

## Book review

Zirker, Angelika and Winter-Froemel, Esme (Eds.) (2015). *Wordplay and Metalinguistic/Metadiscursive Reflection: Authors, Contexts, Techniques, and Meta-Reflection*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 311 pp.

“Wordplay and metalinguistic/ metadiscursive reflection” is the first book of the series “The dynamics of wordplay” entirely devoted to investigations on playing with words. The editors of the book, Angelika Zirker and Esme Winter-Froemel, funneled in 13 chapters some of the results of the interdisciplinary research project on “Wordplay in Speaker-Hearer Interaction” and the international conference on “Wordplay and Metalinguistic Reflection - New Interdisciplinary Perspectives”, held at Tübingen University in 2013.

The first chapter by the editors introduces the reader to the basic points of the book. Firstly, wordplay is considered as a communicative phenomenon (i.e. involving speaker-hearer interactions) which is investigated both in everyday life and in literary works. At first glance, the association of these two distant contexts may look puzzling, but on this association lies one of the strengths of a new book on an old topic: wordplay is a pervasive phenomenon. Whether in advertising or in literary works, spontaneous or script based, wordplay serves several functions (e.g. poetic, aesthetic, psychological, communicative, commercial ones) and is built on different strategies (e.g. homophony, polysemy, paronymy, allusion). Wordplay in both literature and everyday language is intended to achieve different aims, ranging from drawing attention to a meaning to showing the linguistic competence of a speaker or character, in order to present him/herself as a witty, comical, or even subversive person. Secondly, the editors clarify the interdisciplinary approach that is at the basis of the book. In the framework of Jakobson’s (1960) model, the metalinguistic function of language is the starting point of the “metalinguistic reflection” of wordplay the editors propose. The hearer of a wordplay is faced with a problem solving activity and therefore the ability to reflect on the metalinguistic dimension of wordplay is required in order to understand wordplay and its implications from a communicative and functional point of view.

An interview with Ian Duhig, conducted by Angelika Zirker, is added to the traditional book chapters. As a practitioner of wordplay, the poet discloses his point of view on wordplay which he considers a very important tool for intensifying literary language.

Martina Bross analyses the wordplays used by William Shakespeare in the first two lines of *Hamlet* and discusses the interplay among characters, the playwright, and the audience. The author poses an interesting question on the functions of wordplay in literature: is wordplay used to invite the audience to gain its most relevant meaning or to challenge the audience to discover as many interpretations as possible? The hermeneutic work conducted by the author on the two lines lies in favor of the second possibility, which therefore can be seen as epitomizing what Eco (1979) called *lector in fabula* [*The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the semiotics of texts*].

The role of the reader of a piece of literature is the focus also of Matthias Bauer's contribution. He points out that the reader's cognitive effort to solve wordplay could be more or less demanding, depending on the level of secrecy of the wordplay. On the basis of Grice's (1975) model, he distinguishes secret from open wordplay.

Similarly to Bauer's contributor, Thomas Kullman's is based on the Gricean approach, according to which wordplay violates some of the conversational maxims and therefore the cooperative principle. In this framework, the author analyses wordplay in *Much Ado About Nothing* by Shakespeare and in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll and argues that wordplay has communicative and social functions that are not fully covered by Jakobson's model (p. 47): teasing and provoking the interlocutor the wordplay is addressed to (i.e. characters and readers), and showing social superiority by erudition or amusing the audience by making it laugh at or with the characters.

The masterpiece by Lewis Carroll is the source of wordplay examples also for Monika Schmitz-Evans. The starting point is that Lewis Carroll—or better Charles Lutwidge Dodgson—was a mathematician. Therefore, the author argues that this influenced Lewis Carroll in creating wordplay. In particular, she shows how the spatial representations of surface, depth and their implications in terms of two and three geometrical dimensionalities are brought into the narration of *Alice*: paradoxical scenarios à la Echer and playing with the surface of language, that is wordplay, emerge. In pointing out that the dichotomous concepts of flatness and dimensionality are rooted in Western thinking, philosophy, and geometry, the author's approach has the potentiality to show how the *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) also apply to pieces of literature.

