Cathy Wilcox meets the phrasal lexicon

Creative deformation of phrasal lexical items for humorous effect*

Koenraad Kuiper

Phrasal lexical items, since they are phrases, may exhibit a range of idiosyncrasies which single word lexical items cannot (Burger 2003; Moon 1998; Wray 2002). These idiosyncrasies will be outlined in this chapter because they provide resources for artistic deformation (Gläser 1995; Naciscione 2001). Such artistic deformation will be illustrated by reference to the work of the gifted cartoonist, Cathy Wilcox of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Humour, it may be supposed, can result from the cognitive dissonance arising from a disjunction between the expected conventional properties which a PLI has in its lexical entry and which are accessed when the item is recognised, and the unexpected twist given to one or more of such properties by the cartoonist.

'Conventional, formulaic, and memorised expressions of all kinds play a large role in language play and linguistic creativity. The innumerable phrases known to fellow speakers are alluded to, toyed with, and varied just a little for emphasis and effect. Such phrases arise within families, organizations and groups of all kinds. Humorists and cartoonists draw on them constantly and journalists rely on them as "eye catchers" in their story titles.'   (Van Lancker 1987: 100)

1. Introduction

Phrasal lexical items (PLIs) are lexical items which have phrase structure, as contrasted with single word lexical items which have word structure. For example,

dog-eared is a compound adjective and thus a word while *a dog's breakfast* is a lexicalised phrase. Like all lexical items, PLIs are coined at a particular point in time and may come to be lexicalised when some use is found for them. It might be that they express a complex predicate such as, for example, *make allowances for*, or that they perform a useful social role, such as, for example, *Make sure you … .* Unlike single word coinages, however, potential PLI coinages occur almost every time someone constructs a new phrase or clause since any phrase which is uttered is potentially a new PLI.[1] Creativity in terms of the coinage of new PLIs is, therefore, hard to study. As Noam Chomsky has tirelessly pointed out, speakers are being creative every time they put a new phrase or sentence together. However, that creativity is not in itself intentional.

If we make a distinction between intentional and unintentional creativity then there are certainly PLI coinages which are intended to be creative. In domains such as new product onomastics or slogans and pop song lyrics it may be possible to discern an intent to be creative. Frequently, this is manifest in the coined word or phrase(s) being repeated so many times by its creator(s) that it becomes lexicalised, sometimes reposing in our mental lexica 'like a hectic'. John Lennon's *Give peace a chance* and McDonalds' *You deserve a break today* or *I'm lovin' it* come, regrettably, to mind.

In this chapter another form of lexical creativity will be explored, namely the creativity which takes an existing lexical item and performs an operation on it which is not conventionally permitted. Lexical items, since they are stored and retrieved from the mental lexicon, generate stable expectations on the part of their users as to what may conventionally be done with them. *Finnegan's Wake* shows that these stable expectations may be tampered with in a variety of ways. Such word play involves a form of intentional lexical creativity.

The approach to PLIs adopted here is thus primarily psycholinguistic because PLIs are stored and retrieved from speakers' mental lexica. Whatever properties PLIs have, they have on that account. Whatever properties are revealed by their use in texts result from the interplay between the items accessed from the mental lexicon and speech production or perception processes in context. The metal representation of PLIs thus has primacy. In production and perception, where the standard form PLI is used as a template for modification, that template is the set of stable expectations against which lexical play is to be seen.

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1.   I ignore, for the purposes of this chapter, the possibility that PLIs are subject to constraints on their structural representations (Kuiper and Everaert 2000).

2.   Potential locations for word play in PLIs

PLIs have potential idiosyncrasy in a number of areas of their representations. We could see these as rigidities of various kinds and thus potentially a source of 'artistic deformation' (Mel'c&uk 1995: 213–4).[2] Such deformation is local in space and time. Therefore PLI deformation has a unique creative aspect. Being local it is normally context dependent. For example, subeditors who create headlines based on PLIs normally use the particular changes once only.

The approach to be taken here is to enumerate the potentially idiosyncratic properties of PLIs and then to see which of them are further available for humorous manipulation, after which we will see how one cartoonist actually does manipulate them. This is thus a theory-driven approach as compared with studies which provide taxonomies of humour based on the study of examples (Alexander 1997; Chiaro 1992).

