Angelika Zirker and Esme Winter-Froemel

**Wordplay and Its Interfaces in Speaker-Hearer Interaction: An Introduction**

**Abstract:** Taking the ubiquity and variety of wordplay in both everyday communication and literary texts as a starting point, this contribution sets out to present two different perspectives that allow for a profound interdisciplinary approach. Firstly, the metalinguistic / metadiscursive point of view helps us analyze how wordplay is used and interpreted in various communicative situations. This metalinguistic / metadiscursive perspective reflects on both the linguistic code (or linguistic codes in cases of multilingual wordplay) and on the act of communication itself. Secondly, we are looking at various interplays of wordplay, including linguistic, cognitive, social, etc. forms of such interplay. Our approach foregrounds not only the complexity of wordplay as an interface phenomenon but also allows for a better understanding of wordplay as employed in speaker-hearer interaction and thus also unravels fundamental aspects of language and communication.

**Keywords:** auto-referentiality, everyday communication, fraternization, interdisciplinary approach, interfaces, interplay, metalinguistic function, poetic function, Roman Jakobson, speaker-hearer interaction

1 **Introductory Remarks**

Wordplay is a genuine interface phenomenon to be found both in everyday communication and in literary texts and is thus part of various discourse traditions. It may fulfil a wide range of functions and be entertaining and comical, it may be used to conceal taboo, and it may influence the way in which a speaker’s character is perceived. The interdisciplinary approach to the study of wordplay proposed here thus combines literary and linguistic analysis and integrates various kinds of text types, genres as well as contexts of usage. For instance, linguistics is interested in the semantic connections between the lexical units involved and, more generally, in linguistic motivation / transparency as illustrated by wordplay, as well as in its pragmatic use in communication. Literary studies analyzes autoreferentiality of wordplay, for example in nonsense literature. Methods and tools of analysis may therefore be combined and lead to broader perspectives with regard to functions, effects and the systematics of...
wordplay. Literary studies hereby provides a corpus of highly complex phenomena, while linguistics offers criteria of description and analysis for these: The reference to linguistic categories results in the more precise analysis and classification of forms and functions of wordplay and thus allows for a refinement of tools of analysis in the field of literary studies. The approaches and material complement each other in that both the aesthetic quality of wordplay in everyday communication is foregrounded and the linguistic analysis of literary wordplay proves to be fruitful.

The two opening volumes in the series *The Dynamics of Wordplay* go back to an interdisciplinary research project on “Wordplay in Speaker-Hearer Interaction” and a conference which took place at Tübingen University in 2013. The conference aimed at bringing about an interdisciplinary dialogue and at joining researchers from different linguistic and academic backgrounds. At the same time, we wished to bring together academic perspectives and “practical” perspectives of comedians, authors, directors, etc., who use or deal with wordplay in their professional life. Thus, the conference programme included also a performance by Christian Hirdes (comedian, singer and poet) and contributions by Marc Blancher (author), Valia Sakkou (media director), Sam Lesser (actor), and Phillip Breen (director).

The conference languages were English and French, which has resulted in the bilingual publication as now presented. The volumes show that the conference not only managed to bridge differences in the realm of language, but also provided manifold interdisciplinary insights which are reflected in cross-references within the individual contributions. They should therefore be regarded as a joint project, and the reader is invited to approach them as such. We have provided a French version of this introduction (see *The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2), and in the concluding parts of the volumes we also assemble the abstracts and contributors’ notes in both English and French in order to emphasize the links between the volumes.

The following interdisciplinary analyses of wordplay focus on two main aspects: firstly, a conception of wordplay as a metalinguistic / metadiscursive phenomenon (see the topic of the conference where most of the papers published here were presented, “Wordplay and Metalinguistic Reflection – New Interdisciplinary Perspectives / Les jeux de mots et la réflexion métalinguistique – nouvelles perspectives interdisciplinaires”), and, secondly, a communicative approach with a particular focus on speaker-hearer interaction (see Winter-Froemel and Zirker 2015), which permits us to approach various kinds of interplays in concrete uses of wordplay. This means that the definition of wordplay
is not based on formal criteria alone, but on regarding wordplay as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon in concrete communicative settings.

2 The Ubiquity of Wordplay in Everyday Language and Literature – and Its Fugacity

Wordplay can be seen as being part of our everyday linguistic experience. It may turn up in spontaneous face-to-face communication (1) as well as in Twitter messages (2), on road signs and posters as well as in advertising slogans and brand names (3), in jokes (4) and nursery rhymes (5) as well as in literary language (6). In these various contexts (and many more), we can find a broad range of manifestations of playful language use that we may intuitively categorize as wordplay, although they may differ considerably with regard to formal and functional aspects.

(1) Germ. Schittebön. – Schankedön. (wordplay on German Bitteschön. [Here you are.] – Dankeschön. [Thank you.])

(2) i dont remember much about my dream with zayn but i remember he pushed me into an elevator and things escalated quickly (Twitter message by “a loves baby bean,” 22 October 2014, 11:39)

(3) Germ. haargenau (name of a hairdresser playing on German haargenau [to a hair] and Haar [hair])

(4) Deux poules discutent:
   – Comment vas-tu ma cocotte?
   – Pas très bien. Je crois que je couve quelque chose!
   [Two hens are talking to each other. – How are you doing, my dear? – Not so well. I think that I am incubating / coming down with something.]

