

CHAPTER 2

THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of related literature and the previous studies concerning the choice of words from the newspaper readers. It consists of four main parts: mass communication, political news, diction, and types of meaning.

Mass Communication Audiences

Mass communication at the present time reaches audience more conveniently and easily, around the world, through the high technology. Since every audience member is able to access any channel from mass communication, it is necessary to know the nature of mass communication audience in presenting the news to them, especially the readers from the internet community who are increasing greatly.

Studying the nature of reader is necessary in a study of mass communication. Merrill, Lee, and Friedlander (1994, p. 9) remarked on traits of mass audiences as follows:

Mass audiences are large. Just how large varies, but the numbers usually range from hundreds to thousands to millions of people:

1. Scattered nature. Mass audiences are widely scattered or dispersed geographically. Some audience members may be in one section of a

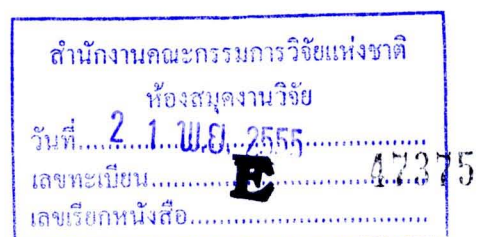


city and other audience members in another. Some may be in different parts of a state or a region. Others may be dispersed nationally or even internationally.

2. Anonymous nature. Members of a mass audience are usually anonymous--unknown to one another and to the communicator; as you watch Dan Rather or Tom Brokaw on network television, you may know a few other audience members--your family or certain friends--but generally you don't really know the countless others who are watching. This is quite different from squeezing into a booth with a few friends at a local café for coffee and conversation.

3. Heterogeneous nature. A mass audience is not only large, scattered and anonymous, but it is also heterogeneous. It is made up of a wide variety of people with different background, ages, sexes, occupation, educational levels, interests and political persuasions. Audience members have little in common. The only common element among heterogeneous audience members might be that they are being exposed to the same message at the same time.

In conclusion, mass communication audiences are large, but some have the same fields of their interests, on political topics as the example. The same audience members are interested in the same topic; therefore, they may be able to build up a large community as a social network, especially on the Internet, in order to follow up news contents, share their ideas both internally and with the external community.



Feedback

Merrill, Lee, and Friedlander (1994, p. 12) gave this explanation of feedback:

Feedback is a response that allows the communicator or the sender of a message to know that the message has been transmitted via its channel and it has been understood or misunderstood. The communicator or the sender usually expects a return message from the receiver, i.e.

feedback. One's raising his hand to ask the speaker a question best describes the immediate feedback and one's writing a letter to a newspaper in reaction to a story he likes or dislikes best describes the delayed feedback. Sometimes people nod as a speaker talks to them or asks a question in response to something he or she says. Some might get up and abruptly leave the room, i.e. the response is obvious to the speaker or overt, whereas, some people may just sit there and fret, hiding the true response from the speaker, i.e. covert.

The speaker may note this passive demeanor and assume someone is interested in the message or that people are sleepy or not feeling well. This is inferential feedback, and its reliability is always questionable

In conclusion, feedback in mass communication is a major factor making the communication between two parties succeed or fail. The sender, when he knows the feedback from the receiver, will be able to improve the message, re-check the understanding from the receiver and prevent any unexpected errors that may have occurred when sending the message.

Online Newspaper

Other channels such as radio, television and film are unable to provide the space or other channels for audience feedback in as wide a range as an online newspaper like the Bangkok Post, which provides space below each news story. The online newspaper has become an effective channel of mass media that allows access for a large number of readers.

