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SYNTACTIC LANGUAGE PLAY IN AMERICAN HUMOROUS DISCOURSE (BASED ON SITCOM "SCRUBS")

Yulia Kniga

Mogilev State A. Kuleshov University
Kosmonavtov St., 1 Mogilev, 212022, Belarus
yuliakniga96@mail.ru

Книга Ю. Синтаксична мовна гра в американському гумористичному дискурсі (на матеріалі ситкому "Клініка")

У статті досліджено найпопулярніші прийоми синтаксичної мовної гри в гумористичному дискурсі. Репрезентовано особливості її використання в мовленні шести персонажів американського ситкому "Клініка" (Джона Доріна, Перрі Кокса, Кріса Терка, Еліот Рід, Карли Еспіноза і Джордан Салліван). Витлумачено поняття "мовна гра" й "гумористичний дискурс". Визначено конкретні прийоми мовної гри, до яких найчастіше вдаються названі персонажі, зокрема повтор, парцеляції, риторичне питання, тавтологія, зевгма.

Ключові слова: мовна гра, прийоми мовної гри, синтаксичний рівень, гумористичний дискурс.

Книга Ю. Синтаксическая языковая игра в американском юмористическом дискурсе (на материале ситкома "Клиника")

В статье исследуются самые популярные приемы синтаксической языковой игры в юмористическом дискурсе. Рассматриваются особенности ее использования в речи шести персонажей популярного американского ситкома "Клиника" (Джона Дориана, Перри Кокса, Криса Терка, Эллиот Рид, Карлы Эспиноза и Джордан Салливан). Истолковываются понятия "языковая игра" и "юмористический дискурс". Определяются наиболее часто используемые персонажами конкретные приемы языковой игры на синтаксическом уровне, в частности повтор, парцелляции, риторический вопрос, тавтология, зевгма.

Ключевые слова: языковая игра, приемы языковой игры, синтаксический уровень, юмористический дискурс.

Kniga Yu. Syntactic language play in American humorous discourse (based on sitcom "Scrubs")

The article is devoted to the study of syntactic language play techniques in humorous discourse, since the phenomenon of language play is closely connected with this type of discourse. The notions of humorous discourse and language play are considered.

Humorous discourse is based on the principle of transmission of a humorous message from the addresser to the addressee. The purpose of this message is to get away from a serious conversation, reduce the social distance between the conversation participants and form friendly interrelationship. Communicative intension and humorous tonality are key components of humorous discourse.

Language play means intentional violation of the rules of the language in order to achieve a humorous effect. Language play exists at all levels of language structure: phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic.

The article is based on the material of a popular American sitcom "Scrubs" dedicated to the everyday life of doctors. Cases of usage syntactic language play in the speech of six characters of the sitcom (John Dorian, Percival Cox, Christofer Turk, Elliot Rid, Carla Espinoza and Jordan Sullivan) are considered. In their jokes, characters in the majority of cases use lexical language play techniques, but syntactic language play is also quite common. The most frequently used syntactic means (repetition, parcellation, rhetorical questions, tautology, zeugma) are determined. Specific cases of usage language game techniques at the syntactic level are presented.

Key words: language play, language play techniques, syntactic level, humorous discourse.

Problem statement and its connection with important scientific tasks. "Play" is a widespread concept in the spheres of culture and science. When the play penetrates the sphere of language, it becomes "language play". D. Crystal defines language play as a manipulation of language for fun, "bending and breaking the rules of the language" [Crystal 2001 : 1].

Humorous discourse co-exists with language play. W. Chlopicki and D. Brzozowska define humorous discourse as "global humorous action which makes use of local means (words and expressions) that direct the thoughts of the audience in particular, not always entirely predictable directions" [Chlopichki, Brzozowska 2017 : 2]. Thus, humorous attitude to reality differentiates it from other types of discourse.

According to the Russian linguist V. Karasik, communicative intension and humorous tonality play a key role in humorous discourse. Communicative intension is understood as the speaker's desire to organize a humorous situation and reduce the social distance between the conversation participants. Humorous tonality is characterized by friendly interrelationship of the participants in the conversation (their mutual willingness to joke and laugh) and

humorous perception of everything that happens [Karasik / Карасик 2002 : 305].

Analysis of recent research and publications. The researches carried out by R. Harris, C. Di Marco [Harris, Marco 2017], L. Servaite [Servaite 2005] and T. Tanto [Tanto 2015] served as the theoretical basis for this article in the field of language play. Language play may occur at different language levels: phonological morphological, lexical and syntactic. The unwieldiness of syntactic units often makes it difficult to use them as the language play techniques. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish such techniques of the syntactic level as parcellation, repetition, rhetorical question, tautology and zeugma.