(5) En passant dans un petit bois,
   Où le coucou chantait,
   Où le coucou chantait.
   Dans son joli chant il disait:
   “Coucou, coucou,
   Coucou, coucou.”
   Et moi je croyais qu’il disait:
   “Coupe-lui le cou!
   Coupe-lui le cou!”
   Et moi de m’en cour,’ cour,’ cour’
   Et moi de m’en courir.
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[...] [Walking through a small forest where the cuckoo was singing. And he said in his nice chant “Cuckoo, cuckoo! Cuckoo, cuckoo!” And I thought that he was saying “Cut off his neck, cut off his neck!” And I ran, ran, ran, and I ran away.]

(6) SAMPSON. Gregory, on my word, we’ll not carry coals.
GREGORY. No, for then we should be colliers.
SAMPSON. I mean, and we be in choler, we’ll draw.
GREGORY. Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of collar.

(Shakespeare 2012: 1.1.1–4)

The wordplay in (1) is based on a permutation of two sounds in each word ([b] and [ʃ], and [d] and [ʃ], respectively), leading to nonsense items that may make us laugh if we recognize the formal deviation, successfully undo the permutation, and “retranslate” the words. In (2), by contrast, the pun is based on two conventional meanings of the English verb elevate (‘rise,’ ‘get out of control’), the latter, figurative meaning suggesting a sexual interpretation, so that the play alludes to a taboo. In (3), we can also find a play on the lexicalized German expression haargenau and the conventional literal meaning of one of the elements of the compound, German Haar. In this case, however, the wordplay is much more innocent, and its main achievement consists in remotivating the compound by stressing what would be its literal meaning. In (4) we can also observe a play on the polysemy of French couver ‘to incubate (an egg)’ / ‘to come down with (an illness),’ and (5) narrates a comical misunderstanding of the cuckoo’s chant in a much more threatening sense ([cut off his neck]; the nursery rhyme continues with a series of other misunderstandings of real-world sounds as threatening acts). For an analysis of the complex wordplay in (6), see below.

In that sense, all the examples cited require a certain additional effort of interpretation, reflecting on various senses of the linguistic items or on certain formal manipulations. At the same time, however, in spite of its eye-catching or ear-catching nature, wordplay can be seen as a somewhat ephemeral phenomenon. On the one hand, as we have seen with the advertising slogan in (3), wordplay is often used in order to attract the hearer’s or reader’s attention and enhance the memorization of the message; on the other hand, the ultimate aim of the advertising message is a different one, and the producer of the advertising campaign does not intend us to remember the wordplay as such, but the product and the advertising message. Similarly, in social contexts of telling jokes to each other (see (4)), it is common to deplore one’s own lack of memory concerning good jokes once heard. Here again, in a certain sense, the ultimate function of communication in joke-telling is not the message of the wordplay itself; ra-
ther wordplay is a means for the speaker (and the hearer) to present him-/her-self as being linguistically competent, witty as well as quick-witted to pass a subtle underlying social battle – and once this message has passed, the word-play itself is no longer important (unless one tries to remember it in order to use it again in a later context of joke-telling with a different audience).

Let us therefore dwell on the phenomenon of wordplay itself, which, as we will see, permits us to approach very fundamental aspects of language and communication and explore interdisciplinary bridges between linguistics, literary studies and various other disciplines. Which perspectives can be gained by departing from a large conception of wordplay including very different contexts of use and very different perspectives of analysis? And what can the different disciplines and previous studies on wordplay in various contexts contribute to a more comprehensive approach of this multifaceted phenomenon?

3 Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Wordplay in Speaker-Hearer Interaction

Many previous linguistic approaches have focused on various types of wordplay based on formal analyses, aiming at a comprehensive classification (see e.g. Guiraud 1976; Vittoz Canuto 1983; for an overview see also Winter-Froemel 2009). Other approaches, by contrast, have focused on the use of wordplay in specific authors (e.g. Kemmner 1972) or specific settings, e.g. in publicity (see e.g. Vittoz Canuto 1983; Grunig 1990; Tanaka 1992, 1999), in newspaper language (see e.g. Carstensen 1971; Hausmann 1974), in new media (Chovanec and Ermida 2012), or in specific elements within texts, e.g. headlines (see e.g. Dittgen 1989). Special attention has also been directed to specific text types involving wordplay (e.g. jokes, see Ulrich 1977), and still other approaches have focused on the challenges that translating wordplay and multilingual wordplay involve (see Rauch 1982; Grassegger 1985; Heibert 1993; Paton, Powell and Wagg 1996; Delabastita 1997; Ulrich 1997; Stefanowitsch 2001; Schröter 2010; and Valero-Garcés 2010; Kharkhurin 2012, respectively).

