

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, COMMUNICATION

USE OF STYLISTIC MEANS OF COMIC CATEGORY
AT THE LEXICO-SEMANTIC LEVEL: FIGURES OF QUANTITY**Iryna Blynova**Ph.D., Assistant Professor, National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, Ukraine
e-mail: i.a.blynova@npu.edu.ua, orcid.org/0000-0003-2788-5403**Summary**

The article deals with the study of linguo-stylistic means of the comic category representation at the lexico-semantic level. Modern English prose is characterized by a specific comic modality, which is a characteristic feature of the author's individual style. The leading means of the lexico-semantic level, that contribute to the realization of the comic effect in belles-letters texts, have been analyzed. The material of research is the English-language prose works of small forms by the most prominent writers, such as: K. Barry, K. Vonnegut, R. Carver and R. Dahl. The aforementioned authors use hyperbolization, which is introduced by means of similes, indefinite pronouns, nouns formed from numerals (in the process of numeralization), temporal and spatial adverbs, a set of lexical units with negative colouring, adjectives in the superlative degree of comparison, modal verbs in the negative form, emphatic constructions.

Keywords: comic effect, language level, hyperbole, meiosis, litotes.

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1. Introduction

The comic is the category of philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, literary criticism and linguistics, which characterizes the objects and phenomena of reality with a greater or lesser degree of ridicule. The 'comic' notion has been studied since the time of Aristotle. There have been a lot of works on this category, theories of different orientations, but almost all researchers agree that the essence of the comic category is a kind of 'disorder', contradiction, contrast, deviation from the norm.

The study of the comic is of interest to scholars of the humanities knowledge paradigm. They have been trying to study the nature of the comic; to single out its types; to describe forms; to highlight genres; to give reasons for various theories of the comic and laughter; to describe the mechanisms of the comic production and perception. In this case, we consider the analysis of linguistic verbalization and exteriorization of the comic due to expressive means and stylistic devices of a certain level to be the linguistic basis for the interpretation of belles-letters text/discourse.

The works by S. O. Shvachko, V. Z. Sannikov, A. V. Karasik, O. M. Kalyta, O. A. Kyrychenko, O. I. Nazarenko, O. Ye. Nesterenko, V. V. Zhuhai, O. V. Materynska, G. Ferré, M. McCarthy, R. Carter and other national and foreign scientists focus on the multifaceted study of the range of linguistic and stylistic means and techniques that tend to perform the comic function in a special context (both in the light of related with linguistics sciences, such as: linguo-stylistics, cognitive

linguistics, linguistic poetics, linguo-cultural studies, linguistic pragmatics; and in terms of various angles, including a lexico-semantic one) (see (*Shvachko, 2012; Sannikov, 1999; Karasik, 1999; Kalyta, 2013; Kyrychenko, 2015; Nazarenko, Nesterenko, 2020; Zhuhai, Materynska, 2020; Ferré, 2014; McCarthy, Carter, 2004*) for more details). The research works are carried out on the material of texts that have various stylistic and genre directions.

The topicality of this paper is predetermined, firstly, by the fact that, being a means of expressing the author's viewpoint and evaluation, a specific comic modality is (according to our observations) an essential feature of the English literature of the second half of the 20th – the beginning of the 21st centuries. Secondly, due to the presence of various approaches to its study and aspects of its consideration, the comic (and its varieties – humour, irony, satire, sarcasm, black humour) is a very diverse and heterogeneous phenomenon. In addition, we currently see the need to consider the insufficiently studied belles-letters text in terms of functional and communicative linguo-stylistics aspects.

The aim of the work is to analyze the functioning of linguo-stylistic means of a comic effect creating at the lexico-semantic level. The material of our research is the original collections of short stories by the most prominent writers of modern literature, namely: 'Dark Lies the Island' by Kevin Barry (1969); 'Palm Sunday. Welcome to the Monkeyhouse' by Kurt Vonnegut (1922–2007); 'Collected Stories' by Raymond Carver (1938–1988); 'Collected Short Stories' by Roald Dahl (1916–1990). To achieve the general aim of the study and solve specific problems, the following methods and techniques have been used, namely: a quantitative analysis, a contextual analysis, a semantic and stylistic one.

