



## REGISTRAL FEATURES OF JOURNALISTIC WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper deals with the register used in English language newspapers. Journalistic writing makes use of various strategies to attract the readers' attention. The use of abbreviations, pun, alliteration, stylistic deviations and idioms is an integral part of journalistic writing. Punctuation marks are also creatively used in it. The lexis and grammar are used in a special way to have a telling effect on readers. Headlines are worded to give a punch to news stories.*

**Keywords:** Register, lexis, idioms, deviations, clipping, acronyms etc.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with English used in English newspapers. It also lays stress on the use of idioms in headlines. English used in English newspapers is a variety used in the field of journalistic writing. The term 'register' used in sociolinguistics means a language variety which has certain features typical of certain fields or occupations. English language newspapers use a specific style of writing which is different from English used in other fields.

Newspapers give information to people about local, regional, national and international events. The language used in English newspapers is easy to understand so that most of the readers should understand it. At the same time, it should be spiced up so as to make them want to read on. That's why headlines are very short and easy to understand. Journalists take care of making headlines simple and direct. Economy in words is a mantra used in framing headlines. They keep headlines compact, vigorous, short and expressive for maximum effect. Various strategies are deployed in journalistic writing. English newspapers are bristled with abbreviations and short words. These words are not only short but also striking and attention

**KALYAN K. SATHE**

1P a g e



grabbing. A reader who is not accustomed to reading English language newspaper may find these abbreviations and short words difficult to make out and even irritating. In newspapers, words are abbreviated in an innovative way. Some abbreviations are easy to decipher whereas some are not so. Names of famous people are abbreviated in English language newspapers. For example, PC is used for P. Chidambaram (The Times of India, 7 May, p.11), NaMo for Narendra Modi and RaGa for Rahul Gandhi. These acronyms remain in vogue for some time and drop out of use. English newspapers also use acronyms for political parties, organizations and institutions. For example, BJP, JDU, CPI, AIDMK, ISRO, AIIMS, IIT, etc.

Clipping is one of the word formation processes which has been widely used in English language newspapers as it saves space. Some of the examples frequently found in English newspapers are: oppn (opposition), anniv (anniversary), plaint (complaint), op (operation), versity or univ (university), mins (ministers), certs (certificates), etc.

Apostrophe is also used to show the omission of some letters. 'Karnataka' is written as 'K'taka', Uttarakhand as U'khand, Bangladesh as B'desh, Wicket keeper as 'Keeper.

Another innovative strategy used in the papers is to spell words as they are pronounced in spoken language. This is one of the stylistic deviations. The word 'prez' for 'president' is often used in headlines in newspapers. Another stranger case is 'Oz' for 'Australia'. Actually, Australia used to be shortened as 'Aus' later on, it was changed into 'Auz' and now 'Auz' is written as 'Oz' in the Times of India. The times of India uses upper case for the pronoun 'I' only if a sentence begins with it and lower case in other places.

Another striking and important registral feature of the journalistic writing is the use of short words instead of long ones. These words, in addition to saving space, give a ring of attractiveness and avoid circumlocution. Headlines containing such short words stand out and catch the readers' eye. Sometimes in order to make headlines brief, short words are used but they may cause ambiguity also. Hence choosing short but apt words is essential to journalistic writing. The short words that readers frequently come across are picked out from the Times of India. They are: kid (5May, p.9), bid (15May, p.5), dip (24May, p.1), nab (20May, p.3), aid (22May, p.9), ton (8May, p.14), axe (25May, p.1), cop (17May, p.4), hike (21May, p.9), quit (4May, p.13).

Alliteration is also one of the poetic devices put to use most of the time to have a dramatic effect on the reader. The following headline taken from *the Indian Express* is an example of alliteration.

'Guts, Guns and Some Glory' (28May, p.17)

KALYAN K. SATHE

2P a g e



Other examples from *the Times of India* are:

1. New sizzler on the job scene, data science **bags big bucks**
2. ‘Raghuram Rajan Redux’, which is an editorial title used in the Times of India (19 May, p.10)
3. Shirdi temple trust taps tankers for 50k devotees (9May, p.9)
4. Bamu slots two exams a day, faces flak (8May)

The use of suffixation, a word formation process, is made ingeniously in English language newspapers. There was one headline on the front page of the Times of India of 20<sup>th</sup> May. The suffix –less was used very imaginatively in the following headline:

A Cong**less** India, Almost

Even rhythm and rhyme are also used in headlines that sound more striking. The Times Life is a supplement that comes out on Sundays. One column on food is named ‘**eat and delete**’. Another one is named ‘**O-zone**’.

