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**EFFICIENCY AND HEADLINE PATTERNS ON THE *COSMOPOLITAN*  
BULGARIA WEBSITE**

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**Abstract:** The subject of the present study is the regulative principle of efficiency conceived as a criterion for assessing the quality of texts in terms of their processing ease (see Beaugrande, Dressler 1981). The study discusses the specific ways in which efficiency is achieved in the qualitatively new context of Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) and more specifically – web-content headlines. The object of the study is the discourse of women’s e-magazines and more specifically, the headlines of love and relationship advice articles from the Bulgarian website of the *Cosmopolitan* women’s magazine. For the purposes of the present study, the term “headline” is understood as a type of “document metadata” (HTML Living Standard 2015 URL) - the highest and most important level of document heading (<h1>), which “serves to describe the topic of the section it introduces” (MDN 2015 URL). The object of the study thus includes web article headlines from the „Любов” (“Love”) subcategory on the Bulgarian website of the magazine (<http://www.cosmopolitan.bg>) and is represented in the form of a specially-created corpus of 1100 headlines uploaded between 2010 and 2016.

The corpus of the study comprises headlines of computer-mediated discourse or, in other words, web content in the form of digital or electronic texts as opposed to written/printed texts. Preserving images of the original appearance of the website during the period of accumulating the corpus has been deemed useful for future reference, due to the idiosyncratic fluidity and mutability of digital content on the World Wide Web. Moreover, screenshots preserve the original formatting and outlook of the content and the design of the web page itself and its content in general, which would be impossible to reproduce and burdensome to explain in purely textual form.

As previously stated, the present study regards the notion of efficiency as a principle which guides the design of web headlines in terms of achieving processing ease. In order to be efficient, therefore, headlines are expected to exhibit qualities such as brevity and clarity of surface structure, combined with the processing ease resulting from the consistent re-using of particular patterns. In order to achieve the brevity aspect of efficiency, headlines rely on particular sets of language resources; i.e., they utilize particular cohesive devices which provide great contributions to the compacting of surface structure. More specifically, the brevity and compactness of surface structure is expected to be enhanced by a number of linguistic affordances specific to the Bulgarian language, as well as the use of specific sets of patterns for creating headlines. Patterns in headlines serve as templates or models applied in the creation of particular headline occurrences. Firstly, these patterns comprise specific sets of constant elements which build up the basis of the pattern itself. Secondly, they include empty “slots” or positions which are open to be filled by various elements in order to produce specific occurrences or, in this case, headlines following the particular pattern in question.

**Keywords:** efficiency, headline patterns, writing for the Web, *Cosmopolitan BG* website

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The crucial role headlines play in this selection and accessing content motivates the specific features they need to exhibit in order to adequately perform their function. Since they are a type of interface (or mediator - Baehr, Schaller 2010: 155-156) between the user and the content, they need to be able to provide clues regarding the content they serve as links to. The sheer volume of options users need to select from, combined with their limited resources of time and attention, however, preclude that headlines must not only provide the right kind and quantity of information. What is more, they need to do this in an efficient way - one which makes it possible for users to process the largest possible amount of information, in that the fastest possible way, while expending the least possible amount of effort.

Therefore, the notion of efficiency as a design criterion for the evaluation of the quality of texts in terms of processing the greatest amount of content with a minimum of effort is accepted as a valid principle not only for the written/printed medium, but is indeed of great value and importance in the context of the so-called “new media” or, more specifically, computer-mediated discourse in the form of web-content headlines. Therefore, this new discourse is expected to exhibit specific strategies aimed at achieving efficiency. These strategies are

naturally expected to rely for their fulfillment on the specific resources the medium and the communicative situation in question can provide, as they will as well inevitably face the limitations and specific requirements these factors entail. Previous research on the topic of online headline patterns in connection with the regulative principle of efficiency includes a number of articles by the author of the present article (see Iglíkova 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017).