Bradley (1965, p. 44) mentioned that there are five basic responsibilities a newspaper has:

To survive, to provide information, to offer guidance or interpretation of the news, to entertain, and serve the public. In spite of such skepticism, it does seem that the concept of the general public is meaningful to many and perhaps is the type of audience most think about when they talk of mass audience. Although mass audiences are difficult to discuss because of their ever-changing and anonymous nature, one type of classification might be helpful in studying them. It is a binary typology based on complexity. One type of audience is the general public audience; it is very broad and extremely complex, a kind of all-encompassing, anonymous, massively heterogeneous and scattered mass of individuals. The other type of mass audience is smaller, more specialized, more homogeneous, and usually less anonymous.

In conclusion, there can be communication between a mass medium and its audience; in order to have effective communication, there has to be an effective channel for presenting the news and allowing feedback from the

audience, which the Bangkok Post Online has done, to make it a more effective English newspaper.

Political News

Political news is quite a sensitive topic among the general public, many of whom are highly aware of the issues and take discussions with one another very seriously. Merrill, Lee, and Friedlander (1994) mentioned, “Politics and armed confrontations are subjects that are usually surrounded with heated opinion” (p. 68). Political news attracts a large number of viewers and readers every day. Communication channels such as newspaper, websites, radio, press, and television present political news daily in a wide range to reach their audience. In the Bangkok Post Online, political articles are the most popular topic; readers pay the most attention to these articles, and they share their opinions on the political scene with the community of readers, so they are able to communicate with the outside readers widely and successfully. Nantiya Phermkwarmprasert (2008, p. 86) indicated that politics has a strong impact on human life, bringing people around the world closer. This idea supports the notion that politics affects people’s lives, so they need to get involved whether they like it or not.

Aside from reading about political movements and getting people’s points of view on politics situation, readers can find some language benefits by reading the commentators’ views, by paying attention to and studying the

diction and word choices in the comments. Moreover, the writers' attitudes and feelings about Thailand's political situation are expressed.

Diction

Diction has to do with individual word choice, and it is the level of diction that varies according to speaking and writing situations. It is important for the writers or the speakers to deal with word choice so that they can present and express their attitudes and opinions more effectively. Below are discussed several aspects related to diction.

Chosen Words and Style

Willis (1973, p. 209) writes that sentence structure and diction make style, and just as sentences can be composed instead of issued thoughtlessly from the writer's mind, so words can be chosen and presented in different styles--formal, informal, casual and official--depending on the purpose, attitude and situation of the writer or the user.

In a specific field, such as political news, the sentence structure and diction or choices of word are related to the writer's attitude, feeling, and form of expression, so the writer needs to choose the right words for the political topic he is writing about.

Specific and General Words

Willis (1973, pp. 222-223) also wrote that the more specific a word is, the more precise it is; the more general, the less precise. A general word covers many different varieties of whatever the word applies to; a specific word covers only one or a few varieties-there are degrees of specificity. Here are three general sentences in descending order from the general to the specific:

An animal hurt a person.

A dog bit a boy.

A boxer nipped Freddie Spivak.

Even this simple paradigm illustrates the value of specific diction. It shows that the more clearly a writer specifies the particular variety of whatever he is mentioning, the more exact his meaning becomes. Note that there are degrees of specificity in verbs as well as nouns.

Concrete and Abstract Words

Willis (1973, pp. 224-225) wrote that a concrete word names an object that really exists and can be perceived by the human senses; if we talk about *beauty*, which is an abstract noun, there is no named thing that we can see or touch, but when talking about a girl, we can think of one who really exists and can be perceived by human senses. The abstract names a quality that an object can have, but that cannot be detached from that object so that it has a separate existence of its own such as a word *girl*, which names something we can see or touch.

Apart from the examples given, there many concrete words in our daily life such as *election* and *politician*. An *election* is a political activity that can be seen; it is held by people to choose their representative, so it is a concrete noun, but being allowed to vote for their favorite representative without orders from anyone is a *right*, which has no concrete form, but everyone knows and understands that they have the right to vote, even though it is untouchable or invisible.

Denotation and Connotation Words

Newspaper advertisements employ many words to convey the meaning, and the word that the advertisers employ have denotative meanings and connotative meanings.

The denotation of a word is its dictionary definition; on the other hand, Hornby (1995, p. 243) define *connotation* as an idea suggested or implied by a word in addition to the main meaning. For example, a rose is a kind of flower in denotative meaning, and there are many flowers, but the rose has a connotative meaning most closely related to love. Hence, words with a similar denotation do not have the same connotations.

Moreover, Abrams, (1957) stated that in literary usage the denotation of word is its primary meaning, what the dictionary ordinarily specifies; the connotation is the range of secondary or accompanying meanings which it commonly suggests or implies. For instance; the word *house* and *home* both refer to a building or structure in which people live. The word *house*, however, doesn't carry any emotional baggage; it is likely to suggest only a

residential structure or building, but the other word, *home*, adds connotations of the warmth of family life. It may be said that the difference in meaning between *house* and *home* is that a house is made of brick and stone but a home is made of love.

The denotative meaning of a word is its basic dictionary definition-- what the word means to all who know it. For example, the denotative meaning of *orchid* is "any of number of related plants having flowers with three petals, two regularly shaped and the third enlarged and irregular in form." Its meaning is just a bare, factual definition without emotional suggestions. All nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs have denotative meanings that form the basis of their use for language communication; denotation relates to a word with its basic meaning in a dictionary; connotative meanings, on the other hand, often differ with individuals or groups and so cannot be put into dictionaries. Connotative meanings have emotional overtones because they reflect the attitude of an individual or a group toward a word, such as the word *orchid* to a young woman means she has just received one to wear her first formal dance. (Abrams, 1957, p. 250)

According to Altick (1962, p. 7), connotation is divided into two types: personal connotation and general connotation. Personal connotation is our reaction to a word, which could be the result of an individual's experiences with the word and the referent for which it stands. One's reaction to a word may be determined by all of one's experience with the word and its referent, which might be synthesized into a single image or emotional response.

General connotations, on the other hand, “result when the reaction of the majority of people to a specific word is substantially the same”.

Slang

Willis (1973, pp. 214-219) wrote that slang is usually the result of linguistic inventiveness, especially by young and lively persons who want fresh, original, pungent or racy terms with which they can rename ideas, actions, and objects they feel strongly about. The slang terms are derived from, or give new meaning to, standard words. There is one important point of using slang: it is used very sparingly and consciously intended to produce a certain effect.

Swan (2005, p. 526) wrote that slang is used in informal speech by people who know each other very well and is not usually used in written language, and it is also not used in formal kinds of communication; for example, in the sentence “How are the kids?” the speaker used the word *kids* which indicates that there is little social space between the two persons; they are not in an official meeting. So the speaker chose the words *kids* instead of *children*, which is less informal.

Jargon

Willis (1973, p. 216) wrote that jargon has several meanings, the main ones being a long word, circumlocution, and generally hard-to-comprehend language, often connected with a specialized field of learning, such as sociology.

The examples that we may see easily are found in the new technologies coming into our world in recent decades, such as the computer terms *log on*, *broadband*, *internet* and *wi-fi*. Not only computer jargon is difficult to understand by the general public, but also political jargon and military jargon, which are often used in news reports.

Register

The language use in the classroom between a teacher and students is different from the language used at home. For instance, at home the children would call their father “dad” and call their mother “mommy,” which would not be used when their teacher asks about their parents. *Dad* and *mommy* are used between family members in informal situations; the words *father* and *mother* are used at school between teachers and students. There are many register words, such as the speech style in the offices, in huge organizations, and even on the pavement when people ask each other for a direction. In this context; two persons who do not know each other, the words they use in their communication come from the formal register. Yule (1996, p. 259) described register in the following way:

Another influence on speech style that is tied to social identity derives from register. A register is a conventional way of using language that is appropriate in a specific context which may identified as situational (e.g. in church), occupational (among lawyers) or topical (e.g. talking about).

The general definition of register on language variation can be defined by use not the user. The term of register and its meaning falls under sociolinguistic, stylistics, pragmatics or systemic functional grammar.

Style and Word Choice

Rankin (1972, pp. 5-6) wrote that any piece of writing is made of words. And its meaning comes from the interplay among its individual words. It is found that the individual words in a sentence are an important feature of a writer's style. Each word must be chosen with care so that a sentence means precisely what the writer intends it to mean. Choosing the words to convey experience accurately is, in fact, the writer's main task. But accuracy is only one measure of an effective style. Several general qualities of diction must be considered such as: economy--the writer has to say it in the fewest words possible; simplicity--when the writer attempts to impress rather than to communicate, he often produces inflated prose; candor--the writer who is reluctant to say what is on his mind sometimes resorts to euphemisms--refined or elegant terms substituted for more candid speech; and freshness--the writer uses his own language instead of using somebody else's language, such as clichés.

Fraser (1978, p. 68) claimed that good writing is more than being correct; the words that are used may all be words approved by the dictionary and used in their right senses, and the grammar may be faultless and the idiom above reproach. Yet what is written may still fail to convey a ready and precise meaning to the reader.

Santi, Nicolai, and Strugala (1996, p. 282) wrote that the way of choosing don't understand the meaning of words from the writers, bring fail to what the writer means and want to say. To avoid this problem the writer should do the following:

Use a dictionary which contains information about words spelling, pronunciation, and origin and a thesaurus which contains synonyms, words that same or close to the meaning of the words the writers have in mind. Avoid common word-choice problems which are weak repetition from the limitation of limited number of word choice, the incorrect usage of the words that sound similar causes the confusion, illogical construction which can create an illogical image, and slang which might be appropriate in a relaxed conversation with friends. Slang is not the Standard English and should be avoided in college essays and reports. Review the glossary of correct usage, the list of words that are often confused and misused. Review until getting the correct meaning of each word.

The Writing Center (2010) described writing as a series of choices:

As we work on a paper, we choose our topic, our approach, our sources. The times when we have to write, we have to choose the words we will use to express our ideas and decide how we will arrange those words into sentences and paragraphs. Finding words that capture our meaning and convey that meaning to the readers is challenging. When we instructors write things like “awkward,” “vague,” or “wordy” on our draft, they are letting us know that they want us to work on word

choice. It is necessary to save words from our original sentence than to write a brand new sentence to convey the same meaning or idea.

Awkward, Vague, or Unclear Word Choices

In the view of the Writing Center (2010), if a student's paper comes back with "awkward" scribbled throughout the margins, there are several questions that may follow. The difficulties with word choice are not the only cause of awkwardness, vagueness, or other problems with clarity. Sometimes a sentence is hard to follow because there is a grammatical problem with it or because of the syntax (the way the words and phrases are put together). An example is the sentence "Having finished with studying, the pizza was quickly eaten." This sentence is not hard to understand because of the words chosen. Everybody knows what *studying*, *pizza*, and *eating* are. The problem here is that readers will naturally assume that the first bit of the sentence ("Having finished with studying") goes with the next noun that follows, the word *it*, which in this case is "the pizza." It doesn't make a lot of sense to imply that the pizza was studying. The expression should be "Having finished with studying, the students quickly ate the pizza." If a sentence is marked "awkward," "vague," or "unclear," the writer has to think about the reader's point of view--see if it can tell where it changes direction or leaves out important information.

Style and Meaning

In Rankin's (1972, p. 18) opinion, the connection between thought and expression is so close, one cannot say definitely that some words in a sentence affect the style and others affect the meaning, because all the words in a sentence and their arrangement within a sentence contribute to its style and to its meaning.

That means that style and meaning are related to each other.

Yodpornpin Wiratkasem (2002, p. 88) states that the way the writer chooses and uses words, punctuation, sentences and paragraphs to convey meaning is their way of presenting their intentions and attitudes. This corresponds with the notion of sender's meaning proposed by Griffiths (2006, p. 9) as follows:

Sender's meaning is the meaning that the speaker or writer intends to convey by means of an utterance. Sender's meaning is something that addressees continually have to make informed guesses about.