The relevance of the research consists in lack of studies focused on language play techniques at syntactic level in the context of modern humorous discourse.

The aim and approaches of the study. The aim of the study is to determine the principal language play techniques at syntactic level in American humorous discourse, based on a popular sitcom "Scrubs" (seasons 1, 2, 4 and 8) telling about the everyday routine of young physicians.

In determining the syntactic means of creating the language play effect the following approaches were used: descriptive approach, which consists in observing and systemizing the language material; continuous sampling approach (selection of all the cases of usage language play); quantitative research approach, aimed at calculating the most used language play techniques; contextual analysis approach, based on the study of the linguistic phenomenon within the context.

Presentation of the main research material. The study reviews language play techniques at syntactic level, used by the main characters of the sitcom "Scrubs" (for details of creating the language play effect at different levels see [Vasilenko, Kniga / Василенко, Книга 2017 : 296–303], for details of the gender aspect of language play see [Kniga / Книга 2018 : 13–20]).

The study found that language play at syntactic level is rarely used by the characters in comparison with language play at lexical level (1022 cases of usage language play at all levels in sitcom

"Scrubs" were selected on the basis of continuous sampling approach: 35 (3,4%) – at phonological level, 52 (5,1%) – at morphological level, 787 (77%) – at lexical level, 148 (14,5%) – at syntactic level). The total number of cases of usage language play at syntactic level may be summarized in the table below (see Table):

Table 1

The number of cases of usage language play at syntactic level

Technique/ Character	JD	Dr. Cox	Turk	Elliot	Carla	Jordan	Total
Repetition	38	46	15	9	11	4	**123** *83,1%*
Parcellation	4	3	1	4	0	1	**13** *8,8%*
Rhetorical question	0	5	1	0	0	1	**7** *4,7%*
Tautology	1	1	2	0	0	0	**4** *2,7%*
Zeugma	1	0	0	0	0	0	**1** *0,7%*
Total	**44**	**55**	**19**	**13**	**11**	**6**	**148**

The most commonly used syntactic technique is repetition (83,1%), when humorous effect is achieved by duplication of words and syntactic constructions:

a) It was difficult for Turk to accept the fact that JD and Carla had kissed. He promised to put up with this incident if JD and Carla wouldn't try to apologize, make excuses and demonstrate the way they had kissed:

Carla: Turk, you know how I was so upset because you started calling your ex-girlfriend? I just couldn't understand how a married person could slip up like that, now I do. I'm so sorry.

J.D.: (Looking up & behind him) Me too buddy.

*Turk: (Smiling) Guys, as insane as this may sound I'm actually gonna be OK with this. Just do me a favor, **no more apologies** and **no more explanations** and for the love of God, honey, **no more girl-on-girl kissing demonstrations** (S04E22, 05:46);*

b) JD found the patient's son, although Dr. Cox had told him not to. JD wrote a song in order to show Dr. Cox that he didn't obey him:

Murray: I'm not quite sure I'm getting this.

J.D.: Ugh! What's not to get? Look, Dr. Cox told me not to get involved, I defied him, and now, with your help, I'm gonna rub it in his face, okay? Now for the last time, the song goes like this: "You were wrong! **I found his son, I found his son, I found his son***!" And then you jump out and go, "That's me!"* (S04E11, 4:47);

c) JD told Dr. Cox about the patient's condition, but Dr. Cox refused to talk about it. He repeated the word "problem" several times, hinting that the patient was JD's problem, which didn't concern him:

J.D.: ...And now, Mr. Mueller's doing so much better, I'm not even sure telling him the truth about his pancreatic cancer is even the best thing for him.

Dr. Cox: So, what you're saying is that you have a **problem** *that is totally your* **problem***, but you'd like to find a way to make that* **problem** *my* **problem***. But here's the* **problem***, Newbie: it's not my* **problem** (S02E20, 14:23);

d) Carla wanted to figure out why Dr. Cox didn't like one of the residents. The same interrogative constructions were repeated in her speech:

Carla: **Did he say "Back in the day"***?*
Dr. Cox: No.
Carla: **Did he say "Back in the dizz-ay"***?*
Dr. Cox: No.
Carla: **Did he call you Dr. C***?*
Dr. Cox: He did, but I liked it.
Carla: **Does he like Hugh Jackman***?*
Dr. Cox: Wrong again (S08E05, 08:43);

e) Elliot asked the patient about the medication he had took, listing different types of pills:

Elliot: Mr. Gerst, what seems to be the problem?
Gerst: I took some pills.