One specific aspect of text online is the constant pressing need for reducing the length of texts, i.e. limiting and minimizing the volume of content. At the same time, this very content needs to be informative (it can not be so short as to have low informative value) and understandable (removing too many explicit elements may cause a breach of communication).

As a result of this need, the resources which language provides need to be employed so that content may be configured in an appropriate way that is compatible with economy of surface structure. In a sense, the content needs to be transformed so as to become less reliant on the surface structure and explicit statement (the words themselves). The World Wide Web as a technological phenomenon and web content in particular provide a multimodal framework which comprises various channels of informational exchange, and what is explicitly worded in textual content is only one of them.

On a women's magazine website, for instance, users have vast resources of exophoric reference at their disposal which serve to clarify and supply any relevant information left implicit – the nature of the website, the audio-visual clues provided at different points on the website, the homepage, the website's hierarchy, etc.

This shared context of situation along with the shared experience and fields of interest holds an immense potential for efficient employment of text as an element within the entire system. One such potentially beneficial and economic strategy is the purposeful use of such linguistic items which have a very light information load and practically no independent meaning of their own but simply serve to signal reference to some other, meaningful element. These serve as links, trails, tracks guiding those who are willing to follow, to the place where the relevant information can be retrieved, in this way ensuring optimal speed and ease of selection and accessing the vast resources of information on the World Wide Web.

## 2. CASE STUDY

Since the present case study is corpus based and in order to ensure easier navigation and reference, the discussed headlines from *Cosmopolitan Bulgaria* have been assigned the abbreviation CBG along with a number, corresponding to their position in the corpus; thus, "headline CBG 20" refers to the 20th example headline from the *Cosmopolitan Bulgaria* column in the corpus.

Regarding the hypotheses and expected results from the study, efficiency in web headlines is expected to be achieved in two mutually supporting ways - by maintaining a light processing load through the repetitive use of patterns for the construction of headlines (the effect of this factor is further enhanced by the consistency and frequency of utilization of these patterns which results in a sense of familiarity in users - see Alexieva 2010: 40-42); and, secondly, by maintaining the brevity of surface expression, which is realized within the pattern itself and consists in the use of cohesive devices which promote compactness without damaging the flow of information or limiting its volume.

The Bulgarian language provides the following options for compacting surface structure which will be considered relevant to the present study:

- omitting subjects expressed by pronouns (Popov 1998: 127-128) of the first and second person when they play the role of subject, since the grammatical information is duplicated morphologically in the form of the verb;
- compact personal pronoun forms in the Objective case (Popov 1998: 287) – namely the proclitics/enclitics „ме"/„ми" instead of „мен"/(prep. + „мен"/*me*) for the first person singular *me*; „те"/„ти" instead of „теб"/(prep. + „теб"/*you*) for the second person singular *you*; „го"/„му" instead of „него"/(prep. + „него"/*him; it*) for the masculine/neutral third person singular *him/it*; „я"/„ѝ" instead of „нея"/(prep. + „нея"/*her*) for the feminine third person singular *her*; „ни" instead of „нас"/(prep. + „нас"/*us*) for the first person plural *us*; „ви" instead of „вас"/(prep. + „вас"/*you*) for the second person plural *you*; „ги"/„им" instead of „тях"/(prep. + „тях"/*them*) for the third person plural *them*;
- compact forms for determinative possessives (Quirk et al 1985: 361; Popov 1998: 190) – „ми" instead of „моя(т)/моята/моего/моите" for the first person singular *my*; „ти" instead of „твоя(т)/твоята/твоего/твоите" for the second person singular *your*; „му" instead of „неговия(т)/неговата/неговото/неговите" for the masculine and neutral third person singular

*his/its* respectively; „*и*” instead of „нейния(т)/нейната/нейното/нейните” for the feminine third person singular *her*; „*ни*” instead of „нашия(т)/нашата/нашето/нашите” for the first person plural *our*; „*ви*” instead of „вашия(т)/вашата/вашето/вашите” for the second person plural *your*; „*им*” instead of „техния(т)/тяхната/тяхното/техните” for the third person plural *their*.

