

“I Sid you not”, “Raanta Claus” and “Getz the last laf”

Punning wordplays in the news headlines of the National Hockey
League’s official website

Master’s thesis

Sami Peltonen

University of Jyväskylä
Department of Languages
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kieli ja kielen käyttö on monipuolinen ilmiö. Kielen avulla viestitään, kommunikoidaan ja jaetaan kokemuksia. Ihmisten käyttämä kieli kehittyy jatkuvasti mm. erilaisten teknologisten innovaatioiden synnyttämän tarpeen johdosta. Kieltä voi käyttää luovalla ja innovatiivisella tavalla, sillä ihminen pääsee itse vaikuttamaan suoraan siihen, millaisena muut ihmiset hänen kielensä kokevat. Kielellä voi leikkiä, sanoja voi yhdistää aivan uusilla tavoilla ja odottamattomilla sanavalinnoilla voi yllättää. Myös media pyrkii käyttämään kieltä luovasti ja lukijoita houkutellen. Herkullisilla otsikoilla houkutellaan lukijoita ostamaan sanomalehtiä ja klikkaamaan uutisotsikoita Internetissä.</p> <p>Uutisotsikot ovat myös tämän tutkimuksen tutkimuskohteena. Jääkiekkoliiga NHL:n (National Hockey League) viralliset kotisivut ovat synnyttäneet Internetissä pienimuotoisen ilmiön kekseliäiden uutisotsikoidensa ansiosta. Sivuston uutisotsikoihin on tapana sisällyttää sanaleikkejä, jotka hyödyntävät erilaisia kielitieteellisiä tekniikoita. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tutkia, millaisia eri tekniikoita sivustolla julkaistujen uutisotsikoiden ja niihin tehtyjen sanaleikkien luomisessa on käytetty. Teoriapohjana käytettiin aiempia tutkimuksia median luovasta kielen käytöstä, ja erityisesti Isossa-Britanniassa tehtyä tutkimusta, jossa tutkittiin jalkapallon EM-kilpailujen aikana julkaistuja sanaleikkejä sisältäviä uutisotsikoita. Tästä tutkimuksesta saatiin seitsemän eri tekniikkaa, joilla media voi kiinnittää lukijoidensa huomion uutisotsikoiden ulkoasuun.</p> <p>Tutkimusta varten kerättiin aineistoa syksyn 2013 aikana vierailemalla päivittäin NHL:n kotisivuilla, ja poimimalla talteen kaikki sellaiset uutisotsikot, joihin oli sisällytetty jonkinlainen sanaleikki. Kaiken kaikkiaan aineistoon tuli yhteensä 80 uutisotsikkoa. Nämä otsikot jaoteltiin aiemmasta tutkimuksesta poimituihin seitsemään eri kategoriaan sen mukaan, miten sanaleikki oli otsikkoon sisällytetty.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksista kävi ilmi, että kaksi kategoriaa oli ylivoimaisesti eniten käytetty sanaleikkejä sisältävien otsikoiden luomisessa: alluusio ja homonymit kattoivat yhteensä lähes 90% koko aineiston otsikoista. Alluusiota hyödyntäneiden otsikoiden määrä oli lähes kaksinkertainen homonymisiin otsikoihin verrattuna. Pelaajien ja joukkueiden nimet sekä populaarikulttuuri olivat suosituimpia kohteita mihin alluusiota hyödyntävissä otsikoissa viitattiin. Homonymiset otsikot puolestaan olivat kaikki yhtä lukuunottamatta luotu pelaajien nimistä.</p> <p>Kaiken kaikkiaan tuloksista kävi ilmi paitsi uutisotsikoiden kirjoittajien luovuus ja mielikuvituksellisuus, myös se, että sivusto on suunnattu jääkiekkoa tarkasti seuraaville faneille. Monet sivustolla julkaistut otsikot saattavat vaikuttaa todella vaikeilta ymmärtää ilman vankkaa tietoutta pelaajista, joukkueista ja jääkiekosta yleensä. Täten voidaan todeta, että sivusto on tarkoin suunniteltu tietyille kohderyhmälle, joka seuraa jääkiekkoa tarkasti.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords wordplay, pun, media, sport, creative language use	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Language and language use cannot be seen as a static element in our society. We use language to communicate with each other on a daily basis, and the way we use language has an effect on how our messages are understood by the recipients. Creativity in language use can bring versatility and character to our everyday speech and allows us to connect with other people in a more personal level. We can induce humor and light-heartedness into our conversations by using language in a creative way, we can surprise other people with totally unexpected word choices and we can even play around with the words we use. Media is known to use language creatively as well in their news reports, headlines and articles in order to sell papers and gain new readers. Attracting readers' attention can be achieved by e.g. modifying the spellings of words in headlines, or by combining multiple words into one. Whatever the technique used in forming creative bits of language is, they all work to attract the audience's attention and to lure readers to pick up the paper from the newsstand or to click on the headline while browsing the Internet. It is the linguistic characteristics of these techniques used in creating attractive news headlines in a popular website that is also the focus of the present study.

The National Hockey League, or NHL, is widely recognized as the top ice-hockey league in the world. Best players and best teams compete for the chance to win the Stanley Cup, the championship award given at the end of the season for the best performing club. The NHL's official website, www.nhl.com, is visited regularly by fans all over the world. According to nhl.com, the average number of unique visitors during the 2010-2011 season on the NHL's website and the official websites of all 30 teams had increased to a record of 21.2 million per month ("NHL businesses show substantial growth", 2011). The website offers for example news, scores and statistics for fans of the sport to read. It is the news section of the website that is of interest for the present study, and especially the headlines of the front page news items. Visitors to the website have noticed the way news headlines contain elements of pun and wordplay, as a Google search with the term "nhl.com headline puns" reveals a number of blogs and also a Facebook page dedicated to puns and wordplay in the website's news headlines.

What is of interest for the present study, though, is the linguistic character of these puns, namely the ways and techniques used to create headlines that have given birth to such success and popularity on the Internet. Thus, the aim of the present study is to explore these headlines from a linguistic perspective, and attempt to identify different linguistic techniques used to generate puns and wordplay into news headlines. Language is often used as not only by filling the slots in a sentence with fitting words, but as larger, readily available entities. The use of these preconstituted blocks of language (Partington, 2009:1798) is actually more common than individually selecting each word in a sentence. The preconstituted blocks are easier and faster to retrieve from the brain, thus enabling speakers to have a more natural, freely flowing conversation. It is also the altering of these readily available blocks that is often at the core of punning and wordplay. Previous studies in this area have researched for example punning wordplays in the news sections of daily newspapers (Partington, 2009) and in football headlines in newspapers' sport sections (Chovanec, 2008). However, ice hockey related news items and the puns included in their headlines have not been examined. As can be later seen from the data sample of the present study, even slight changes into a normal, everyday phrase may bring more life to ice hockey headlines. Leaning on previous studies on linguistic wordplay in the media, an attempt is made to analyze the character of the headlines according to the linguistic devices used in creating the punning element into the headline. The data sample for the present study was gathered from the website www.nhl.com during the autumn of 2013, and consists of 80 headlines in total. These headlines were then following Chovanec's (2008) classification categorized according to the linguistic techniques used in inducing punning elements into the headlines. All in all, Chovanec's (2008) categorization included seven different *foregrounding devices* with which the media can not only attract their readers' attention, but also add a touch of friendliness to tighten the relationship between media and its audience.

The structure of the present study is as follows. First, a closer look is taken on the role between sports, media and language. The relationship between sports and language and sports and media is examined as well as the importance of sports as cultural phenomenon that reflects the society surrounding it. Second, a more detailed inspection will be made to the language of sports, sports commentators and sports media. Section four then inspects previous studies conducted on creative language use in the media. From these studies also the categorization for the data sample of the present study is

introduced, followed by section five in which the methodology and the research question of the present study will be presented. In section six the findings from the data sample of the present study are presented. The present study concludes with section seven in which the results are discussed, along with the limitations regarding the present study, suggestions for further research in the area and a concluding chapter on the present study as a whole.

2 LANGUAGE, SPORT AND MEDIA

At the first observation, sport in general may not seem a fruitful or important enough topic of academic research. As Meân and Halone (2010) illustrate, some fields of research actually consider sport an important topic of academic endeavors, yet some still underestimate its significance. Some advocates of sport as a meaningful area of academic study have, for example, stated that “sport is itself characterized as major cultural and socializing force” (Creedon, 1998; Sklair, 1991 as quoted by Meân and Halone 2010). This view is further supported by Beard (1998:1), who states that especially competitive sport is “tied in with the complex systems of human behaviour that we call ‘society’”. Beard (ibid.) lists for example economics and money surrounding sport, sport’s role in establishing national identity and sport and politics as just a few factors that contribute to sport’s place in our society. Sport can thus be said to be a major factor in our culture, and for example in the U.S, according to the website tvbythenumbers.com, five of the ten most-viewed television broadcasts of all time are broadcasts covering sport events (“Top 100 Rated TV”, 2009). Thus, it feels safe to argue that sport, being such a big part of people’s everyday life, could be of benefit to the scientific community as well. Some researchers have recognized this, and studies inspecting for example the gender roles or racial issues in sport are widely available. In addition and especially of importance from the viewpoint of the present study, observing sport and sport media from a linguistic perspective has also been of interest for academics and, for example, Angelini and Billings (2010) have studied the nature of sport television commentary in relation to athletes’ gender. In their study Angelini and Billings (2010) observed how the language of the commentators did show gendered bias in terms of words and phrases used to describe the successes and failures of male and female athletes. Another research that focused on sports and its linguistic perspective examined the effect a sports commentary can have on viewers’ attitude towards violence in sport. Frederick et al. (2013) developed a questionnaire that was filled by participating undergraduate students in two stages: before and after watching a short football video clip. In their study, Frederick et al. (2013) found some evidence that a sport commentary may indeed alter viewers’ perceptions on violence by justifying violent activities occurring in a sport event.

Important and contemporary issues of our society are reflected in the world of sport as well. Beard (1998) illustrates how athletes' gender affects the language and word choices used to talk and write about individual athletes. The classic Wimbledon Tennis Tournament, as Beard (1998:20) points out, refers to female players with their marital status and surname as in "advantage to Miss Graf", whereas male players are referred to with surname only. Also the newspapers covering Wimbledon Tennis Tournament showed gendered language use in the form of name-tags. As Beard (1998:21) illustrates, male players such as Peter Sampras or Andre Agassi were known as "Pistol Pete" and "The Pirate of SW19", whereas female players were given name-tags of a different nature. French player Mary Pierce, for example, was called "La Belle" and "The Body", probably because of the build of her body. In addition, the representation and reporting of women's sports in general and in the television can be said to be minimalistic compared to men's sports. As Boyle (2006:146) reports, in the US in 2005 only 6.3 % of television's sport coverage was devoted to women's sport, with the percentage of coverage dedicated to men's sport was 91.4. Reporting on another study, Boyle (2006:146) also illustrates how in the UK in 2003 only 5 % of media's sports coverage time was given to women's sport. Another interesting phenomenon regarding gender equality in society that is reflected in the world of sport as well is the ratio of male and female reporters reporting sport. According to Boyle (2006:154), of the 46 sports news reporters working with UK-based *Sky Sports*, only 1 was female. In addition, as Boyle (ibid.) points out, of the 47 television presenters working with *Sky Sports*, 13 were women. These numbers seem to be in line with the general division of men and women working in journalism, as the website womeninjournalism.co.uk reports that in the UK, 78 % of articles in newspapers are written by men ("Why is British Public Life", 2011). In the US, according to American Society of News Editors website asne.org, 37 % of full-time journalists working in daily newspapers were women ("U.S. newsroom employment", 2009). Whether or not then the ratio of female reporters working behind the scenes and in front of the television cameras in the UK is a coincidence is out of the scope of the present study, but may serve as a reminder of how contemporary issues in society are reflected in the world of sports as well.

Also professional athletes are known to promote issues of e.g. gender inequality and civil rights with their behaviour. The 2013 World Championships in athletics in Moscow, Russia, saw individual athletes standing up to defend the gay rights in

response to an anti-gay law passed in Russia in June, prior to the World Championships. As was reported by e.g. foxnews.com and sportsillustrated.cnn.com, Swedish female athletes painted their fingernails in the colours of the rainbow, thus showing their support for gay rights (“Swedish athletes at track”, 2013; “Athletes sport rainbow”, 2013). However, as pointed out by espn.go.com, the International Association of Athletics Federations viewed the Swedish athletes’ painted fingernails as a violation of the code of conduct and a breach of regulations (“Gay-rights gesture”, 2013). Thus, a warning was given to the Swedish athletics federation, which forced the athletes to change the colouring of their fingernails. Although short-lived, the gesture of the athletes led to worldwide discussion about the rights of gay people, and inspired even some politicians to show their support as well. As reported by pinknews.co.uk, the Finnish Minister for Culture and Sport was seen waving a rainbow flag in the arena in Moscow after the Swedish athletes were warned about their fingernails (“Russia: Finnish minister”, 2013). In addition, the human rights in Russia have led to discussions of the upcoming Winter Olympics, held in Sochi, Russia in 2014. A Google search with the term *Sochi boycott* reveals a number of news items reporting e.g. artists planning to boycott the upcoming games, as well as Facebook pages and blogs dedicated to the promotion of human rights in Russia.

