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DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2026.48.10>**WORD FORMATION AS LANGUAGE PLAY IN ROALD DAHL'S GOBBLEFUNK****СЛОВОТВІР ЯК МОВНА ГРА В GOBBLEFUNK РОАЛЬДА ДАЛА****Doybush O.I.,***orcid.org/0000-0003-3637-9676**Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,**Associate Professor at the Department of English Philology and English Language Teaching Methodology**Volodymyr Hnatiuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University***Karpeniuk O.S.,***orcid.org/0009-0008-3571-8684**Student**Ternopil Classical Lyceum*

The article examines the relationship between word formation and language play in Roald Dahl's Gobblefunk. The study focuses on the ways in which familiar English word-formation patterns are modified, combined or extended to produce playful lexical effects. The analysis is based on selected lexical units documented in Susan Rennie's Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary, which provides lexical material from across Dahl's children's fiction. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between recognisable linguistic patterns and unexpected morphological, lexical, semantic and phonological elements. The study considers derivation, prefixation, compounding and blending, as well as forms of phonological manipulation that contribute to Dahl's lexical play. The analysis shows that Dahl's lexical inventions are rarely arbitrary: familiar affixes facilitate the interpretation of unusual formations, recognisable lexical components make unexpected combinations accessible, and blending preserves associations with source words while creating unconventional forms. Some formations combine different word-formation patterns, with compounding and derivation operating within the same lexical unit and contributing jointly to its playful effect. Phonological manipulation, including spoonerism, further demonstrates how recognition and deviation may operate together in the creation of word play. The study establishes recognisability and deviation as closely connected features of Dahl's lexical creativity. The playful effect of Gobblefunk frequently arises when conventional linguistic resources are placed in unexpected relationships, allowing invented words to remain accessible while acquiring expressive and humorous qualities. Across these different formations, recognisable morphological or lexical structures provide a basis for deviation, while the modification of familiar patterns creates surprise and expressive effect. The findings demonstrate that word formation in Dahl's fiction functions not only as a mechanism of lexical creation but also as a resource for literary word play. Thus, his lexical creativity lies not in complete linguistic novelty, but in the transformation of familiar word-formation resources into unconventional forms that remain recognisable while producing new expressive possibilities.

Key words: Roald Dahl, Gobblefunk, word formation, language play, lexical creativity, nonce formations, word play.

У статті досліджено взаємозв'язок словотвору та мовної гри в Gobblefunk Роальда Дала. Увагу зосереджено на тому, як знайомі словотвірні моделі англійської мови модифікуються, поєднуються або доповнюються для створення ефектів гри лексичними засобами. Матеріалом дослідження слугують відібрані лексичні одиниці з Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary Сьюзен Ренні, який містить лексичний матеріал із різних творів дитячої прози Дала. Особливу увагу приділено взаємодії звичних мовних моделей із несподіваними морфологічними, лексичними, семантичними та фонологічними елементами. У дослідженні розглянуто деривацію, префіксацію, словоскладання та контамінацію, а також форми фонологічної модифікації, що сприяють створенню мовної гри Дала. Аналіз засвідчує, що лексичні новотвори Дала здебільшого не є довільними: знайомі афікси полегшують інтерпретацію незвичних форм, упізнавані лексичні компоненти роблять несподівані поєднання зрозумілими, а контамінація зберігає асоціації з вихідними словами, створюючи водночас незвичні форми. Деякі утворення поєднують різні словотвірні моделі, причому словоскладання та деривація діють у межах однієї лексичної одиниці й спільно створюють ефект гри. Мовна деформація, зокрема спунеризм, додатково демонструє поєднання впізнаваності та відхилення у створенні мовної гри. Встановлено, що впізнаваність і відхилення є тісно пов'язаними характеристиками лінгвокреативності Дала. Ігровий ефект мови Gobblefunk часто виникає внаслідок несподіваного поєднання звичних мовних засобів, завдяки чому новотвори залишаються зрозумілими та набувають експресивного й гумористичного забарвлення. У різних типах таких утворень упізнавані морфологічні або лексичні структури створюють основу для відхилення, тоді як модифікація знайомих моделей породжує ефект несподіваності та експресивності. Результати дослідження демонструють, що словотвір у мові Дала функціонує не лише як механізм творення лексичних одиниць, а й як ресурс мовної гри. Таким чином, його лексична креативність полягає не в повній мовній новизні, а в трансформації знайомих словотвірних засобів у незвичні форми, які залишаються впізнаваними, водночас відкриваючи нові експресивні можливості.

