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WORDPLAY AS A TOOL CONVEYING HUMOUR

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ABSTRACT

In this article we provide information about the phenomenon “wordplay”. Moreover, the phonological and graphological structure and analysis of it is presented. Wordplay can be employed among friends as well as in media. The aim of wordplay here is to capture the reader’s or viewer’s attention via the unusual formulations used in the titles of the newspaper articles or in the news on television.

KEYWORDS

Wordplay, pun, phonological structure, humour, paronymy, homonymy.

INTRODUCTION

Wordplay is a frequent and common phenomenon and an inseparable part of communication. Delabastita (1997, 1-2) describes wordplay as “a deliberate communicative strategy, or the result thereof, used with a specific semantic or pragmatic effect in mind”.

Wordplay can be employed among friends as well as in media. The aim of wordplay here is to capture the reader’s or viewer’s attention via the unusual

formulations used in the titles of the newspaper articles or in the news on television.

As mentioned above, wordplay is often related to humour. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary provides the definition of wordplay in which the aspect of humour is already included: Wordplay - making jokes by using words in a clever or amusing way, especially by using a word that has two meanings, or different

words that sound the same Nevertheless, the success of a joke is affected by various factors.

With the aim of denoting a new meaning. The game techniques of verbal decomposition of stable combinations are based on the selection of a well-known stable combination and its further recompanisation and its fragment or the whole construction with the help of by means of various types of substitutions, truncations or contaminations based on phonetic or syntactic connection.

In Le Petit Robert's dictionary, a wordplay is a humorous innuendo based on the ambiguity created by words that are phonetically similar but contrast in meaning phonetically similar but contrasting in meaning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Russian linguistic, wordplay is considered as a component of the phenomenon of language play, thoroughly studied in the works of E.M. Aleksandrova, O.E.Voronichev, T.A.Gridina, O.V.Zalesova, O.S.Zubkova, E.I.Kumanitsyna, G.V.Rakhimkulova, V.Z.Sannikov, O.A.Shishkareva and others.

The term wordplay remains controversial in the scientific literature. As applied to the present work, the closest interpretation of language game is the one developed by E.I.Kumanitsyna as "conscious variation of linguistic signs and transformation of linguistic

forms, creating non-trivial new language forms transformation of linguistic forms, creating non-trivial new linguistic units in order to influence the society"

Investigating the model of the mechanism of word play V. S. Vinogradov suggested about its two-component nature, where the first component is the basis, and the second - "result" (a word or word combination) - a "shifter" which becomes a favourable ground for creation of individual-author neologisms. Wordplay occurs only when the "resulta" is realized in speech and mentally correlated with the base, which can be perceived in a wider context or even only implied [5, p. 153-154].

One of them is the environment in which it is uttered. The joke-teller must consider the cultural, political, social and other backgrounds of the environment in which he/she occurs. Chiaro (1992, 15) explains: [...] not everybody is amused by the same things, and what is more, over and above shared knowledge of whatever type, finding something funny relies on a number of subjective variables. What may appear amusing under the influence of a few drinks may not appear quite so funny in the cold light of the morning after. A homosexual is hardly going to enjoy being insulted by someone's idea of a witty remark at his or her expense, any more than the Irish are amused by the thousands of jokes which depict them as imbeciles. Some people are offended by sexual innuendo, while others by political references contained in a joke.

There are different ways to produce wordplay. Almost every linguistic phenomenon possible is used – not only lexical means such as idioms and polysemy, but also grammar or phonetics. Delabastita (1996, 130) suggests the following categorization, according to the linguistic means used to achieve wordplay:

- Phonological and graphological structure
- Lexical structure (polysemy)
- Lexical structure (idiom)
- Morphological structure
- Syntactic structure

Discussion. Delabastita (1996, 131) also claims that “often two or more of the above features of language are harnessed simultaneously in order to obtain one single pun.” Sometimes it can be very hard to decide to which category the given wordplay should be classified.

Phonological and graphological structure. The number of phonemes and graphemes in a language is limited. Moreover, each language has its rules according to which they can be employed and so they can create only certain combinations. Delabastita (1996, 130) uses the term ‘sound-play’ which “ borders on alliteration, assonance and consonance”. He goes on to say that “ in sound-play sound provides the basis for the verbal association, whereas anagrammatic wordplay is based

on spelling.” As an example of sound-play, Delabastita provides: (1) Love at first bite. The sentence in (1) is based on the expression love at first sight in which the noun sight was replaced by its paronym, i.e. a word whose pronunciation is very similar.

Paronymy. According to Attardo (1994, 110-111) “two words are paronyms when their phonemic representations are similar but not identical.” Nevertheless, this definition is not complete. Let me provide a more complex definition provided by Marcu (2010, 202) who claims that “in linguistics, paronym may refer to: a word related to another word and derived from the same root - e.g. cognate words; this types of paronyms often lead to confusion” or “words almost homonyms but having slight differences in spelling or pronunciation – different prefixes or suffixes and added word syllables can change stress and elements of pronunciation - and having different meanings.” By way of illustration, Marcu (2010, 203) suggests the examples of law and low or breath and breathe.

Homonymy. Apart from ‘true homonymy’, i.e. words whose phonological and graphological structure match, there are two more types of homonymy to be distinguished: homophony and homography.

Homophony is a type of homonymy in which two words are identical in pronunciation, but different in

spelling. Meyer et al. (2005, 149) provides the example of [θru:] signifying either through or threw.

Homography. While homophones are words with an identical pronunciation and a different spelling, homographs are the opposite. Peprník (2001, 33) offers the word lead as an illustrative example. It can be understood either as a verb meaning “to go with or in front of a person or an animal to show the way or to make them go in the right direction” (OALD) or “a chemical element. Lead is a heavy soft grey metal, used especially in the past for water pipes or to cover roofs” (OALD). The pronunciation in the first meaning is [li:d] whereas in the second meaning it is pronounced as [led].

