



AN ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF FRONT-PAGE HEADLINES OF ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS ON 15TH AUGUST 1947.

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Abstract

This research aims to study the linguistic features of the front-page headlines of certain newspapers of 15 August 1947. It endeavours to throw light on the various linguistic features of historic headlines. Twelve headlines are taken from 12 English newspapers published in India and abroad. Researchers found that editors prefer sentential headlines to non-sentential headlines, besides, passive voice is the choice of the writers in framing the headlines. Alliteration can be seen in a couple of headlines. Both Indian and foreign newspapers have written headlines from different perspectives, in Indian newspapers, we find a balanced bias towards India. On the other hand, foreign media tried to emphasize the separation aspect.

Keywords: *Linguistics, headlines, Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav.*

Introduction

According to Teun A. van Dijk, a headline functions to signal the main topic of the news report (53).

Newspaper headlines are the stage show of any country. They manifest what happened, what has happened, and what is happening at any given point in time. Teun A. van Dijk suggest that a headline indicates the substantial topic of the news story.(53) Moreover, Bird and Merwin (1955:177) state that the headline conveys the highlights in short, easily understood words. It is a 'miniature replica' of the story. Ogunsiiji opines that newspaper headlines introduces the news reports. In fact, they foreground the social, cultural, economic issues that challenge the society.(97) In the words of Alamoudi (2017:) Newspaper headlines correctly represent a community's linguistic traits as well as linguistic behaviour. He further notes that headlines can



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be important because they make examples of linguistic actions and general characteristics of a language evident to contemporary readers. Readers choose and decide which news stories to read or skip based on the headlines. Headlines usually referred to as headlines, are a crucial component of a news story's structure. Metcalf (2013) argues that newspaper headlines are prose and poetry, sustaining on a minimal grammar of their own and as a result headlines omit determiners and other functional words. This omission cuts down the size and content in comparison to a sonnet. Halliday (1985: 372) thinks of headlines as " little texts " and since they have to convey more through few words due to limited space, they have their own grammar. This special language is called ' block language ' . It is defined by Mathews (2007:42) defines 'block language' as the form of abbreviated structures used in newspaper headlines, in cables, in notices, on the labels of products, and so on. According to David Crystal (Crystal, 2010: 239),

“Linguistics is the science of language.” Stork and Widdowson provide(1981) a holistic view of Linguistics and state that Linguistics encompasses each and every aspect of human communication, from sound speech description to breaking down of intricacies of thoughts are stated in either spoken or written form.(15-16). The review of the literature reveals that various research studies have been conducted in India, Kumar (1978) probed Hindi advertisements and pointed out that headlines of newspapers as well as advertisements use ‘minor sentences.’ Manian (1979) studied Tamil newspaper headlines and indicated the use of nominalized and elliptical structures in headlines. Roy.S (2022) carried out a study of the role of punctuation in English newspaper headlines. These reviews of literature studies have found that, so far, no study has been undertaken to find out the linguistic features of the front - page headlines of newspapers of 15 August 1947. This study aims to describe the linguistic features of the front-page headlines of 15 August 1947 in English. The earlier headlines flash the past in the true sense. India is honoring its 75th year of independence which it gained on 15 August 1947. This celebration is of great importance. It is being celebrated and commemorated as “Azadi ka Mahotsav”. The Azadi Ka Mahotsav. (Ministry of Culture, The Government of India: 2022) is an initiative of the government of India to observe the long and cherished history of its people, culture, and accomplishments. The duration of the program is two years. The program started on the 12th of March 21 and ends on the 15th of August 2023. Azadi Ka Mahotsav is dedicated to the

people of India. In this context, we undertook this study of front-page headlines of certain newspapers of 15 August 1947. The 15 August headlines revealed what the nation and its editors thought then about the opinions of individuals on this historic occasion. It brought out how significant ‘15 August 1947’ was important ‘for the people of India in particular and to the people of the world in general.’ (Nehru) It signifies how Indians and the world reacted to this historical event. Newspaper headlines of this particular date are the best medium to find out the mood of the nation.

