The form and function of word play in sports sections of British tabloids

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Diplomski rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Goran Milić

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Abstract:

When talking about humorous language, the notion of wordplay often comes to mind. A broad definition would be the act of manipulating formal and semantic aspects of lexical units to create playful connections between the form and meaning of words. One such type of wordplay can be seen in the journalistic discourse, particularly in tabloid journalism. When reading those (sub)headlines, questions may arise; such as: how wordplay works in this particular discourse and how it influences or connect to the readers. What underlying mechanisms cause the utterance to be a play on words? This paper utilises headlines from sports sections of the digital editions of the tabloid *The Sun* and analyses them according to previous research and previous taxonomies together with news values all of which are used to identify the underlying punning mechanisms. In addition to what has already been researched, this paper proves that there are key tendencies used in arranging sports (sub)headlines. One major tendency is a playful and irreverent predisposition to the sportspersons, which are mainly the protagonists in question. Another tendency is to be as concise as possible by taking the names of sportspersons, events, venues etc. and creating a play on words with the punning mechanisms of homonymy and intertextuality.

Key words: wordplay; homonymy; intertextuality; headlines; subheading; tabloids.

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1. Introduction

Journalism in Great Britain is divided into two categories. On the one hand, there is coverage of hard news, which caters to people who want to know the circumstances of recent events which can be local, regional, national or international (Mills-Brown 2014). On the other hand, soft news is rather market-centred and has both information and entertainment in its focus (Edwards 2014). This paper will deal with soft news as it is covered in the newspaper type commonly associated with it, viz. tabloid newspapers (as opposed to broadsheets which tend towards hard news coverage), and try to analyse wordplay and its form and function. Previous research sees studies like Alexander's analysis of puns, which addresses how they work on the reader (1986: 156-77). The work in question touches upon *The Economist* which is a prominent weekly magazine, well known among those familiar with economics and financial affairs. In the paper, Alexander (1986) explains and gives further explanation to three categories: puns, allusions and metaphors. Another example is Goodman (1997) who focuses on British tabloid newspapers and the Royal Family. Assuming that most of the works concerning puns are like the ones mentioned or explore them on a formal, linguistic and traditional level, further contributions to the topic are welcome and always needed. The aim of this paper is to gain further understanding on how the different forms and function of puns are used in the journalistic discourse.

According to Attardo (1994: 108), wordplay or puns, have been greatly researched and were seen as the main contact field between linguistics and humour studies. When talking about humour, most people find it rather subjective and he confirms that "it is impossible to define the category of humour "a priori", let alone to provide more detailed internal subdivisions" (ibid., 3). Although puns were the subject of inquiry, there still remains a vast unknown territory concerning puns. This paper will reduce the field of research to only British tabloids, namely, its sports sections focusing on the digital versions. The reason lies in the changes in modern technology that have both provided new ways of, and consequent changes to, the dissemination and consumption of news, whereby one has witnessed a decline in the consumption and relevance of print newspapers/ journalism, and a conspicuous rise of online journalism as the evolution of the latter. [1]

[1] Tobitt (2022) supports this claim by stating that 54% of people in the UK prefer to read news content online rather than in print. The research has shown that 60% people in the US prefer the digital over print editions. The research also shows that adolescents (age 18 to 24) prefer reading news online, whereas only 36% of the age over 55 say the same.

In this respect, this paper examines the online version first and foremost for the methodological advantages due to the ease of compiling and searching the corpus for relevant material. The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, there follows the theoretical part which focuses on various formats of puns and provides further information about them, tabloid formats and their structure and gives a closer insight into the differences and similarities between print and digital tabloids. The methodology is laid out in Section 3, which presents the methodological choices and procedures employed in the study. Results and analysis of the data are presented in sections 4-9, with special emphasis on the different sports (sections) analysed. The paper ends by tying the findings to the research question and a conclusion which outlines prospects for further research.

2. Theoretical part

In order to analyse puns, one must know the theory behind them and the umbrella term of wordplay. This section will also provide some background information to better understand the "softening" or "tabloidization" of news and how puns are made. It is important to know why such a change from hard news became so popular and it will be explained how wordplay is expressed through linguistic phenomena. Firstly, to understand what puns are, one must offer the definition of humour. It is certain that humour is a difficult term to define, but puns are specific and Attardo (1994: 109) says: "In the most common sense, puns are spoken jokes (or jokes meant to be interpreted as if read aloud.)" He also mentions other kinds of puns that differ in form such as visual puns.. The most important thing about puns is the distinction between the signifier and the signified as will be further elaborated in Section 2.1.

As Winter-Froemel (2016: 12) states: "Wordplay is transmitted in the phonic or graphic medium or a combination of both […] The medial realisation of wordplay and the reference to different types of contextual knowledge thus represent basic parameters along which different realisations of wordplay can be described and analysed."

This paper thus adopts tabloid newspapers as a specific type of medium argued to influence and determine the nature and function of wordplay as a device. Also, Winter-Froemel et al. (2018: 52) claim: "Wordplay is always part of social human behaviour and has to be analysed within its specific

discursive context." This is precisely what this paper does by focusing on journalistic discourse. Apart from the intention to play with words, journalism uses wordplay for specific purposes such as amusement of readers, showing competence in the creative usage of language, satirical comedy, condensing information, discussing social taboos and bypassing censorship by insinuating certain themes (ibid., 51). Some of these techniques, which will be discussed about later, are also present in tabloid journalism. Moreover, for the rest of this paper, the term "subheadline" will be used to refer to the analysed items in Section 4, due to their specific mode of realization established in the course of analysis. The reason may lie in *The Sun*'s specific approach to presenting information. By using a different colour and making the subheadline short as possible, *The Sun* presents news which is written in the old-fashioned way on top of the article, before the subheadline. By doing that, they appear as short headings and attract attention to the article because of different font colour and shortness[2]. This paper aims to research and analyse puns in sports subheadlines to understand what makes a subheadline. The key tendencies that are revealed and further talked about in subsections of Section 4 confirm that "juxtaposition of near-to identical items is one of the primary mechanisms to achieve wordplay in tabloid journalism" (Winter-Froemel 2018: 20).[3] With digital tabloid formats in mind, many different linguistic features can be manipulated to form wordplay and new understanding thereof can be gained in the domain of journalistic discourse (ibid., 63). Bazerman defined intertextuality as: "The explicit and implicit relations that a text or utterance has to prior, contemporary and potential future texts." (2003: 86). Furthermore, as will be shown, the majority of examples in this paper are less explicit and can be evoked from generally used collocations, idioms, issues or recognisable language (ibid.,87). In that regard, the term intertextuality will further be used as an umbrella term.

2.1 Pun formats

The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary defines a pun as: "the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound ("Pun"). A different take on puns by Henri Bergson (as cited in Augarde, 2003: 248) is a

[2] The definition of Subheading: www.mailchimp.com/resources/what-is-a-subheading.
[3] It bears repeating that it is important to note that this paper focuses only on the digital tabloid format, therefore the findings might be different from the analysed items if they were hard copies due to the complexity of the web page and search engine.

sentence or utterance in which "the same sentence appears to offer two independent meanings, but it is only an appearance; in reality there are two different sentences made up of different words, but claiming to be one and the same because both have the same sound". Attardo (1994: 114). also adds that those phenomena "are not mutually exclusive and that their epistemological status varies greatly" This means that one subheadline could be exercising more instances of wordplay. Winter-Froemel et al. (2018: 60) support this by claiming:

> There is no one-to-one correspondence between linguistic techniques and concrete occurrences of wordplay. Wordplay often combines two or more techniques and involves more than one level of linguistic description.

Attardo speaks about different categories of taxonomy, one of which is a taxonomy of linguistic phenomena which will be used to analyse wordplay. Therefore, in order to better understand puns as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, we adopt as our starting point Duchacek's (as cited in Attardo 1994:113) suggestion of pun taxonomy, which includes the following:

1. homonymy and its subtypes
    a) homophony
    b) homography
    c) paronymy
2. polysemy
3. antonymy
4. morphemic attraction
5. tendency to motivation
6. contamination

The first category, homonymy and its subtypes appertain to subheadlines where there is a relationship between the signifier and the signified in the sense that they both sound and/or are spelt the same, but do not have the same meaning. Homonymy also translates into *homography* (e.g. park$_{(v)}$ – park$_{(n)}$) which refers to the same spelling and *homophony* (e.g. horse$_{(n)}$ - hoarse$_{(adj)}$) which refers to the similar sound, but also paronymy which analyses the formation of a word and how words are related to each other (e.g. alternately – alternatively). *Polysemy* denotes the existence of more than 2 possible meanings for a word (e.g. frame: structure around a picture$_{(n)}$, a person's body with reference to its build and size$_{(n)}$, the action of placing a picture in a frame$_{(v)}$, to incriminate someone$_{(n)}$). In sports

subheadlines, polysemy is connected to intertextuality a lot of the times, because both linguistic phenomena attract different audiences and overlap in each other's domains.[4] *Antonymy* refers to the semantic relationship between words that have the opposite meaning (e.g. $hot_{(adj)}$ - $cold_{(adj)}$). The next category is *morphemic attraction* and it refers to the phenomenon in linguistics, a type of error that incorrectly extends a feature from one word in a sentence to another with a focus on morphemes. Bock (1995: 56) provides an example:" Efforts to make English the official language is gaining strength throughout the U.S." where the head of the subject noun phrase "efforts" is plural, but the verb is used in the singular form. Furthermore, motivation refers to morphological motivation and it is used to denote the relationship on a phonetic and morphemic level, but also the meaning behind them. For example, in sports subheadlines there will be mostly phonetically motivated subheadlines with words like "cuckoo" which denotes a bird whose call sounds like its own name, therefore it refers to itself, just like the subheadlines.

In another suggested taxonomy, Winter-Froemel (2016: 37) classified wordplay into three major subtypes in a broad sense and defined them as follows: "A first major subtype of wordplay associates and / or juxtaposes linguistic units which are identical or very close in their form and have different meanings, basically in the form of homonymy, polysemy or paronymy". This subtype highlights the simplicity and similarity of lexical items achieving wordplay. Winter-Froemel says that this type of wordplay focuses on the arbitrariness and motivation of language which will be the case in the later sections of this paper when analysing the subheadlines. The second major subtype is "based on the principle of combining elements selected according to a phonic or graphic level" (ibid.,38). This subtype is to be understood as the traditional play with sounds. However, the graphemes should be included as well. Lastly, the third subtype is introduced as "ludic deformations where specific elements of existing forms are substituted on a sublexical level. This subtype of wordplay is also mostly local" (ibid., 38). This subtype implies that there are textual alterations within the items achieving wordplay. Additionally, Winter-Froemel mentions "problematic" cases where "an item exhibiting wordplay consists of phenomena which concern bigger or even smaller linguistic units and it becomes hard to determine what makes the item playful" (ibid., 40). Lastly, she states that there are more aspects to wordplay, therefore, there is a distinction between playing with sound and playing

[4] Puntoni et al. (2010: 51) state that readers' literacy has progressed over the years which resulted in their growing interest of decoding and deconstructing meanings that are hidden in advertisments. Peltekoğlu (2019: 578) supports this by showing an example of a Tiffany & Co. advert and explaining that many people would assume it was connected to the movie Breakfast at Tiffany's.

with sense. The distinction is not so pronounced in international scholarship, so this paper will continue using wordplay as an umbrella term (ibid., 24). The paper will analyse wordplay in sports subheadlines based on the taxonomies of Duchacek (as cited in Attardo 1994:113) where he carefully divided those linguistic pheonomena. It is important to point out that polysemy has been switched with intertextuality as both phenomena are similar and overlap in their domains (see p. 18). This paper will expand on said taxonomy by adding intertextuality, news values which will be elaborated on in Section 3 and Winter-Froemel's taxonomy.