2. Types of lexico-semantic stylistic devices

Lexico-semantic stylistic means are subdivided into two large groups (*Yefimov, Yasyynetska, 2004: 46*): **figures of substitution**, i.e. various ways of secondary nomination (based on the usage of existing words and word combinations to denote new notions or to give a new name to the already known objects), and **figures of combination**, i.e. stylistically significant ways of combining the meanings of one level units in syntagmatic sequence, including the expressive means within the unit of another, higher level.

3. Figures of quantity

The linguists distinguish the *figures of quantity* (**hyperbole, meiosis, litotes**) among the substitution figures in the first group, formed by comparing two heterogeneous objects (phenomena) or their properties with a common quantitative feature for them. Hyperbolic maximization or minimization (in other words a broad meaning of hyperbole) is in the list of basic linguo-stylistic methods of creating a humorous wit. Thus, based on the study of a human verbal behaviour, and first of all on the work of highly recognized masters of the witty word, i.e. comic writers, O. N. Luk includes exaggeration (hyperbole) and diminution/deliberate extenuating into his own classification of linguo-stylistic means of comic direction (*Luk, 1982: 17–23*).

3.1. Hyperbole

The most common trope in terms of representativeness is hyperbole, i.e. 'quantitative' figure of speech, the essence of which is to deliberately exaggerate the qualities of an object or phenomenon in order to enhance the expressiveness and give an emphatic character to the expression (*Borisenko, 2014: 97*): "There's a thousand and one different things keep happening every day to

little babies like that," he said. – "Of course." – "I knew a baby once who caught his fingers in the spokes of the pram wheel. He lost the lot. It cut them clean off." (Dahl, 1996: 34). In this (narrow) sense, hyperbolization is the attribution of a feature/property/quality to a phenomenon or object to an extent that it does not actually have or to a greater extent than it actually possesses. In this sense, the term 'hyperbole' means a deviation from the norm of plausibility. Since hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration, it cannot be taken literally: both the addresser/sender of the speech and the addressee/receiver are aware of its artistic conditional character.

Hyperbolization can concern various ontological spheres (spheres of being): a) an anthropocentric one, that is the sphere relating to the person, including artifacts and products of one's mental activity. The hyperbole in the following fragment represents baby's weight: "Take a good look and tell me if you see anything different." – He peered closely at the baby. "She seems bigger, Mabel, if that's what you mean. Bigger and fatter." – "Hold her," she ordered. "Go on, pick her up." – He reached out and lifted the baby up off the mother's lap. "Good God!" he cried. "She weighs a ton!" – "Exactly." – "Now isn't that marvellous!" he cried, beaming. "I'll bet she must be back to normal already!" (Dahl, 1996: 161); b) a non-anthropocentric one, that is the spheres of animate and inanimate nature: You'll be surprised to see what can collect in a mattress over the months, over the years. Every day, every night of our lives, we're leaving little bits of ourselves, flakes of this and that, behind. Where do they go, these bits and pieces of ourselves? Right through the sheets and into the mattress, that's where! Pillows, too. It's all the same (Carver, 2009: 80). In the abovementioned fragment the author underlines the amount of dirt accumulated in mattresses and pillows for years with the help of hyperbole.

As a rule, hyperbole is used to describe objects, natural phenomena, historical events, when describing the human world – one's appearance, feelings, relationships with others. Such qualities of objects/people as size, colour, features of the form, quantity and the like have predominantly hyperbolized characteristics: No one fished for bass. A lot of people I knew had never seen a bass except for pictures. But my father had seen plenty of them when he was growing up in Arkansas and Georgia, and he had high hopes to do with Dummy's bass, Dummy being a friend (Carver, 2009: 282). As we can observe, the number of people (or, more precisely, their absence), who did not catch bass, is exaggerated.

It should be noted that the degree of deviation from plausibility in hyperbole may be different: an *absolute* one, when an exaggerated feature is impossible in any situation of reality, and a *relative* one, when an exaggerated feature is possible in reality, but it is unlikely in this context. In terms of pragmatics, hyperbole externally violates the maxims of quantity and quality of H. P. Grice: as a result, it distorts the truth by saying a lot.

Hyperbolization is often carried out by transference (transposition), in other words the attribution of properties, states, actions of one object to another object. Such transference is possible thanks to comparison as an operation of human thinking. It is no coincidence that hyperbole is often expressed by using similes, for example: It looked like a million bass fingerlings were finning inside. It was the strangest sight, all those live things busy in there, like a little ocean that had come on the train (Carver, 2009: 282). In this case, the transference of the ocean size to the number of bass in the tub is expressed with the help of a simile in combination with the conjunction 'like'. We should pay attention to the fact that the farther the comparable objects lie apart from each other in the ontological picture of the world, the more expressive the potential of this technique is.