*Elliot: Come on, help me out here. Were they **happy pills**, **sad pills**, **sleepy pills**, **wake up pills**, **sane pills**, **pain pills**, **brain pills**, **Spain pills**...*

Gerst: Man pills? (S04E21, 01:05);

f) Jordan complained that Dr. Cox was constantly competing with his best friend Ron. She duplicated the syntactic construction in her speech:

*Jordan: You know, this whole competition thing that you have happening with your high school buddy, it is very, very boring. **You know**, **like you were the homecoming king**, **he was the prom king**. **You went to medical school**, **he went to business school**. **You got divorced, he got divorced**.*

Dr. Cox: Yeah, but he never has to see his wife anymore, so technically he's got me beat on that one (S04E18, 02:52).

Parcellation (8,8%) is used by the sitcom characters to add emotional coloring through intonational division of an utterance into constituent parts:

a) Entering the clinic JD thought that he had become a chief resident. He repeated the word "chief" and used parcellation in his utterance in order to intensify the humorous effect:

*J.D.: Today I walk in here not as a resident, **but as a chief. Chief resident. Chief Resident Dorian**. **Chiefy-chiefy-chief*** (S04E03, 00:02);

b) Dr. Cox considered the new residents very stupid and decided to talk to them like they were cavemen, dividing sentences into single words and phrases:

*Dr. Cox: Now, since the rest of your brains are so tiny, from now on, I will speak like a caveman. **You**, **bad doctors**. **Me**, **good doctor**. **You**, **follow**. **Patient**. **Iron high**. **Heart swollen big**. **You**. **What make sick***?*

Denise: Hum, could it be hemochromatosis?

*Dr. Cox: **Correct**. **Rounds**. **Over**. **You**. **Go*** (E08E05, 01:52);

c) Elliot was outraged by the fact that nobody wanted to listen to the story of her amazing life. Turk answered sarcastically that, obviously, she had started seeing a shrink:

Elliot: [to Turk] Why doesn't anyone ever listen to me?

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Turk: [exasperated] **In a better place. Look different. Feel good**. *Okay? That's what usually happens when you see a shrink* (S01E06, 07:55);

d) Jordan remembered how Dr. Cox used to hate his job. She emphasized each word in the sentence "I don't want to be a doctor!":

Dr. Cox: I'm betting your ability to thrive under pressure is what drove you to medicine.

*Jordan: Oh, please, you should've seen him when he was a new intern: "***I. Don't. Want. To. Be. A. Doctor***!"* (S01E11, 06:20);

e) Elliot told JD that rivalry used to be a real problem for her, but she didn't strive to be the best anymore:

Elliot: **I'm probably "Miss Hyper Competitive"**. *I mean, it used to be a big problem for me.* **Used to**. **Past tense** (S01E01, 14:21).

Such syntactic means as rhetorical question (4,7%), tautology (2,7%) and zeugma (an isolated case) are rarely used by the characters:

a) Dr. Cox was so tired of his patients that he didn't mind being in their shoes. He used a rhetorical question in his speech:

Dr. Cox: Dammit, Laverne. **Why can't I ever be the one dying***?*

Nurse Roberts: I don't know (S02E04, 05:06);

b) Jordan was irritated by JD's habit of tattling. She asked a rhetorical question to draw JD's attention to his behavior:

Jordan: Excuse me, Sally Sensitive, I don't remember asking you anything. **Your mom's aware that she'll eventually have to stop the breast-feeding, right***?* (S01E11, 17:37);

c) Turk lied to Gooch and said her that he had no children, although Carla was pregnant with her second baby. Then he explained that "it's their first child since their first" (tautology):

Carla: Did you tell her it was our first baby?

Gooch: It's not your first?

Turk: Um, **it's our first since our first** (S08E09, 15:03);

d) Dr. Cox called JD "a girly girl" since the resident didn't always behave like a real man (tautology):

Dr. Cox: [slides over on his chair] Ask Betty why he's such **a girly girl**. *Do it now, do it now. Call him "Betty"* (S04E20, 12:05);

e) Speaking about the things he liked, JD used zeugma in his speech (he combined the verb "to like" with logically different ideas):

*J.D.'s Narration: But the important thing is just to never stop trying especially if **you like girls named Alex**... **and chicken salad*** (S01E13, 20:25).

Conclusions and perspectives of further scientific research. Language play techniques at syntactic level are quite infrequently used by the "Scrubs" characters (only 14,5% of the overall number of cases of usage language play). All syntactic means presented in the paper usually occur in the character's speech to emphasize the significance of the word (or phrase), characterize the emotional state of the heroes, create a friendly atmosphere and achieve a certain humorous effect. The most often-used technique is repetition (123 cases of usage). Parcellation, rhetorical question and tautology occur significantly less often (13, 7 and 4 cases of usage, respectively). The only case of usage zeugma was noticed in JD's speech.

The results of the research can be used for further study of American humorous discourse and language play techniques.

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