



# Directives in English language newspaper editorials across cultures



Farzana Masroor<sup>a,\*</sup>, Ummul Khair Ahmad<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences, Air University, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>b</sup> Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 15 March 2017

Received in revised form 8 September 2017

Accepted 12 September 2017

### Keywords:

Newspaper editorials  
Argument structures  
Directives  
Stance  
Persuasion  
Media discourse

## ABSTRACT

In opinion discourse like newspaper editorials, written arguments exhibit an interesting interplay of linguistic features and strategies to achieve the communicative purpose of persuading the audience which is worth investigating especially in cross cultural settings. The intentions of editorials are fulfilled most explicitly through the strategy of directives, where facts may be provided only to endorse editorial stance. A pragma-dialectical approach to discourse analysis assumes argument structures as speech acts which require careful analysis of text and context. In this vein, this study analysed directives in 90 English editorials, taken from two Asian (*Dawn* and *New Straits Times*) and one American newspaper (*The New York Times*), by looking at their form, frequency and co-text. The results indicate *Dawn*'s stance when realizing directives as direct, *NYT*'s stance was authoritative, whereas *NST*'s stance was less engaging and more cautious.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Role of editorials in opinion building

In newspaper discourse, opinion pages, as distinct from news stories and advertisements, are known for explicit articulation of the political beliefs of owners and editors (Kahn and Kenny, 2002). One such opinion page discourse serving the purpose of influencing the readers is newspaper editorial (Greenberg, 2000). This genre is usually kept unsigned, making it distinct from other discourses on the opinion page. An editorial piece in a newspaper for this reason is usually not considered as the work of a single person; rather, its agenda is believed to be set by the editorial board or “editorial gatekeepers” (Ciofalo, 1998: 18) who decide the position to be adopted after intense discussions. According to some journalism critics, “signing it only dilutes the message and confuses the readers” (Simurda, 1997: 47). Its purpose and role in the newspaper discourse has attributed several names to this genre such as “timely essay” (Bond, 1961: 214), “voice of the newspaper” (Schaffer et al., 1998: 251) and mouth piece of the newspaper mirroring its ideological stance over the current issues (Le, 2008).

Being part of the newspapers meant for public consumption, the editorial as an opinion discourse is addressed and meant to influence a diverse range of audience, ranging from ordinary public

to the political decision-making pundits (Greenberg, 2000). Since newspapers perform varying roles in their societies due to their varying affiliations, such as with the governments, elites and economic stake-holders, they are accused of having a *slant* (see Kahn and Kenny, 2002 for example) towards the issues and are considered to project only those facts that are relevant for defending their position. Consequently, news media holds a considerable control over the formulation of policies and actions and the choices made by political leaders due to its judgmental stand taken through persuasive and evaluative language (Eilders, 2000). The powerful role of the editorial is evident through its influence or impact on society's opinion formulation, both in the public sphere and political arena which takes its shape based on the criticism made in this media outlet (Simurda, 1997: 48). However, the impact an editorial has on society's opinion building is significant though not an immediate one. Instead, it is influential in agenda-setting (Le, 2010), an important line of research in journalism, which “helps give the public a syllabus, a list of things to think about” (Newsom and Wollert, 1988: 417).

### 1.2. Argumentation and stance projection through directives

Just like other social genres including political speeches and pamphlets, editorials are known for taking positions. According to Edward C. Jones, the managing editor and former editorial editor of *The Free Lance-Star* in Fredericksburg, Virginia, “taking positions strongly and clearly is what we need to be doing” (as quoted by Simurda, 1997: 47). This goal of influencing a wide readership

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [farzanamasroor@hotmail.com](mailto:farzanamasroor@hotmail.com) (F. Masroor), [m-ummul@utm.my](mailto:m-ummul@utm.my) (U.K. Ahmad).

through a plausible stance makes editorials a form of persuasive language (van Dijk et al., 1992). Belmonte (2008: 2) calls editorials the most “genuine” examples of written argumentation, while Connor (1996: 143) claims that they “set [the] standard” for the forms of “written persuasion”. As established, if editorials are meant to persuade, the question arises as to what is the most salient and explicit strategy for fulfilling this communicative purpose. If we look closely at the editorial discourse, the rhetorical and persuasive nature of opinion discourse necessitates the incorporation of both facts as well as assessments in articulating opinions (Rodríguez, 2008; van Dijk, 1998). According to van Eemeren et al. (2002: 5), the constituted arguments could present “facts or events, a prediction, a judgment, or advice”. Similarly, Masroor (2013) has shown that newspaper editorials argue by a number of factual and non-factual propositions, such as facts, opinions, assessments, predictions, directives/advice or the more conclusive judgments. Among these strategies, editorials attempt to persuade its readers by providing them with a course of action or alternate solutions to the problem. The most direct or explicit type of persuasion is achieved through the strategy called ‘directives’ (Masroor, 2013) in editorials. Here, through direct engagement of audience, newspapers attempt to change thinking patterns of the readers or even motivate them to take some action (Schaffer et al., 1998). The persuasiveness of directives is increased manifold due to the fact that the strategy ensures maximum involvement of its readers by enabling the writers to engage with the readers in a direct address during the act of persuasion (Hulteng, 1973).

