

Tense in News Headlines

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Abstract

One of the main components in news discourse , is news headlines, which has become an interest of linguistics(Chin&Tsou,1997), this is because news headlines are considered to have their own characteristics and status in news discourse (Vandijke,1986;Bell,1991).Newspaper headlines are written in a special kind of language with its own vocabulary and grammar .Headlines have a special grammar which differs from that of ordinary sentences (Yoneoka, 2002) .One feature of this grammar is a special tense system. This paper will examine the tense system of English news headlines. What tenses are used and how they are used specially the present simple tense. The aim of the present paper is to explore the ways the present tense is used in newspaper headlines and explain what functions this tense fulfils. It reports the results of a small study undertaken in order to reveal the general tendencies and patterns of some of the more frequent sentence types used as headlines. The canonical use of the present tense to report past actions is noted and explained with reference to standard grammar. The material under investigation has also indicated a tendency to use the present simple tense in headlines made up of complex sentences, where it occurs in subordinate clauses introducing the circumstances for a more important event expressed non-verbally. The reference of the present

tense to past time is explained in view of its universal reference within the system of English tenses, its role as an 'internal evaluation device' in narrative and the support it lends to the interpersonal function of headlines.

Introduction

English newspaper writing style generally consists of three parts. These are: headlines, lead and body. The headline is the most interesting of them, because its grammar and usage are very characteristic . Fairclough(1995:21)states that "headlines have distinctive syntactic properties ,which make them a grammatical oddity." The headline is a unique type of text. It has a range of functions that specifically dictate its shape, content and structure, and it operates within a range of restrictions that limit the freedom of the writer (Reah , 1998:13-14). It encapsulates the story, i.e. article content, in a minimum number words, attracts the reader to the story and, if it appears on the front page, attracts the reader to the paper (ibid).

The style of writing headlines is largely geared to saving space and presenting information in striking ways. The spatial constraint in newspapers does not allow editors to put every thing into the headlines. Instead, they have to pick out the salient information from the news stories to be highlighted in the headlines. They will choose appropriate linguistic expressions, sentence structures or rhetorical devices which can best fit the information to be expressed in the headlines. In addition , information which is assumed among the readers or can be inferred from the context is always ellipted from the headlines(Chin&Tsou,1997)

There are two types of headlines:

1) sentence headlines they may be shortened by omitting certain words :

Example1: "Police rescue 12 divers as launch sinks off Phi phi"

Example2: "Pen manufacturers still see good future for luxury pen"

2) Phrase headlines or titles which leave out the verb.

Example3: "Getting in touch with the spirits"

Example4: "Heroism and cowardice at the "Top of the World""

Example5: "Reward for tracing suspect"(ibid).

1. Tense System in News Headlines

Readers of newspaper in general pay attention to the contents of the news, and seldom pay attention to tense in newspapers. They may not be aware that in terms of tense, newspapers are a special kind of writing(Shun,1995:60).

Since headlines are the gist of the news ,the language is compressed and condensed. They have their own special rules and regulations(Reah,1998:14).

Grammars and dictionaries agree unanimously that tense is used to express time, i.e. it is used to tell the time relations between sentences. Quirk et al (ibid:175)state that time can be thought of " a line theoretically ,of infinite length on which is located, as a continuously moving point the present moment". Anything ahead of the present moment is in the future ,and anything behind it is in the past. The continuum of time is commonly divided up into three :past-present-future ,and tense is a binary (divided into two) : present and past.

Morphologically English has no future form of verb in addition to present and past forms(Quirk et al,1985:176).

1.1. Present Tense in headlines

Simple present in headlines will be dealt with in detail in section(2).

1.2.Past Tense in headlines

Quirk, et al.(1985:183)state that past tense is used when the event\state must have take place in the past, with a gap between its completion and the present moment .Accordingly, thing of the past is commonly written in the past tense in body of newspaper. But in headline, the present tense is used instead of the past tense .However, the past tense in news headlines occasionally will be used to signal that the newspaper has just learned of an event that occurred more than a day or two ago , as in "Nixon taped all White House conversations" (Yoneoka, 2002:1).