Another example of the gender inequality in sports is given by Licen and Billings (2013) in their study on gender and nationalism in Slovenian 2008 Olympic television coverage. The Olympic Games are one of the most popular content in television, and according to the International Olympic Committee (2012), the 2012 London summer Olympics gathered a total approximation of 3.6 billion viewers worldwide that saw at least one minute of television coverage. Thus, the audience for the Olympics is huge and therefore the research conducted by Licen and Billings (2013) show some interesting facts about television sports commentators and their somewhat gendered language use. According to Licen and Billings (2013:390), male athletes not only received considerably more commentary than female athletes, but also the nature of the commentary varied according to the sex of the athlete. As Licen and Billings (ibid) illustrate, commentators were more likely to discuss the athletic performance of men than women, with female athletes receiving more discussion related to their looks. One commentator, as Licen and Billings (2013:390) point out, went as far to describe a female hammer thrower as having “the sexiest figure of all hammer throwers, she put on

the least body weight”. Of course it has to be remembered that this study is only one example, and quite limited at that as it only studied the television coverage of a single nation, but nevertheless some conclusion can be drawn of how professional sports still is a predominantly male field.

In addition to sport being a somewhat lesser field of academic study to some, sport has traditionally also been a victim of undermining in the field of journalism, and sports journalism has sometimes been called as “the toy department” (Boyle, 2006:1). Sports journalism has been described as being “a bastion of easy living, sloppy journalism and ‘soft’ news” (Boyle, 2006:1), but as Boyle (2006) further points out, sport’s commercial status has always been of importance to the press. The press in general and sports journalism alongside with it have, and still are going through a major change due to the digitalization of our society. According to the website ofcom.org.uk, 97 percent of homes in the United Kingdom in 2013 had digital television and thus access to many 24-hour news channels that view covering sporting events on a regular basis as a legitimate part of their business (“UK Communications”, 2013). New synergies have emerged across media and journalism boundaries, as corporations from different sectors have started new collaborative endeavors. Boyle (2006:129) reports on a Swedish television channel called *SPORT-Expressen*, which was born as a product of cooperation between the newspaper *Expressen*, a sports rights distribution company *IEC* and a technology company *Hego*. These collaborations, according to Boyle (ibid.) are beneficial to the participants, as print media can, for example, enhance a television channel’s brand and it also enables the flow of news from print to television and the Internet. The digitalization of society has also altered the way traditional sports reporters work, as different social media applications, such as Twitter, have gained popularity among sport fans. As Singer (2006, as quoted by Emmons & Butler, 2013:167) points out, journalists face continuous pressure to maintain professional legitimacy through presence on the Internet, and Twitter has become one of the tools for reporters to form such online presence. Twitter has become a popular social media application for athletes as well, as Emmons and Butler (2013:163) illustrate, American race car drivers in Nascar competitions are known to post tweets from inside their cars during races. This kind of social interaction between athletes and fans has spurred similar interaction between sports journalists and fans as well, which in its own way is

an example of digitalization and the shift of audience growth to online media retrieval (Mitchell & Rosentiel 2012, as quoted by Emmons and Butler 2013:184).

The emergence of microblogging services such as Twitter, and their relevance to society, media, sports and even politics have also been studied. Norman (2012) studied Canadians' tweeting behaviors during the 11th annual *Hockey Day in Canada* television broadcast in February 2011, a broadcast that aired for all but 30 minutes between 12:00 pm and 1:30 am. During the broadcast the spectators' Twitter messages, or *tweets*, were analyzed and three main topics for the tweets were found. These topics were discovered through Twitter's *hashtags*, a tool which allows users to identify a tweet with a topic of their choosing. Tweets about Canadian nationalism and praise for Canadian ice-hockey as well as greetings to the broadcast's main sponsor, Scotiabank and discussion about the actions and sayings of the controversial commentator Don Cherry were the three main topics. The mere length of the broadcast dedicated to ice hockey is in itself a reminder of the importance of the sport in the Canadian culture, and as Norman (2012:308) reports, various researchers have studied ice hockey's status in Canada. For example Scherer and Whitson (2009, as quoted by Norman, 2012:308) have gone even so far as to argue that access to televised NHL broadcasts can be seen as a form of Canadian cultural citizenship. However, the changed role of the audience is what Norman's study (2012) perhaps highlights the most. Twitter, Facebook and online blogs can be seen as new tools for consumers to take part in e.g. social and political discussions. As Jenkins (2006, as quoted by Norman, 2012:309) argues, new media technologies such as Twitter and Facebook also allow audience members to become active producers of content. In addition, for example the possible political influence of social media applications is illustrated by an article released on The Globe and Mail website theglobeandmail.com ("How a brutal beating", 2011). The article on theglobeandmail.com illustrates how the recent revolution in Egypt was fuelled by the use of social media in attracting the public's attention and organizing demonstrations.

3 THE LANGUAGE OF SPORT

Sport, as any other aspect of our culture, has its own language, or *code*. What is meant by this is that the grammar and vocabulary used to talk or write about sport are particular to the context of sport, and any sport in question, amateur or professional (Beard, 1998:47). The language of a sport can also be said to be specific and unique to the sport in question, meaning that each sport has its own code. One example of this phenomenon of the code of sport could be the way national identities are described in sports media. As Beard (1998:34) illustrates, it is not uncommon to refer to German athletes with terms like discipline, reliability and efficiency, all of which are generally believed to belong to German manufacturing. Another concept easily linked to national identities is that of war and warfare, and as Beard (1998:34-35) further points out, war terminology is fairly evident in especially team sports and sport media. Terms such as “attacking and defending”, “shooting on target” and “off target” and “siege” are just a few examples Beard (*ibid.*) presents. An interesting phenomenon regarding sport and war is also the fact that media tends to make connections between events in e.g. international team sport competitions and actual wars between participating countries. Beard (*ibid.*) gives the example of the classic football match between England and Scotland, which is frequently depicted in the media in war themes and terminology. Newspaper reports covering England’s matches in this particular competition varied from “England put Scotland to the sword in this Battle of Britain” to a headline “All-out war” when England played against Germany (Beard, 1998:35).

The code of sport can be said to include a great deal of nationalism and nationalistic expressions. For example, as pointed out by Licen and Billings (2013), the successes of individual athletes can be referred to as belonging to the athlete’s home nation as a whole. In their study of nationality and gender in Slovenian 2008 summer Olympic television coverage, Licen and Billings (2013:388) found out how, for example the gold medal of a Slovenian hammer thrower was referred to as “a gold medal for Slovenia”. Thus, the victory of an individual athlete was transformed to a victory of the whole nation. Similar kind of behavior is rather common during international competitions all around the world, as for example rankings of countries in order by medals achieved is a

familiar sight during e.g. the Olympic Games. These patriotic perspectives were used also when television coverage was not about Slovenian athletes. As Licen and Billings (2013:388) illustrate, a language characteristic of Slovenian nationalism and patriotism was used when the television coverage reported the training methods of a foreign swimmer. The fact that the foreign swimmer, a European swimming champion prior to the 2008 summer Olympics was practicing in Koper, Slovenia was attributed to the fact that she wanted to prepare well, which was then reported as “she trained at ours in Koper” (Licen and Billings, 2013:388). This inherent nationalism in sports is by no means limited to Slovenia or any other country alone, but is a worldwide phenomenon. As Real (1980, as quoted by Licen and Billings, 2013:381) has reported already in the 1980s, the amount of newspaper coverage dedicated to reporting about a country’s own athletes and sports teams, a factor known as a nation’s *index of nationalism*, has surged from 17 % to 79 % worldwide. Having read the sports sections of newspapers today, it feels safe to assume that the number is still closer to 79% than 17% even now, more than 30 years later.

Another illustration of the use of national identities and even stereotypes in sport language is offered by Desmarais and Bruce (2010). In their article, Desmarais and Bruce (ibid) studied how national stereotypes led television sport commentators to produce interpretations of the actions on a rugby game between New Zealand and France that did not always represent what actually happened in the game. The fact that sport commentators use stereotypic language is natural, as Desmarais and Bruce (2010:341-342) note that sport commentators do not produce their output from a vacuum, but from powerful discursive formations that are culturally built into “international rugby folklore and in each country’s rugby culture”. Thus, the *code* of a sport seems to depend not only on the sport in question but also on the location where the sport is being played. One reason for the use of national stereotypes in sport commentary is also provided by Desmarais and Bruce (2010:342), as they report how stereotypes work as important pieces in national sport narratives. In addition, as further pointed out by Desmarais and Bruce (ibid), national stereotypes fulfill the function of group differentiation, highlighting positive aspects of in-group stereotypes and negative elements of out-group stereotypes. Desmarais and Bruce (2010:348) illustrate this phenomenon with an example from their data, and how sports commentary sometimes rely on national stereotypes even if the visual images on the screen clearly contradict the

commentary. They report how a New Zealand sports commentator depicts the warm-up routines of a New Zealand and a French player, both showing clear signs of stress, anxiety and nervousness before a big match between the countries: the New Zealand player is described as looking “not worried”, but “calm and cool and collected”. When cameras shift to the French player and his warm-up routines, the commentators’ main focus is on the French player’s dyed hair and how he thus exhibited “typical Gallic style” (Desmarais and Bruce, 2010:348). Thus, as Desmarais and Bruce (ibid) further point out, the commentator differentiated the aforementioned in-group from the out-group, bringing positive elements of the New Zealand player and negative elements from the French player to the audience.

The importance of nationality is clearly evident in the language used by sports followers as well. In Norman’s study (2012) on television spectators’ tweeting behaviours during the *Hockey Day in Canada* broadcast, it was discovered that most tweets handled the important place of the sport in being a Canadian. This “Canadian hockey nationalism” (Norman, 2012:312) was evident in the comments tweeted by the people watching the broadcast. The viewers were asked to post their comments on what hockey means to them, and Norman (ibid) brought up the following two tweets: “Hockey means Canada being Canada, it makes us who we are and we always be the best in the world!” and “Hockey is a pivotal aspect to Canada. It is one of the few things to bring together our nation, regardless of ethnicity!”. Both these comments from sports followers, along with Desmarais’ and Bruce’s study (2010) on national stereotypes used by sports commentators, could be argued to highlight the importance of nationality in sports language or code, and the traditional *us* versus *them* mentality, touched upon also by Desmarais and Bruce (2010:351).

In fact, as Beard (1998:52) illustrates, the code of sports in general is largely metaphorical in origin. The terminology from different sports highlights this observation, for terms such as a *kiss* and a *short head* are obvious to the followers of snooker and horse-racing, but may need further explanation for others. As Beard (ibid.) points out, a *kiss* in a game of snooker refers to two balls slightly colliding to each other and a *short head* means a small winning margin in a horse race. These are just a few examples of the everyday nature of metaphorical language use, and work as further

reminders that metaphors, as illustrated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:1) are not strictly limited to complex language use such as poetry or literature. In addition, as illustrated by Beard (1998:53-54), sport's metaphorical code works as a source for many metaphors used in everyday life as well, thus forming a two-way relationship between sport and metaphoric language use. Politicians, for example are famous for using metaphorical expressions from football, such as *a level playing field* when indicating that rules are, or at least should be the same for all (Beard, *ibid.*). Another example given by Beard (*ibid.*), is the phrase *scoring an own goal*, which is used by politicians when someone has done something to harm him or herself. This interconnection between using language to form an idea of sport, and how this code of sport is again used to form a view of society shows how intertwined sport and the society surrounding it are (Beard, 1998:56).

Sport and the nature and style of the language surrounding it have been of interest to the academic community as well. Sport may, for example, contain technical terminology that requires specific knowledge and understanding from spectators. An example is given by Seifried (2008:205) from the context of American football, where the term *intentional grounding* may not be clear to the viewer if they lack previous experience and understanding of the game. From the perspective of the present study, it could be argued that professional ice-hockey as well has its share of unique terminology. Ice-hockey related terms such as *playing the game short-handed* or *being given a power-play* could be seen as phrases equivalent to the *intentional grounding* from the context of American football. These technical terms could be seen as examples of the "code" of sports, which means the grammar and vocabulary used to discuss a sport, introduced earlier by Beard (1998). On the other hand, according to Seifried (2008), the nature of the language surrounding sport in general could be called "emotive language". As Seifried (2008) continues, emotive language refers to language use that is sensational and even over exaggerated, as, in sports for example, it can induce intense feelings such as horror, disgust and rage for the purpose of attracting public attention.

The use of emotive language, or "sensationalism" was also studied by Molek-Kozakowska (2013), and especially sensationalism regarding news headlines. In their paper, Molek-Kozakowska (2013) defines sensationalism as a device with which news

items can be made to appear more important and newsworthy than they really are. Sensationalism can be an effective strategy especially in news headlines, as Molek-Kozakowska (2013:180) argues that the headline is “the main hook” for the reader. In addition to being the main point of interest for readers, headlines, as Molek-Kozakowska (2013:180) points out may be very complex in nature, and readers often have to rely on subheadline and lead to understand the meaning of a headline. In addition, as Harcup and O’Neill (2001, as quoted by Chovanec, 2008:222) point out, it is common for many tabloids for example that stories are selected on the basis of their headline potential, which means what headlines can be created on their basis. The complexity of news headlines is fairly evident in the data of the present study as well, which consists of ice-hockey related news headlines from the official website of the National Hockey League, which further emphasizes the somewhat changed role of news headlines. As Molek-Kozakowska (2013:180) illustrates, headlines are no longer accurate summaries of the news texts they lead as their secondary function of catching readers’ attention has led them to cause misrepresentations of the contents of the news texts.

As the focus of the present study is ice hockey related news headlines, it is important to take a closer look at the nature of news headlines in general. Dor (2003) illustrates how headlines serve multiple purposes for the reader: they allow the reader to get the maximum amount of information with minimal cognitive cost, headlines are often written according to the characteristics, beliefs and state of knowledge of the audience in question and headlines work as a kind of negotiator between news stories and readers. What is especially interesting from the viewpoint of the present study is Dor’s (2003:720) notion of how readers usually scan headlines in a newspaper and only rarely stop to read the whole story. This kind of behaviour could be presumed to be evident in the hectic world of Internet news as well, as the amount of news items available in the Internet is huge. Thus, it feels natural that news authors in the web are willing to use creativity while writing headlines in hopes of luring the reader to click on the headline and read the whole story, and hence invoke the need for a more detailed inspection of creative language use as well.