The initial analysis and observation on the corpus reveal a number of categories into which the headlines can be categorized with the two most general types being numeral-containing and non-numeral containing. Each of these general types includes a number of subtypes or subcategories which will be discussed below.

## 2.1. Numeral-containing headline patterns.

### 2.1.1. Pattern 1 – „*n* неща, които ...” (“*n* things which ...”).

In addition to the three elements – a numeral, „*неща*” (“things”) and the relative pronoun „*които*” (“which”) – shared by all occurrences of the pattern, these headlines can be separated into sub-groups based on who or what the enumerated “things” refer to. In other words, based on the choice of subject to follow the relative clause introduced by the relative pronoun „*които*” (“which”), the following clusters of similar headlines can be formed:

- **headlines in which the user is an implicit subject**

In this case, the information which differs from sentence to sentence provides elaboration related to the intended user and the “things” the user does, while at the same time the position of subject is left unfilled (the personal pronoun serving as subject is left implicit):

„10 неща, които си мислиш за срещите от „Тиндър””/ “10 things which [you] think of dates from Tinder” (headline CBG 1)

In all such headlines, the grammatical information which a potential personal pronoun would express when it serves as a subject is duplicated in the morphological structure of the finite verb form. Thus the verb forms „*си мислиш*” (“[you] think”), „*знаеш*” (“[you] know”), „*търсиш*” (“[you] Google”), „*се срещаш*” (“[you] are dating) are all morphologically marked as corresponding to a second person singular subject. As has already been observed, this is not the case with the subject of the English finite verb clause, due to the weak morphological marking of finite verb forms. Thus, if one were to omit the verb in such a way that it cannot be supplied by referring to another part of the sentence (as in coordinate clauses, for example) or to an immediately preceding occurrence (such as a question and its answer, for example), in most cases the verb form itself would not have the affordances to express the grammatical information. For example, even the richest paradigm – that of the auxiliary verb “be” for the Present Simple – includes only 3 different forms (“am”, “is” and “are”). This way, without an explicit (or retrievable) subject, one could not possibly tell if “is” follows “he”, “she” or “it”, or if “are” follows “you” in singular or in plural, “we” or “they”.

- **headlines in which the user’s boyfriend/partner, a particular type of man/men in general is the subject/object**

In this type of headlines, the new information added to the basic pattern has to do with the user’s boyfriend, partner or a male person in the role of either subject or object. Since a third person is the grammatical subject or object in this pattern, it is explicitated by using a noun and a determinative possessive which reflects the relationship to the user („*ти*” as in „гаджето ти” (“your boyfriend”). Another way of introducing this type of subject is by using the third person singular, masculine pronominal form in the Nominative case „*той*” (“he”) with exophoric reference. Respectively, for the object position, headlines use the third person singular masculine form of the personal pronoun in the Objective case – „*го*” (“him”):

„5 неща, които гаджето ти няма да си признае”/“5 things which your boyfriend will not admit” (headline CBG 7)

Headline CBG 7 is of specific interest, as it will serve as the first illustration of another option which the Bulgarian language provides for compacting surface structure. This results from the existence of two sets of pronoun forms for both the direct and indirect object within the paradigms of the personals, as well as two sets of forms for the determinative possessives. Thus, in headline CBG 7 compactness is achieved by using the short (enclitic) versions of the second person determinative possessive, the reflexive proclitic serving as an indirect object, and the second and third person singular proclitics as direct or indirect objects, instead of the full forms:

Paraphrased variant CBG 7a – „5 неща, които **твое** гадже няма да признае **на себе си**” (“5 things which **your** boyfriend will not admit (“5 things which your boyfriend will not admit **to himself**”)

The use of the long forms, however, does not only make the headlines much longer, but also marks them as emphatic – „предизвикват него” (“challenge him”) as opposed to „предизвикват теб” (“challenge you”); also, „да изневери на теб” (“to cheat on you”) as opposed to „да изневери на приятелите си” (“to cheat on his friends”), for example. When more than one instance of these long forms occurs within the same clause, however, the result causes confusion since there is more than one candidate for the emphatic position.

