TARTU UNIVERSITY NARVA COLLEGE

DIVISION of FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Viktoria Sokolova

FORMS OF WORD PLAY IN THE TITLES OF AMERICAN BLOCKBUSTERS

Bachelor's thesis

Supervisor: Olga Orehhova

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PREFACE

The topic of the present thesis is the use of different kinds of wordplay in the titles of American blockbusters. The paper aims at researching the titles of the most popular American blockbusters of the last 5 years; examining if they involve different forms of word play and finding out the most common ones. The paper concentrates on the studying, understanding and analyzing these types of wordplay used in the titles of American blockbusters to attract the viewer's attention.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part is the introduction, which presents the historical context, justifies the choice of the topic and focuses on the genres, blockbusters and their box-office success; it also describes the aims and hypothesis of the research. The second section, Chapter 1, presents the description and discussion of different forms of wordplay. The following Chapter 2 focuses on the empirical research of the titles of American blockbusters of the last 5 years and its results. The main ideas of the present paper are presented in the conclusion; it also summarizes the main points of the thesis and gives a summary of the empirical research.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Historical context

If to return to the past and to walk down the streets of any city of the United States in 1963, we would have seen just one film theater. Nowadays, when we hear the word 'Hollywood', the first thing we create in our minds are movies.

The history of popularity of American movies can be traced back to the the past, when a few independent studios ventured away from "the trust", mainly Thomas Edison and his
lawsuits, and moved to Los Angeles to produce, distribute, and show their movies. Los Angeles was far away from New York and this fact helped it become the home for independent film studios. And although major film studios were also present in Los Angeles, Hollywood started to grow and become so successful largely due to independent film studios' realization of the positive aspects about the location of Los Angeles. (Wael Khairy 2010: para.1)

There were some aspects why Los Angeles was and is the perfect place for shooting movies: sunny weather all the time, huge amount of shops, cheap property, and of course its excellent location and variety of beautiful landscapes for filming. Any independent studio wanted to make there their own history, so Hollywood became full of film factories (ibid.).

Of course, first of all, we pay attention to Hollywood films because of their "origin", but the second thing that is also important are their titles. Many years ago titles were made on a copy stand, and from year to year, with the development of technologies and opportunities, from something simple and monosyllabic, the opening titles turned into complex and interesting. The opinion of Gabrielle S. Prendergast (*BASIC Attraction: How Movie Titles Work (or don't)*, 2013: para. 4) is that the title plays a critical role in the film's success. "For some screenwriters the title is the first thing they think of and a major source of their inspiration. In fact the title may be the ONLY thing they know about their project, before they even know what it's about. " (ibid).

It can be surprising, but nowadays there are many companies that specialize in this area – the "art of titles", so, some movies, firstly named by screenwriters as Teen Comedy can be seen on screens like American Pie, for example (ibid).

To achieve the desired effect, namely the audience's attention, such companies have resorted to the use of various forms of wordplay.

According to the *Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, 'wordplay' is "the use of words to witty effect, especially by punning." (*The Oxford English Reference* 1995: 1665)

Webster's New World Dictionary explains it as follows: "wordplay – subtle or clever exchange of words, repartee." (*Webster's New World Dictionary* 1988: 1538)

1.2 Justification of the topic relevance

Throughout life we face with a variety of stylistics devices, whether it is in a conversation or in writing. It is important to know their types and structure for understanding the context of diversified expressions that people tell us. In this particular case we consider different movie titles, which were created to attract our attention, thereby manipulating the minds of viewers, who are all of us. In my opinion, the topic is relevant, because cinematography is arguably a big part of many people's lives, and in view of the above, it appears reasonable to examine such film promotion techniques. For this reason, the present research will concentrate on examining different forms of wordplay and word formation used in titling of movies.

1.3 American film industry

1.3.1 Genre

Modern American cinematography develops year by year, and if in the past there were just several types of movies, in these latter days we have many genres, and everyone can find something to their taste. The word "Genre" itself came from France; it means "type", "kind". (*The Free Encyclopedia*. Imagery 2013: para. 1)

As Tim Dirks notes (*Main Film Genres* 2013), there are ten groups of the main genres of modern American movies:

- Action films – a genre, which includes high energy and lots of physical stunts. Often in such movies we can see scenes of races, combat scenes, disasters, fires.

- Comedy – movies of light character. Such movies are made in a humorous or comic style and are always with a cheerful ending. The main idea is to provoke laughter.

- Drama – this genre include serious, realistic plot. Usually, the hero of such movie is facing a conflict. Dramatic movies are not focused on special-effects; themes are taken from the real life.

- Adventure – this movie describes an interesting, exciting story and it often shows heroic journeys for the unknown. Unlike action movies, adventure movies display lots of exotic locales.

- Horror – horror films force us to go deep into something supernatural. It is designed to frighten and invoke our fears. They often feature shocking scenes and elicit negative reaction.

- Historical movies – such movies that tell us a story about the past. Usually, the movie contains historical persons and presents significant events from that period (from the point of view of the people living in that period).

- Musicals – films consisting of a plot where actors sing songs, sometimes accompanied by dance scenes. Musical films contain elements of theatre – actors play like there is an audience watching them.

