

DCCD 2020**Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding****WORD-PLAY IN FRENCH COMIC SKETCH**

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Abstract

This article represents the analysis of a comic technique, word-play. The authors studied this phenomenon examining the material of French humorous sketch, which is based on the increased attention in modern linguistics to the analysis of certain types of discourse, including the humorous discourse. The authors pay special attention to the peculiarities of humorous discourse and its characteristics, such as the specifics of the French humorous oral sketch, its varieties, thematic component, and place in the system of genres. The authors of the article also identify various comic techniques used in the sketches, one of which is "word-play". They generalize approaches to the concept of "word-play" in Russian and foreign linguistics and consider numerous types of the phenomenon, the classification of ways to create word games. In the course of the study, the authors conclude that a special technique in French sketches is a pun. It resulted from certain features of the phonetic and lexical structure of the French language. Moreover, paronyms are considered to be the most common way to create a pun in a French humorous sketch. Polysemes, phonetic phenomena, homophones, comparisons and suffixes are also studied by the authors. The article outlines the possibility of further use for the results of the research as the basis for continuous study of text linguistics and discourse analysis, the study of humorous discourse in general, the means of creating a comic text on the example of the French language, particularly in teaching French as a foreign language.

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1. Introduction

Our culture is a set of material and spiritual achievements of our society, and reflects all aspects of life and mentality of an ethnic group, its historical, social and psychological characteristics: views, ideas, value systems, traditions, ways of thinking and perception, verbal and non-verbal behavior (Komissarov, 2014). Humor in its various forms, including the form of language games is one of the components of culture. This article is a study of the linguistic and stylistic features of French word-play in humorous sketches.

Many researchers in their studies refer word-play primarily to works of fiction in which the author uses this technique to emphasize individual style, or to create a comic effect. In our work, we address the implementation of wordplay in a French humorous sketch for the first time.

Modern scientists have not yet reached a common understanding of the essence of the stylistic device in question, despite the abundance of works on various aspects of word play (T.A. Gridina, E.A. Zemskaya, V. Z. Sannikov, B. Yu. Norman, S.A. Mironenko, V.I. Shakhovsky, etc.). The magnitude of language play in speech has led to its active study within the framework of cognitive linguistics. Scientists working in this field of linguistics consider a language as a cognitive mechanism that plays a role in encoding and transforming information. Representatives of this field of linguistics (such as M. Minsky, S. Attardo, A. B. Karasik, N.D. Arutyunova, etc.) study language play from the point of view of the deep mental activity of a person, as well as from the position of the cognitive nature of the mechanisms that are operating in one's mind when perceiving a language game and making a person laugh. Practically no research has been done in the sphere of scientific definition of wordplay.

Language play is an element of culture, characterizing the essence of a person, it is our constant companion at all stages of life. The language game has a tendency to consciously violate the norms of speech communication. We perceive this as a universal phenomenon for all languages, that is used to entertain the interlocutor, give the statement a comic effect. Word-play, or pun, created using various language tools (polysemy, homonymy, phraseology) or arising from an individual game of consonance, is part of a language game.

Word-play has different interpretations in different languages. Word-play is a joke where one replaces one word (or meaning) with another; a pun. A pun is a joke based on the use of different meanings of the same word; several different words that sound similarly, word-play (Fefelova, 2016).

Word-play is not only a game based on sounds, but also a mix of incompatible meanings, where on the phonetic level we observe a characteristic predominance of the sound side over the semantic side. The most common criterion of difference is the linguistic basis. J. Munen and L. Larchey believe that the pun is based only on omorphy (Larchey, 1893.). We are convinced that the main difference between word-play and pun lies in understanding their semantic basis, not in the form itself.