Ключові слова: Роальд Дал, Gobblefunk, словотвір, мовна гра, лінгвокреативність, оказіональні утворення, гра слів.

Statement of the problem. Language is not used in literary texts solely as a means of conveying information. Writers may deliberately manipulate familiar linguistic forms, create unexpected combinations and exploit the sound and semantic potential of words to achieve particular expressive effects. Such practices are especially characteristic of children's literature, in which linguistic experimentation may contribute to humour, characterisation and the construction of fictional worlds. *Language play* and *lexical creativity* are therefore closely related phenomena: both involve the creative use of linguistic resources, although lexical creativity is more directly concerned with the creation or modification of lexical units.

One of the principal resources available for lexical creativity is the word-formation system of a language. English offers a wide range of established patterns for forming new lexical units, including derivation, compounding and blending. At the same time, literary creativity may involve the extension, combination or deliberate modification of such patterns. Consequently, a newly created lexical form may retain recognisable features of existing words while departing from conventional word-formation models. The distinction between productive word formation and creative individual formations has received considerable attention in linguistic research. In particular, recent work emphasises that creativity in word formation should be considered not only in terms of the resulting lexical unit but also as a creative act performed within the resources of a language [8, p. 137].

Language play provides a broader framework for considering such formations. In his research on linguistic intervention, David Crystal defines language play as the intentional manipulation of linguistic forms and functions for aesthetic or ludic purposes [4, p. 328]. This process encompasses various levels of language structure, including phonological patterns, morphological modifications – such as the creative use of suffixes – and the subversion of semantic expectations [4, p. 334]. This perspective is particularly relevant to literary language, where the manipulation of familiar linguistic forms may produce additional expressive, aesthetic and humorous effects. A similar understanding can be found in recent Ukrainian linguistic research, where language play is considered in relation to linguistic creativity and deviation from conventional language use [2, p. 23]. Thus, language play may be viewed not simply as an additional stylistic device, but as a mode of linguistic creativity capable of generating and transforming lexical forms.

The interaction of word formation and language play becomes particularly noticeable in literary neol-

ogisms and nonce formations. Such units may be created for a particular textual context without necessarily entering the permanent vocabulary of the language. Studies of English literary neologisms have demonstrated the importance of examining their formal structure together with their textual function [10, p. 123]. This perspective is especially relevant to children's literature, where newly created words may simultaneously perform naming, expressive and playful functions.

Roald Dahl's fiction offers a particularly rich field for examining this interaction. His children's books contain numerous invented and modified lexical units, many of which exploit familiar English word-formation patterns while introducing unexpected morphological, phonological or semantic elements. Although *The Big Friendly Giant* (*The BFG*) is particularly well known for its inventive vocabulary, Dahl's lexical creativity extends across his children's fiction. The use of nonce vocabulary is particularly prominent in his fantasy-based works, where newly coined words contribute to the construction of imaginary worlds [3, p. 97]. The concentration of such vocabulary in Dahl's fantasy fiction is particularly relevant to the present study, since his invented words form an important part of the linguistic texture of his imaginary worlds. The variety and creativity of these lexical formations make Dahl's fiction a suitable field for examining how familiar linguistic patterns can be modified and combined to produce playful lexical effects.

The term "Gobblefunk" is particularly useful for describing this distinctive aspect of Dahl's linguistic creativity. The *Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary* [6], compiled by Susan Rennie, provides a lexicographically documented collection of Dahl's unusual and invented vocabulary from his children's fiction. Thus, it makes it possible to examine Gobblefunk as a cross-textual phenomenon rather than restricting the analysis to the vocabulary of a single work.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. The study of lexical creativity in English has developed at the intersection of several areas of linguistic research. Classical work on English word formation established the major structural patterns through which new lexical units are created and drew attention to such issues as productivity and the relationship between established and newly formed words [9; 1]. Specifically, L. Bauer provides a fundamental distinction for this field, defining productivity as "rule-governed innovation," while creativity is viewed as an "ability to extend the language system in a motivated, but unpredictable (non-rule-governed) way" [1, p. 63]. More recent research has placed greater emphasis on the creative potential of these patterns.