4 CREATIVE LANGUAGE USE

In order to study news headlines from the National Hockey League's official website in more detail, it is first necessary to inspect some of the theory of creative language use and wordplay and punning in English in a general level. Puns and wordplay have been studied rather extensively, and as Partington (2009:1794) reports, of all the forms of humour puns and wordplay have received the most attention in linguistics. In addition, creative language use is an important device for the media and as Chovanec (2008:219) points out, especially English news reporting is known to use a wide variety of tools called *foregrounding devices* to attract readers' attention to the linguistic form of the news presentation. Sometimes, as Chovanec (ibid.) continues, the urge of the press to use language creatively results in "wanton word play". Word play and the use of other foregrounding devices can be seen as contributing to the complexity of e.g. news headlines, as reported earlier by Molek-Kozakowska (2013:180). However, the complexity and the attracting of readers' attention to the sometimes complex form of the news representation may be seen as a positive phenomenon as well (Chovanec 2008:219). As Chovanec (ibid.) reports, the use of foregrounding devices on linguistic form of the news items is an attempt at "increasing interactivity and reader involvement". In addition, as was earlier illustrated by Beard (1998), the language of sport is considerably metaphorical in origin, thus invoking the need for a more detailed account of metaphors as well.

4.1 Metaphors

The war and warfare terminology related to the language used in sport contexts discussed earlier is only one example of metaphors used in sport language. Metaphor, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) illustrate, is a phenomenon so deeply absorbed into our everyday lives and language use that its presence may not even be recognized. The old misunderstanding that metaphor is a complex issue only related to the language of poetry is given new perspective, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980:1) argue that our everyday lives are filled with metaphor. We can win arguments, defend our positions and views, come up with new counter arguments and think of a strategy while arguing

are a few examples of how war terminology is used in our everyday language as well (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This kind of metaphoric language use, in which one concept, e.g. argument or sport, is metaphorically structured in terms of another concept such as war, is further described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:14) as a “structural metaphor”. Another example of a structural metaphor given by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) include for example “time is money”, which allows us to speak of time in terms usually related to money: we may spend time and save time and we can also run out of time. Thus, metaphors are a natural part of our everyday language, and it is then not surprising that sport and sport media uses metaphorical language as well. As Beard (1998:4) illustrates, sport and the language of sport is not in any way its own separate entity living in a world of its own, but it is a part of our society and culture.

4.2 Puns and wordplay in newspapers

In his research on puns in newspapers in the United Kingdom, Partington (2009) provides a rather comprehensive account of different kinds of puns, thus generating the need for a more detailed inspection of the study. Verbal puns, as illustrated by Partington (2009:1795) in his article are “plays on sounds, or rather, on the resemblance between two sets of sequences of sounds”. Partington (2009:1795) recognizes the traditional division of puns into homonymic puns and homophonic puns, but goes on beyond this division, and argues that “a more fundamental distinction is between “exact” puns and “near” puns”. According to the traditional distinction, a homonymic pun involves two sounds that are identical in sound and spelling, whereas a homophonic pun plays around two sounds that are identical in sound only (Partington, 2009:1796). According to Partington’s (ibid) distinction, in an exact pun, two sound sequences that are identical to each other are called into play. Thus, an exact pun includes both, homonymic and homophonic puns, whereas in a near pun, according to Partington’s (ibid) distinction, two sound sequences that resemble each other are used. An example of an exact pun exploiting homonymy is given by Partington (2009:1797):

- 1) “Do you believe in clubs for young people?”
- 2) “Only when kindness fails”

Here the pun relies on the different meanings for the word *club*, which are a group of people and an item used to hitting in various sports for example. In addition, an example of a near pun joke is given by Partington (2009:1796):

- 3) A man forgets to buy his wife her favourite anemones for her birthday. The shop has only some greenery left, which he purchases. But the forgiving wife exclaims on his return: “With fronds like these, who needs anemones?”

Here, the pun is based on giving the reader just one of the sound strings related to the joke. The reader, thus, is required to recover the original sound string that has been modified for the joke, namely “with friends like these, who needs enemies?” For the quality of the joke it is also interesting how the phrase usually used in negative situations is now rather surprisingly used in a different manner. This kind of unexpected, creative and unusual language use is in its base what wordplay involves (Partington, 2009:1795).

In addition to defining what verbal puns are, Partington (2009) also gives an explanation on the theory of what wordplay in a more general level involves. As noted before, wordplay relies on unexpected and surprising language use. Collocation, as Partington (2009:1797) illustrates, has an important role in the creation of the element of surprise in wordplay. As Partington (*ibid*) further points out, collocation has frequently been defined as the actual, observed occurrence of a lexical item with other words in a short span of text, usually limited to five words to the left or right of the lexical item in question. In other words, collocation can be explained as those words or phrases that usually occur in the near vicinity of the lexical item that is of interest. But, as Partington (*ibid*) reports, collocation may also be a psychological phenomenon. What this means, is that language users, through repeated encounters with a certain word, become acquainted with the typical behaviour of the word in interaction with other words, and reproduce this behaviour in their own discourse (Partington, *ibid*). As Partington (2009:1798) continues, words can be said to be primed to behave in these particular ways, and points out that this lexical priming is regarded as not only a textual, but also a mental phenomenon. For example, the word *winter* can be said to be usually collocated with words such as *in*, *that* and *during* (Partington, *ibid*). The whole range of behaviours for a single word, that is all the situations in which the word has been known to appear in language use, is called its *priming prosody* (Partington, 2009:1798). This phenomenon of lexical priming has been studied rather extensively, and e.g. accurate

models of different types of lexical priming have been identified. Estes and Jones (2009: 113-114) report on earlier studies and identify priming models such as *expectancy* and *distributed representation*. In the *expectancy* model, a prime word may spark generation of a set of target words (e.g. *cat* may generate *dog*, *mouse* and *kitten*), whereas *distributional representation* assumes a semantic network consisting of nodes (Estes and Jones, *ibid*). As Estes and Jones (*ibid*) continue, a prime word such as *dog* does not activate a single node in the brain, but rather a set of feature nodes, such as *four-legged*, *hairy* and *barks*. As Hoyes (2005, as quoted by Partington, 2009:1798) illustrates, it is the language user's success in exploiting and overriding these conventional priming prosodies that is often at the heart of creative language use and wordplay.

The exploiting and overriding of normal priming prosodies can happen in a couple of different ways. What they all have in common, is the underlying principle of language organization. Sinclair (1987, as quoted by Partington, 2009:1798) describes two such basic principles, namely *idiom* or *collocational* principle and *open-choice* principle. The *idiom* or *collocational* principle sees language use as largely consisting of preconstituted or semi-preconstituted blocks. The *open-choice* principle however, describes language production as a process of open-ended choices, where users may fill up the slots in a sentence with words of their own choosing, with the only limitations being those of grammatical rules. As it is further argued by Sinclair (2004, as quoted by Partington, 2009:1798), collocational or phraseological principle of language organization is the default mode of understanding language, as it is more effortless and less time-consuming for hearers. Thus, the first way of overriding conventional priming prosodies as introduced by Partington (2009:1798), called *relexicalization of preconstructed phrases*, exploits the collocational principle of language. Partington (2009:1799) gives an example of relexicalization:

- 4) Is the tomb of Karl Marx just another communist plot?

In this example, hearers are primed to recognize *communist plot* as a preconstituted block of language. However, the context and the word *tomb* enforce hearers to reinterpret the set phrase again, this time using the open-choice principle, as “grave space” (Partington, 2009:1799). In other words, relexicalization, as illustrated by Partington (*ibid*) means the “freeing up” of the parts that normally form a fixed or semi-

fixed, preconstructed lexical unit. In addition, there is another type of relexicalization pun, namely *delexicalization* (Partington, 2009:1800). As Partington (ibid) explains, the verbs in phrases such as *take a bath* or *take a sandwich* are *delexicalized*, which means that they add no meaning, but work as syntactic support for phrases that function as preconstructed blocks. Partington (ibid) gives an example of a delexicalization pun:

- 5) 1st man: "Have you taken a bath?"
- 6) 2nd man: "Why, is there one missing?"

Here, the preconstituted block *taken a bath* has to be, due to the answer of the second man in the joke, processed again using the open-choice mechanism.

Another way in which a creative language user can play with set phraseologies is called *reworking and reconstruction of an original version*, as introduced by Partington (2009:1801-1802). As the name suggests, it is connected to the *near pun* introduced earlier, as it in some way reworks and reconstructs a set phrase. Thus, a hearer is given the altered, modified version of the set phrase as in these examples given by Partington (ibid.):

- 7) It would appear that I am dying beyond my means
- 8) Once the parents were out of the way it was every child for itself

Here the wordplay relies on reconstructing the original passages (*living beyond one's means* and *every man for himself*) by replacing one item from the original phrase with its opposite. Thus, it can be said that an element of novelty and surprise is sought (Partington, ibid.). Oftentimes the humorous effect lies in the ingenious reconstruction of a phrase, as in the following example from Partington (ibid.):

- 9) CNN/Reuters: News reports have filtered out early this morning that US forces have swooped on an Iraqi Primary School and detained 6th Grade teacher Mohammed Al-Hazar. Sources indicate that, when arrested, Al-Hazar was in possession of a ruler, a protractor, a set square and a calculator. US President George W. Bush immediately stated that this was clear and overwhelming evidence that Iraq did indeed possess weapons of maths instruction.

Here, the humour lies on the phonological resemblance to the infamous phrase *weapons of mass destruction* and the joke is once again an example of a near pun. Yet another form of reconstruction, which relies on spoonerism, that is the transposition of sounds, is introduced by Partington (ibid.) with the following example:

- 10) What's the difference between a conjuror and a psychologist?
- A conjuror gets rabbits out of hats

In this case, the reader is supposed to understand the concept of spoonerism, and know to look for the transposition of sounds in order to reconstruct the phrase in order for it to fit in the context. Eventually, the reader is supposed to come up with the continuation *psychologist gets habits out of rats* that fits the context of what a psychologist supposedly does (Partington, *ibid.*). However, as Lippman, Sucharski and Bennington (2001) note, spoonerism or the switching of speech sounds can also happen unintentionally, as a slip of the tongue phenomenon. Lippman et al. (2001:158) illustrate this with a notorious example: the reference to *our dear old queen* that has turned in the speaker's mouth into *our queer old dean*. Spoonerism has also been widely used for other purposes than humour, as spoonerisms are used as one tool to study the reading skills and deficits of both children (see e.g. Brice and Brice, 2009 and Savage et al. 2005) and adults (see Allyn and Burt, 1998).

Considering near puns in more detail, it is important to note that also near puns can be further categorized based on the nature of the change to a set phrase that has led to the birth of a near pun. Partington (2009:1806) reports on his earlier studies, in which he has argued that the creation of a near pun from a set phrase can happen in one of four different ways. These possible changes to the set phrase are called *substitution*, *abbreviation*, *insertion* and *rephrasing*, i.e. *reordering of parts*. For *substitution*, Partington (*ibid.*) gives the following two examples:

- 11) Bonfire of the Sanities
- 12) Elway does it his way

As can be seen from the first example, the change to the set phrase can be rather minimalistic, even the substitution of a single letter or phoneme, changing the original *Bonfire of the Vanities*, the title of a Tom Wolfe novel. However, the substitution process can sometimes be quite drastic, as can be seen in the second example. Here, the original phrase is the title of the song *I Did It My Way* by Frank Sinatra (Partington, *ibid.*). What is interesting, as Partington (*ibid.*) points out, is that the reader can make out the original phrase from the changed one, even though three of the five lexical items have been substituted with other items, with *it* and *way* being the only ones unaltered. What the reader recognizes, according to Partington (*ibid.*) is the phrase pattern, or the lexical template of the original form. This might be seen as an example of the phenomenon *priming prosody* introduced earlier, which has to do with the behaviours of

words, and further emphasizes the ability of the brain to store not just single words but collocational patterns as well (Partington, *ibid.*).

The second mechanism for phrase change while creating near puns, *abbreviation* is presenting the reader with only a part of the original set phrase and leaving the rest of it for the reader to come up with. An example is given by Partington (2009:1807):

- 13) Accountancy & Management: *For what we are about to receive*. Simon Pincombe finds that company administrators and receivers are among those destined to do well this year.

Here the biblical phrase *For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful* is shortened, leaving out the most important part that receivers of some financial reward should be thankful. Here, it is the responsibility of the reader to supply the missing part of the phrase from their mental lexicon (Partington, *ibid.*). Another quite similar technique, namely *allusion* can be seen as relying on same kind of cooperation between the author of the text and its reader. In allusion, according to Chovanec (2008:225) certain part of a text *in praesentia* is recognized as alluding to a text *in absentia*, which triggers the reader's processes of comparing the two texts. In other words, some part of a piece of text known to the reader is presented, which triggers the reader to supply the missing part of the text from his or her mental lexicon, in rather similar manner to the *abbreviation* method.

The third type of phrase change, *insertion*, as the name suggests, adds lexical items to the original preconstructed expression. An example is given by Partington (2009:1806):

- 14) Iain Gale gives the artists the chance to put the palette knife in.

Here, the original expression *to put the knife in*, which means 'to criticize' (Partington, *ibid.*), is changed by adding the item *palette*, in order to make the idiomatic expression more suitable for the context of artists light-heartedly criticizing the works of art critics.

