Lexical Stylistic Devices

Pun. Zeugma. Violation of Phraseological Units.

Semantically False Chains. Nonsense of Non-sequence

Irony.

Antonomasia

Epithet.

Hyperbole. Understatement.

Oxymoron

- ***Pun, zeugma, violation of phraseological units, semantically false chains,*** and ***nonsense of non-sequence*** are united into a small group as they have much in common both in the mechanism of their formation and in their functioning. They operate on the same linguistic mechanism: namely, one word-form is deliberately used in two meanings. The effect of these SDs is humorous.

- ***Pun*** (also referred to as *paronomasia* /ˌparənəˈmeɪzɪə/) - a joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings.
- On the etymology of the word “pun” read at

https://blog.oup.com/2010/02/pun/

- Contextual conditions leading to the simultaneous realization of two meanings and to the formation of ***pun*** may vary:

- it can be misinterpretation of one speaker's utterance by the other, which results in his remark dealing with a different meaning of the misinterpreted word or its homonym, as in the famous case from *“The Pickwick Papers”* When the fat boy, Mr. Wardle's servant, emerged from the corridor, very pale, he was asked by his master: "Have you been seeing any spirits?" "Or taking any?" - added Bob Alien. The first "spirits" refers to supernatural forces, the second one - to strong drinks.

- Punning may be the result of the speaker's intended violation of the listener's expectation, as in the jocular quotation from B. Evans "There comes a period in every man's life, but she is just a semicolon in his."

- Here we expect the second half of the sentence to unfold the content, proceeding from "period" understood as "an interval of time", while the author has used the word in the meaning of "punctuation mark" which becomes clear from the "semicolon", following it.

- Clearly, the pun is an important part of the stylistic arsenal of writers because it allows a controlled ‘double meaning’ to be located in what is in effect a chance connection between two elements of language. It is however a resource of language that we all share, and it is important not to sequester away literary uses of language from everyday language practices.

- The names of various hairdressing salons in the south of the city of Belfast:
- Curl up n Dye
- Shear Luck

- Curl up n Dye, Shear Luck use ‘homophones’ which are words with the same sound but different spellings: thus, ‘dye’ versus ‘die’, ‘Shear’ versus ‘sheer’.
- Interestingly, these puns are framed in the context of familiar idioms and fixed expressions in the language: ‘curl up and die’, ‘sheer luck’.

- Cambridge dictionary
- curl up and die

INFORMAL

to feel very ashamed and sorry:

I just wanted to curl up and die when I spilled coffee on their new carpet!

- sheer luck
- sheer - used to emphasize how very great, important, or powerful a quality or feeling is; nothing except:
- *The suggestion is sheer nonsense.*

- In very many cases polysemantic verbs that have a practically unlimited lexical valency and can be combined with nouns of most varying semantic groups, are deliberately used with two or more homogeneous members, which are not connected semantically, as in such examples from Ch. Dickens: "He took his hat and his leave", or "She went home, in a flood of tears and a sedan chair". These are cases of classical ***zeugma***.
- ***Zeugma*** /ˈzjuːgmə/

- **Zeugma**
- A figure of speech in which a word applies to two others in different senses (e.g. John and his driving licence expired last week).

- When the number of homogeneous members, semantically disconnected, but attached to the same verb, increases, we deal ***with semantically false chains,*** which are thus a variation of zeugma. As a rule, it is the last member of the chain that falls out of the thematic group, defeating our expectancy and producing humorous effect. The following case from S. Leacock may serve an example: "A Governess wanted. Must possess knowledge of Romanian, Russian, Italian, Spanish, German, Music and Mining Engineering."

- In ***violation of phraseological units*** the literal original meaning of the word is restored, as in Galsworthy's remark: "Little Jon was born with a silver spoon in his mouth which was rather curly and large." The word "mouth", with its content, is completely lost in the phraseological unit which means "to have luck, to be born lucky". Attaching to the unit the qualification of the mouth, the author revives the meaning of the word and offers a very fresh, original and expressive description.

- ***Nonsense of non-sequence*** rests on the extension of syntactical valency and results in joining two semantically disconnected clauses into one sentence, as in: "Emperor Nero played the fiddle, so they burnt Rome." Two disconnected statements are forcibly linked together by cause / effect relations.

- **IRONY**

The essence of *irony* consists in the foregrounding not of the logical but of the evaluative meaning. The context is arranged so that the qualifying word in irony reverses the direction of the evaluation, and the word positively charged is understood as a negative qualification and vice versa.

- Irony thus is a stylistic device in which the contextual evaluative meaning of a word is directly opposite to its dictionary meaning, So, like all other SDs, irony does not exist outside the context, which varies from the minimal - a word combination, as in J. Steinbeck's "She turned with the sweet smile of an alligator ,“ -

- to the context of a whole book, as in *Ch.* Dickens, where one of the remarks of Mr. Micawber, known for his complex, highly bookish and elaborate style of speaking about the most trivial things, is introduced by the author's words "...Mr. Micawber said in his usual plain manner".

