Flash language

In recent years headlight flashing has become popular with the general population. It's a way to get a point across. Also it can tell of hazards ahead, such as deer, an accident, even a flash flood. The use of headlights as a means to communicate messages on the roadway appears to have expanded over the years. Even police officers use headlights to say " pull over" when they don't want to use their sirens.

In a sense, as flashing headlights has expanded to include more uses, it has become something of a flash language. A traditional use of flashing lights to send messages, Morse code makes use of a series of short and long signals of light or sound (electric tones or voltages) to represent letters and numbers. While the flash language of headlights may resemble Morse code, head light flashing is a random collection of flashes that vary from situation to situation, instead of a fixed sequence of signals. Headlight flashing is not like Morse code. it cannot be translated into legible language.

It is just alerting the driver of another car to some problem, such as " something is wrong with your vehicle" and needs to be seen to immediately. Flashing headlights can send a fairly straight forward message. In a conventional example, a car flashes bright lights at another car to say:" Turn your lights on." Sometimes, however, headlight flashing can lead to confusion. When you are coming up to an intersection, the car flashes his headlights saying to " go first" even though he has the right-of-way. In another example, a car comes to an intersection with a pedestrian walk.

A person is waiting for the light to change. The car flashes its lights. It could mean " Go ahead and cross the road. I see you." Or, in stark contrast, it could mean. " Don't cross the road.

I'm here and coming through the intersection." There is no standard code such as flash ' FLASH' flash indicating that " you may go." This could be terrible if the person miscalculates what the driver actually means. After surveying the diverse meanings of flashing headlights, Peter Mercer commented: " This [variety of messages] has many times led to accidents involving serious injury or death, not to mention thousands of property damage events" (Headlight Flash). Using flash language is analogous with football.

A quarterback signals a play: his team knows the signals he uses, but the other team may have doubts about what is being communicated. Likewise, the driver " intercepts" the headlights flashing and interprets them in a unique way that may differ from the signaler's intent. A trucker's headlights flash at a vehicle on the other side of the road. In the trucker's playbook, this means " Stay put." In the car's playbook, on the other hand, it may mean the trucker is ? saying: " I am letting you out into traffic." What is actually being signaled might thus be the complete opposite of what is received.

The results could be disastrous. Why do people in cars act rudely but would never cut in line in a shopping mall? Cutting in line would be seen as a rude behavior, so people standing in line rarely push ahead in public. Everyone can see. When people are in a car, it's hard to identify them; therefore, their behavior changes. In addition to the anonymity of the vehicle, driving

behavior differs from that seen in a shopping mall line in one other very important respect.

Driving is stressful. If you don't think fast and pay strict attention, you could get in a wreck. Traffic can also be stressful, since there are many cars closely packed together. After a stressful day at work, drivers can make more mistakes than usual. More tickets are given out on Friday for aggressive driving because people are more hot tempered than normal (Sarkar 16). In a country in which people often have a long commute, Carl Miller has reported that according to a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration survey, half of those surveyed confessed to having been guilty of aggressive driving (par.

1). This is not good because aggressive driving can lead to road rage. When a driver endangers other drivers or damages vehicles that is road rage. On a personal note, I once saw road rage up close and personal. A truck was two cars in front of us, and the truck sped up, passing closely alongside, and then blocking and almost hitting the car. The truck driver got out and was menacingly walking forward with a metal pole in his hand, when the other car's driver backed around him, swerved out into traffic and got out of there.

Fortunately, this did not escalate into a full outburst of violence, but it could have. In a report for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety , Matthew Joint, noted: " Almost half (45 percent) of all motorists claimed to have, within the last 12 months, flashed their lights at another motorists when they were annoyed with them." Avoiding flashing your headlights (stated as avoiding high beams) is recommended as a tip to sidestep skirmishes caused by

aggressive driving and road rage (Mizell, Aggressive Driving Report). Aggressive driving includes signaling other drivers in ways that are often interpreted as intimidating. Flashing headlights can be viewed as intimidating in certain contexts. Thus flashing headlights can legitimately be included, as it is in Indiana, among the driver behaviors that can on occasion constitute aggressive driving.

Although flashing headlights can seem like a harmless way to send a message to another driver, it can be interpreted as provoking the other driver, leading to aggressive driving that can quickly escalate into road rage. Headlight flashing can seem pretty straightforward; a driver might flash their high beams to say " Hi. " Or " Bye car I have been following." However, just as any language can be open to interpretation, so too with headlight flashing. Unlike Morse code, which establishes a clear designation for its code, headlight flashing in varied contexts can be confusing. Moreover, as Peter Mercer points out: " Many of these visual signals are not legal, are not supported by the highway traffic act and are not deemed a safe method of communicating a message" (par.

5). Drivers who flash their headlights should get ticketed if the situation calls for it, but when it is used for good reason (such as to warn of an obstacle in the roadway) headlight flashing is a useful way to communicate with other drivers. In a study that details the real potential threat of road rage, Louis Mizell's implies that flashing headlights may be interpreted as aggressive behavior. He writes: " Dim your lights for oncoming traffic; don't retaliate to oncoming high beams with your own in order to " teach them a lesson." Don't approach a vehicle from the rear with high beams and dim your lights

as soon as a passing vehicle is alongside" (Under Subheading " Advice for Motorists," par. 14).

Indiana's statute is considered representativeof the aggressive driving laws. " At least three of the following: following too closely, unsafe operation, passing on the right off of roadway, unsafe stopping or slowing, unnecessary sounding of the horn, failure to yield, failure to obey traffic control device, speeding, repeatedly flashing headlights." IC 9-21-8-55 Aggressive driving; Sec. 55. http://www.

in. gov/legislative/ic/code/title9/ar21/ch8. html Works Cited Aggressive Driving and the Law Report US Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 23 Jan. 1999. Web 30 Sept.

2011. http://www. nhtsa. gov/people/injury/aggressive/Symposium/introduction. html Joint, Matthew.

Road Rage. The Automobile Association. Group Public Policy Road Safety Unit. 1996. 30 Sept. 2011.

http://www. aaafoundation. org/resources/index. cfm? button= agdrtext Mercer, Peter. " The Headlight Flash: What Does It Really Mean?" RV. Net 19 August 2010.

Web 28 Sept. 2011. http://blog. rv. net/2010/08/the-headlight-flash-what-does-it-really-mean/ Miller, Carl. " Aggressive Driving Laws.

" eHow Money. http://www. ehow. com/list_6967092_aggressive-driving-laws. html Mizell, Louis. Aggressive Driving Report.

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. 1996. Web. 30 Sept. 2011.

http://www. aaafoundation. org/resources/index. cfm? button= agdrtext

Sarkar, Sheila et. al.

Spatial and Temporal Analyses of the Variations in Aggressive Driving and
Road Rage Behaviors Observed and Reported on San Diego Freeways, April
1999, 16. Web. 30 Sept. 2011. http://www. stopandgo.
org/research/aggressive/smekw. pdf