Statistic Analysis of English Newspaper Headlines in Azerbaijan Republic

Ghaffar Khamahani

Ajashir, Razi High School, Iran.

ABSTRACT

To carry out this research, Baku Today news site was selected as the source of news. The number of headlines arrived at a total of 200. This research was directed toward studying the syntactic and lexical features of headlines. The investigation began with the description of the basic units of analysis in the English headline structures (categories, word classes, constructions). In doing so, for the analysis of the structure of English headlines, the grammatical framework provided by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Savartvik (1985) was chosen. As mentioned before, this study pinpointed the cases of utilization of lexical and syntactic features in Azeri headlines in order to see in what ways they are organized. Below is a brief description of syntactic and lexical features.

Introduction

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Syntactic features: Syntax refers to the rules for ordering and connecting words into sentences. More generally, it refers to the study of the interrelationships between all elements of sentence structure, and of the rules governing the arrangements of sentences in sequences. It allows various possibilities to be exploited for effective linguistic communication (Crystal, 1992; Radford, 1997; Trask, 1999).

A systematic description of syntactic features of headlines includes headline types, functional types, and complexity in headlines.

Headline types: In order to get an overall picture of the structure of English headlines, Mårdh's model (1980) was chosen. Following Mårdh's model, the corpus was divided into three basic groups: verbal, nominal and adverbial headlines. A verbal headline contains a verb phrase or part of a verb phrase that is not dominated by a noun phrase (Mårdh, 1980). In the sample headlines, the main structural types of verbal headlines were distinguished according to finite verb phrases, nonfinite verb phrases, headlines with omitted auxiliary, subject complement (SCs) headlines, and subject adverbial (SA) headlines. Finite verb phrases contain a finite verb form which may be either an operator or a simple present or past form (Quirk et al., 1985), e.g. *Australian Opposition Leader Quits*. Nonfinite verb phrases consist of a participle or infinitive which may be followed by an object or an adverbial (Spears, 1976),

e.g. *Getting a Small Audience for Bad News* (30.11.2003). Subject adverbial headlines have no verb, but a form of the copula "be" can be inserted between the noun phrase and adverb in English sentences (Mårdh, 1980; Schneider, 2000), e.g. *Obama ø in Baghdad*. Subject complement phrases or omission of copula type consist of a noun phrase as subject and a noun phrase as subject complement. In English structures, a form of the verb *be*, may be inserted between the subject noun phrase and the noun phrase functioning as subject complement (Mårdh, 1980; Quirk et al., 1985), e.g. *Supreme Court opinions ø Not Private Enough*. Verbal headlines with omitted auxiliary are headlines in which the verb is nonfinite and in which forms of 'be' are left out before the verb (Mårdh, 1980), e.g. *Six Spanish Intel Officers ø Killed in Iraq*.

Nominal headlines: A nominal phrase is an expression headed by a noun (Radford, 1997). In order to examine syntactic variation within the noun phrases across the language, the structural types of nominal headlines were analyzed according to unmodification, premodification, postmodification and pre [+] post modification:

A. Unmodification: Structures in which the head of noun phrase is not modified by any other item are referred to as unmodified structures (Quirk et al., 1985; Spears, 1976).

B. Premodification: A premodifier is a modifier that precedes the word it modifies (Quirk et al., 1985; Spears, 1976), e.g. *Artificial Sweeteners*.

Postmodification: A postmodifier is a modifier or quantifier that follows the constituent it modifies (Quirk et al., 1985; Spears, 1976), e.g. *The Future of Data Storage*.

C. Pre [+] post Modifications: Structures which have both pre and postmodifiers are referred to as pre [+] post modified headlines, e.g. *The Solar System that Neptune Built*.

Adverbial headlines: An adverbial clause (headline) is an expression headed by a word, phrase, or clause that is equivalent in its structural role to an adverb (Fallahi, 1991) , e.g. *Before You Babysit*.

Analyzing headline types by function: **Headlines can be divided into four functional types:** statements, questions, commands and exclamations (Mårdh, 1980; McLoughlin, 2000). A statement headline describes a state of affairs, actions,

feelings or belief, e.g. *China to Let Foreign Banks Provide Money*. A command headline expresses a request or advice, e.g. *Put These Question Marks by the Hardware*. An exclamation headline shows the writer's or speaker's feelings, e.g. *Turkey + Duck + Chicken = Turducken!* A question headline is addressed to a reader or listener and asks for an expression of fact, opinion, belief, etc, e.g. *Hot Cocoa, the Healthy Drink*? This study focused on the cases of functional headline types in Azeri headlines.