In order to drive our study from its origins in the linguistic resources of the phrasal lexicon, it is necessary first to understand what the relevant properties of PLIs are. It needs to be supposed, in the following discussion, that each PLI is a lexical item with its own entry in the mental lexicon of a speaker who knows it. Such knowledge is potentially complex. Furthermore, not all native speakers of a language who know a particular PLI will necessarily know it in exactly the same way, i.e. some will know it as having properties which other speakers will not (Fraser 1970: 23; Mel'c&uk 1995: 171); but for every speaker there must be the mental equivalent of what Naciscione (2001: 20) terms, the PLI's *base form*. Without such a base form a number of kinds of creative lexical play could not be recognised. That they are, corroborates the claim that PLIs have base forms.

This leads to two more observations. The first is that a speaker must know the PLI in order to be able to perceive artistic deformation of it. That seems obvious but it needs saying. All intentional deformation has as its intent that a perceiver perceive the difference(s) between the base form and its variant. That can only happen if the perceiver knows the PLI and its base form and can therefore access it from their mental lexicon. For this reason many second language learners cannot perceive this kind of lexical play since they do not know the PLIs on which it is based. I shall term this *the accessability condition*.

The second observation is that, if the base form of a PLI is to be recognisable perceptually, then any artistic deformation of it must be such that a perceiver who knows the base form can retrieve it from his or her mental lexicon. To put it dif-

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2.   See Naciscione (2001) for a discussion of various approaches to such manipulation.

ferently, after artistic deformation there must remain sufficient perceptual cues to allow the PLI to be accessed. I shall term this *the recoverability condition*.

2.1   Idiosyncratic properties of PLIs

To see what those perceptual cues might be requires a listing of the idiosyncratic properties by which PLIs are recognised and which form their mental representation.

PLIs are phrases of which speakers know at least two of the words. We can term these words **lexicalised constituents** and define such a constituent as one where the lexical content of the constituent is given in the lexical entry of the PLI (Verstraten 1992). For example, in the *let alone* construction discussed by Fillmore, Kay, & O'Connor (1988) the words *let alone* are lexicalised constituents of the construction which I take to be a PLI. Testing for this property is often done by substituting for a lexicalised constituent (Gläser 1986: 20, 1995; Verstraten 1992: 27). If the substitution results in the phrase no longer being recognisable as a PLI then this shows the original phrase was a PLI.

PLIs may also contain a **bound word** (Aronoff 1976). These are single words which occur only within a PLI. For example *take umbrage at* contains the word *umbrage* which cannot occur freely, and occurs in no other PLI. In German these are termed *unikale Komponenten* (Soehn 2003).

Since PLIs are phrases where not every word must needs be specified, PLIs can contain **slot**s (Koopman and Sportiche 1991; Williams 1994). A slot in the syntactic representation of a PLI is a position in the structure which requires to be 'filled' with other lexical items but which is not filled in the representation of the item in the lexicon. For example, in the PLI *take NP to task*, the NP is an obligatory complement of the verb which must be filled for the phrase to be used grammatically but the lexical content of the NP is not given in the lexical entry of the PLI.

Sometimes slots also have an additional **slot restriction**. While the syntactic category of a slot constrains what it may contain syntactically, there are frequently other constraints of an arbitrary or semantic kind. For example, some slots must be filled with animate or human NPs when that is not an inherent requirement of the verb of which the NP is a complement, i.e. not the result of the s selection properties of the verb (Chomsky 1996: 54). Again examples of slot restrictions are given in Fillmore et al. (1988) for the *let alone* construction.

Some PLIs have **optional constituents** which may or may not be used. They are part of what the speaker knows when (s)he knows the PLI but their use is optional. For example, in the English PLI *breathe one's last breath* the final noun

is optional; speakers can and do just say *breathe one's last*. Note that optional constituents are not just adjuncts which may be added freely. The form of words is particular and is part of what native speakers know of the particular PLI.

In some PLIs there appears to be more than one lexical item functioning in the same position. *To be in a bad mood* is equivalent to *being in a bad temper*. It seems that *mood* and *temper* function as alternative last nouns in this PLI. But there are no other possible nouns here that are 'known' as part of knowing the PLI. These two thus constitute a **selection set**. Selection sets only occur where the PLI is semantically and pragmatically equivalent regardless of which member of the set is used.

Some PLIs will take freely inserted adjunct constituents. Others will not. This can be termed the PLIs' **modifiability** (Nicolas 1995). For example, one can *get annoyed* or *get very annoyed* but one cannot modify the dismissive PLI *Get lost!* to *Get very lost!*

PLIs have greater or lesser degrees of syntactic **flexibility** under movement, supposing a theory of syntax which allows movement. Classically the PLI *kick the bucket* will not passivise (Nunberg, Sag, & Wasow 1994).

