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COGNITIVE “WARNING SIGNS” IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING MEDIA TEXTS

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WHTV (*Warn Human Trafficking Victim*) aims at elaborating linguistic strategies to prevent human trafficking (HT). Fueled by social disturbances, HT becomes a greater threat across the globe. Awareness should be raised at various levels, with much attention given at the pre-employment stage which can be achieved in academic setting.

This study explores cognitive pre-requisites of warning potential victims about HT. The methodology relies on the premises of media linguistics that realities mediated through pre-constructed messages (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998) make impact on people’s lives; Image-Schema Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, Johnson 2013) for identifying image-schemas (IS) actuated during reading; and empirical methods (Peer 1986) for verifying a dependence of readers’ response on the use of IS.

The material includes 2 texts with less/more frequent use of IS. Hypothetically, the increased number of schemata-charged verbal units may help impose the feeling of danger on the audience. If this is true, then the results are meaningful for raising awareness of HT risks.

The qualitative analysis shows the frequent use of such IS as *up*, *center-periphery*, *containment*, *blockage*, *counterforce*. We predict that the level of response is higher to Text 2, rich in meanings actuated by image-schemas, than it is to Text 1.

The study is gender-sensitive: respondents are 40 female humanities students aged 20-21, many of them are thinking of their careers abroad, and thus represent a vulnerable social category. In the course of the reading session at BGKU, Ukraine, they were asked whether they imagined themselves being in the same situation, whether they felt sympathy with the trafficked girls, and whether they were affected with HT.

We observe more frequent commenting in open question section after reading Text 2. The SPSS-processed quantitative data will shed light on the degree of the readers’ involvement in the content charged with IS.

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