

# Linguistic Creativity in Otto Häuser's "Ottokar" Series: A Study of Playful Language Use

Лінгвокреативність у серії «Оттокар» Отто Хойзера: дослідження ігрового використання мови

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## Анотація

This article explores the linguocreative potential and manifestations of linguistic creativity in Otto Häuser's satirical "Ottokar" book series. The study defines the concept of linguistic creativity, identifies its characteristic features, and presents the main expressive devices employed in the author's texts. The theoretical foundations of linguistic creativity are examined alongside grammatical, lexical, and stylistic aspects. Lexical devices appear most frequently in the novels, allowing for their classification into distinct groups. The author's most commonly used techniques include ironic expressions, comparisons, metaphors, and phraseological modifications. Special attention is given to metaphors and their modification techniques; pictorial comparisons and their functioning in literary texts; occasional word formations and their creative potential; and humor types at both word and sentence levels. The analysis reveals how Häuser masterfully employs wordplay, transformed phraseological units, zeugma, speaking names, and other devices to create a multi-layered humorous narrative that reflects the social and cultural context of GDR Germany.

Стаття присвячена дослідженню лінгвокреативного потенціалу та засобів вираження мовної креативності в сатиричній серії книг «Оттокар» Отто Хойзера. У дослідженні визначено поняття лінгвістичної креативності, виявлено її характерні ознаки та представлено основні виражальні засоби, використані в авторських текстах. Розглянуто теоретичні основи лінгвістичної креативності поряд з граматичними, лексичними та стилістичними аспектами. Лексичні засоби найчастіше зустрічаються в романах, що дозволяє класифікувати їх на окремі групи. Найпоширенішими прийомами автора є іронічні вирази, порівняння, метафори та фразеологічні модифікації. Особливу увагу приділено метафорам та технікам їх модифікації; образним порівнянням та їх функціонуванню в літературних текстах; оказіональним словотворенням та їх креативному потенціалу; типам гумору на рівні слова та речення. Аналіз показує, як Хойзер майстерно використовує гру слів, трансформовані фразеологічні одиниці, зевгму, промовисті імена та інші засоби для створення багатопланового гумористичного наративу, що відображає соціальний і культурний контекст НДР.

## 1. Introduction



In contemporary linguistic discourse, the terms “creativity” and “creative” have become ubiquitous, serving as defining keywords of our era. Increasingly, scholars across diverse academic disciplines are engaging with creativity as a research category.

Creativity as a linguistic phenomenon, conceptualized as linguistic creativity or linguocreativity, has emerged as an intensively studied research field among linguists. This is evidenced by numerous publications from both Ukrainian scholars [1, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 34, 38, 39, 44, 45] and international researchers [2, 4, 6, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 40, 41, 42, 43].

Scientific interest focuses on the linguocreative potential of linguistic devices and creative linguistic manifestations across various language levels. Lexical creativity is investigated by researchers including Haidanka [23, 24], Romanchenko [38], Rubanez [39], Rybakova [40], Simutova [43], Dalmas [6], Donalies [13], Elsen [14, 15], Piirainen [33], Polzin [35]. The creative potential of grammar is explored by Kosmeda [28], Remchukova [37], Pusch [36]. Linguistic creativity in textual domains and literature is the focus of scientific interest for Elsen [14, 15], Gridina [20, 21, 22], Haidanka [23, 24], Kubryakova [29], Koloyiz [27], Munat [31], Nagornaja [32], Pikalova [34], Sandig [41].

Despite growing interest in linguocreativity and intensive scholarly engagement with this topic, the phenomenon remains incompletely explored. To date, there exists no unified conceptual understanding of linguocreativity, and notably, encyclopedic definitions are still lacking. Consequently, this phenomenon is interpreted in various ways.

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## 2. Research Questions and Theoretical Foundations

This article examines the linguocreative potential and playful use of language in the “Ottokar” book series by Otto Häuser (1924 – 2007), who wrote under the pseudonym Ottokar Domma. Häuser, a German writer, journalist, qualified educator, and senior teacher, became particularly known for his outstanding satirical series about the world and adventures of a GDR schoolboy named Ottokar Domma [18, 17].