Restricted collocations occur (Mackin 1978; Mel'c&uk 1998). For example, if one wishes to use a bus as a means of public transport, one is said to *catch the bus* and then *get on the bus*. One does not trap the bus or get in the bus. Restricted collocations involve preferential selection of word combinations where such combinations are arbitrary. They may also be idiomatic, i.e. not semantically compositional. Catching the bus is, in some sense, idiomatic but getting on the bus could be seen quite literally to be placing one's feet on the floor of the bus or oneself on its seats. Wine is (classically) either white or red; it is not ever purple or light green regardless of the truth conditions of these colours in collocation with *wine*. *To the best of one's abilities* is what English speakers say rather than *at the best of one's abilities*. In terms of their semantic properties neither preposition is preferable. Both create semantically well-formed and appropriate compositional meanings in this construction. Yet one is lexicalised as a restricted collocation. The other is not.

If the meaning of the whole PLI is a compositional function of the meaning of its constituent parts then it is fully compositional. Thus PLIs with this property will have all the possible meanings available from the semantic interpretation of the senses of their constituents. For example, the checkout farewell, have a nice day is fully compositional but is a PLI.

A lexical item which is non-compositional in its meaning, i.e. in which the meaning of the whole is not a predictable semantic function of its constituents words is **idiomatic**.

It is possible for a PLI to be compositional in that the meaning of the whole is a compositional function of the meaning of its constituents, but for not all the possible readings to be available in the lexicon. For example, a *political party* could be a social occasion which is political, but in its lexicalised form it is an organisation which functions to select and have elected members of a legislature. This is one of the possible compositional meanings of *political party*, but only one, given that *party* is polysemous. It is thus **selectively compositional**.

In some PLIs only one of the words has an idiomatic sense, i.e. a sense that it does not have when on its own. This sense only exists in combination with the other words in a particular PLI. Such PLIs are **unilaterally idiomatic**.

In some PLIs more than one word has a sense that it has only in the PLI. For example a *red herring* is neither red nor a herring, i.e. both words have special senses that they have nowhere else but in construction within this PLI (Weinreich 1969). Such PLIs are bilaterally idiomatic.

It seems important in the discussion of the semantic properties of PLIs to clearly differentiate these from the syntactic properties of the same PLI. The work of Mel'c&uk, as exemplified in work such as Mel'c&uk (1995), makes it clear that PLIs can, in many cases, be seen as mapping semantic predicates idiosyncratically onto verbs for specific arguments. So, for example, the weather is forecast, rather than predicted.

The properties above relate to the formal properties of a PLI in terms of its syntax and semantics but many PLIs also have conventional conditions of use. A **formula** can be regarded as a PLI with contextually restricted conditions of use. For example, *I'm sorry* is a PLI which is used to offer an apology. Speech act theory provides examples of formulae and subclassifications of types of usage conditions. However this is just a beginning. Every small scale ritual tends to be accompanied by formulae: cabin crew on aeroplanes use them, '*What would you like to drink, Sir/Madam?*' Flight crew use them: '*This is your captain speaking.*'

2.2   Creative artistic deformation of PLIs

It is now possible to survey which of the above properties is available for artistic deformation.[3] Since PLIs have syntactic structure, that may be deformed, for instance by adding a modifier where conventionally the PLI is not permitted to take such modifiers. For example the PLI *as scarce as hen's teeth* cannot have the modifier *red* added before *hen* or the word *white* before *teeth* however appropri-

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3. We will only survey deformation of those PLI properties which result from their being PLIs.

ate these adjectives might otherwise be. The semantic properties of a PLI may be independently deformed. For example, a lexicalised constituent of a PLI may be semantically ambiguous in the general case but have only one reading in the PLI. The PLI may be re-contextualised in such a way that the other reading becomes accessible. In many instances, however, both kinds of deformation may occur together. A pun created by the substitution of a homophone for a lexicalised constituent of a PLI has both structural and semantic effects. As Chiaro (1992) suggests, many of these kinds of deformation are closely paralleled by kinds of slips of the tongue.[4] The leading hypothesis of what follows is that, in general, artistic deformation will be of this kind.

2.2.1 *Phonological deformation*
It is possible to create phonological deformation through substitution and exchanges in the same way as these are found is slips of the tongue. Spoonerisms are a classic example in which the onsets of stressed syllables are exchanged.

