

A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Newspaper's Stories

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Abstract:

This study presents a stylistic analysis of newspaper stories. It is hypothesized that the language used in newspaper stories violates the rules of grammar and the norms of literary writing. Moreover their style tends to be very distinctive. This can be attributed to the limited space given to each article and the author as all journalists writes to an absent or imaginary reader that must be quickly attracted.

The study aims at:

- 1. identifying some linguistic features of newspaper language.*
- 2. shedding light on the style used in newspapers and how it differs from that used in literary writing.*

Six stories have been selected for the purpose of analysis. They are selected randomly from different English newspapers. All of them are written in the inverted pyramid style.

Three models are adopted for the purpose of the analysis of the texts.

The results show that the language and style used for writing newspaper stories deviates from the ordinary norms of writing.

Key words: inverted pyramid, language of newspaper, stylistic analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

'Newspaper' is the universal cause and grounding of conversation, commerce, opinion, and decision. Most of us look

upon newspaper as providing a full, sufficient, and satisfying package of current information. The goal of a well-written newspaper article is to capture the validity of the moment and to allow readers to relive the experience. (Donnelly, 1996: 210). According to Reah (1998: 2) the term *newspaper* suggests that the content of a newspaper will be primarily devoted to everyday news and some analysis and comment on this news. A newspaper, however, contains a range of items; news, comments and analysis, advertising and entertainment. Thus newspaper may contain not only strict information, but also evaluative material and views of the newspapers writers.

1.1. Newspaper History

English newspaper writing dates from the 17th century, the first newspaper carried only news without comments as commenting was considered to be against the principles of a newspaper. (Goumovskaya, 2007:1). Eyre (1979:206) cited in Media M. (2005:6) points out that because most people were uneducated at that time, the effect of newspaper on people was very limited. It was until the latter part of the last century, with the introduction of compulsory education, that the ability to read increased. With the increasing of the ability of reading, the demand for newspapers, magazines and books has gradually increased.

By the early years of the 18th century, the history of the press was a history of the struggle to establish the right to free speech against the tendency of the state to restrict both what could be said, and the number of publications which could appear. (Price, 1998: 420). Newspapers in the 19th century include "a system of interrelated lexical, phraseological and grammatical means, they are written for the purpose of informing, instructing and, also of entertaining the reader." (Goumovskaya, 2007:1)

As a result of this diversity, a modern newspaper carries materials of an extremely diverse character. Within their pages one can find news and comments on it, poems and stories.(ibid)

2. THE LANGUAGE OF NEWSPAPERS

The language used in newspapers is recognized as a particular variety of style that is characterized by a specific communicative purpose and its own system of language means (Goumovskaya, 2007:1)

The language of news has certain characteristic of its own. Newspaper language is a combination of different stylistic features, a mixture of several kinds of material (Van Dijk, 1988:76). The language of the press may be said to be a special discourse which has its own style and vocabulary. (Pop& Fetherston, 2005:49) cited in (Pajunen, 2008:5). Because of the wide range of content in a newspaper, Crystal (1989: 388) believes that "there is no probability of finding a single style of writing used throughout a paper, nor of finding linguistic characteristics that are shared by all papers. There are, of course, certain superficial similarities between newspaper styles arising out of the fundamental constraints of the medium".

Information in newspaper is usually compressed and put in columns due to the limited space, without losing any of its legibility. Interest has to be focused, captured, and maintained through the use of certain linguistic features such as; frequent subheadings, short paragraphs, and accurate sentences. Wolseley et. al, (1946:119) point out that newspaper sentence structure and vocabulary must be chosen in such away to convey as much meaning as possible to suit the needs of all readers.

Goumovskaya (2007:1) states that the vocabulary used in newspaper writing has its own specific features such as the intensive use of:

- a. Special political and economic terms, e.g. stability, anti-terror war, presidential vote.
- b. Abbreviations. News items, Press reports and headlines contain different kinds of abbreviations, e.g. names of organizations, public and state bodies, political

associations, etc. known by their initials are very common, e.g. *EU* (European Union), *WTO* (World Trade Organization).