2.2 A brief history of tabloids

When talking about newspaper format, tabloids are known to be the compact version of the well-known broadsheets. According to Gossel (2017), the origin of the term "tabloid" remains uncertain, but it is believed that the word is derived from the words tablet and alkaloid. He states that it is a play on words in the field of chemistry and pharmacy. In 1903, publishing magnate Alfred Harmsworth tried to appeal to the British masses by revolutionising the already famous broadsheets such as: *The Independent, The Times, and The Scotsman*. He started the first modern tabloid newspaper which would be known as *The Daily Mirror*. It comes out regularly ever since 1903 and its initial intent was to be an all-female staff to publish and cater to women's interests, thoughts and work (ibid.). At first, *The Daily Mirror* contained lots of advertisements in order to pay the costs of running a paper as it was difficult to start from scratch (Reid 2021). Also, another popular tabloid newspaper is *The* Sun, which is the leading newspaper in terms of wordplay instances. Unlike other tabloids, *The Sun* uses wordplay in almost every headline and subheadline. The main features of tabloids are: its compactness (they were half the size of regular broadsheets), many photographs, smart usage of space and stories that were easy to read (Gossel 2017). The question of print vs. online editions will be answered in Section 2.3 and in the later sections of this paper there will be an analysis of how the different forms of puns are used across the webpage and whether it might influence the consumers and their decision process to read certain newspapers.

2.3 Printed vs. digital tabloids

In today's modern society, searching for information has never been easier. This is also aided by the digitalisation of newspapers. There are numerous publishers which have a large number of printed newspapers, but thanks to technological evolution, consumers only need a few clicks of the mouse to read their favourite newspapers. As this paper will focus only on digital tabloids, it is important to note that there are differences when browsing either of the two categories. Firstly, hard copies are not available instantly, instead they need to be physically distributed which also has an impact on climate change and carbon footprint, whereas digital versions often require a subscription or a fee to be paid and after that it can be downloaded or viewed in a browser. Secondly, to ensure financial viability, tabloids usually have some kind of advertisements on the margins. Lastly, the most important feature for the purposes of this paper is the subheadline design. Digital versions have their subheadline designed in a way that ensures search-friendliness. This is to ensure that the reader can access an article without needing to type in the whole name of the subheadline. Just a phrase or one word of the same is enough to find every article. It would pose a problem to digital tabloids when the readers would type keywords in the search box and the results would be completely different.

3. Methodology

For this paper's corpus, a total of 90 sports (sub)headlines[5] from the digital version of *The Sun* were selected and analysed. The number of subheadlines per sport amounted to a random number of 15 in order to maintain objectiveness. The analysed sections were taken in the time span from August 2021 to December 2022. The main reason for such an approach is that every sport featured a dominant topic at that time, ensuring a particular spike in coverage which could act as a common denominator for the coverage and possible production of specific types of puns. The corpus consists of 6 different sports which have been found to feature most frequently on the website of *The Sun,* chosen as a prime example of a British tabloid. Those categories will be analysed by utilising 6 different linguistic phenomena suggested by Duchacek (as cited in Attardo 1994:113) together with Winter-Froemel's taxonomy (2016) and pertinent news values (addressed below) in order to find possible patterns, tendencies and specifics of the tabloid subheadline language.

All of the 6 sports (Football, Boxing, Cricket, WWE, Formula 1, Tennis) have an archive or history at the bottom of the page, so the reader could access the previous editions at any given time. The subheadlines that contained wordplay were picked from the total corpus and analysed randomly to ensure a representative number from the specified time frame. All of the sports categories, expectedly, also featured subheadlines where there was no sign of wordplay. That particular number of relevant subheadlines varied across the type of sport and whether a sport featured a prominent event such as the World Cup in football, for example. It is important to note that *The Sun* featured 1-2 subheadlines not containing wordplay every single day. Also, there is a conspicuous tendency at work in online editions. It was observed that the sub- and headlines from the footnotes (their URL which indicates their title) seem to differ from the ones on the actual webpage. This finding points to a ubiquitous tendency that there are more versions of sub- and headlines out of which the editors pick the best suited one. During the time of the World Cup competition, 25-30 subheadlines were produced every single day because of the quantity of events (and the affordances of the medium, which enables quick,

[5] The analysed examples were digital edition headlines which displayed the said tendency to attach subheadlines which excercised wordplay and not vice versa. An example is: NO MORE JULES (subheadline) 'He has no right' – Deschamps fumes at 'superstitious' Kounde for wearing banned necklace in World Cup win over Poland (main headline).

up-to-date publishing), whereas in other sports sections the number of featured subheadlines amounted to approximately 15-20 during the time of no major event.

The analysed subheadlines have shown that they possess certain characteristics in common, so they were sorted under common denominators which could be argued to make them newsworthy[6]. The first one is prominence, which groups subheadlines referring to some kind of important event, competition or high-profile figures which is held for a particular type of sport. The second one is proximity which refers to events happening locally, in the UK. The third category is timeliness, which refers to timely or old information, with the former considered more relevant for publishing. The fourth category - conflict - concerns stories with some kind of conflict between persons, teams or industries. The fifth category is novelty or oddity. It deals with situations that are novel or odd enough to be accepted as a story. The sixth category is human interest which emphasises shared experience, personal growth or acts of kindness. The last category is impact and it is important for every previously mentioned one, because it determines whether a story is relevant enough to make a subheadline. It is important to note that the previously mentioned categories overlap each other, e.g., the first and seventh category; prominence and impact. Also, almost all of them cover the characteristic of timeliness.

[6] The categories of newsworthiness can be accessed here: www.unomaha.edu/office-of-strategic-marketing-and-communications/public-relations/what-is-newsworthy.php

4. Analysis

Table 1 shows the instances of wordplay throughout all 90 subheadlines across 6 sports. It confirms the previously mentioned claim that more instances of wordplay can be spotted in a single subheadline, because the sum of the subheadlines amounts to 123 instances. The table shows the predominance of certain wordplay types such as homonymy and its subtypes and intertextuality, which were spread across all sports equally as it will be later analysed. Only one example of contamination was spotted in the domain of football. On the other hand, types such as antonymy, morphemic attraction and motivation were not found at all.

	Football	Boxing	Cricket	WWE	F1	Tennis
homonymy (& subtypes)	11	9	12	9	15	14
contamination	1	0	0	0	0	0
antonymy	0	0	0	0	0	0
morph. Att.	0	0	0	0	0	0
motivation	0	0	0	0	0	0
intertextuality	6	10	7	10	10	9

Table 1: Types of wordplay and key domains in which it is present

A preliminary tendency of wordplay instances seems to be the one with a strong correlation between the wordplay type homonymy and prominent persons or events across all sports. The majority of wordplay is based on people or places that are linked to the type of sport or were key figures at events. In the next subsections, this paper will address instantiations of said wordplay types in each sport and support them with the examples from the corpus.

4.1 *Wordplay in the domain of football*

In this subsection, a total of 18 instances of wordplay was found. The most robust finding is wordplay involving persons' nicknames. This section offers illustrative examples of that particular punning mechanism. Also, the majority of (sub)headlines of this domain utilise prominence as the denominator of newsworthiness. This is because the World Cup competition was in progress at the time of publishing the articles.

The first subheadline to be analysed will be *No more Jules*[7]. This subheadline is used to exemplify the use of homophony/polysemy as the key mechanism underlying a pun. This incident happened in the match France vs. Poland when the French footballer Jules Kounde was forced to remove his gold necklace during their 3:1 lead over Poland. The French player began his match wearing jewellery and it could also be seen from anyone watching the TV. Many people were pointing it out on social media. He was able to go through with it until the end of the first half when the referee had him take it off. This is a good example of homophony of the words: Jules and jewels. Depending on the pronunciation of the lexical item, one variation of the sentence would be "no more jewels" where "jewels" is the corresponding homophone to the personal name "Jules". This is precisely what the editors were aiming for.

The next subheadline to be viewed is named *Hey Jude*[8]. It concerns the Englishman Jude Bellingham who had a great game against Senegal in their round of 16. He managed to assist Jordan Henderson to take the lead in the 38th minute of the game. Also, Bellingham took the team forward in a big advantage to assist Harry Kane's first goal of the tournament and score the second goal against Senegal. Later, the former professional footballer Gary Lineker tweeted about Bellingham, praising and congratulating him. This subheadline is interesting because to understand it, one must know where the phrase 'Hey Jude' comes from. To somebody not knowing the song *Hey Jude* (Beatles), this subheadline wouldn't have had any impact or it would sound like a regular subheadline. However, this song inspires a positive outlook on a situation, hence the subheadline for Jude Bellingham to take his team one step closer to winning the World Cup. So far, England has got only one trophy of the World Cup, so winning another one would mean a great deal to them. This is an example of the denominator prominence and intertextuality in a subheadline and how a play on a person's name could

[7] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20645658/france-jules-kounde-didier-deschamps-necklace-world-cup
[8] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20648233/england-senegal-jude-bellingham

contribute to making an interesting and intriguing title. Winter-Foremel et al. (2016: 91) state that the complexity of wordplay may even increase in subheadlines with intertextual reference than in subheadlines utilising other punning mechanisms.

The next subheadline, which again, focuses on homophony and intertextuality is called *Upped The Ant-e*[9] and focuses on Brazil's winger Antony Santos. His body transformation was revealed and it shows him putting on more muscle and mass which will definitely help him in his career. Since his debut for Sao Paulo 4 years ago he has changed his diet and started working out. This subheadline makes a pun because it uses a phrase from poker and other betting games "to up the ante" which means to increase what is at stake. In his case, it was his physical attributes. "Ant-e" refers to his name, Antony in a shortened sense – nickname. This headline deals with personal growth, therefore the category of human interest is what makes it newsworthy.

The next example, is that of *Lion in*[10] and it was chosen to exemplify homonymy which partially falls under the subtype homography. The first item stems from the lexical item "lion" which serves as a noun. However, Messi's first name is Lionel. The editors thought this partial homography would make for a good subheadline because of its context. Namely, Argentina's forward striker Lionel Messi shares the same four letters in his name as the king of the jungle, the lion. As such, a little bit of intertextuality is needed to fully understand the subheadline. It was designed as such because Argentina or Messi and Co. had managed to qualify into the quarter finals of the World Cup. With their win over Australia, Argentina has managed to get one step closer to touching the World Cup trophy and as Messi is widely considered as one of the best players ever, this subheadline pays tribute to that fact. The subheadline denotes a lion, which in this case is figuratively and literally Messi. As one of the best, if not the best football player he has managed to get 'in' the quarter finals. The newsworthiness falls on the category of prominence.