- Westerns – primarily, westerns tell us the stories about American Old West. The most recognizable elements of western films are horses, guns, cowboys, dusty roads, etc.

- War – the primary plot of such movie is combat fighting. War films show all the horrors of war. They can be based on history, biographical or just fiction.

- Science fiction movie – often imaginative movies, use of science fiction. Such films depict aliens' worlds, fantastic places, futuristic technology, time travel, robots, etc.

It can be also argued that there are movies that people like to watch more often than others and these movies are often action, comic or sentimental and dramatic films. So, primarily, film industry seeks to create their "masterpieces" closer to the genres above. It can be even a combination of types and elements of genres, but the main reason nowadays seems to be business and successful box-office.

1.3.2 Blockbusters

American movies include independent films and blockbusters. The *New World Encyclopedia* concludes:

> The term "blockbuster" fixed in the cinematography in the 1975 year, when Steven Spielberg revealed to the world his work named "Jaw". Such blockbusters emphasize spectacle, star power, and high production value, all of which entail an enormous budget. Blockbusters typically rely upon star power and massive advertising to attract a huge audience. A successful blockbuster will attract an audience large enough to offset production costs and reap considerable profits.
>
> (*The New World Encyclopedia*, Film Industry U.S., 2008: para. 7)

To know what the term blockbuster exactly means, we need to turn to the dictionaries. According to the *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 'blockbuster' is a "particularly powerful, forceful, or effective person or thing-specific, an expensive or pretentious movie, novel etc. intended to have wide popular appeal." (*Webster's New World Dictionary* 1988: 150)

Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary explains it as follows: "a new film, book that is described as a blockbuster is one that will be very popular and successful because of the exciting or sensational events shown or described in it." (*Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* 1987: 141)

As we can see, to earn this title, it must be a really amazing and spectacular movie that can attract millions of people and force them to spend their money for a ticket.

We can name some of the world-known blockbusters: *Avatar* (2009), *Titanic* (1997), *Skyfall* (2012). To verify their blockbuster status we can see their box-offices.

According to *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, 'box-office' is "an office for booking seats and buying tickets at the cinema." (*The Oxford English Reference Dictionary* 1995: 171)

According to the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, 'box-office' is the "place in a cinema where the tickets are sold; the box-office is also used to refer to the degree of success that films, plays, etc. achieve in terms of the number of people who go to watch them." (*Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* 1987: 160)

So, for example, a research by official representatives of the *Box Office Mojo* company shows that Avatar's box-office is $2 782 275 172, Titanic − $2 185 372 302 and the third, accordingly Skyfall, earned $1 108 561 013 (*IMDb, Box Office Mojo* 2013).

1.4 Aims and hypothesis of the research

The aim of the paper is to research the titles of the most popular American blockbusters of the last 5 years and to examine if they involve different forms of wordplay, and concentrate on its analyzing.

The hypothesis of the research argues that titles of popular American blockbusters often involve different kinds of word play to attract the viewer's attention, and the most used type of wordplay is alliteration.

CHAPTER 1. Different Forms of Wordplay

Wordplay can be used at the phonetic, lexical and stylistic level. In this chapter we will discuss each part in detail.

Verdonk (2002) explains it as follows:

> It will have become clear that in order to derive a discourse from a text we have to explore two different sites of meaning: on the one hand, the text's intrinsic linguistic or formal properties (its sounds, typography, vocabulary, grammar, and so on) and on the other hand, the extrinsic contextual factors, which are taken to affect is linguistic meaning. These two interacting sites of meaning are the concern of two fields of study: semantics is the study of formal meanings as they are encoded in the language of texts, that is independent of writers (speakers) and readers (hearers) set in a particular context, while pragmatics is concerned with the meaning of language in discourse, that is, when it used in appropriate context to achieve particular aims.
>
> (Verdonk 2002: 19)

2.1 Word-formation

According to Donka Minkova and Robert Paul Stockwell (2009), there are three regular or common word-formation types:

1. Derivation by affixation – adding endings or affixes to the basic form of the word.

   Example: nation - nation-al; national-ise

2. Derivation without affixation – one word can refer to different functions (it can be noun and verb depending on context)

   Example: They wanted to green the neighborhood. They were given a green light. (ibid.: 8)

3. Compounding- "putting together two words on a perfectly transparent way, and then various changes take place which may cause the compound to lose its transparency."(ibid.: 9)

   Example: 'Good-bye' from 'God be with you'.

As Minkova and Stockwell (2009) note, new word creation means "the generating new words in more unexpected and creative way. The main difference between the types of

word-formation discussed below and the 'regular' types above is that "word-creation" can be a highly individual, personal matter."

The first type of new word creation is creation *de novo*. This means the creation of the new word without basing it on some pre-existing word or part of the word.

Example: Kodak

It was registered as a proprietary name by George Eastman (1888), and from his words it was "a purely arbitrary combination of letters, not derived in whole or in part from any existing word." (Minkova and Stockwell 2009: 12)

The second type is blending. It is also called portmanteau words, following Lewis Carroll (Charles L. Dodgson), the author of *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). He wrote: "well, "slithy" means "lithe and slimy" … You see it's like a portmanteau – there are two meanings packed up into one word … "Mimsy" is "flimsy and miserable" (there's another portmanteau)".