- c. Neologisms. They are very frequent in newspaper vocabulary. The newspaper reacts very quickly to any new development in the society.

Bakhshandeh et al (2003: x) add that news writing tends to be:

1. impersonal so that it may appear objective; hence news
 - a. is written in third person,
 - b. uses direct speech or indirect speech which is attributed to someone other than the reporter,
 - c. uses some passive verbs mostly to show their objectivity about an issue.
2. Is about something that has taken place; so mostly written in the past tense.
3. Is simple, using relatively short sentences and words and some uses of clichés which the whole audience understands.
4. punchy- it must grab the reader's attention; so it often uses:
 - a. short rather than long words.
 - b. active verbs.
 - c. concrete rather abstract vocabulary.
 - d. sometimes emotive and colorful vocabulary.
 - e. adjective, though moderately.
5. sometimes imagery is used to help create a clearer mental picture for the reader.

3. STYLE AND STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Many scholars find that it is difficult to find an exact meaning for the term 'stylistics'. This is because of the different meanings that are attached to the word. The simplest definition for stylistics is presented by Chapman (1973: 11), who defines stylistics as the linguistic study of different styles. Lodge

(1966:52) along the same line believes that modern stylistics addressed itself to several interrelated tasks such as clarifying the concept of style, establishing for style a central place in the study of literature and developing more precise, inclusive and objective methods of describing style. These definitions give predominance for style in the study of stylistics, and limit the concept of stylistics to the study of literature. Such definitions are not preferred by others who see stylistics as "the study and interpretation of texts from a linguistic perspective. It also explores how readers interact with the language of texts in order to explain how they understand and are affected by texts when they read them".
(Mhtml:file//F:\what20%is20%the20%name.mht)

Galperin (1977:9) presents a more comprehensive definition when he defines stylistics as "a branch of linguistics that deals mainly with two interdependent tasks, a) the investigation media which secures the desirable effect of the utterance and b) certain type of texts which due to the choice and arrangement of language means are distinguished by the pragmatic aspect of the communication". Galperin's definition elaborates the concept of stylistics to involve not only literature, but also the study of all varieties of language use including news writing and everyday language.

3.1 Styles of Newspaper Writing

Writing in newspaper requires adopting a special type of style that may differ from any other style used in writing in other disciplines. Journalistic prose is explicit and precise, and tries not to rely on jargon. Journalists often use short words rather than long ones. They use subject-verb-object construction and vivid, active prose. They offer anecdotes, examples and metaphors, and they rarely depend on colorless generalizations or abstract ideas. News writers try to avoid repetition of the same word within a paragraph. (File ://F:\News style-
Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.htm)

Many readers find that a newspaper article is not enjoyable, that is why writers in newspaper choose subjects which are of interest to the reader, such as disasters, wars and other catastrophic events. A news article is written in a way that attracts the attention of the readers. Newspaper writers put all the important information at the beginning, mostly the headline in a newspaper is a summary for the whole story. Within the pages of a newspaper, the reader will find a wide variety of writing styles. These styles vary depending on the type of information and the purpose of the message. The style used in newspaper is characterized by the following:

- Inverted pyramid structure; 5 WHs (Who, What, When, Where, Why and How) in lead, other details in descending order of importance
- Adheres to accepted grammatical conventions
- Written by reporters
- Objective, facts-only reporting
- Purpose is to inform
[http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/Education/peopleparliament/pdf/newspaper2_e.\)](http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/Education/peopleparliament/pdf/newspaper2_e.)

3.2 Style Used in Writing News Story

A story can be told in two types of style; chronological narration and the inverted pyramid. The first one is mostly used in literature."It refers to the narrative as a sequence of episodes when journalists tell the story as a good suspense that culminates of some dramatic piece of information at the end. (Blake, 2010:1). In other words, the writer starts his story with the least important information then developing the events reaching the climax and the end. The events are arranged into time- line describing the development of the story situations (Filatova, et. all. 2001: 1). The inverted pyramid, on the other hand, is used by most journalists who put the most important information at the beginning, and the less important facts are added in a descending order according to their degree of importance. The reason for this is that sometimes stories have

to be cut, very often just before the end, so as to fit the available space ,this style of hard news writing ensures that the deleted facts are the least important ones. (<http://www.clagaryhrald.com>)

4. MODELS OF ANALYSIS

The researcher could not find a comprehensive model that could be used for analyzing newspaper stories. Accordingly three models have been adopted; the first one the 'inverted pyramid' will be used for analyzing the structure of the stories, and the other two are used for analyzing the linguistic features of the stories. One of them, Grast and Bernstein's (1961) model will be used for analyzing deletion in the stories, and Dunworth (2008) is used for analyzing the use of passive.

