Wordplay in children's literature: typology of word de-formation processes and translation of ex-nihilo coinages without clear extralinguistic referents

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The overwhelming presence of wordplay in English literature for young children with limited vocabulary implies that transparency of meaning is not essential to successful communication. There is more to a word than its lexical meaning: the pleasure of its sound and rhythm; the joy of distorting and deciphering it.

This article presents a typology of word de-formation processes, for neologisms encountered in a corpus of children's literature. The analysis of this inventory shows that, in children's literature, wordplay creation is unrestricted, ranging from readily analysable occurrences to obscure ex-nihilo coinages without clear extralinguistic referents. The classification follows Jean Tournier's matrix of lexicogenesis ("*matrices lexicogéniques*") with three types of coinages in English:

- morphological neology
- semantic neology
- morphosemantic neology

For each standard word-formation process, there is a de-formation equivalence and the de-formation processes are often combined with one another. This classification of wordplay lists lexicological processes (e.g. affixation, conversion) as well as rhetorical devices (e.g. homonymy, paronymy, reduplication) and the alteration of customary collocations and phrases. To demonstrate the playfulness of ex-nihilo coinages despite their lack of a clear referent, the article reviewed, in a parallel corpus, how Camille Fabien translates such wordplay from Roald Dahl's *The BFG* into *Le Bon Gros Géant*.

(1)   *That is the most **flushbunking** rubbish I is ever hearing!*

Dahl's neologism, ***flushbunking***, illustrated in (1) has four other occurrences in the text, with various referents. Camille Fabien's translation strategies demonstrate that ex-nihilo coinages are created to stand out rather than convey meaning. Thus, a successful translation is one that recreates the global playfulness of the original utterance.

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