

Investigating English Newspapers Headlines Grammatical Features versus Conventional Grammar

Kirya Ahmed Mohammed Nas
Open University of the Sudan (OUS)

Abstract

This study aims at investigating the grammatical features of the language of the press i.e. of newspapers headlines against conventional grammar; it also aims at hinting readers with grammatical illustration about how tenses are formulated in Newspapers Headlines, and this will be done through making comparison between the constructions of tenses in headlines versus the conventional ones. The samples used in this study were collected from the daily newspapers of “Sudan Vision and Sudan Tribune (Electric Version). The researcher used the qualitative comparative method in order to find out answers for the questions of the study. The study found out that the successful circulation of the newspapers depends on attractive and economical headlines that oblige and provoke passers – by into becoming readers and more further buying the target newspaper itself. The study came up of this finding: Headlines of English Newspapers are written in a way that differs from the conventional norm, particularly on the level of tenses structure that causes ambiguity and uncertainty to readers. The study recommends readers to focus on the event of what headline is about, and skip the way that it has been formulated and get the conventional formulation by reading details below the target headline where texts are written in an ordinary language.

Keywords: replica = very good, exact copy of something
Ellipsis = leaving out words
Headline _ the title of an article

Article= a topic in a newspaper

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي السمات النحوية لعناوين الصحف في اللغة الإنجليزية مقارنة مع القواعد النحوية المتعارف عليها، كما أنها تهدف إلى مد القراء بإيضاح نحوي عن الكيفية التي تصاغ بها الأفعال في عناوين الصحف باللغة الإنجليزية، ويتم ذلك عبر إجراء مقارنة بين صياغة الأفعال في عناوين الصحف والصياغة المتعارف عليها. جمعت العينة المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة من صحيفتي (سودان فشن و سودان تريبون الإلكترونية). استخدم الباحث المنهج المقارن النوعي من أجل التوصل إلى إجابات لأسئلة البحث. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن التوزيع الناجح لهذه الصحف يعتمد على العناوين الجذابة والموجزة والتي تدفع المارة ليصبحوا قراء، بل إلى أن يصيروا مشترين للصحيفة نفسها من أجل قراءتها بتمعن. هذه العناوين تكتب بطريقة مغايرة عن الطريقة المعتادة، خاصة على مستوى تراكيب السياقات الزمنية للأفعال، وهذا يجعلها تشكل غموض وحيرة للقراء. توصي هذه الدراسة القراء بالتركيز على الحدث الذي يصده العنوان وتخطي الطريقة التي تمت صياغته بها والحصول على الصياغة المعتادة بقراءة التفاصيل أدناه حيث تكتب النصوص باللغة المتعارف عليها.

1. INTRODUCTION

The language of the press that is to say, the language of newspapers is a unique varieties of the varieties of language, its uniqueness is considerably noticed in the way it hunts its reader into buying them to decipher the vagueness that they fold within their pages, particularly that is clearly seen in the main sheet headlines. In fact, the headlines are usually chosen in rhythmic wording that appear very economically, this is due to noticeable omission of

some functional words. This international deletion turns it a form of telegraphic language; it appears at first sight very ambiguous and uncertain.

A main sheet title like “**TWO MEN KILL**”, couldn’t be deciphered easily, unless you go between the lines or the text, when you go reading the text of the article, you come across a well-structured type of language, that is straight forward, i.e. is clear both in meaning and structure, since it turns inside the text into a good stringing of grammatical order, with that correct tense, and above all the presence of all the functional items of language that intentionally missed in the headlines of the paper.

The violation of English grammar in newspapers headlines is a newly invented method run in especially by all newspapers worldwide as a fine art of delivering news.

It’s intriguing and distinctive style aims to attract the viewer and transforms him from viewer into a reader by violating some grammatical rules of English language which deliberately omitted from the original text for the sake of intriguing the viewer.

There is no use of auxiliaries in newspapers headlines and the only use is every day English besides the present tense in delivering the news. A lot of evaluation takes place in the history of headlines after the Second World War as a result of the literacy techniques and qualities of the writers to maximize the number of the sold copies after a broad recession in Europe.

