Unusually Combined Lexemes as Means of Creating Uncertainty in English Postmodern Short–Short Stories

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Abstract: The issue of words combinations draws attention of linguists starting from the second half of the XX c. until the present day. This study is focused on the research of semantic mechanisms of unusually combined lexemes and unexpected collocations in English postmodern short-short stories. Reconsideration of the literary past and ironic view on traditional poetic canons are reflected in postmodern literary texts due to the principles of postmodern poetics. Being distinctive feature of postmodern literature in general, uncertainty creates multiplicity of meanings of entire literary text, as well as separate unexpected collocations, by means of unusually combined lexemes. The aim of the study is to elaborate the phenomenon of valence violation, created by unusually combined lexemes and unexpected collocations in English postmodern short-short stories. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to define the notion of valence and lexeme compatibility, to identify types of valence violation in lexemes combinations, and to provide their possible interpretation. Functioning in English postmodern short-short stories such language units widen boundaries of their usage and their combinatorial profile. Unusually combined lexemes focus the reader's attention and provoke a cognitive mechanism of continuous searching for a hidden meaning of unexpected collocations and the general message of a literary text. In this research unusually combined lexemes are regarded as special markers of postmodern short-short story genre for which violation of text structure, violation of usual relations between lexemes in logic, semantic and syntactic aspects are quite common.

Keywords: *lexemes; uncertainty; valence; English postmodern short-short story.*

How to cite: Zavarynska, M., & Babelyuk, O. (2022). Unusually Combined Lexemes as Means of Creating Uncertainty in English Postmodern Short-Short Stories. *Postmodern Openings, 13*(4), 00-00. https://doi.org/10.18662/po/13.4/

1. Introduction

English postmodern short-short story (EPSS) as experimental genre of postmodern literature was established in the 1960s-1970s. (Miller, Vandome & McBrewster, 2010; Steiner, 1999, p. 428; VanSpanckeren, 1994, pp. 138-139) under the influence of post-structuralism philosophy, which represented a total retreat from dogma. Initially, the short-short story was derived from the term "flash fiction" and associated with Cosmopolitan magazine. In the 1930s short-short stories were collected in anthologies such as The American Short Short Story. Traditionally the lenght of a short-short story is not established, though, usually, it is characterized as extremelly short fiction (mostly - 1000 words and fewer). Apart from innovative short-short story genre, other experimental short-short genres include such terms for marking experimental small literary texts as "sudden fiction" (750 words), the "dribble" (or "minisaga" 50 words), the "drabble" (or "microfiction", 100 words), "six-word story", the 280-character story (or "twitterature"), "micro-story" and "flash fiction" (1000 words) ("Flash fiction", 2021). As examples of the first significant publications of EPSS serve "Sudden Fiction: American Short-Short Stories" (ed. by R. Shapard & J. Thomas, 1986), "Short Shorts: An Anthology of the Shortest Stories" (ed. by I. Howe & I. W. Howe, 1982).

EPSS obtained experimental status due to the reduced rhizomatic text structure, based on violation of linear narration, the extraordinary style of writing full of wordplay at different language levels, and a mixture of incompatible words, which we denote as unusually combined lexemes (UCLs). UCLs are regarded as special markers of postmodern literary text, which imply primarily destruction of logical relations at collocation level, leading to uncertainty, and can be traced in a sentence or in the entire literary text.

The notion of "uncertainty" implies lexical and semantic varying of a word, which demonstrates a slight modification in form with the word's general denotative meaning, and has several aspects of a single meaning (Ullman, 1959; Kudrevatykh, 1996). Uncertainty, resulted from such rhizomatic principles as multiplicity (a never-ending game of meaning diffusion, where narration lines link the author, the reader, and the characters), connection, and heterogeneity (no dominant point in a postmodern literary text that dictates a single meaning, one point of a "root" can be connected to the other), "asignifying rupture" (the ripped root of rhizome continues growing and doesn't mean incompleteness but a new twist (for example, unfinished plot line make the reader create the ending of his own, to his liking), cartography and decalcomania (rhizome is a map with

a multiplicity of entrances rather than a calque, which copies), became the key feature of EPSS. The emergence of uncertainty in a postmodern literary text, particularly in EPSS, is caused, to our minds, by innovations in text writing, typical for postmodernism. Among them are the usage of wordplay, experiments with typography and structure, and a mixture of genres in a particular literary text, involving the reader as a critical thinker. Through uncertainty, any postmodern literary text is constantly transforming, being overwhelmed with different meanings, codes, voices, and images (Babelyuk, 2010). The reader is often not quite sure about the correct route of text interpretation of a definite literary work, which leads to the controversial perception of any postmodern literary text.