In our mind, games are often associated with the comic effect, which is pointed out by many researchers (Abderrahmane & Abrane, 2017; Aleksandrova, 2016; Borodina, 2015; Farhat, 2011; Fernandes Sanchez, 2017; Gabriel, 2018; Gutarenko, 2016; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2018; Minyuan, 2019; Rybakova, 2015; Winter-Froemel et al., 2018, etc.). The perception of the comic effect is based on such properties of human consciousness as knowledge and reflection of the surrounding reality. The accumulated experience determines the formation of a stereotypical perception of reality. When a comic message enters

the recipient's mind, it violates this stereotypical pattern, thereby enabling a parallel "game" mode of processing information. The need to study the relation of thinking processes to the factors of the external world led to the consideration of the comic in the scheme of a communicative situation. This research is done on sketches as a reflection of the modern realities of French culture.

2. Problem Statement

The word-play is a field of active scientific research for modern linguists. For French researchers, the concept of "word-play" remains quite broad and ambiguous. Defining it in different ways, French linguists are unanimous in the opinion that this concept is difficult to describe with a scientific term. Russian linguists share their opinion on the thesis about the impossibility of word-play scientific definition.

At the same time, taking into consideration the fact that the research material is French humorous sketch, we believe it appropriate to take into account the research of French linguists in this field. There is no definition that would fit for such a thing as "word-play". There are many ways to play: the game can relate to sounds, form, meaning, the place of words in a sentence (Blancher, 2015).

The works of foreign linguists show us that the idea of ambiguity, double meaning is one of the key elements in word-play research. The vast majority of scientists use the term "ambiguity" when they speak of this subject. According to Jacqueline Henry (2003), this phenomenon always implies "duplication of meaning". Fuchs (1996) speaks of a "set of values". Word-play is a term full of ambiguity and inaccuracy. Vittoz Canuto agrees with them: "Word-play is a term full of ambiguity and inaccuracy" (as cited in Jaki, 2015). In Delia Chiaro's work on wordplay (as cited in Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2018), ambiguity is also the center of attention. She identifies two types of ambiguity, which, according to her, are two conditions for the term "word-play" to be used, namely ambiguity of form and ambiguity of context. Ambivalence is another aspect that is often mentioned in the verbal analysis - Winter-Froemel et al. (2018) consider this to be the central feature of word-play.

Recently, this phenomenon has taken an important place in various spheres of life, including education. Scientists have noticed that children have a tendency to play with words from an early age. More and more research is done on the importance of word games for the language skills development (O'Mara, 2004). In addition to word games, various texts containing such a phenomenon as word-play are currently actively used in education, including humorous sketches (Vildanova et al., 2019).

The study identifies various comic tricks used in the texts of sketches, one of which is the "word play", summarizes the approaches to the concept of "word play" in domestic and foreign linguistics, and considers various types of the phenomenon being analyzed.

3. Research Questions

At all times, humor has played an important role in the life of society, including the French-speaking one. As one of the most interesting and complex manifestations of human nature, based on the inextricable connection of consciousness and speech, it is deeply rooted in the history and culture of mankind, reflecting the age-long cultural and verbal traditions of nations and communities. On the other hand, humor is an exclusively individual phenomenon that accompanies a person at different stages of life, it reflects the

immediate experience and direct reaction to the surrounding reality. Being cognitive in its nature, humor is a culturally specific phenomenon that, at the same time reflects all the features of the mentality and culture of a nation and is a direct reflection of the consciousness and culture of an individual (Gabriel, 2018).

In the modern world, humor is also one of the unique socio-cultural phenomena that reflect national character, mentality, traditions and cultural customs. It helps one to develop and form in society, reflects the accumulated experience, values. It is also the manifestation of general public attitude towards something: situations, personalities, events or phenomena (Pushkarsky, 2003).

If that is the case, the role of facial expressions, gestures and voice timbre becomes secondary and is pushed back, while the cultural and psychological characteristics of communication take the leading role. It is known that each culture has its own perception of humor, its own cultural values, its own forbidden topics for jokes, sometimes even prohibited by law. Something that is considered to be a brilliant sense of humor in one culture may be considered offensive or completely incomprehensible in another. The reasons for this misunderstanding are often the following: a word-play, a misunderstanding of cultural norms and values, an ignorance of the real situation and realities of the country, lack of cultural knowledge.