The past tense or the past participle is often seen in headlines. passive sentences are constructed in news headlines with no auxiliary verbs-just the past participle. So instead of saying, for example , "A man is being held by the police" ,the headline would probably say "Man held by Police". Headlines like this are easy to misunderstand .For instance ,"Black Teenagers Attacked in Race Riot" means that the black teenagers were attacked ,not that they attacked somebody else. If the black teenagers did the attacking, the headline would use the present tense "Black Teenagers Attack".

However, it is hard to distinguish the past tense from the past participle if the form of the past tense is the same as the past participle. For example,

play-played-played ;feel-felt-felt; spend-spent-spent. But actually, most of them are not past tense but past participle. And the verb 'be' is omitted.

1.3.Futurity in headlines

Quirk et al(1985:213)state the future is marked by means of constructions which are used for expressing future time, i.e. by means of modal auxiliaries (shall/will +infinitive),or by semi auxiliaries (be going to + infinitive) forms. These forms show future plans and future expectations.

In newspaper and headlines the auxiliary verb such as 'will\ shall' as well as semi-auxiliary is\are going to are usually used in case of form of the future construction to express future time .But in headlines, it is a common to take the form ' to + verb' instead of 'be going to +verb' or 'will+ verb'; in other words, an auxiliary verb and the verb be is omitted. Some publications of newspapers accept the infinitive as a substitute for the future, but it is awkward (Chin&Tsou,1997; Yoneoka, 2002).

The reason for permitting the infinitive is obvious: less space is required for ' to ' than for will/ be going

Therefore, in news headlines the infinitive is used to express future events or plans.

Example 6:"kajiyama to enter LDP race" =" kajiyama is going to enter LDP race"

Example 7:"France to elect president " ="France will elect president"

Sometime there are exception like the following headline where a quotation is used:

Example 8:" 'Gas pipe rout will hit prices' "

1.4.Omission of the Verb "be" in headlines

In headline, the verb 'be' after subject is omitted(Yoneoka,2002:1).'be'+present participle , 'be'+ past participle ,this 'be' is omitted (ibid).besides 'be' in the form of 'be+ adjective' and 'be +preposition +subject' is omitted also (ibid).The verb 'be' in parenthesis in the sentences that follow is omitted:

Example 9:"Prompt action(is) necessary to save Earth"

Example 10:"Syria (is) willing to talk peace if Israel leaves Golan heights"

Example 11:"Japan's cities (are)still most pricey"

1.5.The present Progressive in headlines

The progressive aspect ,as Quirk et al (1985:197) state is used to indicate a happening in progress at a given time.

Present progressive can be used also to refer to future happening anticipated in the present. Its basic meaning is "FUTURE ARISING FROM ARRANGEMENT,PLAN,OR PROGRAM."(ibid:215)

In headlines the present progressive is used usually to describe something that is changing or developing ,but "the auxiliary (is\are)usually left out."(Swan,1984:409).

According to Swan(ibid)the verb '-ing' of the future tense and the present progressive means that a thing is in progress or near future. On that occasion ,in headlines ,the verb be is omitted and only the present participle is used.

Example12:"Fewer students getting work visas"= Fewer students are getting work visas (ibid).

Example 13:" Road side land prices still falling" =Road side land prices are still falling

Some exceptions exist through like in the following:

Example 14:"US is facing battle over freeman's heir at EBRD"(ibid).

1.6.Present Perfect in headlines

Quirk et al(1985:190) state that the present perfect signifies past time "with current relevance".

The present perfect often rears its head in headlines ,i.e. the auxiliary verbs have \has of the present perfect are dropped in news headlines. .A headline such as "oldest cat died" will probably explained into "The (nation)oldest cat has died ". Writing ellipted forms of headlines, the tenses may caused some problems.

