

**Stylistic Functions of the Creative Collocations and
Wordplay in Salman Rushdie's Novel
*The Moor's Last Sigh***

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ABSTRACT

Titel/Title: Stylistic Functions of the Creative Collocations and Wordplay in Salman Rushdie's Novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*

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Sammanfattning/Abstract: Salman Rushdie's prose is celebrated by many critics for its creativity on the whole, and linguistic creativity, in particular. In the essay, some examples of the unusual collocations and wordplay in the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* are examined from the point of view of their stylistic functions. It is demonstrated that the use of the above-mentioned creative features adds semantic density to the text and simultaneously creates an undeniable 'Indian flavour' that permeates the text.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

‘Creativity is difficult to define’ claims Ronald Carter. ‘The extent of the presence of creativity in different conversational contexts is difficult to measure in any quantitative way. It is not a wholly linguistic phenomenon but it is often manifested in language’ (2004: 140).

It is no wonder that creativity is manifested in language, since language itself is the creation of human beings and possesses high creative potential, which enables its development. According to Carter’s observations, everyday speech abounds in creative features; language users spontaneously add inventive variations to the conventional norms. This process does not differ so much in its nature from the linguistic creativity in fiction. Still, in written texts it is possible to use the creative elements more consciously, so that they are endowed with various stylistic functions. One modern author writing in English in an apparently creative way is Salman Rushdie. Not only is his language abundant in unusual collocations, wordplay, allusions, metaphors, etc., but it has an obvious ‘Indian flavour’ which is strongly felt by the reader, even if it is not so easy to pinpoint what exactly accounts for it.

Salman Rushdie observed in one of his interviews:

I could not set down the music in my head, the noise in my head, in standard English. I couldn’t do it. It didn’t sound on the page the way it would sound in my head, and so – well, the great gift of English as a language is its malleability – its huge size and its huge versatility as a language – you can do this with English. You can stretch it and pull it and chop it up and tie it into knots and it still makes sense. And it’s capacious enough. It’s a great good fortune to me to have English as a language, but certainly I wanted to make a new noise with it (Rushdie, in Isaacs 2001: 162).

Therefore, it seems interesting and productive to analyse how the author performs this ‘stretching, pulling, chopping and tying into knots’ of the English language in practice, and what he accomplishes by doing it. As Hoey puts it, one ‘of these kinds of creativity occurs when someone says or writes something that surprises the recipient, whether because of its incongruity, humour, wordplay or simple oddness’ (2005a: 169). Undoubtedly, the surprising and striking linguistic features add a lot of humour to Rushdie’s texts, but entertaining the reader is only one of the aspects that are gained by the author.

1.2 Aims

In this essay, I argue that the above-mentioned creative features have various stylistic functions in Salman Rushdie’s prose, since they account for the semantic density and

‘Indianness’ of his writings, for the ‘poetical’, or paradigmatic, rather than syntagmatic, structure of his text and also for the apparent tension between the humorous language and the tragic events described in the novel. While reading the novel, one gets a strong feeling of ‘Indianness’ of the text, which is certainly not only due to the fact that the action is set in India or that some Hindi words are used. In fact, Rushdie does not use them often, and when he does, it is mostly for the sake of a subtle wordplay. In other words, the author skilfully creates this feeling of ‘Indianness’ in his text on phonological, lexical and syntactic levels. Referring to his previous book, Salman Rushdie remarks:

For instance, an English response to *Midnight’s Children* is that they’ve never heard writing like that before. Now I suspect to Indian ears, they may never have seen it in print before but they have probably heard it quite a lot – the rhythms of the book are not a million miles away from the rhythms of Indian speech and thought (Rushdie, in Dube 2001: 14).

Rushdie was quite often praised by critics for his unique language and these rhythms of Indian speech that he so successfully managed to catch and recreate. There are, however, other opinions on this matter, one of them being represented in the review devoted to the novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. ‘Much of Rushdie’s Indian-English is absurdly inauthentic’, claims the reviewer (Wallia 2010). Undoubtedly, everyone has a right to like or dislike a particular author; nevertheless, one can argue if any writer ever reproduces authentic language in fiction and whether it is necessary or possible. Besides, Rushdie never claimed that he writes in authentic Indian-English; the writer rather artistically recreates the Indian peculiarity in using English and does it, to my mind, extremely ingeniously.

