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ANALYSIS OF THE RHETORICAL FIGURES EMPLOYED IN THE HEADLINES OF ARTICLES ABOUT CELEBRITIES

Analiza języka tytułów artykułów prasowych na temat celebrytów

Streszczenie: Artykuł poświęcony został analizie języka wybranych tytułów prasowych. Systematyczne pojawianie się na medialnym rynku nowych czasopism i gazet wymusza walkę o czytelników. Sformułowanie dobrego, przyciągającego tytułu znacznie zwiększa szanse na utrzymanie się na rynku. W tekście opisywane są sposoby wykorzystywania w tytułach artykułów prasowych środków retorycznych, między innymi: metafory, oksymoronu, elipsy, gry słów i pytania.

Анализ языка газетных заголовков статей на тему селебрити

Резюме: Работа под заглавием Анализ языка газетных заголовков статей на тему селебрити посвящена описанию способов использования языка в избранных газетных заголовках. В настоящее время в связи с тем, что на медиальном рынке появляются всё новые журналы и газеты, журналисты вынуждены бороться за читателя. Формулирование хорошего, привлекательного заголовка значительно увеличивает их шансы. В статье анализируются функции, черты и способ использования в заголовках риторических средств, между другими: метафоры, оксюморона, игры слов, вопроса, эллипсиса и ритма.

Słowa kluczowe: język, tytuły prasowe, środki retoryczne

Ключевые слова: язык, газетные заголовки, риторические средства

1. INTRODUCTION

The following paper looks at the language of newspaper headlines. Since nowadays the number of newspapers that are published is constantly increasing, editors face severe competition and have to go to great lengths to attract readers. They use a plethora of techniques to catch their attention and encourage them to read what they offer and they have to carefully select the items of news they wish to be the focus of articles [cf. Garlicki 1981: 9]. As Bell and Garrett claim [Bell, Garrett 1998: 45] “[...] opinions may be expressed and combined at the different levels of a typical ‘opi-

nion article “. Since a headline is an inseparable part of an article it may be used by a journalist to signal the opinion or approach to what will be discussed or argued further in an article. No doubt headlines are the first elements that may capture readers’ attention, and they often influence the way they look at and interpret the story [cf. Duff, Shindler 1986: 3]. Moreover, headlines may also decide about the popularity of newspapers. These features are very important because many readers are skimmers who rarely read the whole newspaper from the first to the last page. The headlines that have been chosen for the analysis in the present article come from two British tabloids i.e. the Sun and Mirror, and four American tabloids i.e. The New York Post, The New York Times, and The Washington Post and Chicago Sun-Times.

2. HEADLINES

Headline is like a highway marker that catches the motorist’s eye and gives him a message as he speeds along the road

[Bastain 1956: 207]

Headlines are written in bold, capital letters and summarize the whole article in a few words. Thus, the choice of words, their layout and graphic design in a headline is often a crucial factor deciding whether a given article will be read or simply skipped.

2.1. The functions of headlines

1. Providing brief information and introduction.

Headlines, in order to catch the reader’s attention have to be very eye-catching and encourage the reader to read further. They should inform about the article’s theme; invite the reader to get more information about a given topic and tell the story in a few words.

2. Categorization and organization of news.

Journalists use some techniques which enable them to categorize headlines i.e. the width of a headline (this depends on the length of the article and its placement on the page) and the size of font, which should be proportional to the story. The bigger the size of the font the more important the story is.

3. Making press attractive.

Headlines, often together with the picture, are one of the factors which decide about the attractiveness of the newspaper. Together, they guide the reader through the articles which may be of interest to him/her .

4. Selling the newspaper.

What is important for every newspaper, and which frequently decides whether a newspaper is purchased by the reader is the title page of a newspaper. This page should be full of great headlines accompanied by colourful pictures.

