

# Editor's Preface

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**Lexical Creativity, Texts and Contexts**

**Edited by Judith Munat**

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## Editor's preface

This collection of articles has its origin in a seminar I conducted at the 2004 ESSE Conference in Zaragoza (Spain), entitled “Lexical Creativity as a Feature of Textuality.” Two papers from that seminar, together with ten invited contributions, make up the content of the present volume. This is a multi-faceted, predominantly synchronic investigation of lexical creativity viewed in relation to a variety of textual and contextual, including sociopolitical, constraints, in which nonce words and other new coinages are analysed in relation to co(n)text, speaker/writer intentions and the wider social environment.

The noted artist, Richard Serra, in speaking of his steel sculptures, has said that it is the *context* which makes him think and which sets the wheels in motion, serving as a stimulus to his monumental artistic constructions.<sup>1</sup> The role of context in lexical creativity is no less significant, and only by considering the specific (written or spoken) environments in which these novel formations appear can we fully comprehend the meanings intended by the speaker (a parallel with the creative artist) and the functions that they are intended to fulfil. Close observation of the context in which new lexical items occur will allow us to capture the clues that serve to interpret these unfamiliar and often semantically opaque words and expressions, and discover how these novel formations both reflect and implement the surrounding co(n)text. Thus the papers in this volume, while considering the way in which morphological theory affects the creation of novel words, also consider the way that these creative formations illuminate morphological theory.

The majority of coinages examined here will never find a permanent place in the lexicon because of their ephemeral nature, their utility being strictly bound to their original contexts of use. Nonetheless, these lexical items, whether creative manipulations of the rules or new formations based on canonical word-forming

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1. These words are cited from the documentary film “Richard Serra. Thinking on your feet” made by Anna Tappeiner (Germany, 2005).

processes, all contribute to the construction of discourse meaning and text worlds in subtle and interesting ways.

Creativity, according to Pope (2005:xv) is always "creation from something," an on-going process in which the speaker/writer draws on a finite number of existing items from which an infinite number of fresh or imaginative solutions are 'created' to satisfy the communicative needs of the moment. This is creativity in the Chomskyan sense, where a limited set of rules and a finite set of terms allow humans to produce an infinite number of novel structures (be they words or longer utterances) that no one has previously produced. We might well reformulate the eternal question of creativity vs. productivity in the domain of word formation as originality informed by knowledge. Therefore, creativity is not to be seen simply as the product of 'genius' of a single user, but a collaborative effort between the speaker, who (re)combines the building blocks of the system, and the listener, who (re)constructs meaning by relying on linguistic as well as sociocultural knowledge (for a full discussion see Carter 2004). In the same manner, the reader approaches the interpretation of unfamiliar or novel words in written text.

Lamb (1998:205) defines real creativity as the invention of new lexemes for new or old concepts, allowing us to build new concepts by drawing on and integrating ideas in our conceptual system that have not previously been connected; Benczes (2006:7) similarly identifies creativity as our ability to make new associations between concepts based on "similarity, analogy or contiguity."

This overview of linguistic creativity is a synthesis of the approach taken in this volume. These data-based studies all aim to illuminate the way in which lexical creativity emerges from the interplay between a given communicative, textual or social environment and the speaker's manipulation of the system, as he coins new words, recombines existing expressions or forms new concepts.

Thus a children's story is seen to spawn novel lexical creations which are sharply distinct from those in the Science Fiction genre, in that they are determined by different textual worlds and reader-oriented agendas. Another study discusses the constraints operating on electronic communication to explain the unique types of word formations, abbreviations and acronyming used in text messaging or computer-mediated discourse. An in-depth study of British broadsheets over an extended period shows wordplay in the media as a self-generating creative process and documents the vast numbers of variations on existing words and expressions that are rapidly coined in the aftermath of certain media events. An investigation of the humorous effect achieved by the reformulation and manipulation of phraseological expressions sheds light on the semiotic interplay between visual image and text in cartoon art, while a study of ad hoc formations in interpersonal interaction shows that the meta-functions of novel formations in speech go well beyond the naming of new concepts or entities. And an examination of creative

blends, drawn principally from advertising and the media, illustrates novel word-play as an attention-seeking device, at times bordering on a marketing strategy.

The area of concept creation is examined in two studies, one focussing on the generation of lexical analogies – similar to the creation of new noun compounds – in computer-based ontologies such as WordNet. The other concentrates on the way in which concept formation and semantic re-categorisation serve to disambiguate neosemes and novel formations in the world of fantasy fiction.

The importance of sociopolitical attitudes in effecting language change, often conservative rather than innovative, is examined in relation to the imposition of 'politically correct' terms in government and other public documents; and political ideologies are identified as one of the principal motivating forces behind translation policies which have effected shifts in word-formation and idiom use in Latvian.

Also, an original diachronic study of recorded New Zealand speech offers insights into the phonotactics of compositionality, and suggests that morphological creativity may be reflected in phonetic detail, thereby providing a quantitative measure with which to distinguish stored words from creatively formed ones.

Lipka, in his introductory chapter, highlights and expands upon the various issues raised in these studies, adding numerous personal insights. He makes important connections between earlier contributions in the field (many of which his own) and the functional approach of the present volume. His introduction will enable the reader to appreciate the many links between the research presented here and earlier studies in the fields of morphology, word formation, lexicology, lexical semantics, discourse analysis and stylistics. While the rich bibliographies accompanying the single papers provide ample and up-to-date references to recent research in all of the foregoing fields, the older, classical works on word formation have not been ignored.

The original and thoughtful studies presented in this volume ultimately illustrate the way in which lexical creativity in both spoken and written discourse is determined by functional considerations relating to the particular co(n)texts of occurrence, identifying the text (including co-text and wider social context) as the most significant stimulus to lexical innovation.

In the certainty that the issues raised in this volume will be of great interest to the morphological scholar, the student of lexicology, the stylistician and translator, as well as the researcher in computational linguistics and artificial intelligence, it is also my hope that the reader will find stimulating suggestions for further study and research.

Finally, I wish to express my special thanks to Peter Hohenhaus who provided numerous valuable suggestions and comments as the volume progressed and who was of paramount assistance in the course of the editing process.

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