“The large type front page headline did not come into use until the 19th century when increased competition between newspapers led to the use of attention-getting headlines”.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Headlines

A headline is a unique type of text usually at the top of a newspaper article. The function of headlining is very complex; as Crystal and Davy maintain, (1969) headlines are clear, brief and of possible captivating message to encourage interest in the potential and avid reader. Headlines offer chance to the reader to choose. Readers select what they want or do not want to read and headlines help them with this decision by their ability to catch the reader's attention.

Headlines are the titles that appear over news articles. Van Dijk, (1988:53) believes that a headline expresses the major topic of the text. It summarizes the whole report. To Bird and Merwin (1955:177) the headline conveys the highlights in short, easily understood words. It is miniature replica of the story. Headlines writers seek to influence readers. Cotter (2010:26) states that "headlines are short maximally informative and font size or typefaces semiotic stand-in for importance.

The impact that headlines achieve through linguistics, makes them memorable (Develotte and Rechniewsik, 2001:2). Helliday (1985:372) refers to headlines as "title texts and since they have to convey more through few words due to limited space, they have their own grammar. This special language is called "block language". It is defined by Mathews (2007:42) as the form of abbreviate structures used in newspaper headlines, in cables, in notice, on labels of products and so on.

Headlines are the most important elements in a newspaper since they inform the reader of what the article is about or as Dor (2003:718) explains that headlines are often scanned by most readers without reading the articles.

Headlines perform four basic functions (Mallette, 1990:80, cited in Bedrichova, 2006:14). These functions are:

- To summarize the news

- To grade the importance of stories
- To act as clear elements in the design of a page
- To persuade the looker into becoming a reader

2.2. Grammar in Headlines

A special language is used in newspapers can be distinguished and this is the most obvious with the headlines. They are the first and often the only things which many readers are interested in.

A newspaper page has restricted space and headline writers are limited by the layout of the page. Grammar and its structures can help headline writers a lot and they often have to break many grammatical rules and use non-standard structures to produce a successful headline. A newspaper headline is a very short summary of a news report. It normally appears in large letters above the report. The grammar of headlines is often non-standard and they can be difficult to read. The main features of the grammar of headlines are the use of a series of nouns and use of ellipsis (leaving out words which are not necessary). We often leave out articles (a, an, the) and verbs (especially the verb to be).

Headlines often use the present simple, even where the report refers to the past event. This is done to make the news seem more dramatic and immediate.

2.3 Review of Related Studies

Study One:

Salih, (2012), has tackled: Linguistic features of newspaper Headlines: this study aims at investigating the linguistic features of headlines. It is an attempt to shed light on the morphology, semantic, and syntax of headlines and to find out the differences between the language of headlines and the ordinary one. The study postulates that the language of newspapers headlines deviates much

from the ordinary language in terms of vocabulary and structure. The hypothesis of the study is verified.

Study Two:

BagasTirangga (2014), conducted a study entitled: Lexical and Grammatical Ambiguity of Newspapers Headlines of the Jakarta Post and New York Times: This study is aimed at investigating lexical and grammatical ambiguities that occur in the news headlines of the Jakarta Post and New York Times, and analyzing the possible meaning of those ambiguous headlines.

The researcher used the descriptive qualitative method to find out the types of ambiguity and the possible meanings that occur. The data of this research are the news headlines which are taken from two different news provider websites; the Jakarta Post and New York Times were published in March, 2014. The result showed there are 30 ambiguous headlines, in which mostly produced by the Jakarta Post (18 headlines) consisting of (11) lexical ambiguities, and (7) grammatical ambiguities, while in New York Times, there are (12) ambiguous headlines consisting of (10) lexical ambiguities and (2) grammatical ambiguities. The Jakarta Post produced more grammatically ambiguous headlines compared with New York Times.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is comparative and analytical. Headlines language as a variety will be compared with conventional grammatical rules; a questionnaire is also used to reflect on the phenomenon of grammatical violation. Therefore qualitative research necessarily includes a longitudinal element as the subjects of the study are studies over a period of time and the emphasis is on the process of how things happen and change.

