

Stylistic Analysis of Newspaper Language:

The difference between *Newsday* and
The New York Times

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I. Introduction

In order to investigate the style of prose, I chose two American newspapers. Different newspapers in the U.S. are said to have distinctively different styles of writing, for they aim at certain audience. Another advantage of choosing a newspaper as a corpus of investigation is that one need not have to pay attention to the differences in content as long as one chooses articles on the same issue, because what they report basically stays the same.

For the purpose of this comparison, I chose *Newsday* and *The New York Times*, for there is a claim that *The New York Times* has a more authoritative way of writing and that *Newsday* is more informal. (Note here, however, that *Newsday* is not in any way a lowbrow paper such as *The New York Post*. It is a good newspaper, well read locally all over Long Island, New York.) I would like to investigate these two newspapers in depth so that the difference in style will become obvious.

II. Procedure

I selected articles from *Newsday* and *The New York Times* on the same topic: "Ford workers reach agreement on contract," which appeared in both papers on February 28, 1982.⁽¹⁾

I numbered each sentence consecutively, starting with the headline of the *Newsday* article, and continuing in *The New York Times* article. Then I analyzed both articles on three levels:

1. Visual.
2. Grammatical.
3. Semantic.

(1) See Appendices I and II at the end of the article.

Further, on the visual level, (A) graphic and graphological difference, and (B) paragraphing are observed. On the grammatical level, (A) sentence analysis, (B) prepositions before dates, and (C) punctuation are investigated. On the semantic level, (A) headlines, (B) wording in the same context, and (C) differences in lexicon are considered.

Let me define here the sentence analysis that is undertaken in this paper. There may be countless ways to investigate the sentence. I chose the following three taxonomies, for they allow the numerical analysis as will be shown in the latter part of the paper.

- 1) Classification according to sentence arrangement:
 - a) Loose sentence
 "The robins sing early in the morning."
 - b) Periodic sentence
 "Early in the morning, the robins sing."
- 2) Classification according to sentence type:
 - a) Simple
 - b) Compound
 - c) Complex
- 3) Classification according to cumulative modifier:⁽¹⁾
 - a) Prepositional phrase (P.P.)
 "*At the end of a conference on human genetics last year*, a biologist rose to summarise the proceedings."
 - b) Noun clusters (N.C.)
 "William Randolph Hearst was an only son, *the only chick in the richly feathered nest of George and Phoebe Hearst.*"
 - c) Verb clusters (V.C.)
 "*Walking through the fields*, we learn quite a number of things about snails."
 - d) Absolute (Ab.)
 "*Allison having finished the work*, we could relax.

(1) I owe much of this idea and the example which follows each topic to *The Contemporary Writer* (W. Ross Winterowd, Harcourt Brace Javanovic, Inc., New York); however, I felt it necessary to add a category of relative clause to this list.

e) Adverb clause (A.C.)

"When the notion of man as machine was first advanced, the machine was a very simple collection of pulley and billiard balls and levers."

f) Adjective clause (Adj. C.)

"The babies were all under one year old, *very funny and lovable*."

g) Relative clause (R.C.)

"I went to a zoo, *where I met a stranger*."

III. Discussion

1. Visual level

A. Graphic and graphological difference

It is certainly true that graphic and graphological variation is of great importance in defining the distinctiveness of newspaper language.⁽¹⁾ The larger the letter is, the more "eye-catching" effect it yields. Therefore, it is relevant to describe the salient differences:

<i>Newsday</i> :	Headline: bold	13 mm
	Text:	3 mm
<i>Times</i> :	Headline: italic	8 mm
	Text:	2 mm

B. Paragraph

Apart from the headlines, the most obvious visual feature is the paragraphing structure. *Newsday* breaks up the text into very short paragraphs; *The Times* tends to keep the paragraphs long. The following table shows how many lines each paragraph contains.⁽²⁾

(1) David Crystal and Derek Davy, *Investigating English Style*, p.174, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1969.

(2) There are more lines in one paragraph in *The Times*. That is partly because the width of a column is smaller than *Newsday*.

<i>Newsday</i>				<i>Times</i>			
1.	5	10.	3	1.	7	9.	9
2.	8	11.	4	2.	3	10.	10
3.	3	12.	5	3.	8	11.	7
4.	4	13.	5	4.	6	12.	9
5.	3	14.	2	5.	10	13.	9
6.	4	15.	9	6.	6	14.	5
7.	4	16.	2	7.	7	15.	2
8.	2	17.	6	8.	10	16.	5
9.	4	18.	2				
average=4.2/paragraph				average=7.3/paragraph			

This clear difference in visual quality may make *Newsday*, with its wide columns and smaller paragraphs, easier to read than the narrow, long paragraphs of *The Times*, which requires more shifting of the eyes.