 Example: Smog – a blend of smoke and fog (ibid.:13).

The third type is clipping. This means shortening the word by clipping off the part of this word.

Example: Info (from information)

The fourth type is back-formation. As Minkova and Stockwell (2009: 15) observe, this is "the part of the word that is clipped off a recognizable affix. The word burgle is an example of this process (burgle from burglar)."

New word creation includes abbreviations: acronyms and initialisms. The use of acronyms is the fifth type – a special type of shortening. Usually, a new word appears by taking the first letters from each or several words.

Example: BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation).

Initialism is formed by combining the first letters in a name or expression and each letter is pronounced separately.

Example: the National Broadcasting Company is known as NBC (ibid.).

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The next type is eponyms. This is the new word creation which is based on names. Such creation is very popular in biology or chemistry. (Usually, discovering something new, people like to give their names to their discoveries.)

Example: Es – in chemistry, means Einsteinium (ibid. 19).

And finally, slang – the use of informal words or expressions, can be also added to this part.

Example: Cop – police officer.

2.2 Sense variation

According to Minkova and Stockwell (2009:163), we can discuss the meaning of words in two ways: 1) in terms of sense variation around a common core; 2) in terms of the kinds of affinities and contrasts we can discern between meanings.

The first phenomenon which bundles words together is homophony. The term is used to cover two historically distinct types of semantic identity: 1) homonymy; 2) polysemy (ibid.: 163):

- Two words that have absolutely different meanings and origins but sound alike, we can name homonymous. ("Having the same name")

  Example: 'date' – My favorite fruit is a date. /John took Miley out on a date.

- Polysemy, the opposite to homonymy, means that one single word has different meanings. It should be mentioned that "the differentiation from one into several meanings is most commonly a consequence of the change, usually over long time spans, from concrete to abstract meaning – i.e. increasingly figurative use of language" (ibid.: 164)

  Example: flower – flour.

One more way of looking at the meanings of words is also presented by Minkova and Stockwell:

Another way of looking at the meanings of words is by relating their meanings to the meanings of other words in the vocabulary, without reference to etymology, pronunciation, or spelling. The main

criterion for grouping words together in this classification is the presence or absence of shared or contrastive meaning.

<div align="right">(Minova and Stockwell 2009: 165)</div>

The meaning relations are:

- Synonymy – equivalence in meaning: funny, comical, humorous, hysterical (Synonymy 2013: para. 1)

- Antonymy – words that have the opposite meaning: dark vs. light (Opposite 2013: para.3)

- Hyponymy – is a term for a word whose meaning is subsumed under the more general meaning of another word: oak, beech, poplars are types of tree (Minkova and Stockwell 2009: 166)

- Eponym-using a proper name as a common noun: sandwich (ibid.: 167)

- Heteronym – a word is spelled like another but has a different pronunciation and meaning: bass (fish) –bass (male voice) (ibid.: 167)

- Meronym – a word denoting an object which forms part of another object: a page is part of a book (ibid.: 167)

- Metonym – a word used for another with which there is some special association, as in space or time: "I always support the point of view of Buckingham Palace. (ibid.: 167)

- Oronyms – homophones based on misplacement of a word boundary: scream –ice-cream (ibid.:167)

- Plesionyms – near synonyms, differing in the degree of the core property they share, as in e.g. error "an act or thought that unintentionally deviates from what is correct, right or true"(AHD), thus, erratum, miscue, mistake. These are clearly centered around the same basic meaning but their associations with the intentionality and seriousness of the error are different (ibid.: 167).

2.3 Stylistic devices

The next important dimension of wordplay is stylistics, i.e. the study of style. A good definition of this is provided by Norgaard, Busse, Montoro and Rocio (2010):

> Stylistics is the study of the ways in which meaning is created through language in literature as well as in other types of text. To this end, stylisticians use linguistic models, theories and frameworks as their analytical tools in order to describe and explain how and why a text works as it does, and how we come from the words on the page to its meaning.
>
> (Norgaard, Busse, Montoro and Rocio 2010: 1)

In order to appeal to the senses of the reader, the author uses a variety of stylistic devices. The most common among them are presented in the *Glossary of Linguistic Terms* (2004):

- Metaphor – is the expression of an understanding of one concept in terms of another concept, where there is some similarity or correlation between the two. (Metaphor 2004).

    Example: broken heart

- Metonymy – metonymy is, broadly defined, a trope in which one entity is used to stand for another associated entity. (Metonymy 2004)

    Example: The suits – in place of business people

- Antonomasia – the use of a proper name to stand for something else having an attribute associated with that name. (Antonomasia 2004)

    Example: "the Iron Lady" for Margaret Thatcher

- Irony – is a trope in which an expression is used in such a fashion as to convey the opposite meaning of what is expressed. (Irony 2004)

    Example: Marriage is the leading cause of divorce

- Epithet – an adjective or phrase expressing a quality or attribute regarded as characteristic of the person or thing mentioned (*The Oxford Dictionary*. Epithet 2013.)

