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### AUDIENCE DESIGN IN NEWSPAPERS

*У статті розглянуто методи та засоби привернення читацької зацікавленості в газетних текстах. Цей метод визначається як створення аудиторії. Це може бути досягнуто шляхом використання візуального стилю та мовних засобів.*

*Ключові слова: побудова аудиторії, засоби масової інформації, газетний текст, візуальний стиль, використання мовних засобів.*

*В статье рассматриваются методы и средства привлечения интереса читателей в газетных текстах. Данный метод определяется как создание аудитории. Это может быть достигнуто путем использования визуального стиля и языковых средств.*

*Ключевые слова: создание аудитории, средства массовой информации, газетный текст, визуальный стиль, использование языковых средств.*

*The article deals with the study of the ways and means of attracting readers' interests in newspaper texts. The method is defined as audience design. Audience can be constructed through visual style and language usage.*

*Key words: audience design, mass media, newspaper text, visual style, language usage.*

**The actuality of the problem.** Language is, and has always been, the means by which we construct and analyze what we call “reality”. The pundits opine that the economy wins and loses elections, but who has actually encountered or touched an economy? What we know of it we know through carefully selected words, images that tell us what we ought to think and believe we know. It is no accident that politicians and others in the public eye have developed armies of specialists whose job it is to construct public meanings via the skillful manipulation of language. “Just language” has become big business. If in Calvin (“Silent Cal”) Coolidge’s time, the business of America was business, in ours the business of America is language” [5, p. 20]. But how can language have this kind of power? How can something that is physically just puffs of air, a mere stand-in for reality, have the power to change us and our world.

**The purpose of this article** is an attempt to study the ways and means of audience design in newspapers.

The language of newspapers was given quite considerable attention in scientific literature. Mardh [7] offers an exhaustive study of the characteristic

features of the headlines of a range of English newspapers. Kniffka [4] analyzes headline structures of German and American English newspaper texts. Bell analyses the 'distinctive telegraphic syntax' of English newspaper headlines [2]. Simpson [12] explores the ways in which point of view in language intersects with and is shaped by ideology. Reah [10] explores the ways in which the press portrays current events. From the ideological bias of the press to the role of headlines in newspaper articles and ways in which newspapers relate to their audience, the author provides a comprehensive analysis of newspaper language. Conboy [3] focuses mainly on the way language is used in newspapers, but also includes some comparison with other news media. The author acknowledges that the traditional function of newspapers is changing in an era of online and rolling news: for most people today newspapers are not turned to for the latest news but more often for commentary on events already known.

As Bell points out, "communicators who work in the mass media are always in some sense trying to win audience approval" [2, p.143]. Their intention may be to inform, persuade, provoke, or entertain, but unless they can attract their readers' or listeners' interest they are wasting their time.

The main method they use to attract this interest is what Bell calls **audience design**: speakers or writers call up a mental picture of the audience they want to impress, then tailor their material and style to suit. Audiences have their expectations too; if they don't find a reflection of their own attitudes, values, and ideas in what they read, they will buy something instead. Liverpool readers, for example, refused to buy the Sun for months after it unfairly blackened the reputation of fans caught up in the Hillsborough disaster [11, p.168].

Speaking about **visual style layout** and *typography* should be mentioned. Newspapers make their content attractive to readers by the way they arrange it on the page. As Ingrid Marhd points out [7, p. 126], the natural movement of the eye for Western readers is from top left to bottom right: items of the greatest interest are therefore usually, though not always, arranged in descending order from top left to bottom right. The "fallow corners" left empty by this technique are generally filled with pictures and/or less important headlines.

**Headlines** reach an audience considerably wider than those who read the articles, since all those who buy the paper will glance, if only fleetingly, at the headlines. Moreover their impact is even wider than on those who actually buy the paper, since headlines are often glimpsed on public transport, displayed on fliers etc. This is particularly true of front page headlines, which also of course draw the casual observer to conclude the importance of a particular issue which has been given prominence in this way.

Editors also grab readers' attention by the size and boldness of their headlines. As Bell remarks, "Large headlines in striking black print are the written equivalent of an excited shout." They are also reader-friendly in that they and the white space around them break down the body copy into smaller

chunks. (The body copy is the technical term for the columns of writing below the headlines.)

