

# A Critical Discourse Analysis of Newsworthiness in English and Urdu Newspaper Headlines In Pakistan

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## Abstract

This research is a comparative study of Newsworthiness (importance of news items) in English and Urdu newspapers. This research is a qualitative study that explores the impact of the placement of news items in the newspapers. The data has been collected from three Urdu and their counterpart English newspapers from the same groups. The placement of same news items in different newspapers will help to know about the policies and ideologies of newspapers. The research investigates how the readership influences the newsworthiness of news items. The language of the news items is studied to discover the relation between the placement and the language used in the same news items inter and intra newspaper groups. The results are not only interpreted on the basis of frequencies of news but also on the basis of lexical choices made by newspaper editors through qualitative method of research.

**Keywords:** CDA, Newspaper, Headlines, Newsworthiness

## Introduction

News is defined as something new, surprising, unexpected, counterintuitive, first, biggest, or that raises new issues or problems. But what makes something 'newsworthy'? Tuchman (1976) referred to the news as "a constructed reality" (p. 97), while Cohen and Young (1973) suggested that the news is "manufactured by journalists" (p. 97). In the same vein, Schudson (1989, p. 265) pointed out that "news items are not simply selected but constructed" [emphasis added]. So, rather than objectively reporting events and facts, newsmakers engage in a highly subjective and selective process of news production based on socially and culturally constructed criteria. Notably, decisions about who/what is newsworthy are filtered through a predominantly Western, White, heteronormative, middle-class, male lens (Henry & Tator 2006).

Newsworthiness is defined as "what makes a story worth telling" (Jiwani 2006, p. 38). The specific criteria of newsworthiness can change depending on the individual reporter or news organization (Chermak 1995). However, generally speaking, newsworthy events are those considered to be dramatic, unusual, or fit with a continuing news theme. Additional features such as conflict, action, and deviance increase the likelihood of an event being deemed newsworthy (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987, 1991).

CDA is a field of study which has paved the ways for the linguists to find out the hidden ideologies behind seemingly simple and plain words. Language is no longer seen as merely reflecting out reality, but as central to creating the reality (Taiwo 2007). Newspapers play a vital role in depicting social issues according to their own ideology. Newspapers are particularly known to lead in the initiation of discourse on the national issues by picking on statements or reactions of prominent national figures. News headlines are the greatest source of providing information to all, especially to people who are too busy to read the whole of the news articles or stories. These headlines are description of social, cultural and national representations circulating in a society at a specific time. The following study analyzes the differences of the various headlines with their respective ideologies.

## Literature Review

Newsworthiness is defined as "what makes a story worth telling" (Jiwani 2006, p. 38). The specific criteria of newsworthiness can change depending on the individual reporter or news organization (Chermak 1995). However, generally speaking, newsworthy events are those considered to be dramatic, unusual, or fit with a continuing news theme. Additional features such as conflict, action, and deviance increase the likelihood of an event being deemed newsworthy (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987, 1991).

According to Greer (2003), over and above these criteria, what makes an event eminently reportable is its spatial and cultural proximity to the audience. Spatial (or geographic) proximity suggests that events 'close by' will be more newsworthy than events far away. In other words, readers react most strongly to events

happening near them (Greer 2003, p. 53). Cultural proximity is closely related and refers to the extent to which events are seen as culturally meaningful and resonate with readers' values, beliefs, and concerns (Greer 2003, pp. 47-48).

Greer further noted that, in the context of sex crimes, proximity adds additional 'shock value' as such crimes are being committed 'on our streets' by offenders 'on the loose' in the same area as a substantial portion of readers (2003, p. 73).

Hall (1973) argued that, of the millions of events that occur daily across the world, only a very tiny fraction will actually become part of the daily news landscape. Along the same lines, Meyers (1997) identified a hierarchy of crime operating in the news media, meaning that not all crimes are seen as equally newsworthy (see also Jewkes 2004). Severe violence, especially murder, is seen as most newsworthy, and young and elderly White females in particular receive considerable attention (Dowler 2004a, pp. 575-576). Sexually motivated homicides perpetrated by someone unknown to the victim will "invariably receive substantial, often sensational attention" (Jewkes 2004, p. 48). Previous literature has indicated that news stories exaggerate the risks of violent crimes faced by high-status White women (Reiner [1995] 2003, p. 386).