3.1 Sample of the Study

Fifteen headlines tensed of Sudan Vision and Sudan Tribune are taken in to this study for investigation and analysis.

3.2 Instrument and procedures for data collection:

Required data for this study are collected randomly from Sudan Vision and Sudan Tribune , besides a questionnaire. Data concern Sudan Vision is collected through direct tangible paper versions and electronic version. Sudan Tribune is only electronic via the Internet.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of headlines tensed will be done through making comparison between the headlines tensed odd structures (phenomenon) and ordinary grammar.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

-Results related to the first hypothesis:

4.1 Historical Present:

The present simple is used to talk about things in general. It is used to say that something happens all the time or repeatedly, or that something is true in general. Murphy (2004). But it is not the same in newspaper headlines where events that happened in the Past are written in present form; this keeps headlines fresh, attractive and gives Newspapers Headlines its language variety.

Down here there are samples of historic headlines with details:

4.2 Headlines

- President Affirms Aila Will Remain Governor of Gezira State
- Details: President Omer Al Bashir has affirmed that the governor of Gezira State Mohammed Tahir Aila will remain in the post of Governor of Gezira State.

Sudan Vision. Vol. 14 Issue

No. 4025

Law Provides Protection to Complaint: Grievances Chamber Chief.

Details: Head of the Public Grievances Chamber, Ahmed Abu Zaid revealed guarantees and protection provided by the chamber law to complainant.

Sudan Vision. Vol. 14 Issue

No. 38889

Ban Names Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria as New Deputy Special Representative for Liberia.

Details: United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon today announced the appointment of Yacoub El-Hillo of Sudan as his deputy special Representative in the UN Mission in Liberia.

Sudan Vision Vd. 14

Issue No. 3891

Ministry of Guidance and Endowments and UNDP sign MOV on Preventing Extremism.

Details: Ministry of Guidance and endowments and UNDP signed yesterday a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) to joint efforts in preventing violent extremism.

udan Vision Vol. 14

Issue No. 3903

Abu Mazin Arrives in Khartoum on Three-Day Official Visit

Details: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abass has arrived Khartoum Tuesday on an official three-day visit.

Sudan Vision Vol. 14

Issue No. 3903

Sudan Says Hosting More Than 400,000 South Sudanese Refugees.

Details: September 21, 2016 (Khartoum) – Sudan’s State Ministry of Interior Babiker Digna on Wednesday has said that his country is hosting more than 400,000 South Sudanese Refugees.

Sudan Tribune

Sudan’s FM arrives in New York for UNGA meeting.

Details: September 20, 2016 (Khartoum) Sudan’s foreign minister Ibrahim Gandour on Tuesday has arrived in New York to participate in the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on behalf of the Sudanese president.

Sudan Mourns Musical Legend Mohammed Wardi.

Details: February 19, 2012 (Khartoum) tens of thousands of Sudanese citizens including president Omer Al-Bashir attended the burial ceremony of iconic singer Mohammed Wardi who passed away on Saturday night.

Sudan Tribune

Sudan Defends Decision to Form University Police Force

Details: August 31, 2016 (Khartoum) Sudan higher education Minister Sumaya Abu-kashoa, defended on Wednesday a decision to establish a special police department to protect the Universities and their campuses.

Table One: This shows how historic present is used to express past events

Headlines Tenses	Conventional Tenses
President <u>affirms</u> Aila will Remain Governor of Gezira State.	President Omer Al-Bashir has <u>affirmed</u> that the governor of Gezira State Mohammed Tahir Aila will remain in the post of Governor of Gezira State.
Law <u>Provides</u> protection to Complainant: Grievances Chamber Chief.	Head of the public Grievances chamber, Ahmed Abu Zaid revealed guarantees and protection <u>provided</u> by the chamber law to complainant.

