

Extended Abstract

International Symposium of Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka (ICSUSL) – 2017

Scrutiny of Phrase Structures in Headlines of Editorials:

Sri Lankan English Weekly Newspapers

Nirupa D. Ranasinghe

Department of Languages, Faculty of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities,

General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka.

rnirupad@gmail.com

1. Abstract

The aim of this study was to ascertain the extent of the usage of syntax, phrase structures to be newspaper editorial headlines. This report is initiated with an insight into the study of language editorial and editorial headline; with detailed descriptions of parts of speech and relevant phrases. Subsequently findings on research carried out by other researchers on similar areas, are listed in a number of editorial headlines from the English weekly newspapers, Sunday Island and The Sunday Times, over January to July 2016, were the primary data analyzed. These newspapers were preferred based on a survey carried out to determine readership among young learners. The secondary data were gathered from the theoretical background and literature review; and the theory, Phrase Structure Rules, was adopted for analysis. A qualitative analysis on word orders was carried out based on parts of speech to categorize the phrases, such as, noun phrases, noun phrases with noun possessives, verb phrases with present part phrases with imperative verbs and prepositional phrases. Whilst 37% of the corpus of headlines of editorials comprises of the abovementioned phrases; minor deviations of 5% of the corpus were hypothetical means to conform to phrase structure rules. The balance 58% does not belong to the categories of phrase structures mentioned above. Other vital aspects of syntax, such as, prepositional modifiers, etc., could also be taught with the use of newspaper editorial headlines. More importantly reveals that second language and/or foreign language teachers would benefit using newspaper editorials as teaching devices to educate young learners on syntactic knowledge.

Keywords: headline, newspaper editorial, phrase structure, teaching device

2. Introduction and research problem

The editorial is a sub-genre of the newspaper genre, presenting the editor's opinion on a current topic of news already reported in the media. Since its headline must provoke the readers' curiosity, the linguistic devices, such as, literary devices and syntactic devices. Syntactic devices enhance the meaning affecting readers positively and expressing the writer's attitude.

Nine parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, preposition, article, conjunction, interjection) form the basis of syntax. The basic word order of English Language is S(subject) V(verb) O(object): "We attended the lecture." S(we) + V(attended) + O(the lecture). Therefore, word orders of phrases/clauses/sentences are determined by parts of speech.

Phrase Structure Rules which describe the syntax of a language are related to the early stages of transformational grammar proposed by Noam Chomsky in 1957. The quantitative analysis determined that both news and literary texts formulated varied phrase structures: noun phrases with head words/modifiers, noun phrases with noun modifiers, verb phrases with imperative verbs, verb phrases with present participles and prepositional phrases. A noun phrase possesses a noun (person/place/thing): "Children are singing." The ability to replace a noun with a pronoun, "They are singing", proves that "Children" functions as a noun phrase. A singular possessive (boss's car) shows ownership/relationship with "'s"; and "s'" for a plural possessive noun phrase (singThe constituent of a sentence/predicate contains a verb with objects. The base form of verbs is used in orders/commands: 'Open the door!', also called imperative verbs. Verb phrases with present participles include objects/modifiers that complete the thought: "Sleeping till late is bad for our health".

4. Results and findings

In the corpus, three variations of noun phrases

to Phrase Structure Rules, with minor deviations; as analyzed below with two examples each:

In the hypothetical statements of Table 1, the phrases can be replaced with the pronouns. Therefore they could function as pronouns and are considered as noun phrases.

Table 1: Noun Phrases (i)

Headline	Hypothetical Statement	Pronoun	
Terror in Nice	We read about <u>it</u> .	<u>it</u> = Terror in Nice	We read about <u>Nice</u> .
Lessons from Brexit	We learnt <u>them</u> .	<u>them</u> = Lessons from Brexit	Brexit.

Uniformity is noted in the headlines of Table 2, which are noun phrases. Each noun phrase begins with a head word with modifiers.

Table 2: Noun Phrases (ii)

Headline	Article	Modifier	Head Word
A numbers game	A	numbers	game

Headline	Article	Modifier	Head Word	Verb	
The economic heat is on	The	economic	heat	is	on

The singular noun possessives of Table 3 are at the beginning of the headlines. They are possessive pronouns. Therefore these headlines

Table 3: Noun Phrases with Noun Possessives (iii)

Headline	Pre-modifier/ Possessive Noun	Hypothetical Phrase
<u>Sirisena's</u> conundrum	Sirisena's	<u>his</u> conundrum
<u>Europe's</u> Economic neo-colonialism	Europe's	<u>its</u> economic neo-

The headlines of Table 4 begin with imperative verbs and are also the predicate/verb phrase. A indicate the headlines as verb phrases/predicates. The headlines begin with the imperative “choose”, which are in the base form of the verb.

Table 4: Verb Phrases with Imperatives (i)

Headline	Imperative verb	Hypothetical Statement	Subject	Predicate
Get moving on the RTI Act	Get moving	We (must) get moving on the RTI Act.	We	the RTI Act
Choose the right healing process	Choose	We (must) choose the right healing process.	We	(

The headlines of Table 5 begin with present participle verbs: “Muddling” and statements, the present participle verbs are a part of the verb phrase/ predicate.

Table 5: Verb Phrases with Present Participles (ii)

Headline	Present Participle	Hypothetical Statement	Subject	Predicate
Muddling along	Muddling	He (is) muddling along.	He	along
Reviving Sri Lankan	Reviving	They (are) reviving Sri Lankan.	They	Lankan

The objects/modified words of the headlines of Table 6 are nouns: ‘Egg’ and ‘question’. Also phrases begin with a preposition and end with a noun.

Table 6: Prepositional Phrases

Headline	Modified word	Prepositional Phrase
Egg on the face	Egg	<u>on</u> the face
The question of representation	question	<u>of</u> representation

Deviations were identified as follows:

Parity for women, take practical steps

Combination of a noun phrase and a verb phrase beginning with an imperative verb.

RTI: Let it be implemented in spirit

Terrorism: End the duplicity

‘Let’ and ‘End’ are imperative verbs. The abbreviation ‘RTI’ and the noun ‘Terrorism’ precede the v

5. Conclusions, implications and significance

37% of the corpus conforms to phrases with 5% deviations. 58% comprises of other devices: inversion questions, passive voice and parallelism. Further research should be conducted on other newspapers, the use of phrase structures along with alliteration, irony, metaphor, etc.

Second language teachers should adopt the teaching device, newspaper editorial headline; to teach the of speech and word order, leading to the abovementioned devices. The editorial is the least interesting a newspaper to this population. Hence this would inculcate the habit of reading, to improve vocab develop logical and grammatical analysis.

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*Corresponding Author, [Tel:0779826679](tel:0779826679) E-mail

Address: rnirupad@gmail.com