

STYLISTICALLY AIMED PHRASEOLOGICAL DEFORMATIONS

(Based on L. Carroll's book “Alice in Wonderland”)

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În acest articol autorul tratează variatele modificări prin care pot trece unitățile frazeologice în procesul vorbirii. Modificările gramaticale și cele lexicale sunt concepute în scopuri stilistice și pentru a crea metafore expresive. Aceste modificări expresive prezintă un instrument pus la îndemâna scriitorului și a oratorului. Indiferent de modificările suferite de orice unitate frazeologică, integritatea înțelesului niciodată nu este perturbată. Jocul de cuvinte și deformațiunile unităților frazeologice utilizate de Lewis Carroll în scopuri stilistice ne pot provoca zâmbetul doar în cazul când înțelegem esența textului. Unitățile frazeologice își pot găsi întotdeauna aplicare în vorbirea expresivă, pe care o încarcă cu originalitate, individualitate și precizie.

Phraseological expressions sometimes may undergo certain deformations which are made by the authors, that is, speakers or writers, for various reasons and purposes. In our studies we have found out that in lexical variants we may change verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs and even non-significant elements. It is also possible to find combined groups of variants, in which different parts of speech are replaced.

There are cases when we can replace synonymic verbs and we may call them interchangeable components. **E.g.:** *to kill (the) time* = to do anything, however trivial, to pass the time and so avoid being bored.

The synonymic phraseological expression we have found in “Alice in Wonderland” by Lewis Carroll: **e.g.:** “Well, I’d hardly finished the first verse,” said the Hatter, “when the Queen bawled out”. “He’s murdering the time! Off with his head!” [3, p.112]

In this example the play is on the phraseological expression “to kill time” = “a omorî timpul”, where an importance is attributed to the verb. Here the author uses a revived metaphor, his beloved and magic stylistic device which creates an unusual effect of horror. But still, on the other hand, as we may understand, the Queen’s words have one meaning more, indicating that the Hatter violated the rhythm of the song (if compared to the word-combination “to beat time” that means “to beat repeatedly” - “a bate tactul în muzică”).

To spring to one’s feet means “to jump suddenly from the ground; move suddenly (up, down, out,) from being still, hidden.” In “Alice in Wonderland” we find the sentence: “..... but when the Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a Rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket or a watch to take out of it” [3, p.37].

In order to attract the reader’s attention to the fact that the actions performed by Alice were very quick and instant, he used in the first case *started to her feet* instead of *to spring to her feet* which altogether shows that the action at the same time was first thought about for a little while and then done. Another phraseological expression used in this example is *it flashed across her mind* which is the author’s deformation of the original phraseological unit *to cross one’s mind*, meaning “to occur to one, to have a momentary thought”. This is another evidence of the fact that the author wanted in stylistic purpose to underline that not only Alice’s thoughts, but also her deeds were logical, that she was a quick-witted girl.

There are phraseological expressions in which the verbal synonymic component elements may be changed. These changes lend certain stylistic colouring to the contexts they are used in. Sometimes the verbal component elements in the structure of the phraseological units are not synonymic, but the meaning is just the same and which one to choose constitutes the author’s attitude in expressing the ideas he wants to communicate. **E.g.:** *to think to oneself* = *to judge to oneself* = *to think critically*. These verbs are not completely synonymic, as their initial meaning is quite different. The verb *to think* has the meaning of to use the mind in order to form opinions or come to conclusions and the verb *to judge* means *to give a decision, estimate, consider*.

Lewis Carroll uses *to think to oneself* and gives preponderance to this one in the sentence:

e.g.: “Well,” thought Alice to herself, “after such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs” [3, p.38].

For stylistic purposes the authors may change the synonymic substantival elements, non-synonymic substantival components, adjectives and other parts of speech. There are phraseological units in which all their components may be changed, that's they may be deformed completely and sometimes preserving the meaning and sometimes not. Such cases are very rare. **E.g.:** *to crook/lift the elbow/the little finger* = to get drunk.

There are syntactic deformations. A.V. Koonin in his book "Фразеология современного английского языка" distinguishes five types of syntactic variants of deformations [13, p.182]. He only calls them constructions. Such constructions may be called deformations as well or maybe deformed phraseological constructions because some of their components, after being replaced, give birth to another phraseological unit with the same meaning but to an extent, in the majority of cases, attributing a more simple and colloquial style to the new expression. **E.g.:** *take off one's hat to somebody* = *take one's hat off to somebody* = to show one's admiration for somebody by taking off one's hat. As we know, removing one's hat has always been the traditional way of showing respect and in this example the phraseological unit *to take off one's hat to someone* was used not in its direct but figurative meaning, in order to underline the author's deep respect towards the person spoken of. This very expression in a different context may have the meaning *to greet someone by taking off one's hat*.