Ban <u>Names</u> Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria as New Deputy Special Representative for Liberia.	United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon today <u>announced</u> the appointment of Yacoub El-Hillo of Sudan as his Deputy Special Representative in the UN Mission in Liberia.
Ministry of Guidance and Endowments and UNDP <u>sign</u> MOU on Preventing Extremism.	Ministry of Guidance and Endowments and UNDP <u>signed</u> <u>Yesterday</u> a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) to joint efforts in preventing violent extremism.
Abu Mazar <u>arrives</u> in Khartoum on Three-Day Official Visit.	Palestinian president Mohammed Abass has <u>arrived</u> Khartoum yesterday on an official three- day visit.
Sudan <u>says</u> Hosting More than 400,000 South Sudan Refugees.	Sudan's State Minister of Interior Babiker Digna on Wednesday <u>has said</u> that his country is hosting more than 400,000 South Sudanese refugees.
Sudan's FM <u>Arrives</u> in New York for UNGA meeting.	Sudan's foreign Minister Ibrahim Gandour on Tuesday <u>has arrived</u> in New York to participate in the 71th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on behalf of the Sudanese President.
Sudan <u>Mourns</u> Musical legend Mohammed Wardi.	Tens of Thousands of Sudanese Citizens including president Omer Al-Bashir <u>attended</u> the burial ceremony of iconic Singer Mohammed Wardi who passed away on Saturday night.
Sudan <u>Defends</u> Decision to Form Universities Police Force.	Sudan's higher education Minister Sumaya Abu-kashoa, <u>defended</u> on Wednesday a decision to establish a special police department to protect the universities and their campuses.

Results related to the second hypothesis

4.3 Future Tenses in Headlines

‘Will’ is omitted in Newspapers Headlines as a matter of limited space or presenting headline in striking way, which might cause ambiguity for the reader. We use I’ll (I will) when we decide to do something example:

Oh, I’ve left the door open. I’ll go and shut it.

But headlines tenses use to instead of will as a matter of keeping space, that’s for the limited space on the top of the front page.

4.4 Headlines

* Ghandour to Partake at Fourth Arab-European Union Meeting at Premises of the Arab League in Cairo.

Sudan Vision. Hits: 261

Legislature to Endorse Constitution Amendments by Majority: Official.

Details: Khartoum (SMC) National Dialogue Coordinative Mechanism, Abboud Jabir expected that the national legislative will endorse the constitutional amendments by more than 95% of the votes.

Sudan Vision. Hits: 1724

Sudan’s Central Bank, U.S. treasury and banks to meet in London: Official.

Details: December 14, 2016 (Khartoum) Central Bank of the Sudan (CBOS), the office of foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Treasury Department and international banks will meet in London.

Sudan Tribune

Libyan Prime Minister to Visit Sudan Soon.

Details: September 21, 2016 (Khartoum) prime minister of the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) Fayz Al-Sarraj will visit Khartoum within the next few days, said foreign minister.

Sudan Tribune

New Sudanese satellite TV channel to start Next Month.

Details: September 24, 2007 (Dubai) – A new Sudanese satellite channel will be launched next month from Dubai Media City.

Sudan Tribune

South Sudan President to Address Legislatures of Transitional Parliament.

Details: August 11, 2016 (Juba) – South Sudanese president, Silva Kir, will on Monday next week address a transitional parliament.

Sudan Tribune

Table Two: This table shows how the word to substitutes will in future.

Headlines Tenses	Conventional Tenses
Ghandour <u>to</u> Partake at Fourth Arab-European meeting in Cairo.	Foreign Minister, Professor Ibrahim Ghandour <u>will</u> participate at the fourth Arab European Union Meeting.
Legislature <u>to</u> Endorse Constitution Amendments by Majority: Official.	National Dialogue Cooperative Mechanism, Abboud Jabir expected that the national legislature <u>will</u> endorse the constitutional amendments by more than 95% of the votes.
Sudan's Central Bank, U.S. treasury and Banks <u>to</u> Meet in London: Official.	Central Bank of the Sudan (CBoS), the office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Treasury Department and International banks <u>will</u> meet in London.
Libyan Prime Minister <u>to</u> visit Sudan Soon.	Prime Minister of the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) Fayz Al-Sarraj <u>will</u> visit

	Khartoum within the next few days.
New Sudanese Satellite TV Channel <u>to</u> start Next Month.	A new Sudanese Satellite Channel <u>will</u> be launched next month from Dubai Media City.
South Sudan President <u>to</u> address Legislatures of Transitional Parliament.	South Sudanese President, Silva Kir, <u>will</u> on Monday next week address a transitional parliament.