Körtlvélyessy, in particular, considers word formation at the intersection of productivity, creativity and structural complexity and stresses the role of creative naming acts in the formation of new complex words [8, pp. 2–3]. *She argues that linguistics should shift its focus from the products of word formation to the processual level, specifically to the “creative process, the naming act that results in a new complex word” [8, p. 15], asserting that the outcome of this process is deeply tied to the “creative potential of the coiner” and the way it is manifested in their “creative performance” [8, p. 16].* This approach provides an appropriate theoretical basis for analysing literary formations that make use of familiar word-formative resources while departing from their conventional application.

Research into language play has moved beyond viewing it as a purely ornamental phenomenon. David Crystal defines language play as the manipulation of linguistic forms and functions as a source of fun [4, p. 328]. He further relates language play to deviation from normal language use and to the use of familiar forms in unexpected contexts [4, p. 334]. Such play may operate at different levels of language structure, including phonological and morphological levels, with morphological play involving the creative modification of familiar word forms [4, p. 332]. In this light, as A. Bychikhin emphasizes, such activity functions as a mode of “linguistic creativity” that actively transforms standard lexical units into playful communicative constructs [2, p. 21]. Thus, language play may be considered not simply as an additional stylistic device, but as a mode of linguistic creativity capable of generating new lexical forms.

The relationship between word formation and literary language has also been examined in studies of literary neologisms and nonce formations. Specifically, Yanyshyna asserts that authorial neologisms are inextricably linked to a writer’s individual style and the specific communicative tasks of the prose [10, p. 122]. This approach is particularly relevant to Dahl, whose lexical inventions are closely connected with the stylistic and humorous character of his fiction.

Dahl’s lexical creativity has been examined from several perspectives. Cheetham’s study is concerned with the distribution and patterning of Dahl’s neologisms across his children’s books, drawing attention to the particularly strong presence of nonce vocabulary in fantasy-based works [3, p. 97]. A different perspective is offered by Jesenská, who approaches Dahl’s nonce lexis through its structural and semantic characteristics and examines the ways in which the invented forms can be described as lexical formations

[7, p. 96]. The *Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary* [6], compiled by Susan Rennie, provides a broader lexical basis for the present study by bringing together Dahl’s unusual and invented vocabulary from across his children’s fiction. Its cross-textual coverage makes it possible to examine recurring patterns of word formation and language play beyond the context of an individual work.

Gobblefunk has also been examined as a form of creative lexical production. Zorgati analyses Dahl’s humorous lexical creations as occasionalisms and distinguishes morphosemantic, morphological and semantic types, drawing attention to the role of structural and semantic incongruity in their humorous effect [11]. A broader linguistic perspective is offered by Danilović Jeremić and Veličković, who show that Dahl’s lexical creativity extends beyond the formation of new words to include phonological resemblance, spoonerisms, misspellings and malapropisms [5, p. 311]. They also emphasise the “familiar effect” or “familiar feel” of Dahl’s unusual lexical formations, relating it to the recognisable linguistic material retained in them [5, p. 315]. These observations are particularly relevant to the present study because they point to the importance of familiarity in the interpretation of Dahl’s lexical inventions. However, the relationship between familiar word-formation patterns and the playful transformation of these patterns remains insufficiently explored. The present study therefore shifts the focus from the classification of Dahl’s lexical formations to the interaction between familiarity, structural deviation and language play.

Unresolved aspects of the problem. Roald Dahl’s fiction offers a particularly rich field for examining the interaction between word formation and language play. His children’s books contain numerous invented and modified lexical forms, many of which draw on familiar English word-formation patterns while introducing unexpected morphological, phonological or semantic elements. Dahl’s lexical creativity operates within a recognisable linguistic framework while constantly extending or modifying it.

The distinction between conventionality and novelty is particularly important for understanding such formations. A newly coined word may preserve the formal characteristics of a familiar word-formation pattern while producing an unexpected combination of form and meaning. In other cases, morphological structure may interact with sound patterns or semantic incongruity, making the formation playful rather than merely innovative. It is this movement from recognisable word-formation pattern to creative linguistic effect that constitutes the central concern of the present study.

The **relevance** of the study lies in approaching Gobblefunk not simply as a collection of nonce words or as a set of word-formation types, but as a form of lexical creativity in which familiar morphological resources are transformed through language play.

The **aim** of the article is to examine how familiar word-formation patterns become instances of language play in Roald Dahl's Gobblefunk. The analysis focuses on selected formations documented in Susan Rennie's *Oxford Roald Dahl Dictionary* and considers the ways in which established morphological patterns are modified, extended or combined with phonological and semantic manipulation. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between recognisable word-formation patterns and the deviations that transform them into instances of language play. In this way, the study seeks to identify recurring patterns through which Dahl turns familiar English word-formation resources into distinctive lexical inventions.