Some other deformations in the phraseological expressions may be called positional which are characterized by a replacement of the component elements without any further changes in meaning, in their stylistic effect or grammatical structure. **E.g.:** *to cross the T's and dot the I's* = *to dot the I's and cross the T's* = to put an end to; to finish; to complete something.

Another type of phraseological deformations may be considered the quantitative variants, which have not the same number of the components and being formed by means of cutting down or vice versa, by adding some additional constituting elements.

The process of forming of the quantitative variants especially by means of reducing one or more constructive elements is largely used. Below we present some peculiar examples of quantitative variants:

1) Formed by cutting down: **e.g.:** *the black sheep (of the family)* = a member of the family who has disgraced him or herself, one whose name is generally not mentioned in the family circle.

2) Formed by addition: **e.g.:** *to be green* = to be as green as grass. The first has the meaning to be inexperienced or untried and from it comes the second one meaning to be naive, totally inexperienced in the ways of the world. **e.g.:** You cannot expect Mary to do business with such people. She is only 18 and is green as grass.

We may conclude that the process of forming of quantitative variants, especially by means of cutting down or reducing one or more component elements is very popular and widespread now, these variants becoming part and parcel of colloquial speech, and we may say that it is the newest variant among the others.

Among some other variants of deformation there are lexico-grammatical variants which may be subdivided into lexico-morphological and lexico-syntactic variants.

"In the lexico-morphological variantness the interchangeability of the component or constructive elements of a phraseological unit are combined with the variantness of the singular and plural numbers of the nouns" [13, p.187]. **E.g.:** *to keep one's eye/eyes peeled/skinned* = *to keep an eye peeled* = to be extremely vigilant and alert. Another lexico-grammatical variant of deformation we may consider the phraseological expression *to close a/the door/doors on/upon/to something/somebody* = *to shut the door in someone's face* = to terminate any further negotiations.

In the lexico-syntactic variants of deformations there exists a possibility of exchanging the component elements as well as of those principal and auxiliary ones in combination with the replacement of one component, a fact which leads to a change in the structure of the phraseological expression.

A.V. Koonin suggests that such variantness may serve the expression: *put/set/turn back the clock/back* = *to recapture an earlier period of time*. We may observe that the meaning of the all mentioned lexico-syntactic variants is equal, but in their separate combination a certain difference is clearly seen.

At the basis of the majority of the verbal phraseological expressions we can find a metaphoric evaluation of the word combination. The transfer of the denomination is realized on the basis of the analogy of actions. Such may be considered the following: *to dance on a volcano* = *to play with the fire* = a dansa pe vulcan;

Some other phraseological expressions evidently have a hyperbolic character. **E.g.:** *to eat out of somebody's hand* = to submit willingly to someone's wishes, to do anything to please someone, as in the situation:

Many metaphorical deformations have a euphemistic character. We could find some of them among the phraseological combinations with the meaning "to die": from the Bible: *to go the way of all the earth* = *to go the way of all flesh*; *to go to one's account*; *to go to one's long rest*; *to quit the scene*.

Many metaphorical phraseological expressions take their root in terminological word combinations with a direct, literal meaning. The etymological analysis sometimes gives the possibility to find out the metaphorical character of the phraseological expression. For instance, the word combination *to give somebody the cold shoulder* means *to treat someone with marked coldness, to ignore him in a noticeable manner* and it does not refer in this case to the human shoulder; the shoulder of a sheep (mutton) is to be understood here, because it was served cold not hot or warm to a guest who was not expected or desired to come.

Metonymic transferances are more rare than the metaphorical ones but they still can be found with certain authors. **E.g.:** *to have a dirty tongue* = to use bad language.

In many cases for stylistic purposes the phraseological units can be interrupted by other words and vary greatly. Authors can miss separate elements of the phraseological units and use only a part of it or in other cases, for a greater expressiveness, the author can replace some component elements by others. As a result, the semantic unity, in the majority of cases, is not violated thanks to its being well-known and largely used. And the authors make a great use of it.

To take, for example, Lewis Carroll, who, in his famous book „Alice in Wonderland”, distorting the representations of the common sense, at the same time tried to preserve after his characters the psychological exactness of their behaviour. The contrast created between the unusual situations and the psychological controlled concrete real emotions give way to the use of different specific and to a certain degree new phraseological meanings of, maybe, the older phraseological expressions. Feeling the word, the author keeps his eyes on the mouths of his characters. He marks the incorrectness of meaning and tries to understand what they are motivated by.