The following subheadline focuses on the reader knowing the expression *no way Jose*[11] which is used to express disagreement or disbelief. In this particular subheadline, Uruguay's football player Jose Gimenez was caught striking a FIFA official on the head with his elbow. This happened because Gimenez was frustrated over the loss and knockout out of the World Cup and while he was trying to

[9] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20639299/antonys-amazing-body-transformation-revealed
[10] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20646847/lionel-messi-wife-antonela-argentina-world-cup
[11] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20638192/uruguay-jose-gimenez-ban-elbowing-world-cup-rant

confront the referee, he lost his temper. This particular example requires the reader to be familiar with the expression to receive the full effect of the pun, otherwise it may fall flat and just be taken literally. This subheadline suggests that the viewers who saw that incident on TV and in person must have had a reaction similar to saying "no way Jose" or simply being shocked. This subheadline features conflict and prominence as news criteria.

The following subheadline uses intertextuality again to prepare a funny and creative delivery of an event. Namely, in the World Cup game Brazil vs Cameroon, as one of the Cameroonian players needed medical attention, one of the doctors rushed to help the injured player. The medic did not know that the top of his backside was exposed due to his extremely tight shorts. The camera caught the scene and it became an internet sensation. Many joked on the social media platform Twitter over the accident. The subheadline is labelled *Shock Treatment*[12] which is a metaphor for what happened and the editors tried to go for a joke over the medic exposing his backside, but the real punchline lies in the event that followed after that, which is the defeat of Brazil and win of Cameroon. That event must have shocked the viewers, hence the subheadline. This headline was chosen because of the denominator oddity.

Another example of intertextuality can be seen in the subheadline *Going Green*[13] which is about the English team's kits. Namely, a few matches into the World Cup, England have spotted strange green marks on their kits which are entirely different from normal grass stains. There have been rumours of FIFA using tricks to paint the bare areas green as to make the pitch look in great condition, but they rejected it, claiming those were just rumours. In this example, wordplay is achieved by playing on the idiom "to go green/going green" which means changing certain things or way of living in order to make an eco-friendly environment. Now, football is played in large stadiums with great pitches which consist of carefully trimmed and cared for grass. By combining such an idiom with the theme of football, one gets a solid ironic subheadline – a pun. Prominence and oddity are the leading criteria for publishing this (sub)headline.

The following subheadline is also an example of intertextuality with homophony. It is called *For Whom the Bel Tolls*[14] and it connects John Donne's poem *For Whom the Bell Tolls* with the World

[12] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20634996/cameroon-medic-wardrobe-malfunction-brazil-win-world-cup
[13] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20650903/england-complain-stains-kits-fifa-world-cup-2022-pitches
[14] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20602484/croatia-vs-belgium-world-cup-group-f-how-theyre-doing-injuries-and-prediction-as-big-guns-aim-to-avoid-early-exit

Cup game between Croatia and Belgium. To understand the meaning of the poem, one should know the last few lines. It is about death and that nobody stands alone in this world. We are connected; therefore, every death affects us as and that everybody has their own funeral bell which we hear:

Each man's death diminishes me,

For I am involved in mankind.

Therefore, send not to know

For whom the bell tolls,

It tolls for thee.

The connection between the poem and the World Cup game lies in the outcome of the match. This particular game was the knock-out phase of Group F. The pun in the subheadline lies in the defeat of one of the teams, namely, Belgium. In the subheadline, the editors purposefully left out a single /l/ to mimic the abbreviation of the scoreboard (Bel vs Cro) to tell the readers who got defeated. Additionally, the bell could act as a synonym for whistle in this case. For example, in boxing there is a bell that represents the end of a round. Another interpretation lies in Hemingway's novel *For Whom The Bell Tolls* which is a classic war romance, set during the Spanish Civil War. The subheadline may thus also potentially be seen (by competent readers) to draw on the theme of war to utilise the conceptual metaphor SPORT IS WAR (A GAME IS A BATTLE). In this example, it can be observed that the choice of a subheadline can be complex with regards to intertextuality, which require the reader to elicit the meaning from the subheadline and event. This variation can be seen as non-humorous wordplay. As Winter-Froemel (2016) suggests, these instances of wordplay can be found in serious texts or serious argumentation that of religious or philosophical nature. On the other hand, if the pun is easy to understand or visible the reader can "find" it and the wordplay is then successful (ibid.: 15). The (sub)headline, just like the previous ones focuses on the World Cup which is a prominent event. Therefore, it features prominence as the denominator for newsworthiness.

Just like the previous one, this subheadline focuses on intertextuality and homonymy. It is titled *Best Mate*[15] and it focuses on Croatia's midfielders Luka Modrić and Mateo Kovačić. The

[15] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/17599949/luka-modric-croatia-mateo-kovacic

editors of this subheadline tried to make a pun on the name Mateo, because one of his nicknames is 'Mate' which directly translates into the word 'friend' in English. To give a bit of insight into why this article was written, Luka Modrić is already a veteran player and surely, he has many more years of playing ahead of him. He was asked who would be suited to replace him someday and he answered Mateo Kovačić, saying he has got a lot of talent. The pun lies in the nickname 'Mate' and the friendship between the two. The word 'mate' would then be a homograph and have different meanings, such as 'best friend'. This piece of news, along with the rest of examples of this domain fall under the category of prominence.

The next subheadline is named *Wave Goodbye*[16] and it concerns the families of the football players who came to cheer for their loved ones in the upcoming games in Doha, Qatar. The families were stationed on the luxury ship named MSC World Europa. The incident occurred after someone of the families, wives and girlfriends reported that someone has urinated from the fifth storey. Hence the subheadline "Wave Goodbye" from which two meanings can be inferred. One is wave, as in the verb "to wave" or "to wave someone goodbye" just like the families and girlfriends did to the luxury ship ticket after witnessing the act of urinating publicly. The other meaning would be "wave" as in the noun "wave or waves" which denotes the sea. When combined, the homophones "wave" with the meaning of "goodbye" it can be concluded that a person is saying goodbye to the sea, or in this case, a luxury ship and a "wave of urin" which is the gist of the subheadline.

Another example of homophony with intertextuality can be seen in the subheadline *Raining Champions*[17] and the play on words lies in the first word. Normally, this collocation sounds unnatural, but changing the first word into a similarly sounding one, such as 'reigning' makes much more sense. To better understand it, one should know the background of the article. The winner of the previous World Cup in 2018 were France. The quarter-finals were set between England and France and the forecast for that playoff was showing rain. Therefore, the editors chose to combine those words that connect both teams on that particular day; the reigning champions, the challengers and a rainy day. The play on words fits in nicely with the synthetic language of newspaper headlines, characterized by

[16] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20651292/england-hms-wag-maguire-grealish
[17] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20679926/england-france-world-cup-quarter-final-rain-temperatures

the omission of auxiliary verbs, placing the -ing form the word classes of adjective and verb (in its participle form).

The next subheadline is named as *Blanc Faces*[18] and the article is about two football players who both debuted in the same club, starting from nothing and rising up to play in prominent teams and even their national team. The article also talks about how they have changed physically, therefore the wordplay lies in the metaphor that their faces were blank, as to say they have not yet completed their journey as professionals. Now they have many trophies, games and achievements to their name. Again, the editors played with words by exchanging the words "blank" and "blanc" which are homophones.

The following example of homophony is targeted at the FC Barcelona and the readers are expected to know that their home stadium is called Camp Nou. Hence, the subheadline name *Nou Move*[19] which designates a player transfer between FC Barcelona and another team. The article is about FC Barcelona trying to scout Brazilian player Gabriel Martinelli who had a soon-to-expire contract with Arsenal FC. The La Liga giants thought Martinelli was a cut above the rest and wanted him to sign a contract with them. The wordplay lies in the first word of the subheadline. "Nou" and "no" are pronounced the same (at least by non- native speakers), therefore, one can think of a possibility that a player is or is not going to sign for FC Barcelona. "Nou move" would suggest they acquired a new player, whereas "no move" could mean that no contract has been signed and the idea failed. It is important to note that this example is exhibiting the same tendency to play with, or rearrange and alter the name of the venue such as in previous examples with the names of sportspersons.

The next subheadline focuses on homophony and intertextuality, which is shown through combining the first word of the subheadline *Ev Some of That*[20] with the Manchester United F.C. player Patrice Evra. The phrase "have some of that" is purposefully used in this subheadline. It addresses a past dispute between the players and rivals Patrice Evra and Luis Suarez. This subheadline was created

[18] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/18482555/brazil-world-cup-unrecognisable-neymar-real-madrid-rodrygo-santos
[19] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20665643/barcelona-scouting-arsenal-star-martinelli-world-cup-transfer
[20] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20634331/evra-like-post-suarez-crying-world-cup-uruguay

as a result of Evra liking an Instagram photo of the Uruguay striker Suarez who was shown crying over the loss and knockout out of the World Cup.

The last entry for the domain of football is called *Still Kicking*[21] and it deals with intertextuality with homophony. The subheadline is about Luka Modrić and the question of him being ready to retire as he was then 37 years old. He assured the viewers in an interview that he will not retire as there is no reason to for now. This leads us back to the subheadline *Still Kicking* which is a modification of the idiom "to be alive and well/kicking." The wordplay lies in the second word of the subheadline. When talking about football, one would surely assume there is a lot of kicking the ball into the opposing goal. The editors thought it would make a good pun to put the idiom and the theme of football together.

To sum up, some of the puns overlap homonymy with intertextuality, which had 6 instances of wordplay. For example, "Hey Jude", "For Whom The Bel Tolls" and "No Way Jose" use intertextuality and combine a personal name of an athlete to make it a pun. The first one is a song, the second one is a poem (or Hemingway's novel) and the third one is a slang expression. What connects them are the names: Jude, Bel and Jose. Moreover, the single subheadline that makes a pun through the device of contamination *Go Green* not only is a homophone, intertextual reference, but it also denotes greenery, and eco-friendly actions.

4.2 *Wordplay in the domain of boxing*

This subsection, similarly to the previous one, exhibits largely the same punning mechanisms. The most robust finding is the use of persons' names or well-known collocations. This sport, although different from WWE has yielded the same number of punning instances as WWE, which is to follow in the analysis. Both fall under the category of fighting. In order to find patterns, this subsection will cover representative examples as to how wordplay is achieved by reliance to types of homonymy and intertextuality. The articles featured in this domain put more focus on the characteristic of newsworthiness of prominence. Since this is a fighting sport, one would assume conflict is the basis for newsworthy content. However, unless the piece of news is about a real, heated and controversial fight between persons, the denominator conflict will not be taken into account as stated in example (11).

[21] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20692342/luka-modric-croatia-retire-world-cup

The first subheadline is named *Duck & Cover*[22] and it deals with professional boxer Tyson Fury's story of how his first fight went. In an interview, he said that he wore Donald Duck boxing shorts in his first ever match. To make it funnier, the cartoon character did not wear any, also, they kept falling down whenever Fury tried to throw a punch. Therefore, the wordplay lies in knowing who and what Donald Duck is. The cartoon character with a mischievous and temperamental personality who is known to rage easily. The wordplay lies in knowing the difference between the homophones of the cartoon character, corresponding to a verb and a noun. In a boxing match, the fighters are supposed to block and duck, but Fury had to duck and cover because his trousers were falling down. Because of that, the editors went with this subheadline to bring out a humorous mishap by combining the two homophones.

The next entry deals with a phrase that is commonly heard today, especially in fiction such as movies. The subheadline is labelled *Pay the Price*[23] and it deals with the sparing match between British heavyweights Anthony Joshua and David Price. The pair were once training partners and looking back, Price stated that he knocked Joshua out during one of the practice sessions. The editors made a play on words by using the phrase 'to pay the price' which connects to David Price. By both words being homophones, it sounds as if Joshua had to suffer the consequences of being Price's opponent, by getting knocked out.