2.2.2 *Structural deformation*
a.   Lexicalised constituent substitution. Lexicalised constituents might be substituted for. For example, the clause *It takes a thief to catch a thief* might have the word *thief* substituted for by *cop*. Recall that a crucial aspect of such deformation, as with all the other processes to be outlined below, is that the original PLI must still be identifiable or else the deformation is not identifiable as such. For example, if one substituted the word *bus* for the word *cake* in the PLI *to take the cake,* the original PLI would not be accessed by any hearer. Instead, if the word *biscuit* were substituted for *cake* and the PLI was used in a context where it was clearly the speaker's intent that the phrase should be taken as an expression of astonishment, the substitution could then be seen as a kind of lexical play. That rests on the fact that *biscuit* and *cake* are co-hyponyms, whereas *bus* has no relationship with the PLI's lexicalised constituent *cake* for which it has been substituted.

In this regard, puns can be seen as being of two kinds; either a lexical substitution of a homonym (homophone or homograph) has taken place, or a non-conventional sense of a polysemous lexicalised constituent within a PLI is accessed. I will suppose that, in every case, some preferred sense or lexical item has been substituted for the one in the PLI. There are clearly complexities here that have to

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4.   See Kuiper (2004) for some examples of PLI slips which parallel cases of the artistic deformation of PLIs. Note that not all slip types are plausible conscious artistic deformations and so not all slip types will be used in this study. For example, anticipation and perseveration slips arise as the result of activation patterns which are unlikely to be replicated as a conscious process, while metathesis and exchanges such a Spoonerism can be.

do with the accessing of lexical items and word senses in the mental lexicon. Since this chapter deals with the way in which the properties of PLIs are utilised, such complexities will be ignored.

Substituting for a bound word would normally yield a freely formed phrase since the rest of the phrase would give no clue that the word substituted for was a bound word. For example if one substituted the word *offence* for *umbrage*, *take umbrage at* would not be recoverable. Hence such a form of lexical substitution is unlikely in the kind of lexical creativity under discussion here.

The same holds for addition to a lexical selection set. Such a creative addition can essentially be seen as a lexical substitution for all the members of the set. Here again the recoverability of the PLI may be hampered. For example, if one substituted *equilibrium* for *cool/rag/temper* in to *lose one's cool/rag/temper* the PLI would not be recoverable. But of one substituted *cloth*, there is potential recoverability on the basis of the fact that *rag* is unilaterally idiomatic in this PLI and in its literal sense it is semantically closely related to *cloth*. That allows for recoverability of *rag* in the appropriate context.

Optional lexicalised constituents provide little opportunity for artistic deformation since any lexical substitution in an optional constituent would likely lead to it being read as a normal adjunct.

Lexical substitution may be further examined in terms of the characteristics of the lexicalised constituent and what is substituted for it. A number of characteristics of the word might be similar or related. For example, they might rhyme or be synonyms and so forth.

Since restricted collocation is a kind of minimal idiosyncrasy for a PLI, substituting for either of the words which are involved in such a collocation is likely to be perceived as non native-like selection (Pawley & Syder 1983). For example, the substitution of *accept* for *take* in the PLI *take offence* would probably not be taken as a form of artistic deformation. A native speaker would generally know that the conventionally prescribed verb is *take* and so recoverability can be maintained.

b.   Lexical exchanges. Some PLIs allow for words of the same syntactic category to be exchanged. For example the proverb *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.* might have its nouns exchanged to read *A bird in the bush is worth two in the hand*.

c.   Violating slot restrictions. While filling in, say, a noun phrase in an open slot in a PLI would not yield anything remarkable, breaching arbitrary slot restrictions in a PLI would. Take, for example, the PLI *take NP to task*. The noun phrase slot has the conventional restriction that it can only be a human NP. If one inserted

an inanimate NP, say, *the rock*, this would be akin to the violation of a selectional restriction. In other cases, slots are restricted in terms of co-reference. Many possessive PLIs have arbitrary restrictions on their antecedent co-reference. For example, in *get NP's goat* the goat which is being got must not be co-referential with the subject of the verb *get*. So the sentence *Andrea got her goat* cannot be read as involving the subject of the PLI in question.

d.   *Modifying unmodifiable PLIs.* If a PLI is conventionally unmodifiable then it can be modified as a form of artistic deformation. For example, indicating that someone is *a moderately bad egg* could be seen as a form of artistic deformation.

