

General Interpretation of the Title in the Literary Text

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Abstract: This article provides an in-depth exploration of the significance and evolution of titles in literary texts. Drawing from historical, linguistic, and literary perspectives, it illustrates the origins of titles, their various functions, and their typologies. The article discusses how titles have transitioned from mere identifiers to complex entities that frame readers' expectations, convey themes and ideas, and shape the overall reading experience. Additionally, the article emphasizes the diversity of title forms and their impact on attracting attention, evoking curiosity, and conveying emotional and conceptual content. Overall, it offers a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted nature of titles and their pivotal role in literary interpretation and appreciation.

Keywords: author, conceptual information, explicit and implicit titles, functions of the titles, literary work, reader.

Title is one of the main components of any text, which has been in the focus of various scholastic researches for centuries. If delved into the etymology and history of this notion, the word "title" originates from the Old English "titul" and was further influenced by the Old French word "title," both deriving from the Latin "titulus." This term initially referred to a notice or a sign attached to an object that provided details about it. Over time, it came to mean a descriptive heading or name for a book, which is how we commonly understand the word today (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/title>).

In the early era of the development of fiction, the title did not yet exist, the works were simply named after their first word, as they were passed down orally from generation to generation. Before printing was invented, the title was mainly functional, used to identify books easily, often printed in large letters on the top page. The advent of printing changed how society viewed books, making authorship and selling printed copies important. Consequently, authors' names started appearing on title pages, followed by additional details like the place of printing, the printer, the publisher, and the date (Ciobanica, 2022).

Throughout England's history, the title emerged from the need to identify and differentiate individual literary works. This practice became more common after Christian monks began writing down myths and legends. In the 16th century, Shakespeare's works, particularly his chronicle plays and tragedies, were often titled after their main characters or monarchs. By the 18th century, book titles had evolved into detailed phrases or sentences that summarized the entire content, covering even minor plot details. These lengthy titles often filled the title page, reflecting readers' interests in exotic journeys and extraordinary characters. (Ciobanica, 2022). In the XX century, writers recognized that the title could convey themes, ideas, intrigue readers, or set a particular mood. Titles from this era are notable for their expressiveness, emotion, and imagery, offering more insight into the work than just naming the main character. Authors used key concept contrasts in the title to engage audiences. Later, poets and writers employed literary

devices like allusion, metonymy, synecdoche, and quotations in their titles. Due to the manifestation of implicitness within the title, these devices allowed for broader plot development (Lodge, 1992).

Gaining a significant importance in the course of the years, the title has become the main object of investigation in the fields of literature, psychology, various branches of linguistics such as stylistics, text linguistics, cognitive linguistics, pragmalinguistics, psycholinguistics and some others.

The definitions given to the title vary from scholar to another in the field of linguistics. A. Lamzina claims that "A literary work is presented to the reader as a single text, that is, a materially fixed sequence of signs. Among them, the title is regarded as the main frame component and a mandatory part of the text, which has a fixed position in it (Lamzina, 1999, p.94) (Translation is ours). It is a strong position of any text, "the strongest one" (Kojina, 1987, p.111). V. Kukharenko defines the title in the following way: "the title is autonomous, condensed, integral name of a literary work, providing it with independence and recognition. The title acts as an actualizer of almost all text categories: author's modality, completeness, articulation, coherence, cohesion, prospectivity and pragmatic orientation" (Kukharenko, 1988, p. 90) (Translation is ours). N. Veselova proves that the title of the work is not just "the key word" or "one-phrase text". The title absorbs the concentrated essence of the work and at the same time "does not belong to it undividedly". On the one side it comes into contact with the world beyond the text, and the other with the text, marking it start. Because of this borderline position, the title "serves as a connecting link between the text and the reality external to it" (Veselova, 1998, p.18).

According to I. Galperin, the title of a literary work is seen as a symbol that carries meaning throughout the entire text. It contains condensed information that is later expanded upon in the body of the work (Galperin, 1981). From the structural-semantic viewpoint, the title represents a starting point in the creation of the concept of the text (Martashvili, 2010). This is mainly because with a deep acquaintance, it reveals the essence of the work, progressively assigning new meaning from each page, interpreting it (Galperin, 1981). In essence, from the perspective of psycholinguistics, A. Brudniy identifies three stages of title perception: firstly, **immediate perception** (interpretation of the title before the text), where the initial hypothesis for understanding the title depends on an extralinguistic factor - the reader's thesaurus; secondly, **dynamic perception** (interpretation of the title within the text); and finally, **final perception** (interpretation of the title after finishing the text) (Brudniy, 1988). Therefore, the title is regarded as a micro text due to its influencing power on the reading process (Adam, 1992). Furthermore, the title has the ability to delineate the text and endow it with completeness. This is its leading property. It is not only a signal directing the reader's attention to the prospective unfolding of thought but also sets the framework for such exposition" (Galperin, 1981).