The next subheadline which is titled *Young Guns*[24] deals with a list of boxers the audience can look out for in 2023. The list of boxers promises spectacular fights as it did back in 2022. The play on words can be seen from the word "gun" which in informal language means muscular and well-developed biceps. This also involves the use of metaphor and metonymy. From a layman's point of view, contestants have to have big and defined muscles among many things to compete in the sport. Therefore, the editors chose to go with two variations for the reader to understand. Either compositionally, by activating the individual parts of the expression, or as a whole (young guns = successful and upcoming young stars).

[22] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20869552/tyson-fury-boxing-first-fight-donald-duck-trackies
[23] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20875804/anthony-joshua-knocked-out-david-price-sparring
[24] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20765775/five-boxers-to-watch-2023-itauma-whittaker, also see the definition https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/young%20gun

Another example of homophony combined with the name of the person can be seen in the title *Ad-a Boy*[25]. The article talks about Adam Azim, a British 20-year-old lightweight boxer who suffers from ADHD. It is said that every dent and blemish on his face is the result of him being accident-prone in his childhood. He took up boxing because he thought it would be good to channel all the restless energy into the sport. This subheadline follows the example of the colloquial idiom "that a boy" or informally "attaboy". The editors found a way to combine that phrase with Azim's name to sound the same and have the same meaning of encouragement.

The next subheadline is titled *up Fur It*[26] and it involves the lexical item "Fur" which is a nickname for the surname Fury and the preposition "for" to act as a pair of homophones. The article describes Tyson Fury and Oleksandr Usyk's agreement to fight each other without any interim bouts before the clash. Fury, being the world boxing champion, defended his heavyweight title against Derek Chisora earlier. On the other hand, Usyk has beaten Anthony Joshua twice over the past 15 months which makes him an unformidable foe. The subheadline for this article tries to make a play on words by taking Fury's surname and adjusting it so it becomes a homophone, which leads to an informal phrase 'to be up for something.' This would describe Usyk and whether he is ready to take on the WDC Tyson Fury in a match.

The following subheadline is an example of intertextuality. It is titled *Stop Joshing*[27] and the article is about Anthony Joshua, who was having a large loss streak and problems with performance. At the time, he was looking for a new coach team to look for wins again, despite having cycled through many coaches already. The editors chose this type of subheadline because of partial homonymy between the name "Josh" and the second part of the phrase "stop joshing" which means to stop joking or teasing people. The subheadline implies that Joshua has nobody to blame, but himself. Also, that he should "stop joking" and take it seriously.

Another example of homonymy, to be precise, a homograph can be seen in the title *Handy Work*[28] that talks about female professional boxer Ebanie Bridges. In the build-up to her fighting Shannon O'Connell, she injured her hand during a training session. After that, she has undergone a surgery and posted a picture about it. In this specific subheadline, the wordplay lies in more than one aspect. One

[25] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20824068/adam-azim-boxing-adhd-amir-khan
[26] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20820322/tyson-fury-oleksandr-usyk-agree-fight-undisputed
[27] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20811090/anthony-joshua-trainer-coach-shane-mcguigan
[28] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20783421/ebanie-bridges-hand-surgery-bone-shannon-oconnell-fight

would be partial homography between the noun "hand" and adjective "handy". The second one lies in the fact that she underwent hand surgery and the surgeon could be proud of his handywork if he restored her hand in time before the big fight. The wordplay causes the reader to not know whether by working on her hand or by him working with his hands on hers. The third one could be ironic, and "handywork" could translate into her ironically injuring her hand. Therefore, the fact that it is spelt apart also plays a role in punning.

The next subheadline was also written by drawing on homonymy and unlike the previous one, which was a homograph, this is an example of a homophone. It is titled *Luke at That*[29] and as mentioned previously, many subheadlines tend to use personal names in the making of puns. The article is about Tyson Fury and his actual name. His fellow boxers call him Luke because he said on his YouTube channel that his middle name is Luke and whilst the cameras are not recording, he is a different person. On the other hand, when he is in the spotlight, or in a match he is Tyson. The wordplay in this subheadline tries to give away a piece of information about Tyson Fury at the start by making the reader interested in the rest of the article by clever phrasing. By reading the subheadline, the reader is sure to go through the whole article just to find the reason for writing "look at that".

The following subheadline is an example of a clean intertextual reference. It is titled *Box-to-Box*[30] and the article is about an interaction between a famous Youtuber and boxer Olajide Olayinka Williams Olatunji, who is better known as KSI, and former Manchester United F.C. football player Wayne Rooney. KSI is the founder of MisFits, a banner which is focused mainly on crossover boxing, had a talk with Rooney about players who might appear in that event. Now, what makes this subheadline a play on words is the term box-to-box. It is used in football when talking about tactics and playstyle of a player. It denotes that a player is assigned defensive as well as offensive tasks which makes them a good and all-round player. The notion of a player switching areas from the back to the midfield and forward can be understood metaphorically as someone who changes their area of expertise in this example. The editors chose this subheadline to catch the interest of the readers who know the terminology used in football, plus they can always rely on the basic relation between the words box-to-box if a reader fails to associate it with football and elicit the meaning literally.

[29] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20747650/oleksandr-usyk-whyte-tyson-fury-luke
[30] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20768202/ksi-man-utd-wayne-rooney-fight-footballer-boxing

Additionally, the image with KSI and Rooney that was used in the subheadline makes it much more interesting.

The next analysed item is called *Eb and Flow*[31] and it deals with the match between Ebanie Bridges and Shannon O'Connell which lasted eight rounds in total. Prior to the fight O'Connell tried to banter with Bridges and had a few remarks on her clothing choice she wore to weigh in. Again, this subheadline is an example of homonymy; homophony in combination with intertextuality. The editors used the phrase "ebb and flow" and replaced the first word with Bridges' first name which sounds the same. Furthermore, the subheadline is also a metaphor for the movements and phrases sometimes used in boxing. In this subheadline, 'ebb and flow' represents Bridges and how the comments from Connell brought her down, but she managed to win in the end which symbolises decline and regrowth.

Another example of homonymy; homophony can be seen in *All four It*[32] which is about Tyson Fury who wants to fight Deontay Wilder for the fourth time. In an interview he said that he wanted to have the match in Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas boasting 70 000 seats. The editing team chose to make a play on words which involves the fact that it is their fourth time fighting and Fury very much like many spectators would be "all for it" to come and see it.

The next subheadline is labelled as *Paul no Punches*[33] and its article is about the banter between boxers Jake Paul and Tommy Fury. It is another example of partial homophony and intertextuality. In an interview, Paul said there was no need to train for the fight against Fury. Paul was determined to win and claimed that the fight would be an easy one. The subheadline tries to make wordplay on the name 'Paul' and the verb 'pull' by sounding the same depending on the pronunciation and hence the partial homophony. The idiom that the subheadline is built upon is "to pull (no) punches" which means to be or not to be less forceful or to (not) restrain one's comments or criticism.

In the following subheadline, the categories of linguistic motivation and partial homophony can be observed. The subheadline says *Glove to See It*[34] and its article is about ex-heavyweight boxer and two-time champion Chris Byrd's body transformation. In the article, it is said that after hanging up his boxing gloves, Byrd underwent an incredible body transformation and wanted to return to boxing.

[31] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20718251/ebanie-bridges-shannon-oconnell-boxing-result, can be used in domains: health, cinematography, technology etc. (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ebb and flow)
[32] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20651333/tyson-fury-fight-deontay-wilder-oleksandr-usyk
[33] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20568200/jake-paul-train-tommy-fury-fight
[34] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20545240/heavyweight-boxing-chris-byrd-body-transformation

What makes this subheadline a play on words is the usage of the word "glove" in the phrase "love to see it" when talking about boxing. While the actual headline does not say this openly, one of the interpretations is that many fans would like to see him make a comeback. The actual reference may lie in the fact that everybody 'loves to see' a healthy and muscular body.

The subheadline *Push Over*[35] is another example of the usage of intertextuality. It describes the article which is about the match between Tyson Fury and Dillion Whyte. Whyte claimed that Fury pushed him down which is against the rules and as a result, Whyte twisted his leg and ligaments. The creative usage of the word 'pushover' makes for a good pun and chance to poke fun at the boxers. It can be understood in two ways. On one hand, Whyte lost due to a push downwards and twisted his leg which made him easily overcome. The main target pun is to be understood as Dillion Whyte being a pushover and easily beaten by his opponent. On the other hand, Fury using illegal moves in boxing to acquire victory also makes him the agent of the verb pushing, which in turn makes him a "pushover".

Another example of linguistic motivation can be seen in the subheadline *May Day*[36]. Its article is about the bout between Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Deji Olatunji. Mayweather had an enormous 50-0 streak of wins and the editors chose to make a play on words by combining his name with the term May Day or mayday. The first one denotes the first day of May and in some countries, it is celebrated as labour day. The second one denotes a distress signal which is used in radio-telephone communications. To understand the pun, one must put into perspective Mayweather's undefeated record and the contestant Olatunji. Olatunji's chances of winning being slim, the editors chose to make the subheadline sound like a distress signal. In other words, he is likely to lose the bout. However, when disambiguated by the main headline, the intended meaning of the subheadline clearly hints at the semi-literal gist. The day when MAYweather's fight is to take place.

The domain of boxing exhibits the tendency to involve the use of names as bases for punning and this was confirmed to be the key finding. Also, the key mechanisms to achieve wordplay are combinations between idioms, known collocations used in everyday life and usage of personal names to give the subheadlines more of a boxing trait or quality, exemplified above by subheadlines in footnotes (31), (33), and (33).

[35] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20491320/tyson-fury-twisted-two-ligaments-foot-rules-dillian-whyte
[36] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20401285/floyd-mayweather-vs-deji-ring-walk-time

4.4 *Wordplay in the domain of Word Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)*

As stated earlier, WWE and boxing do not have many aspects in common, except that both are sports centred around the notion of fighting. WWE is regarded as sports entertainment rather than being professional wrestling. In the analysed corpus, both sports have the same number of instances of wordplay. Similarly, WWE will not feature the characteristic of newsworthiness of conflict unless there is a real fight or dispute between the prominent persons.

The first subheadline analysed is titled *Blast From the Basz*[37] and it describes WWE wrestlers Ronda Rousey and Shayna Baszler's amity. The subheadline is targeting the readers knowledge of the phrase "a blast from the past" which denotes an event or occurrence in life that reminds oneself of an earlier time in life. WWE fans surely connect this phrase to Basz and Rousey's recent teaming up on WWE SmackDown where the two of them showed good cooperation and friendship. This subheadline focused on partial homophony and intertextuality to achieve wordplay and it is based on the same strategies as in other sports, namely, puns involving personal names, serving to support the main headline as the key framing device.

The second subheadline is grounded on intertextuality and it is titled *Health Scare*[38]. Its article is about WWE superstar Bray Wyatt's uncle Barry Windham. He was also a professional wrestler, but suffered a serious heart attack. Thankfully, a brave citizen, along with his nephew Wyatt stayed with him and performed CPR until the paramedics came. Windham was saved, but Wyatt claimed his uncle's heart did not beat for 20 minutes. The subheadline tries to connect the term "health care" with the verb "scare" to get some ironical positivity out of an almost tragic situation. With "health care" denoting "efforts made to maintain or restore physical, mental, or emotional well-being especially by trained and licensed professionals" the subheadline tries to warn people that if they do not take care of their physical and mental wellbeing, a "health scare" might seem inevitable. This article is a good example of the news value of human interest rather than prominence, because it emphasises an act of kindness which lead to saving a life.

The next subheadline is titled *Log on*[39] and it is about the brothers Logan and Jake Paul. The elder sibling being in the WWE stated his brother will inevitably switch to the same sport. Jake, just like

[37] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20730357/ronda-rousey-wants-huge-new-change-on-her-wwe-storyline-and-teases-tag-team-match-up-with-former-ufc-star
[38] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20745842/wwe-news-bray-wyatt-barry-windham
[39] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20187387/jake-paul-wwe-brother-logan

his elder brother started as a YouTuber, got involved in the boxing industry and now maybe joins the WWE. The subheadline makes a play on words in more ways. Firstly, it can be homophony again. Depending on the manner of pronunciation, *Log on* can be interpreted as "Logan" which is the first name of the elder sibling. Secondly, it can be interpreted as "logging on", because the Paul brothers' roots lie in their YouTube career. It can be seen as an intertextual reference where they are "logging into" a new sport. According to the Collins Dictionary, to log on means to start using a computer or program by typing in a password, which in this case, substitutes logging into the YouTube account with starting a WWE career.

The next subheadline is titled *Hips Don't Align*[40] and it is about WWE competitor Kevin Nash. This subheadline expects the reader to possess knowledge about the song Hips Don't Lie (Shakira) and its background. In an interview, the song's author, Shakira stated: "Listen, hips don't lie. If they're not moving, this isn't working. If they shake, we're in good shape." (Songfacts[41]). The singer explained that her hips literally decide whether a song is good enough to be released or whether it needs some refinement. In that sense, WWE star Kevin Nash also felt that he was not in a good enough shape to compete in WWE while still being affected by the lack of movement and exercise after his knee and hip alignment. Two pictures are shown in the article and they show Nash's body before and after the alignment. The editors thought it would make for a good pun to combine the intertextual reference of the song with the literal meaning of the article. The pun is achieved by similar sounding pronunciation of the two.

The next pun is titled *Eur Next*[42] which provides context on WWE's expansion NXT Europe. Retired professional wrestler Paul Michael Levesque also known as Triple H who also serves as the business executive felt that expanding the WWE beyond the UK is a good move for the entertainment. The decision was influenced by the success of live events and talent identification efforts through Europe. What makes this subheadline a pun, is the homophonic usage of the words: "Europe", "your", "NXT" and "next". All of the previous words are similar sounding with their counterpart. The first syllable of the noun "Europe" is "Eu" and by adding the /r/ sound becomes identical with the sound of the possessive determiner "your". On the other hand, the pun would be more effective if it were pronounced as an acronym. Instead, the reader has to draw on the knowledge of WWE television and

[40] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/wwe/10703651/wwe-kevin-nash-body-transformation-hips
[41] The lyrics are available at: www.songfacts.com/lyrics/shakira/hips-dont-lie
[42] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/wwe/19556940/wwe-mass-cuts-stars-axed-triple-h-nxt-europe

know that WWE NXT is a well-received and more upgrade to the old WWE ECW television program. In that matter lies the play on words that WWE NXT represents the "next" generation. The subheadline can be understood in two ways. The first one being "you're next" and the second one being "Europe next" and either way the meaning stays the same. It refers to the WWE expanding its territory beyond the UK.

Another subheadline focusing on pronunciation is titled *Cen-Sational*[43]. The article is about professional wrestler John Cena helping his fellow wrestlers who were reprimanded in a six-man tag match and as a result they had to face a fine between 10 and 20 thousand dollars. Thankfully, Cena paid their fine without them knowing which was "sensational" for them and therefore *Cen-Sational*. The subheadline uses homophony to achieve wordplay. In this case, *Cen-Sational* is pronounced as "sɛnˈseɪʃənl̩", although the first part of the word is taken from Cena which is pronounced "ˈsina".

The following subheadline also focuses on a professional wrestler's name. The subheadline *Liv-ing It Up*[44] refers to professional wrestler Liv Morgan. The article is about her physical makeover which differs from her usual blonde hair and outfit. In the article, two pictures are shown side by side which compare her appearance before and after. The subheadline succeeds in making a pun by relying on intertextuality and homophony. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term "living it up" means to have an exciting and enjoyable time with something or to spend a lot of money to enjoy oneself. The homophonic words are "live" and "Liv" with the first one being a verb and the latter one a personal name.

Just like the previous subheadline, the next one focuses on a personal name and intertextuality. *Bray-ce Yourselves*[45] refers to the retired WWE star Bray Wyatt, who is also known as The Fiend. The article is about the possibility of his return to the WWE, since he had a great career until he left the company in 2021. The subheadline touches upon the idiom "brace yourself" which is said when warning someone of a danger. The pun's effectiveness is achieved when the reader knows Wyatt's successful wrestling history and the idiom "brace yourself". Since Wyatt is retired, other competitors

[43] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/13646208/john-cena-fines-wwe-aiden-english-wrestlemania
[44] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19539855/wwe-hair-liv-morgan-fans
[45] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19526700/the-fiend-bray-wyatt-wwe-vince-mcmahon

can keep wrestling knowing that The Fiend is out of the sport, however, if he decided to return, it would be one more difficult match for them to overcome.

The next subheadline also focuses on a personal name and intertextuality. It is titled *Mick Drop*[46] and focuses WWE star Mickie James. The article states the wrestler hinted at her retirement from WWE over social media. According to the article, she is keen on pursuing a country music career despite having a successful stint in WWE. What makes this subheadline a pun, is the use of James' first name in combination with the informal phrase "mic drop" which means to literally drop a microphone after giving a speech or performance to make it look impressive. In this case, the pronunciation of her name is altered to fit the homophony of the phrase and name.

The next item focuses only on homophony with its title being *Ken You Believe It*[47]. Its article is about WWE and UFC star Ken Shamrock's childhood. The article states Shamrock grew up in poverty and had to fight to survive. Shamrock revealed he was stabbed after robbing a store when he was aged ten. The subheadline tries to intrigue readers by combining his first name with the phrase "can you believe it?". "Can" and "Ken" are homophones in this instance and in that way, the title manages to capture the reader to read more about something unbelievable and related to Shamrock.

Just like the previous one, this subheadline focuses on homophony to achieve wordplay, but it can be interpreted differently by knowing the intertextual background of the idiom "fill your boots". *Phil Your Boots*[48] is about the wrestling pay-per-view (PPV) and livestreaming event that will be hosted at Lincoln Field in Philadelphia in 2024. The arena can hold up to 65 thousand spectators which is why the editors chose to make a play on words hinting at the enormous capacity of the arena. "Phil" and "fill" are homophones and are pronounced the same, but "Phil" refers to the location at which the event is held, Philadelphia. The meaning of the subheadline refers to the arena quickly filling up or selling tickets as it is a big and famous event. On an intertextual level, knowing the informal idiom "fill your boots" might refer to the accusations of misconduct of WWE's chairman Vince McMahon which the article talks about. Therefore, by enjoying or taking as much as one wants, the WWE

[46] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19491003/wwe-news-mickie-james-retirement-impact-wrestling
[47] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/10436984/wwe-ufc-ken-shamrock-stabbed-aged-ten
[48] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19336747/wrestlemania-40-philadelphia-wwe-vince-mcmahon

chairman had to step down to avoid further escalating the situation. This example makes a play on words by taking the name of the venue as already seen in example (19).

The subheadline *Ric Rolled*[49] uses intertextuality only to achieve wordplay. Its article is about previously mentioned WWE star Ric Flair who announced his final match of his career. The article is followed by a video[50] in which Flair engages in a brawl which seems to be filmed in a parking lot. The video is meant to be a set-up to maximise the impact of his last fight ever. In this subheadline, wordplay is achieved by the reader associating Ric Flair's video with the well-known rickroll. Rickrolling refers to "the playfully pointless practice of performing or playing the song *Never Gonna Give You Up* by the British singer Rick Astley to a person or group of people either at a public event or online by means of a disguised hyperlink" (Rickrolling). The subheadline attempts to warn, or foreshadow to the reader of what is hidden in the article, therefore making it a play on words.

The next item analysed is titled *Ric of Time*[51]. The article also concerns WWE star Bloody Ric Flair and his last winning match in his career. The professional wrestler, aged 73, retired from the sport in a tearful farewell to the fans. This pun also focuses on homophony and intertextuality. There are more ways to interpret this subheadline. The first interpretation would be the association with the wrestler's successful and long-lasting career. "Ric of Time" would literally refer to his time spent in the sport, which almost amounts to five decades of professional wrestling. The second interpretation refers to the phrase "in the nick of time" and it accesses the reader's intertextual knowledge about the idiom and ability to connect it to Rick Flair. The idiom's meaning is to do something at the last possible moment and it could refer to his last winning game of his career or it could be an ironic statement to emphasise his age and timing of retirement. This can be elicited from the headline which complements the subheadline.

The next subheadline is based on homophony and intertextuality again. *Cen Too Much*[52] is about WWE star John Cena. According to the article, Cena stated he liked to wear Y-fronts and that they are comfortable. The competitors in the industry always have some kind of a costume and wear sports underwear so it is not out of the ordinary. The subheadline is based on the phrase "seen too

[49] www.the-sun.com/sport/5811293/ric-flair-brawl-final-match-opponents-partner
[50] This example of wordplay is an exception to use a video in its punny subheading based on the corpus. It is a possibility (i.e. an affordance) of the online edition.
[51] www.the-sun.com/sport/wwe/5901692/ric-flair-last-match-wrestling-fight-result
[52] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/wwe/11476525/wwe-legend-john-cena-wwe-hot-pink-hammock

much" which refers to someone who cannot deal with more of something or it can refer to something embarrassing. The verb "seen" is in homophony with "Cena" when written without the vowel -a. The play on words refers to the thought of Cena wearing a Y-front. This subheadline is a nice example of oddity and prominence.

The last entry in this sport section is the subheadline *Tear We Go*[53]. It is also about previously mentioned WWE star John Cena. The article describes Cena's career change to being an actor and his comeback to celebrate his 20 year-long wrestling career. "Tear We Go" is based on the phrase "here we go" which denotes something is beginning to happen. Also, it is an attempt to inform the reader on what the article is about. If the reader possesses intertextual knowledge about the phrase and Cena's 20th anniversary, the play on words is then achieved.

Similarly to the previous sections, the domain of WWE consists mostly of subheadlines concerning key figures: participating in brawls that are previously arranged, their lifestyle choices or events from their life and playful banter which WWE and boxing are known for, making it the perfect tabloid content and thus an natural playground for puns in the functions and forms we have found so far. The most popular punning mechanism seems to be the alteration and usage of phonic and graphic lexical items, which happen to be personal names, again. For example, puns underlying articles in footnotes (43), (44), (45), (46) and (47).

4.3 *Wordplay in the domain of Cricket*

In the time span of covering the subheadlines concerning cricket, The Twenty20 World Cup was in progress. It is important to note that the majority of featured articles in the domain of Cricket were about England and its players. Out of the analysed items, the main topics were England's national team's results in the World Cup and individual events concerning players. This section will provide examples of the most dominant mechanisms of punning.

