

Changes of Writing Styles in the Newspapers Editorials between a Ten-year Interval

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Abstract

Newspaper editorials play a pivotal role in educating the people and they are very important for the society. This research tries to make a linguistic analysis of newspaper editorials from THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR published in 2002 and 2012. Among the newspaper editorials in 2002 and those in 2012, the ones with same theme were chosen to study in this research. The aim of this research is to find out the changes of writing styles in the newspaper editorials across the eras. The objectives of the present research are to investigate whether target newspaper editorials contain the features of the language of newspaper editorials and to examine whether target newspaper editorials have the features marking information density. Data were analysed in terms of the six sets of features of stylistic and pragmatic phenomena on linguistic variation and changes of language of English newspaper editorial proposed by Biber (1988). The findings reveal that the newspaper editorials in 2012 have high information density, move towards non-narrative discourse and less argumentative discourse. Abstract discourse and explicit reference remain the same over the years. The number of words and the average number of words per sentence decreased in 2012 newspaper editorials. Word length and type/token ratio increased in 2012 newspaper editorials. Therefore, the findings of this research reveal that the newspaper editorials in 2012 become more attractive and the language changes to the information-based writing style and the sentences of the newspaper editorials became clearer, shorter and more compact. The writing styles of the newspaper editorials in 2012 increased explicitness and matter-of-factness. The findings of this research can be used in a broader linguistic context.

1. Introduction

An editorial is a piece of writing in a newspaper that gives the editor's opinion about some particular topic, rather than reporting facts. In British journalism, and editorial also referred to as a "leading article" or a "leader", is a newspaper article expressing the opinion of the editor or publishers of the newspaper on some topical issue. Weintraut (1994) discusses that editorials are meant to influence public opinion, promote critical thinking, and sometimes cause people to take action on an issue. In essence, an editorial is an opinionated news story.

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Today, the newspaper editorials are usually printed on an inside page, sometimes referred to as the 'leader' page. The newspaper editorials are however easily distinguishable from other pieces of writing, they not only report on current affairs but also comment on them. Therefore, newspaper editorials play one of the important roles in public. The New Light of Myanmar is a government owned newspaper published by the Ministry of Information and based in Yangon, Myanmar. The newspaper was founded in 1914, first published as a magazine before becoming a newspaper. It is the longest-running circulated newspaper in Myanmar. Originally established on 12th January 1964 as "The working People's Daily", the New Light of Myanmar is Myanmar's oldest English daily. The Working People's Daily changed its name into The New Light of Myanmar on 17th April 1993. The process of black and white printing was terminated on 17th October 2012 in Nay Pyi Taw. New version of the New Light of Myanmar came out on 18th October 2012 with full colour printing. It is a daily printed in the Berliner format (17 in x 11.5 in).

Newspaper editorials have the opinion of a writer delivered in a professional manner. The first step of writing the newspaper additional is to pick a significant topic that has a current news angle and grabs readers' attention. Newspaper editorials can give realistic solutions to the problem that goes beyond common knowledge and encourage critical thinking and pro-active reaction. Moreover, Weintraut (1994) proposes that newspaper editorial can keep to 500 words and never use the first person pronoun 'I'.

In addition, newspaper editorials take a significant role in educating the people and they are very important for the society. For this sound reason, a great deal of research on media language has been done, especially during the last few decades. Many researchers have investigated newspaper language from a general stylistic point of view. To take out a few examples, Crystal and Davy (1969), who compared two newspaper articles, one from *The Times* and the other from the *Daily Express*, O'Donnell and Todd (1980), who compound a few prominent linguistic features in the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror*, "On the Role of Computational, Statistical, Interpretive Techniques in Multi-dimensional Analysis of Register Variation" was carried out by Biber (1988), "The Language Changes in English Newspaper Editorials during the 20th Century Perspectives", a Doctoral thesis by Westin (2002). However, there has been no research on the changes of language in the newspaper editorials in our country, Myanmar.

THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR newspaper was selected as the main focus for this research. It is published in two languages: Myanmar and English. However, publication in English Language was chosen for the research because this research focused on English

Language features of newspaper editorials. The second reason for selecting THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR as material for this research is that it is the only daily newspaper which has a large readership in English version. Therefore, the present research attempts to make a linguistic analysis of newspaper editorials from THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR published in 2002 and 2012. Among the newspaper editorials in 2002 and 2012, the ones of the same theme were chosen to do the comparative research. The aim of this research is to find out the changes of writing styles in the newspaper editorials between ten years interval.

The objectives of the present research are:

- (i) to investigate whether the target newspaper editorials contain the features of the language of newspaper editorials
- (ii) to examine which feature is the most significant change in target newspaper editorials.

This is a pair of comparative newspaper editorials in 2002 and 2012 used in carrying out the research. The analysis was done in terms of the six sets of features of stylistic and pragmatic phenomena on linguistic variation and changes of language of English newspaper editorial propound by Biber (1988). They are personal involvement, information density, narrative discourse, argumentative discourse, abstract discourse and explicit reference.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Background

Westin (2001) from Uppsala University defined sets of features concerned with the English Newspaper Editorials from 20th century newspaper editorials. Westin (2001) mentioned six sets of features of stylistic and pragmatic phenomena in her investigation on linguistic variation and changes of language of English newspaper editorials. The scholar did the research about the changes of newspaper editorials writing styles between ten-year intervals. To find out the language of newspaper editorials, the features proposed by Biber (1988) are employed.

Westin (2001) selected 46 of Biber's features and used his communicative-functional clusters. They are

- (1) Features marking personal involvement (PI), 17 features
- (2) Features marking information density (ID), 8 features
- (3) Features marking narrative discourse (ND), 6 features
- (4) Features marking argumentative discourse (AD), 5 features

- (5) Features marking abstract discourse (AbD), 6 features
- (6) Features marking explicit reference (E R), 4 features

The following is the detailed information of the features associated with newspaper editorials by Westin (2001).

1. Features marking personal involvement

The features that indicate in personal involvement have 17 features, namely

- (1) present tense verbs
- (2) not-negation
- (3) questions
- (4) imperative
- (5) contractions
- (6) adverbial amplifiers
- (7) private verbs
- (8) first person pronouns
- (9) pronoun 'it'
- (10) demonstrative pronouns
- (11) possibility modals
- (12) second person pronouns
- (13) indefinite pronouns
- (14) causative subordination
- (15) discourse particles
- (16) general emphatics
- (17) general hedges

2. Features marking information density

There are 8 features linked with information density. They are

- (1) nouns
- (2) attributive adjectives
- (3) prepositional phrases
- (4) present participle WHIZ - deletion
- (5) word length
- (6) sentence length: average number of words per sent
- (7) type / token ratio
- (8) subordination

3. Features marking narrative discourse

The development of features associated with narrative discourse consist 6 features, namely

- (1) past tense verbs
- (2) no-negation
- (3) 'detached' present participle clauses
- (4) perfect aspect verbs
- (5) public verbs
- (6) third person pronouns

4. Features marking argumentative discourse

Westin (2001) found 5 features of argumentative discourse. They are

- (1) infinitives
- (2) conditional subordinators
- (3) suasive verbs
- (4) predictive modals
- (5) necessity modals

5. Features marking abstract discourse

Abstract discourse means a short written statement containing only the most important ideas in an editorial. Abstract discourse has 6 features, namely

- (1) agentless passives
- (2) by-passives
- (3) 'detached' past participle clauses
- (4) past participle WHIZ-deletion
- (5) conjunctions
- (6) subordinators with multiple functions

6. Features marking explicit reference

There are 4 features linked with explicit reference. They are

- (1) relative wh-clauses
- (2) pied piping relative clauses
- (3) relative that - clauses
- (4) nominalizations

3. Research Methodology

This research is an attempt to find out the changes of writing style of the newspaper editorials in THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR between 2002 and 2012 newspaper editorials. In

this research, six sets of features of the newspaper editorials proposed by Biber (1988) and 46 features of language of newspaper editorials selected by Westin (2002) were used.

