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PHONOGRAPHIC AND GRAPHOSTYLISTIC MECHANISMS OF CREATING LINGUISTIC ABSURDITY IN POSTMODERN FICTION

Abstract

This article explores the phonographic and graphostylistic mechanisms employed by postmodern authors to create linguistic absurdity in fiction, using phonetic and graphic variants. The analysis focuses on violations of phonetic and graphic norms that deviate from traditional literary conventions. At the phonographic level, the mechanisms for creating linguistic absurdity include sound imitation, alliteration, assonance, phonetic language play, and phonetic occasionalisms. These techniques result in unusual combinations of phonemes that contrast with accepted, stereotypical sound patterns. This generates a cacophony of strange sounds that violates the euphony of language, thereby creating an “estrangement effect”. Specific examples are provided to demonstrate how postmodern fiction utilizes absurd sound imitations, such as nonsensical words mimicking animal noises or physiological functions. Alliteration and assonance are used to reproduce unpleasant sounds typically avoided in traditional texts as those violating aesthetic norms. Phonetic occasionalisms open up diverse palettes of new, unregistered sound combinations for the reader. The graphostylistic mechanisms examined involve violating graphic norms through techniques, such as excessive variation of fonts, capitalization, and non-punctuated text organization. Textual visualization that disrupts typical graphic conventions is achieved through extra spacing between words/lines, unconventional paragraph divisions, inserted curly lines, and embedded text fragments in different styles. There is also an excessive accumulation of non-verbal graphics, such as drawings, diagrams, formulas, and symbols from other semiotic systems. Orthographic deformations, including reduplication, hyphenation, and author-created graphons (new graphic units) also contribute to the absurdist effect. Detailed examples illustrate how the accumulation of these phonographic and graphostylistic deviations generates graphic chaos that impairs readability. However, the article argues this is an intentional strategy by postmodern writers to create an absurdist literary experience that rejects conventions and engages the reader in exploring multiple possible interpretations of the fragmented, unconventional text.

Keywords: linguistic absurdity, graphic, grapheme, language play, linguography, phoneme, postmodern fiction, semantics, variant, violation.

Анотація

У статті досліджено фонографічні та графостилістичні механізми, які використовують постмодерністські автори для створення мовного абсурду в художній літературі. Аналіз зосереджено на порушеннях фонетичних і графічних норм від традиційних літературних конвенцій. На фонографічному рівні механізмами створення мовного абсурду є звуконаслідування, алітерація, асонанс, фонетична гра слів і фонетичні okazіonalіzmi. Такі прийоми спричиняють незвичні комбінації фонем, які контрастують із прийнятими стереотипними звуковими моделями. Це породжує какофонію дивних звуків, яка порушує милозвучність мови, створюючи ефект “одивнення”. Алітерацію й асонанс використовують для відтворення неприємних звуків, яких зазвичай уникають у традиційних текстах як таких, що порушують естетичні норми. Фонетичні okazіonalіzmi відкривають перед читачем різноманітні палітри нових, незареєстрованих звукосполучень. Розглянуті графостилістичні механізми передбачають порушення графічних норм за допомогою таких прийомів, як: надмірна варіативність шрифтів, капіталізація та непунктуаційна організація тексту. Текстова візуалізація, що руйнує типові графічні конвенції, створюється за допомогою додаткових інтервалів між словами/рядками, нетрадиційного поділу на абзаци, вставлених фігурних ліній, убудованих фрагментів тексту в різних стилях. Спостерігається надмірне накопичення невербальної графіки – малюнків,

діаграм, формул і символів з інших семіотичних систем. Орфографічні деформації (дублювання, переноси, авторські графони) також сприяють абсурдистському ефекту. Докладні приклади ілюструють, як накопичення цих фонографічних і графостилістичних відхилень породжує графічний хаос, що погіршує читабельність. Однак ця навмисна стратегія постмодерністських письменників спрямована на створення абсурдистського літературного досвіду, який відкидає конвенції і залучає читача до дослідження численних можливих інтерпретацій фрагментованого нетрадиційного тексту.

Ключові слова: мовний абсурд, варіант, графіка, графема, мовна гра, лінгвографія, фонема, постмодерністська художня література, семантика, порушення.

