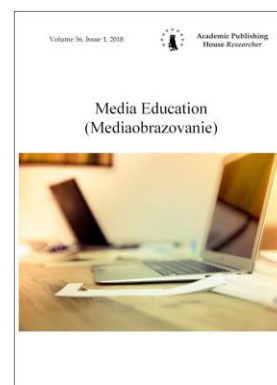


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## Wordplay in Headlines of Media Texts as a Media Presentation Means: Teaching Aspect

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### Abstract

The paper is devoted to a very important aspect of media literacy in training students of English as future translators. Teaching how to translate such means of media presentation of a media article as a headline based on wordplay proves to be relevant. The authors ground their point of view by considering linguocultural, stylistic, translation, and teaching aspects of media texts. In this connection a sequence of exercises reflecting the process of creating wordplay in headlines was elaborated. Future translators should be aware that the choice of a translation method depends on the features of a headline, its structure, background information, and the author's purport. These components determine the four stages of teaching interpretation and translation of wordplay in headlines for media articles featuring social and political issues. A translation algorithm based on the sequence of analysis and synthesis procedure is worked out to enable both students and teachers to develop necessary skills for translating headlines under consideration. The emphasis is laid on types of connotations revealed in the selected types of media articles which requires certain background knowledge to provide an adequate translation and, consequently, accurate spreading of information by means of translated media texts. The authors draw the conclusion about the role of teaching translation of media texts headlines for enhancing media literacy.

**Keywords:** media presentation, headline, wordplay, linguistic frame, connotations, teaching the translation of wordplay.

### 1. Introduction

A part of media literacy is teaching media text decoding which is a relevant issue in professional training of translators. Future translators are taught to decode media texts in one language and then to translate them adequately into another, i.e. to produce a translated media text. An essential element of this process is the translation of headlines for media texts containing wordplay. Such headlines, due to the fact that they always relate to a specific culture and background, are considered to be a translation problem.

Wordplay has recently become a popular stylistic tool in making up headlines for media texts because it enables an author to convey not only information but also to express his emotional-evaluative attitude to the subject. Being based on polysemy, homonymy, or set expressions, wordplay creates "an effect of surprise" and "comic shock", the wordplay attracts readers' attention by its unusual hidden sense. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is double-faced. It provides the

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reader with two meanings of the same statement, the first of which lies “on the surface” and is expected by the reader, but is linked with the second one that is hidden “in depth”. The second semantic plane will be adequately interpreted if only the wordplay background, or wordplay frames, is understood, that is the reader’s background knowledge of a particular situation described in the text is employed. The specifics of wordplay in headlines for social and political articles are in the fact that wordplay presents the author’s idea and the article’s gist, and it almost always possesses various connotations. In other words, it performs both the informative function and the function of impact. The impact is realized on two levels – semantic and metasemiotic which are considered in linguostylistic analysis (Chakovskaya, 1986). To understand the headline one needs to interpret the complex of linguistic and extralinguistic forms of wordplays. To translate wordplay one also needs to know its structure and “the technology” of its creation, its linguostylistic, semantic, and functional features. Consequently, the major focus is on forming the ability to translate this stylistic device using appropriate transformations, taking into account the results of the linguostylistic analysis of the media text, which accounts for the realization of the connotations. Thus, there is a need to teach the correct interpretation and translation of wordplay in headlines.

The aim of the present paper is to describe how it is possible to form media literacy skills in the process of interpretation and translation of headlines for media texts on social and political issues. This kind of skills includes developing skills for analysis and synthesis of language forms as well as expanding students’ outlook by revealing metasemiotic and ideological aspects of media texts which is viewed (Abdi, Basarati, 2016).

## 2. Materials and methods

The theoretical basis of this paper became, on the one hand, the Federal State Educational Standard (FSES, 2014), the professional standard project in translators training (Alexandrova, 2019) which define certain professional translation skills. To meet the requirements of the FSES in our teaching practice we analyzed pedagogical sources for the best practices for productive work with wordplay in headlines of media texts. We also revealed dominant issues concerning the competence based approach which should be taken into account in translation skills building. Thus, the four stages technique for teaching translation of wordplay in headlines was worked out. Methods of linguostylistic analysis (Chakovskaya, 1986), as well as the method of pre-translation text analysis (Alekseeva, 2008; Baker, 1992; Nord, 2005), were used to build the translation algorithm. A total of 100 headlines were selected as the corpus of this study from articles from periodicals (e.g., *The Moscow Times*, *The Economist*, *The Guardian*) and analytical sources (e.g., *Atlantic Council*). We also analyzed Russian translations of the selected headlines for the purpose of evaluating professional translations. While analyzing the professional translations of the selected headlines, we considered the fact that the pragmatic potential of the original headline may require different linguistic means in the translated headline as it was shown on the example of social and political media texts (Subbotina, 2015).