    Example: careful steps

- Oxymoron – is a collocation of words that have contradictory or sharply incongruous meanings. (*Glossary of Linguistic Terms.* Oxymoron 2004.)

  Example: pretty ugly

- Hyperbole – is deliberate exaggeration for emotional effect. The addressee is not expected to have a literal understanding of the expression. (Hyperbole 2004)

  Example: I have a million things to do.

- Meiosis – is the minimization of the importance of a referent by the use of an expression that is disproportionate to it. (Meiosis 2004)

  Example: Referring to a generous gift as a small token of esteem (ibid.)

- Periphrasis – the use of a verbose or roundabout form of expression; circumlocution. (*The Free Dictionary.* Periphrasis 2013)

  Example: happi-er – more happy

- Simile – a simile is a comparison between two things. It is signaled overtly; in English, a simile is expressed by the words like, as. (*Glossary of Linguistic Terms.* Simile 2004)

  Example: as busy as a bee

- Euphemism – euphemism is a metaphorical or metonymic use of an expression in place of another expression that is disagreeable or offensive. (*Glossary of Linguistic Terms.* Euphemism 2004)

  Example: 'on the streets' instead of 'homeless'

- Personification – is an ontological metaphor in which a thing or abstraction is represented as a person. (*Glossary of Linguistic Terms.* Personification 2004)

  Example: The Ocean danced in the moonlight.

- Antithesis- the placing of a sentence or one of its parts against another to which it is opposed to form a balanced contrast of ideas. (*The Free Dictionary.* Antithesis 2013.)

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Example: Love is an ideal thing, marriage a real thing. – Goethe

- Emphatic inversion – a reversal of the usual order of words, as in the placement of the subject after an auxiliary verb in a question. (ibid. Inversion 2013)

  Example: Never before have I seen such beauty.

- Detachment – The act or process of disconnecting or detaching; separation. (by corresponding marks of punctuation) (ibid. Detachment 2013)

  Example: "She was lovely: all of her – delightful."

- Ellipsis – The omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding. (ibid. Ellipsis 2013.)

  Example: "Prosperity is a great teacher; adversity a greater."

- Aposiopesis – a sudden breaking off of a thought in the middle of a sentence, as though the speaker were unwilling or unable to continue. (ibid. Aposiopesis 2013)

  Example: "Well, I lay if I get a hold of you I'll–." (*Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain)

- Rhetorical Question – has the direct illocutionary force of a question, and is not generally used with the expectation of an answer but with some different, indirect force. (*The Glossary of Linguistic Terms.* Rhetorical question 2004)

  Example: "Can you do anything right?"

- Litotes – is the use of a negated antonym to make an understatement or to emphatically affirm the positive. (ibid. Litotes. 2004)

  Example: They aren't the happiest couple around. (They are unhappy)

- Parallelism – similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases, or clauses. Also called parallel structure. (*Grammar and Composition.* Parallelism 2013.)

  Example: This is not only just what I wanted, but also just what I needed.

- Chiasmus – a reversal in the order of words in two otherwise parallel phrases. (*The Free Dictionary* .Chiasmus 2013.)

  Example: One should eat to live**,** not live to eat**.** – Cicero.

- Climax – device by which a series of sentences, clauses, or phrases are arranged in order of increasing intensity. (ibid. Climax 2013)

  Example:

  > Beauty is but a vain and doubtful good;
  > A shining gloss that vadeth suddenly;
  > A flower that dies when first it gins to bud;
  > A brittle glass that's broken presently:
  > A doubtful good, a gloss, a glass, a flower,
  > Lost, vaded, broken, dead within an hour.
  > (Shakespear, *The Passionate Pilgrim*)

- Anticlimax – opposite to climax. It is a slackening of tension in a sentence or longer piece of writing, the ideas falling off in dignity or becoming less important at the close. (*The Glossary of Literary Terms.*Anticlimax 2004.)

  Example: He lost his family, his car and his cell phone.

- Asyndeton – the practice of leaving out the usual conjunctions between coordinate sentence elements (*Webster's New Dictionary.* Asyndeton 1988.)

  Example: He received applause, prizes, money, fame.

- Polysyndeton – opposite to asyndeton. The use or repetition of conjunctions in close succession (ibid.).

  Example: We lived and laughed and loved and left.

- Apokoinou – a blending of two sentences through a common word which has two syntactic functions, one for each of the sentence. The word common to both sentences is often a predicate object in the first and a subject in the second. (*Wordnik.* Apokoinou. 2013.)

  Example: There was a man in my last parish was a poacher

- Repetition – can be lexical, synonymical or syntactical:

- Lexical repetition:

  Example: Months and months of that sort of thing!

- Synonymical:

  Example: "The poetry of earth is never dead. The poetry of earth is ceasing never." (John Keats)

- Syntactical repetition:

  - Anaphora – repetition in which the same expression is repeated at the beginning of two or more lines, clauses or sentences. (*Quizlet*. Anaphora. 2013.)