The final method of phrase changing, *rephrasing* is introduced by Partington (2009:1806) with the following example:

- 15) Another catch for the early birds

Here, the original proverb *it's the early bird that catches the worm* is rephrased. But as Partington (2009:1807) further points out, the rephrases are not always so obvious. Partington (ibid.) gives another example of rephrasing a set phrase in a newspaper headline:

16) To conquer at the Stoop

In this example, the original set phrase *She stoops to conquer* is a title of a play by Goldsmith (Partington, ibid.), but in this case the *Stoop* actually refers to a rugby stadium. Thus, it would seem that the mere existence of the words *stoop* and *conquer* are enough for the reader to make the connection to the original phrase. This, as Partington (ibid.) points out, can be seen as further evidence of the brain's ability to store and recall lexical items that have been primed to occur together.

The notion of the human brain being able to store and retrieve larger units of language has also been noticed while studying the nature of e.g. vocabulary learning in general. Vocabulary has been studied to constitute largely of “chunks” (Schmitt, 2000) or “formulaic sequences” (Schmitt and Carter, 2004). According to Erman and Warren's study (2000, as quoted by Schmitt and Carter, 2004:1), 58.6 % of spoken English language constituted of various types of formulaic sequences. Rather than being conceptualized as individual words like in the past, vocabulary is now seen to consist of sequences of words which operate as whole units (Schmitt, 2000:400). As further pointed out by Schmitt (ibid), a vast amount of knowledge can be stored in the long-term memory, but the human mind is able to process only small pieces of it in real-time, during e.g. conversations. Thus, the mind stores frequently used lexical items as chunks consisting of multiple items, which are easily retrieved without the need to select each word in a conversation individually (Schmitt, ibid). As can be observed, the notion of vocabulary consisting of larger units and humans' preference to use them seems to be in line with Sinclair's principle of language organization (1987, as quoted by Partington, 2009:1798) into *idiom principle* and *open choice principle* reported earlier.

4.3 Puns in football headlines

The focus of the present study is on the headlines of the news items in the National Hockey League's official website, and thus it is important to observe in more detail a study with similar approach but from another context. In their article, Chovanec (2008) explored the technical tools used in headlines in sport sections of various British newspapers reporting international football matches during the European Championship tournament, organized by Portugal in 2004. These newspapers included *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *Sky News*, *Mirror*, *News of the World*, *BBC Sport*, *Daily Mirror*, *The Independent*, and *The Daily Star*. In total, a number of 23 headlines were analyzed in more detail and were categorized according to the linguistic techniques used in creating the headlines. These tools that include for example *alliteration* and *rhyming* have usually been categorized to belong into literary, rhetoric or poetic uses of language, along with constructs such as *metaphors* (Chovanec, 2008:224). However, as further pointed out by Chovanec (ibid), his categorization focuses solely on those devices that clearly affect the linguistic form of the language, rather than the meaning, thus leaving *metaphors* out of the analysis. Also, as mentioned earlier, headlines in general serve not only the purpose of leading the reader to a story, but also work as a tool to catch the reader's attention. As illustrated earlier by Molek-Kozakowska (2013:180), this secondary function of catching readers' attention may sometimes even obscure the message the headline and the following news item are presenting.

However, it has to be remembered that the potential complexity of headlines may serve a purpose. As Chovanec (2008:220) argues, the relationship between media and its recipients is one-way only, thus leaving the consumer without any possibility of taking part in the discourse in any other role than as recipient. This *communicative imbalance* (Chovanec, ibid.), along with the fact that print media communicate via writing and use the national standard of the language in question, poses a possible threat in the sense that the audience may be frightened by the absence of any personal relation. However, as was introduced earlier by Norman (2012), the role of the audience has changed with the development of technology, and audience can, at least to some degree, interact with media. This can be seen for example in television broadcasts, which have started showing Facebook and Twitter comments from the audience. Thus, it could be argued

that the nature of the relationship between media and its audience may not be as one sided as suggested by Chovanec (2008). But it also has to be remembered that audience usually cannot have an effect on the contents or the style of the news produced by media, thus suggesting a mild existence of the *communicative imbalance*. This imbalance, as Chovanec (ibid.) points out, may then turn into consumers disconnecting themselves from that media channel altogether. Thus, a potential barrier between media and its consumers may be born, and one way for the media to battle this barrier is relating to its audience on a more personal level (Chovanec, ibid.). This can be done efficiently according to Chovanec (ibid.) by manipulating the form or the presentation of the message. As Leitner (1997, as quoted by Chovanec, 2008:220) points out, style, informality and conversation may reflect ideas of familiarity, cooperativeness and friendliness in the minds of the readers.

The devices introduced by Chovanec (2008) with which the distance between media and its recipients may be reduced are called *foregrounding devices*. These devices, as Chovanec (2008:221-222) illustrates, are linked to many metafunctions of the somewhat dated structuralist conception of the functions of language, introduced by Jakobson (1960, as quoted by Chovanec, ibid.). These functions that foregrounding devices are linked to are the *phatic function* (i.e. helping to establish contact), *metalinguistic function* (e.g. drawing attention to the possibilities of the code) and the *poetic function* (concentrating on the form of message itself). Thus it is the *poetic function* of language that foregrounding devices are best associated with. Though the name may suggest otherwise, as Chovanec (2008:221) reports the poetic use of language is not limited to literature only, but is widespread to virtually every domain of language use. These foregrounding devices and their linguistic nature are defined and explained by Chovanec (2008) in more detail, but for the purposes of the present study it is not their exact linguistic definitions that matter, but the categorization of football headlines according to the manner with which the form of the headlines have been manipulated. Chovanec (2008:224) distinguishes several foregrounding devices used in UK media in sport section headlines, namely *alliteration & assonance*, *rhyme and reduplication*, *homonymy and morphological adaptation*, *nonce words*, *eye dialect*, *foreignisms* and *allusion*. This categorization of creative language use will also serve as the basis for the analysis of the data of the present study as well, and will thus be discussed in more detail.

4.3.1 Alliteration and assonance

Alliteration and assonance, as Chovanec (2008:226) points out, are one of the less intrusive ways of foregrounding the presentation of e.g. headlines. They have been widely used in English literature, and especially in poetry, as both these devices are used to repeat individual sounds (Hebron, 2004:17). Chovanec (ibid.) defines alliteration as the repetition of initial letters, while in assonance identical sounds in other positions are repeated. Hebron (ibid.), however, distinguishes alliteration and assonance even further, and defines alliteration as the repetition of consonant sounds, and assonance as the repetition of vowel sounds. Chovanec (ibid.) illustrates the phenomena with the following examples found in football headlines:

- 17) Greek Grind
- 18) Rosicky resplendent
- 19) Figo figures large in the great fiesta

In examples 17 and 18 above, alliteration takes place as the initial letters of the words that form the headline are repeated. Example 19, however, is not only an example of alliteration, but also an example of assonance, as the identical sound segments –fi and –fig are repeated.

4.3.2 Rhyme and reduplication

Rhyme, as illustrated by Chovanec (2008:227) is a literary device in which a special effect is accomplished by selecting words that end in the same or similar sound. Hebron (2004:20-22) discusses rhyme in more detail, and makes the distinction between *full rhyme* and *half-rhyme*. Full rhyme, according to Hebron (ibid.) is the repetition of both vowel and consonant sounds in the end of a word. In half-rhyme, however, only the consonant or vowel sounds that conclude a word are repeated (Hebron, ibd.). Thus, from the point of literature, it can be concluded that assonance, a foregrounding device that was discussed earlier, can actually be seen as an instance of rhyme. Reduplication then, as pointed out by Chovanec (2008:227) is a word-formation process, in which new lexical items are coined by repeating the first word either without any change or with some morphological exchange. Lexical items such as *ping pong* and *tip tap* may be seen as products of reduplication, but as Chovanec (ibid.) demonstrates, journalistic

reduplications are usually of different nature. In journalism, it is common to form rhyming combinations of two independently existing words. Thus, the element of novelty and unexpectedness may be achieved, as in these examples given by Chovanec (ibid.):

- 20) Swiss Bliss
- 21) Double Trouble

As Chovanec (ibid.) further points out, taken out of their contexts these examples of rhyming and reduplication may be difficult to understand. The example *Swiss Bliss* refers to the satisfaction of the English after beating Switzerland, and *Double Trouble* was used in indicating the result of another football match from the opponent's viewpoint.

4.3.3 Homonymy and morphological adaptation

Yule (2006:106-107) describes homonymy as one written or spoken form having multiple unrelated meanings, such as the word *bank* (the *bank* of a river and *bank* as a financial institution). Homophones, however, as Yule (ibid.) points out, are words that share the same pronunciation but differ in their spelling and have different meanings, such as *flour* and *flower* or *right* and *write*. Homophones are not considered by Chovanec in his categorization (2008:229) as a category of its own, but as an instance of homonymy. Homonymic language use, as further reported by Chovanec (2008:228) is a tool to cause ambiguity in news media, and the interplay between an ambiguous headline and a disambiguating news text that follows the headline contributes to creating humour and light-heartedness. This in turn can be seen as another way of diminishing the potential barrier between media and its consumers, and forming a more personal connection to media recipients. The following headlines are given as examples of homonymy in football news reporting by Chovanec (ibid.):

- 22) Real Chance?
- 23) No Real Deal

These headlines, as illustrated by Chovanec (2008:229) rely on the shared knowledge of media and its readers, and were used in reporting the possible player transfer of Wayne Rooney to the Spanish team Real Madrid. The deliberate use of the homographs 'Real' and 'real' work as a device to attract readers' attention to the ambiguity of the form of

the headline, which aims at readers' appreciating or at least noticing the linguistic creativity and playfulness (Chovanec, *ibid.*). As further pointed out by Chovanec (*ibid.*), the purpose for the use of linguistic creativity and playfulness is to offer news to the readers with an increased personal feeling.

A similar effect of media relating to its audience on a more personal level can be seen in the instances of headlines where homophones are used. Words that are spelt differently but pronounced in the same way rely on the readers' ability to recognize the identity of sound, and thus communicate not only through the 'eye' but also through 'the ear' (Chovanec, 2008:229):

24) Roo the man

In this example given by Chovanec (*ibid.*), the clipped form of the football player Wayne Rooney's surname is used as a homophone with the verb 'to rue'. As illustrated by Chovanec (*ibid.*), the headline is ambiguous in more ways than one, as the first reading might suggest the headline to be an imperative addressed to the losers of a game in which Wayne Rooney scored a goal. However, the homophony results in ambiguity in the grammar of the headline. To the reader's eyes, it may appear as a nominal headline in which a proper name and a common noun in apposition are used, while to the ears it may also appear as a verbal headline, in which the imperative of the verb 'to rue' along with its grammatical object are used. As further pointed out by Chovanec (*ibid.*), the homophony of 'rue' and 'Roo' creates a momentary link between the two homophones, thus actually resulting in the phrase 'rue Roo' – "incidentally paralleling the original headline where 'the Man' stands in apposition to Roo, whereby identity of reference is achieved". Another homophonic example, in which the spelling of the pun also indicates the identity of the news actor, is given by Chovanec (2008:230):

25) Ruud boy.

Here, the ambiguous forms of the homophones 'rude' and 'Ruud' are used, with 'Ruud' referring to the Dutch football player Ruud van Nistelrooy. This headline can be seen as an example of condensing the necessary information into a single expression, such as the identity of the news actor and also the paper's comment on that person (Chovanec, *ibid.*).

Morphological adaptation, according to Chovanec (2008:230), includes words whose spelling has been altered, but the pronunciation of the original word is retained. As Chovanec (ibid.) further points out, morphological adaptation usually refers or alludes to a proper name, as in the following example ('Roo' referring to Wayne Rooney):

26) Russian Roolette

As Chovanec (ibid.) illustrates, this kind of playful combination of altered spellings of words have the possibility of leading to acceptance of taboo words, as the alterations in the spelling of the word soften the taboo word. An example is given by Chovanec (ibid.):

27) Scroo you

The headline above refers to Wayne Rooney's refusal to change team in the midst of transfer discussions, and is an example of the popularity of morphologically adapted taboo words in the popular press (Chovanec 2008:230). As Chovanec (ibid.) further points out, as a result of the adaptation the phrase is no longer offensive to the eye, while remaining to be offensive to the ear. In addition, the headline above is the product of the word formation process called *blending*, in which two independent lexical units (in this case the verb *screw* + *Rooney*) are merged into one, with the constituting parts still being partly identifiable (Chovanec, ibid.). However, as Chovanec (ibid.) illustrates, morphological adaptation may also take a more simple form, as in the following example:

28) Please Roo not disturb.

In this example, the syntactic structure of the headline suggests that the word 'Roo' replaces the grammatical word 'do'. The identical vowel sound enables the adaptation while the spelling identifies the reference of the alluded auxiliary 'do' (Chovanec, ibid.).

4.3.4 Nonce words

The next foregrounding device that attracts attention to the linguistic form of the headline is the use of nonce words. Nonce words, according to Chovanec (2008:231) are words used only once, and as Chovanec (ibid.) further points out, some of the

examples above, such as *Russian Roulette* and *Scroo you* can also be seen as such ad-hoc formations. However, according to Chovanec (ibid.), these formations should be separated from nonce words created as compounds, such as the following example:

29) Roo-mania: Shirt's Value Triples

As Chovanec (ibid.) points out, it is important to note that although the nonce formation 'Roo-mania' may seem like a morphological adaptation of 'Romania', it is in fact a compound, roughly meaning a "mania about Roo". Another pattern for creating nonce compounds concerns *morphological re-analysis* of words originally created as compounds (Chovanec, ibid.). In this pattern, a compound word is re-analyzed into its component parts, and either the determinans or the determinatum is substituted with another word. Chovanec (ibid.) illustrates this phenomenon with an example:

30) Twit-ham, the tragic figure of English football

In the example above, according to Chovanec (ibid.), the determinans of the compound proper name 'Beckham', has been replaced by the common noun 'twit', "an informal British slang expression denoting a silly or annoying person". As Chovanec (ibid.) further points out, this kind of morphological re-analysis is most effective when an element of the compound that bears no syntactic meaning is replaced with a meaningful lexical item, like in the example above. The latter part of the compound, or the determinatum was kept intact, which serves a trigger for the reader's recognition of the famous football player's name (Chovanec, ibid.).