### **Tide of immigrants**

Desperate human cargo landing at the gateway to Europe

(The Times, 2008)

The greater the news value of a headline, the larger the type it is printed in: readers can judge its importance visually before they see what is being said. When something really important happens, headlines become so big they swallow up most of the front page. Sub-headlines in smaller, heavy black type are similarly used to break up the body copy within an article. These often consist of one word hinting at what is to come in the next paragraph.

Words chosen for headlines are often short, giving rise to headlines.

**Headlines** is nonconversational language used in newspaper headlines.

Because of space constraints, a copy editing requirement is the ability to write headlines in a compressed telegraphic style. Headlines often omit forms of the verb "to be" and other grammatical articles, or use verbs infinitives for the future tense, as in "*Dow Jones board to vote on News Corp offer*" (The Times, 2007). Virtually no finite verbs are used except in the simple present tense. Conjunctions are also often excluded from headlines. In the United States, for example, the word "and" is often replaced by a comma. Headlines feature many contractions and abbreviations: in the USA, for example, *Pols* (for "politicians"), *Dems* (for "Democrats"), *GOP* (for the Republican Party, from the nickname "Grand Old Party"); in the UK, *Lib Dems* (for the Liberal Democrats), *Tories* (for the Conservative Party).

Some periodicals have their own distinctive headline styles, especially *Variety* and its entertainment-jargon headlines such as "Sticks nix hick pix". "Sticks nix hick pix" is one of the most famous headlines ever to appear in an American publication. It was printed in *Variety*, a newspaper covering Hollywood and the entertainment industry, on July 17, 1935, over an article about the reaction of rural audiences to movies about rural life. Using a form of headlines that the newspaper called slang, "Sticks Nix Hick Pix" means that, according to an Iowa theater manager, people in rural areas ("the sticks") reject ("nix") motion pictures ("pix") about rural life ("hicks"). The conventional wisdom of the movie industry was that themes of upper-class life would not be popular in the countryside; according to the article, this assumption was incorrect.

Headlines are a particularly rich source of information about the field of cultural references. This is because titles 'stand alone' without explanation or definition; they depend on the reader recognizing instantly the field, allusions, issues, cultural references necessary to identify the content of the articles. They thus rely on a stock of cultural knowledge, representations and models of reality that must be assumed to be widespread in the society if the headlines are to have meaning. Common shorthand in headlines such as references to the '*PM*', *GOP*, *Pols*, suppose not only a certain minimum of

political and general knowledge, but also help to situate the readers within a national framework.

Journalists make their material easier to read by using short, concrete words wherever possible. There are three main reasons for this:

- they take up less space, having fewer syllables;
- they can be immediately understood by a wide range of readers;
- they have a forceful quality that makes an immediate impact.

In broadsheets and tabloids alike, words like *probe* can be used for “in-depth investigation”, *slam* for “criticize severely”, *slash* for “make sweeping or random cuts”, “*is set to*” for “is preparing to”. Nicholas Bagnall [1, p. 98] calls words like these buzzwords. **Buzzword** is an informal term for a word that is fashionable and used more to impress than inform. In newspapers we can track a huge number of political buzzwords. What we consider a political buzzword is words that become hot. By hot what we mean is that they take on a meaning other than originally intended. And everyone uses this word or this phrase to connote a whole host of ideas that boil down to one word or one phrase. For example, the word *surge*. It’s been in the language for time immemorial, and we all know what surge means, if you’re at a concert the crowd surges toward the stage, a storm has a wall of water before it that’s a storm surge, there are many meanings. But in the specific political, combat meaning of the word, it meant an increase of troops. It became “the Surge”. So if you’re talking about politics or the Iraq war, it is a word that has a new meaning. “Did the Surge work?” It was a word that was redefined. That would be a buzzword to us.

Some newspapers make further concessions to their readers by using colloquial language and outright slang in their reporting of serious social concerns, e.g.:

### **BOOZE IS “RUIN OF BRITAIN”**

**HEAVY boozing is taking a whopping £3.3. billion toll on Britain.**

Sozzled employees unable to work properly – or who go sick – cost **INDUSTRY** £2.8 billion.

Treating alcohol-related illnesses leaves the **NHS** with a £200 million hangover. Meanwhile the bill for **CRIME** and **ROAD ACCIDENTS** fuelled by drink is £257 million, Alcohol Concern revealed yesterday.