***Complexity in headlines*:** The classification of headlines was done in terms of simple, compound and complex sentences. A simple headline contains only one predicate, e.g. *Bush Focuses on Raising Campaign Funds*. A complex headline contains one or more dependent clauses, in addition to its independent, or main clause, e.g. *DNA tests say Lindbergh fathered three children in Germany*. A compound headline contains two or more independent clauses which are joined by coordination.

***Structure of verb phrases*:** In terms of the structure of the verb phrase, Azeri headlines were divided into finite clauses, nonfinite clauses and verbless clauses. Finite clauses are clauses in which the first or only word of the verb is a finite form, e.g. *Bush Plane Flew under False Cover on Iraq Trip*. Nonfinite clauses are clauses whose phrase is nonfinite, i.e. the verb lacks tense, number, and mood, e.g. *Man Caught with 177 Cigarette packs in Trousers*. Verbless clauses are clauses which contain no verb element, e.g. *Factory Growth Fastest in 20 Years*.

Lexicology features: Lexicology, in its most general sense, is synonymous with vocabulary; and, in its technical sense, it deals with the analysis of words (Quirk et al., 1985). Under lexicology, the individual words such as nouns, verbs, articles, adjectives, adverbs, numerals, conjunctions, pronouns and prepositions were analyzed in headlines in order to determine the frequency of their occurrence.

A: A noun is a word which (a) can occur as the subject or object of a verb or the object of a preposition, (b) can be modified by an adjective, and (c) can be used with determiners. Nouns typically refer to people, animals, places, things, or abstractions (Murphy, 1997), e.g. *Bush Comments on Surprise Trip to Baghdad*. The distinct features of nouns used in headlines are the frequent appearance of the proper nouns, the acronyms, and the abbreviations (Baddock, 1988). These features were investigated in Azeri headlines to determine the frequency of their occurrence.

Proper nouns: Proper nouns are basically names of specific people, places, months, days, festivals, magazines, and so forth (Quirk et al., 1985) , e.g. *IOC Member Robbed in Athens*.

Acronyms and abbreviations: Acronyms are words derived from the initials of several words. This process is widely used in shortening extremely long words or word groups in science, technology and other special fields (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998), e.g. *Palestinian PM Rules out Immediate Sharon Talks*. Abbreviation is a reduced version of a word, phrase, or sentence. It is also called clipping (Crystal, 1992), e.g. *Japan Govt. to Nationalize Regional Bank*.

Verbs: Verb is an important lexical category, and one which is seemingly universal. In English languages, verb is the part of speech which, carries markers of 104 grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, person, number and mood and refers to an action or state (Leech & Svartvik, 1994; Natel Khanlari, 1979; Trask, 1993). Verb categories were analyzed in headlines.

Tense and aspect forms: "Tense" stands for the relationship between the from of the verb and the time of the

action or state it describes. Every language is capable of expressing limitless distinctions of time. Traditionally, tense is classified into present, past, and future. (Crystal, 1992; Quirk et al., 1985). One of the idiosyncratic features of the English headlines is the special uses it makes of tenses, which are different from those of ordinary, nonheadline language. In general, there is not a one to one correspondence between grammatical senses and the real time of occurrence of an event. Tenses are used in English headlines as follows (Baddock, 1988; McLoughlin, 2000; Sanderson, 1999): The simple present is often used to refer to events which happened in the past, e.g. *Bush Ends Steel Tariffs*. The past tense is sometimes used to refer to events which happened in the past, e.g. *Bush Plane Flew Under False Cover on Iraq Trip*. The infinitive is used to refer to future events, e.g *Books to Brighten the Joyous Season*. The –ing form of the verb, representing the present progressive, is used to refer to events that are happening at the moment, and also to events which happen in the future, e.g. *Actress Geena Davis Expecting Twins*. Aspect is a grammatical category which deals with how the event described by a verb is viewed, such as whether it is in progress, habitual, repeated, momentary, etc. In English, aspect may be indicated by prefixes, suffixes or other changes to the verb, or by auxiliary verbs (Quirk et al., 1985).