Homonymy vs. polysemy While senses of a homonymous word are not related, in case of polysemy, arguably, they are. Peprník (2001, 26) inserts the distinction between polysemy and homonymy into his definition of polysemy: Polysemy, i.e. having two or more meanings, that is referring to two or more items of extralinguistic reality, but at the same time sharing at least one element of meaning – without this link, the shared meaning, it would be a case of homonymy The difference is illustrated in the following example provided by Atkins et al. (2008, 280):

a) She gave him a punch in the stomach. (a hard blow with the fist)

b) It lacks the emotional punch of French cinema. (a forceful, memorable quality)

c) Glasses of punch were passed around. (an alcoholic drink mixed from several ingredients)

Atkins et al. (2008, 280) point out that meanings of the noun punch in (2a) and (2b) are more related than the meaning expressed in (2c). In (2b) it can be considered to be “a metaphorical extension of the physical punch” expressed in (2a), while (2c) is semantically different – it occupies a “different semantic area”, despite the fact that it shares the orthographic quality. The meaning of punch in (2c) has the origin in the Sanskrit word panch meaning five – the punch drink was originally mixed from five ingredients. To conclude, punch in (2a) and (2b) are polysemous words (or ‘polysemes’) whereas punch in (2c) is their homonym

According to the analysis, wordplays is mostly created by using morphological means, especially conversion and blending. Puns based on syntactic structure were not recognized. As far as the translation is considered, the most problematic cases of wordplay were based on polysemy. In the translation, one of the meanings of a polysemous word is often omitted. A different language typology can be one of the reasons of problems with the translation. On the other hand, idiomatic expressions were, surprisingly, easier to translate because of the existence of a equivalent. The

translation is not always identical, however the formal and functional aspects are mostly maintained.

Playing with words is a part of everyday communication that can be produced by everyone. It is a ceaseless process of creating new puns and new forms of words and phrases. Each individual is able to produce a differently structured wordplay according to their knowledge of language, creativity, current state of mind etc. Delabastita (1996, 129) claims that to accentuate the power of wordplay, it needs “to be employed in specially contrived setting.” Wordplay can be found for example in newspapers where it is used to attract the reader’s attention and to make the articles interesting. Another field capitalizing on wordplay is doubtlessly the field of humour.

Wordplay is the general name for various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings (1996, 128). Roman Jakobson (1959, 238) claims that “all cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing language”. However, as Hatim et al. (2009, 10) argue, “sound and rhyme and double meaning are unlikely to be recreated in the TL [target language]”, i.e. poetry, song, advertising, punning, are difficult to translate.

Delabastita (1997, 10) also suggests that “wordplay (certain types of it more than others) tends to resist (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on many circumstances) certain kinds of translation.” The main problem is that “the sense may be translated, while the form often cannot” (Hatim et al. 2009, 10). Delabastita (1996, 133-134) claims that “the significant wordplay in the original text has to be preserved rather than eliminated.” Although it is sometimes impracticable, he suggests several methods for translation:

Pun → pun: the source-text pun is translated by a target-language pun, which may be more or less different from the original wordplay in terms of formal structure, semantic structure, or textual structure.

Pun → non-pun: the pun is rendered by a non-punning phrase which may salvage both senses of the wordplay but in a non-punning conjunction, or select one of the senses at the cost of suppressing the other; of course, it may also occur that both components of the pun are translated ‘beyond recognition’.

Pun → related rhetorical device: the pun is replaced by some wordplay-related rhetorical device (repetition, alliteration, rhyme, referential vagueness, irony, paradox, etc.) which aims to recapture the effect of the source-text pun.

Pun → zero: the portion of text containing the pun is simply omitted Pun ST = pun TT: the translator reproduces the source-text pun and possibly its

immediate environment in its original formulation, i.e. without actually ‘translating’ it.

Non-pun → pun: the translator introduces a pun in textual positions where the original text has no wordplay, by way of compensation to make up for source-text puns lost elsewhere, or for any other reason.

Zero → pun: totally new textual material is added, which contains wordplay and which has no apparent precedent or justification in the source text except as a compensatory device. Editorial techniques: explanatory footnotes or endnotes, comments provided in translators’ forewords, the ‘anthological’ presentation of different, supposedly complementary solutions to one and the same source-text problem, and so forth. Boase-Beier et al. (1999, 14) demonstrates the role of a translator as an ‘inventive interventionist’, not as a faithful copier, because it is important to amuse the target audience, so a translator has to invent a translation that is as amusing as the original wordplay and comprehensible for an audience. A translator takes into consideration the ‘formal equivalence’, i.e. translating word-for-word, and ‘dynamic equivalence’, i.e. preserving the function of wordplay but employing different means. As far as the translation of TV series is considered, translators encounter different problems when producing subtitles and dubbing. Luyken et al. (1991, 31) define dubbing as “the replacement of the original speech by

a voice track which attempts to follow as closely as possible the timing, phrasing and lip movements of the original dialogue.”. Subtitles must follow different requirements. According to Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, 9) it is “synchrony with the image and dialogue [...], semantically adequate account of the SL dialogue, and [subtitle duration] long enough for the viewers to be able to read them.”

CONCLUSION

Wordplay is a linguistic phenomenon which is an essential part of everyday communication. The use of wordplay may be intentional as well as unintentional. Intentional wordplay can be employed in areas such as media, to attract the attention of the reader or viewer. An unintentional application of wordplay may be based on ambiguity of some items in the text in which they appear, both lexical and syntactic.

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