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CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TABLOID HEADLINES  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyses headlines appearing on tabloid front pages (the Croatian *24 sata* and the British *Daily Star*) in order to determine how they capture the attention of their potential readers. A corpus of tabloid front pages was analysed using methods laid out by Critical Discourse Analysis and a focus group session was conducted in order to complement the results of the analysis. It was found out that tabloids offer to their readers a selective view of the world in which the presentation of certain events is overly exaggerated and the events are offered to the readers in a linguistically complex way worthy of further research. Specifically, this is achieved by making certain events sound shocking and unexpected, thus destabilizing the readers' view of the world and capturing their attention. On the other hand, celebrities are presented in an intimate and revealing way in order to bring them closer to the readers. Both of these strategies have been found in both Croatian and English tabloids. The focus group was mostly aware of them.

**KEYWORDS:** headlines, tabloids, front pages, Critical Discourse Analysis, corpus

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## 1 Introduction

One glance at today's typical newspaper stands reveals noticeable headlines that appear on front pages of numerous publications. One type of publication stands out from the rest, mainly broadsheet ones- those are tabloids. These feature colourful front pages filled with numerous images and large, “screaming” headlines which pique one's interest. We can observe on numerous occasions that these publications capture a potential reader's attention almost immediately and that people are drawn to them to large degrees. Some people do not even buy them- the front pages are enough to convince someone of browsing a café's copy of the publication while drinking a morning coffee alone.



Figure 1: A tabloid front page

Figure 1 displays a typical front page of the Croatian tabloid *24 sata*. The reader's attention could be captured by many means- for example, the very large print of the headline or the story in question (a man's daughter is taken away, and the headline states that this wrong will be righted).

The motivation for this paper stems from the desire to gain a better understanding of the processes tabloids use in order to capture the attention of their potential readers via the front pages as a whole and, in particular, the most prominent headlines featured on these front pages. Moreover, we wished to look into the processes of tabloid front page construal in Croatian and English, which is why two tabloids were chosen: *24 sata* and *Daily Star*. Finally,

we wished to check to what extent the Critical Discourse Analysis conclusions correspond to a view of front pages offered by a group of potential readers.

To do all this, in this paper examples of tabloid front pages are analysed using the basic approach developed by Critical Discourse analysis, and compared and contrasted to the “naïve” view offered by a focus group. The analysis shows two basic strategies: certain events are made to sound shocking and unexpected, thus destabilizing the readers' view of the world and capturing their attention. On the other hand, celebrities are presented in an intimate and revealing way to bring them closer to the readers. Croatian and English differ in usage of certain linguistic constructions, and the focus group takes notice of these constructions, as well as of some multimodal elements of the front pages.

The paper is organized as follows: an introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis is presented in the next chapter. Chapter 3 will present an overview of media language as a whole, while Chapter 4 focuses on specific parts of that language, specifically newspaper front pages and headlines, which are the objects of this research.

Chapter 5 gives an overview of tabloid publications and lists some of their most important features.

The composition of the corpus is outlined in Chapter 6, and in Chapter 7, examples from the corpus are analysed, accompanied by the most important findings of the focus group session. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusion.

## ***2 Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)***

Discourse is a broad term central to this paper. It is of crucial importance that we provide a definition for it and other terms closely related to it. Discourse is a property of language. We can consider language as one of the crucial steps in our evolution which have set human kind apart from all other species and allowed us to evolve to the state we are in today. Blommaert (2005, 4) states that “discourse is what transforms our environment into a socially and culturally meaningful one”. Of course, that statement can be interpreted in many different ways, but the definition most scholars would agree upon, and which Matheson (2005) highlights, is that discourse is basically “language in use” by “real people in real social contexts” (178). Discourse is therefore very important because it is deeply rooted into our everyday lives due to the fact that we use language all the time.

We are social creatures and language (and therefore discourse) is what enables us to form social connections with others. Blommaert (2005, 4) also states that “there is no such thing as non-social use of discourse” in addition to discourse also being crucial for culture and history. All of this emphasizes the close bonds between language (discourse), society and culture. If we observe language as a tool, we can also easily imagine that it is a tool used to exert influence over something or someone. Matheson highlights Foucault's role in the development of the term discourse, whose viewpoint many researchers have adopted, and relays that discourse is a way to exert “the power of language to shape society and culture” (2005, 178). This will be elaborated further on in this chapter. Wodak and Meyer (2001, 21) refer to a previous claim made by Wodak and Reisigl in which they offered their view on discourse and in which they “understand discourse as a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts”. Keeping up with the link between discourse and society, it can be claimed that these linguistic acts appear in various aspects of society and social life.

In order to study discourse in a more effective way, a new approach had to be established. More specifically, because of the aforementioned link between discourse and society, the effect they have on each other had to be studied using a varied approach which encompassed many interconnected fields. To achieve that, Critical Discourse Analysis (or CDA) was established. From its inception, it was designated as a framework, rather than a singular method of research. Wodak and Meyer state that “it is generally agreed that CDA must not be understood as a single method but rather as an approach, which constitutes itself at different levels” (2001, 14). According to Blommaert, we can trace the origins of CDA to “a “school” of scholarship led by people such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, Paul Chilton, and others” (2005, 5). Discourse analysis as a framework has since then grown and developed. Its research pertains not only to material produced by various sciences, but, more importantly, to “everyday knowledge that is conveyed via the media, everyday communication, school and family” (Wodak, Meyer 2001, 33) and other aspects of human life. Richardson claims that “language ought to be analysed in relation to the social context in which it is being used” (2007, 45). Put differently, language should not be analysed in isolation because it is always connected to society in some way, and due to the nature of both society and language, specific problems occur.

CDA was established as a means to revive the study of language in connection to

specific problems in its usage. Namely, its exploitation. To CDA, language “is never a neutral object” (Blommaert 2005, 33). As such, it should always be evaluated, assessed, and analysed. Hence, the term Critical in its name. Wodak and Meyer (2001, 125) explain this by stating that the role of a critical social science should be the exemplification and illumination of problems in social life related to language. Furthermore, the aim of CDA should also be to give people resources that they can use in order to better understand those problems, question them or at least take a stance.

The issue of power now comes into play. Taking into account the complex relationship between language, discourse and society, we can conclude that not everyone has the same access to power in social and linguistic terms. It is only logical that someone (be it an individual, group or institution) who exerts more influence, has greater power over someone else, either in social terms or those connected to language. The issue of power is “central to CDA” (Blommaert 2005, 24). This links back to the aforementioned definition by Foucault of discourse being a way of relaying the power of language. Blommaert also takes this into account, acknowledges the role of discourse as an instrument of power and emphasizes that it has an ever-increasing importance in the society of today (2005, 25). The problem is that this instrument often works in clandestine. The goal of CDA can therefore be interpreted as uncovering this instrument and making it transparent in the complex structure that consists of society, discourse and language in which these three are constantly becoming more and more interwoven.

For this reason, the concept of CDA being an interdisciplinary framework is very appropriate. Instead of limiting itself to a single perspective, it takes into account many different perspectives in order to better analyse its subject matter. Matheson refers to the interdisciplinarity of CDA in relation to media language, which is also an important term in this paper and will be elaborated further on. He stresses the importance of this approach, also because of the complex links between society, language and discourse (2005, 2). Richardson also states that there is a link between the media and society that should be studied by CDA. This link is important because the media (more specifically, the journalists) is “producing and reproducing social realities through either maintaining or transforming social beliefs” (2007, 115).



### ***3 Media language***

Media language is language used in communication which is enabled by the use of various media channels with the capacity to reach a wide audience. Mass communication greatly differs from face-to-face communication.

Bell (1991, 2) lists some of its distinctions:

- multiple originators
- a mass simultaneous audience
- a fragmented audience
- absence of feedback
- general accessibility to the public

What is transmitted through these channels is news- stories about recent events which provide the recipients with information about the happenings in the world around them. The specific subject of this paper are daily printed newspapers. Of course, they fulfil all of the above mentioned conditions for being considered a means of mass communication. Due to the restrictions of their format, they cannot include every piece of information that was relevant in the timespan of 24 hours. The editors of the newspapers thus have to act as selectors of the material which will be transmitted. If they omit a news story or a part of it, “the reader will probably not be aware that the omitted item of information exists” (Reah 2002, 4). The image formed is that a particular newspaper is “the definite, or ultimate, source of what they (the readers) are reading” (Bednarek 2006, 14). By doing this, the newspapers distinguish themselves among each other and can claim different audiences. This is only logical, because news “is a product- a product that must be made attractive or appealing to a market of consumers” (Richardson 2007, 77). By establishing itself in a certain way, different publications create a stereotyped image of themselves and identify themselves in the eyes of the readers. Thus, they are formed as a “stereotyped speaker” (Bednarek 2006, 15).

To ensure their position on the marketplace, newspapers must employ various tactics. All news produced by newspapers is relayed by keeping in mind the audience it is intended for. If the audience finds the news presented attractive enough, they will buy the publication. Newspapers therefore tap into the fields of market research, sociology and economy (among others) to give their audience what they want.

But who exactly is the audience in question? A human being is not determined only

by the newspapers he or she reads, but the newspapers position themselves with the thought that such a person exists. This kind of people then form “a homogeneous group of people with shared beliefs and values whose defining feature is the newspaper that they read” (Reah 2002, 36). Those who do not are then excluded from this group. Two groups are formed by this process – the in-group and the out-group.

There exists a dialectical relationship between the producers (newspapers) and the consumers (the audience). Richardson (2007, 112) states news is produced with both the audience and the producer in mind. The producers keep in mind the characteristics of their intended audience (social class, level of education, preferences etc.), and the audience keep in mind the brand of the newspaper, its standings and the values transmitted through it. Of course, the audience is also a part of a much larger group- it is a constituent of society itself. Thus, the relationship can also be viewed on the level of society and journalism. It is “a two-way relationship (...) in which both affect each other” (Richardson 2007, 114). Society exerts its influence on journalists, and, in turn, journalists decide how to approach the process of production and reproduction of social realities- by “either maintaining or transforming social beliefs” (Richardson 2007, 115).

What determines the news are values. Bell states that “the kind of language in which that news is told reflects and expresses those values” (1991, 2). Richardson offers a definition of news values: “News values are meant to be the distillation of what an identified audience is interested in reading or watching, or the “ground rules” for deciding what is merely an “event” and what is “news”” (2007, 92).