2 Materials and Methods

The examples of creative use of collocations and wordplay, analysed using a qualitative method, were chosen from Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, first published in 1995; the choice was made according to the aims stated in the introduction. The theoretical approach in this study is informed by the theories of Michael Hoey, Baines Professor of English Language at the University of Liverpool, expressed in his book *Lexical Priming: A new theory of words and language* (2005); the ideas of Ronald Carter, Professor of Modern English Language in the School of English Studies in the University of Nottingham, reflected in his book *Language and Creativity: The art of common talk* (2004) and the theories about style discussed by Ronald Carter and Walter Nash in their book *Seeing Through Language: A*

Guide to Styles of English Writing (1990). Definitions of the words and some examples of their use are taken from the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Additionally, the analysed examples are also compared with the collocations found in the BYU-BNC corpus: The British National Corpus, which allows one ‘to quickly and easily search the 100 million word British National Corpus (1970s-1993)’ (Davies 2004). Furthermore, a short interview was conducted with five informants in order to examine the connotations of the name *Bombay*.

According to Carter and Nash, ‘one of the most important of defining criteria categories’ is semantic density. ‘The notion here is that a text that is perceived as resulting from the additive interaction of several superimposed codes and levels is recognized as more literary than a text where there are fewer levels at work, or where they are present but do not interact’ (1990: 39). Reading Salman Rushdie’s prose one can observe that it is remarkably dense, which is illustrated by the analysis of some examples on the lexical level; the interaction of different codes may be detected on the other levels, too, both textual and intertextual. In this essay, however, I deal only with some deliberately chosen collocations and wordplay in order to find out what stylistic functions they have.

Michael Hoey’s theory of lexical priming presents a new view of language opposed to the traditional one; the main idea which he maintains is that all the words in the language are ‘primed’. According to the dictionary, one of the meanings of the word *prime* is ‘to put into working order by filling or charging with something’ (*prime*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). Hoey uses the term in his book in the following way: ‘the notion of semantic priming is used to discuss the way a “priming” word may provoke a particular “target” word’ (2005a: 8). According to Hoey, words are loaded with possible collocations, which makes the speech sound natural and which explains why some phrases, even the grammatically correct ones, may seem clumsy. The author’s definition of collocation ‘is that it is of a psychological association between words (rather than lemmas) up to four words apart and is evidenced by their occurrence together in corpora more often than is explicable in terms of random distribution’ (Hoey 2005a: 5). One of the conclusions that Hoey draws is that ‘priming can be seen as reversing the traditional relationship between grammar as systematic and lexis as loosely organised, amounting to an argument for lexis as systematic and grammar as more loosely organised’ (2005a: 9). In his article, the author summarizes the theories and hypotheses he presents in the above-mentioned book and infers ‘three increasingly alarming implications’:

The first is that grammar is less central to our understanding of the way language works, and semantics as a system is also less central (which in reality it has always been in linguistics).

Secondly, there is no right or wrong in language. It makes little sense to talk of something being ungrammatical. All one can say is that a lexical item or items are used in a way not predicted by your priming.

The third and most alarming implication is that everybody's language is truly unique, in that all our lexical items are primed differently as a result of different encounters (Hoey 2005b).

The theory itself is very interesting, for it is based on the study of the real use of language and explains such notion as naturalness, but the conclusions seem to be somewhat too categorical. First of all, conventional and changing as they are, rights and wrongs in the language do exist for any particular historical period, exactly as they exist in the morals, for example. As to the uniqueness of everybody's language, this seems to be a matter of terms. Hoey maintains that there 'is not [...] a single grammar to the language (indeed there is not a single language), but a multiplicity of overlapping grammars that are the product of the attempt to generalise out of primed collocations' (2005a: 47). One may argue, however, that although the use of language by every individual can be unique, this does not eliminate the notion of the language itself as a whole unit consisting to the certain extent of all individual uses but being at the same time more than just the sum of these uses. This is, probably, just a matter of definitions, for the word *language*, as well as language itself, represents some kind of abstraction, which is inherent to its nature.

