

Book introduction

Everyday style and verbal art

‘Narrative’

One day at about midday in the Parc Monceau district, on the back platform of a more or less full S bus (now No. 84), I observed a person with a very long neck who was wearing a felt hat which had a plaited cord round it instead of a ribbon.

(Queneau, 1998 [1947], p. 43)

‘Rhyming slang’

I see a chap in the bus with a huge bushel and peck and a ridiculous titfer on his loaf. He starts a bull and cow with another chap and complains that he keeps treading on his plates with his daisy roots.

(Queneau, 1998 [1947], p. 158)

‘Sonnet’

Glabrous was his dial and plaited was his bonnet,
 And he, a puny colt – (how sad the neck he bore,
 And long) – was now intent on his quotidian chore –
 The bus arriving full, of somehow getting on it.

(Queneau, 1998 [1947], p. 112)

Exercises in Style is a work by the French author Raymond Queneau, in which he takes a short and rather prosaic anecdote – about a man in a hat getting jostled on a crowded bus – and tells it over and over again, each time in a different style. In the extracts above, one uses extensive metaphor, another is in rhyming slang, and a third is in the form of a sonnet. Queneau repeats the same story 99 times in total and each one – despite relating exactly the same incident – produces a different effect due to the way language is being manipulated.

Queneau's book is a practical illustration of the creative possibilities of language use; of how the choice of words, register, structure, and so on can alter profoundly the way we, as readers, perceive an idea or scenario.

This same topic is also the subject of this book. The chapter authors take an analytic and exploratory look at creativity in language: at how it is effected, the processes it involves, and the ends to which it is put. We begin with the simple question of what creativity is, and how it relates to language. From this starting point we explore the concept from a range of different perspectives, examining its definitions, its manifestations and uses, and the various issues it raises. The book looks at both written and spoken language, drawing on the perspectives of stylistics and discourse analysis; it includes practitioners' approaches in terms both of creative writing and translation; and it extends out to consider other forms of semiotic creativity, looking in particular at visual communication and the way it combines with the verbal mode.

Throughout the book we ask three main questions:

- What is linguistic and semiotic creativity?
- How can one study it?
- Why is it important to study it?

Underpinning all the topics that this book covers is the conviction that creativity, in one form or another, is central to human activities. Similarly, language is something that permeates all aspects of our lives: in using language – often creatively – we discursively construct forms of identity as well as an understanding of the social world around us. Seen from this perspective, an understanding of linguistic creativity can provide fresh perspectives on how communication operates, the uses to which it is put, and, ultimately, on our sense of self and society.

As indicated by the title of the book ('from everyday style to verbal art'), the various chapters focus on the questions above using a range of texts: some traditionally considered literature (e.g. poems, novels), others considered more 'everyday' or ordinary (e.g. workplace humour, interactions on social media). In this way, the book investigates the relationships between creativity and a variety of different disciplines. It looks at the resources that people use in acts of creativity, how these resources are manipulated for creative ends, and how the meaning of

creative acts is a product both of these resources and the ways and contexts in which they are used.

How the book is structured

The book begins with Zsófia Demjén introducing the concept of linguistic creativity and proposing three ways in which it can be understood and investigated. Approaching the topic primarily from the perspective of stylistics, this opening chapter introduces an array of categories for describing and analysing verbal language in written texts. Following on from this, Chapter 2 by David Peplow also draws on stylistics, but employs techniques of discourse and conversation analysis, and examines conversational interactions rather than written texts, to focus on creativity in everyday life.

Chapter 3, by Derek Neale, takes a different tack to the topic, looking at it from the perspective of creative writing and examining creative processes from a practitioner's perspective. The chapter also asks how (or if) creativity, as it is conceptualised in this context, is something that can be taught. The practitioners' perspective continues in Chapter 4, where Frank Monaghan and Guy Cook look at the art of translation. The chapter explores how different creative strategies can address the challenges of translating works from one language (and culture) to another.

The next two chapters in the book focus explicitly on multimodal communication, which includes verbal language but also image, colour, shape and sound. Multimodality foregrounds the importance of different modes and media in any creative activity, and here we look at how these intersect and interact to produce meaning. In Chapter 5, Sharon Goodman introduces social semiotics – which is concerned with exploring the ways in which specific signs, like colours, fonts, or images, connect with specific social meanings – as an approach to analysing creativity in multimodal print texts. This focus on visual communication continues in Chapter 6, where Philip Seargeant explores the ways in which verbal language is incorporated into the visual arts, and what this can tell us about the natures both of art and of language.

The book concludes with a chapter which is structured around a text by Elena Semino on creativity in the context of verbal descriptions of pain. This text is used as an applied case study, drawing together the

key threads that have emerged throughout the book and putting into practice some of the approaches to language and creativity that have been previously discussed.

In examining the complexity around linguistic creativity from these various different perspectives, using a range of different approaches and different types of texts, the book aims to both stimulate thought and illuminate ideas about the nature of creativity and the fundamental role it plays in how we interact and express ourselves.

Reference

Queneau, R. (1998 [1947]) *Exercises in Style* (trans. B. Wright), London, John Calder.