Introduction. Postmodern literature has long been recognized for its radical experimentation with language and form. Among the myriad techniques employed by postmodern authors, the manipulation of phonetic and graphic elements stands out as a particularly striking and disruptive strategy. This study focuses on the deliberate violations of phonetic and graphic norms in postmodern fiction, examining how these deviations generate absurd sound combinations and visual effects that challenge traditional literary conventions. The experimental nature of postmodern texts often manifests in unconventional phonetic arrangements and graphical presentations that go beyond mere stylistic choices. These techniques serve as mechanisms for deeper thematic and emotional expression, inviting readers to engage with the text in novel and often perplexing ways. By analyzing these phonographic and graphostylistic mechanisms, we can gain insight into the linguistic dimensions of what we term “linguistic absurdity” in postmodern literary texts (hereinafter referred to as PLTs).

Critical literature review. A careful analysis of contemporary English poetry through the prism of linguopoetics (Bechta, 2011) proves that phonetic techniques are especially evident in poetry, since the very form of the poem determines the choice of lexical means, primarily considering their phonological characteristics. However, researchers of postmodern prose texts (Babalyuk, 2009; Bieliekhova, 2004; Kondratenko, 2012; Koliasa, 2014, 2015; Korotkova, 2001) highly emphasize the additional stylistic load carried by phonetic expressive and pictorial means in texts of this type. These studies highlight how phonetic and graphic deviations in prose serve as aesthetic choices being mechanisms for deeper thematic and emotional expression.

Aim and objectives. The aim of this study is to analyze how violations of phonetic and graphic norms in postmodern fiction generate absurd sound combinations and visual effects that deviate from traditional literary conventions.

The objectives of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, it examines the employed phonostylistic mechanisms, such as sound imitation, alliteration, assonance, phonetic language play, and phonetic occasionalisms, which create unnatural phoneme combinations and cacophony within postmodern texts. Secondly, it investigates the utilized graphostylistic mechanisms, including violations of norms on font usage, capitalization, and punctuation; destruction of typical textual visualization through spacing, paragraph divisions, and embedded text styles; excessive use of non-verbal graphics; and orthographic deformations. Thirdly, it demonstrates how the accumulation of these phonographic and graphostylistic deviations generates graphic chaos and intentionally impairs readability. Finally, it analyzes how these unconventional techniques engage the reader in exploring multiple interpretations of the fragmented, absurdist postmodern text.

The significance of this research lies in its exploration of the experimental frontiers of postmodern literature. By violating established norms, postmodern authors challenge conventional reading practices and invite readers to participate actively in decoding and interpreting the absurd, fragmented narratives. Therefore, this study contributes to a deeper

understanding of the innovative strategies employed by postmodern writers to disrupt traditional literary forms and engage readers in unconventional ways.

Through a comprehensive analysis of phonographic and graphostylistic mechanisms in postmodern fiction, this research aims to shed light on the artistic and linguistic dimensions of linguistic absurdity, offering insights into the creative processes and aesthetic motivations that shape these avant-garde literary works.

Research methodology. The research employs a range of general linguistic methods, including structural (methods of oppositional, component, distributional analysis, direct components), and constructive methods, contextual-interpretive and linguistic-stylistic analysis, as well as quantitative analysis.

The structural method is implemented through oppositional, component, and distributional analysis, as well as the method of direct constituents. Oppositional analysis is used in the study of linguistic manifestations of linguistic absurdity (hereinafter referred to as LA) at different levels and the identification of semantically relevant differences in one differential feature while others are similar, i.e. opposition. Component analysis is a system of techniques for the linguistic study of word meanings, the essence of which is to split the meaning of a word into its constituent components, which are called semes, semantic multipliers and differential features. Distributional analysis aims at establishing the features and functional properties of a particular linguistic unit by determining the set of elements of the same level status (phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, etc.) associated with it in all possible contexts. The method of direct constituents is a set of procedures for representing the syntactic structure of a phrase or sentence in the form of a decomposition of the whole into its components, which can also be decomposed into components down to the level of final constituents. The contextual-interpretative method helps to identify key features of postmodern literary texts and to distinguish absurd text fragments.

At the phonographic level, the linguistic-stylistic analysis forms the basis for identifying stylistic means and techniques of LA manifestation in PTL in the field of traditional stylistics.

In the research, the methods of semantic-cognitive and poetic-cognitive modelling, based on the theory of mental spaces and the theory of conceptual integration, are used to identify the linguistic and cognitive mechanisms involved in the formation of PLT.

This comprehensive methodological approach ensures a thorough exploration of the stylistic features and linguistic mechanisms that define postmodern fiction's unique approach to creating linguistic absurdity.