However, the new way of looking at language through lexical priming gives us an opportunity to concentrate on the issues that are not common in the traditional linguistics. As Hoey puts it, 'according to the theories of the lexicon that have dominated linguistic thought for the past 200 years, there is no reason to regard the naturalness or clumsiness of the sentences as being of any importance' (2005a: 6). Still, even naturalness itself is a versatile notion. A skilful stylist, Rushdie claims in one of his interviews:

...you can't actually write about India, in classical English, a very cool, precise, dainty, beautifully made English, which is the English of the Great Tradition. That's *not* appropriate for India, it is appropriate for England, rather was appropriate for 19th century England. You have to find another thing to do with English in order to come close to echoing the place that you write about (Rushdie, in Dube 2001: 13).

Rushdie's English sounds natural – and at the same time very peculiar, so that one can almost hear Indian prosody in his writings. It is, undoubtedly, a subjective feeling, but shared by many readers and critics. Orhan Pamuk, for example, in his review of the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, highlights Salman Rushdie's 'creative powers as a verbal illusionist' and calls him 'one of the most brilliant magicians of the English language writing now' (1995: 3). Rustom Bharucha argues that Salman Rushdie 'has created a language of his own that

transcends any English that has been spiced with Indian words and expressions. Even when he does not specifically use Indian words, he is able to capture Indian intonations' (1994: 160). Similarly, Nico Israel calls Rushdie's language 'boisterous, Bombay-accented English' (2006: 90). The author's compatriot Rani Dube speaking about the book *Midnight's Children* claims that 'you could actually hear echoes of the rhythms of India in the book' (2001: 14). Likewise, analysing Rushdie's language, Bishnupruya Ghosh calls his use of English 'energetic and vibrant' (1999: 150), while Jeremy Isaacs maintains that Rushdie's prose 'is rich and dense' (Isaacs 2001: 162).

According to Ronald Carter, who approaches language from another point of view, creativity is not necessarily connected to literary works: it is ubiquitous and permeates everyday use of language. In his book *Language and Creativity*, the author presents numerous examples of such linguistic creativity 'from the CANCODE corpus, collected between 1993 and 2003' (Carter 2004: xii). These examples imply that the so called 'ordinary' speech is extremely rich in creative elements. This may seem contradictory to Hoey's theory of lexical priming, but in fact these two approaches are rather complementary. Without the sense of some normal use of language, that is, the use of words as they are primed to be used, it would be impossible to pinpoint any diversions from this norm. As Carter observes, 'when the word "creative" is employed it entails uses which are marked out as striking and innovative. Conventionally, this involves a marked breaking or bending of rules and norms of language, including a deliberate play with its forms and its potential for meaning' (2004: 9).

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Creative Collocations

Lech and Short (2007: 2) point out that in some way it is more fascinating to analyse poetry than prose:

The poet, more obviously than the prose writer, does "interesting things" with language. And if one wanted to find a definition of poetry that went deeper than the run-of-the-mill dictionary definition, it might be that whereas in poetry, aesthetic effect cannot be separated from the creative manipulation of the linguistic code, in prose, it tends to reside more in other factors (such as character, theme, argument) which are expressed through, rather than inherent in, language.

It seems that Salman Rushdie's prose is nearer to poetry in that sense, for he really does various 'interesting things' with language. According to the writer, his novels reflect an

‘Indian experience of India written in a kind of Indianized English...’ (Rushdie, in Isaacs 2001: 162). This is interesting, therefore, to look more attentively at the way it works on the lexical level in the text of the novel, especially in the creative, unusual collocations and wordplay.

Exotic as they could be originally, the words *kebab* and *tandoor* are used not so infrequently in contemporary English. The word *kebab*, spelled also as *kebob* or *kabob*, means ‘cubes of meat (as lamb or beef) marinated and cooked with vegetables usually on a skewer’ (*kebab*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). *Tandoor* denotes ‘a cylindrical clay oven in which food is cooked over charcoal’ (*tandoor*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). There were found 32 examples of *kebab* and 2 of *tandoor* in the BNC. Verbalised forms *kebabled* and *tandooried* are even rarer: one match was found for the first word (1) and one – for the second (2):

- (1) If I do, I may find myself kebabled between the two ([1 HHX](#));
- (2) However, elation at the beauty of the surroundings meant tandooried legs were far from my thoughts... ([1 AS3](#)).