The “Ottokar” series [7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12] provides an excellent corpus for investigation, representing a rich source of extensive and revealing linguocreative material.

This article addresses the following research questions: How is the concept of “linguocreativity” understood and defined? What is the relationship between linguocreativity and language play or wordplay? Are language play and wordplay equivalent? How does the author manipulate language in the “Ottokar” series? Which techniques and methods of wordplay as manifestations of linguocreativity does the author employ? Therefore, it is important to first examine some theoretical concepts and understandings that guide the subsequent analysis.

In 1970, Serebrennikov [42] introduced the term “linguistic creativity” into scholarly use, connecting linguocreative thinking with the word-forming function of word formation. In 1974, Imhasly’s [26] work “The Concept of Linguistic Creativity in Modern Linguistics” appeared, in which the concept of linguistic creativity builds on Chomsky’s ideas.

The following explores how linguocreativity or linguistic creativity is defined. We present several definitions:

Horina [25] explains the phenomenon of linguistic creativity as a phenomenon of linguistic communication that provokes speakers to discover new semantic connections in the already known.

Voropaj [45] defines linguocreativity as the possibilities of creatively transforming linguistic material to achieve specific communicative goals. The researcher emphasizes that

speakers' linguistic creativity is manifested through specific linguistic devices that promote freedom of thought and speech among modern people, enrich their knowledge, and contribute to the intellectual development of society.

In modern international linguistics, scholars such as Benczes [3], Donalies [13], Elsen [14], Fix [16], Munat [31], Piirainen [33], Polzin [35], Sandig [41] engage with the topic of "linguistic creativity." Benczes [3], Donalies [13], Elsen [14], Munat [31], Piirainen [33], Polzin [35] focus their research interests on lexical creativity, particularly addressing the linguocreative character of neologisms and phraseological units in the context of wordplay. Fix [16], Sandig [41] dedicate themselves to creative linguistic potentials in the text-stylistic domain. Pusch [36] engages with questions of everyday linguistic and grammatical creativity.

Many linguists, however, use the concept of creativity to designate metaphorization and word formation. To create new words, speakers must creatively manage existing lexical knowledge. Their purpose is to create a new linguistic unit in a new communicative situation. The listener must interpret it using semantic, syntactic, and morphological rules. The high productivity of word formation in German depends on the flexibility of compound components and the semantic interpretation of compounds.

What are the peculiarities of implementing linguistic creativity in literary works? Linguocreativity manifests at all levels of the language system. In grammar, creativity is primarily based on linguistic mechanisms regarding their violation, evaluation, or metaphorization. This leads to wordplay, linguistic reflection, linguistic experimentation, various types of grammatical combinatorics, or metaphor. Although "the current state of linguistics worldwide is characterized by a fairly large number of different directions—both formal and functional" [29], it should be acknowledged that in the field of grammatical science, recent achievements have been determined by the fruitful development of functional grammar, whose most important principle is the principle of unity "of its structural and functional aspects, its system-linguistic language elements."

The creative function of language enables both the creation of entirely new semantic connections and their establishment for already known linguistic units. Scholars distinguish various aspects of linguocreativity: productive word-formation processes and other aspects of dynamic lexicology, such as metaphor, metonymy, and borrowing [31]; creation of numerous figurative elements with limited linguistic resources to achieve communicative goals [36]; creativity as originality and eccentricity; as a creative act of creating something new and extraordinary [20].

In acts of linguistic creativity, speakers act not as consumers but as creators—they not only use standard linguistic units but generate new lexemes and new uses based on existing ones. Individual (authorial) and collaborative language creation are distinguished [31]. Individual language creation refers to modifications conditioned by specific communicative situations—the generation of modified words depends on communication conditions, purpose, speaker role, etc. Collaborative language creation gained significance for German precisely in the 20th-21st centuries. Due to the large number of borrowings from English, philological institutions aim to create replacement words for borrowed terms to preserve the language's identity.

### 3. Results

In his book series, Otto Häuser employs numerous devices that generate comic effects. His book series is thoroughly permeated with irony. Additional devices for generating the comic include style mixing, wordplay, repetition, use of first and last names, and comparison.