3.1. Data Collection

As reported above, data source of the present research is THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR (English version) published in 2002 and 2012. Firstly, newspaper editorials in English are gathered from the newspaper published in 2002 and 2012. Then, the collected newspaper editorials were chosen according to the same theme of the information to find out the changes of writing style in the editorials.

Table 1 and 2 show the issue date and the name of the newspaper editorial in 2002 and 2012 in order to find out the language of writing style of the newspaper editorials.

Table 1. The issue dates and the titles of newspaper editorials in 2002

Sr No.	Issue Date	The title of the newspaper editorial
1.	13 February, 2002	From objectives to reality
2.	4 January, 2002	Freedom is not licence
3.	25 May, 2002	Traditional medicine enters new era
4.	16 April, 2002	Merit-making and sharing at Thingyan
5.	2 February, 2002	Pot of gold

Table 2. The issue dates and the titles of newspaper editorials in 2012

Sr No.	Issue Date	The title of the newspaper editorial
1.	12 February, 2012	Our Union! Our family
2.	4 January, 2012	Ardently safeguard our own nation
3.	2 March, 2012	Promote traditional medicine
4.	12 April, 2012	Happy Myanmar New Year!
5.	1 May, 2012	Education for all

According to Table 1 and Table 2, there are 5 pairs of newspaper editorials published in 2002 and 2012. After these steps, the findings of the newspaper editorials were compared and analysed. Finally, data interpretation was undertaken.

3.2. Data Interpretation

Based on the findings of the analysis, the present research tries to find out the changes of writing style between the newspaper editorials in the ten-year interval. According to the comparative study of editorials, the changes of the features of editorials are shown below.

Table (3) : The use of features in 2002 and 2012 newspaper editorials

Sr No	Feature	Pair 1		Pair 2		Pair 3		Pair 4		Pair 5		Average	
		2002	2012	2002	2012	2002	2012	2002	2012	2002	2012	2002	2012
1	PI	8.8%	9.2%	16.9%	7.6%	6.8%	10.8%	14%	18.7%	11.8%	9.3 %	14%	13%
2	ID	50.4%	55.3%	40.1%	54.6%	56.2%	57.4%	48%	51%	52.8%	45.7%	59%	64%
3	ND	9.6%	4.4 %	6.1 %	4.2 %	5.4 %	2.3 %	4%	2.4 %	4.2 %	5.9 %	7%	5%
4	AD	4.2%	0.9 %	5.4 %	3%	1.7 %	4.2 %	1.3 %	2 %	3.7 %	3.2 %	4%	3%
5	AbD	7.2%	5.7 %	4.7 %	2.5 %	5.7 %	5.6 %	9.7 %	3.6 %	4.2 %	10.4%	8%	7%
6	ER	9.2 %	9.2 %	6.4 %	3.8 %	7.3 %	4.8 %	6.3 %	3.2 %	10.6%	10.7%	9%	8%
	Total	89.8%	84.7%	79.6%	75.7%	83.1%	85.1%	83.3%	80.9%	87.2%	85.2%		

When the use of features in 2002 and 2012 newspaper editorials are compared, the use of only one set of feature, information density, increased from 59% to 64%. The other five features decreased in use in the ten-year interval. The features in abstract discourse in the compared newspaper editorials are 8% and 7%. Moreover, in explicit reference, the percentage is 9% and 8%. Among the six sets of features, abstract discourse and explicit reference are nearly 10% in average in the ten-year interval. Therefore, the features of abstract discourse and explicit reference are nearly the same over the years. According to the total percentage of all features, there is only one pair that increased in use. Among the five pairs of newspaper editorials, the increase of total percentage occurs in Pair 3, from 83.1% to 85.1%.

