Intertextuality in headlines in tabloid showbiz news

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Contents

Abstract

Due to a variety of channels of communication, news travel faster than ever before. Therefore, newspaper publishers must use unique techniques in order to distinguish themselves and attract readership. Some of the most important strategies and features of tabloids are explained in the theoretical part of this paper. Moreover, the theoretical part of this paper provides an overview of discourse analysis, as well as the main features of soft news. Furthermore, the importance and role of headlines was explained. The aim of this paper was to analyse the use of discursive features, i.e. intertextual references in tabloid's showbiz news. The analysis is based on a corpus, which consist from 10 headlines collected from the tabloid *The Sun*. This paper analysed headlines of the tabloid *The Sun* in order to determine how intertextuality affects the relationship between the headline and content of the article, and also how it impacts the readers. It was explained how tabloids use different strategies in order to attract reader's attention. The analysis showed that intertextuality is highly used in showbiz headlines and often combined with other linguistic devices, such as puns and alliteration which make headlines even more attractive and interesting to the readers. It was also found out that the intertextual reference and content of the article do not always correspond, which raises reader's curiosity. Moreover, the analysis showed that the showbiz headlines often use implicit references which usually suggests the topic of the article, however does not reveal the whole content of it.

KEY WORDS: intertextuality, tabloids, headlines, reference, news

1 Introduction

Newspapers are considered to be one of the most accessible and trustworthy sources of news. Due to a high number of various types of news and newspapers, newspaper publisher use different strategies in order to distinguish themselves and attract as many readers as possible. The first things that readers see are front pages and headlines, whose main function is to grab reader's attention and motivate them to read the whole article.

The aim of this paper is to investigate and analyse the use of linguistic devices and discursive features, i.e. intertextuality of tabloid headlines. This topic was chosen because of the motivation to understand better how such features form headlines and consequently impact the readers.

This paper is structured as follows: an introduction to Discourse Analysis is provided in the following chapter. Chapter 3 deals with media language and its main features. An overview of tabloids and its distinctive and most important features are provided in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents headlines and its functions. Chapter 6 focuses on the main discursive feature of this paper – intertextuality. The analysis of headlines is provided in Chapter 7. Finally, conclusions are given in Chapter 8.

2 Discourse

In order to understand the topic of this paper, it is important to explain the term „discourse". Due to various multidisciplinary approaches to this field it is hard to define the term „discourse" precisely. Schiffrin (1994: 5) proposed that there are six approaches to discourse: speech act theory, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, pragmatics, conversational analysis, and variation analysis. In fact, such diversity of approaches is one of the reasons why „discourse" is studied and interpreted differently.

However, in his Dictionary of Media and Communications, Danesi defines discourse as a „use of language in communication" and a „particular style of talking and writing" (98). In other words, discourse analysis can be understood as a study of spoken or written language. Moreover, the main focus of discourse is not only the structure of language, but also its function.

In order to study discourse and analyse its subject matter more effectively, with taking into account different disciplinary perspectives, a new approach, called Critical Discourse Analysis (or CDA), was established. As Wodak and Meyer highlight, "it is generally agreed that CDA must not be understood as a single method but rather as an approach, which constitutes itself at different levels" (2001, 14). Since people use language all the time, it is important to analyse the relationship between language (discourse) and society. CDS focuses on discourse and society, but more precisely on the ways "discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society" (van Dijk, 2001b: 353).

Media discourse is one of the major areas of interest for research in the CDA. Many scholars have been analysing media discourse not only because "the language of the news plays a major part in the construction of what have been referred to as the 'social construction of reality'" (Conboy, 2007: 5), but also because "the media context produces unique manifestations of language and discourse" (Cotter, 417). The features of news media, as well as the characteristics of media discourse will be discussed in the following chapter.

3 The news media and its features

Information travels faster than ever before due to a high number of different channels of communication such as television, radio, internet, print etc. Media have a significant role in the society because they use these channels to transmit news – "report of a current happening or happenings" (Danesi, 2009: 212).

One of the most important features of news is reporting promptly and providing recipients with the newest information. Even though most of the newspapers are published daily, not every piece of information can be included due to restrictions of their format and limited time for printing and distribution. Because of that, journalists have to decide what events are newsworthy, i.e. "interesting enough to be described in a news report" (Cambridge Online Dictionary). Richardson stated that there is "a variety of consumers with different tastes and different preferences and these audience groups choose to consume different newspapers (within the limitations of the products on offer) on the basis of these preferences (2007, 78). In fact, readers would buy only those publications that they find interesting enough, based on their preferences. In order to decide which events are relevant and newsworthy, newspapers must also keep in mind the audience for which the news is intended. As Richardson explains it is "a two-way relationship" (2007, 114), because "news is produced with an assumed audience in mind – their class education attainment, their values (. . .) News is read (consumed) with the producer in mind – the 'brand' of the paper (…)" (2007, 112).

However, producers must not keep in mind their readers education level or age only in order to assume readers' news preference, but also to use the linguistic style properly and accordingly. As Richardson puts it, "the language that journalist use to address the audience (or reader) tells you something about the identities of both the *journalist* and the *audience* and *also* something about the assumed relationship between them" (2007, 95).

Based on the type of topics and language reported in the news, news can be divided into two categories: hard news and soft news. In contrast to soft news, which will be discussed in the next section, hard news report political, economic news etc. In other words, hard news provide readership with different facts, implications or reasons of more complex and formal events and logically, report in a serious tone using informative and often difficult language. Furthermore, Rich explains that "the hard-news approach is basically an account of what happened, why it happened, and how readers will be affected" (14). In fact, hard news journalists largely follow

the inverted pyramid structure, which means that the most important information is followed by additional facts and least important information.

4 Tabloids

In the previous chapter was shown how news differs not only in the type of topics or readership, but also in the linguistic style and tone. Moreover, some basic features of hard news were given for the sake of easier comparison to the soft news, which is the subject of this paper. Since tabloids were chosen as the subject of this paper, it is essential to discuss soft news much thoroughly.

Soft news is defined as "news that entertains or informs, with an emphasis on human interest and novelty, and less immediacy than hard news" (Rich 2016, 14). In fact, soft news is both informative and entertaining, with an emphasis on amusing the reader and satisfying curiosity. Soft news is becoming notably popular today because such news is rather easily understood by all age groups regarding their educational level. In fact, soft news is becoming so popular today that "journalists are concerned it is displacing important news and pandering to the public's desire for entertainment" (Rich 2016, 13).

The most representative type of newspapers that covers soft news is called tabloids. Tabloids are defined as "small format newspaper that is roughly half the size of a standard newspaper, usually containing sensational coverage of crime, scandal, gossip, violence, or news about celebrities" (Danesi, 283). Johansson highlights some of the most important features of tabloids such as "a sensationalist style, a focus on the private lives of individuals, a fluid move between news and entertainment and a predominant use of visual imagery and dramatization over textual and analytical elements" (2007, 32).

Even though tabloids report mostly about celebrities, fashion and other soft news, it does not mean that tabloids do not inform readers about major political or important economic news. However, the tone of presentation in tabloids opposes to the tone of broadsheets. In fact, tabloids do this by "conveying important issues in a manner that is understandable and attractive to large audiences" (Johansson 2007, 39). Such sensational, exciting and even provocative way of reporting is what usually entertains and interests readers. In order to achieve this effect, the language of tabloids is "rich in its own tradition of metaphor, word play, categorization and compression of narratives" (Conboy, 15).

Richardson stated that news "is a product- a product that must be made attractive or appealing to a market of consumers" (2007, 77). Conboy explains that tabloids choose specific approach which promotes "their distinctiveness and maintains their market share within a fragmenting news media environment" (2005, 9). In order to attract more readers and ensure its position on the marketplace, tabloids use not only a unique and sensational way of writing, but also attention-grabbing headlines and colourful front pages.

Picture 1: Tabloid front page

Picture 1 shows a front page of the tabloid "The Sun" whose headlines will be analysed later in this paper. However, it does represent the usual tabloids' dominant imaginary of the front page as well as the distinctive and provocative language. Johansson says that tabloids stand out „from the mass of black-and white print through its bold, screaming headlines, its picture-dominated front page and the generous use of colour"(2007, 87). Moreover, another tabloids feature are jokes, which is "employed in graphics, which, creating comic scenarios of otherwise neutral images, can add humorous touches, stress the impact of the accompanying texts, or serve to ridicule a person or group" (Johansson 2007, 91).