The objectives of the study include:

1. to clarify the concept of humorous discus.
2. to identify the main discursive characteristics of the French sketch;
3. to explore the basic techniques of a language game in a French sketch;
4. to analyze the lexical and phonetic features of the pun.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to analyze such a comic technique of the French humorous sketch as a language game, which, in turn, involves identifying the main discursive characteristics of the French sketch, identifying its varieties, as well as determining the place of this genre in the system of genres of humorous discourse as a whole.

We used as research material humorous texts of sketches and oral presentations of French comics for the period from 1979-2019. In total, the paper analyzes 15 humorous sketches illustrating the features of humorous discourse.

The article explores the most common way to create a pun in a French humorous sketch - paronyms, classifies ways to create a play on words, identifies such methods as polysemes, phonetic phenomena, homophones, comparisons and suffixes.

5. Research Methods

In search of solution for the aforementioned problems, we used the following methods: the method of contextual and situational analysis - to identify, first, the types of language games, and, second, techniques used to achieve a comic effect; a complex descriptive and analytical method (including general scientific methods of observation, comparison, generalization) – to define with more accuracy the features of humorous discourse in general and the French sketch in particular; the method of logical calculus – to determine the frequency of use of various methods of language games.

6. Findings

Humor is the main component of humorous discourse. Humorous discourse, that is representing a subtype of the institutional type of discourse, is perceived as "a text in a situation of laughing communication". Typical signs of such situations include the following:

- 1) the communicative intention of people involved in communication to avoid serious conversation,
- 2) humorous tone of communication, used when you want to establish a more familiar contact and the desire to critically reconsider current concepts without taking a radical stance,
- 3) the presence of certain models of laughing behavior accepted in this linguoculture (Karasik, 2018).

Speaking about the genre specifics of humorous discourse, it is worth noting their diversity and the lack of a single classification. Among the most common in modern linguistics are the following: satire, joke, anecdote, parody, sketch.

The last genre of humorous discourse, i.e. a sketch, presents a particular interest for us. It is seen as a comedy performance, lasting from 1 to 10 minutes, presented by one, two persons or a group of people (Farhat, 2011). It holds our interest since this type of comic utterance has a number of features that differ from other genres of this type of discourse.

Its first period of popularity is the 1860-1890s, when the main place for entertainment of the French public were the so-called "concert cafés". In these places people performed their sketches, theater performances, songs, dances, and other forms of entertainment in the evenings. The second period began a century later, in the 1970s. The performances of women, ethnic minorities, and of course, the famous French comedian – Michel Colucci, better known as Coluche, had a huge impact on the popularization of this genre.

The sketch has many names: monologue, comic performance, comic monologue, comic song, comic story, etc. We could consider all the following as varieties of sketch: a silent sketch, using costumes, musical or other special sound effects; a poetic sketch, where the author presents a humorous story in prose; a parody, where the comedian parodies someone, mostly famous people; a musical sketch, where the comic performance has musical accompaniment; a monologue, where the comedian talks to the public, or just tells a story; a dialogic sketch, where several comedians discuss a particular topic; an improvisational sketch, where the narrator goes on stage without preparation and composes his speech on the move; an interactive sketch, where the comedian communicates with the public, invites people to the stage, and goes down to the hall himself; a sketch-clowning with costumes. The main distinguishing feature of these types of sketch is the author's boundless verbal imagination, personality, charisma, and presentation of material – all that makes the genre of sketch so special.

The themes of sketches are more or less similar everywhere in the world and depends on local mentality, taboo topics, religion, etc. People joke about such topics as life and death, including the problems of diseases, disabilities, eternal life, etc.; social life, where they discuss issues of life in a specific environment, communication with people, political views, media, culture, fame, social status, money, and so much more; personal life, which includes everyday life, family relations, friendships, and love life. Black humor stands apart and is characterized by the presence of cynicism and its existence in every culture, making fun of such topics as disease, death, violence and other taboo topics (Mendyk, 2014).

The French sketch is based on French humor, which is an integral part of French culture. The themes of French sketches are quite diverse and in addition to the common ones include those that are inherent in the French mentality. For example, one of the characteristic features of French humor is its traditional criticism of power. The French mostly joke about specific political figures, not about the country's politics as a whole.