**2.1.2. Pattern 2 – „n знака/признака/сигнала/доказателства, че ...” (“n signs/signals that ...”).**

This pattern emerges as the most productive one among both the numeral-containing and non-numeral containing patterns. What is specific about this pattern is the choice of the *Cosmopolitan* Bulgaria website creators to include synonyms of the basic element „знак” (“sign”) which occurs 13 times among the example headlines list and replace it with „признак” (“symptom”/“sign”/“indication” – on 6 occasions), „сигнал” (“signal” – on 1 occasion) and „доказателство” (“piece of evidence”/“proof” – on 1 occasion). Such an approach supposedly results in better effectiveness as it might break the monotony of an otherwise repetitive pattern. It does not, however, particularly contribute to efficiency since it strays away from the principle of consistency and re-using already activated knowledge/elements rather than activating/introducing new ones. In the case of „признак”, it might be argued, consistency is still quite strong due to the obvious resemblance between the two words „знак” and „признак”. In cases of „сигнал” (“signal”) and „доказателство” (“piece of evidence”/“proof”), however, the synonymous relationship with „знак” is indirect and their use is problematic at best in terms of efficiency.

**2.1.3. Pattern 3 – numeral + „причини”/„повод(а)” (“reasons”/“occasions”).**

The third pattern is based on the enumeration of reasons (“причини”) and among the occurrences can be distinguished two basic groups according to the structure they employ after the noun „причини” (“reasons”).

The first one uses the formula „причини за” + noun (“раздяла”/“separation”; „страх(а)”/“fear”):

„7 причини за раздяла”/“7 reasons for separation” (headline CBG 18)

The second group employs „причини да” (“reasons to” + verb („си”/“be”; „се омъжиш”/“get married”; „се целуваш”/“kiss”; „продължаваш”/“prolong”; „се върнеш”/“return to”) and the user as an implicit subject:

„6 причини да си горда, че си сингъл”/“6 reasons [for you] to be proud that [you] are single” (headline CBG 35)

The first one differs in that the numeral it includes is spelled out instead of its being expressed by means of digits – „десетте” (“the ten”) instead of „10-те” (“the 10”). In the second one the noun „причини” has been replaced by „повода” (“occasions”).

**2.2. Non-numeral containing headline patterns - question as headline.**

In addition to the first basic and most productive type of headline pattern, the one containing a numeral, the Bulgarian website of *Cosmopolitan* magazine actively uses headlines without a numeral element. These non-numeral containing patterns account for 28% of headlines on *Cosmopolitan* Bulgaria. The first two examples for headlines without a numeral are in fact the only two headlines in the *Cosmopolitan* Bulgaria corpus abstract which include final punctuation, i. e. a question mark:

„Гаджето ти те контролира напълно?”/“Your boyfriend controls you entirely?” (headline CBG 44)

„Страхуваш ли се да бъдеш сама?”/“Are [you] afraid of being alone?” (headline CBG 46)

In spite of this fact, however, the first headline (CBG 44) is in no way grammatically marked as an interrogative sentence. Instead, it exhibits the structuring of a statement with the interrogative effect added to it by the question mark. The choice of using a statement as a question would seem to have a stylistic and rhetorical effect of engaging the reader in a conversation rather than one that has to do with efficiency, however. This strategy is widely used in certain advertisements, for example, in order to create the impression that those who “ask” the question know their customers so well that they can predict what bothers people even when they are unwilling to admit it.

As far as efficiency is concerned, however, whether headline CBG 44 is formulated as a statement or as an actual question with the use of the question particle „ли”, neither brevity nor consistency would particularly suffer or benefit. As it is, the headline consists of 5 words, and if it were structured as a general (yes/no) question it would have contained only one more – „Гаджето ти контролира ли те напълно?” („Does your boyfriend control you entirely?”).

The only potential benefit from using the second option could perhaps be that in this way headline CBG 44 would resemble headline 46 in structure, which would make the pattern more productive and would therefore enhance the level of consistency.

The indirect question type of headlines are structured as relative finite or non-finite clauses beginning in several different ways – with a relative pronoun „какво” (“what”) or a prepositional phrase containing a relative pronoun „за какво” (“about what”); with a question word such as „защо” (“why”), „как” (“how”) or „кога” (“when”) to play the role of a relativizer. Due to the specificities of the Bulgarian language, however, only yes/no questions exhibit their interrogative nature in an unmistakable way through the presence of the particle „ли”. As far as phrases beginning with question words and followed by „да” (“to”) constructions are concerned, the only way to distinguish between a direct question and an indirect one, or a fragment containing a question word/relative pronoun is by reference to punctuation (in a graphic medium) or intonation (in an oral medium). Compare the syntactic resemblance between the following examples:

Direct question: „Как да си събереш нещата?”

Indirect question: „(Попита ме) как да си събереш нещата.”

Replying with a fragment: „Какво трябва да зная?” – „Как да си събереш нещата.”

The effect in terms of surface structural identity is similar in English, as can be observed from the following translations:

Direct question: “How to collect your things?”

Indirect question: “(He asked me) how to collect your things.”

Replying with a fragment: “What do I need to know?” – “How to collect your things.”

Authors from both languages, however, point out that when they are used in headlines to express suggestion, these structures are not felt as questions, but as “directive headings” (Quirk et al 1976: 840). Popov treats them as relative clauses functioning as a direct object (Popov 1998: 354-355) – i.e., they do not have “interrogative intonation” and are not interrogative unless “with respect to the main clause” (my translation).

The two languages, however, differ in their structural specificities when these “question words” or relative pronouns introduce a finite verb clause. While in Bulgarian the situation is similar to the one discussed above, the English language requires a specific change in word order (an inversion) in the formation of the so-called “wh-” questions (except those retrieving the subject). This means that apart from containing a question word, the English “wh-” question needs to have an auxiliary (or modal auxiliary) verb placed before the subject in order to be truly interrogative. Compare the following translations of the aforementioned examples:

Direct question: „Защо някои жени предпочитат женени мъже?” - “Why do some women prefer married men?”

Indirect question/Fragment: „[Ето] защо някои жени предпочитат женени мъже” - “[Here is] why some women prefer married men”

### 3. CONCLUSION

The present study deals with the ways of upholding the regulative principle of efficiency within the discourse of Computer-mediated communication, with a specific focus on the web-content headlines featured on the *Cosmopolitan* United States women’s magazine website. The efficiency of headlines online comprises two aspects: the consistent use of particular design patterns and the brevity and compactness of the utilized patterns.

In this sense efficiency can be seen as the cumulative effect of the use of a particular number of similar items which creates a strong sense of familiarity. As users gradually internalize the patterns and their specific constantly appearing elements, it becomes easier for them to process quickly this old information and then focus their attention on the new information. The various patterns are thus “containers” or templates with empty slots for inserting new elements in the process of creating specific headlines. Efficiency is therefore enhanced by the consistent and repetitive use of a limited number of productive patterns.

From the perspective of the characteristics of each of the emerging design patterns, efficiency is seen as resulting from the resources language has for achieving brevity and compactness and the way in which these are utilized within patterns and within the headlines themselves in order to achieve optimal headline length. The analysis of the corpus data thus shows that the main cohesive devices pertaining to efficiency and processing ease and enhancing brevity and economy within the English language include exophoric reference, the omission of subject personal pronouns and object relative pronouns, the use of numerals in the form of digits and the use of contracted forms.

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