A Canary in a Coalmine: Intertextuality of Newspaper Headlines

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Summary. The article, first of all, addresses the issue of the role and importance of intertextuality in verbal and visual texts in general. In particular, the focus is on the mass media, namely, newspaper headlines which are treated as texts interacting both with the article texts and the surrounding world, established in the reader’s schemata. Headlines, consequently, fulfil a multipurpose function: convey the information, contained in the article, set the tone of the newspaper, reflect various emotions etc. British quality and compact newspapers, The Daily Express, The Times, The Independent, The Guardian, The Observer, and The Daily Telegraph, served as the object of this research. The aim was to show the functioning of intertextual links and point to the domains of their reference. Such approaches as content analysis, critical discourse analysis and discourse analysis were used to prove the importance of intertextuality in developing the reader’s critical reading activities. The analysis prompted that intertextual links function intertextually (endophorically) and intratextually (exophorically). The sphere of their referencing is wide and heterogeneous; it includes the royal family, events in other countries, politics, literature, art, military sphere, language.

Keywords: intertextuality, reference, links, headlines, newspapers.

Introductory observations

Linguists (Fairclough, 2000; Melnikova, 2003; Rose, 2012), interested in discourse and the study of language in general, have been concerned with intertextuality and the interplay between texts / discourses. Intertextuality is understood as the relationship between writers and readers, between a text and other texts, between a text and the contexts as
well as the world knowledge; it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and independence in modern cultural life (Graham, 2011). Consequently, intertextuality is inherent in the texts of different genres, spoken discourses and visual representations of the surrounding world (non-linguistic texts). The focus of attention in this paper is the genre of the mass media in general and headlines of newspaper articles in particular. As mass media people are at pains to attract and increase readership, they resort to various techniques, some of which they even borrow from fiction. Newspaper people are especially concerned about headlines which are the first to be noticed and evaluated by the reader. Though a headline, in its most elementary form, can be described as the title of news report, in reality it works as the reader’s guide and compass, sparks curiosity and draws the reader into a story. Thus, this study addresses the question of the importance and role of intertextuality in making a headline to meet these ends. The aim is to show the functioning of various intertextual links and the domains they refer to in order to trigger the reader’s schemata, to arouse his / her interest. Such approaches as content analysis, critical discourse analysis and discourse analysis were employed to prove the importance of intertextuality for the reader’s critical reading activities.

The data was collected randomly, and the most interesting and conspicuous examples of headline intertextuality were presented in this paper. The sources were British quality and compact newspapers *The Daily Express, The Times, The Independent, The Guardian, The Observer* and *The Daily Telegraph*.

**Review of the related literature**

Intertextuality, as the term itself implies, deals with texts; it is present in any piece of writing, i. e. text. It has been characterized as one of the seven major standards of textuality, next to cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, situationality, and informativity (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981, 19; Bell, 1991, 163–164). Textual or discourse analyses (discourse analysis is also considered as one of the methods for doing social research) are many-faceted and embrace such approaches as the ethnography of speaking, pragmatics, Conversation Analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis etc (Cameron, 2003). All these approaches involve necessary sets of components, characteristics such as setting / situation, participants, norms of interaction, channel of communication, genres etc. In addition, textual analysis, as Fairclough (2000, 185) claims, subsumes two complementary types of analysis: linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis. In scholar’s words, “Whereas linguistic analysis shows how texts selectively draw upon linguistic system, intertextual analysis shows how texts selectively draw upon orders of discourse [...]”.