4.1 Inverted Pyramid

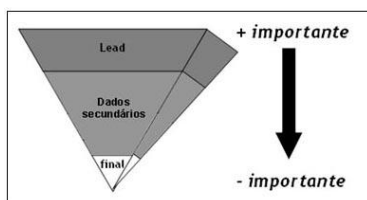
This model cannot be attributed to a single writer because it has been defined and explained by most of those who are interested in analyzing news stories. The inverted pyramid is "a metaphor used by journalists and other writers to illustrate the placing of the most important information first within a text. It is a common method for writing news stories and is widely taught to journalism student". (Inverted pyramid - wikipedia. The free encyclopedia). The inverted pyramid style in newspaper writing was used early in the 20th century and it was developed because editors 'adjusting for space' think that such style enables them to cut the article from the bottom. Also they can add details as they enlarge the article.(Chase, 2001:2) Blake (2010:3) states that

"the practical reason for the inverted pyramid format, is that editors editing news stories often have to make the story in a particular length so that it will be into a predetermined amount of space in the newspaper. Furthermore, they often have to do so because speed is highly important. If a story is written in an inverted pyramid format, the editor can simply

trim the story one paragraph at a time, going from the bottom up, until the story is the right length. The editor can do so confidently, knowing that the information is being cut from the story, it is being cut in ascending order of importance".

4.1.1 Definition:

Different definitions have been presented for the term inverted pyramid. It can be defined as a method of organization in which facts are presented in descending order of importance. (Robert A. 2008: 1). Blake (2010:1) defined the term in another way; he presented a picture of "an upside-down triangle one with the narrow tip pointing downward and the broad base pointing upward.



Web journalism: from the inverted pyramid to the tumbled pyramid João Canavilhas www.bocc.ubi.pt

The broad base indicates that the information at the top is the most newsworthy information in the news story, and the narrow tip represents the least newsworthy information in the news story. This means that when writing a story in an inverted pyramid format, the most newsworthy information is put at the beginning of the story and the least newsworthy information is put at the end".

"The concept behind the inverted pyramid format is that. The writer prioritizes the factual information to be conveyed in the news story by importance. The most essential pieces of information are offered in the first line, which is called the *lead* (or summary lead). This usually answers the so-called "*five W's*" (who, what, when, why, and where). Thus, the reader can grasp the key elements of the story immediately. The writer

then provides the rest of the information and other details in descending order according to their importance, leaving the least essential material for the very end. This technique gives the completed story the form of an inverted pyramid, with the most important elements, or the 'base' of the story, on top." In the next paragraphs the writer should pick up some elements of the lead and elaborate on them. (Ibid:2)

4.1.2 How to write in an inverted pyramid style:

Brech (2013:1) mentions that to write in an inverted pyramid style, the writer should Front- Load the article. This can be achieved by:

1. *Front – Loading every paragraph, that is to;*
 - Limit each paragraph to one main point or idea
 - Start each paragraph with the main point or conclusion in the first one or two sentences.
 - Then go on to explain your point.
2. *Front- Loading the headline*

Start the heading with the significant words. The first words then communicate the subject matter, and catch the eye of your readers. Well- composed heading at the beginning of each section will help the reader to skim and scan entire article looking for points of interest.

Brech (2013:1) proposes four benefits for using the inverted pyramid style:

- i. Readers can quickly assess whether they want to read the entire article.
- ii. Readers can stop reading at any point and still the main point of the article.
- iii. By starting with the conclusion, the first few sentences on the web page will contain most of the relevant key words.
- iv. Front loading each paragraph allows the reader to skim through the first sentences

of every paragraph to get a quick overview of the article.