In addition to similes, hyperbole can be expressed by typified means, such as: indefinite pronouns (*all, every, everybody, everything, no one*); nouns formed from numerals (in the process of numeralization) (*a million, a thousand*); temporal and spatial adverbs (*always, ever,*

never, forever, everywhere). Hyperbole also interacts (converges) with other techniques, such as: an ascending gradation, rhetorical question, parallelism.

There are language or clichéd hyperboles (*I haven't seen you for ages*) and speech or author's individual ones (*all those live things busy like a little ocean*). Excessive conscious exaggeration, intensification, presentation of any properties in an exaggerated form and intensity of the process or features of the object, phenomenon (size, strength, value, insignificance, uselessness, etc.) are used to create descriptiveness, express emotional tones, enhance impressions, intensify expressiveness of the utterance, give it emphatic value. Due to the fact that hyperbole has a significant pictorial and expressive potential, it is widely used as a vivid characterological means to create an image, usually a comic one. R. Dahl, depicting the intolerable character of Lionel – the protagonist of the story 'Nunc Dimittis', saturates his speech with exaggerated remarks: *But now the face is loose and puckered with nothing distinctive about it whatsoever. The individual features, the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the chin, are buried in the folds of fat around the puckered little face and one does not notice them. Except perhaps the mouth, which reminds me I cannot help it – of a salmon* (Dahl, 1996: 203).

The researchers of M. McCarthy and R. Carter recognize evaluative and emotional function among a wide range of hyperbole functioning in the process of communication, where humour and irony play a leading role: "Such hyperbolic expressions usually pass without challenge by listeners, who accept them as creative intensifications for evaluative or affective purposes such as humour and irony, and who often make their own supportive contributions to the figure of speech. Examination of hyperbole in interactive contexts also underlines the expressive and interpersonal meanings foregrounded in its use: intensification, humour and banter, empathy, solidarity, antipathy, informality and intimacy, along with evaluative and persuasive goals, are all recurrent features" (McCarthy, Carter, 2004: 176). In the analyzed literary works, the authors use hyperbole as a feature of strong emotion or passion, which adds liveliness and interest to the conversation.

Moreover, being one of the figurative characterization means, hyperbole acquires mostly comic colouring in the story. The author/narrator tries to enhance the impression, emphasize the positive or negative quality of the person or object being described with its help: *This fat man is the fattest person I have ever seen, though he is neat-appearing and well dressed enough. Everything about him is big. But it is the fingers I remember best. When I stop at the table near his to see to the old couple, I first notice the fingers. They look three times the size of a normal person's fingers – long, thick, creamy fingers. ... He's really a fatty* (Carver, 2009: 16). In the given fragment hyperbolization of the obese man's weight is achieved by the use of the adjective *fat* in the superlative degree of comparison (*the fattest*); the noun *fatty* (a fat man) formed from the adjective *fat* by means of substantivizing; the emphatic structures – *the fattest person I have ever seen, it is the fingers I remember best*; comparative expression – *three times the size*; synonyms – *long, thick, creamy (fingers)*.

Hyperbole is used by K. Barry on a lexico-semantic level in order to intensify the ironic tone in the transference of the hero's inner state after his emotions – disappointment over the unfulfilled dream of the first kiss and sexual experience, transmitted by the temporal dimension of infinity: *With her steps' fading, the summer went, even as the sun came higher across the rooftops and warmed the stone ledge and the slates, and I looked out across the still, quiet city, and I sat there for hours and for months and for years. I sat there until all that had been about us and had faded again to nothing, until the sound of the crowd died and the music had ended, and we all trailed home along the sleeping streets, with youth packed away, and life about to begin* (Barry 2007: 4). As you can see, a characteristic feature of the hyperbole creating

is the inclusion of such expressive means of syntax as: complete parallelism (*I sat there... I sat there*) and polysyndeton (*and, until*). These techniques are one of the richest sources of expressiveness, as they serve to enhance the significance of the utterance, setting a certain rhythm to the prose text.