There are four types for the use of present perfect :

- 1) Perfect of recent past. This perfect is used to report hot news ,that is, an announcement of something that has just happened. This type of perfect is used for breaking news headlines or when wishing to emphasize *that* something has occurred rather than exactly *when* it occurred.
- 2)The perfect of result: This type of perfect is used to refer to a present state as being the result of a past event, i.e. the direct effect of a past event continuous .
- 3)The experiential perfect, also called the existential or indefinite perfect indicates that a given situation has held at last once during some time in the past leading up to the present , i.e. it indicates the existence of past events .
- 4)Continuative perfect this perfect is used to describe a situation that begin in the past and continues to the present moment. Continuative perfect often ,if not always ,occur with an adverbial of duration.

2.The present simple in headlines and its meanings – theoretical Considerations

The widespread use of the present tense in headlines is one of the defining characteristics of the register of news headlines (Fowler ,1991;Halliday, 1985). In news discourse, the present tense is used conventionally to refer either to events which occurred in the past, or to present events (e.g. ‘state present’ and ‘habitual present’ as described by Quirk et al. (1985:179) The focus of the present paper is to identify the reasons why the present tense can be used in headlines to refer to past events, what its effects are, and what major patterns of use emerge.

The present tense is the fundamental tense in the system of English tenses (Dušková et. al 1988:217): in addition to present events, it can also express future and past events. In this sense, the present tense is a temporal. Although future reference of the present tense is usually complemented with an adverbial of time (the futurity thus being expressed lexically),this need not always be so, with the future reference being clear from the context.

The historic present describes the past as it is happening now :it conveys something of the dramatic immediacy of an eye-witness account(Quirk et al.1985:181).

Although the stereotypical description of past events by means of the present tense is usual in headlines, it also frequently occurs in narration – both fiction and conversation (Dušková 1988:219, Shiffrin 1981). The ‘historical present’ is used as a stylistic means – as McCarthy and Carter (1994:94) note, it operates ‘as one of Labov’s “internal evaluation” devices, heightening the drama of events and focusing on particularly significant points in the story’. The concept of ‘internal evaluation’ refers to the fact that a speaker’s evaluation of the prominent importance of particular

information is carried out through the manner of presentation and not by means of some kind of a lexicalized marker, which would constitute 'external evaluation'.

The headline present shares these characteristics with the historical present – its use highlights the urgency and topicality of the news story, thus substantially contributing to its newsworthiness and increasing its news value. (A parallel use of the present perfect divorced from the actual time of the event is noticed and commented on by McCarthy(1998:93-94).

Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between the headline present and the historical present in terms of their relation to other tenses, which can be described with reference to the concept of markedness. While the historical present is a marked tense of referring to the past time in fiction and conversation, the present tense referring to past events in headlines is, on the contrary, an unmarked tense. The marked character of the historical present stems precisely from the fact that it is used as an 'internal evaluation device' (Schiffrin, 1981) in situations where in ordinary communication, devoid of the speaker's attempts at highlighting certain key events and actions, other tenses would be preferred for the expression of the relevant time (namely the past tense).

The situation of the present tense in headlines of hard news in the quality press is, in this respect, quite the contrary: the unmarked tense appears to be the present simple because this tense is conventional for the particular discourse situation (as the articulation of particular headline conventions or the 'grammar' of headlines,(Halliday,1988)). This does not mean that other tenses do not occur – they do, although only in a minority of instances and example in quotations and the more narrative style of headlines of other sections than the hard news.

The use of tenses other than the present simple in hard news headlines in the quality press may thus be seen as a departure from specific headline conventions, and labeled as marked uses against the background of the conventional headline present tense.