Can we understand the King from the Wonderland? Having the function of the Superior Judge, he constantly is losing the essence of the matter from his view hiding behind unimportant words and word combinations. Alice characterizes him very shortly „Stupid Things!” [3, p.155] and then she adds: **e.g.:** A nice muddle their slates’ll be in before the trial’s over! [3, p.157]

The King’s speech is very specific, sometimes short and precisely showing the created atmosphere, as in the following examples:

e.g.: a) “Give your evidence,” the King repeated angrily. [3, p.161].

b) “Do you take me for a dunce? Go on!”

c) “You’re a very poor speaker,” said the King.

A pun is found in the following sentence also belonging to the King:

e.g.: “If that’s all you know about it, you may stand down,” continued the King.

A characteristic peculiarity of L. Carroll’s style constituted the reaction upon the “limited” and regulated life of the Victorian England concerning the system of education. The paradox has become one of L. Carroll’s favourite stylistic means. And he creates specific personal phraseological units which later become widely used. We found phraseological units containing similes. **E.g.:** a) Like pilgrim’s withered wreath of flowers. Plucked in a far-off land [3, p.34].

b) Alice caught the baby with some difficulty, as it was a queer-shaped little creature, and held out its arms and legs in all directions, “just like a starfish,” thought Alice.

The author underlines many a time Alice’s desire to know more, her constant interest to everything that surrounds her and the following phraseological unit used in sentences in which he describes this fact is precisely shown:

e.g.: “... and, burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge [3, p.37].

The phraseological unit “to burn with curiosity” used by the author shows Alice’s excessive curiosity for everything, which is compared with a burning fire.

Another interesting example which we have come across is the next one:

e.g.: “...I wouldn’t say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house.” (which was very likely true) [3, p.38] = ...eu n-aș fi spus nici o vorbă, dacă chiar aș fi căzut de pe acoperișul casei, - spune Alisa. (Și ce era foarte aproape de adevăr) comments the author.

The humoristic effect of the author’s remark is based on the stylistic division or deformation of the phraseological combination „wouldn’t say anything about it” with the help of the realization of the basic, direct meaning of the component of the combination, the verb „to say”. The author considers, that even if Alice would have fallen from the roof of the house, she probably would’t be able to say anything at all.

To show that Alice knew a lot about different things, the author uses stable, precise phraseological units. **E.g.:** "...and though this was not a very good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, still it was good practice to say it over" [3, p.39].

The inverted phraseological units representing an emphatic inversion:

e.g.: a) "...down she came upon a heap of sticks" and

b) "...away went Alice like the wind" [3, p.41], have been used by the author to underline in the first case the end of her fall and in the second – the quickness, the speed of her running away.

Another humorous effect is achieved by the author in Alice's words based on the stylistic device of understatement. Alice mechanically repeats not a single time the indications using *grown-up* phraseology: *it is certain to disagree with you*, not thinking about the blurred, by such an often use, of meaning of the word. (because if "drinking much poison", the affair would not smell only of a stomachache):

e.g.: If you drink much from a bottle marked "poison", it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later [3, p.44].

An absolute negation is rendered in the deformation of the phraseological unit "next to nothing" = nearly nothing, which L. Carroll changes to:

e.g.: I shall have to go and live in that poky little house, and have next to no toys to play with [3, p.50].

Another stylistically aimed deformation may be considered the following example:

e.g.: I move that the meeting adjourn for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies. = Înaintez propunerea de a amâna adunarea cu scopul de a aplica mijloace mai efective pentru lecuire [3, p.57].

In this example, as we may see, the author parodies the archaic style of speech and derides the petrified formulas adopted for the official meetings and not understandable for the rest of the people. In this case L. Carroll plays on the phraseological combination "to adopt a resolution", substituting the second component of the combination with a contextually motivated word "remedies". The necessity of using the word combination "more energetic remedies" does not arise any doubt because Alice, citing her own words, remained "as wet as ever".

The whole scene is constructed on a play on words and is written unusually delicately. If being read, it is clearly enough, that the Mouse's words "I'll soon make you dry enough!" [3, p.57] is a metaphor and it sounds not as a promise, but as a threat and the whole passage is built on the play of the basic and transferred meanings of the phraseological unit "to make dry" the meanings of which are: "a usca" and "a lua cuvântul".