Bednarek highlights that news values “explain what makes news” (2006). She also refers to Bell's (1991) classes of news values, which will be used in the research chapter of this paper. News values represent the conditions by which some stories are deemed “more newsworthy than others” and van Dijk claims they are shared both by the producers and the audience of news media (quoted in Bednarek 2006, 16).

Bell (1991) classifies news values as follows:

- 1) values in news actors and events (refers to the content of the news and the nature of events and actors described)
- 2) values in the news process (refers to the news process as such)
- 3) values in the news text (refers to the quality of the news text)

The class that is the most important one for this research and can be applied best is

the first one because headlines introduce the events and actors of news stories. The other two categories mostly deal with the articles associated with the headlines, but they are not a relevant part of this research because what is discussed in this paper are the functions and form of the headlines in the corpus. However, they will also sometimes be needed for certain elaborations.

The homogeneous group of implied readers (created by the newspapers), they can also be linked to news values. Reah (2002, 41) states that this homogeneous group is addressed by the newspapers of their choice using stories reported in such a way that they evoke an exclusive response. This is a means of reinforcing the set of shared values established in the dialogical relationship between the newspapers and its “designed” audience. The audience always recognizes “a linguistic utterance as having been intentionally produced as an instrument of communication by another being with the same basic cognitive capacities as the addressee” (Verhagen 2007, 7).

There is also another view on the audience of newspapers. The one described above defines the audience as a consumer, but Richardson also claims that audience can be viewed “as a commodity” (2007, 77). This adds another participant to the relationship between the newspapers and the audience- the advertisers. The audience is viewed as a commodity that can be offered to advertisers in the newspapers. This is particularly true for tabloid newspapers. If we adopt the view that news is a product, it must possess some kind of appeal or otherwise it will not sell. To sell, it needs an audience, and “advertisers will not subsidize a news producer without an audience” (Richardson 2007, 78). Newspapers therefore have to “capture” their audience in order to have a commodity the advertisers can make use of. Hence the use of sensationalism- it “grabs” the audience and puts it “in possession” of the newspapers.

#### ***4 Newspaper headlines and front pages***

The main topic of this research are the headlines that appear on the front pages of newspapers. What is also taken into account is their relationship with the rest of the elements that appear on the front pages, specifically pictures and subheadlines (texts that sometimes appear underneath the headlines in smaller print and elaborate them further). Headlines on the front pages were chosen as the research subject because of their special form and their impact on the (potential) readers of the newspapers.

Front pages are the first thing someone sees when he or she takes a specific publication in their hands. In fact, a person doesn't even need to take the newspapers in their hands. The major elements of a front page can be observed even when glancing at the newspapers in someone else's hands in a public place, for example. The goal of front pages is to capture the attention of the readers and potential readers. They do so by the use of various multimodal elements they consist of - most notably, pictures and headlines. Kress and van Leeuwen treat front pages as “complex signs, which invite and require an initial reading as one sign” (1998, 187). Analogous to all other signs (in the linguistic sense of the word), we can deduce that they are also under the influence of cultural and social change, thus referring back to the connection between language and society that was previously discussed.

Upon further reading, the sign, of course, breaks down into multiple other signs. However, this does not negate the connections between them. Reah (2002, 23) also emphasizes these connections by stating that headlines “work in conjunction with the other visual aspects of the newspaper text, particularly the pictures”.

Bell also highlights the importance of headlines and states that they are a “part of the news rhetoric whose function is to attract the reader” (1991, 189). Their function is also to offer the readers a view of the world. This view, of course, depends on the specific publications in question. For instance, they can present to the reader a world of various political and public events, or with a world “in which the boundaries between public and private events have become blurred” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 210). The latter is the stance of the tabloid newspapers which are the subject of this research. In order to distinguish themselves, they employ headlines that enable them “to stamp individuality on what is otherwise a mass-produced product” (Develotte and Rechniewski 2001).

One must also keep in mind that, other than attracting attention, the headlines can also be written in a way that influences the opinions of the reader (Reah 2002, 28). The headlines of tabloids do so by presenting the reader “with one point of view to the exclusion of any other” (Reah 2002, 31).

The headline is both connected and disconnected from the article it refers to. The headlines that appear on front pages are even more disconnected from the articles because the articles appear on pages further on in the publication. On the other hand, the two are connected because the content of the headline still refers to the article, even though in this case the headline is observed as “a stand-alone unit” (Bell 1991, 187). Because of this fact,

they are “a particularly rich source of information about the field of cultural references” (Develotte and Rechniewski 2001). They depend on the fact that the reader should, using his or her knowledge of the world, recognize the references and allusions used in the headlines.

The headline still “abstracts the story” (Bell 1991, 187) of the article. Various signals that appear alongside the headline refer the reader to the article, thus emphasizing that the headline is not all there is concerning the story it covers. Most notably, headlines list the page number the article is on, almost always in smaller print than the text of the headline, so as not to detract the reader from the text that carries the most impact. The headline can ideally be “entirely derivable from the story” (Bell 1991, 187) but that is most often not the case as the headlines summarize a single point in the story in order to capture the audience's attention. This is particularly true for the majority of tabloid headlines, which will be shown in the analysis of the corpus.

The aforementioned impact is achieved by various means. Most notably, headlines stand out because of the use of a font larger than that the articles in the publication are written in. Besides the visual impact, headlines (particularly those which appear in popular publications) also achieve a linguistic impact by “puns, alliteration, the choice of emotive vocabulary and other rhetorical devices” (Develotte and Rechniewski 2001). Puns are used because they are memorable and noticeable. They are used in the formation of witty sentences and phrases which achieve a much greater impact in the minds of the readers than those phrases and sentences which are written in a statement-like format used by the majority of newspaper headlines. Headlines featuring puns can therefore be perceived by the readers as “fun”, even though they may deal with serious themes. Alliteration can be used in a similar sense. It makes the text more memorable and engaging. The same can be said for the use of emotive vocabulary- readers are more compelled to read a story presented in such an engaging way because it seems more direct to them and they can connect to it in a much closer way.

The relationship between the elements of the front pages and further analysis of the linguistic and multimodal aspects of headlines will be provided in the research chapter.

## ***5 Tabloids***

Tabloids were chosen as the subject of this research because of the obvious differences between them and broadsheet newspapers and because they offer an interesting approach to language, more intriguing than that of regular or broadsheet newspapers. Their choice of language and layout makes them stand out from the rest of the printed media and can be regarded as the most attention-grabbing one of all. Even though their choices of stories and language featured may seem trivial at first, they are “firmly rooted in discourses of a national-popular” (Conboy 2005, 10).

Johansson (2007, 32) outlines some the most important linguistic and extralinguistic features of tabloids:

- sensationalist style
- focus on an individual's private life
- a fluid move between news and entertainment
- dominant use of visual imagery and dramatization
- reserved use of textual and analytical elements

Conboy states that the language of tabloids is “rich in its own tradition of metaphor, word play, categorization and compression of narratives” (2005, 15) This partially coincides with Mardh's list of the typical linguistic features of newspaper headlines (quoted in Develotte and Rechniewski 2001) from which it is also important to single out the following: the omission of articles (English-specific), verbs and auxiliaries, nominalisations, frequent use of adverbs with the added omission of both the verbs and subjects, usage of short words and an emphasis on word order.

Today there exists an over-saturation of news stories, and printed media cannot function in the same fashion as the radio, television, or online media. They are bound by their format and decisions have to be made about the inclusion of stories they will present. Tabloids have opted for an approach that promotes “their distinctiveness and maintains their market share within a fragmenting news media environment” (Conboy 2005, 9). A tabloid is seen by many as a kind of an “entry-level” newspaper, with not much substance to the stories it features. The reason for that is that tabloids provide the readers with stories that are presented with a large degree of melodrama. Johansson lists the melodramatic features of tabloids such as “large, dramatic headlines and the close-ups of faces and playing up emotions of individual

news actors” (2007, 89).

All of these features are crucial for the makings of what was named *tabloidisation*, which Connel designates as “a series of processes that are transforming supposedly rationalist discourses into sensationalist discourses” (1998, 12). News that would not ordinarily be considered important is put into the spotlight of the tabloids. This stems from “a desire to connect with the concerns of the readers, and to do so in as direct and immediate a way as possible” (Richardson 2007, 122). Sensationalism is mostly perceived as an aggressive approach to news reporting and its only goal seems to be to increase the sales of a specific publication while disregarding certain postulates of the journalistic ethic. Johansson emphasizes a term that can be seen as a consequence or a product of sensationalist practice – *earthquake news*, in which “a single news story is blown up to the extreme” (2007, 89). This story often stretches out over the course of several days (and thus several editions of a publication), and through these connected stories the publication achieves a certain level of intertextuality. In this case, the headlines and the articles often use previously established nicknames and other “insider” terms. This can generate a sense of belonging in the audience—those familiar enough with the story, who have followed it through multiple editions, gain a better understanding of it. Subconsciously, they feel that their bond to the producers was strengthened because they are “in on the joke”.

A vast majority of the targeted audience is not aware of the existence of these processes because they only take interest in the stories featured and the way these stories are presented only piques their interest. Nevertheless, this does not negate the existence of the previously mentioned bond between them and the producers.

What the tabloids provide “is an explicit sense of place and a textual locus for a popular national community” (Conboy 2005, 9). This national community is an amalgamation of various areas of popular culture: sports, music, celebrities with their associated lifestyles and religion, to name a few.

We can liken the aforementioned national community to Anderson's *imagined community*. Anderson describes nations (and all communities larger than a primitive village) as imagined communities because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991, 6). We can find similarities between his communities and communities formed by the tabloids. Namely, both are imagined because the relationships

between all the members are not based on daily face-to-face communication. They both have a distinct unifying concept that binds all of the members together. The unifying concept of Anderson's communities is a political system, while what unites the readers of tabloids are, of course, the tabloids themselves.

It has been stated that tabloids focus on a different kind of news stories than “regular” newspapers, but even though the “other news” is in the spotlight, it doesn't mean that tabloids do not sometimes feature stories related to politics and other major events. They do so by “conveying important issues in a manner that is understandable and attractive to large audiences” (Johansson 2007, 39). The aim of this paper is not to discredit certain publications and claim that they completely disregard such stories in favour of sensationalistic and melodramatic ones, but to describe how the sensationalistic and melodramatic stories are offered to the audience in a way that overshadows the importance of “regular” news. Various factors are at play in this system, and some of them have already been mentioned and described.

Detailed analysis will be provided in chapter 7, in which we move on to the examination of specific tabloid front pages collected in the corpus. The form and function of front page headlines, as well as their relationships to the other elements of the page, will be described in order to show what exactly makes the headlines and the front pages sensationalistic.