2. Grammatical level

A. Sentence analysis⁽¹⁾

1) Classification according to sentence arrangement

Some handbooks on writing state flatly:⁽²⁾ loose sentences are not as effective as periodic. That may not be true in all the cases; but one can say that more devices in phrasing are involved in periodic sentences than in loose sentences.

As is seen in the table on pages 75 and 76, the ratio of periodic sentences among all the sentences is higher in *The Times* than in *Newsday*.

2) Classification according to sentence type

One can say, comparing simple sentences and complex/compound sentences that the degree of the complexity of a sentence is higher in complex/compound sentences than in simple sentences. The table shows the percentage of simple sentences in the two articles. It is 48% in *Newsday*; 24% in *The Times*. In other words, half the sentences in the *Newsday* article are classified as simple sentences, while in *The Times* it is only one-fourth.

(1) I excluded such sentences as “_____ says” for this analysis, because they are inevitable in newspaper language, yet not relevant to this analysis.

(2) David Crystal and Derek Davy, *Investigating English Style*, p. 382, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1969.

Newsday

ll.	sentence arrangement	sentence type	cumulative modifier
3- 6	loose	simple	V.C.
8- 10	periodic	complex	P.P., N.C.
11- 12	—	simple	—
12- 15	loose	complex	A.C.
16	loose	simple	—
16- 18	loose	simple	—
19- 22	loose	complex	R.
23- 25	loose	complex	A.C.
26- 27	—	simple	—
30- 33	loose	complex	R.
34- 35	—	simple	V.C.
36- 39	loose	complex	R.
40- 42	loose	complex	—
43- 46	loose	complex	—
47- 48	loose	complex	A.C.
48- 51	loose	cmplx, compd	R.
52- 53	periodic	complex	A.C.
53- 56	loose	complex	—
57- 58	loose	simple	—
59- 63	periodic	complex	P.P., R.
63- 65	loose	simple	—
65- 67	periodic	simple	P.P.
68- 69	loose	simple	—
70- 71	periodic	simple	P.P.
71- 73	loose	simple	—
74- 75	loose	complex	A.C.
76- 77	loose	simple	V.C.
	loose/periodic	simple/all	
	19/5=3.8	13/27=48%	

The New York Times

ll.	sentence arrangement	sentence type	cumulative modifier
85- 88	loose	complex	P.P., R.
89- 91	periodic	simple	P.P.
92- 97	loose	complex	R., N.C., P.P.
97- 99	loose	simple	—
101-106	periodic	complex	P.P., A.C., R.
107-110	loose	simple	—
111-116	loose	complex	R.
117-118	periodic	simple	N.C.
118-122	loose	complex	—
123-129	loose	cmpd, cmplx	R.
130-133	loose	complex	A.C.
134-137	periodic	compound	P.P.
137-139	loose	complex	A.C.
140-144	loose	complex	P.P., R.
144-148	periodic	complex	P.P., R.
149-154	loose	complex	—
154-158	periodic	cmplx, cmpd	A.C.
159-165	loose	complex	V.C.
166-169	loose	complex	—
169-173	loose	cmpd, cmplx	A.C.
176-184	periodic	complex	P.P., N.C.
185-187	loose	simple	V.C.
187-189	loose	simple	—
190-195	periodic	complex	P.P., P.P., N.C.
196-200	loose	complex	A.C.
	loose/periodic	simple/all	
	15/8=1.9	6/25=24%	

3) Classification according to cumulative modifiers

As is easily seen, the number of cumulative modifiers is much higher in *The Times* than in *Newsday*.

As a conclusion, one can safely say when comparing *Newsday* and *The New York Times*, that more devices are employed and thereby the degree of complexity is higher in *The New York Times* than in *Newsday*.

B. Preposition before dates

There is no preposition before dates in *Newsday*, while *The Times* has them.

- Newsday*: ll. 23- 24 "...won material approval Saturday"
 47- 48 "... , where negotiations fell apart Jan. 28"
 76- 77 "...was reached at Ford Feb. 13"
Times: ll. 190-195 "On Friday"
 154-155 "Since the negotiations ceased on Jan. 28"

Placing the preposition "on" in front of a date is a characteristic of formal style. In this regard, also, the style of *Newsday* is informal, as compared to *The Times*.