It is worth noting, that UCLs, which produce uncertainty, fall outside the scope of the normativity and stylistic perfection, but enrich and widen their combinatorial profile. Investigation of UCLs implies a profound examination of their syntagmatic relations through the prism of valence, which is interpreted as a word feature, that reflects potential combining of language units. Valence coordinates word combinations and identifies patterns of its usage. In case of UCLs and their investigation through the prism of valence we observe "double mechanism" of collocation creating. Firstly, each specific UCL can produce a brand new meaning by specific lexemes combinations, and, secondly, at the same time, it violates traditional principles of lexemes linking. This process leads to the emergence of definite valence violation types, which in this study is based on the theory, represented by M. D. Stepanova and G. Helbig, which implies valence in terms of level approach. Hence we distinguish such levels of valence as linguistic, which includes syntactic, semantic valence, and non-linguistic, in other words, logic valence (Stepanova & Helbig, 1978). Respectively, in accordance with the valence types theory of M. D. Stepanova and G. Helbig, we point out syntactic valence violation type (SVVT) and logic-semantic valence violation type (LSVVT).

The objectives of the study are as follows: to define the notion of valence and compatibility; to identify the type of valence violation in UCLs; to provide the possible interpretation of UCLs resulting from valence violation.

The relevance of the research lies in the fact that many contemporary readers and writers are interested in EPSS, which is caused by the non-linear world order of present-time everyday living, this, in its turn, affects the postmodern person's worldview. The key assumption of postmodern philosophy is the impossibility of world description as something holistic. Hence, uncertainty, the "aesthetics of chaos", or "chaos

harmony" - is the way of the postmodern world being, where each "picture puzzle" can be transformed, hybridized, giving a new sound to the system and without wrecking it. UCLs, as these puzzles, produces uncertainty, which is a vivid and important instrument in the process of EPSS creation.

In the international context of similar research in the field, in the article, there are newly described valence violation types in EPSS on the basis of the valence theory of M. D. Stepanova and G. Helbig.

2. Literature review

Bulleted lists may be included and should look like this: One of the main issues of modern semantics is the investigation of relations in word or sentence structure that form lexicon systematicity (Kobozeva, 2000; Nikitin, 2007; Selivanova, 2008). In accordance with some scholars, there are such key goals of semantics: to identify the patterns of lexical-semantic compatibility of language units (Katsnel'son, 1987; Kocherhan, 1980) and factors of their violation (Vykhovanets, 1988; Helbig, 1973), to clarify semantic coordination of words in a sentence and in a literary text (Denysenko, 2005; Selivanova, 2008). Since the middle of the XX c., a large number of discoveries have been made in the science of compatibility regarding syntagmatic relations of words and their combinatorial profile. Among theorists of study of syntagmatic principles we cannot but mention É. Benveniste, who investigated syntagmatic integration, F. Mikush, who worked out the notion of the interdependence of language elements, and Ch. Bally, who investigated binary oppositions (Vlavatskaya, 2014). In accordance with C. Butler's statement, a key feature of a lexical item is its capability to combine with other lexical items called collocational behavior. Each lexical item is identified due to the uniqueness of its collocational behavior, in other words, the total pattern of collocation (Butler, 1985, p. 130). In modern semantics, compatibility is defined as a certain feature of language units combined, forming language units of higher linguistic levels. Sounds form phonetic level, morphemes – morphemic level, lexemes – lexical level, collocations, and phrases – syntactic level. The linguistic level creating process is considered a basic feature of every language unit, which reflects their syntagmatic relations. It is worth noting, that compatibility has relations to combinatorics and combinatorial linguistics. The notion of combinatorics ("Combinatorics", 2022) is applied to different branches of science: physics, chemistry, biology, linguistics, etc., although firstly was presented by G. W. Leibniz in the scientific writing "Dissertation on Combinatorial Art" in 1666 (ed by Mugnai, van Ruler, & Wilson, 2020). It is an interesting fact, that as a mathematics branch, combinatorics is concerned