## 3. Discussion

The Council of Europe defines linguocultural competence as a key competence (Common European Framework, 2018). The knowledge of language and cultural differences is emphasized by academics while teaching professional translation. For example, A. Pym insists on exploring “the many differences between languages and cultures” since there can be not only one translation for an utterance (Pym, 2018: 13). Therefore, media text is a source of linguocultural information, and the process of its interpretation and translation is a well-known means of linguocultural competence acquisition. Learning other cultural realia students acquire the ability to compare them with their own, to understand and accept other customs, notions, ways of thinking and behavior. A clear view of Russian and English culture differences and similarities enables students of English to render a particular sense of the author’s wordplay in an English media text.

In spite of the fact that word play is considered in many academic works, it nevertheless continues to be an object of research because of the social (Wijana, 2018a; 2018b), political and linguocultural (Develotte, Rechniewski, 2001) role of a headline. The question of methods of teaching translation of wordplay remains unresolved. The paper presents the translator’s skills training algorithm for translating this stylistic phenomenon worked out on the basis of the complex

of exercises and tasks for training translation techniques. So, the present research enables teachers of English to enhance their methods of working with media texts.

The review of the sources for the present research resulted in the most important methodological grounds:

- Media literacy is concerned about the spread and impact of inaccurate information (Middaugh, 2019) and ways how to evaluate news (Bulger, Davison, 2018; Holmgreen, Vestergaard, 2009; Middaugh, 2018). So we see teaching the translation of headlines as part of this education process.

- Media literacy also concentrates on skills for critical thinking, i.e. “skills to interpret multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts” (Bergstrom et al., 2018: 116) and it presupposes critical engagement for “consideration of the economic and ideological components embedded within the production and reception of these messages (Bergstrom et al., 2018: 116).

- Media texts are investigated for the purpose of revealing implicit and explicit linguistic means of evaluation (Holmgreen, Vestergaard, 2009). Wordplay is often a means of rendering cultural and ideological connotations in social and political spheres (Dobrosklonskaya, 2009). All of it gives the material for teaching future translators necessary interpretation skills.

- Being a means of appealing to the readers’ attention, news headlines adopt new functions which make up a new dimension for investigation in media literacy (Blom, Hansen, 2015).

- The headline is an important structural element of a media text that is why its coherence, unity and integrity should be presented to students with the illustration of its overall linguistic uniqueness as the basis for pre-translation text analysis and for the further choice of translation techniques (Develotte, Rechniewski, 2001).

- The frame of wordplay in media text headlines determines the relevance of systematic and comprehensive work in the course of teaching translation: the development of students’ ability to interpret a foreign text and its headline, the identification of wordplay referring to realia of a different culture. In this respect background and pragmatic knowledge play a significant role in understanding expressive means employed in media texts (Mussolf, 2017) and their headlines (Skalicky, 2018).

- Before reading a media text it is recommended to pay special attention to the formation of students’ ability to anticipate the content of the text as part of the ability to do the pre-translation analysis of the headline.

- Specific forms of work with wordplay in headlines are proposed as four stages in the present paper. The core of the elaborated translation algorithm is the language identity formation and the theory of the second language identity formation by Y.N. Karaulov (Karaulov, 2016) and I.I. Haleeva (Haleeva, 1989).

#### 4. Results

Learning how to translate headlines based on wordplay will be more productive if one pays attention to the process of creating wordplay in a particular headline. Researchers claim that it is necessary to consider designation, modality, and presupposition which are relevant to the analysis of national representations in the analysis of newspaper headlines (Develotte, Rechniewski, 2001). We have considered these factors while working out the four stages of work with wordplay in media texts. They run as follows:

1. Perception and study of foreign culture through the introduction of linguostylistic features for headlines of authentic media texts.

2. Interpretation of wordplay: analysis of the author’s idea, study of peculiarities of wordplay and its types.

3. Revealing the background knowledge through interpretation of headlines based on wordplay taking into account the context and the frame of a media text.

4. Teaching the translation of wordplay in headlines for media texts considering their function as a means of media presentation.

We have developed a set of exercises relating to these training stages, and they are arranged into a general system which is described below within the corresponding stages.

*The first stage.* Perception and study of foreign culture through the introduction of linguostylistic features for headlines of authentic media texts.