    Example: "She laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks. She laughed so hard that he sat up, concerned." (A. J. Cronin)

  - Epiphora – the repetition of a word or words at the end of two or more successive clauses, phrases, or verses. (*The Free Dictionary*. Epiphora 2013.)

    Example: "I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong." (ibid.)

  - Anadiplosis – repetition of the last word or words of one clause at the beginning of the next clause. (*The Free Dictionary*. Anadiplosis 2013.)

    Example:

    "At six o'clock we were waiting for coffee,
    waiting for coffee and the charitable crumb . . ."
    (Elizabeth Bishop, *A Miracle for Breakfast*)

  - Framing – a repetition device in which the opening word or phrase is repeated at the end of a sense-group or a sentence. (*The Glossary of Literary Terms*. Framing 2007.)

    Example: "No wonder his father wanted to know what Bosinney meant, no wonder." (G. Galsworthy)

- Syntactic tautology – the repletion of a part of the sentences, usually the subject, expressed by a noun or by a pronoun. Sometimes vice versa. (*Syntactic Expressive Means and Stylistic Devices.* Syntactic tautology. 2012.)

  Example: The Widow Douglass, she took me for her son, and allowed she would civilize me. (ibid.)

The following section refers to phonetic stylistic devices:

- Euphony (*Gr.* 'to sound well') – combination of sounds the expressive effect of which corresponds to the general mood or emotional tone of the extract. (ibid.)

  Example:

  > Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
  > Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
  > Conspiring with him how to load and bless
  > With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
  > (John Keats, *To Autumn*)

- Alliteration is a stylistic device consisting of the repetition of the same sound in nearby words (Norgaard, Busse, Montoro and Rocio 2010: 49).

  Example: Peter's piglet pranced priggishly.

- Onomatopoeia – is the use of a word that denotes a sound suggested by the phonetic quality of the word or thing that produces such a sound. (*The Glossary of Linguistic Terms.* Onomatopoeia 2003.)

  Example: gong, crackle, twitter (ibid.)

- Rhyme – is the repetition of the last stressed vowel and the following speech sounds in two or more words, most typically positioned at the end of verse-lines. (Norgaard, Busse, Montoro and Rocio 2010: 145)

  Example: While-mile

- Consonance – the repetition of consonants or of a consonant pattern, especially at the ends of words. (*The Free Dictionary.* Consonance 2013.)

Example: blank and think or strong and string.(ibid.)

Some other stylistic devices:

- Palindrome – a word or phrase that reads the same backward or forward. (*Online Dictionary*. Palindrome 2013.)

    Example: stressed or desserts

- Spoonerism – the transposition of the initial consonants or consonant clusters of a pair of words, often resulting in an amusing ambiguity of meaning. (*The Free Dictionary*. Spoonerism 2013.)

    Example: save the whales—wave the sails

- Chronogram – a phrase or sentence in which some letters can be interpreted as numerals and rearranged to stand for a particular date. (*The Free Encyclopedia*. Forms of Wordplay 2012: para. 2)

    Example: such as M, C, X, L and V can be read as Roman numerals giving a date

- Malapropism – incorrect usage of a word by substituting a similar-sounding word with different meaning (ibid.: para. 3).

    Example: I have no delusions to the past. (Allusions)

We have discussed the key points of word formation and the main types of stylistic devices. Of course, due to the limited time and sources, by no means all of stylistic devices are presented. Now we know a considerable number of techniques how to modify our language and its meaning to make it more expressive and attractive to for the reader or hearer.

So, to disguise the real meaning, to attract attention, people love to play around with language. Wordplay describes a broad category of linguistic manipulation of sounds, words, phrases, and text. It can be intentional or accidental; it can be used for humor, offense, and much more besides. There is really no limit to what can be done when you have got entire language at your disposal.

CHAPTER 2. Empirical Research of the Titles of American Blockbusters of the Last Five Years

3.1 Methodology and Sample

The following chapter will present the research of the titles of the most popular American blockbusters (as illustrated by box-office success) over the last five years (2008 – 2012). To conduct a research, a list of the most popular American blockbusters over five years (first 50 films from each year, 250 films in total – see Appendix 1) has been compiled basing on the results of their box-office success (according to *Box Office Mojo*) and the titles where different forms of wordplay are used have been chosen out of the list.

3.2 Hypothesis

Different styles of wordplay are often used in the titles of American blockbusters and the most used form of wordplay is alliteration.

3.3 Linguistic analysis

To begin the research, the first 50 movies have been selected from each year starting from 2008 to 2012 and there have been found 33 movie titles where wordplay is used.

We start from the year 2008 and will move in increasing order.

Marley and Me (2008). The use of wordplay in this title refers to the phonetic stylistic devices – alliteration. It clearly visible that here is used the repetition of initial sounds: "M" and "M". Such title is sonorous, so it captures the viewer's attention. It is well-remembered, and looking at the title it seems that this is a heartwarming movie, maybe about something similar between the two main heroes, so if someone sees a such title, s/he involuntarily starts to think about it, and it means that creators achieved the effect.