The author creates comic effects at the situational level. The situations in which characters become entangled are inherently funny and additionally enhanced at all linguistic levels: lexical, phraseological, syntactic, textual, and intertextual.

Comic situations in O. Domma's<sup>1</sup> works are always accompanied by the comic use of linguistic devices such as: phraseological units, metaphors, comparisons, occasionalisms, metonymies, speaking names, zeugma, wordplay, etc.

To achieve comic effects, the author uses comparisons. This is a grammatically constructed figurative comparison of one object or phenomenon with another based on similarity. Comparative inversions are quite mobile expressive devices of irony. They clearly follow the individual authorial principle.

In comparison, the similarity cannot be absolute and no word changes its meaning. The most expressive comparisons in O. Domma's work are those that reflect people's behavior, their inner qualities, relationships, and carry ironic meaning. The comic in comparison manifests in the incompatibility of subject and object. The greatest expression is found in comparative inversions where the subjects of comparison are people or animals and the objects are people. For example: creeping like a panther, behaving like a trained dachshund, sneezing like a horse.

An interesting example of comparison is little Ottokar's following argument: "The worst thing about grades is that they can't be expunged like a prison sentence" or "When you get an A, mother's mood is like at a celebration" [8].

One of the most popular devices for creating comic effects is wordplay. Language play or wordplay is interpreted differently, hence there is no unified definition. Piirainen [33] defines wordplay as follows: "Wordplay is a creative metalinguistic activity, the product of this play understood as an occasional, unique coinage that requires decoding by the recipient".

Bußmann [5]. understands word or language play as a "collective term for various forms of intentional, playful modification or combination of linguistic material"

Following Bußmann [5], we also use the above definition of word or language play.

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<sup>1</sup>Ottokar Domma (pseudonym; properly Otto Häuser) was a German journalist and writer specialising in satire. He was most famous for his series on adventures of a semi-fictional East German schoolboy named Ottokar Domma. Domma is in parts the younger alter ego of Häuser. Häuser's last name means 'houses' in German language; domma or doma (Russian: 'дома') means the same in Russian language.

Language play occurs at various linguistic levels. At the phonetic level, it involves various sound repetitions. The phonetic level itself is characterized by “rigidity” and is used quite rarely in language play. Play with spelling and punctuation is more frequent than with phonetics, but also quite limited—it appeals to incorrect word spelling and doubling of vowels or consonants.

In the work we examined, wordplay is realized only as a function of play and has a harmless character. It should be noted that wordplay functions differently in various text types. Sometimes it is used as a means of criticism to express negative evaluation: “People say black and actually think white. And us behaving like grown-up adults altogether” [8].

## 4. Linguistic Devices and Techniques

### 4.1. Metaphors

Metaphors are an important form of linguocreativity because they transform the semantic language system and thus contribute to its evolution and renewal. Fantasy, which is unique to humans, plays an important role in the semantics of metaphor. Since reality and linguistic means have their limits and fantasy has none, metaphor can be viewed as an inexhaustible source of linguistic creation. It is not only a device that makes language more vivid but also a necessary means for conveying new ideas. Metaphor enables finding untypical semantic connections and even established metaphors can be actualized in context.

Metaphors interrupt the flow of text and cause a kind of shock to the reader, as understanding comes to consciousness only later. Understanding metaphors is also a creative process because there are no rules for their creation or understanding. The distinction between non-metaphorical and metaphorical will fail because many words have lost their figurativeness and shifted into the literal category. For example, the German lexeme “Dichtung” literally means compression/compacting/abbreviation/reduction. Consequently, writing poetry means compressing/reducing linguistic material. The metaphor itself can also

be viewed as a semantic seal, as the lexeme retains its old meaning despite acquiring a new one.

The figurative meaning of metaphor is based on the direct, literal meaning—it is the figurative projection of the literal meaning. Before a word becomes a metaphor, it must find its context, which cuts off all inadmissible meanings of the word and leads us to the only possible meaning in that context.

Examples from Häuser's work include: "The principal gave a speech and said that we are healthy and quite nicely tanned and so on, and therefore the serious business of life begins again now" [8]. The metaphor "the serious business of life" refers to the beginning of school and makes it clear that things are now serious at school and students must make an effort.