It is necessary to say that the heading performs both the informative function and the function of impact (emotional, expressive, intellective etc.) which are carried out both through

stylistic means and appeals to linguocultural phenomena. This stage should be preceded by exercises aimed at anticipation. The following set of exercises enables students to develop an ability to predict the author's message and his choice of lexical units:

- 1.1. Read the headline of the article, look through its illustrations and predict its gist.
- 1.2. What is the background of the message? Analyze the recent political and historical events. Are there any precedent phenomena in the headline?
- 1.3. Match the headlines on the left with the appropriate topic on the right. Analyze peculiarities in the headlines below and translate them from English into Russian. Write a short article using one of them.

STAR WEDS	royal jewels are stolen
SPACE PROBE FAILS	marriage of famous actress
QUEEN GEMS RIDDLE	satellite is not launched

The following peculiarities of headlines for media texts on social issues – ellipticity, saturation with stylistic means and newspaper vocabulary, the predominance of impersonal forms, the use of a «dual language code» by a journalist and a reader (Heyzing, 1992) – are in the focus of the students' attention:

- 1.1. *Explain the usage of time indicators in the headlines. There are prompts in brackets.*

Patients to receive free medicine

Dog found safe (= the missing dog has been found safe)

- 1.2. *The question mark is often used to emphasize the uncertainty, doubt about what was going on.*

Drivers to be punished?

Crisis over by October?

- 1.3. *Explain what the following headlines mean in English.*

- 1.4. *Mind that the meaning of a particular headline is usually rendered by nouns. In the headlines below you have examples of words used as verbs. Look at the underlined verbs and explain what they mean. You may need to use more than one word.*

E.g.: PM TO CURB SPENDING limit (McCarthy, O'Dell, 2001).

- 1.5. *Look through some English language Internet newspapers and find some examples of headlines illustrating the points made above. Beside each headline make a note of what the story is about. Try to find some examples of amusing headlines (McCarthy, O'Dell, 2001).*

- 1.6. *To enhance expressiveness of headlines authors include colloquial words. E.g.:*

Scramble to Unseat the Confident Mrs. Bain.

Find more examples of headlines with colloquial words.

- 1.7. *Many English headlines are expressive thanks to alliteration.*

E.g.: Buck Bush, Man Behind. When the War of Stones Becomes the War of Guns. Find more examples of alliteration in headlines.

*The second stage.* Interpretation of wordplay: analysis of the author's idea, study of peculiarities of wordplay and its types.

At this stage there is an introduction to the types of background knowledge which is the center of any wordplay. For this purpose we should refer to the classification of frames elaborated by V.G. Kostomarov (Kostomarov, 2015) who singled out types of linguistic frames (including phonetic, spelling, polysemic, pragmatical components) and existential frames, i.e. extralinguistic knowledge. It is noted that the existence of linguistic frames in the thesaurus of communicants is an integral feature of wordplay. Therefore it is important that the translator is aware of the ways how wordplay is created. For this purpose students get acquainted with such notions as synonyms, antonyms, paronyms, homonyms. The following series of exercises is aimed at analyzing these phenomena occurring in headlines.

- 2.1. *Analyze and interpret wordplay headlines. Homophones are words which sound alike but have different meanings and spelling. Fill in the blanks with homophones from the list below the sentences.*

a. She accidentally kicked over the \_\_\_\_\_ of water and her face turned \_\_\_\_\_ when everyone turned around to stare at her.

b. It was \_\_\_\_\_ to see that the man was very nervous about boarding the \_\_\_\_\_ for his first flight.

c. I must \_\_\_\_\_ careful to stay away from \_\_\_\_\_ hives.

Homophone pairs: be-bee, plane-plain, pail-pale.

2.2. Study each set of words below, then match the different meanings with the appropriate title.

Root can mean:

a. underground part of a plant

b. part of a tooth in the gum socket

c. part of a mathematical equation

2.3. Match the following titles with the definition above. Each title is used once.

1. Botanist _____	2. Dentist _____	3. Math Tutor _____
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2.4. Write at least five different definitions for each word listed below. In the next section write a title or an occupation which corresponds to the definitions.

Heart can mean ...

Give a title or occupation that corresponds to each definition. Each choice is used once.

Now supply with your own words!

\_\_\_\_\_ can mean ...

2.5. Create "Antonym Internet News Website". Working with actual headlines and advertisements, create your own opposite ones. Underline the words for which you provide antonyms. E.g.:

The actual headline reads:

"Quick Weight Gain Proves Long Lasting"

The opposite headline might read:

"Slow Weight Loss Proves Fleeting"

2.6. Compare the phrases in English and Russian. What is the wordplay based on? Has the translator preserved the humorous function? What type of the wordplay is used in translation?

"Officers Hurdyew, Talkien and Lissning heard you talking and listening to someone."

"Агенты Слышшельс, Говвоур и Слушни слышали, как ты говорила с кем-то и слушала ответы" (Nikitina, Seryakova, 2018).

