

Book review

Winter-Froemel, Esme and Zirker Angelika (eds.) (2015), *Enjeux du jeu de mots. Perspectives linguistiques et littéraires* [Stakes of wordplay. Linguistic and literary perspectives].¹ De Gruyter: Berlin/Boston.

Esme Winter-Froemel is professor of Romance Linguistics at Trier University (Germany). Her main areas of research are semantics, pragmatics and written language. Since 2009, wordplay is a central focus of both her teaching and research. Since 2013, she is the head of the scientific network “The Dynamics of Wordplay: Language Contact, Linguistic Innovation, Speaker-Hearer-Interaction”.

Angelika Zirker is assistant professor of English Literature at Tübingen University (Germany). She has participated in several scientific projects combining linguistics and literature, such as the ongoing project on wordplay with Esme Winter-Froemel.

The present book they edit is divided into three parts. The first part, entitled *Jeux de mots entre locuteurs et auditeurs* [Wordplay between speakers and hearers] deals with the necessary complicity between speakers and hearers for wordplay to be achieved. The second part, titled *Jeux de mots entre les langues* [Wordplay between languages], focuses on multilingual wordplay and discusses its translation. The third part, *Jeux de mots et dispositifs sémiotiques* [Wordplay and semiotic devices], returns on the principal focus of the book (i.e. the metalinguistic function of wordplay) adding the iconic dimension wordplay may be based on.

Part I

In the introductory article, Esme Winter-Froemel and Angelika Zirker present the two particularities of the book. The first one is to be clearly interdisciplinary, associating literary and linguistic approaches to wordplay. And the second one is to be a second French volume of two books reporting a project of research on wordplay initiated during a congress at the University of Tübingen in 2013 (the other one being Zirker & Winter-Froemel 2015). This second particularity explains why the editors present in their introductory pages all the articles of the two volumes and not only those included in this one.

Within an enunciative framework, Alain Rabatel studies *spoonerisms* through the notion of *points of view* to explain their mechanisms of production and interpretation. Thus, a spoonerism is constituted by two points of view: PDV1 explicit, produced by the speaker and taken into account by the enunciator, and PDV2 implicit, appearing after permutation, taken into account by a second enunciator and not by the speaker. PVD2 is the real, hidden meaning of the spoonerism and the speaker has to signal its presence by various signals (prosodic, gestural, graphic, etc.). Spoonerisms allow the speaker to play with the PDV and trigger two possible interpretations: a substitutive one, where the incongruous PDV1 is just

an excuse to update PDV2; and a cumulative one, where both PDV1 and PDV2 are “taken in charge”, i.e. accepted by the speaker and in accordance with what s/he thinks.

Pauline Beaucé presents her interdisciplinary article on *wordplay in the Fairground Theatre*. Through a historical study of the Fairground Theatre, she focuses on the functions of wordplay through its linguistic mechanisms. Behind the ludicrous dimension, three functions are present: the satirical function (against authors and institutions), the critical one (through parody) and advertising. She concludes her paper insisting on the necessary complicity of the spectator who plays a fundamental role in detecting wordplay.

Patricia Oster’s article deals with *wordplay in Marivaux’s theatre*. The author focuses on the *metalinguistic dimension* of Marivaux’s wordplay which she defines as a way to analyse the links between the conscious and the unconscious (p. 82); this metalinguistic dimension is doubled or tripled by the presence of an audience both on stage and in the room. Marivaux’s wordplay allows revealing the unconscious desires of the characters.

Laélia Véron analyses *Balzac’s wordplay in La Comédie humaine*, as a “double communication” (p. 93): a communication between the characters of the novels and a communication between the narrator and the reader. She presents Balzac’s wordplay as more complex than others because it is anchored in a specific sociohistorical context the reader has to know in advance. According to Laélia Véron, such wordplay has to be analysed on two levels: a linguistic level (the mechanisms employed) and a discursive one (producer’s intentions and reader’s reception). Treating the questions of the production and the reception of wordplay in parallel, she shows that the reader is exposed to difficulties requiring encyclopaedic knowledge (to understand the historical context) and linguistic knowledge (to understand the specific language and the multiple allusions). Laélia Véron ends her article with the essential but complex role of the narrator who can explain and signal wordplay as well as manipulate the way it has to be read and appreciated.