The typology of the title is considerably diverse, different scholars proposed their own way of classification based on their research. Therefore, it can be grouped by identifying types that form a stable tradition in the history of literature.

The literature of the XXI century, on the other hand, is marked by an abundance of intellectual exploration in all directions. Some authors prefer to look back in search of support for forming new theories, while others look forward, trying to predict what lies ahead for humanity. Some choose to focus on the present, highlighting the main problems facing humanity: both global issues like catastrophes and spiritual ones like relationships between men and women, parents and children, society and the individual. The titles of this period mainly consist of one or two words: "Gone Girl" by Gillian Flynn, "Twilight" by Stephenie Meyer, "The Hunger Games" by Suzanne Collin (Kozma, 2016).

Lamzina (1999), identifies the following types of the title:

- The title representing the main theme or problem depicted by the author in the work. The understanding of the theme announced in the title of the work can significantly expand as the artistic text unfolds, and the title itself can acquire symbolic meaning.
- The title setting the narrative perspective of the work. They can be conditionally divided into two groups: those representing the entire narrative sequence (fabula-based) and those highlighting the most important moment in terms of action development (climactic).
- Character title, a significant part of which are anthroponyms, indicating the nationality, familial affiliation, and social status of the main hero.
- The title indicating time and space. In addition to names of times of day, days of the week, and months, the time of action can be designated by a date associated with a historical event.

The semantic-stylistic classification of titles is presented in the work of I.R. Galperin, where the following types of titles are mentioned: title-symbol, title-thesis, title-quotation, title-report, title-hint, and title-narration (Galperin, 1981).

1. Title-symbol represents deeper themes or ideas in the narrative via symbol or metaphor. It acts as a symbolic representation of broader themes or concepts in the work.
2. Title-thesis encapsulates the central argument or thesis of the work. It directly reflects the main idea or message of the narrative. For example, "Crime and Punishment" by Fyodor Dostoevsky. The title directly addresses the central themes of crime, guilt, and moral struggle.
3. Title-quotation is derived from a quotation or a reference to another literary work, often indicating thematic or contextual links. For example, "Brave New World" by Aldous Huxley is a quote from Shakespeare's "The Tempest," reflecting on the novel's exploration of a new but flawed societal order.
4. Title-report provides a straightforward report of the main event, setting, or character.
5. Title-Hint offers a hint or a clue about the plot or the central theme of the work. It subtly suggests something about the story without providing direct details.
6. Title-Narration reflects a narrative aspect, possibly hinting at the storytelling style or a key narrative element.

Notwithstanding the structural or semantic varieties of the title, scholarly research on literary titles identifies two types of relationships between the title and the text: explicit and implicit. An **explicit relationship** is more straightforward, often involving repetition of words from the title within key parts of the text, such as the beginning or end (Djanjakova, 1992). A straightforward example is Ernest Hemingway's story "The Old Man and the Sea" (Hemingway, 1952). The title directly refers to the main characters of the story - the old man (Santiago) and the sea, which plays a central role in the narrative. Throughout the novella, these elements are continuously referred to, making the connection between the title and the text quite clear and direct. In contrast, an **implicit relationship** is deeper, generating additional layers of meaning or subtext, enriching the reader's understanding beyond the surface level of the text. For example, in the novel "The Catcher in the Rye" by J.D. Salinger (Salinger, 1951) the title does not explicitly describe the novel's plot or setting. Instead, it references a metaphorical concept that is key to understanding the protagonist's mindset and the themes of the story. In this example, the title "The Catcher in the Rye" implicitly reflects the novel's deeper thematic concerns. It initially seems unrelated to the story's events but gains significance as it reveals key aspects of Holden's character and the novel's exploration of innocence, change, and the challenges of growing up. Thus, the title that have a complex relationship with the text enables readers to reflectively understand all that is implicitly excluded or deliberately left out (Martashvili, 2010).