4.2 Grast and Bernstein's model

This model is conducted to analyze the headlines in newspaper. Yet the researcher finds that the model can also be used to analyze the body of the stories, since the headline and the body of the story are written in the same style with respect to the economy in which they are written. Grast and Bernstein (1961) offers a very comprehensive model that discusses many linguistic features of newspaper language including deletion. They stat that the sentences in news stories are rarely complete sentences. The omission of functional words, like verb to be, demonstrative, personal pronouns, and articles is one of the most visible characteristic to the ordinary reader.

4.3 Dunworth (2008)

This modal is adapted to investigate the use of passive in the corpus. Passive voice is a common linguistic feature in journal style. Dunworth (2008:1) state that we often use passive in newspaper reports. We use the passive for the following reasons:

1. We want to describe an action, but we do not know who performed the action (this explains why it is often used in news reports)
2. The action is more important in the text than the person who performed it (this explains why it is often used when describing processes, and why it is used in news reports)
3. We want to give the impression of being objective or distanced from the action that takes place (this explains why it is often used in academic texts and reports)
4. We want to make generalizations that are not limited to the actions of individuals (this also

explains why it is often used in describing processes and in academic reports).

The objectivity in point 3 and the generalization in point 4 can be grouped in one point and they will be tackled together in the analysis.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The present section covers the practical part of this study. It includes the analysis of the stories selected for this study. The analysis functions on two levels. The first level focuses on some linguistic features used in the analyzed stories. The second level sheds light on how the information is given in the stories through inverted pyramid style, looking at the 'who, what, when, where and how' of the stories.

The analysis includes 6 stories that are selected randomly from different English newspaper. They tackle various topics, yet all of them are selected to be written in the same style, which is the inverted pyramid style. It has been noticed that stories written in an inverted pyramid style don't have titles, they have headlines instead. Therefore the stories are numbered so that the researcher can refer to them through analysis.

5.1 Linguistic Analysis of the Stories

Journalists present information in a way that is able "to arouse the reader's interest and curiosity" and to influence the reader's view of them. They do so by using certain linguistic features such as: the omission of articles; the omission of verb to be and of auxiliaries, nominalisations, and the frequent use of complex noun phrases in subject position. (Bell, 1991)

The main objective of this analysis is to pinpoint some important linguistic features in the analyzed stories, namely deletion, and passivisation.

5.1.1 Deletion

Deletion is a significant feature in news stories. It is usually used because of the limited space that is given to the story, and also to arouse suspense in the reader (Grast & Berntein,1961) {cited in Media, M. 2005:85} state that this practice has designed to give the story telegraphic speed, and hence to make it more active.

Newspaper sentences are almost incomplete, mostly the non essential words like articles, pronouns, verb to be, auxiliaries are omitted. The analysis of the corpus shows that the frequency of the deletion of auxiliaries has the highest frequency in the analyzed corpus. it occurs 11 times. This can be attributed to the fact that the omission of auxiliaries does not have much semantic effect on the text. Then comes articles whether definite or indefinite which occur 9 times and pronouns comes third, they occur 3 times. The demonstrative comes last which occur only once. The deleted parts are underlined in the following extracts from the analyzed stories.

No.1 *"Singer's Show Ends After a Fire Breaks Out On the Stage, the Attendees have been Evacuated"*

No. 2 *"John Faszier died on Monday afternoon when his car was spun out of control on rain-slickened Broad Street, crashed into a utility pole and threw him through the windshield."*

"A Murfreesboro man had lost control of his car and killed in Main Street and Broad Street intersect."

No.3 *"30% of your stomach was removed"*

No.4 *"Lula Cora Hood, a Missing Woman, was Found After 40 Years Forty years later the police in Galesburg. Who was suffering from mental health."*

No.5 *"Mumpy Sarker, 12 –Year-Old Commits Suicide To Donate Organs To her Family"*
"The suicide note that explaining her plan."