## ***6 The corpus and its composition***

The main research method in this paper is the analysis of the most prominent headlines in a corpus of newspaper front pages. The research and collection process follows Bell's (1991) outlines on gathering a corpus of media language which he divides into three parts: genres, outlets and outputs (12):

- 1) The genres are “the particular kind of media content”; news, game shows etc.
- 2) The outlets are “the publications, television channels or radio stations which carry the content”
- 3) The outputs are “what the media outlets produce in the time period to be covered”

In this case, the genre consists of printed newspapers and the media outlets are the Croatian daily newspaper *24 sata* and the British daily newspaper *Daily Star*.



The outputs were collected in the period from August 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 to October 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 and they consist of front pages of the two previously mentioned publications.

The language used by these newspapers displays the properties that are the main focus of this research. The reason why these specific newspapers were chosen is that they present to the readers the sort of *infotainment* typical of tabloids and the process of *tabloidisation*, which were described in the theoretical chapters of this paper. These two publications do so to a much greater degree than others previously taken into consideration. The two also share a very similar layout and cover the same variety of stories and topics. Other British papers were also considered for the “equivalent” of *24 sata*, but *Daily Star* was chosen as the most appropriate one.

The front pages were collected daily. Physical copies of *24 sata* were scanned and digitally stored. *Daily Star* front pages were downloaded from the archive on ukpressonline.co.uk. A total of 182 front pages were collected. 91 one of them belong to *24 sata* and 91 to *Daily Star*. What followed was a preliminary analysis of all the data collected. The purpose of this analysis was to examine and extract common themes appearing on the front pages. Several themes displayed a very high rate of occurrence, but a number of various other ones was also present to a lesser degree. Between the data featured in *24 sata* and *Daily Star* there is no overlap in the specific subjects (people, events etc.) of the stories featured in the headlines, but the general topics and the language used display many similarities.

The categories of the most common themes are as follows:

- A) shocking, tragic and “weird” stories
- B) stories dealing with the lives of celebrities
- C) sports
- D) political and other recent events of wider significance

These categories are in correlation with those Conboy (2005) has singled out as the most frequent ones in tabloid journalism. The first category coincides with what he refers to as “other news” - “strange happenings, freak events, endearing eccentricity or the grotesque” (33). For the second category, Conboy claims that facts about the lives of celebrities are so popular because they draw the imagined community of readers into “the details of confession and gossip” (2005, 189). He also emphasizes that, no matter how trivial, celebrity news has

become “one of the key places where cultural meanings are negotiated and organized” (Conboy 2005, 186). Johansson also stresses the significance of tabloid newspapers by stating that they are “a vital site for the playing out of celebrity gossip” (2007, 111).

The other two categories did not feature much when observing the corpus as a whole. *24 sata* featured five front pages with major sports headlines and six featuring political and other recent events of wider significance in the chosen time of data collection. *Daily Star* featured seven prominent headlines dealing with sports and nine dealing with politics or other events that don't belong in the most frequent categories.

In some cases there was a noticeable overlap in the categories. For instance, headlines dealing with sports or politics were often presented in a fashion similar to the two primary categories. The emphasis was often not on the news “as is”, but the perspective and focus applied tried to make them look similar to the primary ones.

This coincides with Conboy's claim in which he states that tabloids are usually very selective about including political and similar “wider public” information. Furthermore, he emphasizes that they only include it when “it fits in with the wider patterns of their coverage or when it concerns major issues which can be covered in sensational fashion” (Conboy 2005, 10).

As it has been observed that the categories under A and B feature the most in the corpus and greatly outnumber the remaining two, the decision was made to focus on the front pages on which the A and B are represented (on which headlines feature stories dealing with these two categories). However, seeing that categories A and B make up the majority of the corpus, a detailed analysis of all of the items in question would have exceeded the scope of the paper. The researcher therefore made a selection and reduced their number in order to provide a better analysis of the subject matter. The most representative front pages (for the topic of this research) were selected. The front pages and headlines deemed most representative are those which stood out the most (in their sensationalistic approach to presenting the stories they cover) while performing the initial examination of the corpus. The narrowed-down corpus therefore consists of 66 front pages (33 *24 sata* front pages and 33 *Daily Star* front pages) with headlines belonging to categories A and B. Category A consists of 39 front pages. 26 of them belong to *24 sata* and 13 to *Daily Star*. Category B consists of 27 items- 7 *24 sata* front pages and 20 *Daily Star* front pages.

## ***7 The research***

The headlines analysed in this paper cannot be observed or studied in isolation from the rest of the page they are located on. This kind of approach would not grasp their full meaning and their relationship with other elements of the page which can influence the meaning of the headlines to a certain degree. Because of this, the entirety of the front pages the headlines appear on will be studied. The reasons for this decision are that newspaper front pages should be considered multimodal and that language “always has to be realized through, and comes in the company of, other semiotic modes” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 186). This is especially the case with newspapers- they must rely not only on text, but also on a myriad of other ways to relay their message more successfully. Kress and van Leeuwen emphasize this fact and state that all types of text analysis which ignore the visual arrangement of items on a page will not take into account the full meaning of the texts in question (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 186).

### ***7.1 Methodology and general findings***

A typical layout of a newspaper front page consists of a masthead that features the name of the publication in question, headlines (followed by optional subheadlines) which offer the briefest possible summary of a particular news story, and pictures which in most cases complement the headlines and give a better insight into their full meaning (the process can also work the other way around- the headlines can explain the pictures). The pictures have an evidential function. Their purpose is to demonstrate to the readers that what the newspaper is stating is actually true. It does not matter if they are actual photographs or just illustrations. Another element present on the front pages are various advertisements whose placement can be viewed as deliberate or indeliberate, depending on the particular issue they were published in.

It was previously stated that the front page is different from the rest of the newspaper. Taking into account that the front page's primary function is to attract readers, the most common method is to use a large and noticeable typeface for the headline in conjunction with pictures of a large format. The print of the headline is always larger than the rest of the text it refers to, but Reah points out that front page headlines of tabloid newspapers “can by

themselves occupy more space than the whole article they refer to” (2002, 23).

The typical elements of a newspaper front page are displayed in Figure 1. In the top left part of the page is the masthead carrying the name of the publication. Most often, the central part of the page is occupied by one or several frames containing headlines and images. Depending on their size and placement, one or several advertisements can also be present.



*Figure 2: Elements of a newspaper front page*

The approach that will be used in this analysis was developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in their article “Front pages: (the critical) analysis of newspaper layout” (1998). It was chosen because of the previously relationship of all elements on a newspaper page which stresses that all of them have to be taken into account in order to observe the full meaning expressed by the text analysed. In the following paragraphs the major points of this approach will be described. This approach will be combined with a detailed linguistic analysis of the headlines themselves.

Kress and van Leeuwen claim that the layout of a newspaper front page is an interplay of three connected signifying systems which enable the creation of a coherent and meaningful whole. The three systems in question are:

- 1) Information value – which claims that the value and meaning of an element on a page changes depending on its placement (dichotomies Given-New, Real-Ideal and Centre- Margin)
- 2) Salience – elements on a page attract the reader to varying degrees, and as means of attracting them use a variety of approaches (placement, size, colour etc.)
- 3) Framing – connective and disconnective devices which signify if the elements on a page should be read and understood together or apart (framelines, spaces, vectors, colour etc.)

The first dichotomy of information value, Given-New, is related to page layouts that oppose elements on the left to the elements on the right side. Given is described as information that is common-sense and self-evident, while the New is information that the reader is not yet familiar with. A layout can also distinguish between top and bottom, or Ideal and Real. Ideal elements are presented in a generalized sense, while the Real ones offer more elaborated information. Their vertical relation measures the respective levels of abstraction. The Ideal is concerned with a higher degree than the Real. The third type of layout polarizes items placed in the Centre of the page and those on its Margin. Elements in the Centre are considered to be more important and information-loaded than those on the Margins. Because of their placements, elements in the Centre are given more space in which they can carry information, while the ones on the Margins are “compacted” and due to the lack of space carry a smaller amount of information.

Salience of an element is determined by a visual inspection of a page. It consists of a complex interplay between a number of factors which are involved in the process of structuring a message and determining its “weight”. The factors involved in this process are the size of elements, their amount of detail and texture, tonal and colour contrast, their placement, perspective (foreground or background) and the appearance of certain culturally related factors (human figures or recognizable cultural symbols). The perspective and the appearance of figures and symbols can be related to the figure-ground organisation of elements dating back from Gestalt psychology. We perceive smaller and movable entities as

(highlighted) figures, and the larger ones, moved further back in the visual field as the background (Stanojević 2013, 56). The purpose of devices used in framing is to orient the reader in which way he or she should read and understand the front page since it is formed in a way different than the rest of publication.

The hypothesis upon which this research was based on is that sensationalism in headlines is employed by tabloids in a way that distorts the understanding of the story they refer to, or at least presents the story in a way that is bombastic and (undeservingly) elevates it to the status of a story of high importance. In relation to this hypothesis, some general findings about the categories examined will now be described before moving on the analysis of specific front pages.

Concerning category of the corpus named A (shocking, tragic and “weird” stories), it was found that tabloids use various linguistic means in order to create a certain distance from the readers in relation to these stories. Certain events are thus presented as “freak” occurrences which change the readers' perspective of the world or make them question it.

The headlines and stories in the category named B (stories dealing with the lives of celebrities) serve a different purpose. Their aim is to offer the readers a sense of closeness to the people usually perceived as members of a different layer of society by emphasizing certain issues they potentially share with the audience and to stress that “they are people, too”. Upon studying the corpus, a specific occurrence has also been noted. Some stories are featured in the headlines by using direct speech to transmit the words of the actors involved. Such headlines are sometimes noticeably longer than the logic behind their basic formation dictates. This is viewed as an alternative approach to capturing the attention of the readers.

## ***7.2 Analysis of category A***

This category consists of 39 front pages. 26 of them belong to *24 sata* and 13 to *Daily Star*. It has been stated that the headlines collected in this category mostly deal with bizarre stories. In the centre of these stories are mostly ordinary people who the tabloids present “at the extremes of human experience and behaviour” (Conboy 2005, 16) or frequently occurring events presented as abnormal. The analysis will be carried out on five front pages from the

category. The interplay of the three signifying systems by Kress and van Leeuwen will be examined. Their approach will be combined with the analysis of various syntactic, semantic and multimodal aspects of the front page elements.