Method

Data collection procedure

In order to find out the linguistic features of the front-page headlines on 15 August 1947, an analysis was carried out on a set of 12 headlines from different newspapers of 15 August 1947. There are six Indian newspapers and six newspapers of foreign origin. The twelve headlines revealed the general mood of the country reflected in headlines and the different reactions of various publishing houses of that time in terms of syntactic and lexical features.

Methodology

In this research, the library research method, an online collection of data with a note-taking technique was used. The process of collecting data involved reading the front page of the newspaper as well as visiting the different websites of the different English newspapers. Note-taking in order to compile the data.

Discussion

The Hindu on 15 August 1947 writes ‘FREE INDIA IS BORN.’



Figure 1



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This headline is a sentential headline, in other words, it assumes a sentence or a clausal line. It has a structure of subject and predicate. The subject is a proper noun 'India'. The verb be is a linking verb. This headline announces the emergence of a country. It implies the complete absence of external rein. India breaks free from the shackles of the British empire. It also means gaining the full right to make her own decision.

This headline is in passive voice. The passive voice according to Biber is common in the news (167). Ferreira asserts the profound use of the passive voice as one of the tools in hand to achieve the sentence variety that conveys the appropriate message. further, Quirk et.al states that the verb born occurs with passive construction. (167) According to Pullum 'passives can be long and short'.(60-74) The short passives are those which do not have an exact active counterpoint. This headline falls in the category of short passive. The passivity of the headline makes the action more important than the agency. The focus shifts from India to freeness. In other words, freedom assumes greater significance indicating the new state of the country. moreover, It conforms to 'Given- new principle of communication.' The headline has a noun phrase- "Free India". This noun phrase is the subject of the headline and represents the nation or the entire country that has gained independence. The adjective 'free' is a premodifier. It has a significant impact on this headline. It focuses on the liberation of the country and the release of India from oppressive forces. This headline makes India an animate subject and an experience of the process. Moreover, the adjective free has a positive meaning and vibration. This warm feeling gives rise to a positive, cheerful, and soothing tone to the headline. Another contribution of the adjective is to elicit a strong emotional response. It contributes an elevating and inspirational element to the headline. The addition of the word free compels the readers to take notice of the headline. Thus, the inclusion of the word free in the headline becomes an attention-grabbing device. Although the headline is only four words, its conciseness grasps the main idea excluding the extra details or elaboration. One more feature that stands out in this headline is the application of visual hierarchy.

According to Krug (33: 2014) visual hierarchy is an important aspect in a newspaper. He feels that each page should have a clear visual hierarchy. The news headline has all the letters in a capital case. This capitalization of all the letters captures the attention, conveys the importance

Newspapers on 15th August 1947.

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of news, and helps in scanning the information or news of their interest. The all-capitalization of letters announces a big and important event. It draws the attention of the readers as well as emphasizes its importance. In addition, the headline articulates and stresses the historical and cultural context of resulting in freedom. It signifies culturally the defining moments in the history and aspirations of the people of India.

The Hindustan Times published a two-clause headline on 15 August 1947: ‘INDIA INDEPENDENT: BRITISH RULE ENDS’

India’s protracted struggle for independence from British colonial rule,



Figure 2

This headline is an elliptical headline. The first clause omits the verb “be”. It reads India is independent and the second clause omits ‘has’. The complete headline reads India is independent, The British Rule has ended. To save the space, the definite article ‘the’ is omitted before the phrase British rule. This headline has a colon joining the two clauses resulting in a compound sentence. The colon embodies the coordinating conjunction and saves space.(Saxena 2013). A colon has different uses in news headlines. It can be used to indicate speech–speaker relation or to show cause and effect. It is also used to show topic information and topic description. (Roy. Sampika). From the headline, it is evident that the use of the colon is to show cause and effect.

