

ALLUSION IN THE HEADLINES OF ENGLISH MEDIA TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This article investigates the utilization of allusions as a stylistic device in media texts. The research also delves into understanding the terminology and characteristics of media texts, along with exploring the significance of headlines and their role. **Methods:** The authors examine a variety of examples of allusions in contemporary English media texts spanning diverse subject matter sourced from electronic versions of periodicals. The analysis involves scrutinizing the methods and strategies employed to employ allusions effectively in crafting attention-grabbing headlines. **Results:** The study finds that allusions serve as an effective means of creating captivating headlines in modern English media texts across a wide range of topics. By drawing on cultural references and intertextual connections, allusions enhance the appeal and communicative power of headlines. **Conclusion:** This research underscores the significance of allusions as a valuable stylistic tool for enhancing the attractiveness and impact of headlines in contemporary English media texts. It offers valuable insights for journalists, copywriters, emerging writers, philologists, and individuals engaged in crafting media texts across various subject areas.

Keywords: Mass Media; Media Linguistics; Media Stylistics; Stylistic Devices.



ALUSÃO NAS TÍTULOS DOS TEXTOS DA MÍDIA INGLESA

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este artigo investiga a utilização de alusões como dispositivo estilístico em textos midiáticos. A investigação também se aprofunda na compreensão da terminologia e das características dos textos mediáticos, além de explorar o significado das manchetes e o seu papel. **Métodos:** Os autores examinam uma variedade de exemplos de alusões em textos contemporâneos da mídia inglesa, abrangendo diversos assuntos provenientes de versões eletrônicas de periódicos. A análise envolve o exame minucioso dos métodos e estratégias empregados para empregar alusões de maneira eficaz na elaboração de manchetes que chamam a atenção. **Resultados:** O estudo conclui que as alusões servem como um meio eficaz de criar manchetes cativantes em textos modernos da mídia inglesa sobre uma ampla gama de tópicos. Ao basearem-se em referências culturais e conexões intertextuais, as alusões aumentam o apelo e o poder comunicativo das manchetes. **Conclusão:** Esta investigação sublinha a importância das alusões como uma valiosa ferramenta estilística para aumentar a atratividade e o impacto das manchetes nos textos contemporâneos da mídia inglesa. Ele oferece informações valiosas para jornalistas, redatores, escritores emergentes, filólogos e indivíduos envolvidos na elaboração de textos de mídia em diversas áreas temáticas.

Palavras-chave: Meios de comunicação de massa; Lingüística Midiática; Estilística da Mídia; Recursos estilísticos.

1 INTRODUCTION

English newspapers date back to the 17th century. At the end of the 16th century, the first pamphlets were printed, which preceded the printing of periodicals. Back then, news items were simple and covered local and foreign events. It took a whole century for newspapers to develop their own unique style and standards. By the 19th century, an appropriate functional style had been formed. The linguists of that time were dissatisfied with the quality of written articles, subjecting the language of English newspapers to harsh criticism and characterizing their style as vulgar (Galperin, 2012, p. 296). Despite this criticism, the language of newspapers acquired the status of Standard English. Subsequently, this direction became the research subject of a relatively young science, i.e., media linguistics concerned with the functioning of language in mass communication. Media linguistics originated in 1998, following the meeting of the British Association for Applied Linguistics and the article by John Corner (Corner, 1998). Thus, the concept was introduced into scientific use. Two years later, the term also entered Russian linguistics through the scientific work of Dobrosklonskaya (2020, p. 27).



1.1 Media Linguistics

Media linguistics as the science of the functioning of language in mass communication has been formed relatively recently. One of its key concepts is media text. To make media texts expressive and memorable, various stylistic devices are used. The most effective of them is an allusion, i.e., a reference to facts that are generally known to readers without indicating the source.

This science lies at the intersection of two areas: linguistics and the study of mass information and communication. However, not all scholars classify this science since there are already the stylistics of language and the theory of language which directly study the functioning of a living language in various spheres of life. In addition, Doctor of Philology Duskaeva (2018) claimed that “blurring the boundaries of the scientific discipline”, in particular identifying media linguistics and Internet linguistics was not the right approach (p. 49). The legitimacy of singling out such a discipline as “media linguistics” is justified by significant media influence in the social context (Khamidova, 2018, pp. 293-294). We believe that the discipline has the right to exist if there is a theory that supports its functioning if some science has an internal structure and methodology, as well as its own conceptual apparatus.