e.   *Transforming inflexible PLIs.* One could also transform an inflexible PLI, provided the recoverability condition was met. For example, in a context where it was clear that the death of a person was involved, one could indicate that *the bucket was kicked by old uncle Maurice* which involves passivising *kick the bucket,* a PLI that conventionally does not allow passivisation. But if one clefts *take for granted* as in *Granted for he certainly was not taken* then the resulting construction is barely recognisable as a form of *take for granted* and thus on the border of irrecoverability.

f.   *Blending two PLIs.* Sometimes two PLIs are semantically related and this allows for them to be blended. For example, *cross that bridge when NP come(s)* to it and *burn NP's bridges* can be blended *to burn that bridge when NP comes to it*.

g.   *Foregrounding structural ambiguity.* PLIs can be syntactically ambiguous (Alexander 1997:42ff.). However, conventionally only one of the possible readings is normally available. In such a case the ambiguity may be foregrounded by artistic deformation. For example, the PLI *hail-fellow-well-met* is conventionally used as a pre-nominal modifier. But suppose it were written *Hail, fellow. Well met.* Then an alternative parsing of the phrase has been foregrounded without the form of words being altered.

Not all of these options are mutually exclusive. It is possible to perform both a lexical substitution and transform an inflexible PLI at the same time. Some of the humour illustrated below shows multiple structural deformations.

2.2.2 *Semantic deformation*

a.   *Literalising of idiomatic readings.* PLIs may be idiomatic in whole or in part as we saw earlier. Various means are available to bring to mind the literal sense of either one of the lexicalised constituents which are conventionally metaphorical, or of the whole PLI idiom (Alexander 1997). For example, the PLI *raining cats and dogs* can have attention drawn to its literal meaning by lexical substitution as

in *raining moggies and hounds*. Speaking of his intimations of the whereabouts of Brünhilde, Siegfried could say that *a little bird told me* which, in Wagner's opera, is literally the case. Such literalising is a function of substitution within the analysis conducted here. Usually if a lexicalised constituent is a metaphor that has been literalised, the whole PLI is then also reparsed in a literal sense.

b.   *Pun on a constituent lexeme.* PLIs often contain lexemes which are polysemous but which in the PLI have only one reading. By providing a targeted context the unconventional sense can be foregrounded. Conventionally, *being left speechless* involves being bereft of speech, but a speaker who has left his or her notes behind is also left speechless since the word *speech* is ambiguous as between the power to speak and a public address.

Puns, as suggested above, can be forced through the use of homonyms in lexical substitutions. For instance, by substituting the word *soul* for the word *sole* one can indicate that an elderly jazz singer is the soul survivor of a group. Such puns are common in newspaper word play (Alexander 1997; Cowie 1991, 1998).

The relationships between structural and semantic deformation are not mutually exclusive. While a structural deformation may not have a semantic effect, it often will, particularly in cases where the intent is to create humour.

3.   Word play in a corpus of cartoons by Cathy Wilcox

While all of the above options appear to be available, it is not necessarily the case that all are equally likely to lead to humour or that, even when they are, a humorist will be equally drawn to all of them. Particular humorists may prefer some kinds of deformation to others. What follows aims at two goals. The first is to illustrate how an artist might use artistic deformation of PLIs for humorous effect. In place of an inductive approach this will be done deductively by allowing the analysis to proceed in a resource-based way from the above possibilities for artistic deformation. The second goal is to provide a model of the way in which a particular humorist exploits the resources of the phrasal lexicon. The leading hypothesis is that such exploitation differs from one humorist to another and from one medium to another. We would suppose that Cathy Wilcox's cartoon art differs in this respect from that of Giles or Gary Larson and that the humour of Wallace and Gromit differs from that of the Muppet Show.

Cathy Wilcox is an award-winning Australian cartoonist whose work is to be found in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *The Age*. The data for this study is the complete set of cartoons from her collection (Wilcox 1991). Only those cartoons were selected where there was clear reference to one or more PLIs; those where

Table 1. Number of PLIs per cartoon

Number of PLIs	Instances
1 per cartoon	73
2 per cartoon	14
3 per cartoon	3
Total number of PLIs	110

such reference was evident were then coded for the various artistic deformations that they had undergone.