4.3.5 Eye dialect & foreignisms

Eye dialect, according to the categorization by Chovanec (2008:232) concerns the alterations in the spelling of words, thus introducing another device with which the reader's attention may be attracted to the form of a headline. McArthur (1992, as quoted by Chovanec, 2008:232) has stated that it concerns the way "colloquial usage appears in print", and can be seen in violations of normal spelling conventions, such as 'enuff'. Eye dialect has been used especially in literature, and as Minnick (2001) points out, the language of many characters in Mark Twain's classic novel *Huckleberry Finn* for example are represented using eye dialects. In addition, as further pointed out by Chovanec (ibid.), eye dialect represents vernacular language use and familiarity, with

the purpose of bonding with the audience. An example from the British football news reporting is given by Chovanec (ibid.):

31) LOADSAROONEY

According to Chovanec (ibid.), the headline above is an example of eye dialect combining with morphological transformation of ‘loads of money’. As Chovanec (ibid.) further points out, in the headline there can also be found an allusion to a famous catchphrase ‘Loadsamoney’, which was introduced in the 1980s by the British comedian Harry Enfield. Without these explanations, the meaning of the headline might not be self-evident to the reader, and could perhaps be seen as one example of how headlines’ secondary function of attracting attention may hinder understanding, as has been observed earlier by Molek-Kozakowska (2013). It can thus be argued that a substantial amount of e.g. cultural knowledge may often be required from the reader to fully understand a headline, such as in the headline above. As Chovanec (ibid.) illustrates, the headline concerns a story about the transfer, and the amount of money involved in it, of Wayne Rooney between two British football teams.

Similar kind of friendly feeling between media and its audience can be achieved by inserting familiar, recognizable expressions in a foreign language into the headline (Chovanec, 2008:232). These foreignisms, as Chovanec (ibid.) illustrates, may serve a variety of purposes: they may add local colour, localize the story or form a connection between the content of the story and individuals from the country where the foreign expression originates. An example is given by Chovanec (ibid.):

32) Das boot.

This headline, as Chovanec (ibid.) points out, although appearing to be entirely in German, is actually a mixture of the German definite article ‘Das’ and English ‘boot’, probably from the idiom ‘to be given the boot’. As further explained by Chovanec (ibid.), the headline introduces a story about the Germans losing their match against the Czech Republic, and were thus “metaphorically given the boot”. Foreignisms can also combine with other creative alterations in linguistic forms, as in the following example introduced by Chovanec (ibid.)

33) Gunners Cech out Petr

Here, the foreignism is a footballer's name (Cech), and it is used as a verb. In addition, as Chovanec (ibid.) points out, the foreignism also, through its meaning, alludes to the phonologically identical verb 'check', which is a homophone for Czech which in turn is the nationality of the player and the "literal translation of his punning name".

4.3.6 Allusion

Allusion, as introduced by Chovanec (2008:233) is a foregrounding device that aims at increasing the active participation of the reader in constructing meaning. As Lennon (2004:198-199) has stated, allusion is a complex operation that requires two steps to operate. Firstly, an alluding unit (or, the text *in praesentia*) is recognized by the reader as pointing to another, absent text (or, the text *in absentia*). Secondly, this recognition triggers the reader's deducing process of comparing the alluding text (the text *in praesentia*) and the text alluded to (the text *in absentia*), thus contributing his or her own cultural experience into the interpretation process. Thus, allusion can be said to be a somewhat risky device, as Lennon (2004:196-197) further emphasizes that the shared knowledge between the reader and the writer is a prerequisite for the understanding of allusion. In other words, if the reader fails to recognize the alluding unit as referring to some other text, reader misses the allusion. Chovanec (2008:234.) provides an example of a headline using allusion:

34) Greece is the word

Here, as pointed out by Chovanec (ibid.), the headline can be seen as alluding to the idiomatic expression *mum's the word*, which is said to indicate in a rather familiar manner that something is a secret. Thus, the headline is a paradoxical one, as it actually reveals the secret instantly, and refers to the surprise of Greece winning the European Championship in 2004 in Portugal (Chovanec, ibid.). In addition, as Chovanec (ibid.) further points out, allusion was used in the picture caption of the same news item, which read 'Dell of a shock'. The picture caption alludes to the phrase 'hell of a shock', and was formed by a phonological alteration of the football player's name 'Dellas', who scored the winning goal.

In addition, as Chovanec (2008:234) illustrates, allusion to taboo words is also quite common. Taboo words, as introduced earlier, are words that the press cannot use as such, but have to be somehow altered before they can be used (such as swear words, for example). Chovanec (*ibid.*) gives an example of allusion to a phrase containing a taboo word:

35) What an Urs hole

Here, as Chovanec (*ibid.*) points out, the allusion to a phrase that contains a taboo word is realized by replacing the taboo word with the Swiss football referee Urs Meier's name, who was blamed for England's defeat. This can be seen as an example of the reader contributing his or her own knowledge into interpreting the meaning of the headline, as it is the reader who supplies the taboo word (Chovanec, *ibid.*). As Chovanec (*ibid.*) further points out, allusion is a way for the media to use such taboo expressions and "get away with violating the social convention", as the taboo words are not explicitly used.

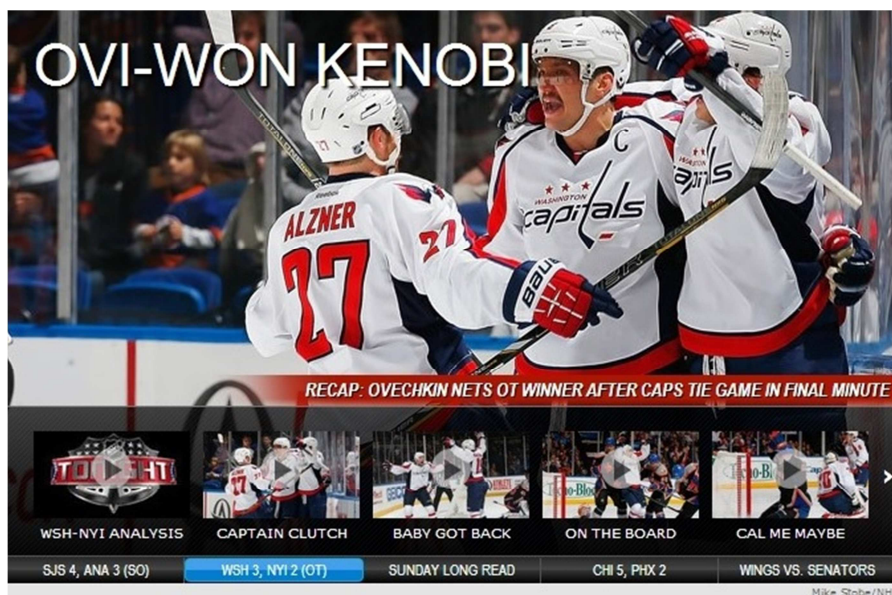
5 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this section, the methods of data gathering and data analysis of the present study are introduced in more detail. In addition, the research questions and aims of the present study are presented.

5.1 Data and methodology

The data for the present study was gathered during the fall of 2013, roughly from the beginning of September until the end of December, thus coinciding with the first half of the 2013-14 NHL regular season. The official website of the NHL was visited, with some exceptions such as holidays and weekends, on a daily basis, with the aim of picking up headlines that included wordplay and punning. Because of the time-zone differences between Finland and the US, the website was most often visited first thing in the morning, as the games in the NHL take place during the nights in Finland. Thus, each game of the day had finished by the time of visit, and reporters in the site had had time to write reports of the matches along with possibly punning headlines to the news items. The gaps in visiting the site because of e.g. weekends during the collection of data were usually 2-3 days in length. In addition, a further analysis of the data revealed that the longest time between collected headlines was 13 days due to Christmas break. As is later explained, the most fruitful headlines from the view of the present study appear on the website's front page and are not archived as such, meaning that some punning headlines were probably missed during these gaps. However, a total of 80 headlines were collected during the fall of 2013, thus putting together a reasonably solid data sample. The data sample included headlines from 55 different dates, meaning a rate of just under 1.5 headlines per date. Considering the whole roughly four-month, 120-day period of collecting the data means a rate of roughly 0.7 punning headlines per each day. This number could probably have been higher without the gaps in collecting the data, as the rate of 1.5 headlines per one date in the data sample implies that it is not rare for the website to produce more than one punning headline per day on average.

Each time when a headline containing a pun was spotted, it was written down in a text document, along with the date, the lead of the news item and also the URL address for the actual news piece that opens when the user clicks on the headline. The lead and the address for the whole story behind the headline proved useful, as it was not always clear what the puns in a headline meant. It also quickly became clear that also a screenshot of the news headline and the lead was required for archiving purposes and later analysis, as the front page of the NHL website rotates five different news items on the main news window. By clicking a headline on the news frame allows the user to get the full news story. This news window is updated with fresh pieces of news each day, and the headlines that are of interest for the present study appeared only on this news window: when news items are archived on the NHL.com website, the headline that had appeared on the site's front page may no longer be used, but news are usually archived with different, less punning headlines. Later, it was also observed that these screenshots of the front page were also useful. The news window contains a headline and a lead for each news story, along with possible video clips relating to the story behind the headline. These video clips also have headlines, and at times, they too included wordplay and puns, sometimes even continuing the same pun from the news headline in these clips. An example screenshot of the news window on the NHL website from the data sample of the present study can be seen below.



Picture 1. An example screenshot of the NHL web page. Source: www.nhl.com

In total, the data sample of the present study consisted of 80 punning news headlines that were numbered from 1 to 80, with number 1 being the first headline collected on 31 August, and number 80 being the last instance, gathered on 31 December.

The data sample of the present study was analyzed in a qualitative manner. The headlines and puns included in them were examined and placed into the categories presented earlier by Chovanec (2008). Chovanec's (2008) categorization was selected to be used in the analyzing process because it had been used in a similar study before with football headlines. In addition, this categorization seemed clearer overall, as it included seven clearly different categories that all had distinct characteristics. When in doubt with a headline, it was marked as being "uncertain", and put aside for later, further analysis. All the headlines then that were marked as being uncertain were analyzed again to see if there were headlines that shared similar characteristics that could thus be placed into the same category.

As was mentioned above, the present study is of qualitative nature. Qualitative study, as reported by Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (1997:170-171), is not so much about finding statistical regularities, but rather understanding a phenomenon in a more general level. This can be done by examining enough individual examples to the degree after which some conclusion can be drawn of the phenomenon as a whole. As further pointed out by Hirsjärvi et al. (1997:171), one characteristic of a qualitative data gathering process is that there are no decisions made beforehand as to how big a sample will be collected. Thus, with the present study a decision was made to gather the headlines for the data sample during the four-month period mentioned earlier, without any certain number of headlines in mind that would have to be exceeded. Categorization or classification then as an analysis method is described by Seitamaa-Hakkarainen (n.d.) as a method that could be said to resemble a multiple choice question in a questionnaire. The classes or categories should be as mutually exclusive as possible, in order to maintain reliability and validity. As further pointed out by Seitamaa-Hakkarainen (n.d.), usually the variable classes of a classification are created before the analysis stage and are not changed at any point. The classification for the present study was indeed formed beforehand in an earlier study by Chovanec (2008), and this categorization was utilized in the analyzing process of the present study as such.

All in all, Chovanec's (2008) classification included seven foregrounding devices used to attract readers' attention to the linguistic form of the headline. The data sample of the present study was thus categorized according to the linguistic nature of the puns in the

headlines, and placed into the corresponding categories. The examples presented before in section 4.3, along with Chovanec's (2008) more detailed accounts of each category served as tools with which the headlines from the NHL's official website were analyzed. There was plenty of space for speculation, and many headlines were between the borders of two (or even three) different categories. These borderline cases will be discussed in more detail in the analysis section of the present study.

5.2 Research question

The aim of the present study was to determine what kind of linguistic devices were used in creating wordplay and puns into news headlines on the NHL's official website. Thus, the attempt of the present study was to answer the following research question:

What kind of linguistic devices have been used to include punning and wordplay into the news headlines on the website www.nhl.com?

An attempt was made to answer this research question with the help from Chovanec's (2008) study on foregrounding devices in football news headlines in British newspapers. Thus, the categorization given by Chovanec (2008) was applied to the data sample of the present study, the findings of which will be presented in the next section.

6 PUNNING HEADLINES IN THE NHL.COM WEBSITE

The data sample of the present study consisted of 80 news headlines picked up from the National Hockey League's official website. A headline was included in the data sample if it was seen to contain some form of punning or wordplay, as the attempt of the present study was to inspect the different techniques used in the website in creating punning news headlines. All in all, a total number of 80 punning headlines were collected during a four-month period. This data sample was then categorized according to the techniques used in implementing a punning element to the headlines. The categories used in the present study follow the guidelines presented earlier by Chovanec (2008), and included seven different categories, or *foregrounding devices* in total: *alliteration & assonance*, *rhyme and reduplication*, *homonymy and morphological adaptation*, *nonce words*, *eye dialect*, *foreignisms* and *allusion*. The overall distribution of the data sample of the present study can be seen from Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of headlines according to the foregrounding devices used.