Nevertheless, one should not be misled by the seeming paradox of interpreting the use of the past tense referring to a past event as ‘marked’: markedness is seen here not as a fixed property of linguistic forms but as dependent on the variable context and the conventions of the particular register in which the forms are employed. Let it be noted that the linguistic forms used in headlines have to be interpreted against the ‘dual background’ of the norms of standard language and headline conventions.

	Status of the tense referring to past events in:	
	conversation, fiction	Headlines
Present tense	Marked (<i>historical present</i> – used as an internal evaluation device)	Unmarked (‘ <i>headline present</i> ’ – used conventionally)
Past tense	Unmarked	Marked

Figure. 1 The contrary character of markedness of the present and the past tenses when referring to past events in various contexts

The choice of the past tense to refer to past events is thus unmarked (‘default’) in everyday conversation, while it is marked in headlines.

The reason for the application of the present tense in headlines may also be sought with the help of Halliday’s functional-systemic approach to language: the choice of the tense in headlines is regulated by the interpersonal function, as the shift of tenses results in a shift of deictic

centers as if to the time of the event, thus bridging the gap between the event and the reader (see also below).

3. Analysis and classification of material

In order to reveal the patterns of use of the present tense in headlines, an analysis was carried out on a set of 220 headline from The Times newspaper. This is an on-line version of the Times a British daily newspaper which rank among the serious or 'quality' papers, with the highest circulation from among the serious national dailies. All news articles were retrieved from the domestic and international news sections, i.e. the vast majority of them introduced hard news, and several provided commentaries.

The headlines were analyzed into two broad areas. One major group consisted of headlines which, despite being presented in the form of block language (the term for the 'style' of headlines used by Quirk et al. 1985), contained a finite verb form in the main clause. Because of the focus of the present study on the present tense, this subset of headlines with tensed verb forms is discussed and exemplified in subsection 3.1 below. The other group was made up of headlines which did not contain a finite verb form in the main clause and were either nominal or condensed by means of ellipsis of auxiliaries. The results are briefly commented on in subsection 3.2 .Both groups were further subdivided in order to reveal the types and frequencies of headlines according to the character of their verbal elements. All numbers and percentages are summed up in Tables 1 , 2 and 3 below.

Table 1

Headlines containing finite main clauses

	instances	% of finite	% of finite	% of total	% of total
Present simple	90	69.2		40.9	

Present simple-double use	10	7.7	78.4	4.5	46.3
Present simple + past simple	2	1.5		0.9	
Past simple	12	9.2	10.7	5.5	6.4
Past simple-double use	2	1.5		0.9	
Future simple	10	7.7	7.7	4.5	4.5
Other tenses	4	3.1	3.1	1.8	1.8
Total	130	100	100	59.0	59.0

Given the headline conventions, it is not surprising that the largest group of headlines with the finite verb form (78.4%, i.e. 46.3% of the total) comprises the canonical simple present tense referring to past events, as Example 15 illustrates:

Example 15: Student drowns on white-water adventure

Such instances typically refer to a single event with a relevance for the present, i.e. the present perfect would most usually be used to report the event in contexts other than the headlines.

The fact that this tense is the unmarked tense for referring to such events is borne out by the first paragraph of the article (the lead), which uses the present perfect: A 21-year-old British tourist has drowned while taking part in an extreme sport on a dangerous river in New Zealand. Example 16: Cameron doubles poll lead as election looms The first sentence of the article (the lead): The Conservatives have doubled their lead over Labour

from seven to 14 points following the row over Gordon Brown's decision to abolish the 10p lower rate of income tax.

The use of the present perfect in the lead is enabled by the absence of a specific adverbial of time (referring to the time of the drown), which would anchor the event to a particular past moment in time, thus requiring the simple past tense. It is the same absence of an adverbial in the headline which allows the conventional shift of tenses and the eventual use of the simple present.

