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Term Paper

"Means of Drawing Attention in English and Ukranian News Headlines"

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTON

In the era dominated by rapid information exchange and digital media, the consumption of news has undergone a cardinal transformation. These days readers are overwhelmed by the amount of information accessible at the tap of a screen, anytime, anywhere. Thus, the competition among news sources for readers' attention has grown profoundly. As news headlines represent the first piece of information readers engage with, they play a pivotal role in information dissemination and audience engagement.

This course paper aims to explore the role of headlines in capturing attention across different linguistic landscapes, namely, English and Ukrainian speaking newspapers, tabloids, news-streaming sites.

To achieve this aim, the paper is structured around several key tasks:
• Explore theories of attention and their practical relevance for headline creation
• Look into the structure of news discourse and the role headline plays in it
• Analyze linguistic devices used in designing attention-catching headlines

Object of Research: News headlines in English and Ukrainian

Subject of Research: Linguistic deviced aimed at crafting appealing, attention-grabbing headlines.

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive research method to collect the data and thematic analysis to interpret it.

The **theoretical value** of this paper lies in exploring the scientific ground behind the choice of linguistic devices used for constructing attention-grabbing news headlines in English and Ukrainian.

The **practical findings** of this work can help media in tailoring news headlines to catch readers' attention and prompt their engagement with publications, thus potentially increase readership.

The structure of the research is organized into Introduction and two Chapters, Conclusions, References and Abstract.

Chapter I explores theories of attention and how this knowledge combined with understanding of the news text structure is used to shape eye-catching news headlines in English and Ukraniain with the help of linguistic mechanisms.

Chapter II delves into syntactic and semantic devices used to design attention-grabbing headlines. Conclusions summarize the findings of this work.

CHAPTER 1: THEORIES OF ATTENTION. STRUCTURE OF NEWS DISCOURSE AND STUDY OF HEADLINE AS ATTENTION GRABBING DEVICE

1.1 Understanding Attention: Definitions and Theories

Attention in the context of media studies and psychology is a broad and multifaceted concept, pivotal to understanding how audiences interact with news and other forms of communication.

Attention can be defined as the behavioral and cognitive process of selectively concentrating on a discrete aspect of information, whether deemed subjective or objective, while ignoring other perceivable information. As William James, a pioneering psychologist, put it, "Attention implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others." [James (1890):5]. This definition underscores the selective nature of attention, which is crucial in the context of media consumption, where audiences must navigate a plethora of information.

From a psychological standpoint, the following theories of attention, proposed by James S. Ross, may be presented:

• **Involuntary attention** which is aroused by our instinct and sentiments. This type of attention does not involve any efforts by an individual in order to focus their attention on a particular object or event. Involuntary attention comes in two types:

Enforced Attention when due to striking qualities of the stimulus an individual is forced to attend or concentrate his attention on it.

Spontaneous Attention which occurs without any effort and is sustained by some internal motivation and sentiments.

• **Voluntary attention** in which an individual has to make efforts, exercise his interest and will power in order to focus attention. It is also divided into two types:

Implicit Attention when a single act of volition is sufficient to bring about attention.

Explicit Attention where repeated acts of will are required to sustain attention.

[Lawrence (2023):7]

In this work we will refer to the Enforced Involuntary Attention as it provides understanding of how the human brain selectively focuses on specific stimuli while ignoring irrelevant information. Therefore, this understanding is fundamental in creating attention-grabbing media messages in general and news headlines in particular.

1.2. News Discourse Structure and the Role of Headline in it

One of the most fundamental differences between a news discourse and other forms of writing is the way they are structured.

The Classic Story Structure, also known as narrative structure or dramatic structure, has been a standard format used for many centuries in visual stories and novels. This structure, called Freytag's Pyramid, includes the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution [Bressmer, (2022):1]. In other words, a classic story begins with an introduction, with the gist or climax coming in the middle of a story and finishes with a resolution.

News articles, on the other hand, are written in a structure known as the "inverted pyramid" where the most newsworthy information goes at the beginning of the story and the least newsworthy information goes at the end. [George Mason University: 2].

According to Van Dijk, a news discourse has a "global rule for its order" [Van Dijk, 1985:14], namely,

1. *Headline,* which represents a summary of the event.
2. *Lead,* an opening paragraph that gives the audience the most important information of the news story in a concise manner, while still maintaining the readers' interest.
3. *Main Event,* full description of the story.
4. *Comments or Consequences* of the event.