with counting and certain properties of finite structures ("Combinatorics", 2022). Postmodern poetics is driven by the wide dissemination of post-structuralism philosophy, while combinatorics resulted from structuralism that emerged at the beginning of the XX c. which presupposed the methodology of scientific area analysis as a stable structure. According to G. W. Leibniz, the art of combinatorics is a component in any investigation, creative act, and, therefore literary text creation. Combinatorial linguistics emerged due to syntagmatic (from Greek syntagma — built together, combination) ("Syntahmatyka", 2020), an aspect in language investigation based on the research of linear relations among language units and their compatibility in text and speech. The founder of the concept of syntagmatic linguistic relations is F. de Saussure (Vlavatskaya, 2017). The concept states that there are two types of relations among language units – syntagmatic and associative. Therefore, combinatorial linguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies syntagmatic relations of language units (phonemes, lexemes, etc.) and their combinatorial capabilities (Vlavatskaya, 2017), or combinatorial profile. The combinatorial profile of UCLs has a specific "hidden" capability of lexemes to have a number of unexpected meanings and their shades in coexistence with others experimenting with language means. Such connotation expansion is mainstreamed through language expression of uncertainty in EPSS.

Alongside the notion of compatibility, there has emerged a notion of valence. The term derives from chemistry and denotes characteristics of a chemical element requiring its capability to link with a particular number of chemical elements simultaneously restricting its capability to link with other chemical elements (Gal'perin, 1974). Initially, the notion of valence was applied to linguistics by L. Tesnière and was viewed through the prism of the verb. Then, S. Katsnel'son explored valence in a wider view and denoted it as a "word feature which implies its realization in sentence and combinations with other words" (Katsnel'son, 1948, p. 132). Further research on valence theory was dedicated to the identification of different valence types and methodology of valence types description, or valence in terms of level approach (M. D. Stepanova, G. Helbig), identification of words, which do not have valence (V. Morkovkin), the definition of "valence carrier" partners (J. D. Apresjan, I. A. Mel'čuk & I. M. Boguslavsky), the distinction of obligatory and facultative valence, relations among valence, componential, transformational and quantitative analyses (J. D. Apresjan).

3. Methodology

The methodology of this study is integrated since it provides the investigation of UCLs, which cause uncertainty in EPSS, and the identification of new lexeme connotations as a result of valence violation. The complex approach of the study implies the usage of a descriptive method for reviewing the notion of valence, as well as applying different valence types with the goal of identifying valence violation types. The research instrument used for selecting EPSS text fragments with uncertainty features is a sampling method. The process of selection of EPSS and analyzing of UCLs is supported by such linguistic methods of semantic analysis. Among them transformational analysis for identification of grammatical transformations dictated by postmodern poetics, contextual analysis with application of stylistic analysis of stylistic means of uncertainty created in EPSS, distributional and componential analyses for indication of several meanings in a word and their simultaneous realization in the context, genre analysis is applied to substantiate uncertainty through language means as a dominant feature of EPSS.

4. Data Collection Procedure

A lexeme is a basic unit of a lexical subsystem of language, which implies a word in all its lexical meanings and interrelated forms (Matveyeva, 2010, p. 174). Uncertainty leads to the expansion of the compatibility sector of a lexeme, distancing us from its central meaning and bringing us closer to the peripheral (Dobrovol'skiy, 2005). This process causes the destruction of expected lexeme connotations and the birth of new connotations. Thus, the initial lexeme meaning is deformed, and instead, new "shades of meaning" emerged. UCLs become the instrument, which creates uncertainty in EPSS at the level of collocation and as a result in the whole literary text. Furthermore, the usage of UCLs by postmodern writers can be regarded as an intentional measure for creating multiple interpretations of EPSS, especially when the specificity of shortened text structure exacerbates this. According to S. Katsnel'son, valence implies words' capability to be realized in a sentence, building relations with other words, or, their compatibility. This leads to valence interpretation as syntactic capability of word lexical meaning (Katsnel'son, 1987, p. 20). In this case, valence and compatibility denote the same thing. Relying on the above-mentioned, for the investigation of UCLs syntagmatic relations we use the notions of valence and compatibility synonymously. Due to applying of the lexical-grammatical

approach to valence investigation, the valence analysis becomes relevant not only to verbs but also to such independent parts of speech as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and numerals (Brinkman, 1962, p. 223-230; Erben, 1965, p. 231).