The Dark Knight (2008). At first, we can decide that here is used the homonym, i.e. the use of words that sound alike but have absolutely different meanings. So, instead of "knight" it may be "night", which can be dark. But in my opinion, here we see a metaphor. Of course, "knight" can't be "dark", and metaphor is used for emotional effect. For viewers this is the "flight of fancy": the movie can tell us about the knight with the "dark" side, or it

can be about hero living in the "shadow". Such titles attract the attention; so maybe, initially this movie became popular thanks to such mysterious title.

Iron Man (2008). As well as the previous title *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Iron Man* (2008) is also a metaphor. We consider the fact that we have not seen the movie and see only the title (*Iron Man* is a story about the inventor of the iron suit and his heroic actions thanks to this suit). Again, here we can give a "free range" to our imagination , and first thing we create in our minds is strength, power and immovability. Of course, we decide that we must see it, and thanks to it *Iron Man* (2008) is so popular and has a box office success. Furthermore, every boy wants to see it, because they are crazy about robots, technologies and other modern inventions.

WALL-E (2008). To create this title, the representatives of the Disney-Pixar movie used the new word creation that includes abbreviations – the acronyms. This new word appears by taking the first letters from each or several words. The full title can be deciphered as "Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth-Class". The abbreviation can intrigue the viewer, and it can try to make him/her go to the cinema and, eventually, enjoy the cartoon about the distant future, where a small waste collecting robot inadvertently embarks on a space journey that will ultimately decide the fate of mankind.

Quantum of Solace (2008). The mysterious and beautiful metaphor in the headline is borrowed by the movie makers from the story of Ian Fleming, who described it as follows: "Quantum of solace is perfect symbol, determining participation/humanity/friendship what is needed in relationships of any pair for their love living. If quantum of solace is 0, love is dead." There are many fans of James Bond, and if they see such title, they will "burn" with impatience, because the title should be connected with the main character. Based on what happened to the character of James Bond in the last film, *Casino Royale* (2006) (his loss of his love), the title Quantum of Solace (2008) is appropriate for this film, considering his mental state. So, the title played the big role in its "coronation" to blockbuster status by intrigue, interest and mysticism.

Horton Hears a Who! (2008) and *Mamma Mia!* (2008) refer to one type of stylistic devices – alliteration. We see that words have the same first sound. Alliteration aids in memory because it is catchy and perhaps humorous. For instance, if someone titles his

movie "Horton Hears a Who" rather than "Horton has very big ears and hears everything", people will be more likely to remember it.

Slumdog Millionaire (2008). Here we see a collocation of words that have contradictory meanings – slumdog and millionaire. So, that means that this is an oxymoron. It can be used to create confusion and grab attention. In this case, oxymoron adds a dramatic effect, and gives the impression of a serious, deep movie, by that encouraging us to see it.

Apparently, the creators of *Yes Man* (2008) tried to use the stylistic device named ellipsis – the omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding (see Chapter 1). This creates an effect of uncertainty and suspension of thought until we see the movie.

Pineapple Express (2008). As it said, the *Pineapple Express* is a term for a meteorological phenomenon. According to *The Free Encyclopedia*, this phenomenon is "associated with heavy precipitation from the waters adjacent to the Hawaiian Islands."(*The Free Encyclopedia.*Pineapple Express 2013). That is why "Pineapple", and probably "express" symbolizes the speed of it . So, probably we can refer this movie title to metonymy (a word used for another with which there is some special association), because it started to mean a type of marijuana as well later.

*Star Trek (*2009). More than likely this is a metaphorical title, and under this "modest" metaphor hides a mysterious, full of adventures story. Metaphorical headlines produce a positive effect, such titles are more noticed.

The Blind Side (2009). First of all we need to think about the context of this title. When I first saw the poster of this movie, I thought about what it can mean. For me, the blind side means the blind side of people. Sometimes people don't see anything beyond the line-of-sight distance, they just live in their worlds and don't want to delve into something else. This metaphor holds a deep meaning, and this is precisely why I decided to watch this movie. It turns out that thanks to a metaphorical title, I have found one of the best movies I have ever watched.

As it was with the movies presented above, such films as *Fast and Furious* (2009), A *Christmas Carol* (2009), *Julie & Julia* (2009) also have alliteration in their titles. As mentioned earlier, every word in collocation begins with the same sound. This cunning

technique shows us the ability of alliteration to effect on our minds, so that such titles remain in our minds for a long time.

Paul Blart: Mall Cop (2009). The main part in this title, "mall cop", and it is clearly visible that here is used slang – the use of informal words. In my view, similar titles designed for the younger generation, because sometimes adult cannot understand it at all (It was unthinkable to use slang one or two generations ago). So, teens will be attracted, thinking that this movie was filmed especially for them. On the other hand, it is also can be homophony: mall – mal- prefix meaning "bad" as in malnutrition or in malfunction, so it can sound to mean "bad cop".

Inglourious Basterds (2009). In my opinion this title includes exaggeration, it means that here is used the stylistic device named hyperbole – the deliberate exaggeration for emotional effect (see Chapter 1). Using this, the title becomes more colorful than ordinary factual name. The creators tried to involve the viewer through the use of humorous effect, and we can say that they did it; this farce about the war became world famous.