2.2. Features of a good headline:

1. The first words of the headline should be the news the editor wishes to publish. Very often it is enough to choose only a noun and a verb to convince the reader to read the article further and find more details about the story.
2. Repetitions should be avoided, especially when the title is a double-decker i.e. it consists of the main headline and a sub-headline, which is usually the continuation of the sentence in the main headline.
3. Words must be chosen very carefully since some words have double meanings and may confuse the reader. It is also advisable to avoid numbers, except for the articles which inform about accidents or disasters where a number is an indication of the seriousness of an event.
4. Many headlines do not include any punctuation marks, which allows journalists to save space.
5. Since the headline summarizes the story it should not contain too many ideas. Too long headline ‘packed with many ideas’ will be difficult to read and understand, and may therefore discourage potential readers from reading a story.
6. A good headline is accurate, specific and concrete. To achieve this journalists use strong verbs (they should be strong, but rather short) that are supposed to affect readers’ emotions and stimulate their imagination.
7. Passive voice should be avoided because it is more difficult to understand sentences containing passive voice than active voice.
8. Usually only surnames are used e.g. Bush, Obama etc. and the first names are omitted. If abbreviations and acronyms are used the editor has to be sure that the reader is familiar with them. Otherwise, the headline may be simply omitted by prospective readers since names that are strange to them will not attract their attention or arouse their interest [cf. Ludwig, Glimore 2005: 111–114].

3. Figures of speech used in headlines

A good headline writer chooses words carefully and plays with the sound and meaning of words. As Bell [Bell 1999: 186] put it “Headlines appear to be the ultimate in the journalist’s drive for summarizing information”. Thus, in order to create good and attractive headlines that will attract attention and will be remembered, journalists use various figures of speech and rhetorical figures such as:

1. **Alliteration.** Some headlines use alliteration i.e. playing with the sounds of words since then the reader has an impression that the headline ‘sounds’ and this helps to attract and stimulate his/her interest.

2. **Metaphor.** Since metaphors are words or phrases used in an imaginative way to describe somebody or something else to show that the two things have the same qualities, and to make the description more powerful they allow to present the theme of an article in a new light and/or from the new perspective. There is no doubt that a metaphor decorates a headline and raises its attractiveness. However, journalists have to be careful when they decide to apply metaphors since they may easily cause misunderstanding or confuse the reader.
3. **Rhyme.** Rhymes allow to play with the language. They are a kind of mnemotechniques and thus help memorize the headline.
4. **Pun.** Due to the fact that puns employ a clever or humorous use of a word that has more than one meaning, or of words that have different meanings but sound the same they are one of the devices journalists use to make the headlines not only more attractive, but more likely to be remembered. Sometimes a pun is included to intrigue and amuse the reader.
5. **Ellipsis.** Sometimes journalists deliberately omit a word or a phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction because their aim is to make the headline energetic, and make it resemble more everyday speech. Omission of some parts of speech does not distort or change the meaning, which is still clear. Journalists usually avoid words which do not add anything to the understanding of a headline e.g. they may avoid the verb 'to be' or an article in a headline, for example, *Actor found dead*.
6. **Oxymoron.** By using two words which have completely different and often opposite meanings oxymorons, when used in headlines, no doubt help attract the reader's attention.
7. **Hyperbole.** By describing something by saying it is much bigger, smaller or worse than it actually is hyperboles show that the writer is emotionally involved, and is supposed to evoke similar reaction of the reader.
8. **Question.** By asking a question in a headline journalists increase the chance of attracting the readers' attention, and in some cases arouse the readers' emotions.

3. HEADLINES-ANALYSIS

1. 'Pay Jude' (The Sun 13th July 2009)

The pun in this headline sounds familiar to many music fans. However, it may be misleading for the readers who associate it with the famous song by The Beatles 'Hey Jude'. In fact, it is neither about the famous band nor about the song. The story behind the headline is about *The Sun* which had to pay compensation to famous actor Jude Law for hacking his phone.

2. ‘WanAbbey Road’ (The Sun 13th July 2007)

The above headline, this time referring to the Beatles, is similar to the title of one of their records “Abbey Road”. A prefix ‘wan’ has been added to the title, and in result we have a new word “WanAbbey”, whose pronunciation is the same as of the word ‘wannabe’. The story behind this headline is about Pop Idol finalists who sang The Beatles songs in one of the episodes, and thus the hidden meaning of the invented word “WanAbbey” can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand it refers to the contestants of the Pop Idol programme who are would-be artists, and the programme is their chance to achieve success and become stars (just like the Beatles). On the other, it stresses that the contestants were singing the Beatles songs.