- In both examples the words "sweet" and "plain" reverse their positive meaning into the negative one due to the context, micro- in the first, macro- in the second case.

- In the stylistic device of irony it is always possible to indicate the exact word whose contextual meaning diametrically opposes its dictionary meaning. This is why this type of irony is called *verbal* irony. There are very many cases, though, which we regard as irony, intuitively feeling the reversal of the evaluation, but unable to put our finger on the exact word in whose meaning we can trace the contradiction between the said and the implied.

- The effect of irony in such cases is created by a number of statements, by the whole of the text. This type of irony is called *sustained,* and it is formed by the contradiction of the speaker's (writer's) considerations and the generally accepted moral and ethical codes. Many examples of sustained irony are supplied by D. Defoe, J. Swift or by such writers as S. Lewis, K. Vonnegut and others.

Sarcasm

- The use of irony to mock or convey contempt.

Significant difference is that, whereas sarcasm is mainly intended to attack, mock or hurt someone, irony is not necessarily designed to hurt people.

EXAMPLES OF SARCASM

- Son: “I am going to attend my friend’s party today.”
  Mom: “Oh great! We all know how well you behaved the last time you attended one.”
  Reality: The son behaved terribly last time, and mom doesn’t have a lot of faith that this time will be much better.
- Thank you for infecting me with the flu!
  Reality: Nobody is thankful for the flu.

- ***Antonomasia*** (/ˌantənəˈmeɪzɪə/) is a lexical SD in which a proper name is used instead of a common noun or vice versa.

- D. Cusack: "There are three doctors in an illness like yours. I don't mean only myself, my partner and the radiologist who does your X-rays, the three I'm referring to are Dr. Rest, Dr. Diet and Dr. Fresh Air."

- Another type of antonomasia is presented by the so-called "speaking names" - names whose origin from common nouns is still clearly perceived. So, in such popular English surnames as Mr. Smith or Mr. Brown the etymology can be restored but no speaker of English today has it in his mind that the first one used to mean occupation and the second one - color.

- While such name from Sheridan's *School for Scandal* as Lady Teazle or Mr. Surface immediately raises associations with certain human qualities due to the denotational meaning of the word "surface".

- **Epithet**
- Epithet expresses characteristics of an object, both existing and imaginary. Its basic feature is its emotiveness and subjectivity: the characteristic attached to the object to qualify it is always chosen by the speaker himself.

- The structure and semantics of epithets are extremely variable which is explained by their long and wide use. Semantically, there should be differentiated two main groups, the biggest of them being *affective* (or *emotive proper).* These epithets serve to convey the emotional evaluation of the object by the speaker. Most of the qualifying words found in the dictionary can be and are used as affective epithets (e.g. "gorgeous", "nasty", "magnificent" etc.).

- The second group - *figurative,* or *transferred, epithets* - is formed of metaphors, metonymies and similes (which will be discussed later) expressed by adjectives. E.g. "the smiling sun", "the frowning cloud", "the sleepless pillow", ''the tobacco-stained smile", "a dreamlike experience". Like metaphor, metonymy and simile, corresponding epithets are also based on similarity of characteristics of - two objects in the first case, on nearness of the qualified objects in the second one, and on their comparison in the third.

- ***Hyperbole*** /hʌɪˈpəːbəli/ - a stylistic device in which emphasis is achieved through deliberate exaggeration, - like epithet, relies on the foregrounding of the emotive meaning. The feelings and emotions of the speaker are so raffled that he resorts in his speech to intensifying the quantitative or the qualitative aspect of the mentioned object. E.g.: In his famous poem "To His Coy Mistress" Andrew Marvell writes about love: "My vegetable love should grow faster than empires."

- Hyperbole may be the final effect of another SD - metaphor, simile, irony, as we have in "The man was like the Rock of Gibraltar".

- Hyperbole is aimed at exaggerating quantity or quality. When it is directed the opposite way, when the size, shape, dimensions, characteristic features of the object are hot overrated, but intentionally underrated, we deal with ***understatement.***

Oxymoron /ˌɒksɪˈmɔːrɒn/ is a stylistic device the syntactic and semantic structures of which come to clashes. In Shakespearian definitions of love, much quoted from his *Romeo and Juliet,* perfectly correct syntactically, attributive combinations present a strong semantic discrepancy between their members. Cf.: "O brawling love! O loving hate! O heavy lightness! Serious vanity! Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!"

- As a rule, one of the two members of oxymoron illuminates the feature which is universally observed and acknowledged while the other one offers a purely subjective, individual perception of the object.
- Thus in an oxymoron we deal with the foregrounding of emotive meaning.

- **Additional reading**:
- T.T. Vrabel

LECTURES IN STYLISTICS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE