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Linguistic analysis of newspaper headlines: focus on differences

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ABSTRACT

Newspaper editorials constitute a part of media discourse, which is an extremely important field of research in both intercultural rhetoric analysis and EFL/ESL studies. Specifically, certain features of editorial headlines and also their important role in monitoring and directing readers' attention have made the interface between the linguistic analysis of newspaper editorial headlines and teaching of English as a foreign language as a relevant issue in language teaching. Through conducting a contrastive textual analysis of selected headlines, culled from the editorials of the English newspaper, *The New York Times*, and those of Persian newspaper, *Tehran Times*, the present study aimed at exploring the kind of textual and rhetorical strategies the two newspapers employed for propagating their preferred ideologies. The results of the study indicated that headlines in the two papers presented a subjective attitude of the writers (newspapers) towards the topic. However, based on the analysis of the data, it became clear that there were certain differences between the two sets of headlines in terms of Presupposition, and certain Rhetorical devices.

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Introduction

Mass media is one of the most powerful forces for shaping public opinion¹. Newspaper headlines, as a subgenre of media genre² are of importance in news discourse. As an opening section to their relevant main text, headlines have been ascribed different functions. Headlines and leads have been referred as categories forming "the summary" of the news reports³. There is a distinction between headlines functioning as the abstract of the main event of the story and headlines as promoting one of the details of the story⁴. Although in most cases headlines do bear such functions in news reports, some newspapers headlines present their readers with fairly complex riddles which neither summarize nor present the detail of the news reports⁵.

The issue of determining the role of the headlines would be much more complicated if one considers the kind of newspaper texts in which the headlines appear. Different newspaper texts namely: service information, opinion and news would both semantically and pragmatically require certain types of the headlines based on the text and the receiver (reader). However, most of the studies on the headlines focused on either service information texts such as advertisement or new texts such as daily news reports. In other words, the role and function of the headlines in opinion texts have rarely been explicated in the literature. Newspaper editorials as a kind of opinion texts⁶ are different from the other types of news discourse in that they are supposed to present evaluations and comments about the news events already reported in the newspapers.

Thus, due to the unique features of the editorial headlines such as encapsulating the content of the editorials, arousing the readers' curiosity⁷, and also their important role in monitoring readers' attention, perception and reading process, the present study attempted to conduct a systematic contrastive textual analysis of English and Persian editorial headlines to investigate the kind of rhetorical strategies the two newspapers employ for propagating their preferred ideologies. It is also hoped that such knowledge would assist the language teachers to

effectively use the newspapers as a teaching device in their EFL/ESL classrooms.

Research Methodology

Data collection and analysis: Adopting a nonrandom purposeful sampling, the present study selected 40 editorial headlines, [20 culled from the electronic version of the Iranian English newspaper, *Tehran Times* and 20 editorial headlines culled from the electronic version of *The English daily newspaper, New York Times* out of a large pool of editorials published daily over a specific span of time (April to September, 2008). The two newspapers are among the top broadsheets in terms of readership as stated by the official websites of the papers. Also, the textual analysis has been carried out using Presuppositions, Modality and also rhetorical strategies.

Classification of the Editorials: For selecting the editorial headlines to be included in the corpus, we used the classification proposed by Hall⁸. Based on the proposed classification, it is possible to sort the newspaper editorials into editorials of Criticism, Attack, Defense, Endorsement, Praise, Appeal and Entertainment. Editorials of criticism are defined here as editorials that aimed at criticizing policies and decisions that are considered as controversial by the newspaper staff. Since editorials of criticism are very similar to the editorials of attack, which are supposed to be much more forceful and call for changes to be made immediately, the two kinds of editorials in the corpus have been referred to as editorials of criticism. The main reason for selecting the editorials of criticism lies in the fact that these type of editorials usually have a social and philosophical commitment to the ideology of the publisher and to the interest of the readership. This commitment, thus, makes them more argumentative and persuasive than the other types.

Categories of Textual Analysis: Textual analysis of the selected editorials has been carried out in term of rhetorical devices employed in the headlines. Definitely, the types of these devices have not been decided in advance as the qualitative categories are not predetermined but are derived inductively from the data analyzed⁹. Thus, the rhetorical devices discussed

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throughout the paper have been emerged during the data analysis.