The term *intertextuality* and the notion behind it have long history though the term itself was coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s when she ‘discovered’ and intro-
duced Bakhtin’s works to a wider linguistic audience. As Bakhtin (2000, 131) noted, “The speaker is not the biblical Adam […] giving unnamed objects names for the first time”. This idea was succinctly expressed by Johnstone (2002, 139) “[…] Bakhtin talked about the ‘dialogic’ qualities of texts, the ways, that is, in which multiple voices (multiple ways of talking, multiple points of view, and multiple things to say) are transformed and re-used each time something new is written”. Allen Graham (2011) in his book *Intertextuality* presents an exhaustive review of the history of intertextuality. Referring to F. de Saussure, M. Bakhtin, J. Kristeva, the scholar claims that this term was initially employed by poststructuralist theorists and critics who rejected the notions of stable meaning and objective interpretation. In his opinion, one of the most famous proponents of poststructuralist theory is the French theorist Roland Barthes for whom “literary meaning can never be fully stabilized by the reader since the literary work’s intertextual nature always leads readers on to new textual relations. Authors, therefore, cannot be held responsible for the multiple meanings readers can discover within literary texts” (Graham, 2011, 12).

Taking into considerations the opinions of many scholars (Graham, 2011; Melnikova, 2003 and others), it could be stated that a very general understanding of intertextuality is that it is the interaction between the author and others’ texts, their dialogue, a special theory of text reading which has its own means of interpretation; the basic notion of intertextuality is that texts do not appear in isolation, but in relation to other texts as responses. The origins of this study lie in literary theory when the discussion focused on how a literary work is related to prior literary works. Later intertextuality study was applied to other disciplines such as media studies, discourse analysis, social studies (Pulungan, 2010); also, intertextuality has been adopted by theorists of non-literary art forms such as painting, music and architecture (Graham, 2011; Rose, 2012). In addition, some of these scholars mention its critical function: intertextuality, like influence or imitation, is not neutral but hints at social-political processes underlying it.

The interaction between two texts may take various ways; therefore, linguists distinguish different types of intertextuality. Some theorists (e.g. Porter, 1986) distinguish between two types of interaction: *iterability* and *presupposition*. Iterability refers to repeatability of certain textual fragments, to citation in its broadest sense which includes explicit allusions, references and quotations within a discourse; also, unannounced sources and influences, clichés, phrases in the air, and tradition. Presupposition refers to assumptions a text makes about its referent, its readers, and its content – to portions of the text which are read, but which are not explicitly ‘there’. Other theorists, depending upon the aims of their research, mention allusion, quotation, calque, plagiarism, pastiche, references, parody, and influences of every kind as types of intertextuality. Miola (2014) distinguishes seven types of intertextuality. *Revision* is the process when the anterior text is revised for some reasons, e.g. censorship, theatrical, legal demands
etc. **Translation** takes a text into a different language, recreates it. **Quotation** reproduces some fraction of the previous text in another text. **Source texts** provide plot, character, idea, language, or style to later text, and close to it is **traditions** when a newly created text reveals its presence through commentaries, adaptations, translations. **Genres** include a wide range of linkings implicit and explicit in generic choices. **Paralogues**, in Miola’s (2014, 23) words, “are texts that illuminate the intellectual, social, theological, or political meaning in other texts”.

As noted above, intertextuality theory has become applicable to various genres; as a special theory of reading (Melnikova, 2003), it was employed in the domain of mass media, especially newspaper analysis. Newspapers carry material of an extremely diverse character: news stories, news bulletins, press reports, advertisements, editorials, cross-words, puzzles, and the like. It is a particular genre with its own rhythms, tones, words, and phrases. Though newspaper discourse is supposed to provide information, each of these sub-genres pursue their own specific purposes and interests; for example, the main function of news stories is to objectively inform the reader, to provide him / her with hard facts whereas editorials aim to form or influence, sometimes even to manipulate, public opinion. Headlines may be screaming (especially in tabloids) to attract readers’ attention; advertisements employ numerous exophoric references to persuade readers to buy or consume. Various means are used to promote these interests such as evoking past events, interconnecting intra and extratextual events, quoting, alluding. This makes newspapers one of the outstanding sources of intertextuality. Taking the above mentioned into consideration, headlines became the object of analysis in this study; they could be considered as the most double-voiced and polyphonic discourses.