The direct speech of one of the characters in R. Carver's short story 'Boxes' is hyperbolically negative and ironic. An elderly woman, the mother of the protagonist, usually uses lexical units with a negative connotation – adverbs (*never, forever*), pronouns (*none, nothing*), the adjective *bad* in the superlative degree of comparison (*the worst*), negative form of the modal verb (*couldn't*), emphatic structures (*the worst place I've ever lived in, the worst icebox I've ever had*) when assessing cohabitation with the son's family, making decisions about moving, expressing judgments about the conditions of staying in the rented apartment: *I thought we'd go on picnics and take drives together. But none of that happened. You're always busy. You're off working, you and Jill. You're never at home. Or else if you are at home you have the phone off the hook all day. Anyway, I never see you," she said* (Carver, 2009: 536); *"...I'm leaving this place forever. This is the worst place I've ever lived in."* (Carver, 2009: 537); *I couldn't stand it. I just couldn't live like that. This time I told the manager I didn't want to be next to any alcoholics. And I didn't want anything on the second floor. The second floor looks out on the parking lot. Nothing to see from there."* (Carver, 2009: 539); *Well, I hope I never see his cheap old face again once I leave here* (Carver, 2009: 540); *It's the worst icebox I've ever had* (Carver, 2009: 538).

Words that are imprecations or express extraordinary emotions associated with cold, death – *kill, die, damned*, are constantly pronounced by her, thus deliberately exaggerating the disadvantages of living outside California, for example: *"Besides," she said, "this weather's killing me. It's too damned cold here. Why didn't you tell me this was the North Pole? If you had, I'd never have come. I want to go back to California, honey* (Carver, 2009: 536); *"I wish I could die and get out of everyone's way,"* (Carver, 2009: 543); *I don't want to see this place again except from my coffin. I hate this g.d. place. I don't know why I moved here. I wish I could just die and get it over with."* (Carver, 2009: 536); *I'm living here like a damned gypsy* (Carver, 2009: 538). The mother's speech patterns and her movements, when changing the place of living, as well as repetitive and mechanical: she is constantly nagging at someone/something – the place of residence, weather, homeowner, neighbours. Everyone is at fault without any exception, but it is not she whose fault it is. The hyperbolization of the actions and behaviour of this character, reflected in speech, proves the social and spiritual immobility of the image: the horizontal movement in the world denies the upward movement, i.e. the growth of personality, her development.

In the following fragments, the character's inner speech in the form of dramatic present time is given an important role. The sarcastic effect is created due to the interaction of hyperbole with other stylistic means, providing gradation (climax) of expressiveness and emotional tension of communication:

"You suggest I stay?" said Susanna wretchedly. "After I've been denounced in public as a scarlet woman? A tart? A wench?" (Vonnegut, 1994: 45);

"Oooh, George," Grace said, "you know how the Jenkinses are. Yes, they're nice, but..." She laughed and shook her head.

"But what?" I said. The possibilities raced through my mind. Nudists? Heroin addicts? Anarchists? Hamster raisers?

"In 1945 they moved in," Grace said, "and right off the bat they bought two beautiful Hitchcock chairs, and..." This time she sighed and shrugged.

"And what?" I demanded. And spilled India ink on them? And found a bundle of thousand-dollar bills rolled up in a hollow leg?

"And that's all," Grace said. "They just stopped right there." (Vonnegut, 1994: 66).

The following structural model is implemented in these dialogue passages: aposiopesis of the addressee after the conjunction *but/and* (*but...; and...*) + the addressee's rhetorical question, which usually begins with a conjunction from the previous phrase *but/and* (*But what?; And what?; You suggest I stay?*) and a list of suggested answer options in the form of nominative (*A tart?; A wench?; Nudists?; Heroin addicts?*) or elliptical interrogative sentences (*And spilled India ink on them?*) that function as partial parallel syntactic structures.

The concept of grotesque is corresponding to hyperbole. The most common view is that hyperbole is one of the means of grotesque creating. If hyperbole underlies the grotesque as a fantastic deformation of reality, it is called the grotesque hyperbole (Borisenko, 2014: 97). Such hyperbole is often combined with an extended metaphor:

"You know," he went on, "it's extraordinary what sometimes happens. Only last week a man was brought in unconscious, and I opened his head without any anaesthetic at all and removed a small blood clot. I was still working inside the skull when he woke up and began talking.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You're in hospital."

"Well," he said. "Fancy that."

"Tell me," I asked him, "is this bothering you, what I'm doing?"

"No," he answered. "Not at all. What are you doing?"

"I'm just removing a blood clot from your brain."

"You are?"

"Just lie still. Don't move, I'm nearly finished."