(The Sun, 2000)

The tabloids go further than this in their lighter features choosing a cheesy vocabulary. The result is a generally coarse, matey style and a knowing tone of voice.

How language affects the ear should be a critical concern of every writer. Headline writers frequently harness sounds for any of several effects. When they repeat sounds in nearby words in order to catch readers’ attention, the result is called **alliteration** (which has two subsets: *assonance* for vowels, *consonance* for consonants). Alliteration is common, especially in the red-tops:

**MILE HIGH MANDY GETS RANDY ON BRANDY** (The Sun, 2000).

So are **puns** and associated **word play**. Popular British tabloids such as the Sun or the Mirror are notorious for the use of puns in their headlines, but even serious papers such as the Guardian cannot resist the temptation. What makes many of the headline puns even more difficult than the simple wordplay of puns used in jokes is that headline puns very often contain cultural references. Unless you are familiar with popular British TV programmes or advertising, the headline will be impossible to understand. The examples which follow were taken from the Guardian:

- *Burning questions on tunnel safety unanswered* (About the possibility of fires in the Channel tunnel). - The pun in this case is in the words burning questions. The questions are about fires, hence burning questions, but *burning question* is another way of saying *an important or urgent question*.

- *Dutch take courage and prepare for the Euro* (About the introduction of the Euro into the Netherlands). - *Dutch courage* is the expression given to bravery that is attained by drinking lots of alcohol.

- *Why the Clyde offer is not so bonny* (About a take-over offer by a Scottish engineering company). - The pun here is in the combination of Clyde and bonny. This refers to a popular gangster film called *Bonnie and Clyde*. Bonny is a word used mostly in Scotland to mean attractive, so the literal meaning of the headline is that the take-over offer of the Clyde company is not attractive to shareholders of the other company.

**Metaphor** can also be found, though not always with any aesthetic intent, e.g. **HOP OFF, YOU FROGS** was an insult aimed at the French during a trade dispute (the example was taken from [11]).

The red-top tabloids have two further tricks up their sleeves to grab and hold readers' attention: sensationalism and the use of clichés.

**Sensationalism** is a manner of being extremely controversial, loud, or attention grabbing. Critics of media bias of all political stripes often charge the media with engaging in sensationalism in their reporting and conduct. That is, the notion that media outlets often choose to report heavily on stories with shock value or attention-grabbing names or events, rather than reporting on more pressing issues to the general public. In the extreme case, the media would report the news if it makes a good story, without much regard for the factual accuracy. Thus, a press release including ridiculous and false pseudoscientific claims issued by a controversial group is guaranteed a lot of media coverage.

A media piece may report on a political figure in a biased way or present one side of an issue while deriding another, or neutrally, it may simply include sensational aspects such as zealots, doomsayers and/or junk science. Complex subjects and affairs are often subject to sensationalism. Exciting and emotionally charged aspects can be drawn out without providing elements such as pertinent background, investigative, or contextual information needed for the viewer to form his or her opinion on the subject. One presumed goal of sensational reporting is increased (or sustained) readership which can be sold to advertisers, the result being a lesser focus on proper journalism and a

greater focus on the "juicy" aspects of a story that pull in a larger share of audience.

**Clichés**, i.e., stereotyped expressions, commonplace phrases familiar to the reader, e.g., public opinion, free markets, long-term agreements, a melting pot, to cast a veto over, crucial/pressing problems, zero tolerance, political correctness, to go postal (extremely hostile). Clichés more than anything else reflect the traditional manner of expression in newspaper writing. They are commonly looked upon as a defect of style. Some clichés, especially those based on trite images, e.g., captains of industry, pillars of society, bulwark of civilization are pompous and hackneyed. But nevertheless, clichés are indispensable in newspaper style: they prompt the necessary associations and prevent ambiguity and misunderstanding.

As Nicholas Bagnall [1, p. 176] points out, there is a ritualistic feel to the writing of the red-tops, where women, if young, are always stunning or sizzling, men are always hunks, the bereaved are always tragic, etc. Why? Because tabloid readers want stories that fit with their conceptions of what life is like, not ones that turn their ideas about the world upside down. Clichés - statements that have been repeated so often that we take their truth for granted – are obviously part of this comforting ritual.