Headlines, according to Reah (1998), are a unique type of text; in its attempt to attract a reader to a story, they may be ambiguous or confusing. In addition, headlines may be treated as opinion manipulators. Therefore, the headline writer uses a number of devices such as alliteration, loaded language, word play. Saxena (2006, 24–32) notes the following major functions performed by headlines: 1) index the news (they guide readers to stories of their interest, help them to save time as they skim through different pages); 2) establish news value (they help the reader to judge the relative importance of a news story); 3) depict the mood of the story (they reflect various emotions by using emotionally coloured diction); 4) set the tone of the newspaper (they are the first indicators of a newspaper’s policy); 5) give identity (readers get accustomed to the typeface and the size of headlines used in their daily newspapers). However, it should be noted that in addition to the above-mentioned functions, headlines fulfil intertextual function as well. In this paper headlines are treated as texts interacting either with the text of an article (intertextual connection) or people, objects, phenomena in the surrounding world (intratextual connection). An attempt was made to highlight the most conspicuous examples of headline intertextuality, the ways it functions and the spheres of human life it refers to.
The discussion of results

As it was mentioned in the introductory observations, the headlines for the analysis were selected randomly, mainly paying attention to their playfulness and innovative character; in addition, we aimed to locate those spheres of the surroundings and world knowledge which headline intertextual links refer to. Therefore, all the headlines of the above-mentioned British newspapers were taken into consideration, and the most representative examples are discussed in this paper below.

_India trip becomes audition for role as ‘new Diana’ (The Times, January 27 2014)_

This headline is both catching readers’ attention, ironic and at the same time ambiguous. First of all, the phrase ‘new Diana’ exophorically refers to a well-known figure, Princess Diana, whom the British people still love and adore. This intertextual link triggers many schemata in readers’ minds and at the same time arouses their intense curiosity: who, why somebody is called ‘the new Diana’. The irony lies in another intertextual link, i.e. the word ‘audition’, which means “a short performance by an actor or singer […] to judge if they are good enough to act in a play, sing in a concert etc” (LDCE). This exophoric reference to one of the characteristic features of the entertainment domain introduces the feeling of temporality, the perception that something is fake, not Princess Diana-like. Finally, ‘India trip’ does not make the message, which is supposed to be conveyed by the headline, more comprehensive. Therefore, the reader becomes intrigued and motivated to read the news story inside the paper. The article under this headline gives an account of President Hollander’s and his former partner’s trip to India in the wake of their split. The latter spent a day with malnourished babies in Mumbai; this gave the pretext to some of the media sources to refer to her as ‘the new Diana’ and characterize her visit as ‘an audition’.

_Going Dutch (The Times, January 28 2014)_

This headline of the editorial gives a clue that the issue under discussion has something to do with the Netherlands / Holland; however, the exophoric reference, or intratextual link, is rather wide and obscure; the reader has to go further to understand which domain of his / her country’s life is covered in the article. This referential link embraces the major part of the editorial due to the nominative chain Dutch – Netherlands – the Dutch scheme – the Dutch schemes – the schemes – a typical Dutch family and points to a Dutch-style pension scheme which some British politicians consider to be applicable for the improvement of their country’s pension system.

_Don’t ask what am I owed but what can I give? (The Daily Express, May 12, 2010)_

The headline is closely related to J. F. Kennedy’s inaugural address and his famous chiasmus My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country. The paraphrase in the headline clearly implies that the article refers
to the world of politics, and, in fact, the article covers the first day of David Cameron as a newly-elected Prime Minister, his actions, a meeting with the Queen, and speeches. In one of these, he made reference to J. F. Kennedy’s famous speech and paraphrased the above mentioned popular phrase. Headline writers ‘borrowed’ this paraphrase for the headline of their article. Thus, the intertextual link here is not only exophoric (reference to the American President) but cataphoric as well as only the article itself provides a concise interpretation of the headline.

A streetcar named mood-wing (The Independent, 17 March 2013)

In this article a theatre critic reviews a young playwright’s early play in which the main character, Lily, is presented as a fantasist oscillating between sweetness and psychotic bitterness, and the neologism mood-wing in the headline reflects this situation. The review is critical, and among other shortcomings of the play the critic notes that the playwright “is too indebted to Tennessee Williams’ mentally unstable heroines”. The paraphrased headline establishes an intertextual link with the latter’s play A Streetcar Named Desire in which the main heroine, Blanche, is also emotionally unstable and on the verge of mental breakdown. This link, on the one hand, defines the domain, covered by the article; on the other hand, it creates ironic tone.