We will take a closer look at the front page labeled as A2. The most prominent headline on the page states:

HORROR IN VARAŽDIN  
DROWNED ON HIS BIRTHDAY



Figure 3: Front page A2

The headline is accompanied by a black-and-white photograph of the deceased. The photograph, the headline and the subheadline are framed together by using a black background and therefore are visually separated from the rest of the front page. The first part of the headline (HORROR IN VARAŽDIN) is additionally separated from the second part because it is framed in red. The picture is placed directly left from the headline and it was given salience by its large size and placement on centre-left part of the page. Kress and van Leeuwen state that an item gains more weight the further up it is placed on a page, and also the further it is placed to the left (because of an asymmetry in the visual field) (1998, 2000). We can also apply the Given-New system of information value to this complex framed element. The picture of the deceased is placed on the left-hand side and thus it is Given. The New contains information about his unfortunate fate. This information is emphasized by visual means- the typeface used in both parts of the headline is considerably larger than those

used on the rest of the page. The headline stresses certain aspects of the story, namely that the event took place on the actor's birthday. Featuring this information emphasizes its tragic tone. The tragedy is reinforced further by the usage of the word *horror* in the first part of the headline.

Another element of the frame is the subheadline:

Branko Križmanić (39) engulfed by the river Drava while swimming.

Last week on unregulated beaches five people drowned...

It is interesting to note that this subheadline offers a much more different perspective than the actual headline. The first sentence consists of information presented as straightforward and objective facts. The second sentence also offers a straightforward fact, but it is written in a way that suggests that it is unfinished due to the use of ellipsis. Combined with the sentence above and the headline, it adds a sense of foreboding to the entire frame. The subheadline also gives us the name and the age of the actor. This can be interpreted as another attempt of amplifying the tragic aspect of the story. The man was relatively young and the attitude of most people is that “it's a shame that someone died so young”. All of these elements combine into what Johansson describes as a “theatrical textual and visual display” which “facilitates an appeal to emotion and the recognition of human experience” (2007, 90).

The entire frame is not only visually separated from the rest of the page, but also thematically. The remaining two headline stories featured deal with the world of soap-operas. In relation to the main headline, their importance is lessened, but the size of the frame containing the larger one suggests that stories dealing with soap-operas are only slightly less important than those dealing with the death of an actual person.





introduce two news values which Bell (1991) connects to actors and events. *Horror* and *shock* introduce the news value of Negativity which Bednarek designates as “the basic news value” (2006, 17). Simply put, the negative makes the news. *In Varaždin* and *near Drniš* introduce Proximity which operates under the assumption that “people are interested in what happens close to them” (Bednarek 2006, 17).

The second sentence in the headline raises the “shock” level even further by introducing the notion that the snake appeared from a common household object. Coupled with the Proximity of the first sentence, a reader could operate under the assumption that this could also happen to him or her. No one can tell for certain if there is an invasion of snakes happening or not. This is caused by the introduction of a news value of Unexpectedness which Bednarek designates as the coverage of “the rare, the unexpected, and the “new” factors” (2006, 17) in news stories. Normally, when we flush the toilet, objects in it “simply disappear out of our reality into another space” (Žižek 2006). But what if the process is reversed? What if something emerges from this “netherworld, a chaotic, primordial reality”, as Žižek (2006) puts it? It is then perceived as “the ultimate horror” (Žižek 2006).

Two photographs are also present in the headline frame. The larger one depicts the head of a snake with its tongue ominously sticking out. It is unclear whether this is the actual snake from the story or merely an illustration, but we can possibly deduce that it is an illustration due to the fact that it appears to be photographed by a professional and not by the “shocked” person whom the snake attacked.

A subheadline is introduced underneath this photograph:

Kristina Ivić (21) was cleaning the toilet and  
from it emerged a one meter long black snake.  
Fortunately, it was a non-venomous whipsnake...

To the left hand side of the subheadline another photograph is introduced. On it is the “victim” of the snake attack. Both the subheadline and this other photograph introduce a more lighthearted tone to the whole frame. It has been stated that the snake is non-venomous, and the “victim” is depicted with a facial expression that doesn't quite resemble fear. Instead, it seems like she is feigning fear in an almost humoristic manner. With all of these elements combined, we can make an assumption that the whole frame actually contradicts itself. The headline and the first photograph lead the reader to believe that a dangerous event took place and that this may be an occurrence of a wider range. The subheadline and the photograph of

the “victim” in a way “deflate” the impact of the story and the tone changes dramatically.

However, due to the graphological features of the elements in the upper part of the frame, a reader's first impression is that this is a very negative story with dire consequences. This is quickly resolved by reading the subheadline and inspecting the photograph in question more carefully. All of the elements together (the headline, images and subheadline) can be viewed as a compressed narrative that initially makes the readers question their established view of the world and frightens them. Ultimately, the readers are left somewhat reassured and are given comfort. The article connected to the elements of the frame could then be viewed as a sort of an epilogue that ties up potential loose ends since all of the important elements of the narrative have been presented.

Other elements on the page (besides the masthead) are two advertisements located on the top and the bottom. The left-hand side of the page features another frame. This one is smaller than the main one, and not so striking. Nevertheless, it is placed in a very salient position, close to the top left of the page. Its salience is amplified by the usage of two photographs which depict strong cultural symbols. On the top of the frame is a photograph depicting a statue of Saint Mary and on the bottom is a photograph of hands holding rosary beads.

Between them is a headline:

Feuilleton:  
Mother of God  
Protector of Croats

and a subheadline:

Find out everything about  
the Lady's miracles,  
shrines in Croatia

When observed together with the main frame, there are interesting connotations between the two, intentional or not. One could interpret Saint Mary as the protector against the “evil” of the snake(s). The snake is undoubtedly presented as ominous and sinister and the attack took place in Croatia, a country under her divine protection. Following this, one could establish a thematic connection between the Centre and the Margin of the page. The Centre is “the nucleus of the information to which all other elements are in some sense subservient” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 196).

The two frames are also presented in contrasting background colours, also with interesting connotations when observed together – white as the colour of holiness versus black as the colour of unholiness. Conboy states that this “categorization into binary divisions of the world suits the tabloids' news values” (2005, 17). We can also refer back to the compressed narrative presented in the previously discussed frame. Since it was resolved that the “evil snake” didn't fulfil its purpose of “spreading evil”, the impact of this secondary frame could be even greater. It could be interpreted as a symbolic reminder that Good always conquers Evil and that people can place their faith in the Good.

We continue with the front page labelled as A24. The most prominent headline featured reads:

MYSTERY  
UNLUCKY STARLINGS  
Frozen birds fall on Knin



Figure 5: Front page A24

The frame in which this headline is situated in occupies almost the entirety of the front page. Due to its size it is given great salience which is amplified by the use of a large photograph that occupies the entire frame. The headline is written on the top part of the frame, on the photograph. The part of the photograph the text is put on is darker than the rest of it and the usage of bright colours in the typeface makes the text more noticeable. Apart from the photograph, the headline is the biggest element of the frame (and the whole page). The most

noticeable part of the headline is the first part (MYSTERY). Immediately, it introduces the previously mentioned news value of Unexpectedness. It is interesting to note that another news story was introduced by the usage of this word on the front page labelled as A7.

The second part of the headline introduces empathy for the starlings by the usage of the word *unlucky*. Besides empathy, this element also bears the news value of Negativity which in this case is associated with animals. As it turns out, the association between animals and Negativity was an unexpectedly frequent occurrence in this category (A5, A14, A32, A33, A36), but this headline is the only case in which the animals were not the “perpetrators” of the negative event, but “victims” of it. This explains the use of the adjective *unlucky* in describing the starlings.

The third part of the headline introduces Proximity. Once again, with all the parts of the headline combined, the subtext of it points us in the direction of a “freak” occurrence which could potentially instil fear and panic in the readers. The dramatic effect of the headline is amplified by the photograph which depicts five dead starlings.

An interesting component of the frame is the subheadline:

Experts claim the birds could have collided mid-air  
or died in a cloud, but they cannot figure out why they are frozen

This front page was also used in the focus group interview and the majority of the participants pointed out the absurdity of this headline. They questioned the authority of the “experts” in question because a simple Internet search could provide a multitude of answers for the birds' cause of death.

Linguistically speaking, this subheadline could be viewed as another element which reinforces the mysterious designation of the headline. It is formed in such a way that leads the readers to believe that even experts on the matter cannot provide a viable explanation of the event, which in turn leads to more confusion and questions. This event could even be considered grotesque as “the appearance of the grotesque signals that there is something beyond or beneath the ordinary recognisable world” (Harries 2000, 8). This sort of event brings instability to an otherwise seemingly stable world people normally long for and take for granted. The grotesque corresponds with the news values of Negativity and Unexpectedness. It is not something beautiful, common and positive. However it has “the

power to fascinate” (Harries 2000, 9). Applying the terminology of Real and Ideal to this frame, we can deduct that the text performs the role of Ideal and the photograph and subheadline are viewed as Real. Since the headline basically provides no explanation of the event, just that it occurred, the Real “presents more specific information (details) and/or more practical information” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 193).

As previously mentioned, there are a number of headlines that deal with animals in this category. We will take a closer look at another of them, namely A33. Unlike the previously analysed front pages, this one belongs to *Daily Star*. Taylor describes the general layout of *Daily Star* as “a circus layout that fairly burst from the pages” (quoted in Conboy 2005, 8). As was previously mentioned, *Daily Star* was chosen for this research because its layout was the most similar one to *24 sata*. Since it was established in 1978 (Conboy 2005, 8), it has had a larger timespan to build an audience and profile itself in terms of stories and news featured. One could deduct that due to this, it gives itself more liberty in the choice of stories and the ways in which they are presented. During the initial examination of the corpus, it was observed that the front pages of *Daily Star* were much more explicit in their ways of featuring stories and their photographs and headlines.



Figure 6: Front page A33

The basic layout resembles that of *24 sata*. The masthead is featured in the upper left corner of the page and a small number of headlines and photographs dominate the rest of the page.

The most prominent frame on this front page features this headline:

FLESH-EAT  
SPIDERS  
COMING  
TO HOUSE  
NEAR YOU

This frame possesses great salience due to its size and colour contrast. The headline is what dominates the frame. It fills up the whole of it. Compared to the previously examined headlines, this one is formed in such a way that its impact is tremendous. Besides resembling an advertisement for a movie (“Flesh-eat spiders”), the news values of Negativity, Proximity and Unexpectedness are extremely emphasized. Negativity and Unexpectedness are featured in the noun phrase *flesh-eat spiders*. Since most people do not usually perceive spiders as animals capable of eating human flesh, the knowledge that such spiders exist can potentially instil fear and panic in them, which we can also link to the previously mentioned front page A24.