Maik Goth suggests an interesting taxonomy of double entendre by merging this genre with metaphor and metonymy. He also addresses the issue of intentionality in the communication of double entendre within the theatrical context, where the pair speaker-hearer extends to a net of agents. He convincingly applies the interplay between the structural and interactional aspects of double entendre to two comedies of the restoration and early eighteenth-century periods (William Wycherly's *The Country Wife* and Richard Steele's *The Funeral*) and he demonstrates how this genre may serve social and moral functions with and without bawdy nuances.

Sheelagh Russell-Brown focuses on wordplay used to convey sadness and sense of isolation. The author analyses several examples of wordplay in the *Dark Sonnets* by Gerard Manley Hopkins with the aim of singling out their poetic techniques and functions. For example, the author, by echoing von Ehrenfels' (1890) motto, although it is not referenced, shows that the combination of words, far from being just a sum of their meanings, produces a poetic "resonance" in Hopkins' work (p. 105). In other cases, Hopkins' playing with words serves -beyond displaying cleverness and creativity—to extend the meanings of the words till they "explode" (p. 103).

As announced in the introductory chapter, the book includes contributions on wordplay in everyday language. Johannes Kabatek challenges the idea of wordplay as a metalinguistic phenomenon and stresses its aesthetic and pragmatic functions. On the basis of the analysis of examples of wordplay taken from the comic *Asterix*, the author suggests that wordplay, from the historical point of view, is built on discourse tradition. The author also points out that, at the same time, wordplay is a universal phenomenon, since the possibility of playing with words is common to every language.

Translating wordplay from English to German is the focus of Svea Schaufler's experimental study on subtitled films. She investigates to what extent proficiency of English as L2, the type of wordplay translation, and the absence of translation influence humour reception. The main result is that the function-oriented translation of wordplay is more suitable in eliciting a humorous reaction than the translation based on formal equivalence.

The experimental method is also used by Pierre Arnaud, François Maniez and Vincent Renner who investigate to what extent wordplay overlaps with proverbs. After having identified the occurrences of six proverbs and their modified versions in a corpus of everyday language, they experimentally verify whether they were perceived as clever and humorous, i.e. as instances of wordplay. Very few proverbial occurrences emerged as instances of wordplay, but this general result cannot be generalized mainly due to the small group of participants involved (12).

Vincent Renner approaches wordplay as a playful case of lexical blending, which comprises morphological operations such as compounding, clipping, and overlapping words. Within this framework, the author suggests an interesting taxonomy of blending words playfully by a cross-linguistic analysis of several examples of wordplay deriving from various languages and occurring within an everyday context.

Sebastian Knospe also considers wordplay as a blending phenomenon; in particular, he focuses on wordplay resulting from blending the English and German languages. He suggests a model useful to shed light on how mental spaces and in particular a blended space are created when a linguistic element from a language evokes, by means of homonymy or paronymy, a linguistic element belonging to another language.

The two settings around which the book revolves are literary works and everyday language, but more than half of the contributions are devoted to wordplay in literature and poetry, whereas 1/3 of the pages is dedicated to wordplay in everyday language. Moreover, script based everyday language (such as advertising, comics, films, and newspapers) is the most considered type of everyday language investigated in the book. For these reasons, perhaps the reader might have wished for more pages dedicated to an everyday context in general and particularly to investigations on wordplay from interactions such as everyday talk. How wordplay works in real life contexts (as, there, it is more or less spontaneous) is worth being investigated in order to depict a more exhaustive picture. One of the forthcoming books in the series could possibly focus on this topic. However, this well-documented book has the merit of harmoniously gathering together many examples of wordplay from different contexts, of reporting their in-depth analyses, and of achieving the announced aim of showing the variety of wordplay functions by means of a metalinguistic and metadiscursive reflection.

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