Cartooning is a medium which has its own potential for PLI humour in that the PLI must normally be in a caption, in the balloon text of the characters or both, while the drawing can shed a contextual light on the (very brief) text(s). There is a substantial tradition of word play in cartoons. *Punch* and the *New Yorker* both publish cartoons of this kind. In one New Yorker cartoon two men are sitting behind identical desks facing one another on opposite sides of an otherwise featureless office. One says to the other, *'One day you will be sitting where I am now sitting.'* Conventionally this PLI is used by a senior member of an institutional hierarchy to a junior member of the same hierarchy as a way of indicating that the junior is on his way up the institutional ladder. However, the featureless office invites the statement to be taken literally and, since one cannot see any difference between the situation of the two men, one is likely to examine the nature of promotion. On the front cover of *Punch* a doctor is writing a script for a Japanese patient who is dressing behind a screen. The doctor says *'It's all right, Mr Hayakawa. I'll just give you something to open your bowels'*. Mr Hayakawa has just produced a samurai sword and appears to be going to commit harakiri. In both cases a PLI is being literalised.

The Wilcox corpus consists of 240 PLIs of which 90 contained reference to one or more PLIs. The rest also involve humour based on varieties of word play but these lie outside the scope of this chapter.

3.1   Phonological deformation

There are four cases of phonological deformation in the data. Three involve exchanges. In one a dog is leaning on a crutch and the caption reads *The leaning piece of towser* where the exchange source is *the leaning Tower of Pisa*. In a second, one cow is saying to the other *I am just a tense simmental fool* where the exchange source is *I'm just a sentimental fool*. In a third an approaching ocean liner named HMS Pinafore is hailed from a small boat with the words, *'Your ship is slowing.'* This last exchange is a Spoonerism.

Table 2. Substitutions

Number of substitutions/cartoon	Total	%
single substitution	39	73.6
double substitution	10	18.9
triple substitution	3	5.7
quadruple substitution	1	1.9
Number of substitutions	72	
Number of cartoons containing substitutions	53	

Table 3. Relationship between lexical items

Type of relationship	Number of instances	% of insertions
homonymy	39	54.2%
homophony	39	54.2%
homography & homophony	26	36.1%
homograph only	0	0%
paronymy	21	29.2%
co-hyponymy	2	2.8%
antonymy	1	1.4%
same semantic/pragmatic field	1	1.4%
syntactic	2	2.8%
none	6	8.3%

Phonological addition occurs in a cartoon showing a cow on a hillside with a caption reading *A ruminant with a view*. This latter case can also be seen as a lexical substitution, in which case it is a malapropism.

The next set involve structural deformation (and possible attendant semantic effects).

3.2   Lexical substitutions

Of the 90 cartoons containing a PLI, 53 contained one or more substitutions for a total of 72 substitutions.

One of the more ingenious cases of substitution is a cartoon showing a mother, father and small child around the dinner table. The caption is *Nuclear family.* The child asks '*What's for DNA*?'. Here the substitution is the acronym *DNA* for the word *dinner*. In Australian English these are close to homophonous. The mother replies, '*You're just like your father.*' picking up the DNA substitution and getting an ambiguity as to whether the child has the same DNA as his father or whether that is what the father always asks at dinner time. I take it that the word

Table 4. Exchanges

Type	Instances
Spoonerism	1
Syllabic exchanges	2
Lexical exchanges	2
Total exchanges	5

nuclear in the PLI *nuclear family* has the conventional sense 'parents plus children' but has been substituted for by the word *nuclear* with the sense 'pertaining to the cell nucleus'.[5]

Lexical substitutions also allow one to examine the relationship between the original word and its substitute. Here the relationship was usually homonymous. Where the substitute was also a homophone one has a clear case of punning. Where the phonological relationship is close, i.e. when the words are paronyms (Attardo 1994), the closeness allows for the recoverability condition to be met, thus producing a near pun.

A typical example of lexical substitution involving a phonological relationship in a PLI is a cartoon in which the male protagonist says, '*What say we burn some hedges?*' The substitution here is that *bridges* has been substituted for by *hedges*. Both words are disyllabic and they share the coda of their first syllable and all of their second syllable. The female protagonist then says, '*Sterling idea.*' alerting us to the ambiguity of *hedge* as between a physical entity and a financial institution.

Homophony without homography is found in cases such as a cartoon where two men are on board a speeding boat. One says, '*I'm afraid I've thrown away the bits that slow us down.*' The other replies, '*Them's the brakes.*'

Semantic relationships are created when a substitute is, for example, a converse as in a cartoon showing the start of a race at a dog track where one hound says to the other, '*This is where the buck starts.*'

Syntactic relationships occur in these cartoons when one pronoun is substituted for another, as in a case where *your* is substituted for by *my* in the Muir and Nordenesque Mae West misquotation, '*Is that a gun in my socket or are you just pleased to seize me?*' which shows a soldier placing the muzzle of a rifle in the speaker's eye.