4.5 Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are not necessary to handling the general meaning. This makes some headlines appear to be in the past tense, when actually the headlines use past participles not the past simple.

4.6 Headlines

115 Killed in Sudanese Plane Crash, Childonly Survivor: Official.

Details: Khartoum, July 8- A total of 115 people were killed when a Sudanese airline crashed in eastern Sudan Tuesday after reporting technical problem, leaving a two-year old boy as the sould survivor.

Sudan Tribune

Sudanese Francis Deng named to UN-genocide Prevention Post.

Details: Wednesday 29, 2007 (United Nations) – UN Secretary – General Ban Ki-moon has appointed today the former Sudanese diplomat Francis Deng as a new special advisor for the prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, succeeding Juan Mendez.

Sudan Tribune

Annual meeting of African academies held in Ethiopia Thursday 14, November 2013.

By TesfaAlemTekle, Novemeber 13, 2013 (ADDIS ABABA)- the ninth annual meeting of the African science Academies (AMASA) was conducted on Wednesday in the Ethiopian Capital, Adis Ababa.

Sudan Tribune

SPLA Minister Killed in Plane Crashed in South Sudan.

Details: Friday 2, May 2008 (Khartoum) – Sudan people’s Liberation Army (SPLA) Affairs Minister Dominic Dim Deng and other 19 Military officials have been killed as result of a plane crash between Wau and Juba the Sudan Television reported today.

Sudan Tribune

Nine killed in dog attacks in Lakes State’s Rumbek, Thursday 25, September2014.

September 24, 2014 (RUMBEK) – At least nine people have died in Lakes State’s Rumbek central country after being bitten by stray dogs.

Sudan Tribune

30 teachers arrested in Jongli State over strike.

Friday 2, December 2016

December 01, 2016 (JUBA) – 30 teachers have been arrested after they protested over delayed wages in South Sudan’s Jonglei State

Sudan Tribune

Al Jazera English: South Sudan facing food crisis, 30 April 2012.

Details: South Sudan is facing food crisis

Tale three: This table shows how auxiliaries are dropped in headlines

Headlines Tenses	Conventional Tenses
------------------	---------------------

115 <u>killed</u> in Sudanese plane crash, child only survivor: Official.	A total of 115 people <u>were killed</u> when a Sudanese airliner crashed in eastern Sudan Tuesday after reporting technical problem, leaving a two-year old boy as the soul survivor.
Sudanese Francis Deng <u>Named</u> to UN genocide prevention post.	Un secretary – General Ban Ki-moon <u>has appointed</u> today the former Sudanese diplomat Francis Deng as the new special Adviser for the prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities succeeding Juan Mender.
Annual meeting of African academies <u>held</u> in Ethiopia.	The ninth annual meeting of the African Science Academies (AMASA) <u>was conducted</u> on Wednesday in Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.
SPLA minster <u>killed</u> in plane crash in South Sudan.	Sudan people's Liberation Army (SPLA) Affairs Minister Dominic Dim Deng and other 19 military official <u>have been killed</u> as result of a plane crash between Wau and Juba, the Sudan Television reported today.
Nine <u>Killed</u> in dog attacks in Lakes State's Rumbek.	At least nine people <u>have died</u> in lakes State's Rumbek central country after being bitten by stray dogs.
30 teachers <u>arrested</u> in Jonglei state over strike.	30 teachers <u>have been arrested</u> after they protested over delayed wages in South Sudan's Jonglei state.

Al Jazera English: South Sudan <u>facing</u> food crisis. 30 April 2012.	South Sudan <u>is facing</u> food crisis.
--	---

Question one:

Table (1): The phenomenon of violation of FL grammar used in newspapers headlines is

Unchangeable.