3. “From Hitler Youth...to Papa Ratzzi” (The Sun 20th April 2005)

The above headline comes from the time Joseph Ratzinger (of German origin) was elected to be the Pope Benedict XVI. It refers to an event from his life when he was a 14 year old boy and was forced to join The Hitler Youth Movement¹. Contrary to this infamous event from his past there is a positive event from his later life when he was chosen to the head of one of the most populous churches in the world i.e. the Catholic Church. Ellipsis, the rhetorical figure used in this headline divides the two phrases i.e. ‘From Hitler Youth...to Papa Ratzzi’ and it symbolizes the time in Joseph Ratzinger’s life between these two events (it may also make the reader pose for a moment and think about this episode in his life). Another rhetorical figure used in this headline is pun made of the Pope’s surname Ratzinger, which has been shortened to ‘Ratzzi’. When the phrase ‘Papa Ratzzi’ is read aloud it is pronounced like the word “paparazzi”. The term “paparazzi” refers to a freelance photographer who doggedly pursues celebrities to take candid pictures for sale to magazines and newspapers. No doubt the Pope is a figure which is always in the limelight, and the journalists are ready to go to great lengths to take picture of him.

4. Pornocchio’s lies v Burrell’s (The Sun 20th March 2008)

At a first glance the readers do not know who is the liar (the name of the liar is revealed later in the article and it is Heather Mills, Paul McCartney’s ex-wife). However, what may attract the reader is the invented word ‘Pornocchio’, which in this headline is a pun. One reason that Heather Mills was dubbed ‘Pornocchio’ by The Sun Newspaper is the fact that she used to be a porn star and this is the first meaning of the pun. Another meaning is connected with

¹ The Hitler Youth was a logical extension of Hitler’s belief that the future of Nazi Germany was its children. The movement was seen as being as important to a child as school was.

the name of Pinocchio (a wooden boy magically brought to life), a famous character in the comic book series *Fables* by Carlo Collodi. One of the most characteristic features that distinguish Pinocchio is his nose, which becomes longer whenever he is lying (under the headline there was a picture of Heather Mills with long Pinocchio nose together with Paul Burrells who used to be Princess Diana's butler and had some connections with her). The comparison and clever reference to the wooden boy who lied was not without a reason since Heather Mills lied in court during her divorce with Paul McCartney. Paul Burrell is also a liar since he had some connections with Lady Diana at the time when she was married. The abbreviation 'v' used between Pornocchio's lies and Burrells stands for 'versus' and thus it refers to the intention to compare the lies of the two (in fact, The Sun newspaper conducted a survey among its readers to find out who they think is a bigger liar).

5. **'Peer-nocchio'** (The Sun 25th March 2008)

The above is another headline which uses pun and refers to Heather Mills. Here, again the fictitious character Pinocchio was used to make a pun, and she was dubbed 'Peer-nocchio'. Thus, instead of the word 'porn' the word 'peer' was used since she lied to the press that Tony Blair offered her a peerage.

6. **They paid how Munch for it? Record £74m for The Scream** (The Sun 3rd May 2012)

The two parts of the headline include a question and an answer to this question. The order of words in the question is deliberate and it is supposed to express surprise, amazement or even shock at the price that was paid for the famous picture 'The Scream' painted by Munch. The play of words in the headline uses the similarity between the name of the painter Munch and the word 'much' which is a part of the usual question asked when somebody wants to find about a price of something i.e. 'How much?' Yet, at the same time, because of the fact that the word 'Munch' is written in capital letters the headline already gives the reader an idea about the subject of the article. The pronoun 'it' refers to Munch's painting and the title of the picture offered for sale is revealed in the answer.

7. **'Stranger relatives: Holly Valance is related to Benny Hill and the celebrities with fame in the family...'** (Mirror 7th May 2012)

The above headline uses oxymoron, a figure of speech used to draw the readers' attention since it is composed of two words which have completely different meanings. Those words are 'stranger' and 'relatives'. Strangers cannot be relatives because relatives are people who have family connections and are related to each other, and a stranger is someone completely unknown. Here, the 'stranger relatives' are Holly Valance, an Australian

actress, singer and model, and Benny Hill, a well-known comedian. Yet, the article does not only refer to the above relationship. The three dots at the end of the headline indicate that there is something more the article might reveal, and which has a chance to attract readers' attention. Later in the article the author concludes "After all, would you want to admit that your cousin shot President Abraham Lincoln? And does Louis Theroux know his cousin's superstar girlfriend had a godfather who played Kojak?"