Analysis and Discussion. The analysis of Gobblefunk shows that Dahl's lexical inventions are rarely based on complete departure from familiar English. On the contrary, many of them retain recognisable morphological, lexical or phonological features which allow readers to construct an approximate meaning. Their playful character emerges when these familiar elements are placed in an unexpected relationship. The novelty of a Gobblefunk formation, therefore, does not necessarily depend on a complete departure from established linguistic patterns. In many cases, Dahl employs a familiar pattern but gives it an unexpected lexical realisation.

This can be observed in formations such as "*dark-some*", "*filth-some*", "*foul-some*" and "*rotsome*", in which the recognisable suffix *-some* is attached to semantically marked bases. The bases *dark*, *filth*, *foul* and *rot* carry strongly negative associations, while *-some* provides a familiar adjective-forming pattern. Similar formations include "*murderful*", "*gigantuous*", "*sickable*" and "*maggotwise*", in which familiar suffixes such as *-ful*, *-ous*, *-able* and *-wise* are combined with unusual lexical bases. The reader can recognise the word-formative pattern even when the resulting lexical unit is unfamiliar. The playful effect arises from the combination of morphological familiarity and lexical unexpectedness.

The affixes also facilitate the interpretation of the invented forms. In "*murderful*", for instance, the familiar suffix *-ful* makes the relationship between *murder* and the resulting adjective relatively transparent. In "*gigantuous*", the form recalls *gigantic* and other adjectives ending in *-ous*, while its unusual form contributes to an exaggerated expression of size. Dahl consequently relies on the reader's knowl-

edge of English word formation while departing from conventional lexical usage. The recognisable morphological structure makes the invention easy to interpret, whereas its deviation from an established lexical form produces the playful effect.

The same principle can be observed in less conspicuous formations involving other morphological patterns. Nouns such as "*babblement*", "*blubberment*", "*glubbage*" and "*norphanage*" retain familiar nominal structures through the suffixes *-ment* and *-age*, while their lexical bases depart from conventional vocabulary. The suffixes therefore provide a recognisable morphological frame within which Dahl can introduce unusual lexical material. Particularly suggestive is "*norphanage*", whose form evokes the familiar noun "*orphanage*" while replacing its lexical base. The playful effect consequently arises not from an entirely unfamiliar construction but from the alteration of a recognisable morphological pattern.

A similar relationship between familiarity and deviation can be observed in verbal formations. The form "*livixate*" employs the familiar verbal suffix *-ate*, which gives the invented base the formal appearance of an English verb. The novelty of the lexical base is thus accompanied by a recognisable indication of grammatical category. In words such as "*dispunge*" and "*mispise*", familiar prefixes are attached to unconventional bases, creating forms that resemble established English derivatives without corresponding to standard lexical items. The prefixes *dis-* and *mis-* provide recognizable structural and semantic cues, whereas the invented bases prevent the formations from being interpreted as ordinary derivatives. Such examples demonstrate that Dahl's manipulation of word formation may preserve the formal expectations associated with a lexical category or affix while deliberately violating expectations at the level of the base.

These formations extend the principle observed in the preceding examples. Dahl's lexical creativity does not depend solely on inventing unusual bases or combining familiar words. He also manipulates the internal structure of English words, retaining enough of a familiar morphological pattern for the new formation to be recognised as a plausible lexical unit. The resulting word play emerges from the contrast between morphological expectation and lexical deviation: the form suggests familiarity, while the invented element introduces the unexpected.

A related form of lexical play occurs in Dahl's compounds, where familiar lexical elements are combined in unexpected ways. In "*buzzy-hum*", for instance, both components look interpretable: *buzzy* describes the quality of a sound, whereas *hum* denotes

a low continuous sound. Their combination reinforces the same acoustic association and creates a more vivid impression than either element would produce independently. Other formations, such as “*bellypopper*” and “*wrappascal*”, similarly combine recognisable lexical elements while producing unexpected semantic associations. The playful character of these formations consequently depends less on the individual components than on the relationship established between them. In such compounds, semantic incongruity becomes an important source of word play. The components remain sufficiently transparent for the reader to recognise them, but their combination does not correspond to an established lexical association. This creates an interpretive gap between the meanings of the individual components and the meaning suggested by the whole formation. Dahl exploits this gap to produce comic or exaggerated images without sacrificing the recognisability of the word.