The present tense in headlines is, of course, reformulated into the simple past tense in the lead if the time is specified by means of a precise adverbial of time, as Example 17 indicates:

Example 17:" Thatcher urges Bush to 'finish business of Iraq' "

Once the journalists make the option to include the adverbial of time referring to when the main reported event actually occurred, there is, of course, no other option than to reformulate the message beyond the headlines by means of the simple past tense: 'Lady Thatcher praised President Bush's leadership yesterday and called for the war on terrorism to focus on the 'unfinished business' of Iraq' (McCarthy 1998:93).

It is worth noting that while the two immediately following sentences describe the same event, they use very different tenses – the atemporal present tense with the universal reference (see above) and the past tense accompanied by the specifying adverbial of time yesterday (ibid). The text is comprehensible due to the readers' knowledge of the conventions of the particular register, which ensures that the present tense in the headline is correctly decoded, in spite of the manipulation and shift of deictic centers carried out by the encoding journalists. The motivation for using the present tense in the headline is essentially its orientation to enhancing the

interpersonal function (i.e. its attempt to communicate topical, 'breaking' news), while the reason for using the past or the present perfect in the lead is connected with the necessity of satisfying the ideational function (i.e. to specify the temporal context of the story (McCarthy 1998:94).

The analysis has also indicated that there are differences between headlines as to whether they include a single tensed verbal form or several (usually two) finite verb forms in various syntactic relationships. The mutual ratio is shown and treated in the following two subsections, according to the number of finite verb forms in the headline.

3.1.1 Single tensed forms in headlines

The number of headlines consisting of a single finite verbal form in the sample is 116 (i.e. 89.2 per cent of all finite headlines and 52.7 per cent of the total sample including nonfinite headlines).

In spite of the operation of the strong tendency calling for the utilization of the present tense in headlines, the group is made up of a variety of tenses in the ratios illustrated in table 2 :

Table 2

Headlines with single finite verbal forms according to the tense used

Single finite verbal forms	instances	%
Present simple	90	77.6
Past simple	12	10.4

Future	10	8.6
Other	4	3.4
Total	116	100

The majority of sentence-type headlines consisting of a single clause use the conventional present tense (77.6 per cent, 69.2 per cent of all finite). However, almost one quarter of the single-clause finite headlines are made up of other tenses, most notably the simple past tense (10.4 per cent), and the simple future tense (8.6 per cent). The remaining four instances indicated in table 1 include combinations of modals with past infinitives (2 instances) and the present perfect (2 instances).

The simple past is the second most frequent tense in headlines, which is hardly surprising given the role of the papers to report past events. However, because of the operation of the headline convention to code past events in the present tense, it is worth exploring the contexts in which the past tense is used and try to see why the headline conventions are not applied in these instances, giving rise to the ‘marked’ use of the past in headlines.

One of the emerging patterns concerns verbal reactions of prominent news actors. It is significant that the news actor is identified by his name (or social role or any other label), followed by a colon introducing what is seemingly the news actor’s verbal comment.

This pattern is illustrated in Example 18. The colon has essentially the same function as the reporting verb ‘says’ but its use enables the focus of the headline to be on the verbal comment itself, rather than being shared by the reporting verb (Example 24 below).

Example 18 :Lonely planet winter :I fabricated guidebook

By this simple device, the newspaper accesses another voice and introduces an indirect (see above) or a seemingly direct quote of the news actor or another discourse participant (see Example 19). The actual words need not constitute a precise quotation, they can be enclosed in what Fairclough (1989:89) calls 'scare quotes' (see Example 20). As a consequence of such an access to another voice, personal pronouns may be introduced into the headline and the headline conventions are loosened, thereby enabling the use of tenses other than the unmarked present tense.

Example 19: McCanns: we nearly took Madeleine out with us

Example 20: Teams 'peeped at' naked cheerleaders

The past tense is thus used in such segments of headlines which are identified as pieces of other discourses, i.e. those words which are seemingly uttered by someone else than the reporting paper. In this sense, they provide an illusion of a more direct access to reality, a 'window' through which the reader is allowed to catch a direct glimpse of the past. It is important to note, however, that this tendency is attested for hard news items in the quality press; opinion articles are not governed by the same set of implicit headline conventions (as they do not disguise the fact that personal opinion is being presented) and the more popular press operates somewhat differently, too.