Rare as they may be, these forms cannot be called unusual, for there are plenty of synonymous words in English with approximately the same meaning: *roasted*, *fried*, *baked*, *grilled*, *broiled*, etc. Their use as pre-modifiers of a noun is quite common, and, as it can be expected, they often collocate with all kinds of the words denoting ‘food’. For the word *grilled* followed by a noun, for example, 211 matches were found in the BNC; some of the typical nouns preceded by the pre-modifier *grilled* are as follows (the numbers show the total of the collocations found): [FISH 14](#), [LAMB 7](#), [SARDINES 6](#), [CHICKEN 6](#), [STEAKS 5](#), [TROUT 5](#), [TOMATOES 5](#), [TOMATO 4](#), [BACON 4](#), [SALMON 4](#), [SOLE 4](#), [FENNEL 3](#), [CHOPS 3](#), [LOBSTER 3](#), [DOVER 3](#), [CHARCOAL 3](#), and so on. In the figurative meaning ‘to torment as if by broiling’ or ‘to question intensely’ (*grill*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*) the word *grilled* is used most often as a predicator, as in examples (3-5):

- (3) Gerald countered with a question of his own: "Has the Big Chief **grilled** you yet?" ([24 GWB](#));
- (4) She **grilled** him about women she saw in hotel lobbies, as if he knew each one personally ([30 JY6](#));
- (5) He **grilled** me severely about the attitude and background of the character [...] ([59 HRF](#)).

Consequently, it is possible to state that the word *grilled* used as a pre-modifier of a noun is primed to have collocations connected to food, and this can be extrapolated to the more exotic *kebabled* (or *kababed*) and *tandooried*. Therefore, meeting these words in the text, one can duly expect any of the ‘food’ collocations to follow; that is why such a phrase as ‘[a]ntique tapestries from Italy depicting kababed saints and tandooried martyrs’ (Rushdie 2006: 26)¹ catches the reader by surprise. Predictably enough, these collocations were not found in the BNC. There were 105 matches found for the word *saints* used with the pre-modifiers which are much more expected than Rushdie’s: [PALE SAINTS 10](#), [CATHOLIC SAINTS 4](#), [OTHER SAINTS 4](#), [HOLY SAINTS 4](#), [CELTIC SAINTS 3](#), [JESUIT SAINTS 3](#), [LOCAL SAINTS 3](#), [ENGLISH SAINTS 3](#), [ABSOLUTE SAINTS 2](#), [BOHEMIAN SAINTS 2](#), [BYZANTINE SAINTS 2](#), [CHRISTIAN SAINTS 2](#), even [FUCKING SAINTS 1](#). The total for *martyrs* preceded by the pre-modifiers was 43, among them such as [ENGLISH MARTYRS 12](#), [GREAT MARTYRS 2](#), [GOOD MARTYRS 2](#), [EARLY MARTYRS 2](#), [COUNTLESS MARTYRS 2](#), [CHRISTIAN MARTYRS 2](#), [ROMAN MARTYRS 2](#), [VIRGIN MARTYRS 2](#), etc.

As it is easy to see, most of the collocations found in the BNC are quite predictable and correspond to the expected connotations of the words *saints* and *martyrs* dealing with religion or ideology. No wonder that Rushdie’s collocations make readers stop dead in their tracks, for these examples evidently do not live up to any plausible expectations. This is also one of the functions performed by the unusual collocations: to make a reader stop for a while, to break the rhythm of processing the text and therefore to consider it more attentively. On the other hand, it is not enough for the collocations to be incongruent in order to be creative. After all, it is possible to use thousands of pre-modifiers which will be unusual to these two nouns. What makes Rushdie’s collocations really creative is, first of all, that unexpected as they are, they are not totally incongruent, because the words *kababed* and *tandooried*, although not usually used with *saints* and *martyrs*, denote some meat grilled or fried on fire; there were several Christian saints tortured exactly in the same way and depicted by various painters. The incongruity of Rushdie’s examples occurs because of the unusualness of the collocations; preparing food and tormenting a saint are certainly different processes, not associated in our minds. Yet, the process itself is similar, and that is why the logical link between the collocated words is perceived without any trouble. Besides, this combination is really dense,

¹ Henceforth all quotations from Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh* will be to this edition: London: Vintage Books, 2006, and will be referred to by the page number.

for it creates numerous links of associations, both visual and emotional. It can possibly call to mind a famous painting by Titian *Martyrdom of St. Laurence* from the Church of the Jesuits in Venice or the pictures of Saint John boiled in the cauldron filled with oil and so on. The effect might be amusing or pejorative, which depends on the reader's sense of humour or piety, but it most certainly will draw attention and will not leave the reader indifferent. In addition, these four words convey in them one more message concerning the author's attitude to religion: obviously, he cannot be a very religious person. This is confirmed by Rushdie himself: 'My point of view is that of a secular human being. I do not believe in supernatural entities, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu' (Rushdie, in Salman Rushdie: *Fact, Faith and Fiction* 2001: 100). Moreover, the use of these pre-modifiers undoubtedly adds Indian flavour to the text.