One of its distinctive features is the **word-play**. It is a linguistic process based on the phonetic similarity of words or expressions, independently of their spelling, and aimed at entertaining the audience with the ambiguity that it generates (Farhat, 2011).

In this article, we will adhere to the traditional point of view, which considers the concepts of "pun" and "word-play" as synonymous and interchangeable. However, these concepts do not define each other, and are not identical to paronomasia.

A pun is a word game that creates a discrepancy between the content of a statement and its form in order to create a comic effect. Many linguists study and consider new aspects of word-play, along with traditionally studied aspects. A pun as a type of word play was studied by Tallarico (2018). The author analyzes in detail the techniques of constructing word games, considers this phenomenon from the point of view of speech communication according to the scheme "author-reader", describes the conditions for its implementation and explores the processes of encoding and decoding.

In this case, the meaning of a word or sentence changes and takes on a completely different meaning. Of course, such a phenomenon as word-play exists in many languages, but due to the large number of homophones, polysemes, paronyms, and various phonetic phenomena, the French language is especially rich in puns. Borodina (2015) stresses out the peculiarities of text construction, in which its form is combined with playing with polysemantic or paronymic characteristics of the vocabulary.

Many linguists have attempted to create a typology of word games. It should be noted that the problem of such a typology is complex and ambiguous due to the complex structure of the phenomenon itself, the ambiguity of the concept itself and the variety of things included in this concept. There are numerous classifications of word games. French linguist Pierre Guiro, author of works on the study of word games, in his work of the same name, compiled a typology of game mechanisms. As types of word-play, he identifies inclusion, enchaînement, and substitution (Jaki, 2015).

Drawing upon the Giro typology, Jacqueline Henry suggests classifying wordplay by the degree of frequency of their use. She notes that word-play is based not only on the meaning of words, but also on the cognitive baggage of people who can or can't perceive this duality of meanings. Michael Byram follows her lead and speaks of the importance of learning cultural codes, not just language codes. Thus, along with the main function of creating a comic effect, there are many other equally important functions in compared languages: aesthetic, cognitive, implicative, and suggestive (Abderrahmane & Abrane, 2017).

As for the widespread use of word-play in the French language, many linguists really consider word-play to be a typical French phenomenon and make their own assumptions.

Thus, the linguist Druetta Ruggiero states that the sound palette of the French language being not so rich in comparison with many other European languages, the phenomena of coupling and linking, polysemicity of meaning all together contribute to the abundance of word games in the language of Molière. The linguist Bailly also notes that certain characteristics of the French language make it easier to create

word games: "... there are more homophones in French than in other romance languages. Phonetic distortions, slips, distortions, ambiguities - they are innumerable, therefore, it is quite easy to insert one word instead of another in our language" (Cauquetoux, 2007).

As we have previously mentioned, French pun is quite complex from the point of view of linguistics and includes various mechanisms of word play, for example, homophones – words that sound the same, but are written differently and have different meanings (vers, verre, vert). Paronyms are words that have similar sounds, but are spelled differently (allocation, allocation). Polysemes – words that sound and spell the same, but have several meanings (louer – rent, rent an apartment). Wordplay can also be expressed by adding various suffixes, comparisons, which produce a comic effect.

The pun is an integral part of the French sketches, analyzed in this study. We would like to cite the following example, the famous performance of the French comedian Raymond Devos «A Caen les vacances?» [Holidays in Caen] (Devos, 2016):

«-J'avais dit, pendant les vacances, je ne fais rien!... rien!... je ne veux rien faire. Je ne savais pas où aller. Comme j'avais entendu dire : - A quand les vacances?... A quand les vacances?... Je me dis: - Bon!... je vais aller à Caen... Et puis à Caen!... ça tombait bien, je n'avais rien à y faire.

Je boucle la valise... je vais pour prendre le car... je demande à l'employé:

- Pour Caen, quelle heure?

- Pour où?

- Pour Caen!

