Wordplay and discourse traditions

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Prior to any linguistic study of wordplay phenomena is the question of how to situate wordplay in a theory of language. The aim of our contribution is to illustrate and to exemplify the theoretical dimensions of wordplay. We will distinguish, according to Coseriu (1985), three levels of considering language: The universal level, with wordplay being a universal possibility of human speech, the historical level, where language-specific systems serve as a technical frame and as a limitation (including the potential of overcoming these limits) for how to play with words and morphemes, and, finally, the individual level of concrete utterances and the given situational effect of a wordplay and its interpretation.

Furthermore, wordplay phenomena are not only historically determined by the techniques of a language system but they use to follow traditional patterns in the sense of discourse traditions (Koch 1997). Discourse traditions not necessarily coincide with languages: they may exist beyond linguistic communities and within them. And they might even be originally individual traditions characterizing an individual author's "style".

The relevance of differentiating these levels will be shown with examples from several European languages. One of the most important tools for the identification of the difference between the levels will be translation.

References

Coseriu, Eugenio (1985). Linguistic Competence: What is it Really? The Presidential Address of the Modern Humanities Research Association, In *The Modern Language Review* 80, part 4, XXV-XXXV.

Koch, Peter (1997). Diskurstraditionen: zu ihrem sprachtheoretischen Status und ihrer Dynamik. In Frank, Barbara, Thomas Haye & Doris Tophinke (eds.). *Gattungen mittelalterlicher Schriftlichkeit*. Tübingen, Narr, 43-79.