Since words have meaning, whether by lexical set itself or by the ones who use it, in order to convey the right meaning, attitude, or intention, the user has to consider the words' meanings seriously. Thus, it is important for the readers to interpret the sender's message which falls into the different types of meaning.

Types of Meaning



There are four types of meanings that the commentators on political articles want to convey in their comments, mainly through their choice of

words: denotation, connotation, concrete, abstract, specific, general register, jargon, and slang. Ahmed (2007) wrote that the three main types of meaning demonstrate how the choice of words is important and related to the commentators' communication. The three main types of meaning are as follows:

First, the referential meaning is the object, notion, or the state of being described by a words, phrase or sentence.

Second, the social meaning is the information about the identity of the speaker that is conveyed by an utterance.

Third, the affective meaning is the speaker's feeling i.e. attitude towards the content or the ongoing context.

There is also a fourth one, which is the unseen meaning, an invisible meaning, that is to say, the additional meaning that is difficult to find but is concerned with the commentator's attitudes and beliefs. The unseen meaning is the commentator's intention or feeling expressed through word selection and gathered in the text in a particular situation.

Referential Meaning

Picking up the word that best indicates the speaker's meaning or combine different terms to say what he or she wants to convey. The referential meaning is defined as the meaning of an object, notion, or state of being described by a word, phrase, or sentence. One example is the headline "Abhisit vows to defy reds." The word *Abhisit* refers to the person who goes by that particular name. At the same time, in the headline "Army chief's

tactics force election offer,” the word *tactics* is a particular notion that is related to an army.

Social Meaning

The social meaning is the information about the identity of the speaker that is conveyed by an utterance. For example, in the sentence “Y’all gonna visit over the holiday?” the words *y’all* and *gonna* indicate a particular regional dialect of American English from the southern states (Ahmed, 2007).

Here are the examples shown the identity of the speaker: “He just went home”, the sentence *he just went home* indicated a particular variety of American English used by American speaker. However, the sentence “He has just gone home’ which consist of the same meaning as the previous sentence, *he has just gone home* indicated a particular variety of British English used by British speaker (Swan 2005, p. 39).

Affective Meaning

The affective meaning is the speaker’s feeling or attitude toward the content or the ongoing context. An example is the sentence “Rehendhi, who always brags about her cooking skills, lectured me throughout the dinner on how to improve my cooking skills.” It can be inferred that the speaker does not have a good impression of Rehendhi, because the speaker seems to consider this person as a meddlesome, self-centered, and boring person (Ahmed, 2007).

Unseen Meaning

As mentioned above, the unseen meaning comes from the commentator's intention or feeling expressed through the selection of words that are gathered in the text in a particular situation. For example, in the sentence "Dear Prime Minister Abhisit: You are the best choice to lead modern Thailand right now. We, majority of Thai people give you our full support" (From Appendix D, Topic 1, Discussion 8), the reader may infer that the speaker of this utterance has faith in Prime Minister Abhisit.

Summary

Studying the nature of the audience is necessary in a study of mass communication. Mass audiences are large and the numbers usually range from hundreds to thousands to millions of people. The message is transmitted via its channel. The sender sometimes expects feedback or a return message from the receiver. Feedback is basically a response that allows the sender to know that the message is getting through and know whether it has been understood or misunderstood. The feedback may be immediate or delayed. An online newspaper can provide space for readers' feedback. It can be an effective channel of mass media that gives access to the newspaper for a large number of readers. Individual words in a sentence are an important feature of a writer's style. Each word must be chosen with care so that a sentence means precisely what the writer intends it to mean. This chapter discusses primarily the commentator's choice of words in different aspects: connotative,

denotative, abstract, concrete, specific, general, slang, jargon, and register; it also looks at types of meaning, which include referential meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, and unseen meaning.