Results and discussions. Phonostylistic mechanisms of creating linguistic absurdity in postmodern literary text involve phonetic techniques that violate stereotypical models of sound combination and are based on an unusual combination of phonemes due to the violation of the phonetic norm, creating a cacophony of strange sounds in PLT.

In modern English, as in any other language, there are certain models of sound organisation that contribute to the emergence of specific acoustic effects. In other words, there are stable patterns of combining and alternating sounds in their syntagmatic sequence, which lead to euphony and have already become a phonetic norm.

Phonostylistic studies show that melodious, euphonic speech typically features a predominance of voiced consonants, sonorants and a few voiceless consonants. Melodious lines usually reflect the beauty of the subject matter and convey the speaker's positive emotions.

In postmodernist works, both poetic and prose, according to the author's experimentation and individualism, which are here reduced to absurdity, we observe an unusual, somewhat "strange" or even "bizarre" combination of phonemes, each of which "expresses some

ambivalent feeling” of the author, and “no one can say what exactly” (Dolitsky, 1994). This deviation from phonetic norms is a hallmark of postmodern literature.

The result of the phonetic mechanisms of creating LA in PLT is phonetic occasionalisms, which open up an extremely diverse palette of unfamiliar sounds. The potential possibility of interpreting unusual phonetic combinations can be treated as the invention of a new unit “is not carried out in a vacuum”, but on the basis of “usual combinations and patterns of vowels and consonants that are acceptable in a particular language” (Koliasa, 2015).

At the phonographic level, mechanisms of creating LA in PLT destroy stereotypical models of sound combination, as they are based on an unusual combination of phonemes due to a violation of the phonetic norm. Examples include sound imitations such as *Leo! Leeolee* reflecting bird chirping; *Yummyyum, Womwom!* mimicking a cuckoo’s cawing; *megeggaggegg! Nannannanny!* resembling bleating (Milligan, 1996); and *mkgnao* and *mrkgnao* imitating purring (Dahl, 1983). The phonostylistic mechanisms of LA creation in PLT (sound imitation – 15%, alliteration – 20%, assonance – 27%, phonetic language play – 38%) result in phonetic occasionalisms that reproduce unpleasant sounds and are perceived as deviations from both phonetic and aesthetic norms.

Their absurdity lies in the fact that they are formed by non-stereotypical combinations of phonemes and contrast in form with the generally accepted ones. Let’s compare: *mew-mew* and the sounds /k/, /g/ (*mkgnao* and *mrkgnao*) in the purr of a cat; *tweet, cheep* and the sounds /l/, /əʊ/, /i:/ (*Leo! Leeolee!*) in the chirping of birds or cuckoo and the sounds /w/, /m/ (*Yummyyum, Womwom!*) in the cuckoo’s caw.

It is worth noting that the widespread use of various absurd sound imitations in PLT, such as *Poulaphouca Poulaphouca* for waterfall sounds (Barth, 2000) *flop, slop, slap* to imitate the sound of waves crashing on rocks; *schlepps* for the sound of tides (Barth, 2000); *seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss ooos* for rustling grass (reeds) on the shore is logically unjustified and leads to a cacophony that only makes it difficult to perceive the absurd and grotesque artistic world of PLT full of contradictions. In addition, the different principles of correlation between spelling and sound in English and Ukrainian not only complicate the understanding of the analysed phonetic combinations by non-native speakers, but also make it impossible to translate them adequately.

According to Cammaerts (2021), postmodern poetry may have little meaning, but it has “a lot of music”. Therefore, it appeals not only to the mind but also to the ear, because the most important task of the poet is to “write music with words”. Taking into account the stylistic analysis of the works of the genre under study, this statement is quite natural in postmodern prose texts, including PLT, where rather unusual phonetic experiments devoid of meaning have already become the norm. For example, in the text fragment below, the unknown dish “*Glop*” is a lexical innovation. However, it does not convey any lexical meaning recorded in the dictionary, is not explained by the context, and therefore only phonological characteristics created by alliteration are used to identify it:

Then they sat down and stared at the sloppy, slimy, sludgy, sticky, smelly, gooey, gluey, gummy, greasy, gloopy Glop (Simon, 2006).