Thus, it is possible to state that the above-mentioned collocations are creative, for they account for an extraordinary semantic density of the text, condensing in a short phrase various associative links and encoding a great amount of information.

The other type of unusual collocations in Rushdie's novel, such as *gowned adventure* (13) or *metamorphic tiles* (76), have a somewhat different function, since they are much more contextualised and play the role of cohesive signs – similarly to rhyme in poetry – returning the reader to the previously depicted event. Even if they are not directly 'Indianized', these collocations are both creative and unconventional; moreover, they add to the exotic flavour of the text. The BNC has no matches for these collocations. A search for the adjective *gowned* followed by a noun gave 7 results, among them such as [SHENANIGANS 1](#), [GLADIATOR 1](#), [DONS 1](#), [FIGURE 1](#), etc. Some examples of the pre-modifiers used with the noun *adventure* (out of 344 matches) are as follows: [GREAT 30](#), [AMERICAN 18](#), [NEW 13](#), [BIG 12](#), [EXCITING 8](#), [GREATEST 8](#), [OUTDOOR 7](#), [EXCELLENT 7](#), [WONDERFUL 6](#), and so on.

The word *metamorphic* is often used in geology in the collocation *metamorphic rocks*, denoting '[a]ny of a class of rocks that result from the alteration of preexisting rocks in response to changing geological conditions, including variations in temperature, pressure, and mechanical stress' (*metamorphic rock*, 2010, *Encyclopædia Britannica*). Aside from this most common use, which has [24](#) matches in the BNC, some of the other matches are as follows: [GRADE 5](#), [GNEISSES 3](#), [ROCK 3](#), [HISTORY 3](#), [GEOLOGY 2](#), [BASEMENT 2](#), [ORIGINS 2](#). As for the word *tiles*, most frequently it collocates with the following pre-modifiers: [CERAMIC 31](#), [WHITE 15](#), [RED 13](#), [GLAZED 11](#), [ACOUSTIC 7](#), [HAND-PAINTED 6](#), [DUTCH 6](#) and so on. Still, unusual as they are, such collocations as *gowned adventure* and *metamorphic tiles* make sense even without the context, since the first hints to some

adventure connected to clothing, and the latter – to the tiles that are changing their appearance.

Such markers with cohesive and linking function are not rare in the novel, one of the most vivid of them being the word *pepper* and the derivative *peppery*. Used at first in a common literal sense, as ‘either of two pungent products from the fruit of an Indian plant (*Piper nigrum*) that are used chiefly as condiments’ (*pepper*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*), the word *pepper* eventually acquires symbolic features, becoming emblematic of the family depicted in the book. *Pepper* as a subject of export from India turns into a pre-modifier of the word *love* (example 6):

(6) Pepper love: that’s how I think of it. Abraham and Aurora fell in pepper love, up there on the Malabar Gold (90).

As expected, there are no matches to this collocation in the BNC. According to the BNC, the word *pepper* is used as a pre-modifier in the following collocations: [PEPPER BOX 7](#), [PEPPER SAUCE 7](#), [PEPPER MILL 6](#), [PEPPER POTS 5](#), [PEPPER POT 5](#), [PEPPER METHOD 5](#), and even [PEPPER LYRICS 1](#). *Love* is a word used often; there were found 1228 matches with this word used as a noun with the pre-modifier. Most common of the collocations are [TRUE LOVE 125](#), [GREAT LOVE 90](#), [REAL LOVE 43](#), [ROMANTIC LOVE 39](#), [LOST LOVE 38](#), [PASSIONATE LOVE 35](#), [BROTHERLY LOVE 32](#), [UNREQUITED LOVE 30](#), [NEW LOVE 25](#), [DIVINE LOVE 24](#), [HUMAN LOVE 24](#), [DEEP LOVE 23](#), [FREE LOVE 23](#), [SEXUAL LOVE 21](#), [LITTLE LOVE 19](#), [MUTUAL LOVE 19](#), etc. Thus, the collocation *pepper love* from example (6) is both an unconventional and symbolic one, for it condenses the literal and figurative meanings of the word *pepper*. Moreover, the protagonist’s parents make love for the first time on the pepper sacks, so the expression used later in the texts refers to this fact, too, preserving at the same time its figurative meaning and implying a hot and dazzling passion.