#### 4.2. Phraseological Modifications

The role of fixed expressions in ironic statements cannot be overestimated. They represent one of the primary means of implementing irony at the lexical level. Successful examples of phraseological units in Ottokar Domma's work include: "prick up one's ears," "the stork brought me a little brother," "babies grow in cabbage," "order a child."

O. Domma succeeds in giving his text special expressiveness, opening up almost unlimited possibilities for bringing together and unexpectedly using various objects and phenomena. O. Domma's phraseological units can be viewed as a kind of micromodel that expresses the author's individual worldview.

A literal understanding of phraseological units is O. Domma's favorite stylistic device: "keep one's trap shut," "she lives a life of wine and song and cake," "whistle at playing," "some of the arriving parents now made a scene," "bring up the rear," "get it behind the ears," "squeezed like a lemon in class," "that's all she wrote," "he makes a mountain out of a molehill."



#### 4.3. Paraphrase

Paraphrase also contributes to creating the comic in the work. The expressiveness of paraphrase lies in the fact that its artistic structure always contains an element of a certain riddle that the reader must solve to understand what is said in the paraphrase. Not the least role in artistic expressiveness is also played by an element of verbal embellishment of the described object. However, riddle and embellishment in paraphrase must have their limits, beyond which the meaning of the paraphrase may remain incomprehensible to the reader without additional commentary: “Ottokar has lice in his hair. My friend Harald said you don’t need to get worked up about the stupid geese” [8]. A successfully employed paraphrase helps the author express hidden meaning without resorting to foreign means.

#### 4.4. Occasionalisms

The achievement of comic effects also involves the important role of using occasionalisms. Among the author’s individual neologisms are many complex names whose components carry evaluative meaning: Zupfmütter (orderly class mothers), Zählmütter (constantly counting students), Frösi (from being happy and singing), Fröfu (combination of happy and playing football).

Humorously effective are newly formed occasional name-anagrams resulting from letter reversal in official German names: Karin > Nirak, Max > Xam, Emma > Amme, Eva > Ave, Hajo > Ojah: “But if someone can’t think of any new names at all, they could simply write all known first names backwards, and then they’d have some rare pieces again. For example, Karin becomes Nirak, Emma becomes Amme, Max becomes Xam, Eva becomes Ave, or Hajo becomes Ojah. And they are German names” [8].

#### 4.5. Zeugma

We find zeugma particularly interesting as a device of figurativeness. For example: “For many middle-aged personalities possess a Trabant or a wife or another expensive hobby. If they don’t possess a Trabant, then they have either many books, many records, several

children, or another pastime that also costs quite a bit” [8]. The author uses the verb “possess” in relation to a wife, thereby emphasizing that having a car, an expensive hobby, and a wife are equally costly for him, which immediately creates a comic effect because one cannot purchase wives. Another example of zeugma can be seen in the following sentence: “He’s studying to later become an agrotechnician like Mr. Hardtbrodth. He earns quite a chunk of money and first had a Wartburg, now a skull fracture” [8]. The comic here lies in the author’s mockery, comparing a car brand, Wartburg, with the consequence of a car accident.

#### 4.6. Speaking Names

No less interesting is the technique of using speaking names. It serves to implement humor, irony, and satire through the use of nominative signs that are proper names—surnames and nicknames of characters. This effect is achieved through semantic transformations observed in nominative units with developed semantic structure when used as “significant” names, as well as through context.

In some cases, nomination occurs using nickname-characteristics, which further deepens the generated humorous or satirical effect. Such a feature of O. Domma’s work is character portraits carefully created with humor, irony, and satire. The following are striking examples: Marie-Antonette Wurzel (combination of an aristocratic name and simple surname); Rainer-Maria Senf (the irony is felt in the exaggeration and pretension of the aristocratic surname and first name); Fritz Gagarin (combination of a German name with a Russian surname, which sounds very funny); Hans-Dieter Beatle; Wolfgang Becke called Schnüffel (nickname given to a person based on appearance).