The first item from this list is named *Dream of the Crop*[54] and it refers to the World Cup final between England and Pakistan. It uses intertextuality to convey the message of its article. English captain Jos Buttler stated that he is hoping to fulfil his 30-year-old dream of lifting the trophy with his team. Now, this subheadline relies on the idiom 'the cream of the crop' which symbolises the best of

[53] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19020893/wwe-john-cena-fights-back-tears
[54] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20409814/england-jos-buttler-pakistan-twenty20-world-cup-final

the best with regards to people or an object (The cream of the crop). The editors found a way to bind the idiom together with Buttler's dream to make the subheadline sound intriguing. *Dream of the Crop* could also refer to the most ambitious dream of all dreams and the Cup itself.

The second item from the list is titled *Ben out of Ten*[55]. It concerns English captain Ben Stokes and the South African team. Stokes managed to secure victory for his team by giving them an enormous lead. The subheadline tries to make a play on words by taking Stokes' first name and combines it with the phrase 'ten out of ten' to make the subheadline interesting. Then, by further reading the article, the subheadline can be understood as Stokes playing very well to ensure his team wins.

The third item is titled *Mor Woe*[56]. It describes The Sun columnist Piers Morgan's posts on Twitter regarding the match between England and South Africa's first test. He stated he flew over 5500 miles to watch England in hopes of winning. However, in the following post, after England's defeat, he stated he was not going to attend the next day. The subheadline uses partial homonymy; homophony to describe Morgan's feelings towards the match. The first three letters of the two words: Morgan and more make the play on words possible. This wordplay instance is again combined with the propensity of tabloids to use nicknames, which they sometimes make up at will as it is shown in previous examples, to perform wordplay, exhibiting their irreverent attitude towards the protagonists involved. The picture connected to the subheadline and text also serves as help to direct the reader towards whom the subheadline is about.

The following subheadline is an example of homophony and intertextual reference to another song called *Johnny B. Goode* (Chuck Berry). The subheadline is titled *Go Jonny Go*[57] and it is about another match between England and South Africa where England's Jonny Bairstow was the key player to lead his team to victory. To give the readers an insight as to how the game went, the subheadline cites the chorus lyrics of a famous song by Chuck Berry. Those who know the song and are able to recall the words immediately connect it with Bairstow's first name.

[55] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19637580/england-south-africa-second-test-ben-stokes
[56] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19559948/piers-morgan-england-cricket-south-africa
[57]www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19341007/england-south-africa-t20-bristol-jonny-bairstow-moeen-ali

Another example of partial homophony and intertextuality can be seen in *In a Bit of a Stu*[58], which is a reference to the informal idiom "to be in a stew" which is used when referring to worrying about something. In order to understand the wordplay in this subheadline, one should be familiar with England's cricket player Stuart Broad. The article talks about his over which cost him a world record. Broad conceded a record of 35 runs of one over against India's number 10 batter. The subheadline tries to make a play on words by switching the word 'stew' with 'Stu' in the phrase, therefore making it sound like Stuart is in a difficult situation.

The following subheadline tries to make a play on words by partial homophony. It is titled *No Mor*[59] and it describes one of England's most significant players, Eoin Morgan. As captain, he lifted the World Cup with his team at Lord's. Later, he confirmed his retirement from the sport and gave the captain's role to his fellow player Jos Buttler. The subheadline makes a play on words by switching 'more' with 'Mor' which is an abbreviated form of the name Morgan. Readers who see this kind of subheadline can immediately expect a situation with Morgan, whether he is injured or will be quitting the team. As is the case, the headline confirms Morgan's retirement. The sub- and headline complement each other.

Next comes the wordplay example *Howzat Happened*[60] which is based on intertextuality and homophony that can be interpreted in two ways. It could be a reaction to a situation, therefore making the reader or spectator say 'how did that happen' or in this case, 'how's that happened'. The whole phrase could act as a homophone for the word 'howzat'. On the other hand, if the reader is familiar with cricket rules and terminology, they immediately understand the context of the article. Howzat is the act of a player or more players to ask for an appeal to further examine whether a batter is out or not. The article describes and discusses whether or not there was a foul play in the match between England and New Zealand. The wordplay in this subheadline lies in the combination between intertextuality and homophony, which is accompanied by the play leaving the spectators and readers in confusion.

The following subheadline uses only intertextuality to achieve wordplay. It is labelled *No Average Joe*[61] which is taken from the similar sounding idiom "average Joe" to describe the English

[58] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/cricket/19070406/stuart-broad-hit-for-most-expensive-test-over-ever
[59]www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19013782/england-eoin-morgan-legendary-captain-retires-cricket
[60] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/18983297/england-freak-wicket-new-zealand-leach
[61] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/18783612/england-new-zealand-joe-root-ben-stokes-test

cricket player's amazing performance against New Zealand. In this case, wordplay is achieved through adding the negation 'no' and 'Joe' being Root's name. With "average Joe" meaning a random, ordinary person, the editors thought of a way to combine the idiom with the player's name to give insight on his performance in the last match.

The subheadline *Waite for It*[62] utilises homophony again and, just like in the previous one, there is usage of personal name, but there is a verb instead of a phrase. The subheadline concerns West Indies' Kraigg Brathwaite. The player was the key figure in securing West Indies win over England. Brathwaite batted for 489 balls as England's bowlers toiled in the Second Test. When pronouncing it, the subheadline transforms into the phrase 'wait for it' which could be interpreted in many ways. One of them is the longevity of the game and Brathwaite sealing the win, another one could be Brathwaite doing his utmost to win, with 'it' referring to win or lose. This could be disambiguated in the main headline, and, most certainly, in the text, which makes the use of the pronoun in the subline a potent expectation- builder itself.

Another subheadline that used homophony to combine a personal name with a modal verb is *Wood You Believe It*[63]. It was edited so that the subheadline resembles the phrase 'Would you believe it?' which emphasises surprise about something. The article is, namely. about England's struggle to win matches with the absence of few players due to injury, especially the one of Mark Wood. After injuring his elbow, he would have to be benched against West Indies.

The following subheadline expects the readers to activate their intertextual knowledge about hands-free or handsfree equipment. *Hands Free*[64] is an article about the poor English team's performance against Australia. The subheadline is an ironic tease on Joss Buttler's behalf. After failing many times and accidentally dropping the ball, allowing the opposing team to score points, Buttler ended up demoralising his team as they left the field. "Handsfree" or "hands-free" refers to a piece of equipment that can be used without the need to hold it in one's hand**.** Hence, the irony of Buttler failing to use his hands to the best of his abilities was used to make a pun. As is often the case, the

[62] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/18005115/kraigg-brathwaite-england-west-indies
[63]www.thesun.co.uk/sport/17913574/england-wood-west-indies-lifeless
[64] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/cricket/17057177/england-australia-ashes-second-test-day-one

efficiency of the pun stems on its position in the space between literal and figurative (in this case metonymic) reading.

The next entry is labelled *Tym to Shine*[65] and the article describes Tymal Solomon Mills, an English international cricketeer being drafted into the team. His last appearance for England was in 2017 and now he has been given a chance to prove himself again. The subheadline uses Mills's first name as a homophone to achieve wordplay. The opposing words are "Tym" and "time" where the personal name is expected to be pronounced as "time" instead of the similar sounding name "Tim". Of course, the pronunciation depends on the reader's background and culture. The targeted phrase is "time to shine" which is used when trying to prove one's ability or set of skills.

The next subheadline in the category of Cricket is again *No Average Joe*[66] which is about the former captain of the English Test team Joe Root. To summarise the article, Root was the key to best India with his abilities and has managed to rescue his team and on top of that, he became the second-youngest in history to reach 9,000 Test runs. The subheadline expects the readers to know the informal phrase "average Joe" which is used when describing a typical, ordinary person. However, Root is a professional cricketeer and the subheadline is focusing more towards implying that Joe Root has not played as he usually does in the last match. Instead, he dominated the opposition which resulted in this subheadline. Again, wordplay has been achieved by using homonymy with a bit of intertextuality.

The following subheadline is labelled *Car-Lost Brathwaite*[67]. Wordplay is achieved by the usage of partial homophony between the phrase 'car lost' and personal name 'Carlos'. The article is about the West Indies' cricketeer Carlos Brathwaite, whose car was stolen amidst his English club debut. Later that day, he posted a tweet which was about the recent events affecting him. He said:" What a day yesterday...First time bowling in a game after injury for six months...First ball duck from a long hop...Car stolen...". When pronouncing the subheadline, one should do it in a quick manner to understand how even partial homophony can make for a pun. This exemplifies the use of prominence and oddity, because the news is odd enough to be featured in a news outlet such as *The Sun*.

[65] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/16096331/tymal-mills-shock-call-ben-stokes
[66] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/cricket/15871124/joe-root-bairstow-england-second-test-india
[67] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/18289236/carlos-brathwaite-car-stolen-golden-duck-debut

The next subheadline is not using personal names to achieve wordplay, but instead only uses a phrase. *Bat's the Way*[68] is an article about Enid Bakewell who is currently aged 82. She played from 1968 until 1979 and she managed to win the World Cup with her English team in 1973 against Australia. She took a picture with full gear now and made a comparison to her younger self. Firstly, this subheadline makes a play on the words: "bat" and "that is" or "that's" because when said in a quick manner, it sounds alike. Secondly, the whole article is based on the phrase "that's the way" which is used when encouraging somebody or when they are doing well. Naturally, the subheadline will praise her achievement in cricket and her healthy life. This particular headline is the only one to feature prominence and non-timeliness. It stands out since the article reviews something that happened quite a while ago, as opposed to other subheadlines in this and other domains.

The domain of cricket, as mentioned before, consisted mostly of subheadlines concerning the English team and its players. Therefore, the instances of wordplay referred to the personal names of players the most. The subheadlines refer to a player who was a key player or made a key play to secure the win. The second most used type of wordplay is intertextuality with again, the use of idioms and common collocations such as examples: (54), (57), (58) and (61). They do not differentiate significantly from the ones used in the domain of football. This would leave room for the discussion of some general journalistic and tabloid-specific strategies.

4.5 *Wordplay in the domain of Formula 1 (F1)*

The examples of puns in this sport domain are, again, not different than the previous ones. The main punning mechanism at work seems to be the combination of personal names with common collocations, which can be seen from the examples in this subsection. In this domain as well, the most featured newsworthiness criteria are prominence with the exception of example (75) where the criterion of conflict can be observed too.

The first subheadline in the sport of Formula 1 is titled *Fears for Shuey*[69]. Its article is about the bond between seven-time world champion, Michael Schumacher and his son Mick Schumacher, who is also a racing driver. According to the article, Mick changed his profile picture on the anniversary his father suffered serious injuries due to an accident while skiing in the French Alps in 2013. From the picture, it can be concluded that the two of them shared a deep and close bond. The

[68] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20902432/world-cup-lady-cricketer-awards-82-years
[69] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20839900/michael-schumacher-update-son-mick-tribute

subheadline achieves wordplay by summarising how every fan of Michael Schumacher feels about the tragic accident and combining it with the meaning and background of the surname Schumacher. In the German language, "Schuh" means "shoe" and "machen" means "to do" or "to produce". The surname literally translates into "shoemaker" in English. Now, the play on words comes from the fact that the nickname for "Schumacher" is "Schuey" which is a homophone for the word "shoey". The term "shoey" refers to a ritual or celebratory drink where the participant must drink from a shoe. The common meaning of the word "shoe" between those words connects them and, ultimately creates a pun.