4.1. Valence and its types

Traditionally valence is viewed as word capability to combine with other lexical units at the syntactic level, however, in linguistics, in accordance with M. D. Stepanova and G. Helbig, there are established two levels of valence realization: linguistic and non-linguistic. The linguistic level includes syntactic valence and semantic valence, the non-linguistic level implies logic valence (Stepanova & Helbig, 1978; Helbig, 1975). Syntactic valence presupposes arguments presented by formal syntactic sentence parts and different parts of speech. Semantic valence lies in the compatibility of semantic constituents. In other words, semantic valence is regarded as the potential of language units to combine in the presence of one particular semantic feature (or seme as the minimal component of the lexical meaning) which is closely related to logic valence. Logic valence reflects relations among non-linguistic notions. The meaning of the word is a socially fixed reflection of an object in the human mind and belongs to word structure as its inner part, decorated by the rules of grammar and predetermined by a semantic system of a particular language (Struganets, 2018). Non-linguistic notions denote facts of reality in logic, represented in logic predicates, which have "open spaces" to be filled with arguments. The predicate is applied to logic and linguistics as an affirmative or negative statement about the subject, displaying the presence or absence of characteristics of the subject (Allerton, 1979). The notion of "argument" implies certain sentence constituents, which depend on the logic predicate and serves to supplement it. The predicate and its arguments create the argument structure of the predicate. In accordance with linguists T. V. Korol, and K. E. Sommerfeldt, logic valence due to its universality is the basis for syntactic valence and semantic valence. Thus, logic valence is a non-linguistic notion with universal nature.

Analyzing UCLs through valence enables consideration of valence violation as a trigger for new words meanings, which serve as the writer's brainchild in EPSS. Such UCLs help the author to express thoughts more precisely, taking into account EPSS text size. Valence investigation in terms of levels approach provides the opportunity to reveal valence essence (Semenyuk, 1977). The abovementioned valence types interact and reflect their peculiarities of meaning realization simultaneously.

5. Limits and Discussions

In our investigation, on the basis of the theory of M. D. Stepanova and G. Helbig, we have formed two types of valence violation – syntactic valence violation type (SVVT) and logic-semantic valence violation type (LSVVT) based on logic valence and semantic valence. Logic valence and semantic valence describe objects and word relations in the same line. Furthermore, in logic, there is emerged the notion of the semantics of logic which denotes the semantics, or interpretations, of formal and idealizations of natural languages usually trying to capture the pre-theoretic notion of entailment ("Semantics of logic", 2022). Thus, UCLs can be explored at two vectors – syntactic and logic-semantic.

5.1. Syntactic valence violation type vs logic-semantic valence violation type

SVVT is performed through the absence of arguments near "valence carrier", that is, words necessary for sentence completeness. Syntactic valence is predetermined by logic-semantic valence and becomes realized in a sentence through grammar correctness. LSVVT implies an absence of logic-semantic coordination among lexemes, which form collocation. This coordination is held by means of different semantic processes such as: seme actualization (highlighting of a particular seme in a word during rearrangement of other semes), seme supporting and intensification when a particular seme is supported by appropriate words or morphemes, seme targeting that is the emergence of new word semes as the result of extraordinary text context, seme modification which presupposes the process of intensification of one seme and liquidation of another in a word, seme liquidation (the process which comes with seme actualization and does not mean full removal of a particular seme), seme neutralization that occurs in case of contradictory semes coexist in a particular word combination, as an example can serve oxymoron dark light, bittersweet, clearly confused (Sokolov, 1997). The key factor of LSVVT is that each component of UCLs comes from a different semantic sphere.