- Comment voulez-vous que je vous dise quand, si je ne sais pas où ?» (Devos, 2016).

In this pun the author used the phenomenon of phonetic ambiguity, since there are homophones "Caen" and "quand", which create a laughing situation of communication. This is due to the fact that the word "Caen" refers to a city in France, and the word "quand" is translated as "when".

In Jamel Debbouze show «100% Debbouze» we encounter another example of word-play: «*J'adore ce quartier, mais il est trop calme, franchement. Et quand j'vous dis qu'il est calme ..., il est d'une calamité, sa mère! On dirait mes voisins sont décédés, mais tous les jours*» (Farhat, 2011). In this pun the artist is playing with words «calme» and «calamité». The word «calme» means calm, and the word «calamité» means a disaster, a catastrophe. This is an example of paronyms that have different spellings but similar sounds.

Wordplay can also be based on neologisms. Here is an example from the same sketch by Jamel Debbouze «100% Debbouze»:

«- Parce que s'ils avaient voulu qu'on se comporte mieux, franchement, ils avaient qu'à nous mettre dans le centre ville avec tous les centre-villistes».

In this statement, the comedian combined the word "ville" with the suffix "iste", thereby naming all those who live in the city center "centre-villistes", which is why the words "centre ville" and "centre-villistes" have a similar pronunciation, but different morphological structure and are now considered as paronyms (Farhat, 2011).

Gad Elmaleh, a French artist of Moroccan origin, uses word-play in his stand-up show «*L'autre c'est moi*» in the pun «*Le blond*» :

«...Il y avait un mec là, qui mangeait un sandwich. J'ai dis: "Quel frimeur!"
Et le mec qui mangeait ce sandwich, c'était le blond! ...

Ma copine, elle voulait prendre l'avion ... Laisse tomber! On arrive à l'aéroport... en plus, on tombe sur le blond! J'en pouvais plus... Il était avec ses enfants, en train de leur parler en blond... j'te jure ça existe! T'sais genre:

– Hey dis donc Pitchounou! Louloute! Hop Hop Hop!»

(Elmaleh, 2018).

The word-play here is accomplished by the words "parler en blond". Gad tells us a story about a blond man who has an ideal relationship with his family and who, according to the comedian, speaks the typical perfect blond language. The humorous effect is achieved by comparing the language with the hair color and character, as well as using parody.

Another example of language wordplay is an excerpt from the same speech by Gad Elmaleh «L'autre c'est moi»:

«...-L'avion reste le moyen de transport le plus sûr aujourd'hui...
-Ah oui? J'te l'fais pas dire!

-C'est ça ouais ... et pourquoi un aéroport on appelle ça un Terminal?» (Seb, 2017).

The comic effect is produced by the polysemy of the word "terminal", which is translated from French not only as a terminal, but also as the final, final, last, finished.

Another example of word-play can be observed in the sketch of a French blogger Seb la frite «Ce mec au supermarché»:

« Ce mec infidèle.

Caissière: –Vous avez la carte de fidélité?

Mec: – Non

Ce mec vraiment infidèle.

Caissière: –Vous avez la carte de fidélité?

Mec à sa petite amie: – Chérie, t'as la carte de fidélité?

Chérie: – Ah, non

Mec: – Ben dégage *Il embrasse la caissière*» (Seb, 2017).

We see a skillful use of the meaning of the expression "la carte de fidélité", which translates as "customer loyalty card" creating a laughable situation, since the polysemous word "fidèle" in this context means "loyalty" and "fidelity" (in this case, loyalty to the girl).

In another sketch of the same blogger «Ce mec...au restaurant»: «Ce mec trop lourd» word-play is expressed by paronyms, since these words have similar pronunciation due to the suffix.

– On peut voir l'addition s'il vous plaît?

– La soustraction même!... et la multiplication aussi!» (Seb, 2019).

In one of his sketches a Belgian artist Stéphane de Groodt, well-known for his puns says: «Picasso est un armateur de femmes qui, naguère-niqua bien des conquêtes. Et quand t'es espagnol, souvent les conquises t'adorent».