Moreover, we may also refer to an important tradition of humour research (Raskin 1985; Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994, 2006; Goatly 2012; see also

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1 The collection of linguistic jokes provided by Koch, Krefeld and Oesterreicher (1997), together with the authors’ linguistic comments, has been a first source of inspiration leading to our interest for this topic.
Preisendanz and Warning 1976; Hesbois 1986) which immediately relates to the topic of wordplay but adopts a much wider perspective, including various forms of non-linguistic humour and emphasizing further aspects of analysis, e.g. the psychological and / or anthropological dimension of wordplay (see, e.g. the works of Sigmund Freud 1905; Helmuth Plessner [1941] 1950; G. B. Milner 1972; Johan Huizinga [1938] 1987; and Henri Bergson [1940] 1993). Finally, wordplay has also been analyzed in the context of linguistic motivation (Gauger 1971, 1976; Käge 1980; Rettig 1981; Cuyckens, Dirven and Panther 2003; Partington 2009; on figurative language see also Gibbs and Colston 2012) and from cognitive linguistic perspectives (Veale 2009).

In the realm of literature (and literary studies) wordplay has so far been studied as a category related to larger interpretive contexts and to particular authors, genres, and periods. One focus of research is the function of wordplay in puns (see Culler 1988; Delabastita 2001), in literary riddles (cf. Cook 2006), modernist poetry (see Cook 1998) as well as an expression of wit, for instance, in order to draw conclusions concerning the truth value of language (cf. Mahood 1957). Wordplay furthermore is a key to the discovery of language as a heuristic tool, for example religious knowledge in metaphysical poetry during the 17th century (see Bauer forthcoming). This leads us immediately to the metalinguistic dimension of wordplay (see Schmitz-Emans 1997, especially 49–105; Delabastita 2001, 2005), which will be explored in more detail below.

Wordplay in literary texts may also serve as a means of characterization – and very often so with some comical intent. In Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, we read about one character:

(7) Mr Cruncher himself always spoke of the year of our Lord as Anna Dominoes: apparently under the impression that the Christian era dated from the invention of a popular game, by a lady who had bestowed her name upon it. (Dickens [1859] 2003: II.1, 57)

“Anna Dominoes” is a comic wordplay based on a mishearing or misunderstanding of the expression Anno Domini (for comic misunderstanding as a specific use of ambiguity see Winter-Froemel and Zirker 2010) – but as the character does not know any Latin, he has reinterpreted the expression (somewhat playfully) and situated it in a context that is identifiable to him, namely the game of dominoes. The wordplay here represents an instance of bilingual wordplay.

Wordplay thus playfully questions the functioning of language and makes creative use of its limits. But wordplay does not necessarily only serve a comic effect; it may also be subversive and it may have a poetic function, especially if one thinks of Huizinga’s situating poetry in the realm of play (cf. Huizinga

(7) Mr Cruncher himself always spoke of the year of our Lord as Anna Dominoes: apparently under the impression that the Christian era dated from the invention of a popular game, by a lady who had bestowed her name upon it. (Dickens [1859] 2003: II.1, 57)

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This link of poetry and play initiates the reflection of poetry as play (see Zirker 2010: 220).

The examples so far have addressed the ubiquity of wordplay in everyday language as much as in literary texts; they have, however, not addressed the aspect of speaker-hearer interaction nor the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach. A first example to illustrate possible interdisciplinary links suggested by wordplay is the following advertising slogan by the tea company Twinings:

(8) Twinings – L’amour avec un grand thé.

This TV slogan alludes to the expression l’amour avec un grand a [the big / true love] and replaces the initial letter of the word amour by the sounds [te]. This sequence of sounds is disambiguated at the level of spelling, where it is transcribed as French thé [tea] which, of course, immediately relates to the conceptual frame (or scenario) of HAVING A CUP OF TEA. On the phonic level, however, [te] generates an additional interpretation in the sense of ‘the letter T,’ i.e. the initial of both the word thé and the name of the company Twinings, a proper name and therefore written with a capital T. Like example (3) cited in section 2, this wordplay is clearly based on speaker strategy: it is aimed at directing the hearer’s attention to the message and in this way, to make him / her memorize the slogan and the brand name Twinings and, eventually, be more inclined to buy the products of this company (see Tanaka 1992). At the same time, the wordplay can be explained as an attempt of the speaker to present him- / herself in a positive, creative way. In this sense, wordplay is a manifestation of an aesthetic use of language, which is condensed in order to achieve an aesthetic effect (even if, of course, this effect is subordinate to the dominant, commercial function in the example cited here). The strategy used – a play on homophony (thé / t) and an allusion to the expression l’amour avec un grand a, or its variation by manipulating one single sound – recalls manipulations of language in literary texts, see e.g. Dylan Thomas’s “Once below a time” (Thomas 2000).

Turning to literary texts, drama is one of the genres where speaker-hearer interaction is most evidently foregrounded. Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet opens with an exchange between two characters that is based on wordplay:

(6) Sampson. Gregory, on my word, we’ll not carry coals.  
Gregory. No, for then we should be colliers.  
Sampson. I mean, and we be in choler, we’ll draw.  
Gregory. Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of collar.