The key concept of media linguistics is media text. It is multi-layer, i.e., it combines text and graphics when it comes to magazines and newspapers, or text is superimposed on audio and video sequences in video reports or radio recordings. It is impossible to fully immerse into media texts and understand them without a communicative background or extralinguistic elements: a portrait of the participants in communication, the specific generation of a message, its cultural and ideological component. Over its 25-year-long existence, media linguistics has acquired an internal structure, i.e., a well-established circle of research areas: media language and intralinguistic status, functional and stylistic differentiation of media discourse, typology of media speech, linguo-stylistic characteristics, extralinguistic components, and linguo-media technologies. Within the framework of media linguistics, research methods are diverse and range from analysis to comparative cultural description. The terminological apparatus of media linguistics incorporates the concepts of the humanities (linguistics, sociology, psychology, journalism, and cultural studies). At the same time, there are also specific terms that characterize the functioning of language in the media. They are associated with the lexical basis of “media”: media text, media discourse, media



genres, media speech, media landscape, media format, media speech science, media personology, media texture studies, media genre studies, linguo-media technologies (Shmeleva, 2015, pp. 32-33). The above-mentioned arguments confirm the legitimacy of introducing media linguistics as a separate discipline.

1.2 Media Language and the Meaning of Headlines

The language of media text is specific due to the extended boundaries of the “text” concept in the media environment. Bakhtin (1996, p. 306) defined “text” simply and precisely as “any connected sign complex”. Media texts are a “polycode formation” or “a layering of verbal and media-level units”, which leads to the creation of media education. The latter combine visual, structural, semantic, and functional elements, creating a special multidimensional influence on the recipient receiving the message (Duskaeva, 2018, p. 49). In turn, the headline is a mandatory attribute of text that precedes and organically links the entire array of the text. The headline traditionally performed an informative function. In the modern media space, this function is not the main one, and there are a number of reasons for this. Due to linguo-media technologies, the author can reflect only part of the content in the headline. Moreover, the headline itself can become a puzzle that requires effort from the reader to comprehend. The headline is no longer perceived as a concise representation of the content of the article (Melnik, 2017, pp. 66-67) but remains a “semantic dominant”, through which the “expressive-evaluative component laid down by the author” is transmitted (Egoshina, 2021, pp. 183-184). The headline determines the style of the article. “In a broad sense, it is expedient to understand style as the expressive originality of the whole, the artistic and plastic certainty of the chosen object” (Sukhikh, 2018, p. 320). The skillful use of stylistic devices creates a pleasant impression of the style and skill of the author and the level of the media text. The writing style of the article creates a certain atmosphere and mood for the reader, while a lively, non-linear approach will keep the reader’s attention. Thus, the author achieves a key goal, namely: the reader will not turn the page and switch to another headline and article but will read the text to the end, forming their own idea of the topic presented in the article. Such a technique is an allusion. By this term, we mean “an artistic device that through hints and associations correlates an artistic image with a motif from another work or some well-known fact” (Semanticheskii slovar, 2023).



1.3 Literature Overview

Using an allusion to create an expressive headline. Interest in such a stylistic device as an allusion is especially high in the middle of the 20th century, in connection with the analysis of implicit ways of transmitting information. Thus, Galperin (1958) and Mamaeva (1977) conducted a stylistic analysis of text. An allusion and philological commentary of the text is the research object studied by Gubbenet (1991) and Mashkova (1989). Chulkova (1978) and Khristenko (1993) considered an allusion from the perspective of text linguistics (Potylitsyna, 2006, p. 143).

An allusion refers to productive stylistic techniques for creating a headline at the syntactic level, along with such means as a rhetorical question, parallel constructions, antitheses, and inversion. The widespread use of an allusion in the headlines of newspapers and magazines is justified by the fact that this stylistic device has a huge potential to attract readers. The addressee is attracted by an expressive, surprising, new, and aesthetic use of the stylistic device. Thanks to the technique, the direction of communication between the author of the article and the recipient is set, a special trusting relationship is created between them. The concise form emphasizes the rich content, whose rhetorical impact has considerable power.

An allusion is a reference to literary, historical, political, mythological, and cultural facts or facts from everyday life, while the source of an allusion is not indicated, which distinguishes an allusion from a quote (Galperin, 2012, p. 187). The depth of reading and understanding the text largely depends on the erudition and awareness of the reader. Thus, all the expressiveness of the message can disappear for the addressee if they do not have associative links that the author of the article points to. However, there are easily comprehensible allusions. The attitude of addressees to an allusion is built on personal experience and perception. It is impossible to guarantee an unambiguous, unidirectional attitude to an allusion since each reader has their own associative array. The structure of an allusion can be modified grammatically but it is still necessary to keep the reference to the original source. The author should preserve recognizability so that the allusive competence of the reader is realized.

There are numerous sources of allusions but the most common are cinema, songs, literature, folklore, mythology, and religion. The use of allusions in the headlines of articles is not limited to questions about social life, allusions are widely used when covering events in art, technology, science, psychology, economics, fashion, and sports.



The article aims at studying the use of allusions in the headlines of media texts and their impact on the effectiveness of media texts.