Voice: Voice is the form of the verb which shows the relation between the action and its subject. In English, there are two voices: the active and the passive. Voice was considered in this study to examine the frequency of its occurrence in the headlines.

Deletions in the headlines: Omission is one of the major features of newspaper headlines (Baddock, 1988; Bell, 1991; Reah, 1998; Tahririan, 1995). Turner (1972, p. 72) says: "Determiners and the verb "to be" are almost universally omitted in headlines". For the sake of brevity and saving space, most closed words and some open words in headlines are often omitted or reduced to a minimum in headlines, e.g. *Grocers, Union Talks ø Set to Resume*.

Data analysis: The analysis of data was conducted in two stages. In both stages, a detailed description of the headlines at lexical and syntactic levels was done. A corpus of 200 English headlines were analyzed lexically and syntactically in order to examine the features of the headlines in these domains. The first level consisted of the analysis of the syntactic features of the headlines. Now the results of the analysis are presented.

Syntactic features: As for the syntactic features, the following three major areas were studied in the headlines: headline types, functional types, and complexity in the headlines.

Headline types: In order to get an overall picture of the structures of headlines, the headlines were divided into three basic groups: verbal, nominal, and adverbial headlines. The frequency of the different types of headlines is shown in Table 1

Table 1: Observed frequency of headline types in Azeri news papers

Type of headline	N
Verbal	180
Nominal	15
Adverbial	5
Total	200

Verbal headlines: Five main structural types of verbal headlines were distinguished in the headlines which are shown in Table 2

Table 2 : The frequency of the verbal headline types in the English and Persian corpora

Type of verbal headlines	N
Nonfinite	4
Omitted auxiliary	38
SCs	4
SA	6
Total	200

Nominal headlines: Nominal headlines in Azeri newspapers were analyzed in terms of unmodification, premodification, postmodification and pre [+] post modification. The frequency of different types of nominal headlines in the sample headlines are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Observed frequency of different types of nominal headlines.

Type of nominal headlines	N
Unmodified	44
Premodified	51
Postmodified	45
Pre[+]postmodified	60
Total	200

In the 200 headlines, adjectives were the most common type of premodifying items.

Postmodified nominal headlines: Different kinds of postmodifications in the nominal headlines of English are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Observed frequency of post modification in the nominal headlines

Type of postmodification	N
Restrictive relative clause	0
Prepositional phrase	5
Adverbial	2
Total	7

As appears from Table 5, prepositional modification was by far the most frequent type of postmodification in the nominal headlines.

Headline types by function: Headlines can be divided into four functional types: statements, questions, commands and exclamations. The distribution of the functional headline types is shown in Table 6

Table 6: Observed frequency of functional headline types written in Azerbaijan

Functional headline types	N
Statements	200
Questions	0
Commands	0
Exclamations	0
Total	200

Complexity in headlines: Headlines can be classified in terms of simple, complex and compound sentences. The frequency of the headlines in terms of their structure is given in Table 7.

Table 7: Frequency of sentences classified by structure

Headlines classified by structure	N
Complex	53
Compound	5
Total	200

Verb phrases in headline structures: In terms of the structure of the verb phrase, headlines are divided into finite clauses, nonfinite clauses, and verbless clauses. Table 9 shows the percentage of these three clauses.

Table 9: Frequency of clauses classified by structure of verb phrase

clauses classified by structure of verb phrase verb phrase	N
Finite	120
Nonfinite	42
Verbless	38
Total	200

To sum up, it was concluded that the headlines use active voice, short words, declarative sentences, finite clauses, and simple sentences and use special tense forms, headline types, modification, and omission of words.

Implications for teaching journalistic English: Teachers can benefit from the findings of this analysis. It can assist the teacher to be aware of the structural conflicts of the headlines and, as a result, help his students get a better understanding of the language of headlines. An EFL teacher of reading journalistic English with relevant information can be a better language teacher in a shorter period of time than a person without such information. Knowledge of the syntactic and lexical features of headlines helps teachers to use them as a guide to their teaching. The teacher who is familiar with headlines will know better what the real learning problems are and can better provide for teaching them.

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