The derivative *peppery* appears in the text also in an unusual collocation with the noun *inspiration*, as in the following example (7):

(7) ...these two ships also ended up adding spice to the ocean-bed; and the C-50 condiment empire (and, who knows, perhaps also the heart of Empire itself, deprived of peppery inspiration) began to totter and sway (110).

According to the dictionary, the word *peppery* has following meanings: ‘1 : of, relating to, or having the qualities of pepper : [hot](#), [pungent](#) <a peppery taste>; 2 : having a hot temper : [touchy](#) <a peppery boss>; 3 : [fiery](#), [stinging](#) <a peppery satire>’ (*peppery*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). No such collocation as *peppery inspiration* was found in the BCN, even if there are 22 matches of the word *peppery*, among them such as [PEPPERY LANGUAGE 1](#), [PEPPERY HINT 1](#), [PEPPERY GENTLEMAN 1](#) and [PEPPERY ENGLISHMAN 1](#). As one can see from the quoted text above, the word *peppery* preserves its figurative meanings, hinting at the same time at pepper as the source of inspiration that brought the English to India in the first place. Hence, yet again, there is much more information coded in this collocation than any common phrase could have.

3.2 Wordplay

According to Freeborn, *pun*, or *paronomasia*, means the ‘use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words’ (1996: 67). Contemplating the use of puns, Carter claims:

Puns are simultaneously reputable and disreputable. In written texts puns are regularly seen as lower form of wit or are associated with less highly regarded genres such as tabloid newspaper headlines, graffiti or advertising copy. However, puns are ubiquitous, occur in a range of different types of texts, and are multilayered in so far as some puns involve simple ambiguities of sound, sight-sound relations (homonymy) or grammatical pattern, while other puns can have semantically dense resonances (2004: 91).

Rushdie’s texts abound in puns, though in this essay I am mostly interested in the wordplay which adds Indian flavour to the narration. Rushdie is praised by many critics for the hybridity of his prose, or, in other words, for his ability to fuse both Western and Indian cultural elements, thus celebrating ‘the idea of writing between cultures as a productive enterprise’ (Sanga 2001: 91). Salman Rushdie himself remarked speaking about the novel *The Moor’s Last Sigh* in one of his interviews:

In science fiction people talk about first contacts between the human race and other races, and Cochin was the site of the first contact between India and the West, a kind of science fiction moment if you like, a meeting of two species. So the meeting and mingling of these two cultures was, you could say, my subject’ (Rushdie, in *The SALON Interview* 2001: 195).

Here is one of the striking examples of such hybrid wordplay in Salman Rushdie’s novel:

(8) Space-lizards, undead bloodsuckers and insane persons are excused from moral judgement, and Uma deserves to be judged. *Insaan*, a human being. I insist on Uma's insaanity (322).

Insaan, according to the author, means 'human being' and it is probably a Hindi word. At least, the online 'Google Translate' service confirms it: *insaan* was translated from Hindi into English as 'person' (*insaan*, 2010, Google Translate). The English word *insane* denotes 'mentally disordered' (*insane*, 2010, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). The similarity of the two words is evident, even if denotations are so different. The quoted extract (8) acquires a paradoxical meaning, because the author insists that his character is a human being and hence deserves to be judged, but the use of the words *insaan* and, subsequently, *insaanity* makes the whole statement ambiguous, for the latter immediately evokes in the reader's mind the word *insanity*, denoting: '1 : a deranged state of the mind usually occurring as a specific disorder (as schizophrenia); 2 : such unsoundness of mind or lack of understanding as prevents one from having the mental capacity required by law to enter into a particular relationship, status, or transaction or as removes one from criminal or civil responsibility; 3 a : extreme folly or unreasonableness b : something utterly foolish or unreasonable (*insanity*, 2010, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). The paradoxicality of the text is achieved by the fact that both straightforward and ambiguous meanings coexist here simultaneously. If we read it straightforwardly, then insane persons are not to be judged; accordingly, as Uma is to be judged, she is not insane. Playing on the words *insane* and *insaan* blurs the meaning of the phrase, adding to it an utterly opposite notion. Besides, it adds a more general philosophical or psychological question about sanity of human beings on the whole, which is not new to the science. What is sanity and what is the norm? These are the notions difficult to denote, still, as with the word *language*, we use them, even if their meaning is quite vague. Thus, the wordplay makes the above quoted extract amazing in its density and richness. Remarkably, Rushdie uses the word *insaan* once more, referring to Bombay:

(9) What magic was stirred into that insaan-soup, what harmony emerged from this cacophony! (350).