"So that's the bastard who's been giving me all those headaches," the man said.

Landy paused and smiled, remembering the occasion. "That's word for word what the man said," he went on, "although the next day he couldn't even recollect the incident. It's a funny thing, the brain."

"I'll have the procaine," I said (Dahl, 1996: 26).

3.2. Meiosis

There are a number of cases with meiosis use. Meiosis is the figure of speech, which is opposite of hyperbole. It is a deliberate diminution of the qualities of an object or phenomenon, the intensity of the feature manifestation or the action proceeding, the size and number of objects, the significance of something that enhances the expressiveness of comic speech (Yefimov, Yasynetska, 2004: 46): "But dumb as I was, then is when I made my *one and only* contribution to the world. As I say, I haven't lifted a finger since." (Vonnegut, 1994: 57); Aunt Glosspan was nearly seventy when she became guardian to Lexington, but to look at her you would never have guessed it for *one minute* (Dahl, 1996: 257); ... she had seen few sunrises in her life and those when she was little. She knew that *none of them had been like this. Not in pictures she had seen nor in any book she had read had she learned a sunrise was so terrible as this* (Carver, 2009: 99); "Yes," he said, sucking his lips, "I was right. It is a fourth growth. Now I am sure of it. A fourth growth from a very good year from a great year, in fact. And that's what made it taste *for a moment* like a third – or even a second-growth wine. Good! That's better! Now we are closing in! What are the fourth-growth vineyards in the commune of St Julien?" (Dahl, 1996: 34).

This expressive means is usually based on the comparison of two heterogeneous objects/phenomena, that have a common feature, in order to emphasize the insignificance of the described

object. Such characteristics are mostly size, volume, time, distance: *Now, Arcata is not a small town and it's not a big town, though I guess you'd have to say it's more on the small side. It's not the end of the world, Arcata, by any means, but most of the people who live here work...* (Carver, 2009: 86).

3.3. Litotes

To convey the restraint of opinion and the ironic attitude of the speaker to the subject of speech, a kind of meiosis – litotes is used. Being a means of emphasizing the speech expressiveness, litotes is built mainly on the reduction/diminution of any feature of the object or person (Yefimov, Yasynetska, 2004: 47). It has a specific semantic and syntactic structure: the use of the negative particle *not* before a word that has a negative meaning or a negative prefix. Thus, litotes contributes to the transformation of the negative sentence by its form into the affirmative sentence by its content and sense, providing extenuating of the positive characteristics of the subject under consideration and thus producing a humorous effect: *"Bomber boys unhappy," Peter said. "Not unhappy," I answered. "Well, they're browned off". "No. They've had it, that's all. But they'll keep going. You can see they're trying to keep going"* (Dahl, 1996: 97); *The sudden arrival of the diaries caused much excitement in the family, and there was a rush to read them. We were not disappointed. It was astonishing stuff hilarious, witty, exciting, and often quite touching as well* (Dahl, 1996: 365); *Coming from Landy, the question didn't seem especially unkind. In a way it was refreshing to have a visitor brave enough to touch upon the forbidden subject* (Dahl, 1996: 304); *We know he (baby) wouldn't win no beauty contests right now. He's no Clark Gable* (Carver, 2009: 372).

4. Conclusions

Quantitative figures (hyperbole, meiosis, litotes) are the main techniques, the role of which is to attribute any size, properties, states, actions to the object. They can be not only much larger (by means of maximization), but also much smaller (by means of minimization). As the analysis of short stories has shown, hyperbolization is based on such standardized means as: similes, indefinite pronouns, nouns formed from numerals (in the process of numeralization), temporal and spatial adverbs, a set of lexical units with negative colouring, adjectives in the superlative degree of comparison, modal verbs in the negative form, emphatic constructions.

The combination (convergence) of hyperbole with other linguo-stylistic devices (parallelism, polysyndeton, aposiopesis, etc.) is widespread, which contributes to the gradation (climax) of expressiveness and emotional tension of the utterance. Hyperbole is also the basis for creating a grotesque. Our observations prove that hyperbolization has an expressed evaluative-emotional colouring. The author's and character's speech is characterized by a humorous, ironic, etc. tonality while describing objects, phenomena of nature, historical events, the person's world – one's appearance, feelings, relationships. The perspective of the further study is, as we see, in a detailed analysis of linguistic means of comic effect creating at other language/speech levels in studying the originality of the prose writers' individual style whose poetics is combined with the comic.

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