As is the case with the mystery deaths of starlings described in A24, this event can also be deemed grotesque because it shatters people's perception of a stable world. Proximity is introduced by the remainder of the headline and is extremely emphasized because of the degree of closeness to the reader. Basically it reads that “this is as close as it gets”. The Proximity of spiders is present even *in* the frame itself since the headline is “wrapped” in a digitally stylized spider web and stylized spiders are even crawling over the words.

This emphasizes the previously mentioned similarity between the text of the headline and movie advertisement. The “movie” this “almost-advertisement” promotes could be interpreted as a way of dealing with the extremely negative event whose “plot” was described by the headline. This interpretation goes hand-in-hand with Žižek's (2006) claim that we have the need to fictionalise any event that becomes so traumatic and violent that it “shatters the coordinates of our reality”.

Other elements present in the frame are two photographs and a subheadline that reads:

VICTIM: Garie Meadows

Poisonous spiders swarming across Britain are moving indoors to escape the cold snap. The flesh-eating critters, relatives of the infamous black widow, scuttle in through drains and windows.

The photographs feature the victim of a spider attack and the wound they inflicted. The explicit photograph of the wound is something that differentiates *Daily Star* from *24 sata* because no such images were found on any front page belonging to *24 sata* in the corpus. The photograph potentially induces feelings of disgust and fear on a much higher level than any published in *24 sata*. Since it has previously been stated that *Daily Star* was founded years (even decades) before *24 sata*, the usage of such images could be interpreted by the ever-growing need to remain relevant and “up the ante” in the world of printed media. *24 sata* maybe has not reached the point in which it has to resort to such measures due to the fact that, compared to *Daily Star*, it is a much younger publication and its audience has yet to tire from way its stories are currently presented.

The reader can immediately link the information given by the headline (which constitutes the Given of the frame) with the image (the New of the frame). The image provides a visualisation of the effects the spiders can have.

This story is featured in two other major headlines (A32 and A36). Both feature the same approach to the topic (*KILLER SPIDER ATE MY LEG* and *KILLER SPIDER MADE MY LEG EXPLODE*). These three headlines and their associated articles are intertextual. They build a theme, introducing more and more elements to the story. All of these elements further build up the news values of Negativity, Proximity and Unexpectedness. All three feature graphic photographs similar to that featured in A33 and the victims' descriptions of the events. The headlines together form a discourse of fear. One could be lead to believe that there is a wide-scale invasion of spiders at hand, all of this based on three featured cases. Only two days later (on front page A39), the story was demoted and it was featured on a headline of a much smaller scale. The headline which demoted it deals with the abduction of Madelaine McCann (*MADDIE'S SNATCHER KILLED BY A TRACTOR*).



The last front page to be discussed in this category is A37. This front page also features a headline that “warns” the readers of an immediate danger:

MORE KILLER STORMS ON THE WAY

Five die in St Jude hell



Figure 7: Front page A37

The headline is framed together with a subheadline and two photographs. The typeface of the first sentence of the headline is exceptionally large. It occupies the majority of the frame, and coupled with a black background is thus given great salience. Negativity is immediately introduced by *killer storms* and amplified by the use of *more*. Proximity is introduced by *on the way*, meaning that the storms are on their way to the audience.

The second part of the headline introduces the notion of previous storms and likens them to *hell*, thus emphasizing the danger they epitomize. It is also exclaimed that the storms have actually killed a certain number of people and that their designation as *killer* is not used without cause. This is also pointed out by the other elements of the frame, namely the photographs. One of them depicts a car wrecked by the storm and the other a person killed in the same car. This way the audience can perceive the victims of the “killers”. The event is further described in the second part of the subheadline:

CRUSHED: Bethany

Among the dead was Bethany Freeman, 17,

who was crushed when a tree flattened her caravan.

The word *crushed* is used twice in this part. The first mention carries the greatest effect. It can almost be perceived as insensitive. The insensitivity is emphasized by the use of the phrase *among the dead* (corresponding with the *five* from the second sentence of the

headline) which makes it seem that Bethany is just another victim selected randomly from the pool of many others.

The first part of the subheadline introduces an element already observed in A24- the experts stating their opinion on the subject matter:

Five people were killed by the 100mph winds that blitzed Britain- as experts said megastorms will now hit us every year.

The mention of the experts who provide certain facts (however negative they may be) could be interpreted as an attempt of stabilizing the unexpected instability that took place and shook the stable folk model. The instability thus became more trustworthy.

The word *blitzed* gives the storms almost a human-like feature, describing them as an army<sup>1</sup> carrying out its attack. To accentuate the scope of the storms, they are also given the prefix *mega-*.

Bednarek describes this occurrence as the news value of Superlativeness by which “the bigger, the faster, the more destructive, the more violent, the more, the better” (Bednarek 2006, 17). This category can also be observed as one of the crucial ones in the formation of sensationalised news, along with Negativity, Proximity and Unexpectedness.

### **7.3 Analysis of category B**

We now move on to the second category of the corpus. This category deals with headlines that feature stories about the lives of celebrities. This category consists of 27 items- 7 *24 sata* front pages and 20 *Daily Star* front pages. Conboy describes the way in which stories about celebrities are featured in tabloids and claims that their lives “are often represented as two-dimensional rollercoaster rides between elation and depression” (2005, 187). In other words, there seems to be no middle-ground in the ways of representing their lives, which seemingly consist of only extremely positive and extremely negative events. As it was previously stated, the crucial effect the headlines in this category are trying to achieve is to bring celebrities closer to the average reader by emphasizing some aspects of the celebrities' lives which the reader can relate to. This process of bringing the two closer together is necessary because, by definition, “celebrity signifies a distance from ordinary

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<sup>1</sup> [www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/blitz](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/blitz) (accessed on 1 September 2014)

people” (Johansson 2007, 111). In order to do that, “celebrities' private lives are shared with the imagined community of readers” (Conboy 2007, 189).

We will focus on four front pages due to the fact that it is smaller in scope than A, and that the majority of front pages in this category are very similar (reoccurring actors, themes and constructions). However, in the analysis of these four front pages we will occasionally refer to the others in the category as well.

The first item that we will inspect is the front page labeled as B2. This front page features a story so massive in its scope that it claims the whole page for itself. The entire front page (sans an advertisement at the bottom) could be considered as a single frame, and the largest one in the analysis so far.



Figure 8: Front page B2

The headline reads:

EXCLUSIVE

“MOVE OUT WITH THE BABY IN TWO DAYS”

It seems that it is necessary to immediately introduce the other elements that complement the headline. These are two subheadlines:

SEVE VS. MILAN

UNDISCLOSED DETAILS OF THE CONTROVERSIAL DIVORCE

and

How will Severina prove that she is the better choice for raising their son

The frame these elements are in also comprises of a photograph and the masthead. The most salient elements of the frame are the headline and the photograph, due to their size.

The headline is written in a large yellow typeface which covers almost half of the frame and is in contrast with the background photograph that is mostly in much subtler colours than the text of the headline.

The photograph is given such importance that it actually overshadows the masthead which is pushed to the background. The verb *overshadow* is not used without reason because there are visible (digitally added) outlines resembling shadows on the parts of the photograph that overlap with the masthead.

The first part of the headline includes the word *exclusive* as to signal to the audience that what follows is a story that they will not be in an opportunity to read anywhere else. In order to find out everything, they must buy this publication, and no other- this is the one that they need. This corresponds to the news value of Competition which belongs to the second of Bell's three classes of news values. This class deals with values in the news process itself, and this particular news value introduces the notion that the term *exclusive* emphasizes the fact that some "stories are in competition with each other" (Bednarek 2006). Journalists compete with their colleagues in the race for the best story – the elusive *exclusive*.

The main part of the headline is somewhat ambiguous to those unfamiliar of the story. But due to the fact that this story has been featured in some way on numerous front pages in the whole corpus (five times only in this category, also on B1, B3, B4, B5), the producers believe that the audience does not need to be spoon-fed the same information over and over, and instead they decide to act upon this relationship they have been building with the audience. The readers are already introduced to some aspect of the story, and this is seen as its continuation, like an episode of a TV series.

Coupled with the two subheadlines, we can finally come to a conclusion that the event which is taking place is the divorce of the two protagonists on the photograph. The event covered and the explicit depiction of the protagonists point out to the news value of Personalization for which Bednarek states that it "indicates that news stories that are personalized attract the audience more than the portrayal of generalized concepts or processes" (2006, 17). She also points out Fowler's claim that this aspect is most prominent in the popular press and its aim is to provoke straightforward feelings of identification, empathy or disapproval (quoted in Bednarek 2006, 17).

If we wish to put this frame into the context of Real-Ideal, we can interpret the headline as Real and the visible part of the photograph as Ideal. The Ideal is then

“communicated visually and the text serves to comment or elaborate” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 194).

The interplay between the photograph and the text of the headline is very interesting. Due to the fact that both protagonists are embraced on the photograph, one could interpret it as an older photograph, from the time when there were no marital disputes between the two. That way, the whole frame introduces a melodramatic tone to the story-images of marital happiness clash with the harsh reality presented by the headline and subheadlines. However, the headline also introduces an interesting notion. Upon closer examination of the photograph we can see that the man could be whispering something into the woman's ear. Could these be the *exclusive* words the headline is quoting? The woman has a concerned look on her face, as if she just received some very bad news. One possible interpretation is that the two were observed by journalists and photographers at the exact moment those words were said and that is why the story is *exclusive*.

However, data from the corpus reveals that this is a re-used photograph, used on the front page labeled as B1 which predates this front page by two weeks. Thus it is more likely that it is a “stock” photograph used by the paper to display the protagonists together.

The first part of the first subheadline introduces a linguistic element (*vs.*) which introduces the notion that, semantically speaking, the divorce is seen as a conflict or a competition between the two protagonists and the prize is the custody of their son. This again refers us to the theatrical textual display we have previously mentioned as one of the key features of tabloid language. Furthermore, the two protagonists are addressed by their nickname and first name respectively, as if to raise the level of familiarity between them and in order to spark more interest in the readers- they are not some random people, but people the audience knows by their names and nicknames.

This same construction is used on the front page appearing four days later, which was used in the focus group (labeled as 2). In that headline the score has changed (*Seve vs. Milan 0:1*).