Part II

Through one of *R. Manderschild’s novels*, Julia Genz focuses her article on the study of multilingual wordplay in order to show how the various languages interact and how such wordplay functions in the novel. According to the author, wordplay shows efficiently the heterogeneity and ambiguity existing in each multilingual situation. Moreover, it does not resolve the contradictions, but it allows individuals to appropriate these contradictions to construct their identities. The wordplay studied here is presented not only as “polyglossique” [polyglossic], i.e. emerging from the coexistence of different languages or different varieties of a same language (p. 119), but also as polyphonic. Polyglossia, diglossia and polyphony allow the author to present both the linguistic mechanisms of wordplay and their fundamental role in the construction of a Luxemburgish identity.

Federica Di Blasio studies *Perec’s wordplay in La disparition* through an emblematic mechanism of Perec’s work: the *lipogram*. Insisting on the role of the metatext as the “enigmatic references” (p. 135) to the book itself and to its writing style, the author deals with the stakes of translation such wordplay triggers. She presents lipogram as a combination of “play” and “game” (p. 138), the former embodying the freedom of the play and the later, the respect for the linguistic rules. Considering writing and translation as interdependent, Federica Di Blasio explains that the translation of Perec’s wordplay is a constant “renewal of the game” (p. 160) where the translator has to find equivalences necessarily constituted by “loss and compensation” (p. 160) to refer to the original text.

Marc Blancher approaches *wordplay in crime novels* through the writer’s point of view. Explaining that mystery books and wordplay are built on the same elements (a

mystery/riddle, a game and a double reading), the author divides his article in three parts: a historical overview of wordplay (based on a distinction with puns), its narrative analysis, and, finally, its use in crime novels. After a description of the different kinds of novels belonging to the general literary genre 'crime novel', the author presents the specificities of wordplay through its mechanisms and its functions. He concludes with the questionable links between the writer and his/her wordplay based on his/her intentionality and positioning as a narrator or through the characters s/he stages in the novels.

Part III

In his article on *neologisms*, Jean-François Sablayrolles insists on their playful function. He studies these playful neologisms taking into account three parameters: their functions, their situation of occurrence and their morphological construction. Thus, while listing some morphological constructions, the author insists on the necessary complicity between the interlocutors to decode wordplay, engaging thus in an "as if" (p. 199) mode of communication named "colludique" (p. 200), as if the name/expression produced was a real mistake. Then, insisting on the various situations of occurrence, the author presents different functions of neologisms: hook, complicity, weapon to discredit someone else, sale argument and provocation. He ends his article trying to answer the question of neologisms' lifespan taking into account their situation of occurrence and their mode of diffusion.

Michelle Lecolle interrogates the linguistic notions of *motivation* and *arbitrary* choosing to study wordplay based on a linguistic motivation, which could be "real, supposed or created" (p. 217). Consequently, she treats wordplay as a manifestation of the "linguistic feeling" defined, following a metalinguistic competence which is non-theorized, not necessarily explicit and sometimes unconscious (p. 128). The author proposes an overview of notions such as *epilinguistic*, *metalinguistic* through various authors, and also interrogates the notion of *motivation* from Saussure's seminal work (1916) to its place in linguistics nowadays. Finally, before presenting various kinds of wordplay, the author gives them a new definition through the prism of motivation (p. 233).

The main question asked by Sylvia Jaki is if the diversion of a set phrase by *lexical substitution* constitutes wordplay. To answer this, she uses the *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* (Raskin, 1985). In a first part, the author defines phraseology and the diversion of a set phrase and, after having listed some functions of diversion, she presents the mechanisms of substitution. Then, she explores the notion of wordplay, beginning with a short overview of general definitions before analysing it within the *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* framework and using the central notion in humour studies: incongruity. She concludes by saying that Raskin's notion of *script opposition* cannot explain all the cases of lexical substitution.

