Book review

Winter-Froemel, E. and Thaler, V. (eds.) (2018) *Cultures and Traditions of Wordplay and Wordplay Research.* **The Dynamics of Wordplay 6. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter.**

This sixth volume of The Dynamics of Wordplay Series is indeed an accessible introduction to wordplay research. As much as it is a learning and introductory experience for beginners, the collection is a reference book for scholars wanting updated summaries of methodologies and perspectives on wordplay and corresponding concepts. As a reader-friendly text, *Cultures and Traditions of Wordplay and Wordplay Research* is written in a lucid and simple style, yet, it offers a rigorous comprehensive review of literature and provides in-depth analytical perspectives on data samples examined by the contributors. A primary merit of the book is that its contributions cut across disciplinary boundaries with the advantage of presenting a holistic conceptualisation of wordplay. The volume is divided into three parts; Part I is titled *New Perspectives on the Dynamics of Wordplay* while the focus and title of Part II is *Approaches to Wordplay and Verbal Humour.* The contributions in Part III, evoke sociocultural and interactional/genre settings in analysing wordplay and it is titled *Traditions of Wordplay in Different Social and Cultural Settings.*

As it is with edited volumes, the editors' introductory chapter presents an overview of the different chapters in the text. However, in a succinct manner, the editors summarise the different approaches to wordplay so as to give a good grounding for readers encountering wordplay research for the first time. Raymond Gibbs' chapter on the dynamics of metaphoric creativity, titled "Words making love together: Dynamics of metaphoric creativity", is the first contribution in Part I. From the vintage point of cognitive linguistics, Gibbs argues that metaphoric language use entails wordplay. He uses examples from newspaper headlines, Bob Dylan, Shakespeare and few other authors to illustrate his perspective. His point is that, even in contexts of intentional use, the production of metaphoric wordplay needs not to be necessarily driven by a conscious mental process. While playing with words metaphorically, words tend to activate other semantically related words. For Gibbs, such acts "result in novel ideas bursting forth as if the words themselves were making love together" (p. 30). Gibbs questions the role of intentionality in (metaphoric) wordplay. What Gibbs tries to show is that wordplay needs not to be a conscious act as there are other factors like culture and thought that influence the use of wordplay. Gibbs' position on the possible non-intentionality of metaphorical wordplays echoes the general conclusion in cognitive linguistics that we need not to necessarily be deliberate in the use of metaphoric language.

The next article, "The dynamics of wordplay and the modern novel: A paired case study", by Dirk Delabastita presents an analysis of intentionally created wordplays in two novels - a global one (in a broad sense, novels with styles, themes and subject matters that cut across national boundaries and cultures) and an American novel. In the article, the author projects a dynamic approach to wordplay analysis, which conceptualises wordplay on four continua: formal similarity, semantic dissimilarity, dependency on language structure, and communicative significance. This dynamic approach helps in reading multiple pragmatic meanings into

wordplays in the two analysed texts. In addition, the approach underscores the historicity and pragmatic functionality of situated wordplays. Delabastita's analysis, aided by its novel conceptual framework, accounts for both structural and functional properties of wordplay in the selected texts. In "Wor(l)dplay: Reflections on a writing experience", the third chapter of the book and the last in Part I, Astrid Poier-Bernhard takes the reader through a surprising experience which underscores the stylistic and aesthetic consequence of wordplay as an intentional act. It is interesting to see how the author juxtaposes wordplay with his notion of "world play", namely "a dimension of play 'which happens'" and which is made up of many factors that "interact to constitute a constant- yet constantly changing- stream of experience" (p. 77). The article itself evolves through the writer *playing* on wor(l)d play by drawing on a different technical use of the term *wordplay* and its polysemous essence from the linguistic, creative, semantic, mental, and performative angles. What Poier-Bernhard is pointing out is the possibility of an experience which dwells on the realisation of the unconventional use of language and of meaning-making process. This she encodes in the term "aesthetics of wordplay", which she describes as "its creative origin and its (intended) effect on (us) language users" (p. 78). With the distinction of wordplay and world play, Poier-Bernhard is pointing out that, as much as wordplay could be used to indicate/express a state of affairs, it can be used to create a state of affairs (or, technically, perform a speech act).