In this chapter some of the most important features of tabloids were discussed. It was explained how colourful, eye-catching front pages and large headlines written in an interesting, attractive and sensational style. Since headlines are the main topic of this paper, the explication of headlines in general is needed.

5 Headlines

Due to the specific writing style and their impact on the potential readers of the newspapers, headlines were chosen as the main study of this paper.

Reah defined a headline as "a unique type of text that consists of a range of functions that specifically dictate its shape, content, and structure, and it operates within a range of restrictions that limit the freedom of the writer" (2002, 13). In fact, Conboy explains that headlines serve three functions, i.e. "they provide a brief summary of the main news, second they attract attention and, third, they often provide an initial indicator in their content (. . .) " (2005, 13).

Since their main function is to provide readers a concise, but informative summary of the news, they are placed above the news story. As Conboy highlights, a headline is "the first indicator of the content and perspective of the story which follows" (2005, 17). However, headlines are sometimes disconnected from its text, meaning that the headline can appear on the front page, while the article is on a different page in the publication.

Moreover, headlines stand out not only because of their placement, but also because they are written in a bigger font size in order to catch the reader's attention and to signal the relative importance and content of the story. In that way, it is easier for the reader to decide which news is more important or interesting to read, simply by scanning through the headlines.

Beside the placement and font of headlines, journalists use different linguistic devices and language to attract readers. Different linguistic devices help journalists to write a short, concise and yet attractive and effective headline. Conboy (2007, 15) explains:

> "Pressure on space means that newspapers have developed a particular form of language, especially in the headline and the lead paragraph. Syntax and vocabulary are both compressed into and intense concentration of communicative form. There is high reliance on puns, alliteration, reference to proverbs and inversion of popular sayings."

Each linguistic device serves a different purpose for the text or the headline and affects readers differently. For example, the use of puns makes headlines sound more amusing and memorable to the readers. Moreover, with the use of such literally devices even the serious and important

themes can be reported in a manner that is more interesting and appealing to larger groups of readers, which is a typical feature of tabloids.

The use of particular linguistic devices often has a humorous effect on the readership which Johansson (2007, 92) explains thoroughly:

> "(…) its main aim is to stimulate sensations, yet, the constant presence of the joke provides relief from the tragedy and drama offered, enabling a distancing to the material at hand. Paradoxically, the joke can also add potency to persuasive political messages, as the invite to laugh along is an invite to agree with the newspaper. The role of humour is therefore ambiguous, and deserves attention when exploring the way that readers relate to tabloid newspapers."

Other than attracting the readers' attention, the use of different linguistics devices helps journalist "to stamp individuality on what is otherwise a mass-produced product" (Develotte and Rechniewski 2001). In fact, Johansson highlights the importance of headlines and its writing style:

> "The use of the headline, equally, is undeniably a powerful tool in developing a distinct style and vernacular of a newspaper, and the tabloids in question (…) have effectively incorporated puns, wordplays and colloquialisms, to the extent that this is integral to their character" (2007, 23).

6 Intertextuality

In the previous chapter, some of the main functions of headlines were discussed. It was shown how different linguistic devices affect the notion of a headline and have an impact on the reader. The main purpose of this paper is to analyse discursive features in tabloid headlines, i.e. intertextuality. Before the analysis of headlines, it is essential to discuss the term "intertextuality" and its main functions and features.

The term "intertextuality" implies that it deals with texts. Richardson (2007, 100) explains that "the concept of intertextuality is founded on the notion that texts cannot be viewed or studied in isolation since texts are not produced or consumed in isolation". In other words, one must not examine texts separately, but must be aware of their relation to other texts, in order to understand and interpret them better. Moreover, Allen (2011, 1) explains that this way "reading becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates (. . .). The text becomes the intertext."

Interestingly, intertextuality concerns both spoken and written language. Norrick explains that "intertextuality occurs any time one text suggests or requires reference to some other identifiable text or stretch of discourse, spoken or written" (1987, 117). However, in order to recognize the source text and understand the intended meaning, reader must have some additional general knowledge or, as Norrick puts it, there must be "a performer and an audience with shared knowledge of some pre-existent stretch of discourse" (1989, 120).

