

Word Play as an Indicator of Pragmatic Competence: Insights from Early Modern German sources

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Since ancient times all the way to the 17th century, playing with language/words was considered a prominent vehicle of general education as well as language teaching and learning. The ability to demonstrate a creative usage of language served the purpose of legitimacy of vernacular idioms and was an object of detailed metalinguistic reflections. The elaborate play with words proved a high level of linguistic and especially pragmatic competence. It was rather handled as an element of cognitive creativity and an important attribute of higher level learning and thought. In the past times, the techniques of the word play creation were manifold and based not exclusively on violations of conventional semantic use.

Exactly these strategies of word play and the metalinguistic reflections about them will be put in the center the planned paper. We use German baroque rhetorical and linguistic treatises and language teaching materials as sources. However, since the language theory at this time is not unique to a specific language and interwoven intertextually, our findings promise to be valid for other languages as well.

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