Part II of the book begins with Salvatore Attardo's contribution "Universals in puns and humorous wordplay". Attardo repeatedly referred to his earlier monograph on humour (Attardo 1994) and this makes it a bit difficult for readers who might not have read the book to understand the basis for his arguments and assertions on mechanism of pun/humorous wordplay and their classification. Pun is commonly defined as the presence of two senses in an utterance (a defining factor for ambiguity). Attardo warns that ambiguity does not denote pun and that incongruity is not necessarily found in ambiguity; just as incongruity does not necessarily mean the presence of humour. These observations are vital for understanding the mechanisms of pun and humour. The thesis of the next contribution is that ambiguity in verbal irony can be resolved through phonetic cues and this is a departure from the common approach to ambiguity which is grounded in semantic/pragmatic interpretations of ironic utterances. The authors Angelika Braun & Astrid Schmiedel, with the title "The phonetics of ambiguity: A study on verbal irony", present an analysis which shows that phonetic cues such as pitch and vocal intensity signal irony and facilitate the classification of context-free utterances as ironic or not. Joshua Katz's "Exercises in wile" completes Part II. Katz's chapter is borne out of his reflection on what we consciously do when we play with, on and in language. Katz draws attention to the need to have a multifaceted view of the concept of wordplay that cuts across languages, histories in time and space and even disciplines. Katz presents a profound conceptualisation of wordplay; what makes wordplay possible is self-reflexivity. In his words, each instance of wordplay involves "some degree of self-reflexivity, pointing in its very form to its status as language, but elevates form to the point of content and sometimes even beyond" (p. 141). In his chapter, Katz tries to show this *play* within language only. Still, there is more we may deduce about how humans perceive and react to language if we extend Katz's notion of self-reflexivity to diverse contexts (situational and sociocultural).

Eline Zenner & Dirk Geeraerts' "Image macros as multimodal constructions" is the first chapter in the third part. Image macros refer internet memes that contain an image and superimposed written texts. Image macros share links with wordplay and humour. The authors ground their analysis in cognitive linguistics with which they model four dimensions in processing image macros: monomodal to multimodal wordplay, monolingual to multilingual wordplay, low to high degrees of intertextuality, and low to high levels of external referencing. As the authors point out, these dimensions do not mean that image macros could be processed individually; rather, they necessitate that processing image macros entails simultaneous

consideration of the picture, verbal text, language(s) of the text and the text/picture's references (both endophoric and exophoric). The next chapter in Part III, Gesa Schole's "Wordplay as a means of post-colonial resistance", presents a sociocultural and functional analysis to wordplay in that it locates an instance in which wordplay is used as a strategy for the politics of linguistic and cultural identities in a postcolonial context. In many African nations, language enacts identity politics. Literary writings in such often portray this. In the chapter, the author examines wordplay as an instrument for strategic resistance against colonial strictures and structures in *A Veranda do Frangipani* (Under the frangipani), a novel by Mai Couto. The concepts of hybridity and mimicry, which posit an 'in-betweenness' rather than an 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy, is significant for understanding Schole's approach to wordplay. Mai Couto writes in Mozambican Portuguese – a domesticated variety of Portuguese. The hybridity and mimicry portrayed through wordplay and linguistic deviations in the novel indicate the writer's alignment and support for a Mozambican identity and the post-colony's linguistic independence. Thus, wordplay here generates a form of consciousness of two linguistic identities (i.e. the Mozambican identity and the colonial Portuguese identity). Schole, therefore, indicates that the deployment and choice of wordplay possess ideological and identity implications.

The last two chapters in Part III resonate a functional view of wordplay. Like the preceding chapter, they indicate that wordplay is not just a manipulation of the structure of language, but it is inherently a sociocultural phenomenon that functions as a tool for socio-political criticism. In "Examples and poetics of wordplay in Han Shaogong's language-reflective novel- A dictionary of Maqiao", Monika Schmitz-Emans' analyses the implications of playing on and with the semantics of words. In the lexicographic novel, the author Han Shaogong displays the sociocultural implications of linguistic deviation and inventiveness by (re)naming, namely giving new names and meanings to already established concepts and words. Schmitz-Emans, therefore, maintains that the novelist highlights the power of language in transforming the way people explore the world since playing with words means playing with the world which comprises both collective and individual experience.

Natalia Filatkina & Claudine Moulin's "Wordplay and Baroque linguistic ideas" is the last chapter in Part III. The authors focus on (word)play in the discourse tradition of a 17th century German writer, Georg Philipp Harsdorffer, whose works are based on the view that (word)play provides support to knowledge creation and to educating the young. The authors exemplify this position with three types of (word)play in Harsdorffer's work: ambiguity and the juxtaposition of letters and signs, skipping letters, regrouping and combining letters, syllables and parts of words. The authors, quite distinctively, merge a modern perspective on the theory of wordplay with a baroque linguistic stylisation that is multilevel and multimodal in nature. Thus, the authors present a systematic methodology that bridges historical, modern, and even future perspectives in the analysis of wordplay and in the analysis of the use of wordplay to reflect the world (world play).

The volume is, arguably, an electrifying read in many ways. The ideas in the chapters address one another either in a supportive or antagonistic manner. For instance, as much as Gibbs' contribution implies that contexts may not necessarily determine or motivate wordplay, Delabastita shows that we cannot separate wordplay from their intentional and/or contextual use. Thus, when one reads between the lines in these analogous and diverging ideas on wordplay, one is placed in an advantageous position to pick out the shortcomings of each approach, and then discover the 'appropriate' perspective(s) for wordplay to adopt. Researchers interested in wordplay and related concepts, and writers (journalists, novelists, poets, etc.) are, therefore, encouraged to read this book which has been published as an open access one.

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References

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