The future tense tends to be utilized in the same manner in sections reserved to another voice (understood here as a linguistic form presented as if originated by or belonging to another participant), as Example 21 attests. Such a use of the auxiliary *will* as a 'voice marker' is parallel to the use of the simple past tense in headlines discussed above.

Example 21: Smith 'will support ID cards in defiance of fierce opposition'

However, there are also instances when the future is used within the voice of the paper itself in situations when the futurity needs to be specified explicitly or if the presence of such adverbials as sooner or later calls for the use of the future tense:

Example 22: Why today's Webster-Riddell reports will concern Gordan

The auxiliary 'will' used to form the future tense also tends to be used in its modal meanings expressing willingness or unwillingness. One may thus be faced with e.g. an emphatically worded 'present refusal' rather than 'future reference', especially in view of the convention of coding the future in headlines by means of the to-infinitive (classified among non-finite headlines owing to the ellipsis of the finite form of the verb 'be' Volunteers[is]oldest serviceman to die in Afghanistan). The notion of 'present willingness' is thus apparent in e.g. the following instance:

Example 23: Congress will approve \$50 bn Aids funds

Other modals have been attested in headlines as well, e.g. *can*, *may*, *could*, *would*, etc., for example Climate change may avert crisis in US – Russia relations .

They can be co-classified together with the past and the future tenses because they share an important distinguishing characteristic as opposed to the conventional present tense: they do not realize any tense shift but refer to the real time of the event reported, expressing the whole range of modal meanings – present/future/past ability, possibility, permission, etc.

3.1.2 Multiple tensed forms in headlines

Table 3 below indicates that in 10.8 per cent of the cases, headlines contain two finite verb forms, i.e. they are made up of two clauses forming

either a complex or a compound sentence. The vast majority of cases includes a double use of the conventional present tense.

A distinct pattern is formed with noun clauses functioning as direct objects of the reporting verb 'to say', as in Example 24:

Example 24: The final battle for Basrah is near, says Iraqi general

The present tense of *says* refers to a past event, while the present form *is* in the noun clause refers to a present state. This pattern is similar to the colon structure discussed in

Example 18 above and has the same effect of enabling the access of another voice into the headline.

Other patterns are usual as well: coordinated main clauses (Example 25 – expressing addition, contrast, etc.), noun clauses as objects of verbs other than 'to say' (Example 26), direct quotes consisting of several independent sentences (Example 29), and others.

Example 25: The flying media circus sits at the back and waits to be summoned

Example 26: EU checks to see if sauce is a vegetable

Example 27: peter Riddell: The rot goes to the heart of government, to No 10, and the sense that something is seriously wrong has spread, ominously"

However, there are also several instances when the present tense is used in connection with the past tense. Although the number of instances is too small to draw any clear conclusions, it appears that the conventional present tense is used in the main clause of the headline, expressing the

major event which is being reported. The past tense occurs in subordinate clauses which express a previous action (the arrangement of the tenses thus indicates posteriority, (Example 28) and/or a circumstance (see Example 29).

Example 28: Wife's affair tore my heart out, teacher tells jury

Example 29: Couple who hushed boys in cinema are beaten up

In this sense, the past tense in such complex sentence headlines is connected with a more 'distal' event – either one which is further removed in time or perceived as relatively marginal or circumstantial. The present tense may thus serve a foregrounding function, while the past tense may be used for backgrounding. More material will be needed, however, to show how frequent and systematic the tendency of mirroring clause subordination by the choice of tenses (i.e. main clause = present tense, subordinate clause = past tense) might be.