In some cases, for example where there are PLI blends, the substitutions have no individual relationship. Here the relationship often arises from the context. For example a dog is scratching itself and the caption reads *Scratch and smell*. Here the PLI target is *Scratch and win*, which is a game of chance.

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5. Whether these are two senses of one word or two different words, i.e. homonyms, is not pertinent to the argument.

3.3 *Lexical exchanges*

Five of the 90 cartoons contain exchanges. Two of these are lexical. In one, one sheep says to the other, *'Do you know "Click go the shears"?'* The other replies, *'No, but if you baa a few hums …'* where the exchange source is *hum a few bars*. In another, two dogs are bemoaning the state of urban living. One says to the other, *'This dog's going to the country.'* Here the exchange source is *This country is going to the dogs*.

3.4 Violating slot restrictions

There are three cases which can be interpreted this way. The phrasal verb *let NP out*, when its complement is a domestic pet means that the pet is to be allowed/made to leave the house; when its slot is a garment it means that the garment is to be made larger. In the cartoon the husband, in bed with his wife with a large cat sitting on the bed, asks, *'Didn't you let that cat out?'* The wife replies, *'No dear, I just bought a bigger one.'*

The phrasal verb *NP go off* has two sets of slot restrictions; if the NP is food then it means the food has become unfit to eat and smells; if it is an explosive then it means that the explosive has exploded. One cartoon shows a woman bending over a fish. She sniffs and says, *'I think this fish has gone off.'* In the next frame the fish has exploded and her face and hands are covered with black soot.

3.5 Adding a modifier where none is conventionally permitted

No cases were found.

Figure 1

3.6   Transforming a frozen PLI

One case only occurs where the one hound says to the other, *'This is where the buck starts.'* The canonical form of the source PLI is *The buck stops here.*

3.7   PLI blends

There were four PLI blends. In one *The Lone Ranger* was blended with *loan shark* to make *The lone shark*. In another *The Bermuda triangle* was blended with *Bermuda shorts* to give *The Bermuda shorts*.

3.8   Structural re-analysis

There are nine cases where a non conventional structural representation of a PLI is foregrounded. *The Queen's English* comes up for re-analysis in a cartoon in which the lady says, *'I was taught the Queen's English.'* Her disreputable-looking male interlocutor replies, *'I already knew she was.'*

The following cases involve semantic deformation (much of which arises from structural deformation)

3.9   Literalising the sense of a metaphor within a PLI

There are seven cases of punning using this device. At a bar a gentleman asks a lady, *'What do you do for a crust?'* The lady replies, *'Eat out the soft bit.'* Note that literalising one word in a PLI usually involves reparsing the meaning of the whole PLI.

3.10   Literalising the sense of a figurative PLI

There are eighteen such cases. In many cases where an individual substitution has taken place the reading of the whole PLI has become literal. A brain surgeon holding up the whole of a brain says to an assistant, *'This is the stuff that dreams are made of.'* A man delivering a box of underpants to a prison says to the guard at the gate, *'200 pairs of Y fronts for maximum security, Sir.'*

3.11   Calques and other paraphrases

There is one ingenious case of a loan translated PLI. The lady asks an academic-looking gentleman, 'Do you speak Latin?' The gentleman replies, '*Pontifex catholicus est?*' The latter is a loan translation of *Is the pope a catholic?*

In another cartoon, the PLI *rose-tinted glasses/spectacles* is paraphrased as *pink contact lenses*.

3.12   Pragmatic incongruity

Many PLIs have conventional conditions of use which can be foregrounded by placing the PLI in an unconventional context. For example, under the caption *Humane lobster cooking* a chef is looking into a boiling pan saying '*I hear what you're saying.*' Many of the cartoons also show unconventional contexts alongside other verbal deformations. In one a hunter in pith helmet holding a gun asks a lion, '*Why won't you talk to me?*' The lion replies, '*You've hurt my pride.*' The pun on *pride* exists alongside the pragmatic incongruity of a hunter asking a lion why the lion won't talk to him. The pragmatic incongruity is partly occasioned by the pun to come.

3.13   Inferred PLIs

In some measure any PLI which has been artistically deformed must be inferred and accessed from the mental lexicon on the basis of what remains after the deformation. However, in the majority of cartoons, a PLI is directly quoted in whole or in part. Occasionally, however, the PLI must be largely inferred in that it is not stated but just hinted at. There are four such cases among the PLIs found in the cartoons. In one ingenious case one snake is saying to another which has a large bulge in its middle and a dummy in its mouth, '*Spit it out, Bill, that's only the garnish.*' The only word of the PLI *spit the dummy* which is overt is *spit*. The dummy can be seen in the picture and it must be inferred that the baby that once sucked the dummy is the bulge in Bill's middle, therefore the main course that has the garnish.