According to Montgomery et al., allusion is one form of intertextuality, where one text makes a reference to another, either on an implicit or and explicit way (2007, 156). Moreover, it is explained that "in an explicit verbal allusion an actual quotation is made and signalled with quotation marks. In an implicit verbal allusion, no signal is given and the original wording is sometimes changed to suit the new context" (Montgomery et al., 156).

The analysis of tabloid headlines is provided in the next section. It will be analysed how intertextuality impacts the reader and what references are mostly used in those headlines. Moreover, it will be examined how references are made, i.e. on an implicit or explicit way.

7 The Research

The main purpose of this paper is to study discursive features of tabloids, i.e. the use of intertextual references in headlines and their impact on the readers. Because of their distinctive and interesting approach to language, tabloids were chosen as the subject of this research.

The headlines were collected from the online version of the British tabloid *The Sun*. The online version of this tabloid was used for data collection because it is free, easy to use and resembles the printed version in many ways, yet there are some minor differences. Firstly, both the printed and the online version of The Sun pay attention to the layout. However, in the online edition the text is minimalistic and pictures are the main focus of the article. Moreover, the printed edition has much more attractive and attention-grabbing fonts of headlines, whereas the online version follows the same pattern for all headlines. In fact, all headlines in online version of *The Sun* are written in the same colour, which differs only in the category of news, i.e. section.
 For example, showbiz news headlines of *The Sun*, which is the study of this paper, are all written in purple font. However, in the analysis, this paper focuses only on the discursive features of headlines, and not their font or design.

7.1 Analysis of the Headlines

The headlines for analysis were collected in the period from May to July 2017. In total, 10 headlines were selected based on their intertextuality, innovative discursive features and playfulness. Moreover, all the headlines were collected from the showbiz section, since each section differs in news and therefore language and discursive feature.

(1) SMELLS LIKE MONEY (*The Sun*, *3rd January 2017)*

At first, headline (1) seems rather short, but attention-grabbing and ambiguous because it does not reveal much. Even though there is a verb "smells", which signals the third person singular, the subject is omitted and unknown, which raises reader's curiosity. Moreover, the word "money" suggests the content of the article. However, in order to grasp the intended meaning behind this headline, the reader must be aware of the reference to the title of a famous Nirvana's song "Smells Like Teen Spirit". For the purposes of this newspaper's article, the noun "spirit"

from the original title was substituted with the word "money", while the adjective "teen" was omitted.

The article informs about a battle over a 1 Million dollars' worth guitar belonging to the frontman of the previously mention rock-bend. With the use of intertextuality in this particular headline, content of the article was interestingly summarized and the curiosity of readers was raised.

(2) THE FORCE IS WITH HIM! (*The Sun, 16th July 2017*)

The headline exophorically refers to a famous quote "May the Force be with You" from the film series "Star Wars". The intertextual link is rather obvious, even though it does not resemble the original quote completely. Since the word "you" was replaced with the pronoun "him", the intratextual link becomes quite wide and ambiguous because it is unclear for the reader who *he* is. In that way, the reader has to read the article, in order to understand the content of the headline. Interestingly, the main subject of the article is not a character from the above mentioned film series, but the singer Zayn Malik, who's new tattoo is a Star Wars Lightsabre. In fact, headline does indicate the content of the story. In fact, there is even a photo of a tattoo (Picture 2)[1] which supports readers' inferences. However, the reader is still forced to read the whole article in order to get all the information which was achieved with the use of intertextuality.
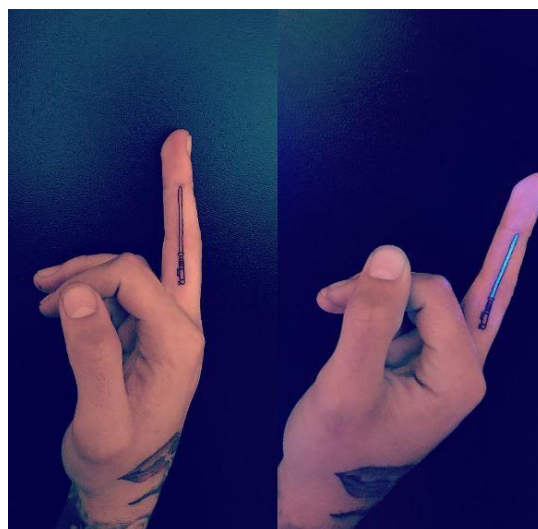
Picture 2: Zayn Malik's tattoo

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[1] All pictures have been reproduced in original form, as featured in the article on the web page on the date in question.