3.3 Non-finite sentence types as headlines

In the analysis of non-finite headlines, it was felt necessary to make a two-fold distinction. One of the classificatory criteria was whether the headline is a sentence fragment

which arose as a result of an ellipsis of a finite auxiliary, as in *Diana's butler sent for trial* (referred to as 'non-finite ellipted') or whether it is entirely nominal, as in *Weighty task for Chinese army* (classified as 'non-finite nominal'). A second distinction was made between such non-finite structures that stand entirely on their own (as is the case with the previous two quoted examples) and those that are accompanied by a clause (typically specifying circumstances, e.g. *Call for new trawl nets as dolphin deaths rise*). As such headlines are not formally sentences but structurally resemble complex sentences, they are marked in Table 3 below as 'simple sentence fragments' and 'complex sentence fragments', respectively.

Table 3

Headlines containing non-finite main clauses

Headline type	Instances	%	%	% of total	% of total
Non-finite ellipted – simple sentence fragment	49	54.4	62.2	22.3	25.5
Non-finite ellipted – complex sentence fragment	7	7.8		3.2	
Non-finite nominal – simple sentence	32	35.6	37.8	14.5	15.4
Non-finite nominal – complex sentence	2	2.2		0.9	
Total	90	100	100	40.9	40.9

As the focus of the present article is on the uses of the present tense in headlines, the non-verbal headlines (consisting of non-finite ellipted/nominal simple sentences) will not be dealt with. The remaining 9 examples (see Table 3), making up 4 per cent of all headlines (i.e. 15.5 per cent of the non-finite ones), have the structure of a complex sentence, regardless of whether the non-finiteness is the result of an ellipsis of an auxiliary or merely the nominal form of the main clause element.

3.3.1 Non-finite ellipted and non-finite nominal headlines with a complex sentence structure

The following two examples indicate the difference between non-finite ellipted headlines (Example 30) and non-finite nominal headlines (Example 31):

Example 30: Isle of Man sealed off as police hunt killer of teenagers

Example 31: Hard time for graduates as employers cut intake

Even though the number of instances falling into this category is relatively low (9), all of the headlines exhibit a striking structural similarity. They follow the same pattern – a non-finite structure is followed by the conjunction ‘as’ introducing a clause with a finite verb form – in the conventional present tense.

This pattern stands out particularly because such headlines refer to two main events (news) in combination: a STATE (expressed by the non-finite element) followed by an ACTION/EVENT (expressed by the finite clause). It is significant that the finite clause is structurally backgrounded, yet it is sufficiently newsworthy (and could take over the focus of the headline in the absence of the non-finite element, as in: Hamas blamed as suicide gunmen kill four Israelis). The conjunction ‘as’ plays various roles in this template – most typically, it may express causality (cause-result relationship) and simultaneity (two parallel events). The event introduced by ‘as’ is conceived of as a frame for another, related event. Such a duality of events in the headline may be a welcome opportunity for increasing its ‘narrativity’ and turning it into a real story.

4. Conclusion

Newspaper headlines use a simplified tense system. It is unusual to find complex verb forms .

The analysis of the set of headlines from The Times newspaper has shown that headlines are almost always in the simple present tense ,even if the story reports something that happened in the recent past such as in Female bomber kills dozens near sacred site ,and Inventor of the package holiday dies at 85. The analysis also has shown that the present tense in hard news headlines is used in three distinct patterns. First, it conventionally refers to past events in simple headlines. Second, it occurs in connection with other tensed forms and there appears to be a tendency to use the present simple for fore grounded actions while events considered as circumstantial to the main news story may be coded by means of the simple past tense. Finally, the present simple tense is utilized in clauses introduced by the conjunction 'as', which provide the background to (or the reason for) the focal event presented as a current state by means of a nominal (non-finite)element.

The use of the present simple in headlines is explained in connection with its 'atemporality' and its operation as an 'internal evaluation device' in narrative. Its property of referring to past events, seen as unmarked within the context of hard news headlines, is interpreted as being essentially motivated by the interpersonal function.

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