Taken together, the buzzwords, the slang, and the clichés create a misguided impression of poor writing in the tabloids, yet their editorials often offer clearer and more cogent expressions of complex issues than writers in the broadsheets can achieve. And the broadsheets themselves frequently resort to clichés in reporting the scenes of disasters and fires: *fire appliances, at the scene, battling, blaze, engulfed, threatened*, etc.

Another technique used to stimulate interest is **personalization**. Conflict in the abstract hardly stirs the blood, but conflict between people does. Lerman suggests that “sports and entertainment provide the thematic model” for news reporting of this kind: “Political campaigns and issues of public policy are reduced to personality conflict, sporting contests, or battles. The focus is “who’s winning?” [6, p. 98]. Not surprisingly, therefore, “metaphors of warfare and to a lesser extent sport are prevalent”, and even complex issues are presented in terms of conflict between two opposing sides.

In practice, social descriptions are polarized and tend to operate with binary distinctions: *for example, workers/non-workers, dropouts; peaceful/violent; organized/disorganized; moderate/extreme; democracy/civil war, anarchy*. This gives rise to the tendency to reduce a complex system of social relationships to simple opposites.

If political issues are presented in terms of conflict between two opposing sides, one aggressive (e.g. the workers), one passively resisting (e.g. the management), it is easy to see how accusations of subjective writing can be leveled at the journalists reporting them. Reporters do have prejudices like the rest of people, and when these are awakened their writing may become overtly emotive.

**Speech verbs** also help to color newspaper reports. *Say* and *tell* give a personal note; *announce*, *declare* and *refuse* are neutral, while *claim* is altogether more ambiguous in tone, and may be used to cast doubt on the truth of what is being said. Verbs such as *threaten*, *insist* and *denounce* show us events through the filter of the reporter's eyes; they create news action.

It can be distinguished two main aspects of connotative/subjective reporting: **inclusion** and **exclusion**.

Inclusive reporting uses terms which "linguistically express the consensus [of civilized society]", from which those who are perceived as hostile in some way are excluded. Examples can be "the overwhelming majority", "the people", "ordinary citizens", "the majority of decent people", "right-thinking people".

A key theme running through the book of Conboy [3] is how newspapers represent different social groups to their readers. At its most crude, this process involves the categorization of people as insiders or outsiders, depending on the assumed values and attitudes of the newspaper's target audience. In the chapter 'Narratives of exclusion' Conboy discusses how linguistic devices are used to create a negative view of people considered to be on the periphery of mainstream British life, whether they are viewed as ethnic, religious or social outsiders. For example, he shows how a word like 'chav' has been used in headlines to predetermine the way the reader approaches and interprets a story, even where the term is not employed by those involved in the story itself. Other words and phrases that are similarly used to sensationalise and reinforce social divisions include 'hoodies', 'binge drinkers', 'unruly pupils' and 'feral youths'. This type of categorization through language is motivated by the wish to maintain credibility with the paper's readers, in this case reinforcing the assumed view that they, and the nation, are directly or indirectly threatened by those who do not live or behave or think as they do.

In the same way, direct quotations in inverted commas allow journalists to report on controversial issues while preserving an impartial stance, as in: *Lecturer "robbed of career" after she miscarried*.

Journalists often simplify complex social and political issues by presenting them in terms of **stereotypes**. Stereotypes are the "building blocks" of the linguistic picture of the world. The general idea of what a stereotype is builds on Putnam's treatment of linguistic meaning [8]. Stereotypes are not restricted to knowledge and opinions about members of social groups, as in the common usage of the word and in social science and sociolinguistics research [9]. Rather, stereotyping is regarded a general mechanism of organizing knowledge about entities (objects, acts, relations) in the world. Thus, stereotypes are viewed as a chiefly cognitive phenomenon, with the evaluative function of enforcing in- and out-groups in the case of social stereotypes being secondary.

Stereotypes are fixed ideas of individuals or groups that endow them with particular attributes, values, attitudes and ideas: *radical feminists; a male*

*chauvinist pig*. Once people have been slotted neatly into such stereotypes, they can be brought into conflict with one another without any details or qualifications that might otherwise spoil the broad sweep of the story.

Making a **conclusion** it is important to mention that audience design can be made through visual style and the use of language. Newspapers lure their readers with a combination of words and pictures. It can also be said that language (the language of newspaper in particular) not only has the ability to allocate power, but also is the means and the medium by which we construct and understand ourselves as individuals, as coherent creatures, and also as members of a culture, a cohesive unit.

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