In addition to these emerging rhetorical devices, the headlines have been analyzed in terms of another linguistic device namely *presupposition*. Presupposition is any proposition whose truth is accepted by the speaker but not asserted by the utterance. Linguistically, they are marked through using certain grammatical structures and lexical items. Presuppositions allow speakers and writers to make claims without actually asserting them, and, moreover, take specific beliefs for granted although they might not be. They in fact provide the writers with a kind of a linguistic device that can be used at word/phrase level to manipulate readers¹⁰.

Thus, considering the manipulative nature of presupposition and the rhetorical devices, the selected headlines have been analyzed in terms of presupposition and the emerging rhetorical devices.

Textual Analysis of Headlines; Presupposition in Headlines: Presupposition in NYT Headlines. A textual analysis of the headlines in the selected editorials revealed that the editorial writers employed this linguistic device.

The kinds of presupposition employed in NYT headlines include: existential, lexical, nominalization and iterative verb. Table no. 1 tabulates the kinds of presuppositions employed in NYT headlines.

In addition to these emerging rhetorical devices, the headlines have been analyzed in terms of another linguistic device namely

As the Table indicates existential presupposition is the common presupposition employed in NYT headlines. Through this kind of presupposition, the writers presupposed a negative attribute for Others and positive ones for Us. Attributions such as stolen election, belated truth and war of ambition are examples of the point. Lexical presupposition was the other kind presupposition employed in the headlines. Through certain lexical items or loaded words- words that have strong positive or negative connotations beyond their ordinary definition, the writers tried to presuppose their intended propositions. The lexical items such as dealing, still in headlines no. 4 and 5, for example, presuppose respectively that Mr. Mugabe is a serious problem and The American forces were expected to leave the country but they did not. Through nominalization, not only the writers did try to make the headlines concise, but also they took for granted certain propositions which were not openly stated in the editorials. The phrase empty promises in the headline no. 8, for example, presupposed that The promises were empty.

Presupposition in TT Headlines: The analysis of the headlines revealed the frequent use of presupposition as a textual strategy for persuasion purpose. The following Table tabulates kinds of

Presupposition employed in the headlines of NYT

As Table 2 suggests the presuppositions have been established through existential, nominal, and implicative verb. The word "mimicking", for example, in the first headline suggested "imitation" and the possessive construction "'s" presupposes the existence of "ulterior motives of Rice". In the third and fifth headlines, "provocative war games" and "the secret plans of the US" have been presupposed respectively through nominalization. The use of the implicative verb, End, in the fourth headline, presupposes the existence of "wage discrimination" throughout the country. Similarly, the fifth headline implied the "secret evil plans of the US in Iraq". The sixth and seventh headlines presupposed the existence of Israel's "pipe dreams" and "war crimes".

The analysis of the selected headlines in terms of presupposition revealed some similarities and differences between the headlines of the two papers. In general, the writers in the two papers presupposed certain propositions through certain types of presuppositions namely: existential, lexical, nominalization and implicative verbs. The papers preferred existential presupposition triggered by possessive construction such as Rice's ulterior motives and Israel's war crimes. Nominal presuppositions in the headlines were triggered by noun phrases such as Empty promises. Implicative verbs were found to be the least employed presupposition types in the two sets of the headlines. The commonality of using just these certain types of presupposition in the headlines of the two newspapers might suggest that writers opted for common types of presupposition in spite of their different linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, limited use of the implicative verbs and the other types of the presupposition types such as "factive", "nonfactive" and "structural presuppositions"¹¹ might reveal a specific characteristic of the newspaper genre specific to the editorial headlines. Tehran Times headlines compared to those of the New York Times contained more existential presuppositions. The NYT headlines, on the other hand, contained more lexical presuppositions.

Rhetorical Devices Parallelism: Moreover to add balance and rhyming and also further clarity to the headlines, editorial writers in NYT in some cases opted for Parallelism, using the same pattern of words and structures. The following excerpts are examples of the case, i. Georgia, NATO and Mr. Medvedev (Ref. NYT 19), ii. Good Intentions, Vague Promises (Ref. NYT 12)

Parallelism in the first headline has been achieved through using the same class of the words, nouns. Noun phrases, on the other hand, have been used in the second headline for parallelism.