(3) SHAVEHEART (*The Sun, 17th January 2017*)

The headline makes an intertextual link to the movie "Braveheart". The adjective "brave" from the title of the movie was substituted with the word "shave" to signal the content of the article. In fact, with the use of this intertextual link to the movie, i.e. epic scene where the main actor Mel Gibson screams, a humorous effect was also achieved, since the article is about Mel Gibson howling while he gets his beard shaved in US talk show.

(4) SEXY AND SHE NOSE IT (*The Sun, 17th February 2017*)

This headline is both catching readers' attention, amusing and also ambiguous. Firstly, the ambiguity of the headline is achieved with the pronoun "she" because it is unknown to the reader who the subject is, without reading the whole article. Secondly, this headline is an intertextual reference to the title of a song "I'm Sexy and I Know It" which not only signals the content of the article but triggers reader's associations about it. However the article does not report about the song, but about celebrity Chloe Khan, who got her nose done and was seen buying provocative lingerie in sex shop.
On top of that, the headline of the article is amusing, witty and therefore memorable due to a use of linguistic device, i.e. homophony, where the verb "knows" was replaced with the word "nose" which is pronounced the same. Moreover, the alliteration, i.e. the repetition of the sound "s" intensifies the rhythm of the headline.

(5) THE REAL SLIM SHADY? (*The Sun, 9th March 2017*)

The phrase "Slim Shady" exophorically refers to the singer Eminem, but more specifically his alternate name and his song "Slim Shady". The headline's intertextual link and the question mark at the end of the headline rise intense curiosity among the readers. Moreover, the use of a nickname "Slim Shady" instead of the singer's real name forms a bond between the publication and the readers. In fact, this headline interestingly catches reader's attention makes him question himself, who the new or real "Slim Shady" is.
Even though the photos of Eminem and the subject of the article (Picture 3), Kristen Stewart

suggest the content, reader still needs to read the article to understand the intended meaning of the headline better.

Picture 3: Kristen Stewart and Eminem

(6) CAN'T BUY ME NEW CLOTHES (*The Sun, 17th September 2016*)

This headline contains an intertextual link to a title of the song "Can't Buy Me Love" by The Beatles. In fact, the intertextual reference is expanded because the noun "love" was not only replaced by the word "clothes", but an additional word was added. The added word "new" emphasizes that the clothes must be new. However, the intertextual link is still obvious and clear. The article does not report about the whole bend but focuses on Paul McCartney, who wore the same jacket from 1964, to Eight Days a Week premiere.

(7) 'WINTER IS COMING' (*The Sun, 8th February*)

Quotes are widely used in headlines, mostly as a summary of important statements or interviews. In this headline, quotation marks indicate that the headline is in fact someone else's statement. Moreover, the headline is an intertextual reference to the mostly used sentence from the drama

television series "Game of Thrones". The sentence "Winter is Coming" is used in the series to warn and announce that heavy winter is approaching. Interestingly, that sentence is used in the headline not only to awake reader's association to the series, but also to announce new series season in attractive and amusing way.

(8) DON'T BE LEFT OUTSIDE ALONE (*The Sun, 24th May 2017*)

The article reports about the Anastacia's (singer) 2017 UK tour. The important information such as dates, venues or ticket prices is given in the article. However, the content of the article is not easily recognizable from the headline.

The intertextual reference to a title of Anastacia's song "Left Outside Alone" is interestingly used as an invitation to the tour. In fact, the article mainly targets singer's fans who will recognize the intertextuality immediately, but does not exclude other readers, who are forced to read the article in order to retrieve the intended meaning of the headline. The imperative "don't be" emphasizes the importance of attending the tour and manipulates readers to attend it because otherwise they'll fell like "outsiders".

(9) MAKE IT RAIN (*The Sun, 2nd July 2017*)

The intertextual reference of this headline is rather obscure and wide. Firstly, the headline contains an intertextual reference to an idiomatic expression "make it rain" which is used when one earns or has a lot of money and throws it in the air. That suggests that the article is about money. However, the readers could associate the headline with the title of Prince's song "Purple Rain". Either way, the reader is again forced to interact with the text and read the whole article in order to retrieve the intended meaning. The article reports about Prince's shirt from movie Purple Rain which was sold for almost £75,000 at auction.