One of the characteristic features of the journalistic writing is the widespread use of idioms. Idioms are used in almost all English language newspapers and especially their supplements. As readers are not familiar with these idioms, they find such headlines with idioms difficult to figure out. However, after reading the lead they may work out the meaning of the idioms used from the context. But unfortunately this is not true of most of the idioms. They have to consult a good dictionary to look them up in a good dictionary.

To dramatize a certain situation, idioms are used in headlines. That’s why, English language newspapers are peppered with idioms to make headlines coloured with different shades of meanings. But these idioms can be a stumbling block in the way of readers. Admittedly, headlines with idioms do conjure up a vivid picture before readers’ eyes. They also make headlines lively and add drama to them. Even editors frequently resort to using idioms to give their opinions strongly.

Following idioms have been culled from the Times of India, May 2016.

1. Pass the baton (4 May, p.12)
2. Loaves and fishes (4 May, p.12)



The first idiom is taken from athletics. A baton is a short stick that is passed from one runner to the other one. The meaning of this idiom is to pass the responsibility to another person. The editorial tells about passing responsibility to next generation leaders. The second idiom is a title of Maugham's famous play and meaning is temporal benefit, main chance.

In Times Sport, the reader comes across many idioms, which liven up these headlines. Sometimes these headlines appear in uppercase to impress the reader.

'Foxes Turned Tables on English Elite' (4 May, p.16)

'Spurs lose their heads and title chances' (4 May, p.16)

The first of the above two headlines has the idiom 'turn tables on somebody'. It means, 'you change the situation completely so that others are in trouble and not you.' The team Foxes changed the situation and the rival team English elite is in a difficult situation. The headline with this idiom doesn't give any clue to the reader about the football match unless they read on.

Another headline is about a scuffle between two teams that took place after losing a match and the title as well. Idioms are difficult to decipher. Idiom is defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as 'an expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but that has a separate meaning of its own'. Hence, idioms pose problems to the reader.

Most of the idioms are borrowed from different fields, occupations, food, clothes, environment, etc. Idioms are rooted in culture. Hence readers for whom English is a first language has no difficulty to work out meanings of idioms but for whom English is a second language, idioms must be learnt. Some idioms are based on snow/ ice, as it is part of their environment. So the idiom 'miracle put on ice' (3 May, p.14) may not make any sense to the L2 reader. But someone from the UK or the US has no problem to understand it.

Today we too use ice to keep things fresh to be used later on. The idiom 'on ice' means 'to put off' or 'to delay' doing something. The idiom in the headline tells us about the match that was delayed.

The advent of new gadgets, the net, mobiles have given rise to the generation of many idioms. The idioms related to the net, social media are now being used in English language newspapers.



The idiom 'go viral' seems to have gone 'viral' and used to talk about the spread not of virus but video clips and posts. These gadgets are now part of our lives. Hence we don't have to think hard to guess its meaning. In this way, idioms sneak into our language.

The terrorist attacks have now become a common occurrence. To describe such attacks, journalistic writing has used a different way of describing it. They describe terrorist attack by writing a date/ a year. For example, 26/11, 9/11. These dates have now become idioms for terrorist attacks.

Journalist also makes changes in original idioms by tweaking them a little. E. g. one idiom used in a headline was tweaked a little to make it interesting. The headline was: 'How two hip-hoppers went from *rap to riches*'. The idiom is 'rag to riches' but it was tweaked so as to make it suitable for news story. The two boys became rich by singing rap songs hence, 'rap to riches'.

Another idiom occurred in the headline in the Times of India, (23 May, p.5) 'Dance bars won't *sway to govt's tunes*'. The original idiom is 'to dance to somebody's tunes'. But the writer has used the word 'sway', which is synonymous with 'dance', to avoid repeating the word 'dance'.

Journalists take liberty with idioms and tweak them a little now and then to make headlines eye-catching and striking.

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