

Paper 1 (SL) May 2013 Text 1

Student 1

The text is from an appeal published in 'The Guardian' in 2011. Arguably, the text is a representation of the published appeal which could potentially have been published in color. This (exam) text is published in black and white, and this could impact on the analysis. The text targets a British audience, perhaps typically middle class people, to persuade them to make donations to create a more pleasurable Christmas experience for homeless people in Britain. This is achieved through the reference to contextual factors, polyvocality, synthetic personalization, establishing 'Crisis' as a successful charity, and the graphosemantics of the text.

There are many contextual factors that contribute to the reader's understanding and response to the text. Firstly, we should note the importance of Christmas in certain Western cultures and its connotation of togetherness and family. The idea is deeply entrenched in many Western countries, including Britain. It is with this understanding and preconception that the target audience of the appeal will read the appeal. The association of cold weather in a northern hemisphere winter is significant contextual knowledge that is 'naturally' acquired from living in Britain. With this contextual knowledge, the reader will know that living through this cold period can be difficult and unpleasant, particularly for vulnerable people and groups. Reference is made to the economic downturn more than once in the appeal, and to 'rising unemployment and living costs'. This suggests that Crisis cares for the general population, not only homeless people, and this may stimulate a kind of empathy in the target reader who, in turn, may be more inclined to contribute money. The appeal was published in 2011, and this makes specific temporal contextual references extremely relevant.

The text is polyvocal, containing two distinct voices, one of which is a persuasive voice. This persuasive voice is achieved through the use of several stylistic devices. The first word encountered in the text is the inclusive pronoun 'we're', immediately drawing in and embracing the target reader who first encounters the headline/title. This title ends with the rhetorical question 'will you?', establishing an invitation to the reader to join the central ideological position of the text, which is to give to and care for the homeless. This strategy of synthetic personalization is used throughout the text by writing from a second person perspective, and using inclusive pronoun constructions such as 'you're', 'you', 'your', 'we', and 'our'. Synthetic personalization aims to work to effectively encourage the reader to feel that she is being spoken to on an individual basis, thus evoking personal and emotional responses to donate. Furthermore, the foot-in-the-door technique is employed. This compliance technique is characterized by a small request followed by a real and larger request. This text uses this to persuade readers to give, not only a little, but as much as they can –

'one place costs £23.39; two places costs £46.78; and if you were able, £233.90 would pay for a whole table'. The adverb 'just' is essentially redundant, as is 39 pence in £23.39. However, the triviality of this may persuade the largely middle class, educated reader to make a small effort that may have a potentially large and significant impact on the lives of homeless people.

The persuasive voice is further established by presenting Crisis in a positive light. Having been in operation since '1972', Crisis at Christmas is now celebrating its '40th anniversary'. Such deictic references to time instil confidence in the reader that their effort and donation will be professionally dealt with and that the homeless will be directly benefitted.

The second voice in the text is personal and somewhat dramatic. This is expressed through the anecdote 'A Place for John'. Here, a real life testimony of a homeless person – John as a victim of circumstance - is included to trigger an emotional response. Although mostly not written in first person – with the exception of one quote – John's voice is expressed through a third person 'surrogate'. This exemplifies the helplessness and vulnerability of homeless people, conveying the idea that their voice will only be heard through someone else higher up the social hierarchy. This anecdote contains traumatic and tragic life events that escalate as the anecdote progresses, including the harm imagery and connotations of 'leukaemia', John's mother drowning herself, and John 'grasping his most precious possession to his chest.' These graphic images no doubt evoke an authentic emotional response in the reader and may persuade the reader to donate from a sense of sympathy.

The graphosemantics contribute significantly to the persuasive tone of the text. The prosodic effect of the title, displayed in the large font draws the reader's attention to it immediately. The use of the different font style in 'cold weather alert' together with the representation of snowflakes around it create a powerful intertextual effect, emphasizing the cold weather (at Christmas). Bold headings and the compartmentalization of the text into text boxes organizes and condenses information, enhancing the visual appeal and enabling readers to more readily access the text. The inclusion of the image of John – a benign 'grandfatherly' figure – creates an intertextual relationship to his anecdote, making his story more personal, and enabling readers to identify the human aspect of John's narrative. Lastly, the apparently handwritten 'Thank you' that concludes the text evokes a sense of a personal voice, since handwriting is unique and personal, and adds to the synthetic personalization of the text.

The text is probably effective in the ways it enables it to persuade its target audience. Of course, this does not mean it will successfully attract donations. The text requires a particular contextual awareness on the part of the reader for it to

make sense. This textual awareness may also lead readers to oppose or reject the text's effort to persuade. Readers may be tired of responding to such emotive appeals, they may regard homeless people, not as victims, but as agents of their own fate, or in 2011 readers may be simply too distracted by their own economic circumstances to help others.