The pun in this example is good due to the consonance of the word "conquistador", which is "conqueror" in Spanish and the phrase "les conquises t'adorent", which translates as "conquests love you",

when the comedian pronounces this, he uses coupling, a phonetic phenomenon. In this case the word and phrase are homophones (De Groodt, 2014).

Based on the methods in the sketches we have cited, we can deduce a classification of the use of these tools to create such a phenomenon as word-play. The results of our research are presented in the diagram (Figure 01) :

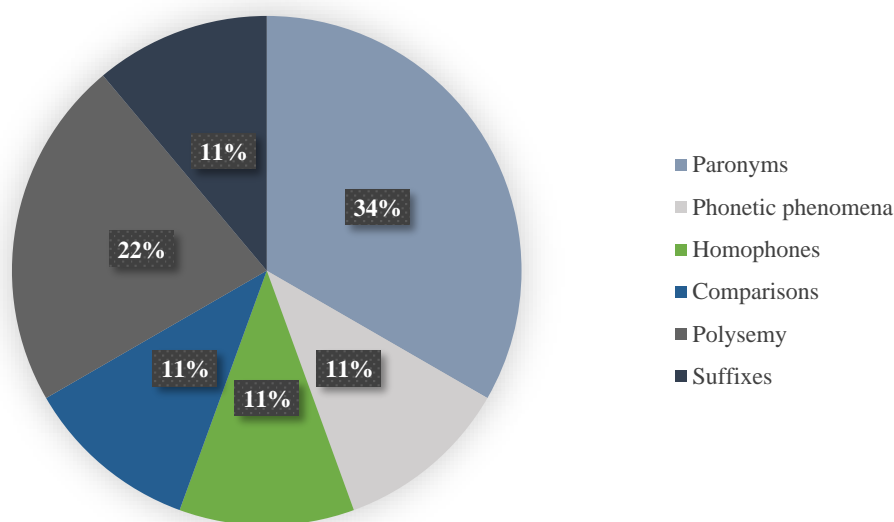


Figure 01. Classification of usage of ways to create word-play

As we can see, of all the ways to create a pun, paronyms are the most common (34%). They are followed by polysemes, which make up almost one-fifth of the total number of uses in the wordplay sketches we are analyzing. Other methods, such as phonetic phenomena (in our example, this is linking), homophones, comparisons, and suffixes, have 11% each of the total number of uses. Based on the data obtained, we can assume that the use of paronyms is the most common method of creating word-play in the French humorous sketch.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to note that the concept of a sketch has many interpretations, but in most cases, it is a comedy performance, lasting from 1 to 10 minutes, presented by one person or a group of people. We note the following types of sketches: silent sketch, with the use of costumes, musical or other special sound effects; poetic sketch; parody sketch; musical sketch; monologue; dialogic sketch; improvisational sketch; theatrical sketch; interactive sketch; clowning sketch. The main distinctive features of these types of sketches are the author's boundless verbal imagination, personality, charisma, and presentation of material. A special technique in French sketches is a language word-play, or a pun. The use of this technique becomes possible due to certain features of the phonetic and lexical structure of the French language.

The humorous technique analyzed in this article is used to create the effect of surprise by replacing the meaning of the word. The main means to achieve this goal are paronyms, homophones, polysemes,

adding suffixes, comparisons, and various phonetic phenomena. A pun is a subtle art that implies a masterly command of language and a great imagination and a good sense of humor.

The results of the study of word-play, and discourse features of French sketch can be used as basis for further examination of the problems of text linguistics and discourse analysis, the study of humorous discourse in general and of means to create a comic effect using the example of French language, in particular. It can find its use in the study of the phenomenon of language game, widely used by the French because of the presence of particular phonetic phenomena in the French language.

Furthermore, the theoretical provisions of the research and the results obtained in its course can be used in courses of lectures and seminars on the problems of text linguistics, in the practice of teaching French as a foreign language, as well as in the preparation of textbooks on practical and theoretical phonetics, lexicology, French language stylistics, and linguoculturology.

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