

Connotation in newspaper headlines

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Connotation is an important and omnipresent source of language enrichment in what headlines newspaper concern. Headlines are important in their own right, because they are the first text that a newspaper reader sees when buying and reading the paper. They employ a range of creative language devices to produce short attention-getting, highly memorable texts, and have the capacity to encapsulate an entire story in a few words.

To reveal the connotative meaning which a word can carry, I will provide some newspaper headlines and analyze them. Andrew Levy, from *Daily Mail*, wrote an article on 15 August 2007, with a not so very impressive headline at first reading: “**A ROMANTIC (BUT CORNY) PROPOSAL**”. The article is based on the story of a boy who proposed to his girlfriend and had the words “*Floss marry me?*” carved into a field of stubble at a farm. What is interesting about this headline is that if the writer would have written “*A ROMANTIC PROPOSAL*” headline, first of all, it would not have stirred the reader's curiosity, due to the fact that proposing to someone is a normal thing to do between two lovers and secondly because it wouldn't have had the same flavor. Therefore he added in brackets the phrase *but corny* (the writer's subjective point of view) in order to have an impact on readers and to make them be interested in the subject. What is great about this headline is the position of the adjective “*corny*” into the context, because due to its connotations, it might create confusion. If the writer decided to use the word “*corny*” in its denotative meaning which everybody generally agrees about, or in its connotative meaning we cannot know for sure. He might have used this term in its literal meaning, describing the way things happened, or he might have used it with the meaning of a sentimental, sweet thing, or with the meaning of an old fashion and not originally thing. As a result, this demonstrates that the subjective, personal extra meaning of the word (connotation) is very important, because connotation refers to the personal aspect of meaning and the emotional feelings that the word arouses. And this thing reveals the writer's ability to convey the message and play with words, always leaving place for interpretation.

The second headline from *Daily Mail* “**A BIG WEDDING IS THE QUICKEST WAY TO THE DIVORCE COURT**” is another interesting and worthily mentioning headline (August 30, 2007). This is an example of a headline which carries a strong message and attitude towards nowadays society. It is an allusion to the wantonness and superficiality of those people who see life and one of its most important moments (the wedding) as a business. The writer's tone induces irony and sarcasm towards some person's actions. The writer might be very familiar to this “trend” (of getting marry and soon after divorcing), or might want to highlight his indignation and disapproval to this kind of acting, using irony. Therefore, nowadays getting married and after a short period of time to get divorce is as easy as any other action, if personal feelings don't exist. Written in the Present Tense, this headline is used to denote past events in order to convey a sense of reality, of closeness and to induce the feeling of immediacy to the reader.

When reading a newspaper headline such as “**HIGHSCHOOL CRUSH**” provided by *Daily Mail* on August 31, 2007, it might evoke different feelings and emotions to the readers and there is an explanation. The word “*crush*” has different meanings, different connotations, leading the reader to an ambiguous interpretation: it might have a negative connotation, meaning that a tragedy happened and the building was destroyed, or it might have a positive connotation, due to the fact that the word “*crush*” has also the meaning of falling in love with somebody. So, it could refer to teenagers and to the already known high school love story or to a disaster. This headline is a clear example of the role which connotation plays in enriching and giving “flavor” to headlines. Readers have to look beyond the denotative meaning of a word, because the

majority of words arouse emotional feelings, connotation thus, providing the means of expressing different attitudes. Even though the headline is not too long (here is to be remarked the presence of brevity, an important characteristic of headlines) and does not use difficult words, it manages to catch the real and important message. It also implies impact on the reader and stirs curiosity, because the more detailed a headline is, the more information will be revealed and it is a well known fact that headlines must have a little source of mystery (or in certain cases, irony or allusion).

Besides these headlines, I also liked another headline from *The Times*, which I consider to be a comic and an innovative headline, due to several elements, which will be stated in the following lines. **MY CAR WAS NOT A GAY, OK?** This headline managed to strike me first of all because of the bizarre association between the words “car” and “gay”, secondly because it had a rhyme and a tone which made me laugh and finally because nowadays the term “gay” is an unusual and not frequently term used in headlines. It is hilarious how the word “gay” is associated with “car”, but it is only a metaphor and doesn't have to be taken in its literal meaning. Due to the continuous changing of meaning, it might sound normally, because you may hear some remarks on the street like “You walk like a gay.” or “You dress or speak like a gay”. It is obvious that for some persons it is a taboo word and has negative connotations. Little do they know that in the past the word “gay” meant “cheerfully, lively” and with the passage of time suffered a process of degradation, acquiring the meaning of “homosexual”. The attitude is the key for solving this issue, because it depends how a person sees it and what feelings may this word arouse to us: fear, disgust or acceptance and normality. By using colloquial and not heavy, pompous words, the writer of this article managed to be understood by every reader and to transmit the message.

“WINTER GOES GREEN” (Daily Mail, February 1, 2007), implies the green color and it is a good example of what colors represent and the connotative meaning that they carry. Color words are loaded with attributive, connotative meaning and the more meanings a word has, the more likely figurative and metaphorical meanings will be included amongst them. This headline is a short but a concise one, and correct in point of grammatical rules. Even though it sounds strange, this title is a metaphor whose message is to reveal the fact that due to the higher degrees of temperature in winter, there isn't snow and all is turning green (a symbol of spring). But it also denotes a metaphor for nature coming to life, a symbol of freshness, revival and in this headline shows that spring is coming. The word green has plenty of meanings and the more meanings a word has, the more likely figurative meanings will be included amongst them. The words aren't randomly associated, because there is a contrast between colors: the representative color for winter, which is white and green standing for spring.

In conclusion, it is important that readers be aware of the reality that words don't have to be taken in their denotative meaning, because a headline in order to convey a message and stir curiosity can't appeal to the denotative meaning of a word. It will appeal to connotation, which is a source of enriching and adornment for headlines.

ARTICLES:

*The Times, *MY CAR WAS NOT GAY, OK?*, 29.07.2004

*Daily Mail, *WINTER GOES GREEN*, 1.02. 2007

*Daily Mail, *A ROMANTIC (BUT CORNY) PROPOSAL*, 15.07.2007

*Daily Mail, *A BIG WEDDING IS THE QUICKEST WAY TO THE DIVORCE COURT*, 30.07.2007

*Daily Mail, *HIGHSCHOOL CRUSH*, 31.08.2007