Though the tense of the headline should have been present perfect, the headline uses the present tense to mark immediacy which is a defining feature of journalistic writing. Both verbs are intransitive. The Verb ‘be’ is a copulative verb showcasing the present state of the country whereas the verb “end’ is an intransitive verb indicating the ending of the British rule. It looks like there is a cause-and-effect relation between these two headlines; British rule has ended

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therefore India is independent. The constituents of the sentences are the noun phrases- ‘India, and British rule.’ The verb phrase is has ended.’ The headline places the importance on the word “independence”, and emphasizes no affiliation with the then-ruling country. Besides, The British rule that symbolically represents ‘The imperialism’ has finally ended in India. The first part the headline bearing the word independence and the last part of the headline in the form of the verb end complements each other. The word Independence would not have been more befitting had there been no word end in the second part of it. in fact, the phrase ‘British Rule ends’ adds value to the phrase India Independent, Stylistically, we find alliteration in India and independence. A colon between the two clauses in place of the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ as well as the capitalization of all the letters of the headlines adds color and flavor to this headline. Collectively, the headline foregrounds the importance of the occasion, drawing the compelling attention of the readers to the text of the headline, as well as imparting a formal and official tone to the headline, and most importantly, adding visual hierarchy to the headline. Moreover, this headline is concise, highlighting only essential words to convey main message.

On 15 August, The Times of India carried the news ‘BIRTH OF INDIA’S FREEDOM.’



Figure 3

Syntactically it is a headline of a noun phrase ‘a phrasal headline’. This headline can be categorized in the non-sentential class. The noun phrase has a post- modifier – the Prepositional phrase. The object of the preposition phrase is a genitive phrase functioning as a specifying genitive. The focus is on the Birth. It emphasizes the emergence of a new state of the country. Journalistically, there are two significant features that are easily obvious, one being the complete uppercasing of words. This results in attracting and directing the readers. The second feature of the headline is the banner form of the headline, running across all the columns, attaching substantiality to it.

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On 15 August 1947, **The Indian Express** gives the headline”
 ‘INDIA CELEBRATES FREEDOM.’



Figure 4

A sentential and a finite headline, It has a structure of subject, verb, and object. On either side of the verb celebrate two noun phrases occupy the position of the subject and object. Semantically, The headline hinges on the word celebration. Since this occasion was about freedom and exhilaration. the diction ‘celebration’ seems appropriate here. Another interesting thing is the use of active voice which supports the idea of celebration. Journalistically, we find a banner headline and absolute upercasing of words.

The Statesman on 15 August writes ‘TWO DOMINIONS ARE BORN.’



Figure 5

The headline is sentential. This is a finite headline. It is in the passive voice. It shifts the focus from state to action. It has a construction of subject, verb, and complement. This headline does not mention independence or freedom, it points out the birth of two nations. The focus is more on the separation of the two countries not on the ending of British rule. Similar to earlier headlines, the verb ‘ born’ is used which usually occurs with passive constructions only. It has a construction of subject, verb, and complement.

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The Tribune publishes a headline in the form of a statement. The headline is ‘INDIA WAKES TO LIFE & FREEDOM.’



Figure 6

This line is a part of Nehru’s speech the tryst with destiny that he delivered at midnight. The entire line of the speech of Nehru in his famous speech Tryst with Destiny on the night of 1947 (Nehru,1947). The focus is on India’s waking up to life and freedom.

The headline declared ‘*At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.*’

It has a structure of the subject, verb, and adverbial. The headline is a modified version of ‘India will awaken to life and freedom. The Verb phrase has a prepositional phrase with two objects- life and freedom. The noun phrase is a proper noun.

The Daily Telegraph a London-based newspaper published the headline on 15 August 1947,

‘INDIA IS NOW TWO DOMINIONS.’



Figure 7

Using a finite verb, the headline presents the division of the country into Pakistan and India." The headline utilizes the finite verb to portray the historic partition of the country in to two supreme sovereign countries. The word dominion' assumes a significant connotation, as it denotes the land owned by two owners. The linking verb 'is' highlights the state of the country. The structure of the sentence is subject, adverbial, verb, and complement.