Figure 1. shows the use of features in 2002 newspaper editorials

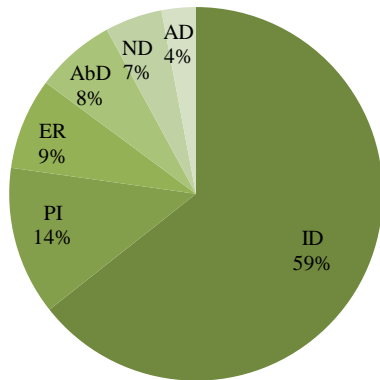
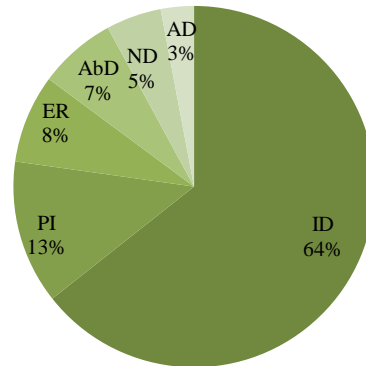


Figure 2 . shows the use of features in 2012 newspaper editorials



- ID = information density
- PI = personal involvement
- ER = explicit reference
- AbD = abstract discourse
- ND = narrative discourse
- AD = argumentative discourse

As can be seen in Figure 1, among the six sets of features of newspaper editorials, the maximum figure was seen in information density. It is clear that the newspaper editorials focus to give the information to the public. The minimum figure was seen in argumentative discourse. Therefore, the language of the newspaper editorials intend to give information and then, narrative and argumentative discourse are found least in the newspaper editorials.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the language of the newspaper editorials developed towards greater information density. Apart from the information density, the use of other features decreased. The newspaper editorials in 2012 have more information density and less personal involvement, narrative discourse and argumentative discourse than the newspaper editorials in 2002. The use of the features of explicit reference and abstract discourse remained the same over the years.

To sum up, the newspaper editorials in 2012 increased in information density and decreased in personal involvement, narrative and argumentative discourse.

4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter reflects the changes of writing styles in the newspaper editorials between ten years interval can be seen. When the features are compared across the newspapers analysed, a clear distinction is noticed between 2002 and 2012 newspaper editorials. The information density is the highest in 2012 newspaper editorials.

It is clear that the features of personal involvement, narrative discourse and argumentative discourse decreased between ten years interval. The newspaper editorials did not only report on current affairs but also commented on them. Editorials intend to give information, influence the readers' attitude, promote critical thinking and contact with the public. Thus, abstract discourse and explicit reference remain the same over the years. Although the number of sentences is different, the number of words and average number of words per sentence decreased in 2012 newspaper editorials.

The use of present tense to illustrate 'personal involvement' increased in 2012 newspaper editorials. The editorials usually deal with topics of "immediate relevance", and therefore, present tense forms can appear with some frequency. The increased of present tense verbs suggests an increased interest in topics of current relevance.

The most commonly used measures of lexical specificity and diversity are word length and type/ token ratio. Since word length in 2012 newspaper editorials has increased, it can be assumed that the vocabulary of the newspaper editorials became more varied and specific across the eras. The increased use of word length and type/token ratio marked high information density and flagged a varied vocabulary and precise lexical choice. The language of the newspaper editorials developed towards greater information density, lexical specificity and diversity.

The reduced use of private verbs means increased explicitness and matter-of-factness. The decrease in the use of first person pronouns is, most likely, due to subject - matter. The sentences of the newspaper editorials are clearer, shorter and more compact. The newspaper editorials in 2012 are succinct in writing styles.

The most important marker of narrative discourse, that is, past tense verbs, decreased in use. Another decreased use of public verbs and third person pronouns reveals the changes of writing style moving towards the non-narrative discourse. The decreased use of narrative discourse confirmed that the language of the newspaper editorials become less narrative during 10 years.