Foregrounding device	N
Alliteration & assonance	2
Rhyme and Reduplication	2
Homonymy and morphological adaptation	22
Nonce words	4
Eye dialect	0
Foreignisms	1
Allusion	49

As can be seen from Table 1, two categories were clearly dominant in the data sample of the present study: *homonymy and morphological adaptation* and *allusion* included the most headlines. The difference in the number of headlines between the two biggest groups is also quite significant. After the two largest groups, the rest of the data sample is scattered between the remaining categories, with each of them having a number of headlines ranging from zero to four. Considering the percentages of the data sample, the

two largest groups (*homonymy and morphological adaptation* and *allusion*) account for nearly 90 % of the entire data sample.

Before presenting examples from each category from the data sample in more detail, it is important to note that this division of these news headlines is only one way of looking into the matter. When analyzing the data sample of the present study, it quickly became obvious that there was room for speculation with many of the headlines. It was not always straight-forward to decide when a headline was an example of e.g. *homonymy* or *allusion*. Thus, decisions had to be made in order to form clear standards and rules with which to analyze the data sample in order to maintain consistency throughout the analyzing process. These rules will be explained in the following paragraph, and reference to them will be made later whenever there rules were needed. However, as was mentioned before, the present study is only one attempt at trying to analyze these headlines from a linguistic perspective, and provides by no means a definite categorization. A different set of rules or standards could have made the numbers in Table 1 look slightly different and could even have prevented the one zero-result.

In the end, there were two major issues regarding uncertain headlines that had to be addressed while analyzing the data sample. Firstly, it was observed that when in doubt with a headline, e.g. whether a headline should be seen as an instance of allusion or homonymy, the news item itself would play a part in the decision-making process. Thus, if a headline showed some signs of both homonymy and allusion, the decision was based on the news article itself: if the element of allusion was strengthened after reading the news item, the headline was thought as being an alluding headline, rather than an instance of homonymy. Secondly, a decision had to be made regarding homonymic headlines. There were multiple instances of headlines in the data sample that were almost completely homonymic, meaning that a change of a single vowel or consonant sound would have made them pure homonymies. Thus, it was decided that if a headline, with the change of a single vowel or consonant sound could, be seen as an instance of pure homonymy it was placed under homonymic headlines. This decision made the analyzing process easier, as there were headlines that could be transformed to pure homonymies by changing a single sound. Then again, there were headlines in which vowel or consonant sounds were added to the phrase that caused the headline to

not be a pure homonymy. These cases were, due to the decision regarding almost homonymic headlines, analyzed as not being instances of homonymy, but e.g. allusion.

The examples that formed the data sample of the present study were, with one or two exceptions, headlines to news items that were written after each day's games had ended. Thus, these post-game match reports were written in order to inform the audience of how each game had ended and who were the key players that had affected the results and how. This can be seen in the fact that a majority of the headlines included a player's or a team's name, and sometimes with even drastic alterations to them. For an enthusiastic ice hockey follower even the most cryptic headlines worked as a kind of shortcut into what was the key performance in the game. The headlines often revealed not only the outcome of the game but also the identity of the player who was in the most crucial role regarding the result of the game. However, for someone who is not a close follower of ice hockey the headlines that will be explained next may seem rather cryptic. Thus, an effort was made to explain and open up the headlines and stories behind them in addition to revealing the linguistic puns that were included and were the main focus of the present study.

6.1 Headlines using allusion

Allusion was clearly the most often used foregrounding device of the data sample. A total number of 49 headlines were found to use allusion in attracting the readers' attention to the linguistic form of the headlines. This can be seen as rather surprising, as it was explained before, allusion can be said to be a somewhat risky device. Allusion, as pointed out by Lennon (2004:196-197), requires shared cultural knowledge between the reader and the author in order for the allusion to gain its effect. Thus, it feels safe to say that the NHL's official website knows its base of readers, and feels safe in implementing sometimes even confusing allusions to its news headlines. The following example from the data sample of the present study illustrates the presumed shared cultural knowledge between the author and the reader:

The time of publishing this headline (December 16), along with the phonological resemblance of “Raanta” probably hints the reader into guessing the alluded text to be “Santa Claus”. However, from the perspective of ice hockey the reader is given no help in deducing what the news item could be about. The lead of the headline reads as follows: “Rookie shines as Hawks snap Kings’ six-game win streak”. The approach of the holiday season is evident also in the videos attached to the headline in the news window of the webpage, as one video is titled “Bad Raanta”. Still, if the reader is not a close follower of ice hockey, the headline leaves the reader with no other option than to click open the news item behind the headline in order to understand actually who the rookie in the headline is. The headline refers to the Finnish rookie goaltender Antti Raanta of the Chicago Blackhawks, who was pulled from the goal the night before after giving up five goals and was given another chance and this time helped the Blackhawks to win the game. After clicking the headline and reading the whole news story, the reader also understands how the Blackhawks had been suffering from injuries to their first two goaltenders. Thus, the improved play of the Finnish backup goaltender can be seen as a kind of early Christmas present for the Blackhawks and the rookie goaltender as being the Santa Claus giving that present.

The NHL website is also not afraid to create headlines that allude to familiar figures from the realm of popular culture. The following headline is an example how ice hockey related headline can include an allusion to a movie character:

37) Ovi-Won Kenobi

Once again, the mere headline does not reveal much to a person who is not a fan of ice hockey, but may reveal the pun to a movie fanatic. The text alluded to can be said to be rather straight-forward, though not perhaps as easy as in example 36 earlier. Even though the first parts of the name of the Star Wars character Obi-Wan Kenobi have gone through slight alterations, the untouched Kenobi may reveal the allusion to the reader. In addition, some help is given by the lead of the headline as to the identity of Ovi-Won Kenobi: “Recap: Ovechkin nets OT winner after Caps tie game in final minute”. The name Ovechkin may be familiar even to people who do not follow ice hockey passionately, and gives reader’s some chance at recognizing who the news item is about. The changes made to the familiar Star Wars name Obi-Wan Kenobi are both small but important in intertwining the ice hockey player Alex Ovechkin of the

Washington Capitals and the Jedi master from the Star Wars universe. Firstly, “Obi” has been changed to “Ovi”, which is Ovechkin’s nickname. Secondly, “Wan” has been changed to “Won”, a small but again crucial change. The lead of the headline reveals the reader that it was Ovechkin who scored the winning goal on overtime, thus winning the game for his team. In other words, it can be said that Ovechkin “Won” the game by scoring the winning goal, revealing how the whole headline was built around the fact that it was Ovechkin who played a key role in the game.

As was mentioned before in section 5, the screenshots of each headline proved rather useful while analyzing the data sample. Sometimes, the pun from the headline continued to the video clips and their titles attached to the headline. The following headline is an example of a pun which may not have opened up the way it was supposed to without the screenshot:

38) Hertl Power

The lead for the headline reads as follows: “Recap: Trick-shot goal highlights Tomas Hertl’s four-goal night”. Thus, the headline was first analyzed as being an allusion to the “power” Tomas Hertl had had in the game, after reading that he had scored four goals in a single game. However, another look at the screenshot some time later revealed that the pun was not yet complete. There were five video clips attached to the headline in the news window, and the first four of them were titled as follows: 1) Teenage 2) Mutant 3) Ninja 4) Hertl. Thus, the original allusion had been to the famous animation series *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and the phonological similarity between *turtle* and the player’s name *Hertl* was the key to the allusion. This discovery would probably not have been possible without the screenshot, as the focus while collecting the data sample was usually on the headlines only.

The team names in the NHL proved to be a rich source of allusions as well. Headlines that alluded to team names are also perhaps easier to understand for visitors who do not have expert knowledge of ice hockey, as in these two examples:

39) Nine lives

40) Claws are out

The lead for headline 38 reads as follows: “Recap: Panthers end nine-game skid, Horachek wins first”, whereas headline 39 is accompanied with “Hungry Predators looking to re-establish ‘Nashville Bite’ in 2013-14”. Thus, the headlines along with the leads that follow them work together to create the alluding effect. Cats are said to have “nine lives”, and the lead for headline 38 continues the allusion by pointing out how a team called “Panthers” have managed to win a game after losing nine in a row. Many predator animals have claws, and thus the headline 39 along with its lead with words like “hungry” and the team name “Predators” in it work together to form the allusion. Readers are likely to get the idea that a team called “Predators” from Nashville are “hungry”, that is, are thriving to succeed in the upcoming season much like they presumably did the year before, in the same fashion as what is being called “Nashville Bite” in the lead. Thus, as these two headlines illustrate, not every headline in the NHL website requires deep ice hockey knowledge from readers to grasp their meaning. The shared cultural knowledge between media authors and its readers that is a requirement for the allusion to work (Chovanec, 2008) can be more universal as well. These kinds of headlines are not as risky regarding possible misunderstandings as those that play around with player nicknames and such, but a general understanding and knowledge of e.g. myths related to cats is enough.

As was introduced earlier by Chovanec (2008:234), allusion to taboo-words is rather common in the media. Taboo words, such as swear words, are not usually used by the media as such, but using allusion enables the media to implement hints of taboo words into texts. In these cases, it is then actually the readers themselves that supply the forbidden word. Also the NHL is not afraid to use such techniques in their news headlines as in the following example:

41) I Sid you not

This headline is in many ways similar to the example 35, introduced by Chovanec (2008). The headline is an allusion to the phrase “I shit you not”, roughly meaning that someone is speaking honestly. Like in example 35 before, this headline also uses a name with which the allusion is created. “Sid” is the shortened version of the nickname “Sid the Kid”, belonging to probably the most famous NHL player, the Canadian Sidney Crosby. The lead also helps the reader to identify the “Sid” in the headline: “Recap: Crosby, Penguins prevail over Leafs despite depleted roster”. Thus, the reader

might get the impression that the fact that Crosby and the Penguins won the game was such a surprise that the alluded phrase could have been used. The impression gets stronger after clicking the headline and reading the whole news item, as it is explained that the Penguins had to play without five of their top defensemen, and were destined to lose in the media before the game. It is also said how it was indeed “Sid” himself who scored the game-winning goal in the game, thus strengthening the allusion towards not only the original phrase with the taboo word, but also towards Sidney Crosby.

As was mentioned before, it was not always straightforward to decide when a headline should be placed under which category. Allusion was clearly the most dominant category in the data sample of the present study, and the number of headlines under allusion could have been even higher, as there were headlines that were on the borderlines between allusion and other categories. There were also many headlines that could have been placed under a different category, but were then in the end thought to fit the best under allusion. One example of this is the following headline:

42) Boyle-ing points

This news item was about the San Jose Sharks defenseman Dan Boyle. At the first read, the headline seems to be an instance of homonymy, as in “boiling points”, referring to e.g. water reaching its boiling point. But, after reading the news story behind the headline, a somewhat new perspective emerged. The article talks about how Boyle, a veteran player, is starting the last season of his current player contract with the Sharks. References to his age are also not rare, and it quickly becomes obvious that he does not have many years left in his career. When the lack of success of the team in the playoffs after having multiple successful regular seasons in the NHL is discussed in the article, the phrase “boiling points” may be seen in a new way. Boyle, the veteran player, is reaching critical stages in his career. His contract with his team ends after the upcoming season, and because of his age, this season could be the last chance for him to pursue success in the playoffs and eventually have a chance at winning the Stanley Cup Championship. Thus, like water reaching its boiling point, so is Boyle facing critical stages in his professional career and he is possibly starting the final season of his career. After processing all this information, it was decided that this headline was, after all, an instance of allusion, and it alludes to the player’s name as well as to the fact that the player is reaching perhaps the most important moments in his career. Thus, the rules

regarding uncertain headlines that were introduced in the introduction of chapter six were used with this headline. The element of allusion was clearly strengthened after reading the whole news story behind the headline, and thus this headline was analyzed as being an instance of allusion, rather than homonymy.

As was mentioned before, there were also headlines that were first put under *allusion*, but were later changed into another category. These examples will be discussed in more detail later, in correspondence with the categories they were placed into.

6.2 Instances of homonymy and morphological adaptation in the data sample

Homonymy and morphological adaptation was the second largest group of headlines in the data sample of the present study. As was mentioned before, Chovanec (2008) considered homophones to be an instance of homonymy, and not a category of its own. Thus, words with similar spellings and different meanings, as well as words with similar pronunciation but different meanings and spellings in the headlines were placed under the same category. Homonymy as a tool to attract readers' attention may be considered a little safer mechanism than allusion, as there is no shared cultural knowledge needed to understand the punning element when using homonymy. What was also interesting with the homonymic headlines of the data sample was that all except one instance had used a player's or a team's name to form the homonymy into the headline. The following two examples illustrate the rather simple nature of homonymic headlines in the data sample:

43) First-degree Bern

44) Getz the last laf

Both these examples can be seen as pure homonymies as such, but they both have something for the ice hockey fanatics as well. Example 43 is a homonymy to *first degree burn*, and the meaning of the homonymic word *Bern* in the headline is revealed to the reader in the lead: "Recap: Bernier makes 31 saves in victorious debut with Leafs." The player's name has been shortened in the headline to form the homonymy between the words *burn* and *Bern*, and together with the lead they suggest that Bernier had played well. The lead also reveals that it was Bernier's first game with the Toronto

Maple Leafs and that he had helped his new team to win the game, thus perhaps strengthening the idea that his performance had been of “first degree”. Example 44 is also a homonymic headline, although at first glance the spelling has been altered quite drastically. Still, “gets the last laugh” can be spotted from the headline, but the reason for the altered spelling may not reveal itself, at least not until the reader has read the lead of the headline: “Recap: Ducks outlast Bolts on Getzlaf’s last-second OT goal”. Thus, it is probably revealed to the reader that this headline is about someone called Getzlaf, and it is his name that has been altered to fit to the original phrase. The lead of the headline also reveals that the homonymic headline actually refers to the events of the game. To a close follower of ice hockey, the lead reveals that it was Ryan Getzlaf of the Anaheim Ducks who scored the game winning goal against the Tampa Bay Lightning, on the last second of the overtime period. Thus, it can be said that this time it is the lead that requires the shared cultural knowledge between the author and the reader, as the lead contains a rather big amount of information condensed into a single sentence. For example the word “Bolts” in the lead refers to the team Tampa Bay Lightning, and can be seen as a small instance of allusion to a “lightning bolt”, and Bolts is also the nickname of the team. The abbreviation OT refers to overtime period, which is a 5-minute period that is played if the score between the two teams is tied after 60 minutes of play. Thus, it was Ryan Getzlaf who “got the last laugh”, as he scored the tie-breaking goal on the last second of overtime.