C. Punctuation

1) Use of quotation marks

Newsday makes use of quotation marks that are not required for normal formal expression; there is no such usage in *The Times*.

- l. 40 "three-tire", l. 49 "mandate"

The use of quotation marks in this way increases the informal, conversational tone of *Newsday* writing.

2) Use of dashes

(*Newsday*)

- l. 54 "Smith — who has predicted a return to the bargaining table within the month — says,"

(*Times*)

None of the this kind of usage

The substitution of the dash for the more conventional comma in the *Newsday* text is another example of a deviant of style from the formal.

3. Semantic level

A. Headline

(*Newsday*) "Ford Workers O.K. Concessions."

(*The Times*) "Ford Workers Accepted Concessions in New Contract..."

The word "O.K." is more straightforward and colloquial than the word "accept". *Newsday* also has a subtitle under the headline ("Pact, which improves job security but limits raises, wins overwhelming approval"), which works as a kind of summary of the whole article following; it helps a reader have some idea about the content even if he wants to skip reading the whole article. On the other hand, the lack of a subtitle in *The Times* forces one to read through the article if he wants to know the content.

B. Different treatment in the same context

The following pairs of sentences convey a very similar meaning; yet the difference in phrasing is striking:

(1) ll. 3-6 (*Newsday*)

"United Auto Workers Union members at Ford Motor Co. last night ratified by an overwhelming margin a historic contract *swapping* wage and benefit concessions for job security the union said."

ii. 83-86 (*The Times*)

"Union Workers at Ford Motor Company overwhelmingly approved a new labor contract today that for the first time in the history of the automobile industry *traded* wage and benefit concessions for assurances of increased job security."

(2) ll. 8-11 (*Newsday*)

"...the pact was approved by 73 percent of the voters, a total of 43,683 to 15,933."

ll. 90-91 (*The Times*)

"...the unofficial vote was 43,683 in favor and 15,993 opposed."

(3) ll. 44-46 (*Newsday*)

"..., while Chrysler Corp. workers last year approved concessions in the midst of the company's *brush* with bankruptcy."

ll. 144-148 (*The Times*)

"The concessions at Chrysler, however, were a condition imposed by the Federal Government in the \$1.2 billion in guaranteed loans that saved the company from bankruptcy."

(4) ll. 70-71 (*Newsday*)

"In return, *there will be no wage increases* for hourly workers for the next 31 months. *Cost-of-living allowance will be frozen* at the current \$2.03 per hour level for the next nine months. Workers will lose 26 paid personal holidays they now receive."

ll. 134-138 (*The Times*)

"Under its terms, they will *forgo their annual wage increases* and six days of paid time off and *will defer for nine months cost-of-living increases*. The deferred increases will be restored before the end of the contract."

C. Difference in lexicon

There are more colloquial expressions in *Newsday* than in *The Times*, some of which are as follows:

- l. 58 No. 1 Automaker
- l. 49 reopen (cf. resume, l. 154 *The Times*)
- l. 13 turnout
- l. 5 swap (cf. trade, *The Times*)
- l. 42 the nation's *Big Three* auto makers.

On the other hand, the choice of words of *The Times* is more formal, which can be represented by such words as "forgo" (l. 134), "defer" (l. 135), "thus" (l. 140).

Another characteristic that adds to the informality of *Newsday* writing is the large number of phrasal verbs such as:

- l. 16 take effect
- l. 17 set for
- l. 48 fell apart
- l. 52 broke off.

IV. Conclusion

Although the function of a newspaper, to report news, stays the same, their styles of language are very different. On a visual level, *Newsday* is easier for a

reader to read than *The New York Times* because of the largeness of the words and wide columns. On the grammatical level, the style of *The Times* is more complex, more formal than *Newsday*. On the semantic level, the choice of words in *The Times* is more intellectual. Which newspaper is better to read is based on the subjective preference of the reader.

It is generally true that, for a native speaker of English, *Newsday* is easier to read than *The Times*. This does not, however, necessarily hold true for those whose native language is not English. Those elements that are considered easy for native speakers, such as phrasal verbs and colloquial expressions, are not easy for non-native speakers of English. From a pedagogical point of view, therefore, when a foreign student asks his language teacher to give him an easy newspaper to read, it is not always right to give the paper which the teacher, as a native speaker, thinks easy.

References

- D. Crystal and D. Davy, *Investigating English Style*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1969.
- W. R. Winterowd, *The Contemporary Writer*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1975.