(Shakespeare 2012: 1.1.1–4)
Sampson begins the dialogue with a refusal to “carry coals,” which is a proverbial expression and means as much as “allow ourselves to be insulted” (Shakespeare 2012: 124n1), Gregory immediately takes up Sampson’s utterance and answers with an instance of wordplay in referring to their not being “colliers,” i.e. a literal ‘carrier of coals.’ The interplay at first is between the figurative and literal meanings of the words coal and collier. Sampson’s retort that they “be in choler” continues the paronymic play on coals and collier, albeit with a completely different meaning: choler refers to their anger (see Shakespeare 2012: 124n1). Again, Gregory joins the verbal game and answers with a reference to “collar,” which is a homophone of “choler” and refers to a halter; Gregory’s “draw your neck out of collar” thus means to “keep clear of the hangman’s noose” (Shakespeare 2012: 124n4): “Gregory cautions Samson against committing a capital offence by drawing his weapon too eagerly.”

Overall, the meaning of the dialogue between these two characters is rather serious: they talk about doing dirty work, anger, avoiding being hanged. But they do so on the basis of paronymic wordplay which invites the audience or reader to deciphering the meaning. The effect on the theatre audience (or the reader, for that matter), therefore, is, at least to a certain degree, comic: wordplay here serves comic relief in a play that is identified to be a tragedy already in the prologue. The characters onstage thus communicate with each other, but, at the same time, the author of the play also communicates with the audience; they learn something about the overall atmosphere in the play, but also about the two characters who open it: tragedy will be interspersed with scenes of comic relief, and the two servants onstage are not to be taken too seriously.

Linguistic categories, such as homophony and paronymy in the example, help analyze literary texts, while the literary text provides the linguist with highly complex examples. The examples thus illustrate the great interdisciplinary potential of studying wordplay.

Summing up, we could say that wordplay invites to and is expressive of metalinguistic reflection. It directs the hearer’s / reader’s attention to the message and the language itself, as it often functions as a riddle that has to be solved, and, in order to be solved, requires the hearer’s reflection about the meanings and ambiguities involved as well as about the structures of language that are playfully manipulated (for linguistic, literary and rhetoric perspectives on ambiguity, see also Fuchs 1996; Bauer, Knape, Koch and Winkler 2010; Winter-Froemel 2013; Winter-Froemel and Zirker 2015). This leads us to a first approach to analysing wordplay that can be explored in an interdisciplinary perspective, as both linguistic and literary methods may contribute to a better understanding of this metalinguistic / metadiscursive and poetic function.
Moreover, the use of wordplay in both everyday language and literary texts is influenced by the speaker’s and hearer’s knowledge, communicative intentions and, more generally, by the communicative setting. Here again, an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond an analysis of the formal features of wordplay and stresses its use in speaker-hearer interaction provides fruitful insights. It is thus these two aspects that we would like to explore in the following sections of this paper and in the first two volumes of this book series.

4 The Metalinguistic Dimension of Wordplay

The metalinguistic component is central to wordplay, but has, so far, only rarely been explicitly foregrounded (see e.g. Koch, Krefeld and Oesterreicher 1997; Mioriţa Ulrich 1997). The term ‘metalinguistic’ immediately leads us to Jakobson’s (1960) approach, where the metalinguistic function is defined as one of the six basic functions of linguistic messages. More specifically, it is related to the code in Jakobson’s model, and thereby opposed to other functions as the referential function, which is in turn related to the context, and the poetic function, which again is related to the message itself. In spite of various critiques that have been stated, Jakobson’s approach still represents a key reference in both linguistics and literary studies, and we therefore decided to take it as a heuristic starting point for both the conference and the first two volumes of the series The Dynamics of Wordplay, in order to explore this specific dimension of wordplay. However, we do not intend to assume that wordplay is restrained to its metalinguistic dimension. Indeed, in many cases, specific realizations of wordplay seem to oscillate between a metalinguistic and a poetic function, and still other functions may be of even greater importance for certain cases of

2 Many of these critiques concern the poetic function, its special role in Jakobson’s model, and the concept of literature and literary language that it implies. They cannot be discussed in detail here; concerning the metalinguistic function, however, it seems important to mention that its delimitation from the referential function can be put into question, as language or the code can be seen as just one special subtype of referent or one specific element of the context, so that the metalinguistic function could also be regarded as a subtype of the referential function (see Coseriu 2007, 76–92 and the contribution by Kabatek, this volume; cf. also other semiotic models such as Karl Bühler’s, who proposes only three basic functions of linguistic signs, namely the expressive, the appellative, and the referential function [Germ. Ausdrucks-, Appell-, Darstellungsfunktion], Bühler 1934).
wordplay (e.g. the conative or appellative function of wordplay in advertisements, see the examples discussed above).

Altogether, the metalinguistic dimension of wordplay is part of its functional characteristics. At the same time, it can be realized in quite different ways: wordplay can be employed creatively in a wide range of uses but it may also be referred to only subtly. The creation of unexpected links between linguistic units often has a comic effect (e.g. the advertisement slogans “Have a break, have a kit-kat,” and “Il n’y a que Maille qui m’aïlle” [There is only Maille that suits me], with a homonymic play on French Maille and m’aïlle) and may be expressive of wit (i.e. of the speaker’s wit). In literary communication it may furthermore be one of the indicators of double communication, i.e. on the internal level of the text as well as on the external one, between the author and reader / audience; a telling name like Mrs. Malaprop in Sheridan’s The Rivals (first performed in 1775) is directed at the audience as a metacommentary about this character and her language use. Wordplay in these cases thwarts mimesis and, thus, the illusion (see Warning 1976).