So, to sum it up, identification of each valence violation type, SVVT or LSVVT, deals with violation of usual patterns of word combinations, or violation of lexical norms in literary language. Lexical norm is "full condensation and preparation of word relations to other class units and extra lingual conditions under which this word is realized" (Shvedova, 1982, p. 154).

Text fragments in EPSS with UCLs focus the reader's attention on searching for hidden meanings of a literary text. Uncertainty at the level of

collocation is achieved by the "failed expectation" of the reader, who usually expects to interpret a word according to its traditional interpretation rules. UCLs in the core of which is a combination of lexemes with incompatible connotations can produce uncertainty by means of simile (a figure of speech that directly compares two things) ('Simile', 2022) and hypallage (a figure of speech in which the syntactic relationship between two terms is interchanged, or, more frequently, a modifier is syntactically linked to an item other than the one that it modifies semantically) ("Hypallage", 2022). For example, in EPSS "Cat's-Eye" by J. Tseng in a text fragment: *The cat follows me into the bathroom. After I sit down, he jumps onto my lap, which is half-fleece, half-skin. Each paw, cold as a child's nose, lands at a slightly different moment* (Tseng, 2021). In this phrase we see the close relationship between a man and his pet. In UCLs "Each paw, cold as a child's nose" emerges simile that describes the character's attitude toward his pet as a child. "Paw" primarily refers to animals and "nose" is a part of a human body, which means that these components of UCLs have different semantic content and serve as an example of seme targeting. The context of the sentence allows recognizing seme "child" in the word "cat". Thus, these UCLs refer to LSVVT.

Let's discuss a text fragment from EPSS "This Book Will Save Your Life" by A. M. Homes: *While he's waiting, Richard pops a nervous handful of salted nuts into his mouth* (Homes, 2006) Adjective "nervous" is used to describe person's feelings, and is not appropriate argument for a noun "handful". In semantic composition, lexemes "handful" and "nervous" are not contradictory, but their combination breaks the usual interpretation of the lexeme "handful". Intentional usage of these UCLs, which creates specific context, is realized by means of seme targeting, which leads to adding new semes to the word "nervous" (tremulous, impatient). In this regard, these UCLs refer to LSVVT. UCLs "a nervous handful" reflects the mood of the character, and in terms of postmodern poetics is realized through hypallage.

Valence violation can serve as the realization of transposition which is the shifting of a particular part of speech to another one ("Transpozitsiya", 2022). As an example we can use a text fragment from EPSS "Killers" by S. Steinberg: *this is a grass-is-greener situation* (Steinberg, 2019). Here we observe the type of transposition which is called adjectivation (performing of the functions of an adjective by another part of speech). "Grass-is-greener" is derived from the saying "the grass is (always) greener (on the other side)", which means "other people always seem to be in a better situation than you, although they may not be" (Grass is always greener on the other side). "Grass-is-greener situation" is shortened version of the above-mentioned well-known saying, but it describes the writer's

thought even more exactly. The long saying is transformed into a simple sentence, which serves as an adjective. Such an experiment at the syntactic level refers this example to SVVT.

Another device applied for valence violation is the author's neologism (a relatively recent or isolated term, word, or phrase that may be in the process of entering common use, but that has not yet been fully accepted into mainstream language) (Anderson, 2009; Arnol'd, 2006). For example, in EPSS "Killers" by S. Steinberg. from this text fragment: *I save the word killers under my tongue* (Steinberg, 2019), we understand that a character is in danger and the word "killers" is constantly running through her mind that she was forced to memorize it. To express the great tension of the described situation the writer creates a neologism "to save something under the tongue". It is quite obvious, that we cannot save something under the tongue literally. But from a logic-semantic perspective, components of these UCLs are far from each other. The words "killers" and "tongue" have totally different semantic content. The word "killers" has such semes as criminal, danger, crime, murder, and the word "tongue" primarily denotes a part of a human body. The process of seme targeting allows us to refer these UCLs to LSVVT.