The newspaper editorials in 2012 have most important ideas because of the features of high information density. The newspaper editorials in 2012 are more endowed

with the characteristics of a good newspaper editorial. The results of the comparison of features between 2002 and 2012 newspaper editorials show that the writing styles of the newspaper editorials indicate increased interest in topics of current relevance and increased explicitness and matter-of-factness.

In order to get the sound reason for the changes of writing style in the ten-year interval, the interview with the Director General of '*Mandalay Daily*' /*Mandalay Nae*' *Zin*/ newspaper, Ministry of Information was done on March 8, 2018. According to the findings from that interview, the political changes and policies have an impact on the writing styles of the newspaper editorial because the New Light of Myanmar newspaper is the representative of the government of Myanmar. At the former time, the New Light of Myanmar is often viewed as propaganda on part of the Tatmadaw and the government, and features many articles about military officials. The majority of domestic news articles comes from the state-run Myanmar News Agency (MNA), whilst most international articles come from news services, particularly Reuters, which are published after censorship by MNA.

After 2011, in spite of having freedom of the press, certain information is still under control according to the government's instruction. Every publication including articles, cartoons and illustrations is undergone through the censorship by the Ministry of Information. Therefore, this state-run newspaper is on limiting press freedom, in other words, the reforms of the writing styles are slightly changed until now.

In earlier times, the name-calling words and extract of the leader's speech are compulsorily expressed by the instructions of the Ministry of Information. After 2012, the newspaper editorials have more information density, less narrative and argumentative discourse. According to 2016 work shop on "The Freedom of Press", the New Light of Myanmar, with relative freedom, has a prior claim to people-oriented message rather than the policy of the government. After lifting the censorship, the writing styles of the newspaper editorials become flexible with the public interest and are distributed on a daily basis. It is supposed that the writing styles will mainly focus on people's voice.

According to the changing situation of the country, the newspaper editorial needs to change from the old style to more attractive and people-oriented one. To meet this end, plans have been made to put the paper under joint venture with the Global Direct Link Co. Ltd, with the support of Kyodo News Agency of Japan. Now, the paper is changed and its works are in full swing. The newspapers are being transformed into public service newspaper. As they would take the public-centered approach, they could not defy the

desires of the people. The policies of the government will be made public in more attractive style of writing in order to transform newspaper into Public Service Media. Therefore, the language of the newspaper editorial will not only move towards the information based writing style but also give the people-oriented message. After reading the transformed newspaper editorials, the readers feel enlightened, empowered and helped in forming their own opinion on an issue.

5. Conclusion

This research tries to present the features of writing styles in the newspaper editorials. The aim of this research is to find out the changes of writing styles in the newspaper editorials published in 2002 and 2012 across the ten-year interval.

The most significant change is information density. The newspaper editorials in 2012 have higher information density and most important ideas. The newspaper editorials in 2012 are more lively and more suited with the people-oriented one. In order to transform newspaper into Public Service Media, it is very essential to change the writing styles of the newspaper editorial. A good newspaper editorial should express an opinion without being opinionated. It should teach without being pedagogic. It should transform without being evangelical. It should engulf without drowning. It should motivate to action without making the readers dictatorial. It should enlighten without getting the readers dogmatic, prejudiced and egotistical. The last, and probably most important, a good editorial should be brief. After lifting the censorship, the later newspaper editorials slightly change until now in order to hold the criteria of good newspaper editorial.

To wind up, changes of writing styles in newspaper editorials are found out when the features of newspaper editorials in the ten-year interval are compared. The most distinctive change is the higher information density in 2012 newspaper editorials. The titles of the newspaper editorials gradually change towards the current issue that everyone is interested in the editorials. The newspaper editorials will engage more to the readers' attention, encourage critical thinkings and pro-active reaction. The newspaper editorials become the effective matter in which the readers are held by the message and retain their interest right till the end.

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