No.6 "A woman prison officer killed herself after she is being sacked for watching"

"Rugby World Cup match while she was on sick leave."

"She was spotted by one of her colleagues who blew the whistle on her."

"She was suspended from work by prison governors and was found hanging after losing an appeal."

"Janet had ambitions of becoming a prison governor but she was hit by a health scare"

"while she was working at Cardiff jail."

5.1.2 Passive Voice

There are various reasons for using passive instead of active, Lauren Kessler et.al. (2012) cited in Parivash M. (2014: 1415) offer two situations in which the passive voice must be used. First, passive voice is justified if the receiver of the action is more important than the creator of the action. Second passive voice is used if the writer has no choice. That's when the writer does not know who what the actor, or the creator of the action, is. These reasons are related to the situation in which the passive is used. Journalists have an additional reason for using passive. They tend to use passive mostly to attract readers' attention, and "to focus on some details rather than others particularly on what happened rather than on the people involved. By omitting the by + agent, readers can be left in suspense". (the language of newspaper: int.)

The frequency of passive voice in the analyzed stories is (23) This frequency is distributed on all stories. The reason for using passive in the analyzed corpus varies from one story to another. Sometimes it is used because the doer is known to everyone as in the following examples from the analyzed stories:

No. 4

1. Lula Cora was found

2. the venue was not evacuated

In these examples it is obvious that the police are the doer.

3. The fire was put out

4. The fire was being extinguished

Similarly In the above examples it is very clear that the firemen put out the fire. Here are some examples from the rest of the stories:

No.3

The baby was delivered at 36 weeks.

No. 5

The girl was rushed to hospital.

No. 6

The American Airlines Center was evacuated.

Another reason for using passive is when the action is more important than the doer as in the following examples from the analyzed stories:

No.1

A Rihanna concert was cut short.

No.2

Murfreesboro man lost control of his car and killed in Main Street.

No.5

But was cremated.

Her wishes were not able to be carried out.

No.6

She was spotted by one of her colleagues

**She was suspended from work by prison governor
was hit by a health scare**

In other situations the passive is used to attract the reader's attention and to raise his suspense. See the following examples:

No. 2

**his car spun out of control
crashed into a utility pole
killed in Main Street**

No. 3

**was being wheeled
was “doomed”**

was warned there was still a high chance

5.2 Structure Analysis of the Stories

The structure of a news story is compared to an inverted pyramid. The most important information is put first, then the story progresses from more important through less and less. Mostly in all news stories that are written in the inverted pyramid style, the headline summarizes the whole story. The reader knows the end of the story from the very beginning of his reading. Then comes the lead, which is the first sentence in the story; the lead informs the reader about the most important information of the story and gives more details about what has been mentioned in the headlines. The analysis shows that nearly in all stories the headline summarizes the most interesting and important information the writer means to convey and it answers the five (wh. Questions, who, where, when, what and why) of the stories, for example the headline of story no.1

Rihanna Concert Fire: Singer's Show Ends after Fire Breaks out on Stage, Attendees Evacuated

In this headline the writer told what happened in Rihanna concert (a fire breaks out) and immediately jumped to the end of the story to inform the readers that there were no victims; (*attendees evacuated*). Then the writer elaborates what has been mentioned in the headline through the lead of the story:

A Rihanna concert in Dallas was cut short Friday night after a small fire broke out above the stage.

This lead is considered a perfect lead because it gives answers for the five *Wh- Questions*;

Who: A Rihannah concert.

Where: in Dallas.

What: was cut.

When: Friday night.

Why: fire broke.

Another example of a perfect lead is taken from story No. 2

John Faszier died Monday afternoon when his car spun out of control on rain-slickened Broad Street, crashed into a utility pole and threw him through the windshield.

This lead also gives the answer for the five Wh. Questions and informs the reader about the following information:

Who: A Murfreesboro man

When: Monday afternoon.

Why: his car spun out.

Where: Broad street.

What: the man died.

And it also elaborates the information given in the headline;

A Murfreesboro man lost control of his car and killed in Main Street and Broad Street intersect.

The headline gives general information about what happens in the story without mentioning who was the man.

