

Fun, but not for everyone: Exclusion in multiple-addressed wordplay traditions in French

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The aim of this paper is to explore the interactional and social complexity of wordplay and focus on serious aspects of wordplay that can be observed when the message is fully accessible only to part of the audience. This dimension has been described as a cryptic function complementing the ludic function of wordplay, and more recently, the concept of ‘secret wordplay’ (Bauer 2015) has been proposed. Moreover, the notion of multiple addressing (cf. Kühn 1995) can be mentioned here, as the existence of different groups of addressees represents a key feature of the relevant practices. In previous research, this dimension of wordplay has mostly remained in the background, and even if there are case studies on specific communicative practices and literary examples, no comprehensive approaches have been developed. The paper thus aims to bring together the results of previous studies dedicated to particular wordplay traditions that take place between the speaker and a first group of addressees, but simultaneously and systematically involve the exclusion of a second group of addressees. The argumentation will be based on selected examples of wordplay traditions in French, including *javanais* (cf. Galli 2023), *loucherbèrn* (cf. Saugéra 2019, Hardy 2023), *verlan* (cf. Méla 1992, Kundegraber 2007), and *contre-pèteries* (cf. Rabatel 2015). Basic descriptive parameters for analysing exclusive wordplay practices and traditions will be elaborated, including structural aspects and techniques, the identification of relevant in-groups and out-groups, metalinguistic / metadiscursive evaluations from in-group or out-group members, the relevant knowledge and competence required to participate in the game as part of the in-group, techniques of signalling the use of wordplay (or the absence of signalling techniques), and the existence or non-existence of an alternative reading which is openly displayed. The parameters therefore include both the speakers’ and the addressees’ perspectives as well as mutual anticipations of linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge and communicative behaviour (cf. the notion of audience design, Bell 1984, Dynel 2017). In addition to these aspects, the traditional character of the practices will be focused on, foregrounding the elements that are not negotiated between the concrete speakers and addressees in the actual communicative exchange, but based on established traditions that serve as reference points for the speakers and hearers. The quality and importance of traditional elements will thus be identified as a further parameter of interest. The traditions examined can be analysed as cultural practices, and I will argue that understanding them as discourse traditions provides further insight into their constant dynamics and re-negotiation (cf. Winter-Froemel 2023).

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