Moreover, the focus on the metalinguistic dimension of wordplay proposed here can be linked to discourse and communication: in speaker-hearer interaction, wordplay may be regarded as an invitation to metalinguistic reflection directed at the addressee of the utterance as much as an intentional expression on behalf of the speaker. Wordplay reflects on language and communication and unravels characteristics of literary language in everyday communication as much as it opens up the possibility to analyze literary texts from a linguistic perspective.

In the first section of The Dynamics of Wordplay 1, contributors focus on authors and contexts. Martina Bross reflects on the prominence of “Wordplay and Ambiguity in Hamlet’s First and Second Line” and especially on its protagonist’s eagerness to play with words. She analyzes two examples of wordplay in the two first lines spoken by Hamlet: both lines – “A little more then kin, and lesse then kind” and “Not so much my Lord, I am too much in the sonne” – allegedly contain ambiguities, but in the second line the pun is more problematic than often acknowledged. Bross therefore shows in how far ambiguity serves as a basis for wordplay in Hamlet, but does so in various ways with regard to the internal and external level of communication. As a metalinguistic and metadiscursive device, ambiguity and wordplay feed into characterization and help to recognize character constellations but they also involve the audience who, in this case, is never fully allowed to disambiguate Hamlet’s lines. Patricia Oster follows a similar approach in her essay (see The Dynamics of Wordplay 2) in studying the metalinguistic aspect of neologisms in the theatre of Marivaux and
their playful dimensions. In his plays, innovative wordplay often is linked to ambiguity and thus points to metalinguistic reflection but also to the unconscious dimension of both the production and the perception of wordplay.

Thomas Kullmann in his contribution on “Wordplay as Courtly Pastime and Social Practice: Shakespeare and Lewis Carroll” focuses on one of Shakespeare’s comedies, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and links wordplay as a communicative practice to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books (published in 1865 and 1872). He takes his starting point from Grice’s maxims and regards wordplay not so much as a violation of these rather than being functional in the texts examined with regard to communication and social interaction. Whereas in Shakespeare’s comedy the main characters use wordplay to show their verbal and courtly superiority and thus create an atmosphere of humour and playfulness, wordplay in Carroll’s *Alice* books proves to be a challenge both for the heroine and for the reader. But even in this context, wordplay serves as a means to further social practices, and Alice, in the course of her adventures, learns to use and react to wordplay and develop a certain degree of “courtliness.” Kullmann thus looks at wordplay as an indicator of metalinguistic awareness that allows for integration into particular social and communicative contexts.

Maik Goth turns “*Double Entendre* in Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century Comedy” to reassess the notion of *double entendre* by placing it at the intersection of dramatic text, theatrical performance and contemporary criticism. He develops a theory of *double entendre* that takes into account the particular communicative situation and double address in the theatre; he bases his analysis on a taxonomy that takes into account various forms of structures and the interaction of meaning. This taxonomy is then applied to the interpretation of Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675) and Steele’s *The Funeral* (1701 / 02), thus juxtaposing double entendre as a play about sexual and intellectual prowess with its non-bawdy variety and showing that wordplay may link different comic modes with one another.3

While the focus so far has been on the comic effect(s) of wordplay, Sheelagh Russell Brown reads it in the sense of *serio ludere* and addresses it as “The Serious Work of Play” in the “Dark Sonnets” of Gerard Manley Hopkins. While Hopkins’s use of wordplay has been widely studied in most of his poetry and in his philosophy of words, the so-called “Dark Sonnets” are more difficult to tackle in this respect: these six untitled poems (composed in 1885 and 1886) express a

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3 For further functions of wordplay in drama in the specific context of the Parisian fairground theatres in the eighteenth century, see also the contribution by Pauline Beaucé (in *The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2).
sense of isolation and, hence, resist a reading that focuses on linguistic playful-
ness. Rather, Hopkins here uses wordplay to be able to “utter” the landscape of
his mind: wordplay becomes a means to distance himself from normal speech
and thus echoes the distance he himself was experiencing in his life.

Vincent Renner turns to linguistic techniques of wordplay and “Lexical
Blending as Wordplay,” i.e. mechanisms of word-formation in the following
section on “Linguistic Techniques of Wordplay.” Renner draws on various lan-
guages in order to show that the formation process of blending can in itself be
regarded as a form of wordplay and offers an overview of features that increase
wordplayfulness in blending. Jean-François Sablayrolles’ contribution (in The
Dynamics of Wordplay 2) takes up and broadens these issues by investigating
wordplay in the more general context of neology, focusing on specific types of
lexicogenic matrices and their communicative and pragmatic functions. Moreo-
ver, Michelle Lecolle’s contribution (also in The Dynamics of Wordplay 2) pre-
sents an in-depth reflection about various kinds of formal processes in their
relation to linguistic motivation.