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	30	100 %
Undecided	0	0 %
Disagree	0	0 %
Total	30	100 %

The table above and figures illustrates the percentage of the respondents to the phenomenon of the violation of English grammar in headlines as follows: (100%) scores agree, (0%) scores undecided, (0%) scores disagree.

FIG (1) The phenomenon of violation of EF grammar used in newspapers headlines is unchangeable

5. CONCLUSION

The study found out, from both the comparative approach and the tabulated data resulted from the questionnaire respondents, that the headlines are different from the ordinary tenses that readers learn in English language classes, hence readers encounter problems. These problems are categories as:

5.1 STRUCTURAL AMBIGUITY

Grammar rules are breached to fit news headlines target (attraction, excitement, influence and comply with the squeezed limited blank at the top of the paper). Historical present simple is dominant in headlines tenses, even in past events as a matter of keeping events fresh, where such use for structure is not allowed in ordinary language. Auxiliaries are not used in headlines tenses that is because headlines editing policy is geared to present short influent headline suit the limited blank at the top of front page. In future tense 'to' is used instead of 'will' this variety is considered as a news headlines register.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends that readers should read headlines with details to overcome difficulties associated with abbreviation and tenses. Readers should not adhere their language study only on school and high education books, they should elaborate their experience into media field to have new variety. The researcher then suggested a further study should be carried out on:

Reasons behind news headlines of tenses.

REFERENCES

Bed Richove, L. (2006), Headlines and sub-Headlines in Newspaper Reporting, MA thesis Masaryk University.

Bird, G. and Merwin, F(1955), The Press and Society. New York: Prentice – Hall, Inc.

Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S. (1982), Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods: Boston: Allyn and Baco.

Bouma, G. and Atkinson, G. (1995), A Handbook of Science Social Research – 2nd London: Oxford University Press.

Cater, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006), Cambridge Grammar of English. A Comprehensive Guide to Spoken and Written Grammar and Usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chin, Andy Chi-on and Benjamin (1997), Subject Ellipsis in Chinese News Headlines. Hon Kong: University of Hong Kong Press.

Cotter, Collen (2010), News Talk: Investigating the Language of Journalism. Cambridge University Press.

Devekitte, C. and Rechniewski, E. (2001), Discourse Analysis of Newspapers Headlines. [Http:// wifms.Nl. Ac. Uk/titles.htm](http://wifms.Nl.Ac.Uk/titles.htm).

Dor, D.(2003), On Newspaper Headlines as Relevance optimizers: Journal of Pragmatics. 33, pp 695-721.

Fairclough, N. (1989), Language and Power. London and New York: Longman.

Halliday, M. (1985), An Introduction to Functional Grammar. London: Edward Arnold.

Hameed, H. (2008), Tenses in News Headlines, Diyala University, volume. 30, 2008.

Hudson, G. (2000), Essential Introductory Linguistics. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc.

Kent, U. (2006), English Verb Tenses. An Informal but Extensive References for ESL Students, the Good Folks who them the Idly Curious, and the Linguistically Perplex.

Manfred, G. (1999), English in Nineteen Century, England: Cambridge University Press.

Mathews, P. (2007), **Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nunan, D. (1992), **Research Method in Language Learning**. Cambridge University Press.

Raymond, M. (2004), **English Grammar in Use**: Cambridge University Press.

Salih, Y. (2012), Linguistics Features of Newspaper Headlines: Journal of Al-Anbar University for Language and Literature, Issue 7, 2012.

Shun, Tang (1995), **A New Approach to English Tense**, Hong Kong: n.p.
Davy, David, and Derk Crystal. 1969. **Investigating English Style**, First ed. London: Longmans, Green and Co.

Tirangga, B. (2014), **Lexical and Grammatical Ambiguities of the News Headlines of the Jakarta Post and New York Times**: Faculty of Humanities, Dian Nuswantoro University: Semarang.

Van Dijk, Teun, A. (1988), **News as Discourse Dictionary of Linguistic**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.