The second subheadline focuses on homophony again. *Geor Dropping*[70] is the subheadline which focuses on the racing driver George Russel and his thoughts on a fast F1 car. The wordplay in this subheadline should be understood as sarcastic. For the past few seasons of F1, Mercedes has been dominating its opposition and when not in lead, they were amongst the quicker teams. Therefore, the fact that Mercedes will build a quick car is not "jaw-dropping". The homophony between the adjective "jaw-dropping and the subheadline "Geor Dropping" works well, because of the linguistic phenomenon of rhoticity, although the second word does not start with a vowel, so there is no need to emphasise the /r/ sound. However, for the sake of homophony, "Geor" and "jaw" are turned into homophones.

The third subheadline in the sport of F1 is *Bin and Gone*[71]. Its article is about Ferrari team's principal Mattia Binotto. The team principal has been replaced with Sauber's former team principal Fred Vasseur after an unsuccessful season despite being one of the fastest teams. This subheadline tries to achieve wordplay by partial homophony and intertextuality. "Bin & Gone Recycling" is an English waste management and rubbish clearance company which provides prompt and friendly service (Rubbish Clearance). By combining part of Binotto's surname with the recycling company, the reader can infer that this subheadline is meant to achieve a more ironic effect, i.e., overtone.

The next subheadline is a direct follow-up on the previous one. *Binned-Otto*[72] achieves wordplay by again, taking the team principal's name and combining it with the informal phrase "to bin something".

[70] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20777719/george-russell-mercedes-f1-fast-car-2023
[71] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20739977/ferrari-mattia-binotto-fred-vasseur-sauber-andreas-seidl-mclaren
[72] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20586275/ferrari-chief-mattia-binotto-axed-formula-one-title

This subheadline focuses more on homophony than intertextuality, because when pronouncing "Binned-Otto", depending on the pronunciation, it sounds like his surname "Binotto".

The following subheadline focuses on homophony and intertextuality again. *All Fer One*[73] is about the Spanish driver and double world champion Fernando Alonso. Just like in the previous subheadlines, by taking a part of Alonso's name, it becomes a homophone to the preposition "for". Therefore, when the reader takes a look at the subheadline, there is a good chance they will immediately associate it with Fernando Alonso. However, the subheadline draws upon a phrase too. "All for one and one for all" is a phrase denoting all of the members of a group support the individual members and vice versa. In the article, it is said that Alonso could be a teammate to his rival outside of F1 in another racing sport. The phrase could be understood as a playful joke to the rivals.

Another example of intertextuality can be seen in the subheadline *Mexican Stand-off*[74]. The article is about the race during the Mexican Grand Prix in 2022. After finishing second in the race, during the interview, British race driver Lewis Hamilton was booed at. Fortunately, having achieved podium on his home race, Sergio Perez turned to the crowd and wagged his finger as a sign to stop. Hamilton appreciated the gesture and even expressed his love for the country and people there. This time, wordplay is achieved by combining the unfortunate situation with the informal idiom "Mexican standoff" which denotes "a situation in which people on opposite sides threaten each other but neither tries to come to an agreement" (Mexican standoff). Since the Grand Prix was held in Mexico and there was a small incident between Hamilton and the fans, the editors chose to make a play on words with that particular phrase. This example features prominence and conflict as criteria for newsworthiness.

The next subheadline also focuses on the race driver Lewis Hamilton during the Mexican GP. The background of this subheadline lies in former Formula 1 driver Martin Brundle's statement. According to Brundle, Hamilton did not show his teammate courtesy on the opening lap. His teammate George Russel gave him plenty of room during turn 1 and 2, whereas Hamilton pushed him out wide into turn 3. The editors chose to utilize wordplay in this subheadline based on partial homophony. *Sore Lew-Ser*[75] is about Hamilton's actions during the Mexican GP which make him out to be bad at

[73] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20361888/alonso-verstappen-teammates-f1
[74] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20278011/lewis-hamilton-boos-perez-mexican-grand-prix
[75] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20295232/lewis-hamilton-f1-mercedes-george-russell-martin-brundle

losing. Despite his teammate's efforts to be fair and not to push him off, Hamilton did not return the favour.

The last entry focusing on the Mexican GP is *Max-Ico Magic*[76]. The subheadline celebrates Max Verstappen's pole position during qualifying. The subheadline also tries to achieve wordplay by partial homophony between words "Max" and "Mexico". By taking Verstappen's first name and adding the suffix -ico, it becomes a homophone to "Mexico". "Max-Ico Magic" refers to Verstappen's fast driving which secured him the starting position on the grid for the race.

The next subheadline is titled *Lewsing It*[77]. Its article is about the rivalry between the teams Mercedes and Red Bull Racing. The latter team have outperformed their rivals by a wide margin. The subheadline ironically refers to the seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, who will have to try to fight for his eight title next year, because Red Bull have dominated the 2022 season. *Lewsing It* is a homophone to the phrase "losing it" which refers to someone being unable to control their emotions or temper. Wordplay is achieved by taking the nickname Lew, short for Lewis, and combining it with the suffix -sing. Just by reading the subheadline, the reader should immediately associate it with Hamilton. If the reader did not associate Hamilton being angry from the subheadline, the main headline, which works closely together confirms the background of the story.

The following subheadline is using homophony again to achieve wordplay. The subheadline *Pitt Stop*[78] refers to Lewis Hamilton's launch of film and TV company. He already has actor Brad Pitt lined up for the lead role. The subheadline manages to make a play on words by taking the act of stopping at the designed pit to change tyres and refuel, which is called a pitstop and combine it with the famous actor's last name "Pitt". The two homophones are "pit" and "Pitt". Although unlikely, readers should be able to associate Brad Pitt when reading the subheadline and distinguish the double consonant "t" which gives a hint as to what the article is about.

The next example is based on homography- based polysemy. The subheadline *Right Turn Ahead*[79] refers to a light-hearted moment of former F1 driver Nicholas Latifi during Free Practice 2 in Japan. Amidst all the fog and rain, the driver took the last corner in the wrong direction which led

[76] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20265952/mexican-gp-verstappen-pole-russell-hamilton-f1
[77] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20237373/hamilton-f1-mercedes-red-bull
[78] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20220654/hamilton-launches-tv-film-company-brad-pitt
[79] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20041285/japanese-gp-nicholas-latifi-wrong-turn-williams

him to a barrier. The play on words is achieved by different meanings. The final corner of the Japanese Grand Prix starts with a right turn, which is followed by a left turn. Latifi took the wrong turn by making two right turns at the end. The subheadline *Right Turn Ahead* puts a focus on the word "right" which can be an: adjective, noun, adverb or a verb. If understood as an adjective, his last corner was not right.

The subheadline *Bling It on*[80] achieves wordplay with homophony. It refers to the new F1 change of regulations which ban the wearing of jewellery while driving the F1 cars during a Grand Prix. "Bling It on" is supposed to sound the same as the phrase "bring it on", which refers to showing readiness for something. Also, "bling" is an informal term for flashy jewellery (Bling) which Lewis Hamilton is known for according to the article of "Bling It on". He had a conflict with the FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile) for not taking his nose piercing off during the Singapore GP. By reading the subheadline, the reader can infer that there is a combination of "bling" and "bring it on", so the article will be about jewellery in F1.

The penultimate subheadline in this category is *Lewk Away Now*[81], which is based on homophony again. Its article is about Lewis Hamilton not recognising the former Manchester City football player Micah Richards. While he was giving an interview for the Red Bull team, Richards turned to Hamilton, who was passing by thinking he was part of their team and not recognising him. Wordplay is achieved by taking Hamilton's nickname "Lew" and adding the consonant -k which makes it a homophone to the verb "look". The subheadline ironically teases Hamilton's looking away from the Red Bull team.

The last subheadline in the category of F1 is titled *Al Be Back*[82]. It refers to the F1 driver Alex Albon, who was rushed to the hospital before the Italian GP due to a respiratory health problem. However, he posted a short video on Twitter thanking the doctors and providing insight on his condition. In this subheadline, wordplay is achieved by intertextuality. In the video, Albon stated he would be returning to the sport immediately after discharge. The editors combined his statement with the famous line from the science fiction movie *The Terminator* where Arnold Schwarzenegger says:

[80] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19977830/lewis-hamilton-nose-stud-infected
[81] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19987934/lewis-hamilton-richards-man-city-red-bull
[82] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19833652/alex-albon-hospital-respiratory-failure-f1-singapore-gp

"I'll be back." . The subheadline can also be viewed as wordplay based on homophony, because "Al" is a homophone to "I'll".

Finally, the subheadline *Get a Grip*[83] uses an idiom to hint at what the article is about whilst literally explaining what the term "grip" in racing refers to. "To get a grip on" refers to someone getting an understanding on a subject. In this case, the editors chose this particular subheadline out of two reasons. Firstly, to explain to newer fans/readers what "grip" means in racing. Secondly, to make the reader aware that the subheadline also refers to themselves. After reading the definition of "grip" in the article, the reader can safely say they now know everything about tyres and their grip to the surface.

Since F1 is also an entertainment sport which takes place in various parts of the world on weekends, the common features the subheadlines involve are writing about a set of events happening prior to or after a Grand Prix. Additionally, some subheadlines involve F1 drivers and their opinions or events in their life, as is expected given the thematic orientation and the traditional focus of tabloids on soft news. The puns are similarly done as in other sport domains with the exception of puns (74) and (75), which are centred around the metalanguage of F1, supposed to be familiar to the fans of the sport.

4.6 *Wordplay in the domain of Tennis*

Again, the findings are quite similar to the previous ones with the focus being on personal names. The puns try to modify the first name or surname with humorous intentions to fit a particular idiom or collocation. This domain features a majority of subheadlines that are based on the news value of prominence. Only one exception was found in example (99) which featured only oddity as the news value denominator.

The first subheadline in the domain of Tennis is titled *Mor the Merrier*[84]. Its article is about Taylor Fritz and Morgan Riddle as they give dating tips before the Australian Open. According to the article, Riddle's 111 thousand followers are increasing due to the popularity of the influencer. The subheadline is based on the phrase "the more the merrier" which is used when more people are invited

[83] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19829528/f1-tyres-cost-colours-slick
[84] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20922679/taylor-fritz-girlfriend-morgan-riddle-stuns-australian-open

and welcome to do something. The subheadline tries to combine Riddle's dating tips with her followers to say that more people that become her followers are more than welcome to try them out.

The second subheadline is titled *Beck Home*[85]. In this subheadline, wordplay is achieved by partial homophony by using and modifying the person's name. Boris Becker is a retired tennis player who once was best in the world. The article talks about, Becker's deportation to his homeland due to insolvency. Also, the article depicts his return home to his mother as the best Christmas gift and ironically arranged the subheadline to sound similar to the phrase "back home". By taking Becker's surname without "-er", "Beck" becomes a homophone to "back".

The next subheadline is titled *Roger That*[86] and it concerns the Swiss tennis player Roger Federer. The article is about a harmless incident between a security guard and Federer. Federer has been denied access to the Wimbledon tournament because security did not recognise him. The subheadline tries to make light of the situation by combining Federer's first name with a phrase used in the days of early radio communication. "Roger that" represents confirmation of a received and understood message. The subheadline can be viewed in two ways. On one hand, the reader can understand the phrase quite literally which combines the tennis player's first name and, in this case, the determiner "that". The subheadline would indicate Roger Federer is there. On the other hand, "roger that" could represent the security guard's reply to his superiors after their rebuke in order to express affirmation of recognising him. This subheadline uses both homophony and intertextuality to achieve wordplay.