Let's consider the following piece of news from the British *The Sun* tabloid in terms of its structure. The story begins the headline *"MUM'S 'SPIKE' HELL"* which gives us a summary of the event — something terrible happenned to someone's mum. More explanation comes in the Lead, *"Horror as mum, 43, left brain damaged after her drink 'was spiked' at bottomless brunch"* and elaborated in the Main Event telling

the reader how *"Simone White, 43, is struggling to walk and talk after the afternoon meal with pals"* where she had some drinks which made her seriously sick. The story ends with comments by the bar representatives, *"The venue said last night: "Nothing is more important than our customers' safety"*, and the consequences, *"Police said: "We are investigating a suspected spiking incident where a woman required hospital treatment."* [6]

As Headlines and Leads enjoy the frontal position in the hierarchy of a news discourse structure, they "may therefore be used as expedient signals to make effective guesses about the most important information of the text" [Van Dijk, 1985:14]

However, with such a top position comes a great responsibility — it determines whether a reader proceeds to the whole story after glancing at the headline, or not. In other words, headlines play a significant role in enticing readers to engage with a story.

1.3. Aspects of Studying Headlines as Attention Grabbing Device

Based on their position in the structure of a news discourse, headlines serve as a critical point of engagement for a news text. Their ability to capture attention and compel readers to engage further with the content is paramount. This section delves into the linguistic devices used to constitute prominent, attention-catching headlines and exploring their psychological impacts on readers.

As stated by Professor Sanda Macroci, "headlines are very specific structural units of news texts. In dealing with headlines, the readers are always involved in seeking out meaning. Those reading them need a special training in a wide range of skills to deduce the rules of headlines usage and use these rules in understanding meanings. An exercise like deciphering headlines is a very necessary argument in our need to grasp the gist of newspaper articles." [Marcoci. (2014); 8].

In order to create outstanding messages that would grab readers' attention and make them get involved in figuring out the implied meaning, media employs a range of syntactic and semantic devices available in the language a news text is written in. Each linguistic device taps into different psychological triggers aimed at provoking and keeping readers' attention.

In studying how an outstanding headline is created in terms of linguistic devices, we should look at two aspects: syntactic or structural aspect, and semantic aspect.

People are used to syntactic structures of sentences where words and phrases are arranged in a traditional, standard order of their language to create well-formed sentences. And based on Enforced Involuntary Attention theory we understand that a traditionally structured stimulus, a text unit in our case, will not trigger attention. Therefore, a break in these traditional structures is required to stimulate and grab attention.

Most information comes to us in a form of statements, imperative and interrogative structures. And every language possesses its own arsenal for making those structures outstanding.

In regard to statements, the most frequently used syntactic device for breaking a traditional sentence structure, and as a result, constructing an attention-grabbing headline both in English and Ukrainian, is Elliptical Construction. These constructions serve to convey information laconically by omitting words that can be inferred from context. This allows headlines to be shorter and more attention-grabbing while still conveying the main message effectively. [MasterClass. (2021); 9]

To understand the full meaning of an elliptical construction, a reader should fe able to fill in the missing parts based on their understanding of a cultural context. By taking into account this ability, headlines can quickly convey news or information without unnecessary wordiness. This conciseness is particularly valuable nowadays when capturing attention quickly is crucial because readers are bombarded with thousands of news on a daily basis.

Another syntactic device heavily employed by headline creators is use of Noun Phrases. The Merriem-Webster Dictionary defines a noun phrase as "a phrase formed by a noun and all its modifiers and determiners" [Merriem-Webster Dictionary: 10]. Noun strings in headlines serve the purpose of conveying information concisely and grabbing the reader's attention quickly. By compressing multiple words or ideas into a single noun phrase, headlines can convey complex information in a short space. Additionally, noun strings can help establish the tone and focus of the article, providing

readers with a snapshot of the main topic or event being covered. The following are examples from English speaking publications employing noun strings in crafting their headlines:

"Florida bus crash: Eight dead and dozens injured" [4];

Mum's Spike Hell [6]

In general discourse the purpose of an interrogative sentence is to request information. But when it comes to news headlines, interrogative sentences can serve several purposes. First, they are aimed at prompting engagement with readers by piqueing their curiosity and encouraging them to seek answers. Second, interrogative structures may highlight problems by drawing readers' attention to pressing issues, framing them as questions that need addressing. Thirdly, questions in headlines can create a sense of tension or uncertainty, particularly when the answer is not immediately apparent. This can generate intrigue and compel readers to delve deeper into the story to find out more. [Morris (2019): 12]

Both in general and news discourse, use of imperative structures is a powerful way to convey a sense of urgency, command attention, and encourage action or response from the audience.