The second part of the first headline states that within this particular issue the reader can find *undisclosed* details about the divorce. The use of this adjective could again be linked to the *exclusiveness* of the story (the details cannot be found anywhere else) and the constant need of the publication to remain relevant by always serving new information. The fact that the details are *undisclosed* could also point us in the direction of the news values of

Unexpectedness- there is still much more to know about the story. If there exist *undisclosed* details, that must mean that there are also *disclosed* details. Going by this fact, we can conclude that the story has been in media spotlight for quite some time. *Details* are what is disclosed- simple facts are not enough. It is necessary to dig deeper into the intimate lives of the protagonists.

The subheadline also uses the adjective *controversial* to modify the meaning of the noun *divorce*. As the protagonists are celebrities, it is assumed that they deal with events in a different way than ordinary people- the divorce is therefore *a controversial battle*. But at the same time it is still a divorce, an event a large number of “ordinary” people goes through. The celebrities just deal with it in their specific way.

The second subheadline is somewhat ambiguous due to the lack of punctuation in Croatian (*Kako će Severina dokazati da je ona bolja za odgoj sina*) and the word order when translated into English. We do not know whether it is a question on just a complement (“The story of how Severina will prove (...)”). In any case, the reader is prompted to read the connected article in order to find out.

We now move on to the front page B9. This front page is more complex in its structure. It consists of the masthead, three frames containing headlines and two advertisements. The most prominent frame dominates the lower-right section of the page and it is highly salient because of the colour contrast between the black background and the white lettering. Also in the frame are two photographs and three subheadlines.



Figure 9: Front page B9

The text of the headline reads:

COWELL: I WANT THIS BABY

The headline is presented as a quote and in a quite dramatic fashion (in accordance with the typical features of tabloid headlines) - the reader can almost perceive it as a line extracted from a play. The language of the headline is very concise and it possesses many previously mentioned linguistic features laid out by Mardh (quoted in Develotte and Rechniewski 2001), the most noticeable of which is the use of short words in order to produce a greater impact on the reader.

The *baby* in the headline is practically referred to as an object because of the omission of its name. It is only a vehicle for the story whose main actor is presented in the headline and the photograph in the frame.

The photograph represents the actor of this event in an idealized way. He is smiling and is dressed in white, which we have previously discussed as the colour of Good. This effect is amplified by the digitally added white outline around the actor, which gives his figure a noticeable glow. Again, the news value of Personalization is at play here because a single person is put under the spotlight. The issue of a custody over a child of two “regular” members of society would not be so news-worthy, but the actor of this story is a celebrity. Thus, different rules apply to him. His social status introduces the news value of Eliteness (which we can also apply to the actors of B2). Reference to an “elite” member of society is judged more newsworthy than reference to ordinary people” (Bednarek 2006).

The first subheadline in the frame is also a quote by the actor:

“I love my Lauren and we'll be proper family”

This subheadline is further elaborated on by the second one:

EXCLUSIVE by Peter Dyke

X Factor boss Simon Cowell wants to settle down with married pregnant lover Lauren Silverman and be a family man.

He furiously denies claims he has ditched her.

The first subheadline emphasizes the fact that the actor is Good (he is trying to do something positive). It also introduces the notion that the other actor involved is *his*- he considers them a couple despite the hardships they are currently enduring. That their situation

is not ideal is introduced by the adjective *proper* which implies that the situation is currently *improper*. Taking this into consideration, we can divide the frame into Given and New information. What is Given is the fact that the actor's love is not in question (explained in the first subheadline), regardless of the current hardships. The New is his solution to the problems, which is explained by the headline and the second subheadline. The actor is placed in the frame as a unifying factor of sorts, which connects the Given and New, thus emphasizing his crucial role in the whole story.

Speaking of the second subheadline, in it we can also observe the occurrence of the news value of Competition- this story is *exclusive* to this publication to such an extent that even the name of the journalist who covered it was mentioned in this subheadline.

We can also note that this particular subheadline is very explanatory and it refers to the actor s involved very specifically. In contrast to several other previously analysed headlines and subheadlines, this one does not seem have an effect of creating an audience that is “in the know”, but rather allows a much more greater number of readers the opportunity to understand the story.

The second subheadline also elaborates on the other elements of the frame by stating why the actors are not a *proper* family- the other actor is his *married pregnant lover* and it is the main actor's desire to finally be a *family man* (which under the current conditions he is not) and *settle down* with her. The verb *to settle down* implies that the actor want to marry the secondary actor, and by doing so, their hardships will end. To reinforce his intent and to establish himself as the Good actor, he *furiously* denies accusations about his intentions not being true.

The frame on the bottom-right part of the page features a photograph and a small headline which contains the following headline:

YOU WHO!  
PETER'S THE NEW DOC

This frame is pretty straightforward – it is an announcement dealing with a TV show. However, in it is a feature of the language of tabloids we have not previously not touched upon- puns. According to Conboy, “the pun demonstrates the ever-present potential for humour in popular culture” (2005, 18). The pun (*you who*) is a play on the title of the TV show in question (*Doctor Who*) and is tied with the revelation of the actor in the photograph



of the frame as the one who will accept the title role. It is also important to note the second part of the headline which uses a first name and a nickname to raise the level of closeness to the actor. These are used in the tabloids “as a bridge of familiarity, connecting readers to a world outside the confines of their lived experience” (Conboy 2005, 22). Furthermore, the effect their usage is trying to achieve is “to establish the “naturalness” of the presence of these people and their affairs in the pages of the newspaper” (Conboy, 2005, 22).

The top left (the most salient part of the page) is dominated by a frame of an attractive female actor, which could be interpreted as an attempt to immediately capture the attention of (potential) readers. It can be assumed that the readers will keep their attention on that portion of the page and then take notice of the much less salient frame below it. However, this frame is also semantically related to the most prominent one on the page, as was revealed by a more in-depth examination. We have established that the main frame on the page deals with the *boss* of the TV show *X Factor*. The actor of this frame is a former judge on the show and the headline (*Tulisa quits Britain*) refers to the fact that the actor is planning on starting a new life in the USA because she was involved in a drug scandal in Britain, as was revealed by the article associated with this headline.

The next item we will inspect is front page B14. This front page features the masthead, several advertisements and three frames which contain prominent headlines. The largest one reads:

HARRY'S WEDDY TO POP QUESTION

Prince admits Cressida is “the one”



Figure 10: Front page B14

Unlike the one before, this front page features a pun in the most prominent headline. The event described by the headline is a potential announcement of an engagement and a wedding. The lexeme *ready* is thus replaced by a new linguistic creation (*weddy*) which is a blend of the lexemes *wedding* and *ready*. The informal tone of the headline is reinforced by the usage of the phrase *to pop question* (from which the article *the* is omitted, in accordance to the general rules of headline formation) which is used instead of the verb *to propose*. The protagonists of the headline are referred to their first name, which acts as the aforementioned “bridge of familiarity” between the actors and the audience. Of course, the potential engagement is not the one of “regular” people but those who are on a high rung of the social ladder. Thus, the news value of Eliteness is introduced. However, the use of informal tone and humour “suppresses” it and the link formed between the audience and the actors seems stronger. We can assume that the attempted closeness is the primary aim of the publication.

The second part of the headline also introduces the notion of Eliteness by the use of the lexeme *prince* in describing the actor, but because it is used without any additional modifiers, we are under the impression that this is almost a kind of a nickname for the actor, especially when taking the informal tone of the whole frame into consideration.

The melodramatic aspect of tabloid headlines is visible in the second part of the headline. The fiancée is represented as the “*the one*”, as the perfect choice shown without any flaws, if we refer to the theory of “perfect halves” of our being (for each person there is only one perfect partner).

The subheadline of the frame reads:

EXCLUSIVE

Prince Harry is expected to propose to gorgeous girlfriend Cressida Bonas, below, royal insiders have revealed. They predict an announcement by the end of the year, and believe the nation could be treated to a spring wedding.

Once again, Competition is introduced by the lexeme *exclusive*, and readers are supposed to be intrigued by the fact that the information made available by this publication can not be received from other sources. *The one* is here attributed as *gorgeous* in order to reinforce the perfect choice made by the actor. Her name is also explicitly stated (she is that “perfect half”). The sources of the *exclusive* news are also revealed in a sense, they are *the royal insiders* referred to only as such in order to keep their identities secret. This also emphasizes the *exclusiveness* of the story- the reporters went through much trouble in order to

acquire this information and their sources could find themselves in a potentially difficult situation if their identities are revealed.

An interesting construction is used in this subheadline. The nation could “*be treated to a spring wedding*”. This implies that there exists an emotional relationship between the actors and the nation (members of which form the audience of the newspaper) and that people will somehow be rewarded by the wedding.

The two photographs in the frame represent the actors of this story. The main actor is placed in the frame in such a way that he is connected to the headline and is gesturing and mimicking towards it. On the other hand, the featured photograph of the other actor is less revealing, indicating that there may be more in the article connected to the headline and subheadline. The photographs are also placed in such a way in the frame that they form the New, since the headline (which is Given) only gives us information about an unspecified Harry.

The second largest frame of the front page features the protagonist of the previously analysed front page (B9). The headline is as follows:

Nudist treat for Si's lover

This time, the actor is introduced by a nickname (*Si*) in an attempt to establish intertextuality and once again raise the level of familiarity between him and the audience. On the other hand, the second actor is introduced only as his *lover*, as if to demote her importance in the overall story. This headline is ambiguous because it does not offer any explanation as to what the *nudist treat* is, prompting the readers to find out by themselves by reading the associated article. The headline introduces the news value of Unexpectedness by the use of this phrase due to the fact that nudity is something usually bearing almost taboo-like connotations, while the lexeme *treat* mostly bears positive connotations. The two actors are portrayed by a photograph and are both looking and point at something off-frame which is undisclosed. This raises the level of the readers' curiosity even higher.

The third frame's headline also features a play on words:

Bruce: I'm no Celebrity Big Boozer

The frame contains no explanatory subheadline. One could assume that this is the case because the part of the audience that watches *Big Brother* already knows the reasoning

behind this headline.

Keeping up with the tone of the entire page, this story is also presented by a witty headline. However, unlike the two previously discussed one, this one deals with a much more serious problem- alcoholism. The actor, presumably a contestant in *Celebrity Big Brother* is reduced only to that role, and his (potential) drinking problem is presented through it (by switching the lexeme *brother* with *boozer*). The fact that he potentially has a drinking problem could be interpreted as an attempt to bring us closer to this celebrity by revealing that even celebrities have their flaws, just as regular people. However, even though it has been explicitly stated that this actor is a celebrity, it is questionable to what degree since Conboy states:

Reality television formats have enabled the celebrity agenda to migrate down the social scale to include people whose celebrity depends exclusively on appearing on a reality television programme. These are given the same treatment and are framed in the same language as their more famous celebrity counterparts. Celebrity thereby becomes not just a metaphor through which we are invited to interpret other parts of the news but literally begins to invade the realm of the ordinary (2005, 204).