The third stage. Revealing the background knowledge through interpretation of headlines based on wordplay taking into account linguocultural context and the frame of a media text. This is an example of an exercise on revealing linguocultural similarities and distinctions.

3.1. Read the titles and find allusions to the cultural phenomena:

Wine merchants brace for the grapes of wrath

Silent blight

Why the Clyde offer is not so Bonny

Are there any similar realia in Russian culture?

3.2. Explain the structure of the wordplays in the headlines given above.

The fourth stage. Teaching the translation of wordplays in headlines of media texts considering their function as a means of media presentation.

After doing the exercises on developing skills of recognizing wordplay in headlines for media texts we offer an algorithm for translating such headlines.

1. To define the basis of wordplay: homonymy; polysemy; 'breaking up' or revising idioms; allusion; nonce words; sound contamination, etc.

2. To define what background knowledge is required for the correct interpretation and adequate rendering metasemiotic (cultural and ideological) connotations of the headline.

3. To find out what metasemiotic connotations are created as a result of wordplay.

4. To reveal the connection between metasemiotic colouring and the purport of the publicistic media text.

5. To translate the headline word by word in order to fully understand the purport of the whole article and its headline.

6. To choose a new adequate language form using the same basis for the wordplay, if possible.

7. If the corresponding language means are missing, it is essential to find some other language means as the basis for the wordplay in the translated headline (alliteration, graphon, paronymic attraction, nonce words, etc.).

To illustrate how this algorithm works we are describing the translation process of two headlines. The first example is the headline of the article “Syria: To Leave or Not to Leave?” (Hof, 2018a). The headline contains an allusion to W. Shakespeare’s quote “To be or not to be”. According to the article the situation around withdrawing American troops from Syria is not certain. What should happen and why – that is the question – and this is the main idea of the article. Its purport is to give food for thought – to produce an intellectual impact – and to show inner motives for US forces’ vacating eastern Syria. Now that the pre-translation analysis is done, we should pass on to finding out which is better: to use the Russian word-by-word translation “Уйти или остаться?” which sounds similar to the Russian “Быть или не быть?” but does not retain the wordplay or to prefer an allusion to the Russian catch phrase “Казнить нельзя помиловать” which is also based on a wordplay and renders the evaluative connotation concerning the motives for vacating Syria. Thus, using the method of compensation the translator managed to preserve the wordplay: “Сирия: уйти нельзя остаться” (Hof, 2018b).

Let us consider another example of translating a headline containing wordplay. The headline “Pipelines and Pipe Dreams” (Hulbert, 2010a) is based on the polysemy of the word pipe. In pipelines it is translated as “труба” but in case of the idiom “pipe dream” it is “несбыточный”. The idiom “refers to the sort of idea that someone is likely to have when they are smoking a drug in a pipe” (Hands et al., 2012). This meaning possesses an evaluative connotation which is justified in the context of the article due to the fact that the author of the article draws the main conclusion about the consumers’ false hopes for good investments into Gazprom’s assets in case if Putin’s “policy of energy blackmail” returns again. We think that this connotation also has got some ideological colouring because Putin’s image of the president of the country supplying Europe with oil and gas through pipelines. The negative ideological connotation is created by the phrase “policy of energy blackmail” and it is preserved in the Russian translation though the wordplay is lost – “Трубопроводы и несбыточные мечты” as it was done by the Russian translator (Hulbert, 2010b) because the Russian equivalent “воздушные замки” is not appropriate in this case.

The presented paper studies, on the one hand, the pragmatic effect of a headline. On the other hand, we have viewed the process of interpretation and translation of a headline as a complex process involving competences formation. We have found out that linguocultural competence goes side by side with the ability to understand a media text devoted to up-to-date political and social issues. Thus, in the given examples of analysis we have focused on present-day realia to show how to deal with subtle evaluative and ideological connotations in the headlines based on wordplay.

The four stages of teaching translation of wordplays in headlines for publicistic media texts should result in:

- pre-translation and translation skills development;
- acquisition of the ways how wordplay is created in media texts and what connotations it conveys;
- better understanding of wordplay as a media presentation means of a publicistic text.

## 5. Conclusion

The four stages approach is in fact the analysis and synthesis procedure. At first we decompose headlines into constituents to understand the meaning and functions of headlines based on wordplays. Then we synthesize a new communicative unit to represent the media text in a different language, for a different audience.

The interpretation process involves students into searching for additional sources of information so that to get a clear understanding of the wordplay frame. Translation of wordplay also requires developing creative abilities since a media text always possesses stylistic features. So the study of creation and translation of wordplay enables students to acquire skills for accurate spreading of explicit and implicit information expressed, i.e. to improve their media literacy skills.

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