The contribution by Pierre Arnaud, François Maniez and Vincent Renner
provides a corpus investigation of “Non-Canonical Proverbial Occurrences and
Wordplay.” The authors collected a set of 303 instances of six English proverbs
and analyzed as well as classified their non-canonical occurrences. Most of
these turned out to be contextual adaptations, while only a few qualified as
instances of wordplay. On the basis of a questionnaire they have been able to
establish that the simple contextual adaptation of proverbs does not create
wordplay, but that wordplay requires semantic complexity combined with hu-
mour.

Both humour and semantic complexity feed into Sebastian Knospe’s article
on “A Cognitive Model for Bilingual Puns,” in which he presents examples of
German / English bilingual puns in German press texts. His focus is on both the
linguistic make-up of bilingual puns and on their cognitive processing in their
contexts of use. Readers have to invest cognitively in order to decode the mean-
ing, while particular discursive effects may be achieved by means of bilingual
puns.

In an interview with Angelika Zirker, contemporary British poet Ian Duhig
reflects on his perspective on wordplay in poetry and discusses how poetry can
express more in fewer words than other texts do. In his view, wordplay is one of
the most important means to intensify literary language. His main examples

4 Cf. also Sylvia Jaki’s contribution on phraseological modification and punning (in The Dy-
namics of Wordplay 2).
comprise Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767) as well as his own poetry. This contribution foregrounds a special feature of our previous reflection on the topic of wordplay as well as of the conference: not only do we wish to transcend disciplinary boundaries, but we also would like to enter into a dialogue with experts on wordplay from various domains, i.e. literary authors, comedians, directors, etc.

Finally, issues of genre and meta-reflection are addressed. Johannes Kabatek in his paper on “Wordplay and Discourse Traditions” shows that wordplay is determined not only by a particular language and its use, but also by traditional and culture-specific patterns. He advocates the importance of a distinction between the different levels of analysis that may be involved in wordplay, including discourse traditions and translation.

Svea Schauffler’s contribution “Wordplay in Subtitled Films – An Audience Study” is situated in the field of (audiovisual) translation studies and presents an experimental study that investigates the reception of two different strategies for subtitling English wordplay into German on the basis of the short film *Wallace and Gromit in a Matter of Loaf and Death*. The subtitled versions were presented to audiences in two renditions, one prioritizing the transfer of humour, the other adhering to the original dialogue. Audience reactions to both versions were documented in questionnaires.

In her investigation into “Plays Around Surfaces and Depths: Transitions Between Two and Three-Dimensionality Reflected by Wordplays and Puns,” Monika Schmitz-Emans once again turns to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books and focuses not so much on strategies of wordplay as such but rather on the preconditions of wordplay as developed by their author, the mathematician Dodgson. She regards concepts derived from mathematics as the stage on which words are enabled to play games and roles and links the *Alice* books to their author’s mathematical writings, for example *Euclid and His Modern Rivals* (1879). Two- and three-dimensional objects as well as surfaces and depths turn into semantic spaces, concepts of surface and depths into means of language reflection.

Matthias Bauer considers “Secret Wordplay and What It May Tell Us” and its wider implications for the study of wordplay. “Secret wordplay” is defined as a kind of wordplay which stays unnoticed for some time and / or by a part of the hearers. Wordplay is thus read in a communicative context: whereas open wordplay flouts the cooperative principle, secret wordplay does not do so. Bauer moreover regards wordplay as a scalar phenomenon and develops four parameters of analysis that take into account linguistic features as well as context, social and communicative functions. Secret wordplay is thus shown to be relat-
ed, for instance, to word knowledge and world knowledge when it comes to reading literary texts.

5 Wordplay and Its Interplays – Playing on Different Levels of Language and Communication

As we have seen in the previous section an important function of wordplay is to orient the speaker and hearer towards language and/or the message and the discourse event itself. The latter aspect leads us immediately to another dimension of analysis, namely to the relation of wordplay to the concrete communicative setting in which it is used. As we have already seen above, it seems helpful to study not only the formal characteristics of wordplay, but also the ways in which it is used in different situations of communication, where it functions as a social practice (as Kullmann explicitly stresses in his contribution).

Wordplay involves certain rules not only concerning formal features, but also with regard to legitimate uses of wordplay or of specific instances of wordplay in certain situations. This functional aspect leads to a dynamics in which wordplay interacts with a broad range of contextual factors, which can be related to the participants of the communicative exchange, their social roles, their knowledge etc. In a sense, wordplay can therefore have a (anti-)social function in that it may create a gap between various groups of hearers, e.g. between hearers who appreciate a certain playful use of language and others who do not, between hearers who participate in the social practice and master it, and others who do not, or at a more basic level, between hearers who understand (i.e. successfully decode) the wordplay and others who fail to do so.