(10) SOME GUN LIKE YOU (*The Sun, 13th March*)

This headline is attention-grabbing not only because it is intertextual, but also because it has incorporated pun, which makes it even more appealing and memorable for the readers.

The article is about singer Adele who was shooting T-shirts and $20 bills into a concert crowd (Picture 4). Therefore, the headline contains an intertextual reference to Adel's most famous song "Someone like you", where the pronoun "someone" was substituted with the words "some" and "gun" to suggests and summarize the topic of the article in a witty and amusing way.

Picture 4: Adele shooting T-shirts

8 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate intertextual references in showbiz tabloid news and how they attract readers' attention and affect them. Moreover, it was studied which linguistic devices are mostly combined with intertextuality in order to compose an interesting, playful and concise headline.

By examining the headlines from the tabloid *The Sun,* it was determined that intertextuality is greatly used. In fact, intertextuality is even combined with other linguistic devices such as puns, word play or alliteration. It was noticed that puns and word plays are frequently used, not only to make headlines more interesting, but also to introduce humour even in serious or inappropriate situations, which makes headlines even more appealing to the readers. Furthermore, the analysis showed that intertextuality is often used with alliteration or homonymy in order to make headlines playful and memorable for the readers.

It was noticed that showbiz articles of the online version of *The Sun* contain a lot of pictures, which complement articles, and more importantly support readers' inferences gained from an intertextual headline.

This analysis showed that most of the examined intertextual headlines are references to different songs or movies. Interestingly, the content of the article does not always correspond with the intertextual reference in the headline, which is a great way to raise readers' attention and urge them to read the whole article.
Furthermore, most of the examined headlines are implicit references to different movies or songs, where only a small part of the original reference is changed and adjusted to the headline of the article. However, the intertextual reference is still obvious and recognizable.

It must be noted that recognizing such references and intertextuality is rather subjective because it mostly depends on an individual's cultural knowledge.

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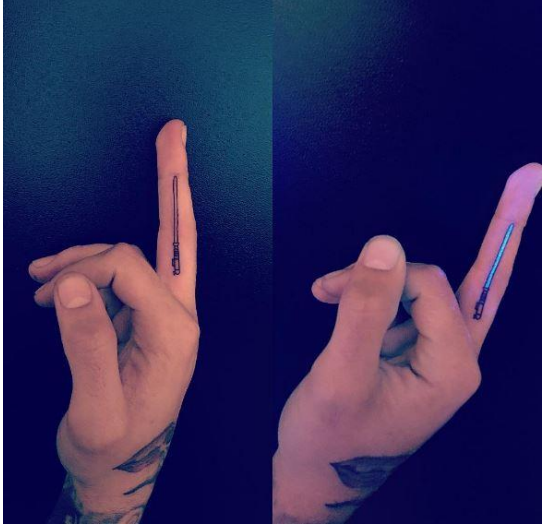
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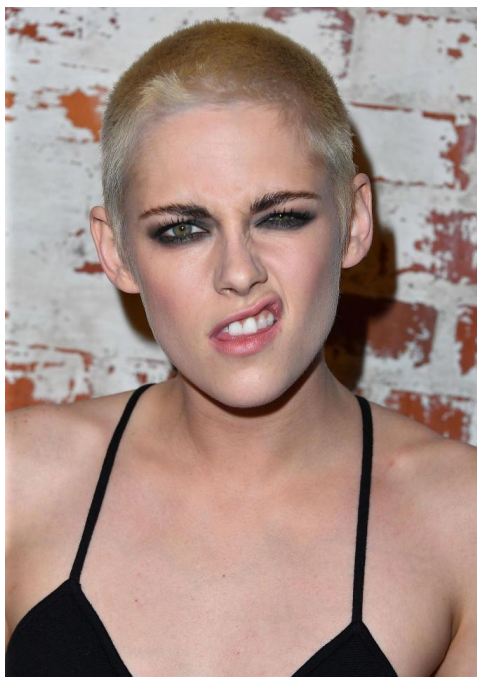Wodak, Ruth and Michael Meyer. 2001. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis.* London: Sage.

Appendices

Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3

Picture 4