The Mona Liza kitsch (The Independent, 17 March 2013)

The headline refers exophorically to the painting of a woman with a mysterious smile. This painting has been acclaimed as the best known, the most visited, the most parodied works of art in the world. The collocation of Mona Liza and kitsch evokes the reader’s interest and motivates him / her to at least skim through the article; in addition, it adds irony to the headline. The article, actually, presents the painting by V. Tretchikoff The Chinese Girl and gives a historical background of both the painter and the painting. The idea behind this is that even though the painting was never a masterpiece, even burglars passed it by, its cheap copies became best-selling prints of all time, and at present it is supposed to fetch three or four thousand pounds at auction. Thus, the intertextual link to Mona Liza allows the reader to infer that some second-rate, kitschy painting might become popular as well.

Now media gets the papal charm offensive (The Independent, 17 March, 2013)

This headline contains an intertextual link charm offensive which refers to a military sphere. The epithet and the link itself presupposes the idea of some positive changes in the Vatican’s PR. The article emphasizes the warmth of the Pope’s personality, the difference from his predecessor as well as points to the conclusion that he charmed the media.

The Emperors New Clothes (The Independent, 17 March, 2013)

First of all, it should be noted that the omission of an apostrophe in the headline is not a matter of negligence; it is deliberately omitted by the journalist, and the article, ironically,
comments on the recent trends of an inappropriate use, or no use at all, of this punctuation mark in the English language. The irony through the better part of the comment is underpinned by complete omission of apostrophes, e. g. *Im*. The headline makes an intertextual link to Hans Christian Andersen’s tale about a vain Emperor; it is highly ambiguous and hardly interpretable without the knowledge of the previous text. In addition, it should be mentioned that the tale itself is also an example of intertextuality. It is based on a story from the medieval Spanish collection; however, Andersen read the tale in a German translation. Intertextuality, thus, makes the headline ironic, ambiguous and eye-catching.


The neologism *returnadores* refers to the history of Spain and Latin America. It is derived from *conquistadores*, i.e. Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru who later settled in Latin America and now, because of poor financial conditions, mainly unemployment, go to live in rustic Spain. Intertextual ties *returnadores* and *the old world*, in their exophoric reference, trigger corresponding schemas in the reader’s mind.

*A white dove, a torch called Hope: the odyssey begins (The Guardian, 11 May, 2012)*

The headline sounds optimistic because of intertextual links *a white dove*, *Hope*, *odyssey* which function both exophorically and cataphorically. The article covers the episode of the lighting of the Olympic flame in Greece, and in the article the flame is compared to a white dove. A white dove stands out in our minds as a symbol of love and, especially, peace; this symbolism goes back to Paganism, Judaism and Christianity. *Odyssey*, which in one of its meaning, means a long journey with a lot of adventures or difficulties has its roots in an ancient Greek epic poem which concentrates on Odysseus’s ten-year journey home. This link emphasizes that the carrying the Olympic flame is a long journey made by many sportsmen. In addition, local people said that it would be female and called Elpida (hope).

*Bumi is the canary in the City’s coalmine (The Independent, 20 February, 1913)*

The article focuses on the mining ventures, consequent financial disagreements, losses and gains by two mining companies; in the end of the article, one of the company’s, i.e. Bumi’s fate was compared “to a canary in the coalmine”. This comparison is reflected in the headline and makes it highly intertextual. “A canary in a coalmine” is an allusion to canaries that miners carried down into the mine tunnels. Canaries are especially sensitive to some gasses; therefore, if gasses leaked into the mine, canaries were the first to die, and this was a warning for the miners to leave tunnels immediately. This phrase, via intertextuality, was transferred to other spheres (business, politics etc). Another intertextual link, the City, defines the field of its application and implies that the fate of the above mentioned company may, in one or another way, affect the City’s business.
Jamie’s carrots are all very well but we lazy lot need a stick (The Sunday Times, February 24, 2003)