The contribution by Alain Rabatel, “Points de vue en confrontation substitutifs ou cumulatifs dans les contrepèteries (in absentia)” (in The Dynamics of Wordplay 2) illustrates several of these aspects: it presents a study on a specific subtype of wordplay which is characteristic for French, the tradition of the contrepèteries. On a purely formal level, these are characterized by a permutation of letters or sounds, which is also characteristic for the German tradition of the Schütteleim and the English tradition of the spoonerism, but there are additional restrictions for the French tradition. Contrepèteries are never explicit, i.e. they are wordplays in absentia, where the second possible interpretation remains hidden, and this hidden interpretation is strongly related to a taboo (in most cases the domain of sexuality). This additional characteristic implies that
this type of wordplay can be hard to decode, and the successful interpretation of a *contrepèterie* will therefore lead to a strong sense of gratification (on an individual level) and fraternization / *connivence* (on a social level). As a side-note, it seems interesting to observe that similar processes of fraternization and effects of *connivence* always (explicitly or implicitly) not only imply a strategy of inclusion and constitution of social groups, but also an exlusion (at least potentially) of others. This complex social setting is also reflected in the cases of *double entendre* studied by Maik Goth: although it is based on a very different kind of linguistic strategy on a formal level, it also involves this double game of inclusion and exclusion by virtue of the successful decoding vs. failure of additional hidden messages; the additional, secret message is also very often related to sexual taboo.

In other cases, the interactional functions of wordplay are accentuated even more explicitly. The contribution of Pauline Beaucé, “Les jeux de mots dans le répertoire des théâtres de la Foire à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: de la publicité à la satire” (in *The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2) offers insights into this aspect by studying the use of wordplay in the plays of the French *théâtres de la Foire*, where wordplay can be used to parody other theatre institutions and to mock legal measures that restrict the liberty and success of these popular manifestations of dramatic play. At the same time, the contribution reveals commercial motives underlying the use of wordplay, which has also an advertising function in order to attract the audience.

Moreover, in the domain of literary texts, we can observe a systematic multiplication of levels of communication. Studying wordplay in drama invites us to analyze its functioning not only on the level of the communication between the characters and the actors on stage, but also include the audience as a further group of hearers. This aspect is also stressed in Patricia Oster’s contribution on the theatre of Marivaux, “‘Ne nous tutoyons plus, je t’en prie’: Jeux de mots et enjeu du langage dans le théâtre de Marivaux” (*The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2). As Patricia Oster shows, Marivaux’s plays make use of the specific communicative setting of dramatic texts in order to manipulate language, or to put language itself on stage in order to invite the audience to reflect about consciousness and unconsciousness in communication.

These observations are complemented by the study of the narrative texts of Balzac provided by Laélia Véron, “Jeu de mots et double communication dans l’œuvre littéraire: l’exemple de la *Comédie humaine* de Balzac.” The multiplication of communicative levels – the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic level – also proves central here, and, again, Véron’s examples illustrate that wordplay can be used on both levels for different pragmatic and interactional functions,
such as social critique; she furthermore shows how the narrator comments on the uses of wordplay. Additionally, Véron stresses the distinction between various groups of readers in a historical perspective, which becomes fundamental when we study wordplay in everyday language as well as in literary texts from earlier periods. As a corollary of language change, we may not necessarily have the linguistic and cultural knowledge required in order to successfully decode wordplay of previous times.

This immediately leads us to a second aspect concerning the social functions of wordplay and inclusion / exclusion of hearer groups: the various types of knowledge that the use of a certain instance of wordplay requires. We have already seen that this dimension becomes relevant in the case of French contrepèteries studied by Alain Rabatel, and in the double entendre studied by Maik Goth; the same goes for the multilingual puns studied by Sebastian Knospe and the cases of multilingual play in the texts of the Luxembourgian author Roger Manderscheid (see the contribution by Julia Genz in The Dynamics of Wordplay 2), which require a certain amount of knowledge of several linguistic codes.

However, we can also observe that the various uses of wordplay themselves are not necessarily directed towards a uniform group of hearers / readers, as the case of Astérix illustrates (cf. the contribution on Astérix by Marc Blancher, in The Dynamics of Wordplay 2). The success of the series can at least be partially explained by the fact that it can be read and enjoyed on various levels. Sophisticated uses of wordplay and allusions requiring extensive historical and linguistic knowledge will increase the gratification of certain groups of readers, but will not lead to an exclusion of others, as there are still enough other manifestations of wordplay that can be decoded in a more direct and explicit way.

The importance of a certain level of linguistic knowledge is also taken up by Marc Blancher’s contribution “De l’auteur de jeux de mots aux jeux de mots d’auteur,” in which he presents some practical examples of motives and restrictions on the use of wordplay in detective stories written for language learners who only have limited knowledge of the foreign language (L2). Again, this contribution provides insights from a practical perspective, thereby illustrating pragmatic constraints on the use of wordplay in specific text types and communicative settings.

The texts of Roger Manderscheid likewise point to interlinguistic aspects of wordplay in a very specific communicative context which is strongly shaped by an interaction of different languages. The relations between plurilingualism and wordplay in this specific context are analyzed by Julia Genz in her contribution “‘Il wullte bien, mais il ne puffte pas’ – de la polyglossie à la polyphonie dans le roman Der sechste Himmel (Feier a Flam) de Roger Manderscheid” (The Dynamics of Wordplay 2).
ics of Wordplay). With the aid of Ferguson’s concept of diglossia as well as Ducrot’s concept of linguistic polyphony, she investigates the functions of wordplay in the novel and with regard to the shaping of the narrator’s identity.