This is yet another illustration of the juxtaposition of two denotations, for the density of human crowd in India can really drive people mad, especially those not used to it.

Another type of wordplay actualises three different meanings of three homonyms, one of them being a Hindi name, another – an English word, and one more – an abbreviation:

- (10) In the city we are for secular India but the village is for Ram. [...] In the end I am afraid the villagers will march on the cities and people like us will have to lock our doors and there will come a Battering Ram (55-56).
- (11) What villagers these locals are with their talk of the rule of Ram! Not Ram Rajya but RAM Rajya – this is our ace in the hole (343).

The first Ram mentioned in the example (10) stands for the Lord Rama, one of the avatars, or reincarnations, of the Hindu god Vishnu, who is the protagonist in the old Indian epic *Ramayana*, still very popular in India and in a way emblematic of the country. Battering-ram, in its turn, denotes ‘**1** : a military siege engine consisting of a large wooden beam with a head of iron used in ancient times to beat down the walls of a besieged place; **2** : a heavy metal bar with handles used (as by firefighters) to batter down doors and walls’ (*ram*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). Here, as we can see, no ambiguity is present: on the contrary, the words are used in their straightforward meanings, the play occurring from the same form of the words. Example (11) brings into play one more homonym, an abbreviation RAM, that is random-access memory, which means ‘a computer memory on which data can be both read and written and on which the location of data does not affect the speed of its retrieval’ (*ram*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). As for *Rajya*, it refers both to the word *raj* meaning ‘[rule](#); especially often capitalized : the former British rule of the Indian subcontinent’ (*raj*, 2010, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*) and also *Rajya Sabha*, ‘the upper house’ in the Indian parliament (*Rajya Sabha*, 2010, *Encyclopædia Britannica*). Accordingly, in these two short extracts, the reader is presented, in the form of wordplay, with three different potential scenarios of the development of political situation in India: either the victory of the Hindu nationalists, or people’s riot, or the triumph of the computerised globalisation. Besides, bringing together these three otherwise quite different words, from different spheres, creates new links between them, tying them all to politics and ideology. As one can see, these two quotations are separated by almost 300 pages; thus, the second extract rhymes in some way with the first one, reminding the reader of the previous extract and cementing the text together.

Almost echoing Michael Hoey, who claimed that the writers ‘force us to think and see things in new ways’ (2005a: 153), Salman Rushdie remarked that “[n]ovel” itself is a word that means new, and the purpose of art has always been thought to make things new, so you don’t see things through the same old, tired eyes’ (Rushdie, in Rance 2001: 106). This statement seems to be true even on the level of very small details. In order to check my own

perception as a reader, I conducted a small investigation, namely I asked five people, who have not read the novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, what associations they have with the name *Bombay*. The informants have Swedish as their mother tongue, but for the purpose of this study, this was irrelevant. Two of these people have been to India, though not to Bombay, three have never been there; nevertheless, the list of the words associated with *Bombay* was approximately the same. As the aim of this small enquiry was not statistical, I will just name some of these words, which are quite predictable: 'crowd, Hindi, bright colours, noise, heat, camels, rickshaws, colonisation, old culture, mystery, yoga, elephants, rajas, sari, beggars, contrasts, palaces, slums, snake charmers', and so on. Had I been asked before, I could have made quite a similar list myself. Not a single person out of the five ones interviewed has noticed the *bomb* embedded in the city's name; at least, to me as a reader it was a kind of shock when I encountered such wordplay as 'Bombay bombings' (405) in the novel. It was almost like seeing something that was always in front of your eyes and still invisible; as if the fate of the city was already coded in its name. There are, of course, a number of other cities that were bombed which do not have such codes in their names. Still, according to Rushdie, '[i]t is impossible to overestimate the importance of names. I think they affect us much, much more profoundly than we think' (Rushdie, in Chaudhuri 2001: 26). One can argue if this statement really represents a general rule, but the way it is illustrated in the novel is undoubtedly impressive.