Incidentally, another subheadline is also titled *Roger That*[87] but referring to a different article. In the last match of his career, he wanted to play pairs with fellow tennis player Rafael Nadal, who agreed. This time, the subheadline should be understood literally, with only one meaning of confirmation. This attests to the polyvalence of wordplay- based subheadlines, and the role of the main headline as a disambiguator, as opposed to the subheadline, which functions primarily as an attention- grabbing device.

The following subheadline, titled *Eu Must Be Joking*[88] concerns Canadian tennis player Eugenie Bouchard. Its article is about her romantic preferences and reason why she would never start a

[85] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20723871/boris-beckers-mum-home-for-christmas
[86] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20704697/roger-federer-blocked-entering-wimbledon-security-guard
[87] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19886190/roger-federer-rafael-nadal-laver-cup
[88] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20470491/eugenie-bouchard-tennis-instagram-2

romantic relationship with a fellow tennis star. The play on words in this subheadline is based on partial homophony. By shortening Bouchard's name to "Eu", it becomes a homophone to the pronoun "you", similar to a previously analysed example from the domain of WWE. The subheadline tries to intrigue the reader as to what Eugenie said or did that the subheadline is titled to resemble the phrase "you must be joking" which is used to express disbelief and shock.

Another subheadline concerning Boris Becker is *Keep Your Becker up*[89]. The subheadline is based on homophony and intertextuality. The play on words lies in the combination of the informal phrase "keep one's pecker up" which denotes staying happy and Becker's surname. Depending on the manner of pronunciation, "Becker" and "pecker" are homophones in this case. The article stated that he has spent his time in jail by lecturing and guiding other prisoners.

The next subheadline is titled *No Djok*[90], which is about the Serbian tennis star Novak Djokovic. The fans were baffled while the professional tennis player consumed a mysterious drink which was made and given to him from the stands. The subheadline tries to make a play on words by combining the bizarre occurrence with his surname. Again, partial homophony is achieved by omitting the last part -ovic of his surname. "Djok" becomes a homophone to the noun or verb "joke". The subheadline can be viewed as from angles with different meanings. One of them would be "no joke", which indicates that he really drank an unknown drink or substance. Another interpretation is that the negation "no" is an abbreviation for the name Novak. The subheadline would be the equivalent of "Novak Djokovic". Additionally, the subheadline could carry the meaning "no Djokovic", which implies prohibition of taking the unknown drink.

The subheadline *Fed up*[91] refers to Roger Federer again. Its article talks about the only person who managed to win against Federer eight times in a row. Former tennis player Danny Schnyder was Federer's first rival and friend who he would spend his childhood days with. "Fed up" is a harmless tease with no ill intent to Federer as he consecutively lost against Schnyder. By using homophony between the phrase 'to be fed up' and Fed (short for Federer), the subheadline implies Federer was

[89] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20401408/boris-becker-teaching-lessons-stoicism-prison
[90] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20352598/novak-djokovic-tennis-mystery-drink
[91] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/20276108/former-swiss-pro-free-beers-roger-federer-eight-times

fed up with his loses then and was ready to start climbing to become one of the best tennis players in the world.

The subheadline *Roger and out*[92] is similar to the previously mentioned "Roger That". By referring to Roger Federer and the phrase "over and out", the subheadline marks his last professional match. The phrase is used in radiocommunications when ending a conversation. In this case, the conversation is a metaphor to Federer's long and successful career.

The next entry is titled *Raf Ride*[93]. Its article is about the professional tennis play Rafael Nadal. In the tournament US Open, the Spaniard suffered a loss which was unusual for the fans. He struggled with injuries during the season which also had an influence of his performance. The subheadline uses homophony to achieve wordplay. The abbreviation Raf is a homophone to the adjective "rough". "Raf Ride" would also be a homophone for the informal idiom "rough ride" which refers to a difficult time during something. The reader should be able to activate their intertextual knowledge and connect the meaning of the idiom with Nadal.

Another example of intertextuality can be found in *Slice Into Your DMS*[94]. The subheadline refers to the three rivals and friends Nadal, Federer and Djokovic. In the article, it is said they have a WhatsApp group chat in which they chat in. The subheadline draws from the online slang "to slide into someone's DMs" with DMs referring to direct messages. The phrase denotes sending someone a direct message in a smooth manner, usually for romantic purposes. Additionally, the subheadline combined the phrase with another that is used in tennis terminology. "A slice" is a technique that is used when trying to return the ball with a particular spin. The three being tennis players, they slice into each other's direct messages.

The next entry is similar to the one seen in the domain of WWE. It is titled *Blast From The Plast*[95], whereas the previous one is titled "Blast From The Basz" (see p. 30). However, this time, the subheadline is used to express the complete opposite meaning. The article is about American tennis player Serena Williams, who is spotted wearing strange plasters during matches. Later, she revealed they help her deal with sinus problems which she confirmed back in 2007. As "a blast from the past"

[92] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19905007/roger-federer-retires-rafa-nadal-laver-cup
[93] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19723380/rafael-nadal-us-open-defeat
[94] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/tennis/11112668/nadal-federer-djokovic-whatsapp-group-chat
[95] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/18981279/serena-williams-face-plasters-why

is used to refer to something enjoyable during a certain time in life, the medical issue was only a hindrance for Williams. The nouns "blast" and "plast" could regarded as homophones depending on the pronunciation and the emphasis on /l/, but the subheadline is based on the knowledge of the idiom, combined with the previous extralinguistic knowledge of the actual situation.

The subheadline *Eug Mistake*[96] is a reference to the previously mentioned Eugenie Bouchard. According to the article, she had her Odlum Brown VanOpen pass card made by using a picture of her in a bikini suit. Naturally, she was forced to have it remade with a proper picture of her. Wordplay is achieved by modifying her name to a homophone. "Huge" and "Eug" are pronounced the same, therefore the phrases "huge mistake" and "Eug mistake" are homophones.

The last item analysed is titled *Give 'Em Jel*[97]. It concerns the Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic. The subheadline is structured to immediately activate the reader's intertextual knowledge of the phrase "give someone hell". The phrase means to criticise or yell in an angry manner. According to the article, his wife Jelena Djokovic was furious after he was labelled an anti-vax person, received negative comments and excluded from tournaments. The subheadline, as a whole refers to his wife and the noun "hell" is switched with "Jel", which, depending on the pronunciation, can be viewed as homophones.

The following subheadline uses intertextuality to achieve wordplay. *Flame Set Match*[98] is play on words which uses a term in tennis used when describing a decisive match-winning point. The term is "game, set, match". In this case, the noun "flame" has been switched with the noun "game" and they are not in homophony. However, an incident that was caused by a fan during a match of the Laver Cup, has influenced this subheadline. After running to the centre, the fan set himself on fire and was immediately saved by security. By reading the subheadline, a tennis fan will immediately know that the article is during the end of a match and has something to do with flames. This is a perfect example of oddity, without the inclusion of other newsworthiness criteria.

The main points to take away from the domain of tennis are the usage of metalanguage involving the sport, which can be seen in examples (95) and (99) and the reoccurrence of puns which are created

[96] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19546630/eugenie-bouchard-pass-changed-bikini-tennis
[97] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19160442/novak-djokovic-wife-jelena-twitter-ben-rothenberg-wimbledon-antivax
[98] www.thesun.co.uk/sport/19901499/fan-fire-laver-cup-02-arena-tennis

based on the same template (as used in previous domains) which can be seen in examples (87), (93) and (96).

4. *Conclusion*

The main goal of the paper was to understand which type of wordplay is used the most, which would potentially provide insight into why *The Sun* is so popular and widely read, if linguistic strategies are anything to go by. After analysing all subheadlines, a pattern emerges from all domains. The majority of wordplay can be seen as relying on the strategy of using homonymy as a punning mechanism. The pattern seems not to be sport-related, instead this type of punning enables the journalists/editors to: try and "to amuse people and achieve humorous effects, show one's creative ability in using language and to ridicule or embarrass out-group members (Winter-Froemel et al. 2016: 51). Those particular functions of wordplay mentioned by Winter-Froemel are frequently used as a punning mechanism in *The Sun* which is perhaps indicative of its appeal to the readers. They not only make a subheadline interesting and eye-catching (different colour), but also introduce humour in inappropriate or serious topics or events. Homonymy thus relies mostly on names of venues, personal names and surnames to achieve wordplay, often coupled with the practice of using irreverent language, reflected best in the practice of clipping and otherwise manipulating the (sur)names of sportpersons involved, either turning them into nicknames, relying on their conventional nicknames, or simply achieving an air of informality by applying the practice. It was unexpected to have only those 2 punning mechanisms take the lead in making a play on words. However, the differences between hard copies and digital tabloids enable each format to function and attract readers. Perhaps hard copies put more focus on other categories and not only homonymy and intertextuality, which should be addressed in future studies comparing the two types of media. The overview of strategies, backed up with analyses of specific examples in this paper might help provide a better understanding to those who are keen on improving wordplay in the digital format of tabloids, or simply drawing on the practice by learning from "the masters". It might be improved so that when a person types in a certain word, the results also show subheadlines related to that word, instead of being limited to the exact phrasing of a subheadline or word. There is also room for further diachronic study, tracing and examining in detail the development of puns in the early days of *The Sun* compared to present practices, to analyse their functioning, purposes and effects. Also, other publishers might have a different approach which would

be a great start for comparative studies to test the extent, efficiency and the general functions of the practices found in the present paper. Based on *The Sun's* success, perhaps the most thought-provoking and attention-grabbing subheadlines are the ones that do not need to be remodelled heavily. The readers may prefer subheadlines with a hint of punning, but not in such a measure they will need to think hard or connect vague symbolism, which is an issue in need of further, empirical testing. Another important factor is the use of multimedia, such as pictures and video, as powerful affordances of the online version, with the former present and attested in hard copy editions, and the latter exclusive to the online edition as a result of advances in IT. In this respect, photos were found to accompany every researched (sub)headline, with videos being a less common occurrence. They complement every article in the sense that they serve a number of functions, first and foremost being the one of providing background information for the reader to interpret the goings-on of an article. As for the most robust finding emerging from the corpus, viz. the fact that wordplay was found to overwhelmingly feature in subheadlines which accompany the main headline, the practice was found to be motivated by a specific set of functions. Subheadlines are meant to be short and attention grabbing, which means the readers are engaged and urged to read the whole article. One starting point for this thought is that the hyperlinks provided in the footnotes differ from the sub- and headline. This suggests that a great deal of thought goes into naming and choosing between real and final version of a sub- and headline. Few of those titles in the hyperlinks indicate the part with wordplay, instead the informative part is featured in most hyperlinks. After eliciting the meaning from the subheadline, the reader is additionally positively predisposed to read the article and frame it in a particular way. The connection is usually less-serious or informal, regardless of how serious the actual event/ piece of news was. This paper provided only 90 subheadlines with puns which had overlapping categories, however, to take newer ones and compare them to these or older ones might lead to a better understanding. Winter-Froemel (2018: 41), as well as this paper, confirms this by saying: "As wordplay and verbal humour are inherently dynamic phenomena, the previous reflections and definitions are open to further discussion and refinement."

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