The fact that wordplay involves playing with certain elements and structures of a specific language also implies, in a general way, that its translation poses a challenge. Perec’s novel *La Disparition* (1969) represents a somewhat extreme case, as argued by Federica Di Blasio in her paper “La Disparition de Georges Perec et les jeux de mots: l’ambiguïté du métatexte et la négociation de la traduction” (*The Dynamics of Wordplay*). On the one hand, on a formal level, the challenge of translating this text which is based on the technique of the lipogram depends on the structures of the target language and, more, specifically, on the rate of recurrence of the most frequent vowel. On the other hand, Di Blasio shows that the lipogram also has a thematic function in the source text, which creates additional restrictions for the translation, but also opens up certain possibilities of developing functionally analogous instances of wordplay in different target languages.

The interplays of wordplay can furthermore be studied from a semiotic perspective. An important question in this context concerns the relationships between wordplay and linguistic innovation. The contribution by Jean-François Sablayrolles, “Néologismes ludiques: études morphologique et énonciativo-pragmatique” (*The Dynamics of Wordplay*) shows that wordplay is based on certain techniques which can also be found in other cases of neology / innovation, but that wordplay predominantly makes use of extragrammatical techniques, whereas “regular” techniques such as suffixation and composition, which are central to linguistic innovation in general, are less frequent. Moreover, Sablayrolles investigates the various functions that wordplay may have and explores the diachronic development of ludic neologisms, which may become conventionalized or, in contrast, fall into oblivion.

The essay by Michelle Lecolle, “Jeux de mots et motivation: une approche du sentiment linguistique” (*The Dynamics of Wordplay*) stresses a particular aspect of the manipulation of language effectuated by wordplay, which is the linguistic competence (the knowledge of the language system, which the speakers may not be explicitly aware of), and, more specifically, the motivatedness of the linguistic items played with. As Lecolle shows, the motivation or remotivation of linguistic items can be seen as a fundamental function of many cases of wordplay, and here again, we touch upon other types of innovation which are no longer ludic, but involve similar processes of (re-) motivation, e.g. popular etymology and learners’ errors.
The contribution by Sylvia Jaki, “Détourment phraséologique et jeu de mots: le cas des substitutions lexicales dans la presse écrite” (*The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2), focuses on newspaper language and on specific structures that may be playfully manipulated, namely phraseologisms in which one specific element is substituted by another lexeme. The issue of defining the boundaries of wordplay equally becomes relevant here. Jaki argues that manipulations of phraseologisms should not automatically be considered to be genuine manifestations of wordplay in the narrow sense, and she proposes to distinguish between true cases of wordplay on the one hand and cases of playing with language on the other hand.

Finally, wordplay may involve not only a play on language or languages, but also on other semiotic systems. This aspect is addressed by Marc Blancher in his contribution “Ça est un bon mot!” ou l’humour (icono-)textuel à la Goscinny” (*The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2), where he examines the interplay of language and the drawings in *Astérix*. He shows that the overall “quality” of the wordplays contained in the text is enhanced if the wordplay is also reflected on at the level of the drawings, and only this joint use of the various semiotic systems at hand means that the true potential offered by the comic strips is explored. Concurrently, this interplay offers a broad range of possibilities to create highly sophisticated wordplays which rely on intertextual and intermedial allusions and which may require a complex process of decoding.5

The various contributions that deal with the various possibilities of playing with different semiotic devices that may be accessible in specific communicative settings leads us back to the metalinguistic and metadiscursive dimension of wordplay, stressing once more the complexity and multifaceted character of this evidence of linguistic and aesthetic mastership.

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5 Another study that provides interesting insights into the interplays of various semiotic systems is Svea Schauffler’s study on strategies of subtitling wordplay. And, on a more theoretic level, Monika Schmitz-Emans’s paper stresses the ways in which wordplay in Lewis Carroll’s texts reflects the “semiotic event” (discourse) itself.
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Against this background of the multilingual and -disciplinary perspectives, each of the contributions has been read and evaluated by several reviewers, representing the fields of both linguistics and literary studies, thus ensuring an interdisciplinary reflection and approach. As organizers of the conference and editors of these volumes, we have encouraged all authors to write their contributions with a heterogenic readership in mind. We have also asked them to make disciplinary and theoretical presuppositions and notions evident that might otherwise be difficult to grasp for readers outside of the respective field of research.

The conference was prepared with the help of a reviewing committee that helped select papers out of over 80 submissions. We are grateful to Heidi Aschenberg (Tübingen), Matthias Bauer (Tübingen), Hans-Martin Gauger (Freiburg), Johannes Kabatek (Zürich), Peter Koch† (Tübingen), Burkhard Niederhoff (Bochum), Margit Peterfy (Mainz), Britta Stolterfoht (Tübingen), and Richard Walteteit (Newcastle upon Tyne). They also helped with the reviewing for publishing the proceedings, alongside further reviewers – Dennis Sobolev (Haifa University), Eline Zenner (KU Leuven) and members of the scientific network “The Dynamics of Wordplay,” Georgia Christinidis (Rostock), Barbara Frank-Job (Bielefeld), Bettina Full (Bochum), Bettina Kluge (Hildesheim), Alexander Onysko (Venice), and Verena Thaler (Mannheim) – as well as the editorial board of this book series, who has accompanied the publication in an efficient and helpful way.

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7 References


