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WORDPLAY IN ENGLISH ONLINE NEWS HEADLINES

To'xtayev Otabek Abdullayevich

Eshkobilov Abror

Tojiyev Mirjalol (Corresponding authors)

Denau Institute of Entrepreneurship and Pedagogy of Samarkand State University

Gmail: toxtayevotabek4@gmail.com

Abstract

Within the endless stream of information available on the news media market, news headline language is characterised by several linguistic, pragmatic, rhetorical and functional features that distinguish it from other varieties of language that are not specialised. In the present study, the rhetorical features of English news headlines, through wordplay investigation, using a sample of 100 headlines were studied. Wordplay is investigated because it leads to the persuasiveness of message that is sometimes so subtle that the readers might not even recognise it.

A taxonomy of wordplays was constructed according to Leigh's (1994) model which made it possible to access a comprehensive checklist. The way the persuasive element, i.e. wordplay, was presented for the English headline readers was examined using the descriptive method and in light of textual rhetorical analysis. The outcome of the study suggests that English news headlines are likely to contain one or more clearly defined wordplay. The most frequent



wordplay is that of tropes or more specifically metonymy. However, there are some wordplays such as polysyndeton, anadiplosis, antimetabole, epistrophe and polyptoton that are absent in English headlines. The majority of unused categories fall under the category of schemes.

Keywords: wordplay, news headlines, schemes, tropes, rhetoric.

Introduction

In such a world where mass communication have a crucial part in shaping attitudes, opinions, events and objects, the wording of the message may be the most important factor in persuading the recipient to adopt a particular point of view. Ungerer (2000) argued that for successfully communicating the message, all texts must seduce their audience. They must urge the potential reader into reading and into accepting the message. Media texts are saturated with strategies to win the audience and maintain the impression.

Accordingly, it seems likely that wordplay (rhetorical figures of speech) may be used in news headlines for attracting readers to read the whole article. Headlines are usually written by different people from those who write the main bodies of the news texts. News editors and copy editors usually dictate the choice of headlines for specific news stories. Bell (1991) asserted that headlines are a "part of news rhetoric whose function is to attract the reader". Skilled copy editors devote noticeable time to write headlines because they know that "dead and dull headlines drive readers away". Given that one of the main functions of headlines is "persuasion," wordplay investigation in English news headlines is the salient issue throughout this study.

Statement of the Problem and Research Methodology

Iarovici and Amel (1989) claimed that both headline strategy and advertising strategy seek to bring about desire. In the case of headline, the desire is to read the whole article; in advertisement, it is to purchase the product. The headline writer has the purpose of capturing the readers' emotion with as few words as possible. The language of news presents factual content as well as emotional tone, mostly achieved through wordplay.

The data for the present study is extracted from the Euronews website. The analysis is conducted using textual analysis and rhetorical theory. Leigh (1994) offered a taxonomy for classifying wordplay:

The Tropes: Involve play on the meaning of words (Puns and Associations).

The Schemes: Involve play on grammar and change in word order (Word order, omissions, repetitions, and rhyme).

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Results and Discussion

Ninety-seven percent of the 100 selected Euronews headlines have one or more clearly defined wordplay. Across the selected headlines, there is a preference for the use of tropes, namely metonymy, rather than schemes.

Frequency of Wordplays

Metonymy: 98 (32.99%)

Ellipsis: 67 (22.56%)

Personification: 52 (17.51%)

Metaphor: 17 (5.72%)

Hyperbole: 15 (5.05%)

Allusion: 9 (3.03%)

Alliteration: 8 (2.69%)

Analysis of Specific Wordplays:

Metonymy: Acts as an effective mental shortcut, allowing one entity to stand for another (e.g., using "Amsterdam" to represent the government).

Ellipsis: Used for brevity to maximize information output while minimizing space.

Personification: Adds dramatic power to inanimate objects and emotionally connects the readers.

Metaphor: Facilitates discourse by conceptualizing abstract ideas through concrete ones.

Hyperbole: Used for rhetorical effect, criticism, or warning.

Allusion: Significant for economy of space and reminding readers of pertinent latent events.

Conclusion

The employment of wordplays strengthens headline capabilities, facilitates discourse, and meets space constraints. It uncovers principles used for delivering language in a way that is impressive and persuasive. Examining wordplay helps

in understanding the complexity and richness of journalistic texts in providing implied layers of meaning.

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