

Muslim schoolgirls risk careers for their symbolic headscarves



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The broadsheet newspaper article titled “ Muslim Schoolgirls risk careers for their symbolic headscarves”, written by Amelia Gentleman reacts to the new law in France prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols. This article highlights the calamity faced by Samia and her sister in having to choose between a symbol of huge significance (the headscarf) and something as equally vital as their careers. The youth of the girls is emphasised as they are just starting secondary school and “ They have to choose what to wear for the first day of term this morning”. The deictic “ This morning” points to how close to the present this is and highlights the immediacy of the issue, which makes it more vivid, appealing to the reader.

The addition of the “ skull caps, turbans and large crucifixes” appeals to a wide audience and causes the reader to empathise for all suffering at the hands of this ban. The general tone of the article is serious, which is to be expected due to the seriousness of the topic. Primarily, the article is informative and gives a balanced viewpoint, as it’s from The Guardian; a balanced, liberal paper more in favour of the “ worker”. However, the writer appears to sympathise with the Muslim girls, despite the fact that they may be defying the law.

This is evident from the title; “ Muslim schoolgirls risk careers for their symbolic headscarves. ” This suggests that firstly, the girls are willing to risk their careers for the headscarf and secondly, being described as “ symbolic” suggests that doing this is just and noble. The words in the title are from a semantic field of fighting for religion, to get across this message from the first instance. The verb “ risk” itself is short, made up of one syllable and

forceful, making the headline more emphatic. This idea of “ risk” has warlike connotations, a theme which is echoed throughout the article.

For example, in the first paragraph, Amelia Gentleman reports that the girls’ choice of clothing could result in “ conflict with the law”, and “ could seriously damage their academic future”. The noun “ conflict” and forceful verb “ damage” emphasis the seriousness of the issue and causes the reader to empathise with “ the twins. ” The writer attempts to place the reader in the girls’ shoes by giving their personal experiences. The article begins with a very personal account of how an ordinary choice could result in much more than a fashion disaster but rather “ a question of life and death. ” For example, the lives of two French journalists are in danger of being killed by the Army of Iraq “ unless the legislation is revoked. ” The lexis used in the article is emotive, such as the noun “ abuse” and adjectives “ frustrated” and “ threatening”.

These appeal to the readers’ emotions. The pre-modification of words such as “ radicalism” with “ rising” and “ damage” with “ seriously” also emphasises the seriousness of the situation. The vocabulary is quite sophisticated, as expected due to the type of newspaper and is from a war semantic field, containing words such as “ direct breach”, “ expulsion”, “ army”, “ law” and “ extremists”. Direct and indirect speech is evident and by interweaving direct quotations, the writer vividly recreates the personal experiences of ordinary people.

This adds weight to the argument. The article doesn’t address the reader directly, but within the quotes from the girls the personal pronoun “ You” is

used; “ Imagine how you would feel”. This involves the reader and provokes sympathy. The writer’s selection of quotes reveals her own opinion, as she has only included quotes from the girls as oppose to the other viewpoint.

The Muslims are also seen as more co-operative, as “ many Muslim organisations have called for calm in order to avoid intensifying French antipathy to the country’s five million Muslims. ” This indirectly suggests that as there is such a huge population of Muslims it seems ridiculous to ban something so central to a faith: a religious symbol. Also, the alliteration in “ called for calm” makes it more memorable, as does the contrast between the word “ calm” and “ antipathy”. Even at the end of the article, Samia co-operatively declares, “ If the director of the school tells me to wear a beret, I’ll wear a beret instead.

” Naming and representation also leads to audience positioning. For instance, the two girls are given by their first names only, perhaps in an attempt to personalise them with the reader and to emphasise their youth. However, it is stated later in the article that Samia declined to give her surname. Furthermore, the woman in charge of the call centre is given by her full name “ Nora Tarifoult”, as opposed to the enforcers of the French ban who are named “ the director” or “ politicians”.

This gives more credibility to the argument against the ban. In addition, the case is stated as being “ Dozens of pupils” revolting against the French ban, against “ Some prominent Muslims” and “ feminist groups” supporting the ban. The pre-modification of Muslims with “ some”, followed by “ prominent”

emphasises how few, yet prominent the supporters are. The way in which both arguments are presented affects the readers' view of them.

For example, the opposers of the French ban see it as “ an example of religious intolerance, an abuse of human rights and an attack on the Muslim population. This triadic structure is immediately more emphatic and affecting. Strong vocabulary such as, the nouns “ intolerance”, “ abuse” and “ attack” are used. “ Attack” has very strong connotations, as well as very hard consonant sound. The noun makes the whole sentence very forceful and emotive.

In addition, the sentence order and structure of the sentence “ The army of Iraq are threatening to kill two French journalists unless the legislation is revoked, politicians insist that they will enforce the law” puts emphasis on the fact that politicians place little value on human life and are willing to sacrifice it for a law. Later on in the article, the controversial point “ But just as the Quran is open to interpretation on whether the veil is an essential element of religious practice, France’s new law appears susceptible to a variety of interpretations” would probably anger a lot of people. The “ But” beginning this paragraph prepares us for it. It is used as a fronted conjunction making it more emphatic and it is an adversative to create a contrast between the sentence introduced and the preceding one. In the final paragraph, the use of alliteration in the quote by Nora Tarifoult stating that wearing the veil is not a “ Reflection of rising radicalism but simply a sign that second generation immigrants were more confident about displaying their religion” makes it more emphatic and memorable.

Also, the fact that the active, forceful verb “ she insisted” is placed in the centre of the quote, makes it a more forceful argument. The fact that “ Hotline” is used emphasises the seriousness of the situation as this word is usually associated with very serious matters. In general the text is cohesive through the use of conjunctions and sentence structure. In the beginning of the article, there is a repetitive sentence structure.

It begins with “ They will be making more than a fashion statement”, followed closely by “ They will be in direct breach of a new legislation”, the veil and other religious symbols “ Will no longer be permitted” and anyone wearing them “ Will be sent home”. The imperative makes the sentence seem more forceful and definite. “ Repeated breaches will result in expulsion” and “ politicians insist they will enforce the law” also follow the same pattern. The modal verb “ will” adds force and the repetition of sentence structure emphasises the harshness of the law. The article on a whole is informative but persuasive.