In the Bermuda shorts cartoon above, the word *triangle* in the PLI *the Bermuda triangle* must be inferred from the fact that the wife has lost her husband in his Bermuda shorts. The contextual real world knowledge that things disappear

Table 5. The PLI deformation signature of Cathy Wilcox

Type of deformation	Total	Type/PLI
substitutions	72	.655
literalisation of a PLI	18	.163
structural ambiguity	9	.081
literalisation of a lexical sense	7	.063
Phonological	4	.036
PLI blends	4	.036
slot restriction violations	3	.027
lexical exchanges	2	.018
calques and paraphrases	2	.018
frozenness violation	1	.009

without trace in the Bermuda triangle must be brought to bear in order to make this inference.[6]

4. Conclusion

It is clear that Cathy Wilcox has a preference for puns and near puns over other forms of artistic deformation. Since we have suggested that puns are a function of substitutions, then this is borne out by the fact that the total number of substitutions (given that there can be more than one per cartoon) is almost as large as the total number of cartoons under analysis, and that more than half of the cartoons contain substitutions. That is not to say that Wilcox is unaware of the other avenues for deformation. This is evidenced by the fact that the only deformation device of which there is no instance in the data is that of an additional modifier where none is conventionally permitted. Given the long list of potential sources of deformation, it is noteworthy that so many of them can be used for humorously intended deformation.

If we look at Table 5 which summarises Wilcox's selective preferences in the dataset of 90 cartoons, then we have a comparison against which other cartoonists who work with PLIs might be assessed. Note that, since any given PLI can undergo more than one of these processes, the index is calculated in terms of the number of cases that appear per PLI in the data.

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6. It remains a largely unresearched question as to when hearers have enough information to look up a PLI.

Figure 2

Lexical creativity can therefore be seen to manifest itself not only on each oc-
casion that a cartoonist produces a new cartoon involving lexical play but also by
the personal set of preferences for certain kinds of creativity.

5. Artistry and artistic deformation

The conclusions above are fine as far as they go, but that is not far enough. Artistic
deformation, i.e. intentional changes to the stable expectations arising from the
idiosyncratic properties of PLIs in the mental lexicon, do not give us quite enough
sense of the artistry which a fine cartoonist like Cathy Wilcox exercises. Here we
are drawing on the kind of distinction between *performance* used in the Chom-
skian sense and *performance* in the sense of Bauman (1975). A sense of artistry is
essentially qualitative and not all artistic deformation is qualitatively alike. Such
quality is not easy to analyse in linguistic terms and, furthermore, to do so would
often mean doing violence to the intuitive sense one has with many of Wilcox's
cartoons that the cartoonist is doing something which is really clever. Analysis
can also be seen as 'brushing the bloom off the butterfly'. However, another in-
stance will perhaps suffice to show what is meant here.

In a hold up with a hostage the PLI *hand over the … or the … gets it* is con-
ventionally understood to mean that the addressee is to hand over the money,
diamonds etc to the speaker, the man with the gun, or else the hostage will be
shot. In the cartoon, a mother is the addressee and her small son is the hostage. By
uttering a second PLI to her son the mother uncovers a multiple ambiguity in the
PLI which it does not conventionally have. *Hand something over* is conventionally
taken to mean "hand it over to the robber" and that is what the phrase appears
to mean here. But there are three participants: robber, hostage and person being
held up. The phrase could therefore be taken as an instruction to hand the cash
over to the hostage. Conventionally the phrase *so and so gets it* means that the

hostage will be shot or killed. But if the cash is to be handed over, then *the kid gets it* could be a structural alternative meaning to hand it over to the robber since the two clauses are connected by *or*. Since the mother would, naturally, prefer that her son get her money rather than the robber, she exhorts her lad not to spend all her money at once. Here the second PLI, *Don't spend it all at once*, is used to expose the structural ambiguity of the first PLI. This is, clearly, a clever and creative use of the two PLIs, but it is also totally unexpected. One expects a mother to want to protect her son who has a pistol aimed at his head. One does not expect him to be exhorted to fiscal responsibility at such a time. It is this element of surprise and delight which comes from 'making it new', in the sense of seeing a hackneyed scenario and its attendant language anew through its creative deformation, and this is what gives a sense of real artistry.

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