In news headlines imperatives are used to issue direct commands or instructions to the audience, urging them to take specific actions. They can also represent a call for action or create a sense of urgency or immediacy, compelling readers to pay attention to the news story or take action quickly. In addition, imperatives can offer solutions or advice to readers, guiding them on how to address a problem or situation. [Shukairy;13]

Examples of imperative headlines can be found in the following samples:*"Wash your mouth out!* [13]

• *"Замість кави – зроби вправи"* [18]

If syntax can offer only so much in terms of the sentence structure, semantics can provide a variety of powerful tools for triggering the readers' attention. Words carry power, therefore a choice of words is crucial in delivering strong attention-grabbing messages. In this regard the prevailing strategy in designing influential

headlines is Wordplay which comes in a range of techniques, such as alliterations, hyberbole and puns, among others.

According to the research by William J. McGuire at Yale University, wordplay triggers Broca area, the area where the language control center of the human brain is located. "Finding the meaning behind a pun or twist of phrase feels like figuring out a riddle. This is called "the pleasure of the text" — the reward that readers get from figuring out figurative language." [Wylie. (2018): 15]

The most frequently used wordplay in news headlines is a pun. By definition, pun is a figure of speech which plays with words to create multiple meanings. Merriam-Webster Dictionary puts it as "the humorous use of a word in a way that suggests two interpretations. [Merriam-Webster Dictionary: 11]

English is rich in words that sound alike but have different meanings, and puns play on this aspect. Therefore, puns are of great help in creating catchy headlines. Firstly, they capture readers' attention additing humor into the headline, making it more engaging and memorable. Additionally, puns can convey complex ideas or information in a light-hearted or clever manner. Moreover, puns can create a sense of intrigue or curiosity, stimulating readers to click on the headline to discover the whole story. However, puns are impossible to comprehend without background knowledge of cultural context.

The following examples are pun-based headlines:

"Good Moaning: Whining can actually make us HAPPIER" [5]*;*

"Vard as Nail" [12]*.*

More detailed analysis of the above headlines will follow in the Chapter II of this paper.

Alliteration is another entrancing wordplay technique to grab readers' attention. Alliteration is a figure of speech that involves the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of closely connected words. In headlines and other forms of communication, alliteration is often used to create rhythm, make phrases more memorable, and enhance their aesthetic appeal [Landsborough. (2024):6]

The headline *"A Double Dose of March Migration Madness"* [1] is a great example of even a "double" alliteration in one sentence.

Hyperbole, as a semantic device that involves exaggerated or extravagant statements not meant to be taken literally, is of great use by news makers to create eye-catching headlines. [Gailman, (2021): 3]

By exaggerating certain aspects of a news event, hyperbole captures attention, creates excitement, and persuades the audience to pay closer attention to it.

Consider the example, "*Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's Nigeria tour was 'controlled skilfully and with an iron hand'*" [7]. The exaggeration "iron hand" gives us a feeling that the "prodigal" Prince's tour was rigorously controlled by the British royal family.

Both alliteration and hyperbole serve to enhance the impact and memorability of headlines, making them effective tools for capturing attention and conveying messages in a compelling manner.

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to identify linguistic devices prevalent for constructing attention-catching news headlines and what science lies behind it.

By studing the theories of attention we can come to the conclusion that the mechanisms that govern the Enforced Voluntary Attention should be taken into account while creating catchy news headlines. The mechanisms that drive this type of attention include the creation of prominent stimuli that force people to pay their attention to them. Thus, the ultimate strategy for headline construction is to design such prominent stimuli and the tactics for achieving this strategic goal are provided by the language syntax and semantics.

The main purpose of syntactic devices lies in breaking a standard sentence structure to make it stand out, while the semantic devices aim at intriguing the readers, sparking their curiosity and ultimately forcing them to read the story below the headline.

CHAPTER 2: ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC DEVICES IN ENGLISH AND UKRAINAIN NEWS HEADLINES

In this chapter of the paper we analyse syntactic and semantic factors found in news headlines in English and Ukrainian media, and the impact they have on readers' engagement.

The data selected and analysed in this chapter consists of news headlines from English and Ukrainian speaking news outlets. Specifically, the headlines were collected from popular national newspapers in the USA, the UK and Ukraine, namely, the American *USA Today, New York Times, New York Post, The Wall Street Journal;* the British *BBC News*, *The Economist, The Sun, Daily Mirror;* the Ukrainian *"Українська Правда", "ТСН", "День", "Апостроф".*

The analysis of the sampled headlines shows that the following linguistic features are typical of them:

- syntactic devices that favour brevity, such as elliptical constructions, noun strings and noun phrases; as well as interrogative and imperative structures;
- semantic devices with emotional impact, which is wordplay in the form of alliteration, hyberbole, and puns.