In EPSS "Huntress" by S. Samatar in a text fragment (Samatar, 2017) we observe UCLs which refer to LSVVT with the usage of personification or anthropomorphic metaphor, which occurs when a thing or abstraction is represented as a person: *For fear of the huntress the city closed like an eye. Only my window stayed open, because, as a foreigner, I didn't know better. In the morning, poor children would scrub the stains from the roofs. Now the rain-dark head came down and rested on the dome of the embassy.* From the context, we guess that through the image of the huntress the writer talks about night fears. Here the process of seme actualization in the word "night" is evident, which is enriched by a new connotation of "danger". The night is like a dark creature in the eyes of children. UCLs "the city closed like an eye", can be interpreted as many people in the city are tired and wanted to sleep. The phrase "the rain-dark head" describes the gray color of the creature, being the author's neologism. In such a way the writer creates the image of a strange night creature, a master of the night city. The phrase "rain-dark head came down and rested" serves as the logic-semantic valence violation of the noun "head" in which emerges the seme of animacy due to the combination with the verbs "came down and rested", which serves as an example of seme targeting. This allows us to refer these UCLs to LSVVT.

In EPSS "Killers" by S. Steinberg: *some nights, I lie back and close my eyes; I can feel their weight above me* (Steinberg, 2019) UCLs are formed by means

of hyperbole (exaggeration). The phrase "Feel the weight of eyes" displays the character's exhaustion or eyes full of tears, and also may serve as the author's neologism. The process of seme targeting is evident here. The writer also highlights the seme "sadness", which is quite obvious from between the lines of these UCLs. Thus, these UCLs components we refer to LSVVT.

In EPSS "Fading" by S. Sidhu a text fragment: *Though home is now six thousand miles away. Old grievances have become butter in a hot pan* (Sidhu, 2021). The provided example serves as the author's neologism, which from a stylistic point of view is a simile. "To become butter in a hot pan" denotes something fleeting. Thus, UCLs "grievances which are butter in a hot pan" means "to have controversies that do not last a long time". Semes of UCLs component "grievances" (insult, disputes) and "butter" (milk, bread) do not intersect in an ordinary language environment. However, the meaning of such a word combination is understandable for the reader, the specific context created by the writer is revealed in the word "butter" by means of adding a new seme "fleeting". This example, built on seme targeting is referred to LSVVT.

In EPSS "Death Letter" by Z. Schomburg we observe a poetic device, oxymoron, which lies in the combination of opposite meanings, that give another, a new meaning in coexistence. *Different deaths for my ex, some more romantic than others* (Schomburg, 2018). Applying the oxymoron through phrases "different deaths", and "different deaths… more romantic than others» shows new connotations of the lexeme "death", being romantic and different. Such neutralization of semes "sadness", "passing" in word the "death" in combination with the contradictory adjective "romantic" refer these UCLs to LSVVT.

6. Results

Through the study, in percentage terms, 87,5 % of examined EPSS refer to LSVVT, and 12,5 % refer to SVVT. The main instrument in creating valence violation among UCLs belonging to LSVVT is seme targeting, which is justified by the specificity of the reduced structure of EPSS. UCLs through LSVVT serve to create uncertainty of separate collocations in such a way that combinatorial potency increases depending on the width of the semantic content of words, even in the presence of contradictory semes in UCLs components.

7. Conclusions

The article displays the value of new connotations, which emerged as the result of experimenting with UCLs, and their importance in uncertainty creation.

The concern of modern writers for the creation of EPSS is an imminent stage of literature development in the context of the postmodern worldview. Experimenting with UCLs in EPSS is driven by writers' creative thinking, craving for exact and emotional expression of thoughts. The author's idea is hidden in a postmodern wordplay or by means of UCLs involves the readers in a multiplicity of interpretations, in other words, into uncertainty. Postmodern uncertainty leads to the violation of relationship patterns among UCLs.

This research makes a contribution to the interpretation of UCLs at different language levels. The results of this investigation reveal that:

• New connotations of UCLs components through valence violation rely on its syntactic or logic-semantic nature

• The creation of LSVVT and SVVT are based on different principles, but in stylistic terms are performed through simile, hypallage, transposition, author's neologisms, personification, hyperbole, and oxymoron

• UCLs and valence violation among their components opens up a new combinatorial potential of lexemes and break up restrictions on their usage

The scientific theoretical and practical value of this research lies in launching the perspective of the creation of a complex methodology for identifying various means of revealing postmodern uncertainty in EPSS.

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