Only one case of parallelism was identified in TT headline presented as below: Turkey's "deep state" runs into shallow water (Ref. TT 7)

As evident in the headline, through using deep state and shallow water, the writer has established parallelism. In other words, the same linguistic structure, a noun modified by an adjective has been used in the headline. Although limited in number, the writers in both NYT and TT have employed this rhetorical device to enhance the persuasive force of the headlines through repetition.

Alliteration: Similarly, in the following headlines the editorial writer preferred to use Alliteration - repetition of the initial consonants- and consonance - repetition of the final consonants respectively to give balance and rhyming to the headlines. Caught in the Cross-Fire (Ref. NYT 8), Not Safe Enough (Ref. NYT 7)

Only one case of consonance was identified in the TT headlines as presented below: Is more inflation on the horizon? (Ref. TT 12)

Through using these two devices alliteration and consonance, the writers in the two papers have tried to create a mood and music in the headlines to further enhance the persuasive effect of them.

Metonymy: Another instance of figurative language used in the headlines of the selected editorials was Metonymy. It is a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated. The use of this rhetoric device can be identified in the following headlines of NYT. i. China's Baby Formula Scandal (Ref. NYT 5), ii. Russia's War of Ambition (Ref. NYT 11), iii. Lebanon at the

Edge (Ref. NYT 18), iv. China's List of Olympic Don'ts (Ref. NYT 16)

The metonymic use of the countries in NYT headlines can be presents as below: CHINA >>Institution (A company), RUSSIA >>Institution (Government), LEBANON>>Status (Political), CHINA >>Institution (Olympic committee)

In the above-mentioned non-verbal headlines, it is clear that editorial writers intended to refer to a company in China, Leaders in Russia, Political situation of Lebanon and Chinese government respectively. However, in an effort to impose their own attitude, the editorial writers employed metonymy to generalize the issue i.e. scandal, war, to be at edge and Olympic don'ts to the respective countries.

Also, referring to some certain news events, in some cases the editorial writers in TT used metonymy as a rhetoric device. This device has been employed in the following headlines. i. Iran is not North Korea (Ref. TT 8), ii. U.S. hypocritically using ICC to pressure Sudan (Ref. TT 4), iii. U.S. meddling in formation of Lebanese cabinet (Ref. TT 5) iv. Israel's hit-and-run war crimes (Ref. TT 18), v. U.S colonialism in Iraq (Ref. TT 9), vi. Israel's pipe dreams (Ref. TT 11), vii. Israel snubs Hamas ceasefire proposal (Ref. TT 14), viii. US dissension plot unfolds in Iraq (Ref. TT 16)

The main argument in the editorial entitled Iran is not North Korea was to compare the Iranian nuclear program to that of North Korea. So, to refer to these programs the editorial writer preferred to use the name of the countries. Similarly, the main arguments entitled by the second and third headlines was to criticize the American authorities for using judges in International Criminal Court (ICC) to put pressure on Omar Hassan al-bashir, the Sudanese president, and the American administration for meddling in Lebanon's affairs. Also, the main argument in the fourth headline is to blame Israeli's army and military authorities for starting assaults against Gaza Strip.

This metonymic use of the countries name in TT headlines can be stated as follows: IRAN>>Nuclear program, NORTH KOREA>>Nuclear program, US >>Institution (Government), SUDAN Institution (Government), US>> Institution (Government), ISRAEL >>Institution (Army), US >>Institution (Government), ISRAEL Institution (government), ISRAEL >> Institution (government), US >>Institution (Government), ISRAEL >>Institution (Army)

Through using metonymy, the editorial writers in the two newspapers tended to keep and background the main news actors and events such as the US authorities, Omar al-bashir, Israeli army officers and nuclear program in the semantic field. In other words, writers used the metonymic concept of names of countries to refer to either responsible institutions or the status (social, economical, political) of the countries. Analysis of the data revealed that writers in TT employed this type of metonymic reference (COUNTRY FOR INSTITUTION AND STATUS) in the headlines much more frequently than those in NYT. Considering the fact that metonymy is not merely a reference device but it also serves the function of providing understanding, the frequent use of this type of reference might be attributed to Iran's government long-lasting problems with the governments of the two countries namely the US and Israel. Names of these two countries have been thematized so that it can influence the readers understanding making them perceive every single event as something caused by the whole country and not by the single institution within the country.