Yet it has been noticed by the researcher that the lead does not always give all the required information as in the following lead which is taken from story no.3

Happy families: Meet the miracle tot who survived million to one operation to remove large portion of her mother's stomach while she was heavily pregnant

Although this lead doesn't answer the five Wh- questions, yet it gives the most important details in the story. The reader knows that a pregnant woman was suffering from a fatal disease and was subjected to surgery. Also the first two words *happy families* inform the reader that both the woman and her baby survived. Such lead seems sufficient to a reader who is not very interested in reading newspaper.

Unlike other stories, story no. 4 has a very economic headline:

Lula Cora Hood, Missing Woman, Found After 40 Years

The headline tells about the following information only:

Who: Lola Cora and

What: found after 40 years.

All the necessary information are given to the reader in the lead of the story

Grace Kivisto was 15 when her mother, Lula Cora Hood, disappeared in 1970 Forty years later, police in Galesburg, Ill. Say they've found her

Story no.5

The headline of this story seems somehow ambiguous:

Mumpy Sarker, 12 –Year-Old Commits Suicide To Donate Organs To Family

The headline gives the following information:

Who: Mumpy Sarker

what she did? Commit suicide and

why? to donate her organs to family.

But it seems that the answer of why is not clear because it leads to other inquiries. For example a reader may wonder whether her family suffers from certain disease that makes them in need to her organs, or they may be in a real need for money.

To the researcher's opinion, such headlines are considered to be clever because a reader will be eager to read more to find answers for his questions. The reader can find the answer after he reads more, mostly in the lead of the story:

The young girl from eastern India decided that suicide is the only way she could help her family, who couldn't afford eye surgery to save her father vision and a kidney transplant to save her brother's life.

Another clever way in writing in an inverted pyramid style is to tell the story in points rather than in narration: the author makes use of the two types of narration the economy of the inverted pyramid and the suspense found in the chronological narration. This technique has been noticed in story no.6. The

author gives the basic information about the event in the headline:

A woman prison officer killed herself after she sacked for watching Rugby World Cup match while on sick leave.

The headline informs the reader about the following information

Who? a woman who works as a prison officer

What? commits suicide

Why? She has been sacked

When? During her sick leave.

This headline seems enough for a reader who is not interested in reading, while at the same time it may arouse suspense for another reader who wants to know more about what is coming. The required information for this reader is found in the lead of the story:

Janet Norridge, 34, was at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium watching a TV screening of Wales' semi final match against France in 2011.

Much information is revealed in this lead; now the reader becomes aware of the name of the woman, the name of the place, the name of the playing teams and the date of the match.

Since the story is told in points, each point gives new but less important information. See the following points:

She was spotted by one of her colleagues who blew the whistle on her.

She was suspended from work by prison governors and was found hanging after losing an appeal.

An inquest heard Janet's grieving parents won an employment tribunal on behalf of their dead daughter.

And a coroner is writing to the director of Her Majesty's Prison Service demanding a review of the way officers are treated during disciplinary proceedings.

The court heard Janet had ambitions of becoming a prison governor but was hit by a health scare while working at Cardiff jail.

From the above sentences or points, we can observe that the author achieves his goal in writing in the inverted pyramid style, in the sense that a reader can stop at any point without losing so much, and at the same time he succeeds in arousing suspense by using the chronological order in giving information.

6. CONCLUSION

The study is conducted to analyze the linguistic features and the structure of newspaper stories. The results provide the following conclusions:

1. Language used in newspaper stories violates the norms of writing with respect to grammar and structure. The deletion of certain items mostly the function words is very frequent, and the fronting of subject, for example it is very normal to find a pattern like VS instead of SV. Passive is used in some situation where the active can do. It is used only to attract the reader's attention.
2. As for as the structure is concerned, the structure of the a newspaper story is compared to an upside down pyramid. It does not follow the normal rules of chronological narration; instead, it begins with the final events of the story and retreats to the beginning.

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. A stylistic study can be carried out to investigate the linguistic features of stories in Electronic Newspaper.
2. A comparative study can be carried out to compare the style used in literary narration with that used in newspaper stories.

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