As it was mentioned earlier, nearly all of the homonymic headlines in the data sample of the present study used players’ or teams’ names as part of the homonymy. Examples 43 and 44 were examples of how players’ names were altered in order to form an element of homonymy, but there were also instances where the players’ names fit the headline perfectly without alterations. The following two examples illustrate how it is sometimes possible to form homonymic headlines without making alterations to e.g. players’ names:

45) Up the Antti

46) Whole Latta love

In these examples it is the players’ names that make the homonymic headlines possible. Headline 45 can be seen as a homonymy to the phrase “up the ante”, which roughly means for someone to take a risk in order to gain better results. The lead of the headline

reveals the identity of the player: “Recap: Niemi’s highlight-reel save caps shootout win for Sharks”. Thus, it can be concluded that it is the Finnish goaltender Antti Niemi who is the player in the headline, and who presumably had “upped the ante”. However, after having read the news story behind the headline, the reader may still not be certain whether or not the goaltender had indeed taken a risk of some sort in the game. It is probable then, that the phrase “up the ante” refers to the nature of the shootout competition in ice hockey in general. The setting for the shootout competition is goaltender vs. player, and can perhaps be seen as a sort of gamble between the participating goalie and player. Thus, the original phrase can be said to fit into the theme of the shootout competition and together with the homonymic player name form a link between Antti Niemi, the fact that his team won and the “highlight-reel save” that Niemi did in the shootout. Example 46 then is an example of a headline that has no deeper connections in it. The headline is a homonymy to the phrase “a whole lot of love”, and the lead reads as follows: “Recap: Latta’s first NHL goal forces OT as Caps beat Wings in a shootout”. Thus, it is revealed to the reader that the “Latta” in the headline is actually the player’s name, who, according to the lead, has scored his first ever NHL goal. After clicking open the whole story behind the headline it is also revealed to the reader that the player’s full name is Michael Latta, but no further comments are made about the pun in the headline. Thus, it could be argued that this headline was formed in an opportunistic manner, and no secondary meanings were attached to it.

It was not always clear whether to consider a headline as an instance of allusion or homonymy. Some headlines were first thought to belong to allusion, but were then later changed into the homonymy category. Thus, the set of rules that were introduced in the introduction to this section were used in the decision-making process. The rules regarding homonymies included two different scenarios. The following two headlines are examples that were placed under homonymy due to the fact that they could be transformed to pure homonymies with the change of a single sound. One example of the second scenario of the rules regarding homonymic headlines will be presented later in the section on nonce words. These rules made it possible for headlines that were not 100% homonymic to be placed under this category after all. Thus, the following two headlines were analyzed as being instances of homonymy:

- 47) Time to be-Leaf?
- 48) Kess it goodbye

Headline 47 above leads to a news story about the Toronto Maple Leafs and their success during the first week of the NHL 2013-14 regular season. Thus, the headline can be seen as a homonymy to the phrase “time to believe”, and with the rules set earlier, was in the end placed under the category of homonymic instances. With the change of a single sound the headline becomes a full homonymy, as with example 48. The lead for the headline 48 above reads as follows: ”Recap: Kessel’s hat trick helps Leafs end Ducks’ win streak at seven”. Thus, the player’s name, Kessel, has been shortened to form the near-homonymic headline, which refers to the phrase “kiss it goodbye”. Again, a change of a single vowel sound would have made the headline a complete homonymy and the headline was thus thought to belong to this category. With the rules that were made regarding homonymic instances, there were also headlines that were first put under homonymy but were then changed to another category. These will be explained in more detail later when the findings from these categories are presented.

As was mentioned before, all except one instance of homonymic headlines were formed around a player’s or a team’s name. The one headline that was not created with a player’s or a team’s name was, however, formed around the name of the home arena of one club in the NHL. The following example was also put under homonymy category after forming the rules with which a headline could be seen as an instance of homonymy:

- 49) Hit the Xcel-Erator

As such, the mere headline does not reveal much to the reader, but the lead may help in understanding what the headline is about: “Kings visit Xcel Energy Center, where Wild are undefeated in openers”. Thus, the headline refers to the home arena of the Minnesota Wild, the Xcel Energy Center. It can also be seen from the lead that the Minnesota Wild are about to play their first game, their season opener in their home arena where they have won each of their season-opening games. With this information the homonymy in the headline starts to take its shape, as it can now be read as “hit the accelerator”, which can be seen as referring to the fact that the Wild are about to play their first home game of the season.

There were also two headlines that were on the borderlines between homonymy and eye dialect and required a great amount of time and reflection. The fact that eye dialect as a category was eventually left with no instances at all would not necessarily have been so. These two headlines both illustrate the challenges in categorizing data samples as they share some elements of eye dialect but were still in the end placed under homonymy:

- 50) Sens of timing
- 51) Enough Sed

The reason why these headlines were placed under homonymy rather than eye dialect was that they were not complete instances of eye dialect. Both have a single word that could be seen as written in eye dialect, but the rest of both headlines do not express the characteristics of eye dialect. Example 50 can be seen as referring to the phrase "sense of timing", and the impression grows stronger with the lead of the headline: "Recap: Ceci scores first NHL goal in overtime to lift Sens over Blues". "Sens" is the shortened version of the name of the team Ottawa Senators, and the "sense of timing" in the headline can be seen as referring to both the team and the player who scored the game winning goal. The fact that the player named Ceci scored his first NHL career goal in overtime to win the game for his team can be seen as perfect "sense of timing" to score one's first NHL goal. Example 51 then can be seen as a homonymy to the phrase "enough said", and the word "Sed" could have been seen as an instance of eye dialect as well. However, as with example 50, the rest of the headline is written in an ordinary manner, which eventually made the decision to put the headline under homonymy rather than eye dialect. The meaning of headline 51 is opened a little with the lead: "Recap: Canucks win fourth straight on D. Sedin's third-period goal". Thus, it is the Swedish player Daniel Sedin's shortened name that appears on the headline and also forms the homonymy to the word "said".

6.3 Headlines using nonce words and foreignisms

There were a total of four instances of nonce words and one instance of foreignism in the data sample of the present study. Nonce words, as was earlier introduced by Chovanec (2008:231) are so-called ad-hoc formations that are usually used only once. The following example from the data sample of the present study is much alike to example 29 before which was introduced by Chovanec (2008):

52) Malk-a-Mania

The lead for the headline reads as follows: “Recap: Malkin’s two goals, shootout clincher lead Pens past Leafs”. Thus, like in example 29 earlier, the headline refers to a mania about a player, this time Evgeni Malkin, a Russian player of the Pittsburgh Penguins. The mania probably refers to the fact that as it is said in the lead, Malkin scored two goals during the regulation and scored an additional goal in the shootout competition which won the game for his team. The whole news story behind the headline also reveals that Malkin was awarded the “first star of the game”, a ceremonial award given to the best player in each game.

There were also two headlines in this category that were first put under allusion, but were later noted to fit better into nonce words. These two headlines both have a clearly alluding element to them, but in the end it was their dominating nonce-word characteristics that placed them into nonce words:

53) Lind-sanity

54) Back in 'Bryz'ness

Example 53 can be seen as referring to “insanity” while example 54 mimics the phrase “back in business”. The lead for the headline “Lind-sanity” reads as follows: “Recap: Lindholm’s first NHL goal helps Ducks beat Coyotes”. Thus, the “Lind-sanity” can be said to refer to Hampus Lindholm, a rookie Swedish player of the Anaheim Ducks and the fact that he has scored his first goal of his NHL career. After clicking open the news story behind the headline, it is also revealed to the reader that Lindholm was awarded the first star of the game. There can also be seen an element of allusion in the headline, as the play of the young Lindholm can be seen as being “insanely” good for a rookie player as he collected an assist in the game as well. Example 54 was also thought to belong to allusion at the first glance, but was later placed under nonce words. Although the text alluded to in this example, “back in business”, is quite easily spotted from the headline it was concluded that the “Bryz’ness” was a strong instance of a nonce word. The lead for the headline reveals the identity of the player involved in the headline: “Ilya Bryzgalov helps Oilers shutout Preds in first start with the team”. Thus, the headline was formed around the return of the veteran Russian goaltender Ilya Bryzgalov, who had been absent from the NHL for the last seven months. Bryzgalov

was now “back in business”, and probably earned his place in the front page by playing a shutout game in his return to the league.

There was also one headline in the nonce words category that was first put under homonymy, but was then changed to a more proper category after the rules concerning homonymy were formed. As was introduced earlier, a certain set of rules or standards had to be created while analyzing the data sample in order to maintain consistency, especially with headlines that had homonymic characteristics. It was decided that a headline could be placed under homonymy even if it was not a pure homonymy if it could be transformed to be an instance of pure homonymy with the change of single vowel or consonant sound. Thus, the following example was analyzed not to be an instance of homonymy, due to the fact that merely changing a single sound would not have sufficed:

55) Schenn-sational

This headline could have been seen as an instance of homonymy, as the resemblance to the word “sensational” is quite evident. However, due to the rules that were formed, the added –sch sound determined this headline to be an instance of nonce word, rather than homonymy. The added sound refers once again to a player, as the lead of the headline reveals: “Recap: Schenn scores twice vs. Pens as Flyers win third straight”. After clicking open the news story, it is revealed to the reader that it was a player named Brayden Schenn of the Philadelphia Flyers who scored two goals and thus helped his team to win the game. Schenn’s performance could be seen as being “sensational”, as he not only scored two goals in one game, but he was also the only player of the Flyers who managed to score a goal in the game.

The data sample of the present study included also one example of foreignism. Foreignism, as was introduced earlier by Chovanec (2008:232) is a device with which the media can add a touch of friendliness into e.g. headlines by including familiar words in a foreign language. Example 33 from Chovanec (2008) that was introduced earlier used a foreign word as a verb, similarly as the one example of foreignism in the present study:

56) ‘Cek him out

The lead for the headline reads as follows: “Recap: Voracek scores twice as Flyers split home-and-home with Caps”. Thus, it is the Czech forward Jakub Voracek of the Philadelphia Flyers that the headline is about. The phonological similarity between “check” and “Voracek” allows the clipped form of the player’s last name to be used as a verb in the headline to refer to the phrase “check him out”. As with example 33 before, the player’s nationality can also be spotted from the headline, as the “cek” in the headline can, due to its phonological likeness, be seen as referring to “Czech” as well.

6.4 Alliteration & assonance and rhyme & reduplication in the data sample

There were two instances of both alliteration and assonance and rhyme and reduplication in the data sample of the present study. As was introduced earlier by Chovanec (2008:226), alliteration and assonance are some of the less intrusive ways of enhancing headlines. Alliteration concerns the repetition of initial letters in words, while assonance means the repetition of sounds in other places. Thus, the following example of alliteration and assonance shares the qualities of both alliteration and assonance, in a similar manner as example 17 that was introduced earlier by Chovanec (2008):

57) Dazzling Datsyuk

In this example from the data sample of the present study not only are the initial letters repeated, but also the sound segment –da in both words that form the headline. The lead of the headline reads as follows: “Latest: Datsyuk dekes through two Stars en route to goal”. Thus, the player of the headline, Pavel Datsyuk of the Detroit Red Wings, has scored a “dazzling” goal against the Dallas Stars. The other example of alliteration and assonance from the data sample resembles examples 15 and 16 introduced earlier by Chovanec (2008) in that it uses alliteration only:

58) Raanting and Raving

The lead for the headline reads as follows: “Recap: Hawks’ Raanta earns 1st career shutout over Western rival Kings”. Thus, this example is an instance of alliteration, as only the initial letters are repeated in the headline. The headline can also be seen as an allusion to the phrase “ranting and raving”, and uses the Finnish rookie goaltender Antti Raanta’s last name to bring the element of ice hockey to the original phrase. Clicking open the news story behind the headline reveals that Raanta was awarded the first star

of the game, and received a lot of praise from the team, as the number one goaltender of the Chicago Blackhawks could not play due to injury. Thus, the “ranting and raving” probably refers to the overall performance of the rookie goaltender against the Western Conference rival Los Angeles Kings, rather than him being angry at someone or something, what the original phrase might suggest.

There were also two instances of rhyme and reduplication in the data sample. Rhyme, as was introduced earlier by Chovanec (2008:227) is a literary device with which a special effect is achieved by using words that end in the same or similar sounds. Reduplication then was introduced by Chovanec (*ibid.*) as being a word formation technique in which new words are formed by repeating the first word with or without some morphological exchange. Hebron (2004:20-22) analyzed rhyming even further, and made the distinction between full-rhyme and half-rhyme. In full-rhyme, both vowel and consonant sounds in the end of a word are repeated, whereas in half-rhyme only vowel or consonant sounds are repeated. Thus, it can be concluded that the two examples under rhyme and reduplication in the data sample of the present study are instances of rhyme rather than reduplication, and can, in Hebron’s (2004:20-22) terms be said to be instances of full-rhymes:

- 59) Rask up to task
- 60) Best pest?