In general, analysis of headlines in terms of this rhetoric device, metonymy, indicated the importance of the device in newspaper genre in general and headlines in particular.

Pun: Pun was found to be among of the rhetorical devicesemployed in just one of the NYT headlines presented as below: Putin's Mini-Me (or Not?) (Ref. NYT 20)

To elaborate on the above-mentioned headline, it is necessary to mention that the editorial writer's main argument in the respective editorial was to represent Russian president, Medvedev, as a puppet played by Valadimir Putin, the present Prime minister of Russia. To do so, the writer has used the word "Me" as a pun in the headline as the word "Me" suggests two distinct meaning .That is "Me" as referring to Putin and the second as referring to Medvedev. Note that the word Medvdev starts with "Me". This rhetoric device, however, was not found in the selected headlines of TT.

Testimonial: Testimonial, using the words of a famous or influential person, was found to be one of the devices employed in only one of the NYT headlines for persuading the editorial readers. The following headline exemplifies the point. What the F.B.I. Agents Saw (Ref. NYT 17)

The main argument of the editorial headlined by the above mentioned phrase was to inform the American people, through descriptive scenes, of what was happening in the interrogation centers in American military prisons. To influence the readers, the editorial used the phrase "the F.B. I. agents" to further endorse its own description. This literary device has not been employed in TT headlines.

Quotation out of context: Quoting out of context, removing the most important quotes from the context, editorial, was another device for persuasion identified in NYT headlines. This persuasion device was realized in the following non-verbal headline. Running Out of Time (Ref. NYT 4)

The headline reflects the growing concern about the failure of the American forces in Afghanistan. It is, in fact, a quoted phrase from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm.

Mike Mullen, which summarizes the main point of the editorial. Examples of this rhetorical device were not identified in TT headlines:

Rhetorical question: Rhetorical question was used a persuasive device in NYT headlines as presented below: i. Remember Iran? (Ref. NYT 3), ii. Putin's Mini- Me (or Not?) (Ref. NYT 20)

The questions were asked for emphasis and provocation purposes. For example, the first yes-no question has nothing to do with whether we remember Iran or not. The question, however, was intended to emphasize the necessity of remembering Iran otherwise negative consequences would be faced. Similarly, the literary effect of the second rhetorical question is to put in doubt the authority of the Russia's president leading the readers to proceed with reading of the main editorial text with a certain mentality posed by the headline via a rhetorical question.

Editorial writers in TT also employed this rhetorical device in the selected headlines. The following two questions represent the point, i. Is more inflation on the horizon? (Ref. TT 2), ii. Is the Caucasus becoming more Balkanized than the Balkans? (Ref. TT 12)

The above rhetorical questions used for effect, emphasis, or provocation purposes as considering the ever-increasing inflation rate throughout the country and the serious political unrest in Balkan Peninsula, the answer to the following question is obvious enough.

Editorial writers in both the NYT and TT headlines employed this literary device with the same frequency. This might indicate the importance of rhetorical questions in newspaper headlines in the two papers.

Table 1
The Types of Presupposition in NYT Headlines

No.	Type	Example	Presupposition
1	Existential	Mr. Olmert's Belated Truths (Ref. NYT 1)	>> The truths should have been revealed before.
2	Implicative verb	Remember Iran? (Ref. NYT 3)	>> Iran has been forgotten.
3	Existential	China's Baby Formula Scandal (Ref. NYT 5)	>> There is a public outrage in China
4	Lexical	Dealing With Mr. Mugabe (Ref. NYT 6)	>> Mr. Mugabe is a problem.
5	Lexical	Still No Exit (Ref. NYT 9)	>> It was expected to exit.
6	Lexical	Stuck in Gerogia (Ref. .NYT 10)	>> There is a difficult situation in Georgia.
7	Existential	Russia's War of Ambition (Ref. NYT 11)	>> Russia has planed to initiate war of ambition
8	Nominalization	Good Intentions, Vague Promises (Ref. NYT 12)	>> The promises are vague
9	Nominalization	Empty Promises on Warming (Ref. NYT13)	>> The promises are empty
10	Existential	Zimbabwe's Stolen Election (Ref. NYT 14)	>> The election has been stolen
11	Lexical	Lebanon at the Edge (Ref. NYT 18)	>> Lebanon is in a difficult position
12	Existential	Putin's Mini-Me (or Not?)(Ref. NYT 20)	>> Putin has a Mini-Me.