It should be outlined that the title plays an indispensable role in understanding and interpretation of the literary texts. The title is the first thing a reader encounters when picking up a book or looking at a magazine's contents. Naturally, this information can only be a general outline, but it can also provide a very specific understanding of the content, as well as a misleading impression (<http://www.allbest.ru/>). The title can be "a condensed version of the book, and the book can be an expanded version of the title" (Krjijanovskiy, 1931, p.3). A concise and expressive title not only leads to the arousal of interest in the reader but also plays a significant role in the process of cementing the book's title in the memory of the reader, or even entire generations of readers (Djanjakova, 1992).

Furthermore, S. Suvorov (1965) highlights the following points indicating the role of the title in literary work:

Separating one story from another: the title serves as a tool to distinguish one work from another. It provides an identity to a story, poem, or novel, setting it apart from other pieces;

Attracting attention to the material: the title acts as a hook to draw potential readers. It can intrigue, provoke thought, or evoke emotion even before the first page is turned. An effective title piques curiosity about the story, characters, or the thematic elements of the work;

Evoking reader's interest: beyond just attracting attention, the title can create a sense of mystery or anticipation. It might hint at a conflict, a setting, or a unique aspect of the story, thereby enticing readers to delve into the narrative to discover more;

Providing an emotional impact: the title can set the tone for the emotional journey the reader is about to embark on. It might evoke feelings of sadness, joy, suspense, or nostalgia, thereby framing the reader's emotional response and engagement with the text;

Concisely conveying the main content or theme: A good title encapsulates the essence of the work in a few words, giving readers a hint of what to expect and the nature of the story or its central idea.

It is significant to outline that the title plays a crucial role in conveying key conceptual information about a text, interacting closely with its content. Both through direct as well as explicit way and via subtle and implicit means the title reflects the underlying theme, idea, or concept that the author embeds within the text. Thus, it serves as the central point of its conceptual message. Initially, the title may appear as an abstract concept, but as one delves into the text, it gains specific, concrete significance (Aznaurova, Molchanova, Ashurova, 1990). The novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee can serve as an example. At first glance, the title "To Kill a Mockingbird" might seem abstract or unrelated to the story, as the book does not literally talk about harming birds. However, in the process of reading the novel, the title gains deeper meaning. The book discusses themes like innocence, prejudice, and moral growth. In the story, the character Atticus Finch tells his children that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird because these birds do nothing but make music for people to enjoy, symbolizing innocence and goodness. As the plot unfolds, the title becomes a metaphor for the wrongful harm of innocent people, represented by characters like Tom Robinson, who is falsely accused and convicted of a crime he did not commit, much like the innocence of a mockingbird being destroyed. So, the title "To Kill a Mockingbird" initially seems abstract, but it becomes loaded with concrete meaning as it encapsulates the major themes of the novel, particularly the destruction of innocence and the condemnation of injustice (Lee, 1960).

In addition, the title plays a significant role in organizing the semantic structure of the entire text. According to V.A. Kukharensko, it is the title that "acts as an actualizer of practically all the main categories... Intermediate titles, which are given to chapters or parts of a single work, actualize the category of text divisibility..." They facilitate reading, "highlight subjects, emphasize, and promote the importance of the compositional-architectural division of the text" (Kukharensko, 1988, p. 91).

In conclusion, title is one of the main constituents of any text, which holds immense significance in its profound understanding and interpretation. There is a wide range of definitions given to this concept by prominent scholars both from linguistic and non-linguistic points of view. As title has a considerably long historical evolution, over the years it has evolved into a complex entity with various functions and forms. Scholars across various disciplines like literature, linguistics, psychology have extensively studied the significance and impact of titles, highlighting their role in framing readers' expectations, conveying themes and ideas, and shaping the overall reading experience.

Moreover, the typology of titles is also diverse, embracing various forms such as symbol-titles, thesis-oriented titles, and those that offer hints or evoke curiosity. Regardless of their form, titles play a critical role in establishing connections between the text and its audience, separating one work from another, and introducing readers with their intriguing or evocative nature. Through explicit and implicit relationships with the text, titles enhance readers' understanding, offering layers of meaning and subtext that enrich the reading experience. They encapsulate the essence of the work, convey its central themes, and guide readers through its narrative journey.

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