John Sinclair, a former Professor of Modern English Language at Birmingham University and the founder of the COBUILD project, claimed, rather paradoxically:

...“the text” is the sentence that is being processed at any time and only that. The text *is* the sentence that is in front of us when an act of reading is in progress. Each sentence then is a new beginning of the text. Each sentence organizes language and the world for that particular location in the text, not dependent on anything else' (2004: 14).

It is possible to argue that this is yet again a matter of definitions; however, the thought itself highlights the fact that our human brains cannot process long strings of the text simultaneously. This is especially true of prosaic texts, which unravel themselves linearly, or syntagmatically, both in space and time.

The state of discourse is identified with the sentence which is currently being processed. No other sentence is presumed to be available. The previous text is part of the immediately previous experience of the reader or listener, and is no different from any other, non-linguistic experience. It will normally have lost the features which were used to organize the meaning to shape the text into a unique communicative instrument (Sinclair 2004: 13).

Literary texts, and especially poetic ones are different in this sense, for all the poetic means, such as rhyme, rhythm, alliterations, assonances, consonances, etc., are used in order to preserve the previous text in the mind of a reader, to return constantly to the preceding sentences by creating unconventional links between the words, generating patterns and forming a paradigmatic structure. Every rhyming word forms a kind of a circling bind with the preceding word it rhymes with, thus fighting with the entropy of our human memory and cementing the text together. This is exactly how the analysed examples of Rushdie's unconventional collocations and wordplay function: besides condensing the text and creating both visual and audible associations, they help to hold the text together as a whole unit. Moreover, the above-mentioned examples demonstrate the potential latent in the language, for they actualise the collocations which are not common, but still understandable and functional, thus enriching the language with the new possibilities. Writing about India in his own 'Indianized' version of English, Salman Rushdie uses the potential of the language which he frankly admires for its artistic properties:

The English language is unique in its flexibility, in its subtleness. This language was created by this cold grey northern island, and is yet somehow large enough and versatile enough to express the cultures and the thoughts and the dynamics of societies which have never come remotely close to this world (Rushdie, in Dube 2001: 12).

Remarkably, the analysed examples from the novel create a certain paradoxical tension between their often humorous form and the tragic events they are used to describe. This is also one of the stylistic functions of the unusual collocations in the novel, since it makes the text even more multidimensional; tragic and comic aspects are usually interwoven in life - as they are inextricably inseparable in the novel, both on linguistic and literary levels.

4 Conclusion

Even if creativity is not easy to define, it is still possible to consider what effects it has on the readers or listeners. Carter, for example, put it like this:

Creativity engages us intellectually. It can prompt thoughts, provide new angles, make us laugh at the absurdity of a situation, enable us to express a critical stance. It also engages us emotionally and affectively, enabling speakers and listeners to feel more intimate and at ease with one another, to intensify utterances or to add an expressive contour to statements. It can prompt evaluation and the expression of attitude (2004: 140).

The above analysis of some examples of creative use of collocations and wordplay in Salman Rushdie's novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* illustrates that linguistic creativity can bring about an unusual semantic density to the text, for it generates unconventional associative links and cohesive ties. Moreover, it adds 'Indian flavour' to Salman Rushdie's prose by alluding to the typical Indian cultural features, which sometimes are named in the novel quite straightforwardly and sometimes are just subtly hinted to, thus permeating the whole narration. In such a way, Rushdie creates an atmosphere engulfing the reader and bringing forth multiple thoughts and feelings dealing with his story, the history of India and of mankind on the whole. In addition, by shifting the conventional norms of the language use, Rushdie reveals the potential inherent to the English language and expands its borders.

Therefore, the linguistic means that the author employs are not accidental or purely entertaining, since they account for delivering the message to the reader, who gets an opportunity to look at the world from a new angle. Or, as Salman Rushdie expressed it himself:

I refuse to see literature as a purely aesthetic enterprise and the use of form is not purely technical. It has meaning. You change the way in which you write and you change the things it's possible for you to say and therefore what is possible to think and therefore what is possible to do. So to shift forms is to act in all those ways (Rushdie, in Dharker, 2001: 49).

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