2.1. Syntactic Structures for Grabbing Attention

Based on what was said earlier, in order to create attention-grabbing news headlines, media refers to syntactic structures which favour brevity, prompt engagement, encourage to seek answers, command attention, and compel readers to delve deeper into a story. [Stylistics. Syntactic Stylistic Devices: 17]

The following are examples from English and Ukrainian speaking media sources.

The English headline *"Saved from Hell Quake"* [9] represents an elliptical construction with an omitted subject. This short construction makes the headline very laconic, doesn't reveal a lot of what happened and where, thus stimulatiang a reader to find out more. The use of the hyberbole *"Hell Quake"* adds drama to the message. The same approach is used in the Ukrainian headline *"Жорстоко побив, а потім*

застрелив" [17], where the omitted parts of the sentence add to the intrigue and curiosity.

The Economist's headline *"Running through the dark to keep Ukraine going"* [8] is an elliptical structure with a deliberately omitted subject, thus making readers wonder who runs, why through the dark and how it keeps Ukraine going.

The following headlines illustrate the employ of noun phrases and noun strings which are used to convey complex information in a short space.

Consider the headline from the *USA Today* on the collapse of the Francis Scott Key bridge in Baltimore, USA, as a result of a collision with a container ship: *"A giant ship. A power blackout. A stamble to stop traffic. How Baltimore bridge collapsed"*.[2] It gives a clear understanding of what happened and what were the consequences using the rhythm of short noun phrases. The noun strings used here help to establish the tone and focus of the article, providing readers with a snapshot of the main topic — the collapse of the bridge and its consequences.

Another example of a catchy, rhythmical noun phrase "seasoned" with alliteration, *"Still No Stag and Not Much Flation"* [10] comes from *New York Times*. This headlines invites a reader to find out whether a frightening economic forecast shows any tendencies to come true.

Next headline employs a string of nouns to tell a story of a bus with migrant farm workers onboard overturning on a highway in Florida: *"Florida bus crash: Eight dead and dozens injured"* [4]. Being precise and to the point, in the first three words this headline tells us what happened and where.

However, one shoud be careful with creating lengthy strings as they may confuse a reader who would not want to bother with deciphering a "coded" message. Thus, the reader might lose all interest in the piece of news altogether.

Being a synthetic language, Ukrainian doesn't favour noun strings, though noun phrases are possible. The following headlines represent prepositional phrases which are laconic and concise:

• *"Про любов, стереотипи і такмед"* [21];

• *"Дарвін проти Енергоатому"*[16]. This headline represents a high level of abstraction from the information in the text, leaving readers curious about a possible relationship between the renown scientist and the largest power producer in Ukraine.

The following Ukrainian headlines are from articles on issues of great importance within their cultural context, namely, Coronavirus pandemics and the full-scale war in Ukraine. The headlines are designed in the question form to grab the readers' attention, prompt engagement and encourage them to seek answers:

• *"Ви ще не хворіли на коронавірус? Тоді до вас йде "Омікрон".*[15]

• *(нема)Відновлення? Які труднощі можуть спіткати людей, які відбудовують житло після обстрілів.*[20]

The English headline *"What Would Jesus Do? Tackle the Housing Crisis, Say Some Congregations"* [14] with a rhetorical question at the beginning and followed by the answer creates a dramatic effect, hooks the readers' interest and encourages them to proceed further to find out more about the answer to this rhetorical question.

Next headlines employ the imperative constructions to call readers to action which may potentially have a beneficial effect on health:

• *"Wash your mouth out! Simple 'swish-and-spit 'mouthwash could detect earliest signs of killer cancer"* [13]

• *"Замість кави – зроби вправи": полтавців запрошують долучитися до тренувань на свіжому повітрі* [18]

2.2. Semantic Devices for Creating Catchy Headlines

Along with syntactic devices news headlines heavily employ semantic features of the language to make their messages emotional, appealing and hence attention-grabbing.

As it was said earlier in the Chapter I of this paper, wordplay is a prevailing strategy for crafting eye-catching headlines. Wordplay comes in a variety of techniques, some of which are alliteration, use of hyberbole and puns. [Glatch S. (2024: 4]

The following are alliteration examples which play on the repetition of the same consonant sound in adjacent words to create intonation expressiveness of headlines and

make them more inticing and appealing. These headlines invite the reader to proceed to the whole story as they give a snapshot of the topic while still not giving away too much information:

- *"Antibodies Good. Machine-made Molecules Better?"* [3]
- *"The Forgotten People Fighting The Forever War"* [11]

The following headline is an example of a homophonic pun on words "moaning" and "morning", and the popular greeting in English:

"Good Moaning: Whining can actually make us HAPPIER, study finds – but only in a key setting." [5]

The next headline — *"VARD AS NAILS"* [12] — is an example of a laconic noun phrase with a clever wordplay around the last name of story's main character, Jamie Vardy, and a popular English idiom "hard as nails". As the story is about the world's sports celebrities who are tough and not sentimental, the use of pun here is clear and justifiable.