Table 2
The Types of Presupposition in Tehran Times Headlines

No.	Type	Example	Presupposition
1	Lexical and Existential	Brown mimicking predecessor's duplicity (Ref.TT 1)	>> Brown is an imitator >>There is duplicity
2	Existential	Rice's ulterior motives	>> Rice has ulterior
3	Nominal	Provocative war games (Ref. TT 19)	>> These war games are provocative
4	Implicative verb	End discrimination in wages (Ref. TT 15)	>>There is discrimination
5	Nominal	U.S. dissension plot unfolds in Iraq (Ref. TT 16)	>>US has secret plans
6	Existential	Israel's pipe dreams (Ref.TT 11)	>> Israel has pipe dreams
7	Existential	Israel's hit-and-run war crimes (Ref. TT 18)	>> Israel has crimes

Allusion: The editorial writers in Tehran Times used allusion, indirect reference to a person, place or event, as a persuasive device in the following headlines. i. Is the Caucasus becoming more Balkanized than the Balkans? (Ref. TT 2), ii. U.S. colonialism in Iraq (Ref. TT 9), iii. Israel's pipe dreams (Ref. TT 11)

The word Balkans in the first headline was supposed to remind the editorial readers of the different wars happening in some southeastern European countries in Balkan Peninsula during 1990s. In the same way, the word colonialism in the second headline was supposed to remind the readers of a policy based on exercising power over a dependent area and people for exploitation of their natural resources and creation of new markets for the colonizer which was practiced by some European countries in the years 1500 – 1900. The allusion in the third headline can be elaborated by referring to Ahmad Chalabi, an Iraqi politician, who promised to reopen an old British buildpipeline from Kirkuk in Northern Iraq to Israeli port Haifa. As a reaction to this promise Israeli then Minister of Infrastructure said that the pipe line would be a dream. Moreover, the phrase, pipe dream, has an additional connotative meaning suggesting a fantastic hope that usually comes from smoking a pipe of opium and thus regarded as an unreal aspiration.

The use of allusion in the above-mentioned headlines was significant in that it could please the readers by reminding them of pertaining events and concepts such as Colonialism, Balkans and Pipe dreams with which they were familiar, allowing them to be persuaded. This rhetorical device, however, was not identified in the selected headlines of NYT.

Neologism: The use of neologism, "a recently created (or coined) word or an existing word or phrase that has been assigned a new meaning" was identified in the editorial headlines of TT. The following headlines exemplify the point. i. Is the Caucasus becoming more Balkanized than the Balkans? (Ref. TT 2), ii. The Iranophobia plan (Ref. TT 17)

As evident in the above-mentioned headlines, the editorial writers created neologisms through the addition of suffix / ize / and blending two existing words. The use of neologism not only reflects the editorial writer's skill in the creative use of language, but also helps him to make an association between two concepts. Excerpt no. 2 might serve as an example of this point. By blending the two words Iran and Phobia, the editorial writer has tried to associate "fearing Iran" with an "illness" that should be treated. Editorial writers in NYT did not employ this device in the selected headlines.

Antithesis: To make the headlines more provocative, some editorial writers in TT used antithesis which can be defined as close juxtaposition and intentional contrast of two terms or ideas in the headlines. Antithesis establishes a clear, contrasting relationship between two ideas by joining them together or juxtaposing them, often in parallel structure. This rhetoric device can be noticed in the following editorial headlines. i. The G8 ate while we went hungry (Ref. TT 6), ii. Turkey's "deep state" runs into shallow water (Ref. TT 7)

The use of antithesis was also of significance in editorials in that it made relatively fine distinctions which might be otherwise overlooked by casual editorial readers. This device was not identified in the selected headlines of NYT. Irony: Irony, stating the opposite of an intended meaning in order to mock a person, situation, was found to be one of the rhetorical devices employed in the following TT headline. The only upholder of human rights in the Mideast! (Ref. TT 20)