The New York Times titled the liberation of India from British rule: 'INDIA AND PAKISTAN BECAME NATIONS CLASHES CONTINUE.'



Figure 8

This headline comprises two sub sentential headlines. The New York Times editor observes the event of independence and notes about the violence that takes place afterwards. Further, this headline brings out the grim aspect of the bloodshed. There is an alliteration of the sound k in the phrase clashes continues– a velar alliteration – showing a discordant state. All words are in capital letters signifying the utmost importance of the news.

The Washington Post on 15 August 1947 writes

'INDIA ACHIEVES__SOVEREIGNTY AMID SCENES OF WILD REJOICING.'



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Figure 9

The headline contains a sentential headline. It has the structure of the subject, verb, and object. Featuring the diction sovereignty, the headline implies that India not only has supreme authority but also enjoys commanding political power. The other meaningful word achieve signifies obtaining freedom after a lot of effort or exertion. The noun phrase sovereignty has stacking of two post modifiers ‘a characteristics of the ‘block language.’ The two postmodifiers in the form of prepositional phrases are amid scenes, of wild rejoicing. Besides, headline has an alliteration in “achieves sovereignty imparting aesthetics. It is a melodious headline it uses labiodental, alveolar and nasal, lateral sounds, and hissing sounds.

On 15 August 1947 **Morning News** titled

‘SOVEREIGN INDIA AND PAKISTAN ARE BORN.’



Figure 10

This headline is a sentential headline. The verb ‘be’ is omitted. The reformulated headline would be ‘Sovereign Pakistan and India are born. The focus of this headline is the birth of two autonomous countries. A remarkable aspect of this headline is the use of upper case or the capital letters. The use of capital letters in headlines serves not only allures the readers but also underlies the importance of sovereignty. In addition, the headline is in passive voice reflecting the action aspect of the verb not of the state.

On 15 August 1947, **Manchester Guardian** writes a powerful three-tier headline

FAREWELL AND HAIL End of the Indian Empire: Birth of Two Dominions

INDIA AND PAKISTAN CELEBRATE.



Figure 11

An absorbing headline surprises the readers with the initial part evoking the quotes from poem Catullus 101. The last words of the poem Catullus 101 from the first part of the headline. Hail and Farewell is a celebratory traditional military event of the US army. The editor has altered it to farewell and hail, as British rule ends and India and Pakistan are greeted or acclaimed. The Indian Empire refers to the region under the Britishers was called Indian Empire. The headline claims the complete non- existence of the Indian Empire. The birth of two dominos refers to the time when two India and Pakistan came into existence. Both nations celebrate this occasion.

On 15 August 1947, **Dawn** writes

‘BIRTH OF PAKISTAN AN EVENT IN HISTORY.’



Front of Dawn on August 15, 1947. – Dawn Archives

Figure 12

The headline focuses on the existence of Pakistan. it is a non-sentential headline. It seems there



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are two headlines, but it is one headline. This headline has a noun phrase with an appositive phrase. This can be read as ‘the Birth of Pakistan is an event in history. All the words in the headline are uppercased. It is a

Result / Discussion

The majority of newspapers have a sentential headline. Both foreign and Indian media have shown similar patterns. Both kinds of newspapers have 5 sentential headlines. Similarly, the same pattern is visible in terms of non-sentential headlines. Both mediums have used stacked noun phrases. Another feature that is starkly visible is the use of passive voice. The probable reason underlying this usage is to highlight the action of India and Pakistan becoming free. Editors were more interested to show the transference of power from imperialistic monopoly. A very striking thing is the preference of active voice or the transitive verb over the passive voice. It marks the deviation or defying of from the usual practice of applying the passive voice. The headline also highlights the moderate reaction and response of the foreign newspapers, although the occasion seemed historic and happy. Stylistically, the use of alliteration and capital letters complements the aesthetic aspect of the headlines.

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