Next title, *The Ugly Truth (*2009) has a metaphorical context. It allows us to use our imagination and try to visualize the connection between these two things that are incompatible. According to Colby Phillips (2013), "Metaphors borrow emotional content from something that is already well understood and lend it to something that the writer is trying to help a reader understand" (The Effects of Metaphors 2013). Looking at this title, we can think that movie can tell us about the real truth of our life, thus attracting attention.

Despicable Me (2010). In my opinion here is used the emphatic inversion, that means a change of usual order of words. Here we see the placing of an adjective before the pronoun. If to title this movie following the rules, it would be "I am a despicable", but movie makers decided to go in a more interesting way and to release this awesome cartoon with such "repulsive" title. Undoubtedly, it was done on purpose: word play in the title suits the playful cartoon.

Due Date (2010) blockbuster has an alliterative title. Why? Memorable, fun, creative writing. Alliteration can light up an otherwise dull writing and convert it into a perfect and catchy one.

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Knight & Day (2010). If you don't know what the film is about, you might think that here is used a syntactic stylistic device which name is malapropism. As we know, malapropism means the incorrect usage of a word by substituting a similar-sounding word with different meaning (Chapter1). It is logical to suggest that instead of "knight" it should be "night". This deliberate error is used for specific effect, i.e. to confuse the viewer. On the other hand, you might think that this movie is about the knight but in this case, the title should be "Knight of the day". Anyway, this trick forces us to think about it.

Blockbusters *Fast Five* (2011) and *Jack and Jill* (2011) involve alliteration. Again, here is the repetition of the sound as "F" and "F" in the first title and "J" and "J" in the second title. As it was mentioned earlier, such titles are easy to memorize.

Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked (2011). As I guess, here is used the detachment – separating a secondary part of a sentence with the aim of emphasizing it by means of inversion, intonation (or by corresponding marks of punctuation) (see chapter 1). As it said the detachment is used to make a notion, an image or a characteristic feature more expressive, thus attracting our attention by the reticence. It is also can be a special type of word formation- blending or a portmanteau word, where two meanings packed up into one word . In this case, "chipwrecked" is the connection of "chipmunk" and "wreck" used for a humorous effect.

Gnomeo and Juliet (2011). Of course, the creators wanted to achieve the humorous effect. For doing this, they have used "blending" – the creation of new word by combining two different words. In the first part of the title, the name "Gnomeo" means the connection of "Gnome" and "Romeo". This is caused by the fact that the cartoon is about two gnomes, who loved each other, but they were from families, which always feuded.

Moneyball (2011). It is hard to understand the meaning of this title without any information about the movie, but if to watch the trailer or to read about it, you can understand that Moneyball (2011) is the result of the combination of words "money" and "baseball", thus here is used one of the types of new word creation – blending. The title involves two different spheres: money and sport, so maybe the creators wanted to draw the viewer's attention in such a manner.

The Hunger Games (2012). This metaphorical title makes us to move away from everyday vocabulary to scientific theorizing. Metaphor makes changes in the standard way of thinking; we try to find the connection between language and thought. Of course we understand that it is impossible to play the "hunger" games in the literal sense, so that means that there is an inner meaning behind the title, and from this moment starts to work our imagination, until we buy a ticket.

Wreck-It Ralph (2012). Probably, here is used the detachment – separating a secondary part of a sentence. We see the separation between two parts by a hyphen. It would seem that these two parts are not connected, but viewers don't need the extra words, they solve it themselves. Maybe here is also used a type of word formation – compounding, i.e. putting together two words "wreck" +"it". (See Chapter 1)

MIB 3 (2012). As it was with the title *WALL-E* (2008), this is also the acronym. The definition of "MIB" is "Men In Black". The abbreviation seems more curious and interesting than the full version, by that attracting an audience.

Silver Linings Playbook (2012). As I guess, the structure of this title is similar to the cartoon named *Despicable Me* (2010) that is to say here is used the emphatic inversion. Here is seen a reversal of the usual order of words. The unusual way of titling is confusing, but nevertheless attracts attention. Maybe by doing this, the creators wanted to make it clear that their movie plot involves the singularity of design, and tells an unusual story.

Magic Mike (2012), *Pitch Perfect* (2012) and *Mirror Mirror* (2012).These movies have alliteration in their titles. Again, here is the repetition of the first sound in each title. The last one, *Mirror Mirror* (2012) also includes simple lexical repetition of the word "mirror".

3.4 Discussion of results

Having done the empirical research of the titles of American blockbusters of the last five years, it can be seen that out of 250 titles we have found only 33 where wordplay is used. So, the hypothesis that different styles of wordplay are often used in the titles of American blockbusters and the most used form of wordplay is alliteration, confirmed only partially. Primarily, only a small part of the titles involves wordplay, and that means that in modern cinematography, the use of wordplay is a relative rarity. The second part of the hypothesis was nevertheless confirmed: we have found alliteration in 12 movie titles out of 33. The

frequent use of alliteration is a reflection of the fact that this is the most popular stylistic device used in titling of blockbusters for attracting viewer's attention, as alliterative titles sound rather catchy and tend to remain in our memory.