Carter (1998) and Jewkes (2004) have drawn attention to how particular forms of violence against women are deemed too routine or ordinary by newsmakers to be considered newsworthy. For instance, physical and sexual violence committed in the home, by acquaintances, and/or that is non-fatal, tends to fall at the bottom of the hierarchy of crime and is left off the news agenda. It is also useful to consider that the news media perpetuate a hierarchy of female victims, meaning that not all women who have experienced violence are treated equally. Media representations of violence against women often emphasize binary categories that differentiate "good" from "bad" woman. "Good" women are seen as innocent and worth saving or avenging, whereas "bad" women are positioned as unworthy victims and beyond redemption (Jiwani 2008). Like social relations in general, this binary is deeply tied to race and class. Traditionally, it has been middle-class White women who have been constructed as "innocent" and "good" (Collins, 2000). The idealization, or placing of certain bodies in higher regard, subordinates and relegates bodies—in particular "raced" or racialized female bodies—to the status of "Others" (Crenshaw 1991; McLaughlin 1991). What must be underscored is that binaries of good/bad, worthy/unworthy, pure/impure, and the like, are relational and mutually dependent on one another. In other words, these binaries develop in the context of each other and each is inextricably bound to the other (Collins 1998). In order for there to be a "bad," "unworthy," "impure," "disreputable" woman/victim there must simultaneously be a "good," "worthy," "pure," and "respectable" woman/victim against whom she is judged. Simplistic binaries produce/reproduce hegemonic assumptions about acceptable and deviant expressions of femininity (Madriz 1997). Idealized depictions of heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, attractive White women have become metaphors for "innocence", both in news discourse and society more generally (Jewkes 2004; Wilcox 2005). The ideologies of human superiority and inferiority underlying these binaries encourage the valuing of some lives over others and act as powerful justifications for continued racial, gender, and class-based oppression (Collins [1990] 2000).

Dyer (1997) explored how over time idealized notions of White womanhood have positioned the White female body as the epitome of purity, cleanliness, vulnerability, and virginity. Dyer traced these notions to Christian traditions of identifying whiteness and blondness with the heavens and angels. The emphasis placed on romanticized images of White womanhood, he argued, connects the White body to that which is both angelic/forbidden, morally superior unavailable. Wilcox similarly contended that Western thought associates White middle-class women "with a lack of sexual knowledge and hence with being childlike" (2005, p. 527). She added that Western cultural images of the "good" and "innocent" woman are often conflated with passivity, monogamy, and fragility.

According to Shome, White femininity does not lie in a specific physical body, but rather is "an ideological construction through which meanings about White women and their place in the social order is naturalized . . . and as sites through which otherness; racial, sexual, classed, gendered, and nationalized [identity] is negotiated" (2001, p. 323). Within this ideology poor and/or racialized women are pre-packaged as "bad" women, regardless of their actual behaviour (Collins [1990] 2000; Crenshaw 1991; Mukhopadhyay 2008). The devaluation of poor and/or racialized women serves to simultaneously affirm the boundaries of appropriate femininity. According to Collins ([1990] 2000, p. 132) the "devalued jezebel makes pure White womanhood possible."

Meyers (1997) argued that compared with high-status White women, poor and/or racialized crime victims are often depicted in the news as more blameworthy for their victimization. To illustrate, in sexual assault and sexual homicide cases, if a victim is judged to have deviated from patriarchal notions of appropriate feminine behavior by drinking/using drugs, dressing provocatively (or not conservatively), and especially if she engages in sex for money, she is likely to be constructed as, at least partially, responsible for violence against her (Ardevi- Brooker & Caringella-Macdonald 2002; Jiwani & Young 2006; Madriz 1997). Likewise, McLaughlin

(1991) found that television representations of prostitution tended to align the dangers of sex work with the sex worker herself, and accordingly assigned victims rather than offenders blame for violence. As pointed out by Wilcox (2005, p. 529), the presumption in the news media is that male offenders are guilty only to the extent that their female victims are innocent.

Previous literature showed some differences on news content between traditional news media and online news media. Leon Sigal (1973) found that the traditional news sites prominently present government official news. For example, about 60% of news articles deal with government official routines in Washington Post and New York Times. Also, the result of Herbert Gans' study (1979) showed that prominent news deals with events that people already know. However, current research study of the characteristics of news content on the online media showed that alternative online journalism develops the user-oriented news; the topics of news broaden to everyday life (Mussi, 2003).

### Methodology

The data for this study has been collected from three newspaper groups along with their Urdu newspapers. From the selected samples, headlines of the front and back pages have been selected for research. These have been further divided into upper and lower half and are presented in tabular form. Newspapers of one month have been selected. Newspapers of one month, March 2013, have been selected for current research. From the selected newspapers front and back pages have been selected. The front and back pages of the newspaper has a special significance. Data is analyzed through critical discourse analysis. Selected news headlines have been analyzed on the basis of their placement in the newspaper and then these are compared with other newspapers. Newsworthiness is determined on the basis of these results. News headlines have been categorized on the basis of important issues. News headlines have been compared within the news group and with other news groups. News headlines of important issues are written in tables. These are analyzed manually to check the newsworthiness on news items. The hidden ideology of the newspaper editors is analyzed on the basis of placement of news item, place/columns allocated to each news item and the use of language.

