

## Conference Paper

# The Newspaper Headline in the Digital Reality: From "Hook" to Text Surrogate

**Roman Yurievich Anisimov**

The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, Moscow, Russian Federation

### Abstract

Modern print media, for the most part, have a representation in the Internet, and the headings of articles turn into clickable links that the reader can click on to decide whether to read or not to read this text. As a result, a number of media outlets followed the path of 'flashy' headlines that do not predict the content of the text, but attract the attention of a potential reader. Such headings go back to the structure of the text adopted in the Byzantine rhetorical tradition: the beginning of the text was the first sign that attracted attention. Other media outlets choose the headline strategy as "ersatz text": the headline is a concise summary of the text. In the context of digital text consumption, such a strategy is more beneficial for the consumer: by the title, he can already read the contents of the text and not open it if necessary. This strategy inherits the Roman tradition of the beginning of the text: in Quintilian's scheme it was assumed that the first character of the text is a short retelling-announcement, designed to unite the audience and allowing making a decision whether or not to perceive this text. An analysis of the latest headlines in digital versions of Russian and English newspapers showed that the first strategy that goes back to the rhetoric of Byzantium prevails in Russia, and the second strategy that goes back to the rhetoric of the Roman Empire prevails in Great Britain and the USA. This allows us to talk about the continuation of the traditions of the cultural paradigm in the era of digitalization and the continuity of the cultural code.

**Keywords:** mass media, newspaper language, headline, text, semiotics.

Corresponding Author:  
 Roman Yurievich Anisimov  
 anisimovry@gmail.com

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## 1. Introduction

The title is the first sign of the text, which specifies the coordinates of its perception and deployment in the mind of the reader. Depending on the genre nature of the text, its purpose, the intended audience, and other factors, the title can interact with the text in various ways.

Two fundamentally different approaches to the formation of the heading, reflected in the Russian and English traditions of texts heading in the newspaper, can be arbitrarily designated as "heading is the part of the text" and "heading is not the part of the text". If the heading is a part of the text, then it as the first sign implies the further development

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of the text “developed with the link to the heading”. If the heading is conceived as a meta-sign that exists separately from the text, the text being signified, the text develops “without a heading”, that is, it represents a holistic unity, whose cohesive and coherent relationships do not fundamentally include the heading as such.

## 2. Methods and Methodology

The first of the above trends, in which the heading is a part of the text connected with other parts by means of micro- and macrocohesion, goes back to the ancient Roman rhetorical tradition, formulated in the books of rhetorical instructions of Marcus Fabius Quintilian [4, p.191]. The composition of the text proposed by Quintilian involves an appeal to the audience with a general outline of the topic as an introduction. In other words, the fundamental idea of Roman rhetoric implies the designation of the general content of the text at the very beginning, a kind of ‘summary’ of its meaning, the task of which is to orient the audience, which is approximately expected in this text.

A man representing the opposite tradition may ask: what is the interest in perceiving a text whose brief content is already known to the reader (listener)? However, the text in the media is neither a detective novel nor a thriller, the outcome of which should be kept in secret until the last moment. The text of a news article, analytical material, reportage or other genre of the media represents the expansion of the stated topic, and the reader, seeing the headline as a marker of the text, decides whether to perceive the text or not, whether he is interested in the details of the event.

## 3. Results and Discussion

For the purpose of comparison, we considered a selection of the best Russian and English headings in 2018. Thus, headings collected by the newspaper “The Week” in English include 51 headings [5]. 90% of the headings included in it are a summary of the situation being covered; in fact, it is typical for English practice to enter the text according to the Quintilian formula, which immediately highlights WHAT, WHERE and HOW [12, p.171]: “Man sues Google because he can’t read a chart”, “A plane carrying dozens of plumbers was forced to turn back because of toilet problems”, “Loaded grenade launcher left at Florida Goodwill store”, “Woman sues restaurant for \$50K over lasagna that caused ‘mental anguish’”, “IHOP teases name change to IHOb, leaving pancake fans devastated and confused” etc.