CONCLUSION

The present thesis aimed at studying various types of wordplay, including word formation and stylistic devices that have been found in the allotted time. There was conducted a research of the titles of the most popular American blockbusters over five years and was made a sample of movie titles, where different types of wordplay appear to have been used. In this context, the bachelor thesis concludes that:

1) For the "blockbuster" title the movie must be world-popular and must have an incredibly high box-office; the title of the movie can also guarantee the success.

2) As can be seen from the theoretical discussion of the relevant forms of wordplay, including word formation and various types of stylistic devices, this process is very complex and there is more in this than meets the eye.

3) Only 33 movie titles from the whole list of blockbusters (250) include elements of wordplay.

4) Alliteration is the most used stylistic device in the titles of blockbusters.

It should be noted that the present information cannot be considered comprehensive and due to certain limitations it cannot be fully-investigated, however it can pinpoint the main techniques.

Summing up, it can be concluded that this work, which concerns the variety of forms of wordplay, provides both theoretically and empirically based information on the topic and is thought to be helpful for someone whoever will do a research on a similar theme and for a general public.

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RESÜMEE

Käesoleva töö põhimõtte on näidata erinevate sõnamängu vormide kasutamine Ameerika filmide nimetustes. Dokumendi eesmärk on uurida populaarsemaid Ameerika blockbasteri nimetused viimase 5 aasta jooksul mis sisalduvad sõnamängu kasutamist. Töö keskendub õppetusest, aru saamistest ja analüüsimist sõnamängu kasutamises Ameerika filmide nimetustes vaatlejate tähelepanu meenutamiseks.

Uurimistöö koosneb neljast osast. Esimene on sissejuhatus, kus on märgitud ajalooline kontekst ja teema valiku argumenteerimine. Erinevate zänri ja populaarsemate filmide kassasuurused selgitatakse ka töö sissejuhatavas osas, samuti kirjeldatakse uuringu eesmärgid ja hüpotees.

Teine osa esimene peatükk sisaldab erinevate sõnamängu vormide kirjeldus ja nende arutelu. Teine peatükk esitab Ameerika filmide nimetuste peamine uuring ja keskendub uuringu tulemuse peal.

Kokkuvõtte koondab endast peamised seisukohad ja ühendab uuringu põhiideid.

APPENDIX 1. List of Movies

2008

1   The Dark Knight

2   Iron Man

3   Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull

4   Hancock

5   WALL-E

6   Kung Fu Panda

7   Twilight

8   Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa

9   Quantum of Solace

10   Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who!

11   Sex and the City

12   Gran Torino

13   Mamma Mia!

14   Marley and Me

15   The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian

16   Slumdog Millionaire

17   The Incredible Hulk

18   Wanted

19   Get Smart

20   The Curious Case of Benjamin Button

43   Vantage Point

44   The Spiderwick Chronicles

45   Fool's Gold

46   Seven Pounds

47   Role Models

48   Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds Concert Tour

49   The Happening

50   Forgetting Sarah Marshall

2009

1   Avatar

2   Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

3   Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

4   The Twilight Saga: New Moon

5   Up

6   The Hangover

7   Star Trek

8   The Blind Side

9   Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel

10   Sherlock Holmes

11   Monsters Vs. Aliens

12   Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs

13   X-Men Origins: Wolverine

14   Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian

15   2012

16   The Proposal

17   Fast and Furious

18   G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra

19   Paul Blart: Mall Cop

20   Taken

21   A Christmas Carol

22   Angels & Demons

23   Terminator Salvation

24   Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

25   Inglourious Basterds

26   G-Force

27   District 9

28   It's Complicated

29   Couples Retreat

30   Paranormal Activity

31   Watchmen

32   The Princess and the Frog

33   Public Enemies

34   Julie & Julia

35

35	He's Just Not That Into You
36	Tyler Perry's Madea Goes to Jail
37	The Ugly Truth
38	Up in the Air
39	Knowing
40	Hannah Montana The Movie
41	Where the Wild Things Are
42	Zombieland
43	Coraline
44	Law Abiding Citizen
45	Hotel for Dogs
46	Michael Jackson's This Is It
47	I Love You, Man
48	Obsessed
49	Race to Witch Mountain
50	The Final Destination

2010

1	Toy Story 3
2	Alice in Wonderland
3	Iron Man 2
4	The Twilight Saga: Eclipse

36

2012

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11	Dr. Seuss' The Lorax
12	Wreck-It Ralph
13	Lincoln
14	MIB 3
15	Django Unchained
16	Ice Age: Continental Drift
17	Snow White and the Huntsman
18	Les Miserables
19	Hotel Transylvania
20	Taken 2
21	21 Jump Street
22	Argo
23	Silver Linings Playbook
24	Prometheus
25	Safe House
26	The Vow
27	Life of Pi
28	Magic Mike
29	The Bourne Legacy
30	Journey 2: The Mysterious Island
31	Rise of the Guardians
32	Zero Dark Thirty

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FORMS OF WORD PLAY IN THE TITLES OF AMERICAN BLOCKBUSTER

supervised by Olga Orehhova

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