The main argument of the editorial entitled by the above-mentioned headline was to criticize western countries for naming Israel as the only democratic country in the Middle East. To express his disapproval of the western countries' view, the editorial writer used a sarcastic headline. Even an exclamation mark (!) has been used in the headline to help the readers grasp the sarcasm and irony. This rhetorical device has not been employed in the selected headlines of NYT. Thus, as the above-mentioned description suggested, editorial headlines not only informed the readers of the topic but also reflected the

editorial writers' subjective point of view as well. The analysis of the headlines revealed that editorial writers, in an effort to persuade their readers, try to employ different textual strategies. Table 3 represents the types of the rhetorical devices employed in the selected headlines of the two papers

Table 3

Frequency of Rhetorical Devices Employed in NYT and Tehran Times

Rhetorical Devices	Headlines in NYT	Headlines in TT
Allusion	0	***
Neologism	0	**
Rhetorical question	**	**
Metonymy	****	*****
Antithesis	0	**
Parallelism	**	*
Alliteration	*	*
Consonance	*	*
Irony	0	*
Quoting out of context	*	0
Testimonial	*	0
Pun	*	0

* Frequency

As Table 3 suggests, Metonymy, Rhetorical questions and Parallelism are the favored devices employed in the headlines of NYT. Editorial writers in TT, however, favored Metonymy, Allusion, Neologism, Antithesis and Rhetorical questions. While, the less frequent devices include: Testimonials, Puns, Assonance, Alliteration, Consonance and Quoting out of context.

Results and Discussion

The results of the present study revealed certain qualitative and quantitative similarities and differences between the English and Persian editorial headlines. In terms of verbal/non-verbal distinction, the study revealed that editorial writers in Tehran Times preferred to write the headlines mostly in a form of full sentences. However, those of in NYT inclined to write the headlines in punchy and short phrases.

In general, the analysis of the headlines in the two papers revealed that the newspaper headlines not only introduced the topic of the editorials but also presented the subjective attitude of the writers (newspapers) towards the topic aiming at influencing the readers understanding of the editorial text.

This subjective presentation of the news events and the news actors were carried out through employing certain textual and persuasive strategies. The analysis revealed that the two papers to some extent were identical in employing existential presupposition, lexical presupposition and nominalization for persuasion purposes. Similarly, Rhetorical questions and Metonymy were found to be employed in the two papers equally. Both NYT and TT metonymically used the names of the countries, for example, to refer to the institutions or political /Social status of the countries.

The two newspapers, however, were found to be rather different in terms of employing other rhetorical devices. The editorial writers in TT did employ literary devices such Allusion, Neologism, and Irony which made the headlines look persuasive.

The writers in NYT, instead, employed other set of devices such as Pun, Testimonial, and Quoting- out- of – context. Employing different sets of rhetorical devices in the two newspapers might be attributed to the certain culture the writers in the newspapers belong to.

The analysis in general revealed that the editorial writers in both newspapers aimed at not only informing the readers of the topic of the editorial but also expressing the preferred ideology of the papers which was accomplished through employing certain persuasive and rhetorical devices

Conclusion

Referring to the ever-increasing accessibility of newspapers as a media discourse to the language practitioners and also considering both the semantic and pragmatic functions of the newspaper headlines in shaping the public opinion, the textual analysis of the editorial headlines in the selected editorials of The New York Times and Tehran Times was carried out. Specifically, the aim of the study was to investigate how the editorial writers in the two newspapers tried to encapsulate the content of the editorials and hence direct both the attention and perception of their readers towards their intended meaning through the headlines.

The findings of the study revealed that the headlines in the two sets of data besides introducing the main topic of the editorials, presented the subjective attitudes of the writers through employing certain rhetorical and textual strategies. However, the study indicated some differences between the headlines of the two papers.

Due to the argumentative nature of editorials of criticism, the present study focused on the headlines of this newspaper subgenre. The other promising area of further research might focus on the textual analysis of other newspaper sub-genres such as editorials of praise, endorsement and entertainment. Studies of this type would reveal the other discourse conventions of the newspaper genre.

It is hoped that equipping the EFL teachers and students with knowledge on the discourse conventions employed in the headlines of the editorials would enhance using of this media discourse, newspaper, as a teaching device in the classrooms.

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