At this point it is important to note that *Daily Star* “claims prominence as the Official *Big Brother* paper” (Conboy 2005, 203) and distinguishes itself among other publications in the same range by this fact. By making itself known as the publication that will bring the readers the best coverage of reality-TV shows through running stories about it, *Daily Star* is drawing upon all the rhetoric of popular involvement (Conboy 2005, 36). This sort of intertextuality is something *Daily Star* is proud of and it “does all it can to reinforce that part of its identity and to advertise it to its readers” (Conboy 2005, 202). This has also been observed in the data collected in the corpus. Numerous front pages of *Daily Star* feature headlines (even very prominent ones) dealing with *Big Brother* (for instance, B12, B16, B18 and B19 in this category). This could be seen as a relationship of two aspects of the media that people perceive to be on the same level- tabloids and reality television. Both have embraced this relationship for, one could assume, beneficial reasons. Maybe some readers of the tabloid do not watch this reality television show, but if they see it promoted in the tabloid, they will be intrigued and take a look. The process presumably works both ways- the tabloid is probably advertised in episodes of the show.

It should be noted that the author hasn't found any explicit evidence of *Daily Star* actually being labeled as the “official” publication of *Big Brother* in the United Kingdom on

the website of the television channel that broadcasts it<sup>2</sup>. The term *official* is therefore interpreted only as a means of establishing the status of the publication in the minds of the readers.

The analysis will be concluded by examining front page B20. It is very similar to those analysed before- a masthead in the top left corner, three frames with prominent headlines and several advertisements.



Figure 11: Front page 20

The most salient frame contains the following headline:

SHOCKING CONFESSION OF EASTENDERS STAR  
I TOOK TO CRACK LIKE A DUCK TO WATER

Also in the frame is a subheadline and a photograph of the actor. The subheadline reads:

EastEnders' newest signing Danny Dyer has boasted of smoking crack cocaine, enjoying wild showbiz orgies and loving life as a petty thief.

The confessions of Dyer, 36, will shock BBC bosses as he prepares to join the soap as new Queen Vic landlord

The frame and the headline are highly salient due to their respective sizes. The headline occupies the most of the frame and the other elements within it seem to be almost

<sup>2</sup> <http://bigbrother.channel5.com> (accessed on 18 September 2014)

pushed to the side.

The first part of the headline introduces the notion that what follows is accordance to the news value of Unexpectedness due to the use of the phrase *shocking confession*. Also, the lexeme *confession* introduces Personalization- what follows is a personal story of the actor. The phrase also refers us to Competition- as one can assume that this specific publication is the only one which carries this story. In turn, this reinforces the bond between the audience, the actor and the publication. The actor uses the tabloid as a means of connecting with his audience (and attempts to connect with the tabloid's audience), the tabloid uses the Personalized actor as a bridge of familiarity to deepen its bond with the audience, and the audience feels closer to both the actor and the tabloid.

The second part of the headline institutes Negativity, but also alleviates it through the use of humour at the same time. A serious problem of drug addiction is thus presented through a witty metaphor with an idiomatic meaning<sup>3</sup>.

What is meant by this is that the actor's drug problem was severe, because it is said that it was as easy for him to consume drugs, as it is for a duck to swim on water. The headline is also governed by the general rules of headline formation- the lexemes used are short in order to compress the narrative. Such language is used in order “to provide an interesting hook for readers” (Conboy 2005, 18).

The frame can be divided into Given information (the headline) and New information (the subheadline and the photograph). Although the headline is not a “traditional” Given (because of its first part and the *shocking confession*), it could be viewed as an “agreed departure point for the message” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 189). New information is then seen as an explication of the Given- it presents detailed information about the overall lifestyle the actor of the story has led while consuming drugs. The matter at issue is how will these facts be interpreted by *BBC bosses*. Their introduction could be interpreted as an attempt to potentially expand the tabloid's audience to the *bosses*. If they want to find out crucial information about their newest acquisition, they should read this issue of *Daily Star*. But the *bosses* most likely approach the issue presented by this frame in a much different way than the regular readers of the newspaper. BBC has a reputation to uphold, and it is most likely that they expect a certain level of moral behaviour from their employees. The revelation of their employee being involved in dubious activities could potentially disrupt their business

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<sup>3</sup> Take to something like a duck to water - Take to something very readily  
(<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/take-to-something-like-a-duck-to-water>)

relationship. Therefore, this headline not only reveals *shocking* facts, but also facts that could carry some serious consequences for the actor.

The photograph in the frame features the actor of the story. We have established that it is a part of the New of the frame. It could be interpreted as an attempt to present the actor in a manner that corresponds with the claims laid out by the headline and subheadline. Unlike the positive representation of the actor in the main frame of B9, this representation is quite different. The actor is depicted with a cigarette in his mouth and with a stupefied look on his face in order to correspond to his image of a person with a history of drug abuse.

Also it is unclear what is the current state of the actor, as the frame doesn't reveal that fact and the readers are therefore urged to find out the whole story (if there is anything else to it) in the associated article.

The advertisement below this frame also stresses *Daily Star's* connection with the domain of popular television and television in general. The second largest frame on the page occupies the most salient position- the (upper) left side of the page (as was the case with the same position in B9). And it seems that it is no coincidence that a photograph of an attractive and scantily clad female was placed in it, as it was observed in the corpus that these kinds of images are often placed in the same position by *Daily Star*. The headline in the frame reads:

Helen plans a show 'n' telly

The pun in this headline refers us to the fact that the woman is also somehow connected to the domain of television- the verb *to tell* in the phrase *show and tell* is replaced by the colloquial expression for *television- telly*. When taking the photograph into consideration, we can only assume what is meant by this headline. The *show* in *show and tell* could refer to the fact that she potentially plans to undress herself on television. What ever the case may be, the usage of such photographs and headlines on front pages refers us back to the well known principle in advertising- sex sells. Conboy also notices the frequent placement of such headlines and photographs on the front pages of tabloids and points out that this sexualisation “is almost exclusively driven from the perspective of an idealized male reader or even voyeur” (2005, 201). In this and similar cases (for example, the *nudist treat* in B14 also bears some connotations to sex) we can perhaps state that the idealized audience of the tabloid is narrowed down.

The third frame on the page deals with one of the most common points of interest

for *Daily Star* (as observed in the corpus)- the British Royal Family, namely the late Princess Diana. The frame features a photograph of her and a headline:

DINAMITE!

Pal hoards secret stash of Princess diaries

This frame also exploits puns as a linguistic means of grabbing attention. The story presented by the headline also introduces the news value of Eliteness because the actor in question was a member of royalty. The first syllable of the word *dynamite* was replaced by the nickname (to raise the level of familiarity) of the late Princess- *Di*. This altered form of the word *dynamite* is used as a metaphor for announcing an “explosive and exclusive” story. The effect is emphasized further by the use of an exclamation mark. Some more details about the story are provided in the second sentence. *Pal* is used instead of the lexeme *friend* in order to shorten the headline, connect with the audience through the use of colloquial expressions and make the *friend* seem less threatening (almost likeable). The fact that the *diaries* were *secret* links this story with Unexpectedness. The use of the lexeme *stash* implies that there exists a large amount of the *diaries* the contents of which could potentially be revealed by *Daily Star*, providing the audience with a plethora of stories in numerous editions to come.

This frame could also be divided by the principle of Given-New. What is Given is the photograph of Princess, which represents her in the most prototypical sense of the word *princess* (with a tiara on her head). The information provided by the headline is thus interpreted as New, as it reveals unknown details about her life- these details trigger the news value of Personalization.

#### **7.4 Focus group**

A focus group was used in this research as an auxiliary method. Its intended goal was to provide further insight into the data collected in the corpus. Critical discourse analysis of items in the corpus is the main research method of this paper. A focus group interview was conducted with the intention of acquiring opinions of people who are not linguists by education and therefore view the subject matter in another light. One might say that they provide layman opinions on the matter. Bloor et al. claim that discussions between members



of focus groups provide “rich data on the group meanings associated with a given issue” (2001, 7).

Initially, focus groups were more frequently used in areas such as market research and a large number of them had nothing to do with academic research. However, it is the previously mentioned access to group meanings that makes them a valuable tool in scholarly research. In recent times, their usage is more widespread and they are used in fields such as social research and education.

Due to the nature and approach of this research, a focus group would have been an insufficient primary tool. Therefore, it is used as an additional method in order to provide the researcher with additional insight into the subject matter. The conclusions, opinions and group meanings are, of course, expressed in “everyday language of the group” (Bloor et al. 2001, 7).

The focus group used in this research consisted of six people. They are between 23 and 29 years old. Some of them are students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb (but their majors are not associated with linguistics), and some of them did not attend any university. The participants belong to a pre-existing social group and as such this focus group has provided a “more natural setting for discussion” (Bloor et al. 2001, 35).

A smaller group was also chosen because of that reason. This fact allowed for a more fruitful discussion and all of the group members were given a chance to speak their mind.

The participants were given a selection of printed newspaper front pages from the corpus. The exemplary front pages were enumerated 1-12. 1-6 are *24 sata* front pages, and 7-12 are *Daily Star* front pages. They were chosen from the previously mentioned narrowed-down corpus consisting of 33 *24 sata* front pages and 33 *Daily Star* front pages. All of the pages used in the session are listed in the appendix.

The entire session was audio recorded in order to “avoid the pitfalls of inaccurate and selective manual recording and inaccurate and selective recall by the facilitator” (Bloor et al. 2001, 42). The researcher also provided the participants with explanations on the subject matter of the headlines when needed. The recording was analysed by the researcher and the most important conclusions and observations from the session were summarized.

The most frequent comment from all the members of the group was that the stories featured are borderline news or no relevant news at all- most of them are “ordinary events presented as though they were relevant news”. The headlines are presented in a way that intrigues the audience to at least read the article associated with them. In some cases, they

even expressed no desire to read the article after reading the headline. This was often the case when the sensationalistic headline was further explained in its associated subheadline. In most cases, even the small amount of desire they had to read the article in order to “satisfy their curiosity” quickly dissipated when the subheadline presented facts that weren't in correlation with the headline or altered its meaning in some way. The group even found some front pages funny, for example the one labeled as 4.