Marc Blancher studies *wordplay* used in the collection of *Astérix le Gaulois*, a famous French comic book. The author divides his article in three parts. Firstly, he analyses textual wordplay used in the names of the characters. Then, he focuses on the French references wordplay is based on. Finally, the link between wordplay and picture is analysed. Illustrating his analysis with many examples, the author insists on the fundamental role of the picture both in producing and in interpreting wordplay and, moreover, in detecting the intertextuality on which many instances of wordplay are based.

This book is presented by the authors as interdisciplinary (drawing on both linguistics and literary studies), which is verified. Of course, all the articles focus on *wordplay* but this specific topic does not prevent them from having a larger perspective of these two disciplines. On the one hand, literary scholars reading the book will find, for instance, many

deep stylistic analyses concerning specific authors (Balzac, Pérec, Marivaux, Manderschild, etc.) or literary genres such as theatre, novel, comic book, crime novel, etc. On the other hand, readers coming from linguistics will be satisfied reading some articles which ask some central questions in linguistics and enrich current debates. This is the case, for example, with the notions of *motivation*, *points of view*, *linguistic feeling*. Finally, both disciplines are brought together when it comes to examining translation issues. In this regard, the simple title of the book is very well-chosen because no hierarchy appears between linguistics and literature. Both are firmly complementary and whatever the principal approach, the other remains a useful tool to complete the former.

But if linguists and literary scholars may totally relate to the articles presented, I am more sceptical about researchers of humour *per se* (whatever their approach is). The firm stance of the book—which appears as soon as page 6—is that humour research is “étroitement lié” [tightly linked] to wordplay research. This means that these two domains are *close but distinct*. It could be, of course, a simple matter of opinion if the consequences were not prejudicial. Indeed, by considering that humour and wordplay do not constitute the same domain of research, one takes the risk to cut oneself off from a large literature already existing on wordplay. The consequences are various. Firstly, one can read here some already well-known phenomena shown as new results (the necessary complicity between the interlocutors and, in a broader way, all the hearer’s activities and competencies are the best examples). Secondly, it is a pity not to use some already existing and useful theories to describe both the production and the perception of humour, which could also apply to wordplay. Finally, when one of these theories is used, it seems that it is partially misunderstood.

As an example, the only author who explicitly asks the question of the links between wordplay and humour is Sylvia Jaki. Thus, she tries to analyse wordplay with one of the most important theories on humour: the *Semantic Script Theory of Humour* (Raskin, 1985). Despite the fact that this theory is only one among others (and sometimes opposite others), the problem is that Sylvia Jaki builds her argumentation, analysis and demonstration on a literal reading of Raskin’s work, considering that the “script opposition” Raskin describes is always and necessarily a *strict* opposition. Nevertheless, as Raskin (1985: 108) says, “[a] few others [i.e. other script oppositions] reveal their antonymous nature if slightly paraphrased”. What is more, Raskin introduces the concept of “local antonymy” (108) as such: “two linguistic entities whose meanings are opposite only within a particular discourse and solely for the purposes of that discourse”. In other words, two elements can be considered as opposite only because they are present in a humorous discourse and not *per se*. As Attardo said, this opposition has to be taken in a “technical sense” (2001: 18). Moreover, Raskin’s theory has been revisited in 1991 (Attardo & Raskin, 1991) in a first step towards the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (Attardo, 2001). One of the contributions of the 1991 article particularly involves the fact that the script opposition is only one of the six “knowledge resources” (Attardo & Raskin 1991: 294) which could account for explaining humour. And more precisely, this nuance justifies why humour –and wordplay– need more than a criterion to be explained: because humour, like the diversion analysed here, is “based on a network of complex associations”, as Sylvia Jaki suggests (p. 268).

To conclude, even if I still think that humour researchers could leave a bit disappointed by the studies of wordplay presented here, this book remains a precious source of information for linguists and literary scholars thanks to the theoretical tools developed therein.

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Note

¹ All the translations into square brackets and brackets are my own. I add the original French version when necessary.

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