Thus, the repetitions of the consonants *sl*, *st*, *sm* reproduce the sounds of something viscous and sticky. Repetitions of the consonants *g* and *gl* convey the sounds of unpleasant gurgling of something disgusting. This combination of consonants creates a phonetic disharmony and naturally disgusts the reader. The unpleasant sensation is reinforced by the convergence of ten epithets with similar meanings, such as *sloppy, slimy, sludgy, sticky, smelly, gooey, gluey, gummy, greasy, gloopy* which in this case, although unjustified, unduly emphasise the unpleasantness of the situation, over-emphasise the unattractive appearance

of the unknown dish, but do not carry any semantic load and rather serve as the author's mockery of the reader in the form of a language play.

In PLT texts, the mechanism of creating LA is actually a phonetic language play, in which sound expression is more important than semantic content. For example, in the text fragment below, the mechanism of creating LA is phonetic tautography, which unexpectedly breaks the textual fabric and serves, on the one hand, as an absurd phonetic combination of words with the letter F, and on the other hand, as an intellectual entertainment / riddle / puzzle for the reader: the principle of combining these words (except for the same initial letter), other phrases and the allusion of Farewell to Formalism to the famous novel by E. Hemingway's "Farewell to Arms":

F = fire and femaleness, fertilization and fetal life, fall from favor and father atonement.

Family firm finished; family infirmity to be continued.

Farewell to formalism.

Father unknown; father unknowing: Oh, Angela! (Barth, 2000)

The widespread use of phonetic techniques of assonance and alliteration in PLT contributes to the reproduction of unpleasant sounds that were usually not reflected in traditional literary texts, as they were perceived as a violation of not only the phonetic norm, but also the aesthetic one. Examples include sounds of physiological ailments of a person, such as coughing *blembles* (Coover, 2005), the feeling of nausea experienced by the hero when he learns that his wife is cheating on him: *A husky fifenote blew. Blew. Blue bloom is on the.* (Zipes, 1991, p. 215), nasal congestion: *I ab bost fod of kissig, dor ever washed id all that tibe...* (Barth, 2000, p. 65), releasing air (farting): *"Whizzpopping is a sign of happiness. It is music to our ears! You surely aren't telling me that a little whizzpopping is forbidden among human beans?"* (Dahl, 1982, p. 58), which is considered a norm and a sign of happiness among PLT characters; physical defects of a person, such as inarticulate gurgling articulated by a deaf-mute: *ggaghahest* (Barth, 2000, p. 350), speech signs of *schizophrenia* (perseveration), i.e. automatic meaningless repetition of a word: *And apologised for my apology ... And did, began to apologise, stopped that, reflected a moment, ... apologised again ... felt incongruity of my apology* (Barthelme, 1996a, p. 76).

In this example LA is realised via the repetition of the word "apologise" and its derivatives, which reproduce a lively, continuous speaking with a choked voice that fragments the stream of consciourness and allows us to reflect the most intimate movements of human thoughts. In addition, the intonation pattern of the above fragment includes a system of pauses, syntagmatic and logical accents, tempo modulation, and the melody of incompleteness, which are conveyed in writing by appropriate graphic means.

At the graphic level, the use of oppositional analysis made it possible to identify a number of graphic and stylistic means of creating LA in PLT. Among them there is the excessive use of traditional punctuation marks, which leads to the levelling of their functional load. For example, the graphic means of ellipsis in the text fragment below, due to its excessive use, no longer indicates the interruption of information, but rather its complete absence. For example:

"Vatricide. That crime of crimes. Well it doesn't look good for you, Bill. It doesn't look at all good for you."

SNOW WHITE THINKS: THE HOUSE

...WALLS...WHEN HE DOESN'T...

I'M NOT... IN THE DARK... SHOULDERS

...AFRAID...THE WATER WAS COLD

... WANT TO KNOW... EFORTLESSLY...

SNOW WHITE THINKS: WHY AM I ...
GLASS... HUNCHED AGAINST THE
WAL... INTELLIGENCE... TO RETURN
... A WALL... INTELLIGENCE... TO
RETURN... HE'S COLD... MIRROR...

“YOU have to learn to spell everything right,” Paul told Emily. “That is the first thing I found intolerable, in other countries” (Barthelme, 1996b, p. 172).

At first glance, the ellipsis in this text fragment traditionally indicates the omission of relevant lexical units, i.e., it reflects a partial interruption of the textual fabric. However, as a result of its excessive use, the analysed text fragment turns into a meaningless accumulation of *fragments of narrative sentences*: THE WATER WAS COLD..., WANT TO KNOW..., HE'S COLD..., and *negative sentences*: I'M NOT..., HE DOESN'T..., *interrogative sentences*: WHY AM I..., WHEN HE DOESN'T..., *parts of phrases*: WANT TO KNOW..., A WALL..., INTELLIGENCE..., TO RETURN and *even words*: WAL... that create LA at the graphic level and are generally perceived as a fragmented, “torn” stream of the heroine’s consciousness.