One phrase almost completely contains all the content of the subsequent note. This is a rather interesting approach to the title of the text: if a person is interested in further details, he/she can read what exactly happened. The selection of the best headlines in the English version includes, in fact, not the best headlines but the most striking events of the past year: curious, amazing, sometimes weird. This is the guiding principle of the text constructed according to the Quintilian model: the heading is fundamentally inseparable from the event, it does not “live a separate life”, and the first sign of the text is embedded in the text and is a reference to the event itself.

This is Quintilian's principle of “playing with an open visor”: the person should understand by the title what the whole text is about, and either get drawn in and interested, or not perceive this text at all [6, p.202]. A summary is announced at the very beginning, and further the text is a development of the specified content.

The iconic heading-sign of the folded text represents a certain opportunity: the authors of such headings are generally close to the traditions of the expanded literature headings of the 18th century, the reading of which immediately determined whether or not to consume the text.

An analysis of the Russian tradition of heading media texts on newspaper material showed that a different strategy works in Russian practice: the heading is not the first sign of the text, but a meta-sign that means the whole text. It should be noted that this is not a regularity (there are also headings built on the “Roman” principle), but a distinct tendency, which is prevailing. An analysis of federal Russian newspapers showed that such a strategy for captioning a text manifests itself in about 70% of cases, and since the headline is not a ‘synopsis’ but a ‘meta-sign’, variants of different strategies for linking the signified and signifying this meta-sign are possible.

The Russian version of the “best headings of 2018” [3] includes 52 units, 36 of which are a reference to certain precedent statements, among which there are names of literary works, and quotes from famous writers, and names of movies, but prevail the proverbs, sayings and simply stable expressions of language practice. For example, State of crooked mirrors — “Kingdom of crooked mirrors”, Sunk in summer — “sunk into oblivion”, The box office came on stone — “the braid came on stone”, Identification — power — “knowledge — power”, I would be glad to serve. Feeling sick without going abroad! — “I would be glad to serve, but sick to lackey!”, etc.

It is the strategy of designating the headline as a meta-sign that allows various media to form their ‘face’ through the headings of texts. Moreover, the heading has not any cohesive relations with the text: being a meta-sign, it, like any sign, is distinguished by an arbitrary connection between the signified and the signifier. In other words, if the

heading in the English-language tradition allows us to predict the content of the text, then in the Russian tradition this is possible in about 30% of cases. In the remaining 70%, the title is a catchy statement whose purpose is to attract attention, but not to retell the content of the subsequent text.

The tradition of perceiving the conception of the text not as the first link of the chain, but as a meta-sign goes back to the rhetoric of the Byzantine Empire: it was in Byzantium that another scheme of eight-part speech emerged, an alternative to the Quintilian scheme, originally owned by Autonius, a scientist, teacher and sophist, but later became known in the Russian tradition by the names of M.V. Lomonosov and N.F. Koshansky [11, p.308]. This scheme presupposes the beginning of the text through an 'attack' and 'paraphrase': at the beginning, a certain vivid statement sounds, which is often a precedent, and then at the stage of paraphrase this statement is revealed and explained. In the tradition of press, this function is implemented by the "headline + lead" complex: in the Russian press, the function of a short summary is performed by the lead, which logically is already part of the text.

The tradition of interaction between the reader and the text, going back to Quintilian and *ordo naturalis*, is based on the predictability of not only the title, but also the entire content of the text. This factor influenced the perception of all spheres of verbal, and not only verbal, art: the very fact of the fame of which part should be followed, and the ability to predict the text caused aesthetic pleasure.

The enthusiasm of the Byzantine tradition for elocution with less attention to disposition leads to less predictability aesthetics in oriental text positioning and interaction with the headline: text amplification is less standard and to a lesser degree determines perception.

In this contrast, one should also take into account the specifics of the target audience of Roman and Byzantine rhetoric: if the former was more oriented toward adversarial eloquence, the latter was part of the pedagogical tradition. With this in mind, it is quite logical that in Quintilian's scheme the beginning of the text 'sets' the main coordinates of the event. The theory of rhetorical statuses, also developed by Mark Fabius Quintilian, assumed the existence of an establishment status, then the status of determination and the status of evaluation. These are the three states that the problem passes in the listener's perception, and the status of the establishment (answering the questions WHO, WHERE? WHEN? WHAT?) Was the first step towards understanding the problem. The accuser or advocate initially set the coordinates of the events in a way that was beneficial in terms of his position.