Blending provides another way of transforming familiar lexical material into playful formations. Forms such as “*delumptious*”, “*mushious*”, “*luctuous*” and “*scrumdiddlyumptious*” retain associations with existing words while incorporating elements of two or more lexical forms. “*Delumptious*”, for example, combines associations with *delicious* and *scrumptious*, while “*mushious*” incorporates elements associated with *mushy* and *delicious/luscious*. The resulting formations are therefore not semantically arbitrary. Their unusual forms preserve traces of the source words and allow several lexical associations to remain active simultaneously. Blending thus enables Dahl to condense familiar lexical material into a single unconventional form while retaining enough of the original material for recognition.

This effect is particularly pronounced in “*scrumdiddlyumptious*”. Its association with *scrumptious* and *delicious* is accompanied by additional sound material, while the length and unusual rhythm of the word contribute to its exaggerated character. The form itself reinforces the semantic excess suggested by the word. A related interaction between lexical formation and sound can be observed in “*churgle*”, which combines *chuckle* and *gurgle*. The formation preserves associations with both source words, while its phonological structure evokes the action it denotes. Word formation and sound consequently operate together, with phonological patterning reinforcing the playful effect of the lexical formation.

The interaction between recognisable linguistic material and deviation is also evident in Dahl’s use of spoonerism as a form of word play. In “*Dahl’s Chickens*”, the familiar name *Charles Dickens* is

playfully transformed through the transposition of initial sounds, while “*catasterous disastrophe*” similarly derives its comic effect from the rearrangement of sounds in the familiar expression *disastrous catastrophe*. These formations retain recognisable phonological traces of their source expressions, allowing the reader to reconstruct the original forms while simultaneously perceiving their distortion. The playful effect therefore depends on the coexistence of recognition and phonological deviation: the original expression remains sufficiently accessible for the reader to identify it, while its deliberate alteration produces a comic effect.

Although spoonerism is not a word-formation process in the strict morphological sense, its inclusion is relevant to the present analysis because it demonstrates that the playful transformation of familiar linguistic patterns may also operate at the phonological level. In *Gobblefunk*, therefore, word play is not restricted to the creation of new lexical forms. Dahl also modifies existing linguistic material in ways that preserve its recognisability while introducing formal or semantic incongruity.

Taken together, the analysed formations show that Dahl’s word play frequently arises from the interaction between recognisable linguistic patterns and deliberate deviation. Familiar morphological, lexical and phonological elements remain accessible to the reader, while their modification or unexpected combination produces the playful effect. The analysis thus demonstrates that in *Gobblefunk*, linguistic familiarity provides the structural basis for creative deviation rather than being opposed to it.

Conclusions. The findings indicate that word formation in Roald Dahl’s *Gobblefunk* functions not only as a means of creating new lexical units but also as a resource for word play. Dahl frequently relies on familiar morphological and lexical patterns, which remain sufficiently recognisable for readers to interpret the invented forms. At the same time, he introduces unexpected bases, combinations or modifications that distinguish these forms from conventional English vocabulary.

Several recurring patterns emerge from this interaction. Familiar derivational patterns may be applied to unusual lexical bases, while recognisable lexical elements may be combined in unexpected ways. Blending retains associations with existing words in unconventional formations, and phonological manipulation allows familiar forms to be recognised through their deliberate alteration. These processes demonstrate that Dahl’s lexical creativity operates across morphological, semantic and phonological levels rather than through word formation alone.

What connects these different forms of word play is the balance between recognisability and deviation. The familiar elements of his formations provide readers with sufficient linguistic information to infer a possible meaning, while the deviation from conventional patterns creates surprise, exaggeration, semantic incongruity or phonological effect. Word play in Gobblefunk therefore does not depend on complete linguistic novelty. Its effect frequently arises from the transformation of something familiar into something unexpected.

This relationship between convention and deviation gives word formation a wider function in Dahl's

fiction. Established word-formative means become instruments of literary play when their conventional use is modified or familiar linguistic elements are placed in unexpected relationships. The creative potential of Gobblefunk thus lies in the tension between linguistic convention and deviation, which allows newly formed words to remain accessible while acquiring distinctive expressive and playful qualities. Further studies of Dahl's language may trace how these patterns are perceived by readers of different age groups and how the recognisability of his lexical inventions influences their reception.

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