The unharmoniousness created by the above phonetic mechanisms as a manifestation of LA in PLT at the phonographic level often emphasises the complexity and drama of the depicted, the lack of harmony and beauty in it, which is a key feature of postmodern reality in general and the absurd and grotesque world reflected in PLT in particular (Babelyuk et al., 2021).

Taking into account the specifics of the implementation of LA in PLT at the phonographic level, in our work we distinguish the following graphostylistic mechanisms of its creation: 1) violation of the graphic norm of the use of graphic means (font variation – 24 %, capitalisation – 4 %, non-punctuation text organisation – 2 %); 2) textual visualisation that destroys the typical graphic image of the text (extra intervalisation – 12 %, occasional paragraph division – 10 %, concrete text – 2 %, fragments of texts of a different style – 8 %); 3) excessive accumulation of non-verbal graphics (drawings – 11%, diagrams – 3%, formulas – 1%, signs of other semiotic systems – 7%); 4) orthographic deformation of the word (reduplication – 2%, hyphenation – 2%, author’s graphics – 3%, graphon – 9%) (see Fig. 1).

These mechanisms collectively contribute to the chaotic, fragmented aesthetic of postmodern literary texts.

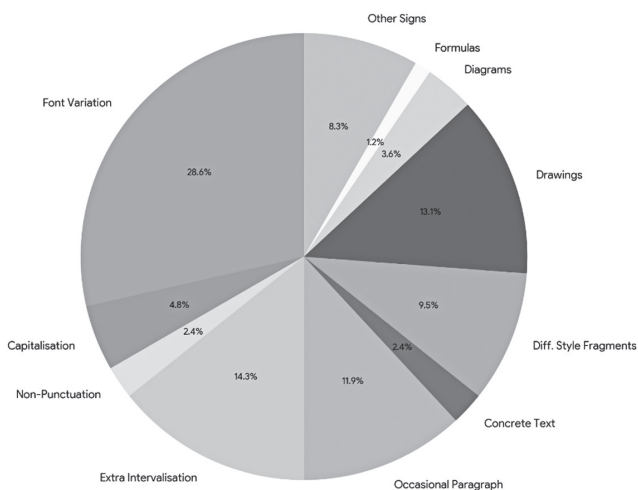


Fig. 1. Graphostylistic mechanisms of creation of LA in PLT (phonographic level)

Thus, the stylistic analysis of the linguistic realisation of LA in PTL at the phonographic level allows us to assert that the phonostylistic mechanisms of LA creation in PTL are sound imitation, alliteration, assonance, phonetic language play, phonetic occasionalisms, which lead to phonetic deviations when their new sound expression contrasts with the accepted, stereotypical one. They violate the euphony of the language and thus create the stunning effect and cacophony of sounds.

Conclusions and implication of further research. Traditionally, graphic stylistic means include such punctuation and spelling devices as exclamation marks, question marks, dashes, periods, ellipses, quotation marks, italics, capital letters, graphs, etc., which are used to visually influence the reader.

In the context of our study, we understand graphostylistic mechanisms of creating LA in PLT as a set of means and techniques of game graphemics that create and visualise graphic chaos in PLT, which precedes the comprehension of their meaning even before reading, by violating the graphic norm. Reflecting a new graphic consciousness, they force the reader to get used to the deliberate accumulation of absurdly heterogeneous graphic elements, not to improve the text's graphics and readability, but for the sake of entertainment, which only complicates the visual perception of PLT in general.

As part of the current trends in the development of experimental literature, postmodernist authors create their own original combinations of graphic means of various kinds, develop the latest graphic techniques that are in tune with postmodern nonlinear writing, resorting to unjustified play with fonts, complete rejection of punctuation, replacement of words with graphic symbols, excessive use of intervals, spaces.

Future research should focus on comparative analyses across different postmodern fiction works and authors to identify broader patterns and unique innovations in phonographic and graphostylistic techniques. Diachronic studies tracing the evolution of these phonographic and graphostylistic deviations across literary movements can map postmodern innovations against prior avant-garde traditions. The primary perspective involves expanding the linguistic analysis to include more postmodern works, authors and contexts, as well as interdisciplinary inquiries into the motivations, impacts and interrelationships of these unconventional literary techniques.

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