Byzantine rhetoric was focused on teaching, in which the content of the speech was predetermined in advance: the speaker gradually, step by step reveals to his audience the information that he himself possesses, and understanding that its assimilation can be difficult to perceive, provides his speech with digressions, jokes and in other ways “entertainment” of the audience.

For the speaker in the tradition of Autonius — Lomonosov — Koshansky, the listener is a kind of negligent student who seeks to be distracted either by the views outside the window or by his companion. The tradition that originated in the bowels of oratory, as a result, was transferred to the journalistic coordinate system: the reader must be “lured”, and, as shown above, many texts, divided into chapters and parts, are subject to the same trend inside: headings are questions or tricks wordplay.

It should be noted that both the Quintilian scheme, widely used in the practice of composing texts of Ancient Rome, and subsequently medieval Europe, and the Autonius scheme, widespread in Byzantium, and then in Russia, are integral compositions: the beginning of the text is not the only element of the idea of the finished composition.

So, for example, in the Roman and Byzantine traditions, such an important element of composition as the ending of the text is perceived in a fundamentally different way. According to Quintilian’s scheme, the end of the text (as well as its beginning) is a brief retelling of its content. This allows you to use both the direct and the reverse Quintilian diagram: the text can be built on a mirror composition. Moreover, retelling the text at the end also has the character of a certain psychological impact: retelling at the end what was in the whole text, the author tries to create the feeling that he has completely exhausted all the information on this topic. The meaning of this strategy is that the speech is originally conceived as a ready-made scheme for judicial speech: a speaker in court, whether he is a lawyer or prosecutor, is obliged to create the feeling that he has provided a comprehensive description of the problem.

At the same time, the Byzantine tradition of rhetoric is not judicial, but teaching, which implies a fundamentally different attitude to the end of the text: completing the presentation, the teacher leaves a ‘reserve’ for the future, suggesting that his target audience will once again (or even more than once) want to communicate with him.

In the media texts, the indicated tendencies towards the completion of the text were not reflected: the English-language and Russian-language traditions of the title of the text interact with the opposite tendencies of the beginning of the text, but not its completion.

## 4. Conclusion

The tradition of the title as the beginning of the text of the ancient Roman rhetoric becomes crucial in the era of perception of the text in electronic format. When a newspaper has its own website, and the headline or the “headline + lead” complex is a hyperlink with which you can go to the content of the text and read it, the strategy of heading the text according to the “prediction” principle is beneficial for the reader. A modern consumer of information, for example, can simply go to “The Times” website and study the headlines to get a general idea of what happened in the world.

A reference to a folkloric expression that is somehow deformed (a word is replaced, a sound is changed, etc.) is a leading technique in the formulation of headings in Russia. A selection of 52 headlines recognized as the best in the Russian press is even provided with leads: without them, it is almost impossible to understand what the theme is. In fact, the “headline-lead” structure duplicates the first two parts of Autonius’s scheme: “attack — paraphrase”.

Thus, it is safe to say that the title of the text in the traditions of the Russian press and the English-language press is subject to various trends. Moreover, these trends go back to the widespread rhetorical practice of the “first sign” of the text, which was radically opposite in the tradition of Roman and Byzantine rhetoric.

The heading as a summary of the content is a kind of indicator lighthouse in the sea of information, which allows you to independently decide whether to use or not to use this text. The information space of a native English speaker is filled with patterns of spontaneous discourse: it is surrounded by abstract headlines, each of which represents fundamentally new information introduced into this space. The reader forms his assessment of these facts and filters them, while the information is supplied to him in the status of establishment.

The information space of a native speaker of the Russian language is a field of references to precedents, among which the reader is guided by the “milestones” known to him — his path to the event begins with a ready-made assessment and indication to him on which position the indicated event should be in his space.

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