The term ‘directives’ is taken from Searle’s (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts, based on the classification of speech acts provided by Austin (1962). According to Searle (1979), directives are acts in which the speaker wants the hearer to do something, and the proposition requires the fulfilment of some future action by the hearer. The present study follows Hyland’s definition of directives (2002) as expressions requiring “obligation on the reader either to do or not to do something” (p. 216). Newspapers make the most of this powerful device by strategically placing it towards the end of an editorial (see Alhudhaif, 2005; van Dijk, 1989). According to Masroor (2013), directives abound in the final functional category of ‘Taking a Stance’ in the editorial’s structural schema, which is regarded as the most definite move for grabbing readers’ attention and influencing their behaviour. Alhudhaif (2005) and Bonyadi (2010) also observe that the number of directives increase towards the end of an editorial.

The fact that directives can be realized by many forms creates an impetus for their analysis, probably due to the reason that they are greatly motivated by the intention of the speaker to maintain social relations besides getting the hearer fulfil speaker’s recommendations (Lee, 1989). Moreover, the presentation of the writer’s persona in relation to his text and context is an integral part of writing unless consciously avoided (Hyland, 2005). With respect to the academic interaction, Hyland (2005) has provided categorisation of linguistic markers meant for projecting writer’s authority as well as his or her interaction with the readers in the text. He terms them as markers of stance and engagement, where stance is mostly realized through hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention. According to Hyland (2005), *hedges* are markers of opinion discourse showing writer’s tentative commitment to claims, *boosters* show writer’s conviction in making claims, *attitude markers* show writer’s attitude when expressing opinions e.g., their surprise, anger etc. and *self-mentions* are first person pronouns. The possibilities of realizing a directive can be numerous and such a rich data of editorials demand a thorough analysis of stance projection through directives.

Depending upon the communicative intentions (either explicitly announced or hidden), the force of directives can be played upon by the expert writers for achieving persuasive goals. The type of form chosen to express a directive is instrumental. As

van Eemeren et al. (2002) points out, a stance can be projected through various propositions which could have varying force and scope depending on whether it is expressed with full confidence or is carefully presented like a suggestion. Directives then differ in their force depending on the level of “strength or commitment” (Searle, 1979, p. 153) attached to them where they have a “world-to-word direction of fit” (p. 152), which means that the illocutionary act is fulfilled when the words bring about a change in the world through future actions of the hearer. Additionally, the context or co-text can further enhance or mitigate the force of a directive. In this respect, socio-cultural circumstances of a country like historical, social and cultural background of the text can be decisive (House, 2007). Additionally, within the news media, the type of audience also becomes a decisive factor in shaping the genre and language choice (Pennock, 2000: 14). Searle (1979) holds that the difference between the status of the speaker and hearer also bears on the force of the act. In fact, there is a need to incorporate textual and contextual features in the analysis, since texts cannot be de-contextualized and studied autonomously. These contextual factors, which are best studied in cross-cultural settings (e.g., de Bolívar, 1994; Bhatia, 1993, 2004), may include “authorial intention, cultural and/or educational background, intended use, reader response, [and] relationship of the written configuration to a theory of text production, etc.” (Martin, 1992: 19).

### 1.3. Editorials and their argument structures

The language of editorials for the achievement of persuasion attracted some attention of the researchers (see Belmonte, 2008), but the connection between editorial persuasion and directives is comparatively less explored. The studies that dominate existing literature are carried out from the journalistic perspective while discourse studies are still rare (see van Dijk, 1996; Vázquez y del Árbol, 2005; Ansari and Babaii, 2005). Among them, the organisational structure of editorials has been analysed employing frameworks such as Genre Analysis (Gunesequera’s, 1989; Bhatia, 1993; Pak, 1996; Bonyadi, 2010; Masroor, 2013; Zarza and Tan, 2016), Systemic Functional Linguistics (Ansari and Babaii, 2005; So, 2005), Birmingham school of text analysis (de Bolívar, 1994) and Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 1989). The studies on the organisational structure of editorials although provide an insight into the argument building across various cultures but only a few of them are on Asian cultures. Among them, Masroor (2013) looked at the schematic structure of editorials from Pakistani and Malaysian contexts and found Pakistani editorials to be more direct when arguing than the less convincing Malaysian editorials. Zarza and Tan (2016) analysed Malaysian and American editorials whereas Bonyadi (2010) looked at the American and Persian editorials, however, these studies were only devoted to the organisational structure and were not concerned with analysis of linguistic features such as directives. The studies devoted to exploring linguistic features of editorials include an analysis of discourse style of Portuguese and English (Dantas-Whitney and Grabe, 1989), argument statements of Finnish, English and German (Tirkkonen-Condit and Liefänder-Koistinen, 1989), argumentative strategies for presentation of ideologies in English (van Dijk, 1989), speech act analysis of English and Arabic (Alhudhaif, 2005), re-entry items of English (Pennock, 2000), lexical and argumentative features of English (Izadi and Saghaye-Biria, 2007), and speech act and coherence analysis of French (Le, 2009). These studies covered analysis of editorial discourse among Anglo-American and European cultures and only a few studies have been carried out in the Asian contexts. The focus of the present study is to analyse the American, Pakistani and Malaysian English variety which needs attention of research due to the growing role of English as a lingua franca and the increased demand to study English varieties around the globe (see Siedlhofer, 2005).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5123966>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5123966>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)