### Results and Discussion

Newspaper plays a vital role in the lives of human beings as it conveys information related to all fields of life. Moreover, newspapers remain active in changing the minds of the readers. The same aspect is analyzed in the present research. The analysis focuses on the issues discussed during the month of March 2013 in the newspapers. The main and prominent issues are taken into account like, IP Project, Karachi attacks, Musharraf return, Pak Afghan relationship and the issue of load shedding. All the major news headlines are included in the discussion and the frequencies of related news headlines' frequencies and place/columns allocated to each news item are given in the tables. The frequencies are also shown in graphic form. The main issue of the month is IP project.

#### Comparison of # of headlines discussing IP project

Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns	Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns
The News	13	20	Jang	11	19
The Nation	11	11	Nawa-e- Waqt	14	15
Tribune	17	19	Express	18	21

The news headlines are analyzed based on the total number of headlines and number of columns, allocated to a specific event. This is a national issue presented in all newspaper groups with less change. Jang group has allocated more space and columns as compared to other groups. The main point of difference is identified in English and Urdu newspapers. IP project is more discussed in Urdu newspapers as compared to English newspapers. The difference is clearly shown in column.

#### Comparison of # of headlines discussing attacks

Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns	Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns
The News	11	17	Nawa_e_Waqt	21	24
The Nation	09	15	Jang	21	24
Tribune	08	17	Express	18	22

As it is local news, it is not mentioned in English newspapers in bulk. This issue covers more space in Urdu newspapers and almost same columns are allocated. In English newspapers this allocation is almost same, but as compared to Urdu newspapers, it is less. This shows that Urdu newspapers consider this news more newsworthy. Same news groups have presented this news differently. Frequencies are different within news groups. Urdu newspapers of each group allocate more space and more columns to these news items.

**Comparison of # of headlines discussing issue of load shedding**

Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns	Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns
The News	08	15	Nawa_e_ Waqt	22	29
The Nation	06	17	Jang	20	22
Tribune	08	14	Express	25	24

In the table frequencies of the occurrences are given. In English newspapers the frequency is less than the half of Urdu news. The reason behind this difference is the readership of these newspapers: Urdu and English newspapers have different readerships.

Parvez Musharraf , the former president of Pakistan, returns Pakistan after more than four years. His arrival to Pakistan remains in the news before his coming. It was a controversy among different newspapers.

**Comparison of # of headlines discussing Parvez Musharraf return**

Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns	Newspapers	# of headlines about written case	# of columns
The News	12	15	Nawa_e_ Waqt	42	48
The Nation	16	21	Jang	38	43
Tribune	21	25	Express	49	53

Very clear difference is seen in the frequencies of English and Urdu newspapers. The frequencies in the English newspapers are less than half of the Urdu newspapers. This difference clearly shows the policy of news groups. The local news is mostly published in Urdu newspapers for the common man of the country, but the same news is not placed in English newspapers. The readership in the minds of the news editors is different. Frequencies also differ in intra groups. Overall, it may be concluded that Jang group gives less importance to such news as compared to other two newspapers.

**Conclusion**

This research has analyzed the newsworthiness on the basis of allocation of columns and space to one news item. The main objective of the research was to explore the difference in the projection of news items in English and Urdu newspapers as well as in the same news groups. It is concluded from the research that differences exist in the placement of news items. English newspapers pay less focus on the projection of local issues as compared to Urdu newspapers. This study has explored so many reasons behind this difference; English newspapers are mostly read by elite class who are mostly interested in foreign issues.

This study has observed how ideology works in the construction of newspaper headlines. According to critical discourse analysis, findings have shown that the headlines of the newspapers not only have universal metaphorical and graphological characteristics but behind the apparently different news items, different ideologies are working behind. Local newspapers editors construct the news items which are considered for the national and international news readers as the issues related to our society. These are a very good source of conveying information to the readers who are not informed about these issues. On the other hand, English newspapers present those news items which are presented and meant for the foreigners. From a nationalistic perspective, such news items are produced to make other people aware of the defence strategies so they can think hundred times before looking towards the country with bad intentions. Newspaper headlines also present different ideologies and certain point of views. But the selection of the language used in headlines shows the political inclinations of the newspaper editors, who select either those speeches intentionally which may make readers annoyed towards certain leader, or those which may shape the thinking of the readers as the editors want them to perceive. On some points of time all the newspapers have the same view. This can be concluded that single news is presented in different papers in different perspectives keeping their political inclinations in view. CDA has successfully laid all these newspaper ideologies transparent which were opaque previously for a common reader.

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