundation.

- 1 👁️ 🟠 a 📖.
- 2 👁️ ❤️ [🟡 + z].
- 3 Did U [f + 👁️ + nd] the # in the 📞📖?
- 4 👁️ no Y U R ☹️.
- 5 The 🌬️ 🟦 the tree ↓.
- 6 [w + air] do U want 2 go?
- 7 It's 🕒 4 🛏️.
- 8 OY R U so mad?
- 9 👁️ will C U when 👁️ have more 🕒.
- 10 👁️ [l + der]Y she is [h + 🕒] now.
- 11 [w + 👁️] R U wearing a [t + 👁️]?
- 12 He is ☹️ [B + cause] a B bit him on the [R + m].

The sentences are:

- 1 I read a book.
- 2 I love oranges.
- 3 Did you find the number in the phone book?
- 4 I know why you are sad.
- 5 The wind blew the tree down.
- 6 Where do you want to go?
- 7 It's time for bed.
- 8 Oh, why are you so mad?
- 9 I will see you when I have more time.
- 10 I wonder why she is here now.
- 11 Why are you wearing a tie?
- 12 He is sad because a bee bit him on the arm.

Looking at Signs

I took this picture of a sign outside the cathedral in Innsbruck, Austria, the city where MED-EL's Worldwide Headquarters is located. When I showed it to one of the young adults with whom I work, his comment was, "Are you allowed to do anything there!" I then used the picture in a simple listening exercise, where I made up sentences related to each symbol, and he had to repeat them. Here are some of the sentences that I used. Some are short and simple, while others are more complex.

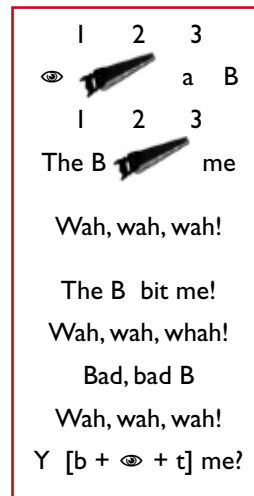
- You are not allowed to smoke in the church.
- No smoking!
- You must not wear a hat in the church.
- Take off your hat!
- You are not allowed to drink.
- No drinking!
- There is no rollerblading in the church!
- People visiting the church are not permitted to wear swimming costumes.
- Visitors to the church must wear appropriate clothing.
- You must not eat in the church.
- There are no dogs allowed in the church.
- Please be quiet.
- No loud talking!
- Shh!
- No cell phones allowed!
- Please switch off your cell phone before coming into the church.



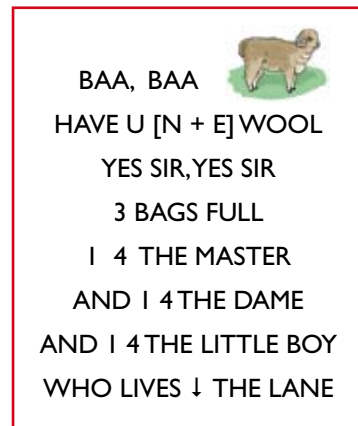
Using Rebuses with Younger Children

I have also used rebuses with some younger children, and find that they love the idea of a secret language form. One child found Webdings and Wingdings, the fonts that I've used for the bulk of the rebuses in this piece, in Microsoft Word, and started to write his own.

I find that they are a good way of presenting simple poems that I have written for use with young children for speech production and listening practice. Here's one that I often use, presented as a rebus.



It's very simple and easy to understand, so it can serve as a starting point for later, more complex rebuses. Teachers and clinicians could also build up a collection of nursery rhymes and other poems in rebus form. It's relatively easy to do so, using the many fonts and clipart resources that are now available. Here's another example:



Another useful resource for use with younger children is Jean Marzollo and Suse MacDonald's "I love you: A Rebus Poem," I encourage parents to use this book with younger children, either as a poem, or as a simple song. The poem is presented as a rebus on one page, and there's an illustration on the other. I won't use the rebus symbols shown in the book, but here are the opening four lines:

Every bird loves a tree.
Every flower loves a bee.
Every lock loves a key.
And I love you.

It's a wonderful book for parents to share with their children, and it provides an excellent introduction to rebuses and rhyme.

Conclusion

I'll probably return to this topic in a future issue of "Listen, Hear!" If you use rebuses with your children and would like to share any materials, please contact me and I'll include them.

Finally, as always, I would welcome any comments, feedback, or suggestions. Please contact me at hearf@aol.com

Geoff Plant