*Figure 12: Focus group front page 4*

The most prominent headline on the page is the one that reads:

NEW FACE OF TERROR

SILICONE BOMBS

The English and the FBI issue a warning: Al-Qaida is putting explosives into silicone implants. Be wary of busty passengers. The British implement rigorous control, Please awaiting instructions. Dr. Duško Maletić: These breasts can contain 800 mL of explosives.

This headline first induced laughter, and then was described as sexist and tasteless. The first interpretation was that the topic was not terrorism, but pornography (especially when the headline was viewed in conjunction with the picture above it. One participant observed this particular front page as cleverly thought-out in order to increase sales because “it features two things that sell the best- fear and sex”.



Figure 13: Focus group  
front page 5

Fear was also the theme of the conversation about the front page labeled as 5.

It features two prominent headlines, the larger one being:

My iPhone exploded near my head

The cellphone was charging all night on my night stand. It started ringing in the morning and burst...

and the smaller one being:

Pula: Plane crashes into the sea, two people dead

It fell apart while falling and sank to 7m depth

The participants thought that the larger headline does not tell a story worthy of the front page and consider the story over blown. They could not understand why it was more important than the story of a fatal aeroplane crash, but some participants assumed that this was a story about an “everyday occurrence that people will react to more” and that it is the “the most basic level of fearmongering”- people face immediate danger from common household objects.

Another observation made by the participants concerns misleading headlines that convince the readers that the events they describe played out in a different way than they actually did. For example, on the front page labeled as 6:

GIRL OPERATED ON NEXT TO A BOMB

ZAGREB: DRAMA UNFOLDS IN CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Bomb squad on roof had to wait for dr. Mislav Bastić to remove a kidney tumour and save the life of a little girl (4)



Figure 14: focus group front page 6

When the participants first scanned the front page by reading the text written in all caps, they assumed that the bomb was actually in the operating room and was armed. Because the headline mentioned the doctor by his full name, they assumed that he was deemed a hero because he operated next to a ticking bomb. Only by reading the subheadline did they realize that the bomb was on the roof and assumed that it was probably there since the Croatian War of Independence.

We can deduce that they were led to their initial assumption because of the formation of the sentences in question. *Next to* implies a spatial relation of extreme closeness in this case, assuming the girl and the bomb are two subjects of approximately the same size and thus can be placed very close to one another. It was also said that the drama unfolded *in* the children's hospital, but in this case we can speak of two separate dramas: one did take place *in* the hospital (saving the girl's life), but another one took place *on top* of the hospital (the disarming of the bomb).

Another misleading headline that they singled out was the one on the front page labeled as 12:

Di ghost tells Kate: “You're too thin!”



Figure 14: Focus group front page 12

Only by reading an explanatory text did they learn the true sequence of events that took place. Those were actually the words relayed by a former spiritual counsellor of Princess Diana. The participants did not understand the purpose of such news stories, but understood that the headline was formed in such a way that it attracts potential readers.

The headline on the front page labeled as 2 reads:

Seve vs. Milan

0:1

The participants found this headline interesting. They all agreed that it was cleverly thought-out because it takes a difficult subject (parental disputes over a child and divorce) and transforms it into a match by using football-related terminology. The whole painful process is reduced to a competition where the big decisions made are marked as points. It was the opinion of the participants that this terminology was used to intrigue the audience by using a simple form of vocabulary.



Figure 15: Focus group front page 2

Some participants also saw a correlation between the picture above the headline and the headline itself. The “loser” in this competition has a sad expression on her face, while the “winner” is seen rejoicing. It was stated that similar pictures can be seen in sports articles. Conboy highlights this feature of the language of tabloids, where because of the use of abbreviations and atypical vocabulary, “the protagonists are reduced to caricatures” (2005, 24). The most frequent comments by the participants were that the headlines were mostly shocking and sensationalist at first glance. In most cases, the related subheadline lessened the “shock value” of the headline. What bothered them the most was the fact that certain headlines presented the news as a given fact and the only possible truth, which confirms Reah's (2002, 31) previously mentioned claim that tabloids present to their readers only one possible perspective and eliminate any possibility of an alternative.

It is the opinion of the participants that all of the headlines about mysteries, shocking events and insights into the lives of celebrities actually “keep people away from the real and important news”, even if the important news is hidden away on other pages of a particular edition. Their use of emotive and melodramatic language has only a short-term effect in order to gain the reader's attention. If the news was written in a more “ordinary” way, it is the opinion of the participants that they would not have been so successful in their intention. This can be linked to a claim made by Conboy in which he refers to Curran, Douglas and Whannel (1980). The language used and the events chosen to feature in these kinds of headlines are constructing a world view “which rejects fundamental political issues and focuses instead on random events within a world of common sense” (Conboy 2005, 16). However, the language of tabloids should not be viewed as inferior to the “classic” journalistic style of writing. It is not formed the way it is because of linguistic incompetence, but it is their way of adapting to the idealized reader by building their “composite version of

the vocabulary and style of their ideal average reader” (Conboy, 2005, 14). It should be noted that the participants displayed an almost borderline judgemental attitude towards the headlines used and that they are not the idealized readers Conboy mentions as they have approached the front pages and headlines in a different way from the start of the session.

## ***8 Discussion and conclusion***

The basic hypothesis of this paper is that tabloids employ sensationalism in a way that distorts the understanding of the featured stories. At the same time, the newsworthiness of the stories was not the concern of this research- the stories exist, the information is available and the publications in question are in circulation. Therefore, there exists an audience that reads these stories. This analysis was strictly objective.

By examining the linguistic properties of the headlines featured in *24 sata* and *Daily Star*, we have determined that tabloids use numerous (multimodal) means in order to attract their readers. The most “attractive” headlines are most often placed in highly salient frames that occupy large portions of front pages (and sometimes even whole pages, such as the analysed example B2). The headlines are featured in these frames alongside other elements, such as subheadlines and images. The typeface in which the headlines are written is large and often highly contrasted with the colour of the background of the frame to make them even more noticeable. The multimodality of the frames is often highlighted with images that add to the meaning of the headlines and modify it. Such headlines and images are what Johansson (2007) designates as the melodramatic features of tabloids. The images can sometimes even confuse the readers because they do not correspond to the meaning of the text (for example, on the front page A5). The featured images range from mere illustrations to very graphic photographs, but all of them are used as “attention grabbers”, especially if they are used in large formats, so as to capture the attention of the readers even before they read the text of the headlines.

Therefore, readers perceive the “the non-linear, spatial structure of the page, and are involved in the active, “linear” process of traversing that structure” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 206). Elements of front pages are mostly strategically placed and influence one another. The reader will take notice of secondary elements of front pages (those that are less salient than the most prominent frame and headline) because of their connections with the

primary ones (visual or semantical, for example).

Concentrating on the very language of tabloid headlines, we can say that it is not an inferior version of the language of broadsheet newspapers. In fact, it is “a clever and profitable game of linguistic ventriloquism by the journalists and sub-editors with a clear appeal to the readers that it targets” (Conboy 2005, 12). Simply put, it is highly adjusted to the targeted audience in order to form a bond between them and the publications. The tabloids mostly speak in the language of the audience, but also influence their readers through the use of many linguistic means we can almost liken to manipulation. Short lexemes and idioms are often used in order to capture the attention of the readers more effectively. Word play and puns are also present- they introduce humour (even in inappropriate situations) and are also efficient in attracting the attention of the readers. Familiar names and nicknames are used in order to establish intertextuality and deepen the bond between the publications and the readers (the readers are “in the know” if they recognize the references).

We have examined the two categories of the corpus and established that there exist two processes which distinguish them. Concerning category A, the tabloids use various linguistic means in order to distance their readers from the featured stories. They present events from a singular perspective that makes the readers question or change their view of the world around them. The most basic way they do so is by introducing the news values of Negativity, Unexpectedness and Proximity, which are then further amplified by frequent occurrences of Personalization. Events that could be rationally explained are presented as mysterious, stories that are mostly regular occurrences are presented as shocking, and negative events are blown-up to such degrees that they could potentially instil fear or panic in the readers. Some are even presented in such a way that the lines between reality and fiction seem blurred (such as the most prominent story in A33). Lexemes such as *shock*, *hell*, *mystery*, *death* and those semantically similar are used in large quantities.

In category B, we have observed an entirely different process. Celebrities, the people the idealized readers of the tabloids perceive as different to them in many aspects, are brought closer to them in various ways. The lives of celebrities are presented to the readers in such a way that the readers feel more connected to them- certain events and issues the celebrities face in their private lives (and potentially share with the audience) are bombastically reported about. The previously mentioned use of familiar names, nicknames, puns and colloquial language is one of the most prominent linguistic aspects of this process.



Due to the fact that these stories sometimes do not carry the same weight as the ones described in category A, the attention of the readers is additionally captured by emphasizing the *exclusiveness* of the stories featured, meaning that the readers cannot get the information anywhere else and are urged to buy the specific publication in which this information is presented.

The members of the focus group, as the “possible audience”, very often took notice of the relationships between texts and images. They deemed these relationships very important, especially in the selected front pages from category A. They also noticed the frequent uses of shocking words (the previously mentioned *mystery*, *hell* and *shock*, for example) on those pages, which was also observed in the analysis. The group also stated that the headline on selected front pages from category B were memorable due to the usage of short words, puns and humour. This also corresponds with the findings of the analysis, in which the aforementioned were described as a successful way of gaining the attention of the readers.

It must also be noted that, even though *24 sata* and *Daily Star* were chosen for this research because of their similarities in layout and the variety of stories covered, there exist some differences between the two. It was shown that *Daily Star* is much more direct in its approach- the front page almost always contains more elements, the language is more colloquial and word games and idioms occur more frequently than in *24 sata*. *24 sata* uses the standard variety of Croatian (like all Croatian newspapers) and this is the major difference between the two.

The main purpose of newspaper front pages is to “orient their readers to the world” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 216). Tabloid front pages offer to their readers a selective view of the world in which the presentation of certain events is overly exaggerated and in which “the boundaries between public and private events have become blurred” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998, 126). Important political and social issues are pushed aside by certain events which do not belong to these domains and which are presented in a sensationalistic fashion. This sensationalistic presentation is what captures the attention of the readers. Depending on the category the stories featured fall under, their view of the world is shifted accordingly.

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# 10 Appendix

Category A

A1 - A12







Category B

B1 - B12





NOTE: Focus group front pages are as follows:

- 1 - A24, 2 - B4, 3 - A5, 4 - A6, 5 - A10, 6 - A25,
- 7 - A36, 8 - B19, 9 - B20, 10 - B17, 11-A27, 12 - A38