### 5. Cultural and Historical Context

Otto Häuser’s work skillfully combines humorous features with historically and culturally conditioned narrative. In “Ottokar, das Früchtchen,” [8] Otto Häuser shows us the local color of Germany, the life of the German population after reunification, changes caused by the fall of the Wall, and much more. Through the example of schoolboy Ottokar, the author shows

us the real Germany, familiarizes us with German political and school systems, highlights Germany's problems of the time, pushing them somewhat into the background, but they still make us curious about the main character's further actions.

"We love our state, which has its birthday on October 7, and then we celebrate happy hours. And if the GDR didn't exist, I would have invented it" [8]. This example makes clear how important German Unity Day is for the German population, how this day is honored.

Regional features can be identified through dialect: "Jötzt haben wüür wüder die Zeit verplömpert" (Now we've wasted time again); "Moin!" (Hello!). The young Ottokar's assertions also help us understand which part of Germany is being described: "One day my friend Harald said we now have to read a book that his father always calls his Bible. It's called 'The Communist Manifesto.' The writers are called Marx and Engels and are famous throughout the world" [8]. The Eastern side was heavily influenced by communism.

The connection between German and Russian cultures and their peculiarities can be seen in the following examples: "On May 1st there's a demonstration: my father marches with the combat group, my mother goes with the LPG, grandma with the DFD, my sister and I naturally walk with the Pioneers. Too bad we don't have a baby anymore; it would sit in the carriage!" This example shows us Russian culture, how Labor Day is celebrated. The next example shows us Christmas with traditions and customs: "The last and highest highlight is Christmas Eve with its gift-giving. Everyone puts their presents under the tree and covers them. Then we eat. After that, father rings an old cowbell, that's the signal to march into the Christmas room. Before the unveiling of Christmas presents, we children have to sing something and recite. My sister recited a Christmas poem and sang 'Little Snowflake, White Little Coat.' A Christmas poem is too silly for me, so I'd rather sing 'Towards the Morning Red, All Comrades.' Father liked the song and sang along, while mother and grandma said it doesn't really fit. That's why this time I don't want to sing anymore, but rather put on a record if there has to be a cultural program" [8]. From this example we can extract features of German and Russian cultures: For people from the USSR, the holiday when gifts are

given is exactly New Year's, not Christmas, whereas in Germany it's Christmas. But as for reciting poems at Christmas, that belongs more to Soviet culture.

## 6. Conclusion

In summary, this study demonstrates that linguocreative devices and techniques in the Ottokar series are based on wordplay and comprehensively characterize the entire work and the author's individual writing style humorously.

The linguocreative potential of the literary work under consideration was revealed, and the linguistic devices and methods or techniques of its realization were identified, systematized, and characterized. It was established that devices from various linguistic levels (morphological, lexical, syntactic levels) serve to express the linguocreative potential of the works and interact with each other.

Phraseological units appear strikingly frequently in the book series, both usual and modified ones, which the author handles skillfully in a linguistically playful manner. It was established that the linguocreative character of modified phraseological units manifests in intentionally incorrect transformation and reinterpretation of their usual components, which gives the linguistic unit a humorous character. The most common technique for modifying phraseological units is the expansion and replacement of their components.

To achieve comic effects, the author uses comparisons. He compares things based on similarity. The most expressive comparisons in O. Domma's work are those that reflect people's behavior, their inner qualities, relationships, and carry ironic meaning.

Numerous occasional word formations in the Ottokar series are associated with generating the comic. Particularly many occasional formations are used for personal designations, for describing and characterizing figures. The most popular techniques are anagrams as a result of letter reversal in usual words and word reversals. Another technique is the production of compound words that form entire thematic groups according to the principle "All about..."

Zeugma as a violation of semantic congruence, manifested in the combination of non-homogeneous words, also occupies a significant place among the linguocreative devices in Otto Häuser's work.

Another popular technique for implementing linguocreativity in the Ottokar series is the conscious deviation from grammatical rules, the use of incorrect grammatical constructions, violation of reference, which manifests in incorrect sentence coupling.

The analysis of linguocreative material shows that Otto Häuser quite often employs situational irony in his novels, which arises through the contrast between situational context and the direct meaning of word, phrase, and sentence and is realized within a sentence or paragraph.

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