Puns are employed by Ukrainian news makers as well. Consider the following headlines which deal with serious matters — fraud allegations against a prestigious CEO Club, or the Ukraine — russia war, but in an emotionally appealing, catchy and funny way:

- *"Наїзд на CEO Club Ukraine. Що насправді?"* [19],
- *"Сезон "бавовни" в розпалі: дрони СБУ уразили дві нафтобази в РФ"* [22].

Conclusions

On the basis of the studied material from English and Ukrainian news sources, we can conclude that short syntactic constructions are more prevalent for news headline creation than lengthy ones. Two-three emotion-filled words at the begining of a headline, which intrigue but not reveal much of the story, catch readers' attention and stimulate them to find out more by continuing with the news piece.

Such laconic structures are created with the help of elliptical constructions, noun phrases and noun string, as well interrogative constructions with rhetorical or provoking questions and short imperative constructions. Some techniques are more characteristic of the English speaking media, for instance, noun strings and rhetoric

questions, while Ukrainian headlines are often noun phrases and questions on urgent and sensitive issues, as well as calls to action.

Both English and Ukrainian are semantically rich languages, which allows for an abundant use of wordplay. The sampled English language headlines demostrated the profound use of alliteration, puns, hyberbole; while Ukrainian headlines operate mostly with hyperbole and puns, no cases of alliteration of news headlines were found within this research in Ukrainian media. To summarize, it can be said that the above mentioned semantic devices helps to create news headlines that attract attention, generate readers' interest and stimulate them to read the story below the headline.

CONCLUSIONS

This course paper undertook the task to explore mechanisms behind headline construction and their impact on reader engagement within English and Ukrainian news media.

To understand why certain mechanisms and devices are used for headline construction, first we need to understand how the human attention works. This knowledge is pivotal for understanding how audience interracts with news.

Another fundamental understanding comes with realization how the news discourse structure is different from a general discourse, and what role headline plays in that structure. Armed with this knowledge, we further studied its practical realization in news headlines in terms of linguistic devices, both syntactic and semantic, used to make news headlines prominent and attention-grabbing.

Based on the sampled material from English and Ukrainian news outlets, we can come to the conclusion that the prevailing mechanisms for constructing news headlines include the profound use of laconic structures, such as elliptical constructions, noun phrases and noun strings; interrogative constructions with rhetorical or provoking questions and imperative constructions. Some techniques are more characteristic of the English speaking media, for instance, noun strings and rhetoric questions, while Ukrainian headlines are mostly noun phrases and questions on urgent and sensitive issues, as well as calls to action.

Being semantically rich languages, both English and Ukrainian languages allow for an abundant use of wordplay desiphering which prompts a reader to engage with a piece of news.

To summarize the above, the combination of laconic structures with connotation-rich vocabulary helps to tailor news headlines that attract readers' attention, generate interest and stimulate them to read the story below the headline, thus prompting readers' engagement with a certain piece of news in particular and the publication in general.

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ABSTRACT

Ця курсова робота має за мету дослідження лінгвістичнх механізмів побудови заголовків новин та їх вплив на привернення уваги читачів англо- і україномовних медіа.

Щоб зрозуміти, яким лінгвістичним механізмам віддається перевага у створенні заголовків новин, насамперед треба зрозуміти, як працює людська увага. Також важливо розуміти, яким чинном відрізняється структура загального дискурсу від структури побудови новин. Опираючись на ці теоретичні знання, дана робота вивчає їх практичну реалізацію в заголовках новин з точки зору лінгвістичних засобів, які застосовуються для привернення уваги читачів.

Проаналізувавши заголовки новин у англо- і україномовних виданнях, можна зробити висновок, що заголовок є найважливішою частиною тексту новин з точки зору привернення уваги аудиторії, тому медіа приділяють велику увагу створенню "захоплюючих" заголовків за домопогою лінвістичних засобів, наявних в кожній мові.

Ключові слова: заголовки новин, увага, теорія уваги, привернення уваги, загальний дискурс, дискурс новин, лінгвістичні засоби, англомовні медіа, україномовні медіа.