In some cases the author tries to make allusions on the base of certain phraseological units. For example, the allusion to the phraseological expression "to be close as an oyster" = to be secretive, reluctant to give information we could find in the following context:

e.g.: "Hold your tongue, ma!" said the young crab, a little snappishly. "You're enough to try the patience of an oyster!" [3, p.64].

The author also tries to play on the stable phraseological combination *to send in a bill* (*a trimite un cont*) and its homonymic form, the free combination *to send in a little Bill* (*a-l trimite în casă pe micul Bill*, Bill being the name of one of the characters). The play on words is based on the homonymy of the common and proper nouns and is built on the use of the capital letters and the article in the title of the Chapter IV *The Rabbit Sends in a Little Bill*.

Stylistic aimed deformation we could find in the described situation in which the expression "as sure as ferrets are ferrets" is used:

e.g.: *She'll get me executed, as sure as ferrets are ferrets!* (*cât ar face doi ori doi*) [3, p.66] The White Rabbit in this context has paraphrased the phraseological expression *as sure as death*, replacing the abstract noun "death" with a more concrete item from his usual surrounding: "ferret" – the most dangerous enemy of the rabbits. Altogether, we might conclude that in this situation as a structural model the author has used a more communicative and semi-humorous expression "as sure as eggs is eggs" with the same meaning.

Another stylistic deformation comes from the phraseological expressions "to go on a message" or "to run errands" which was turned by L. Carroll into "to be going messages", to underline the repeated nature of the action in the sentence:

e.g.: "How queer it seems," Alice said to herself, "to be going messages for a rabbit!" [3, p.67] A reduced variant of the phraseological expression *to grin like a Cheshire cat* is *it's a Cheshire cat* used in the sentence: **e.g.:** "Why your cat grins like that?" – "It's a Cheshire cat," said the Duchess, "and that's why [3, p.97].

The original phraseological unit means "to be all smiles" but the origin of this expression is not clear enough. There exist two variants:

- 1) An artist in Cheshire painted grinning lions on different posts;
- 2) At some times the heads of the Cheshire cheese were given the forms of a grinning cat.

In this case the author uses his beloved stylistic method: he "enlivens" the non-having an independent meaning the component of the phraseological combination and transforms it into a character of the story.

Further on we find the reduced form "they're both mad" which L. Carroll modified using the synonymic phraseological units:

- a) To be mad as a hatter;
- b) To be mad as a March hare, both meaning "to go mad".

These expressions were very popular in L. Carroll's time and he gave them a second life creating the characters of the Hatter and of the Rabbit/Hare. The origin of the phraseological expression "as mad as a March hare" goes to the fact that the month of March is the rutting season when hares go mad. Those who are considered "as mad as a March hare" are usually making crazy remarks.

The English proverb "*Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves*" got in L. Carroll's book "Alice in Wonderland" the changed form "*Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves*": *e.g.*: ...she added, "and the moral of that is – "Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves" [3, p.134].

It's interesting, that the Duchess's words nowadays are very often cited as a principle which should be taken into consideration in order to write good prose or poems.

The phraseological expression "to be suppressed" in the sentence:

e.g.: "Here the other guinea pig cheered, and was suppressed" = a fost impusă să tacă, i-au tăiat pofta să bată din palme [3, p.162], as we may observe, is a play on words based on the realization of the two meanings of the phraseological expression "*to be suppressed*":

- 1) A limita, a aduce la ordine, a trage la răspundere (very often used in newspapers); Alice often has encountered this expression but it wasn't clear to her at all;
- 2) A suprima (the main meaning) which the author uses with an invention proper only for him in this situation. Now the verb "to suppress" becomes understandable to Alice, because it associates in her consciousness with the well-known and full of meaning word "to press" – a apăsa.

In conclusion we might say that we should not decipher the text and the situations of the story to such an extent as it is done by some authors whose affirmations bare sometimes an extremely categorical character. The play on words used by L. Carroll and the deformations of the phraseological expressions which he has done for stylistic purposes may provoke our smile only in the case when we understand the essence; and the essence of the rest of the phenomenon we have tried to explain as well as we could, doing our utmost.

Many metaphorical and grammatical phraseological units have joined the professional speech and the literary language. All branches of the human activity possess their own vocabulary, their special terms, which are penetrating, especially in their figurative meaning, into the literary language.

Our language cannot always adequately reproduce and reflect life in its inexhaustible variety and all the thoughts and feelings. The literary language, whose capacity of word-formation is quite limited, is always ready to borrow already existing special terms and further to attach to them broader meaning. Phraseological units created by the people employed in different spheres of social activity, being short, colloquial and vivid, always can find application in the expressive speech making it original, peculiar and precise.

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