Inferring a Message Through Capitalization

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The English language is unique in the sense that the writing rules are stringent and unbending. The rules generally and the rules of capitalization particularly have practically been set in stone for centuries. Capital letters help us understand what we read and others understand what we have written. It is also about giving elegance to a text. To clarify meaning in your writing you have to consider the capitalization rules. However, in the world of imagery the accepted rules are not always taken into account. Capital letters become graphic stylistic devices containing a diverse semantic meaning when the rules are disregarded. This case may make a big difference in the interpretation of a sentence since capitalization helps to convey information. What happens when complete words are capitalized? Completely capitalized words become great tools for transmitting the right message to a reader. Particularly only modern writes have taken advantage of manipulating and exploiting capital letters as graphic devices and by doing that helping readers to infer the author’s message.

Keywords: capitalization, inferring, author’s message, fiction, disregarded, conventions

Introduction

Existing form of fiction differs significantly from other forms of art by their attitude to material. Marble or wood, which a sculpture is made of, is an inseparable part of the latter and an essential component while evaluating it as a work of art. A paper, on which a book is printed, cannot tell much about its literature value. A broken sculpture ceases to exist while destruction of one or two books cannot bring an end to its existence. The verse stays the verse notwithstanding it is printed or read in the magazine; heard on the radio or said on the stage. To read the work of literature in order to perceive it deeply is much more essential than to listen to it. For this reason graphic design of a text has really attained great importance recently. The latter does not mean a shape of a book or a size of font, although they are quite important in order to read comfortably and get esthetic impression. When we are talking about graphic design we mean the visual means that are used to convey and transmit the definite meaning to readers.

Method

The study is based on the qualitative research method and the examples have been collected from modern works of fiction. The rationale for the current study was to gather information relating to two major areas: (1) the primary purpose of capitalization and existing rules, (2) the rules that are disregarded in fiction on purpose and their effects.
Data Collection

Data collection is based on the analysis of the examples from The Plumps by Aidu (1989) and A Municipal Report by Henry (1957).

Results

Capitals being graphic mean that highlight text and its units have been used since ancient times. The general function of capitals is to give elegance to a text and distinguish concrete words from others (here we mean some grammatical conventions of languages). Capitals, being a graphic device able to distinguish words and some textual parts, have been widely used later, particularly in the modern epoch. The rules of capitalization have practically been set in stone for centuries. However, we pay attention to their use in fiction. Capitals become graphic devices containing esthetic information by disregarding generally accepted rules. Moreover, their overuse serves to distinguish some textual parts and transmit the right author’s intention to a reader.

Stylistic use of language means is mostly connected to the selection of those forms and units that are the most effective for readers to decode an author’s intention adequately. Therefore, the pragmatic aspect of language appears initially in stylistic organization of a text. Finally, any stylistic device that works within the frames of a text with certain form and concrete volume is nothing but the way to organize oral action. Properly organized oral action in itself is the only guarantee of the perfect “exchange” of transmitted information and partly it can forecast the forthcoming effect. Likewise in order to transmit an author’s intention accurately to an addressee, the visualization becomes quite important. In the following example the words are completely capitalized. The way how words are isolated from the rest of the text marks their tone, as if they are written loudly and therefore we have to read them out in the same way.

SOMEONE MUST TELL HER HUSBAND!! (Aidu, 1989)

This example seems very loud and categorical. If we compare it with the same sentence written in low case letters we can clearly comprehend the difference.

SOMEONE MUST TELL HER HUSBAND!!

Someone must tell her husband!!

Despite the fact that we left both exclamation marks at the end of the sentences on purpose, which, in itself, adds emotional colouring and suggests definite intonation, the difference between the first and the second sentences is obvious. The completely capitalized words dictate the way how the sentence must be pronounced and in addition they suggest the definite tone. It is fairly obvious that the second sentence does not disclose the author’s intention and cannot be perceived adequately.

“You confounded old rascal”, I said, reaching down to my pocket, “you ought to be turned over to the police”.

For the first time I saw him smile. He knew; he knew: HE KNEW. (Henry, 1957)

This example also demonstrates how capitalization changes the significance of the complete passage. The meaning is reinforced by repetition and italics first but the great emotional tension is reached only by capitalization.
Capitalization enables readers to guess not only an author’s general mood, his peculiar tone or style, his personal attitude to described events, what is given between the lines but also the definite pragmatic orientation which he/she has toward the readers since an author makes an emotional impact on readers and causes desired esthetic reaction only through graphic means.

The following example is a lot more interesting because the completely capitalized word is placed vertically and not horizontally as it usually happens.

Marija was crying silently. There was a tear streaming out of one of her eyes. The tear was coming out of the left eye only. The right eye was completely dry. Sissie felt pain at the sight of flat one tear. That forever tear was out of one eye. Suddenly Sissie knew. She saw it once and was never to forget it. She saw against the background of the thick smoke that was like a rain cloud over the chimneys of Europe.

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*Forever falling like a tear out of a woman’s eye.* (Aidu, 1989)

From the speaker’s point of view, the completely capitalized and vertically placed word “LONELINESS” stands for the tear coming down from Marija’s left eye. The author places the word vertically in order to give the word an ordinary direction of a tear. The tone dictated by capital letters and their unusual location turn out to be very effective. On the whole, the emotional colouring caused by visual effects and the problem coming out from the word itself coincide with each other and amazingly and completely affect readers.

**Conclusions**

In all these examples, the accepted rules are deliberately ignored in order to transmit esthetic information of an utterance or an author’s intention. We believe that visualization of a text is stylistically essential in order to transmit to a reader something that is passed in oral speech by stress, tone, voice, pauses, and so on. A verbal text has aimed at totally new objectives and therefore has not followed those standards accepted up to now. Taking into account above said, the present work aims at revealing stylistic effect of completely capitalized words; their importance in a verbal text, as readers get authentic author’s information through this particular stylistic graphic device.
References