As can be seen from the two examples above, the repeated element in both headlines includes not only vowel sounds, but also consonant sounds, thus making them full-rhymes. The lead for headline 59 reads as follows: “Bruins’ goalie displaying durability, ability to steal games”. Thus, it can be concluded that the rhyming headline refers to Tuukka Rask, the Finnish goalie of the Boston Bruins. The article that opens when reader clicks the headline concerns the defensive ability of the Boston Bruins as a team, but also the talent of the Finnish goalie. The article reminds the reader constantly about the performance of Rask, as the author believes that Rask’s performance behind Boston’s solid defense may not get the credit it deserves. Thus, it can be argued that the headline works as a reminder to ice hockey followers that the Finnish goalie is indeed up to the task of winning games on his own as well. Example 60 above is also an instance of a full-rhyme. The lead for the headline reveals the identities of the “pests” in question: “Rivalry Night Faceoff pits Marchand against Ott as top agitator”. Thus, the

headline refers to two agitators, Brad Marchand of the Boston Bruins and Steve Ott of the Buffalo Sabres. Agitators are players in ice-hockey that attempt to get under their opponents' skin via various activities both on and off the ice. Thus, the headline presents the audience with the question of who is the best agitator or the best "pest" in the upcoming game between the rival two teams. Reading the whole news item reveals the reader that both of these players are not only good agitators, but both can also produce offense for their teams and score points. Thus, the headline suggests the audience not only to see who the best pest is but also which one of these players helps his team in other ways as well.

6.5 The zero-result: eye-dialect

As can be seen from Table 1 earlier, one category was left empty when analyzing the data sample of the present study. Even though eye-dialect did not include a single headline in the end, there were a few headlines that could have been placed under eye-dialect as well. For instance examples 50 and 51 that were introduced earlier with other homonymic headlines both share the characteristics of eye-dialect. In both of those headlines, part of the headline could be said to have been written using eye-dialect. The same could be said about example 46, in which an element of eye-dialect could also be spotted. However, a decision was made to accept as instances of eye-dialect headlines that were completely written in eye-dialect, thus eliminating examples 50 and 51 from belonging under this category. However, it has to be remembered that examples 50 and 51 were the only ones under consideration of the whole data sample regarding eye-dialect. Thus, the number of eye-dialects with the data sample of the present study would not have been high even with a different perspective. This can be seen as rather surprising, for as Chovanec (2008:232) points out, eye-dialect could simulate friendship, connote familiarity and represent the everyday language to increase social bonding with the audience. The possible reasons for the lack of headlines using eye-dialect, and the abundance of headlines using other attention-attracting devices in the NHL's official website will be further discussed later.

7 DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to take a closer look at the punning news headlines in the official website of the National Hockey League. The website is known in the Internet as a rich source of punning headlines, as a Google search with the phrase “nhl.com headline puns” reveals a number of e.g. blogs about the puns. A data sample consisting of 80 headlines was collected from the website and analyzed according to the foregrounding devices introduced by Chovanec (2008) that were used in creating a punning element into the headlines. The following research question was presented as the aim of the present study:

What kind of linguistic devices have been used to include punning and wordplay into the news headlines on the website www.nhl.com?

An attempt was made in order to get an answer to the research question by analyzing the data sample according to the linguistic tools that were used in the headlines. Having presented the findings in section 6 before, it can be argued that there were two linguistic devices used clearly the most in the data sample of the present study: *allusion* and *homonymy and morphological adaptation* together comprised roughly 90% of all the 80 headlines in the data sample. The remaining five categories were left with a total number of one to four headlines each, with also one category that included zero headlines in the end. Thus, it can be said that an answer to the research question of the present study was accomplished. *Allusion* and *homonymy and morphological adaptation* were clearly the most used linguistic devices used to include punning and wordplay into the headlines, with *allusion* being used in 49 instances and *homonymy and morphological adaptation* in 22 occasions.

The dominance of *allusion* in the headlines in the data sample was a bit of a surprise. Allusion, as was introduced earlier by Lennon (2004:196-197), can be said to be a somewhat risky device to use in e.g. headlines. Allusion requires a certain amount of shared cultural knowledge between the reader and the author, as the text that the reader sees and reads should inspire the reader to look for the absent text. It is oftentimes a necessity for the reader to notice the need for this text *in absentia* in order for the

headline to reach its intended effect. If the text *in praesentia* fails to induce the reader to dwell into his or her background knowledge and look for a connection from there, the headline probably will not open up the way it was intended to. A failed headline is very likely to cause misinterpretations and can perhaps even annoy the reader if the reader lacks the presupposed cultural knowledge.

Thus it feels safe to argue that the authors at the official website of the NHL know their reader-base, and feel confident in including e.g. allusions in their news headlines that require deep enthusiasm from the readers. This is not surprising, because as was introduced before by Dor (2013), headlines are often targeted directly at their intended audience. As many of the examples of the present study illustrate, there is also often a deep, shared cultural knowledge that is required for the reader to fully understand the author and the meaning of the headline, as was discussed earlier in Chapter 4.3.5. This shared cultural knowledge can be ice hockey related knowledge, as in the examples where e.g. a player's name played a crucial role in the allusion, such as in example 41 "I Sid you not" that was presented earlier. For an ice hockey enthusiast the name "Sid" right away reveals the identity of the player and the similarity in the words "shit" and "Sid" probably reveals the alluded phrase as well. However, as could be seen from examples 37 and 38, a visitor to the site is required to have some knowledge of e.g. popular culture as well. These headlines for example will probably not gain their intended effect with a reader who has never seen the movie *Star Wars* or watched the television show *Teenage mutant ninja turtles*. The headlines will perhaps leave the reader at a loss and unaware of what has actually been done with the headlines, and it is thus possible that the reader is left ignorant of the creativity needed in creating such headlines as well.

However, it can be argued that the authors at the NHL's official website are also aware of the possible threats regarding creating punning headlines. For example in the allusion examples that were presented earlier, the texts alluded to can be said to be targeted directly to the website's audience. The headlines, even when they did not allude to ice hockey (e.g. players' or teams' names), usually handled themes that could be thought to be familiar to the website's visitors. These themes included for example popular culture, such as in the examples "Obi-Won Kenobi" and "Hertl Power" that were discussed

before. It could perhaps be argued that these two pieces of popular culture, *Star Wars* and *Teenage mutant ninja turtles* are in a way such universal entities that their identification could be assumed. It is also worth noting that the NHL website is nowadays offered in 8 different languages (German and Finnish, for example), thus implying that the English site could be targeted mainly for the English speaking ice hockey audience, i.e. North-America. Thus, e.g. allusions to phenomena from Hollywood may well be thought to be self-evident to the North-American readers. It is then arguable that the inclusion of popular culture into the news headlines is a somewhat safe bet, as popular culture has such a central role in society today and is rather Anglo-American in its core.

What was also interesting in the results of the present study was how each homonymic headline was formed by using either a player or a team name to create the homonymic pun into the headline. A majority of the examples in the data sample worked as headlines to post-game match reports. Thus, it is understandable that the key players' names, morphologically altered or not, were often implemented into the headlines as well. It enables for an enthusiastic ice hockey follower to instantly recognize a key element from a game, such as the name of the player who scored the winning goal or some other important performance. However, if the reader lacks deep ice hockey related knowledge and experience, even the homonymic headlines can probably seem a little cryptic, especially if e.g. a player's name has been drastically altered. Thus, the shared cultural knowledge that was discussed in relation to allusion before could be said to work for the whole website as well. No matter what the linguistic mechanism has been in creating a pun into an ice hockey related news headline, a certain amount of ice hockey knowledge is often required from the reader. This feels rather natural, as the website of the biggest professional ice hockey league is most likely aimed at serving the sports' followers and their needs, and can do so with a certain degree of presumed shared knowledge.

It is then interesting to ponder about those categories that had only one or even zero headlines in the data sample of the present study. Are for example foreignisms (1 headline in the data sample) and eye-dialect (the zero result) thought as too risky devices to use in the website? Could it be that headlines created with foreign words or

headlines written in eye-dialect could be too difficult for the website's visitors to comprehend? Then again, many of the examples under e.g. allusion can be said to be rather complex, even to the degree introduced earlier by Molek-Kozakowska (2013) where understanding has been hindered due to the attempt made at attracting readers' attention. It also has to be remembered that the data sample of the present study was rather small (80 headlines), just as the time period during which the headlines were collected (roughly four months) was rather short. Thus, no conclusion can be drawn on the basis of the findings of the present study as to whether the lack of e.g. headlines written in eye-dialect or with foreign words was the result of the authors' fear of being misunderstood, but is nevertheless an interesting result. Eye-dialect and foreignism are both, as Chovanec (2008) illustrates devices with which media can interact with its audience on a more personal level, similarly as with the other foregrounding devices that were introduced by Chovanec (*ibid.*). Then again, as has been mentioned before, the present study is only one approach and one attempt at taking a closer look at the puns in the headlines in the NHL's website. With a different approach, the number of headlines under each category could have been slightly different, and even eye-dialect would not necessarily have been left without any headlines at all. In addition, a decision was made to include eye-dialect in the categorization after all even though it was left with zero headlines, as it was a part of the classification given by Chovanec (2008). It was decided at the beginning of the analyzing process to use Chovanec's (2008) classes as such, and thus each of the categories that were introduced were included in the present study as well.

There were also certain limitations while conducting the present study that need to be noted. First of all, the researcher is not a native speaker of English. Thus, it is likely that some headlines were not picked up from the website due to lack of a deeper knowledge of North American culture. Even though knowledge and experience in ice hockey was substantial, some headlines might have included such cultural references that the researcher was unaware of, and were thus not picked up. Spotting changes in the surface-level, such as in spellings of individual words felt rather easy during the data collecting process, but noticing deeper, culture-related phenomena was more difficult. It can be said that the researcher might have lacked the presupposed shared cultural knowledge required to fully grasp the meaning of each headline. Secondly, the data collecting was not completely systematic in that there were pauses during the four-

month period during which the website was not visited at all. During e.g. some weekends and Christmas holiday the headlines were not collected. Thus, it is highly likely that there were punning headlines released on the website during these pauses that were not collected, and the data sample could have thus been bigger. Naturally, the size of the data sample could have been improved by expanding the time period when the headlines were collected. The headlines could have been collected during e.g. the whole NHL regular season, from early September to late April, but such time period was unfortunately not possible. Thirdly, as has been mentioned on numerous occasions, the present study was only one way of looking at the matter. A different approach, with different categorizations and different perspective could have resulted in rather different results. Thus, it has to be remembered that the perspective that was taken in the present study is by no means a definite answer to the nature of the punning wordplays used in the news headlines of the NHL's official website.

Thus, it can be said that future endeavors in studying punning and wordplay in the media could take heed of the limitations brought up by the present study. For example, the categorization used in determining the nature of the puns could be a combination of two or more studies. Also, a categorization of one's own based on earlier studies could very well be used. Thus, a more fitting categorization to the field of research in question could be created. With a categorization of one's own, the differences in the numbers of headlines for each category could possibly be reduced and zero-results prevented. There is also room for future research regarding the news headlines in the NHL website as well. It would be interesting, for example to gather all the headlines during one regular season, from September to April, and study how often wordplays are actually implemented to the headlines. The ratio between headlines that include a punning element and those which do not would probably be an interesting number to study. In addition, a larger data sample with the categorization of the present study would be interesting as well. Would the ratio of eye-dialects or foreignisms compared to allusions or homonymic headlines be as low as in the present study with a longer time period and larger data sample? Also, it would be interesting to study the headlines in a more general level as well. During the four-month data collecting period it seemed that all the headlines were positive in nature, and were created around positive events. It would be interesting to study how often, if ever, the headlines on the website were written in a negative manner and around e.g. mistakes made by players or goaltenders. In addition,

it would be interesting study whether the puns in headlines lessen or increase during the Stanley Cup Playoffs that start after the regular season. It could be assumed that the number of visitors to the site is at its height during the Playoffs and people who do not follow ice hockey so passionately would visit the site as well. Thus, it would be interesting to study if the same trend in creating punning and sometimes even cryptic headlines continued during the Playoffs.

All in all, it can be concluded that the present study was successful in that it attempted to take a closer look from a linguistic perspective at the punning headlines in the official website of the National Hockey League. A research question was placed and answered, and the present study revealed some interesting facts about the creativity of the news authors of the NHL website. Language use, even that of the media does not need to be static and uneventful, but can be lively, interesting and able to connect with its audience in more levels than just sharing news to its readers. The foregrounding devices introduced by e.g. Chovanec (2008) can be used in many ways to attract readers' attention, and can help the media reduce the distance between itself and its audience. For example the news headlines in the NHL website have given birth to a sort of Internet phenomenon, as blogs and Facebook pages have been created around them. It is possible that these blogs and Facebook pages have reached the interest of people who are not passionate ice hockey followers, but have friends in e.g. social media applications that have shared these headlines with them. Thus, creative language use may result even in bigger audiences, and also from outside the intended target audience. With people embracing more and more social media applications with enthusiasm and sharing e.g. news stories with their friends, the position of online news media services is rather important. They can show courage and open-mindedness in e.g. their language use and with their large audiences can work as reminders that language can be rich and used in a diverse way. Professional sports and the media that cover it has also a huge audience and can thus raise people's awareness of the faults of our society as well, and should not be underestimated in the academic field either.

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