8. 'Mr Lover, Lover: Guardiola invites clubs to 'seduce' him back into management' (Mirror 26th May 2012)

The first thing that many readers notice in the above headline is the title of Shaggy's² song "Mr Lover, Lover". The title of the song has metaphorical meaning and has connotations with the word 'seduce'. It is part of a statement made by Pep Guardiola's, who is FC Barcelona manager. Guardiola said: "For the next months I have to charge my batteries, charge my mind. I am going to rest and then I will wait, and when I will be ready, if one club wants me, if they seduce me, I will train again"³. According to the dictionaries the word 'seduce' can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation, which may in this case come to the reader's mind, is persuading someone to have sex, usually with someone younger or weaker. And the second meaning is to make someone do something that seems to be interesting to him/her. The phrase "Mr Lover, Lover" suggests the first meaning, but the quotation shows that it rather means that it is only an attractive and interesting offer that can convince Guardiola to come back and coach the footballers again. There is a big chance that the reader, after seeing the song title "Mr Lover, Lover" is probably more likely to read the whole article. The use of apostrophe after the word management is necessary here as it indicates that the word may be ambiguous because of its double meaning.

9. J-Glo shines in Sin City (The Sun 28th May 2012)

The headlines makes use of Jenifer's Lopez nickname J-Lo which has been changed onto J-Glo to create a pun. The pun together with the verb 'shines' describes the way Jenifer Lopez was dressed at two events in Las Vegas where she was wearing a glitter gold mini dress together with shiny jewellery. Thus, the invented word J-Glo refers to her shiny outfit. The name Sin City is used instead of the actual name of Las Vegas and that's how this city is called because of the many attractions it offers to adults, e.g. strip clubs and casinos.

² Shaggy is a stage name of Orville Richard Burrell, a Jamaican-America reggae fusion singer and deeday.

³ Daily Mirror's official website. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/news/chelsea-and-liverpool-target-peo-guardiola-847922>. Retrieved: May 27, 2015.

10. Wham Bam. Sam Cam to be Mam – she'll need a new pram! (The Sun 31st March 2010)

The headline of the article about David's Cameron's wife uses many rhymes. Her name has been shortened to Sam Cam to save space in the headline, and it also causes that headline has a melody. The rhymes together with the information that the Prime Minister's wife is expecting a child are likely to attract attention of the readers.

11. Obama Campaign Endgame: Grunt Work and Cold Math (The New York Times June 10, 2013)

The headline uses rhyming. The words 'campaign' and 'endgame' rhyme and additionally add 'melody' to the headline. As for their intended meaning they refer to the last days of Obama's run for re-election.

12. Republicans a victim of safer streets (The Washington Post, 20 June 2013)

The headline uses oxymoron, which is present in the combination of the noun 'victim' and 'safer'. The two words refer to the situations which seem to not go together. According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English a victim is 'a person who has been attacked, injured or killed as a result of a crime, a disease, an accident' [Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2000:1500]. Thus, a victim is a person supposed to be involved in something that is dangerous, be it a circumstance, condition or a person. In this light, the word 'safer' does not go with 'victim' since it means something that is free of danger. Through employing the combination of these two words the author intends to attract the attention of the reader, and also points to the irony of the situation. The Republican Party had been fighting for the safety of their supporters for a long time. Unfortunately, they lost the battle and failed to ensure 'safer streets' and, perhaps, prompted the electorate to consider social and moral issues in a different light.

13. Obamanomics = never enough jobs (The New York Post, June 20, 2013)

The author of the article uses pun as a device to attract readers' attention to the issue he discusses in the article. No doubt the phrase 'Obamanomics' is cleverly conceived and eye-catching. The two words that were used to form this expression are 'Obama' – the last name of the president, and a suffix 'nomics' which derives from the Greek and means 'law'. When we look at the second part of the headline what can be seen is that the author meant 'economics' – the study of how a society organizes its money, trade and industry. Thus, playing on words, the author managed to come up with the mixture of the president's name and referred to economics for which the president is responsible. Yet, the condition of the country economy under Obama's presidency is weak and one of the most important problems that need to be urgently solved in the lack of jobs.

14. September Monster Month For Obama (Chicago Sun-Times 20 June 2013)

The headline uses ellipsis which causes that the whole structure is simplified. By saying 'September Monster Month For Obama' the author managed to omit the verb and the article. The article discusses the problem of fundraising to support the presidential campaign. The word 'monster' used in the headline refers to the enormous amount of money that Obama managed to collect in this month. The language, style and graphic design of the above analysed headlines shows how creative and imaginative journalists can be in writing headlines for their articles, all these in an effort to attract the attention of prospective readers. They use various figures of speech, use well-known names or devise new names, directly refer to or make allusions to known events or historical facts. There is no doubt that their efforts to make a headline attractive often help increase the volume of sold newspapers. It may be that even people who may not be very interested in buying a particular newspaper or reading a particular story may be intrigued or enticed by a cleverly written headline.

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