Intertextuality is established, first of all, through an idiomatic expression a carrot and stick approach that refers to a policy of offering a combination of rewards and punishment to influence a person’s behaviour. Originally it referred to a cart driver carrying a carrot in front of a mule and holding a stick behind it. Later this idiom became applicable to many other fields. In this case, its first part refers to the problem of the obesity of the British people, their rejection of “Jamie’s carrots” and consumption of junk food; the other part “a stick” implies, ironically, that punitive measures should be implemented such as restriction and taxation of junk food and drink or prohibiting fat people to use lifts. The other link Jamie’s carrots points exophorically to a well-known culinary specialist who strives to improve unhealthy diets and fights against processed foods in schools.

“I would like to see a church that is poor and is for the poor”, declares Pope Francis (The Observer, 17 March, 2013)

Quotations are widely used in headlines. According to Saxena (2006, 89-92), it is important to identify the person who has made a statement. It sparks the reader’s interest and adds value to a headline. If the subject is missing, the reader might question the truthfulness of the information. Thus, a headline needs attribution to know who has made the statement at first sight; consequently, a headline, being a text, cataphorically refers to article text where the activities and remarks of an official, ordinary person, or some organization are presented in a more detailed way, as for example, in the headline below.

However, Saxena (2006, 91) claims that “attribution can be avoided when the headline is placed over a large photograph of the celebrity”. The photograph then works as a hint enabling the reader to infer who the speaker is. In our case, the intertextual link is double: the headline refers both to the Queen’s photograph and the article text itself. For example,

“The Queen’s leadership is special” (The Daily Telegraph, March 11, 2013)

Another format employed by headline writers is the use of partial quotes, e. g.

Antibiotic risk ‘as bad as terrorism’ (The Daily Telegraph, March11, 2013)

The quotation is used for two reasons: to stress important points made by a speaker and to retain the flavour of the comment. The link to terrorism emphasizes an important point and evokes negative emotions in the reader’s mind as terrorism is associated with violence such as bombing, shooting, or kidnapping; this is an exophoric reference. However, the headline also refers cataphorically, to the article itself, as it contains a partial quotation of one of Chief Medical Officers when she discusses the threat posed by resistance to antibiotics. The first intertextual link is also supported by a nominative chain: a ticking time bomb, catastrophic terrorist attacks, a ticking bomb.
By way of summing up

Language is an inalienable part of human existence, human culture. Our communication acquires a variety of forms: written and spoken, body language, verbal and visual, etc. Despite these differences, there is one feature which unites all these varieties: whatever we say and in what form we express ourselves, we are not the first to invent structures, genres, lexical expressions; we ‘borrow’ them from other people’s experiences and practices. Thus, intertextuality became a leading theory which helps to read and interpret various texts, visual ones included.

Intertextuality is highly noticeable in all forms of the mass media: television, radio and newspapers; the latter are especially apt to employ various forms of intertextuality to attract a wide circle of readership. Headlines play a crucial role in achieving this aim.

The investigation of the headlines of some of the British newspapers (quality and compacts) allows to claim that the established intertextual links in headlines function intertextually and intratextually, i.e. endophorically and exophorically, or sometimes even both ways. In addition, intertextual links functioning endophorically provide basis for the forming of nominative chains which ensure, in their own way, text cohesion. Intertextuality in headlines add to the creation of ambiguity (this triggers the reader’s interest), ironic and critical evaluation of the events described.

The amassed data shows that intertextual links in their exophorical function refer to a variety of spheres of human activity and experience. Our investigation points to the following domains: the royal family, other country’s experiences, politicians who paraphrase their counterparts’ sayings, literature, art, military sphere, language.

Finally, it would be interesting to analyze the headlines in terms of intertextuality in tabloids as the latter use more aggressive means in the fight for readership.

References

Kanarėlė šachtoje: intertekstualumas laikraščių antraštėse
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Santrauka


Esminiai žodžiai: intertekstualumas, referencija, ryšiai, antraštė, laikraščis.