

Creative Intentions: The thin line between ‘creative’ and ‘wrong’

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Highly creative language use, as regularly found in poetry, song lyrics and advertising, has often been characterized along the lines of “deviation from the norm, breaking of rules, doing things differently, that is, law-breaking” (Cropley/Cropley 2013). In fact, this characterization does not only apply to creative language use, which is usually regarded as positive, but also to linguistic errors and – in the case of the quote by Cropley/Cropley (2013) above – crime. Salcedo-Albarán et al. (2009) on the other hand maintain that illegal and creative actions can be distinguished as follows (among other criteria):

- A. When examining the nature of the broken rule:
- a) If the broken rule is a formal one –or an explicit law- then illegality happens.
 - b) If the broken rule is an informal one –or an implicit social rule or custom- then creativity may happen. (Salcedo-Albarán et al. 2009: 3)

Accepting Coseriu’s (1952/1973) distinction between *System* and *Norm*, one could then argue that violations of the system result in errors and violations of the norm can result in creativity. However, such a distinction is much more difficult to make in a usage-based Construction Grammar framework such as the one proposed by Goldberg (1995, 2006), where input and abstractions over input lead to linguistic behaviour instead of abstract formal rules. Without such rules, what are appropriate mechanisms to define what is wrong and at the same time distinguish it from creative language use?

Comparing examples of E-creative language use (Sampson 2016 and Bergs 2018 for discussion) to linguistic errors, I will show how pre-emption (or negative entrenchment in the sense of Stefanowitsch 2006) can help differentiate between ‘creative’ and ‘wrong’ in a Construction Grammar framework even without recourse to abstract rules. Special attention will also be paid to the different expectations and assumptions hearers have when faced with (a) slips of the tongue by native speakers, (b) creativity, or (c) with errors in learner language. I will argue that here the perceived intention (see Uhrig 2018) plays an important role in the categorization of an utterance and that objective criteria in the analysis of the utterance alone cannot lead to a psychologically plausible distinction between ‘creative’ and ‘wrong’ language use.

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