2 METHODS

Over one year of research (from June 2022 to June 2023), we analyzed more than one thousand media texts in more than 15 electronic versions of English periodicals, including Australian and New Zealand ones – Listener (New Zealand), Reader's Digest (Canada, the UK, Asia, India), The Wall Street Journal, The Times, The Guardian, The Observer Magazine, The Sunday Times Magazine, New Scientist, BBC Focus Science, BBC Countryfile, Science, Scientific American, Happiful, The Simple Things, Recharge your life, Wellbeing Wild, Prevention (Australia), Psychologies, What doctors don't tell you. Articles were selected from the social network community [Learn English through Mass Media – <https://vk.com/learnenglishthroughmassmedia>] to involve students in the study and practice of English through the resources of English media. There are more than 2,600 entries in the community, with more than half being excerpts from periodicals. The chosen articles were analyzed on the following topics: social issues, culture, business, psychology, environmental issues, science, engineering and design, technology, aviation and space, tourism, archeology and history. A survey was conducted among the community subscribers of different age groups to identify their perception of allusions in the headlines of articles. In the course of studying the materials, the method of statistical data processing was used.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here are some examples of allusions in the headlines of media texts. While analyzing the articles selected, we found a number of interesting allusions in their headlines. For example, "Why Should I 'Grow up' When I Can *Benjamin Button* It?" (The Observer Magazine) (Haddow, 2023). This stylistic fragment is a quite obvious and easy-to-read allusion. The article covers the common problem of a stereotypical attitude to life when the standard goals and achievements are set for each age. However, the value of life lies in the fact that one lives it not in a stereotyped way, but according to their own beliefs. This idea does not come at a young age when people



are trying to meet the requirements of society. It takes hold in adulthood when a person begins to live the way they want, and not the way society or the environment expect them to. Therefore, the adulthood or maturity of a young person is something unnatural. The allusion refers to the film, whose images are familiar to a wide range of readers, and the headline triggers a huge number of associative links that set the thought process in motion. After reading the headline as a question alluding to the film and the related book, the reader will pause and think about their developmental trajectory. The desire to read the article increases due to a personalized attitude towards the problem from the very beginning, and at the moment of reading a person discovers another personal story that the author shares. One can agree or disagree with this story but the article definitely grabs the attention of readers, and the aesthetic principle provokes the recipient to read it till the end. It is also undeniable that the translation of the headline will require skills, strategies, and techniques since a proper name is used in the form of a verb, which is contrary to the rules of the Russian language. Figurativeness can be lost since there is no equivalent for this verb form: "Why should I 'grow up' when I can live my life the other way around?"

"*Chocolate-Box Philosophy*" (Writing) (Chocolate-box philosophy, 2023). This headline is devoted to an article about the difficulty of overcoming a creative crisis during the transition to writing a new work. This transitional period is a psychological challenge when it is difficult to decide to change the style of writing, its genre, or the manner of preparing a work. Perhaps this headline initially engages with its brevity, simplicity, and the unexpected combination of the image of a box of chocolates with philosophy. On the contrary, the first scene of "Forest Gump" and the protagonist's reasoning about life as a box of chocolates is the combination of philosophy with mundane things – this is exactly what the author means and refers to. The unpredictability of tastes, namely not systematic following the planned course, when everything can turn into a boring action, but the desire for improvisation, impromptu is the key to success in the creative profession. Of course, the Western audience is familiar with the film. In this regard, the allusion is well read by them. The comparison is highly relevant but the attitude towards the issue raised in the article may be controversial.

"*To Do or Not to Do Why We Procrastinate and How to Stop*" (Reader's Digest India) (Palassio, 2023). This is an example of an allusion, where the new lexical content of a well-known grammatical construction preserves the reference to the original



source. A stylistically laconic phrase and the eternal question “to be or not to be?” by William Shakespeare turns into “to do or not to do?” and the equally long-standing problem of procrastination. The article analyzes the nature of procrastination and methods of dealing with it. The reader is to decide whether to follow or not to follow the recommendations set out in the article.

“*All That Jazz* What No One Tells You About Being a Musician” (The Simple Things) (All that jazz, 2022). This headline refers both to the “All That Jazz” film which reveals the drama of a talented workaholic director who staged the “Chicago” musical and to the song of the same name from the musical. Thus, the author destroys the stereotype about the easy life of musicians, their frivolity, and idleness. Having recognized this allusion, the reader initially waits for confirmation of their expectations that the music industry is challenging and difficult.

“*The Time Machine* Way Ahead of its Time” (Reader’s Digest Asia) (Ward, 2023). The headline refers to H.G. Wells’ novel “The Time Machine” about time travel. The article is about the Antikythera Mechanism, a device that was ahead of its time in terms of the materials used and the complexity of engineering. Such complex design ideas are amazing, and suggest the idea of time travel.

4 CONCLUSION

An allusion is an effective stylistic device for creating catchy and engaging headlines in media texts. This technique makes readers focus on an article on any topic. Thanks to the author’s approach to writing a media text, the reader comprehends not only an informative part of the article but also gets aesthetic pleasure from reading high-quality material with an original presentation. If there is an allusion in the headline, people tend to read the material to the end and reflect on the origin and motivation for using an allusion. When decoding an allusion, the material acquires greater expression and significance for the recipient. Consequently, it forms an expectation about the possible content of text at the level of its headline and then allows to confirm or refute one’s guesses.

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