

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HEADLINE WRITING IN BUSINESS NEWS

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### Abstract

The objective of this research were to 1) investigate the headline writing techniques in Business News in the Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and the Financial Times, 2) analyze the frequency of occurrence of various headline-writing techniques in business news across The Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and The Financial Times and 3) compare the frequency of occurrence of each headline-writing technique in business news among The Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and The Financial Times. The sample included headlines published from August to October 2023, with a total of 700 headlines including The Bangkok Post: 255 headlines, The New York Times: 273 headlines, and The Financial Times: 172 headlines. Statistics used in data analysis include frequency and percentage.

The research results found that :

(1) Out of 10 techniques in the study, the Bangkok Post deployed eight techniques while the Financial Times and the New York Times deployed only seven and six techniques respectively. Two techniques-colon for 'say' and nominalization-were not found at all in any of the newspapers.

(2) The Bangkok Post got the most occurrences of loaded words ( $f=149$ , 38.21%), followed by the use of present simple tense ( $f=130$ , 33.33%). In the Financial Times, the most dominant technique observed was the use of loaded words with 147 occurrences (40.61%) with the present simple tense ( $f=131$ , 36.19%) coming in second. The New York Times, which only six techniques were observed, had the most frequently used technique in loaded word with 156 occurrences (49.21%) and the use of simple tense is second with 111 occurrences (35.02%).

(3) Their most frequently used technique and also the top 4 techniques were the same, namely; loaded words, present simple tense, omission of auxiliary verbs and idioms. The use of loaded words was found the most in all the three media. The New York Times has the most frequently used technique in loaded words with 156 occurrences (49.21%) while The Financial Times ( $f=147$ , 40.61%) and The Bangkok Post ( $f=149$ , 38.21%). The use of present simple tense was also ranked second in all three newspapers.

**Keywords :** Business News, News Headline Writing Technique, English Newspaper

### Background and significance of the problem

English has become one of the most widely spoken languages in the world with the majority taking it as a second language (The Economist, 2019 : Online). It is by far the world's most powerful language based on the Power Language Index (PLI), which covers education, geography, economy, communication, knowledge, media, and diplomacy (Chan, 2016 : Online). One practical method for enhancing these skills is to read English news stories, particularly business news, which allows him to study the language while simultaneously acquiring new information to facilitate their lives. These news stories are easily accessible in newspapers, available in both hard copies and online platforms.

Beyond providing readers with news stories, one effective strategy for capturing readers' interest is producing compelling news headlines of which function is to inform readers about the content of the article and influence their decision to purchase the newspaper. Like other news headlines, business news headlines are instrumental in shaping audience perception because they act as the first impression readers would get when they will start reading a news story. Moreover, the headline has become a powerful tool in making any decision in the information-driven world of business, where clarity, urgency, and credibility are needed. With that, the writing style of news headline is indispensable in producing effective news headlines. Each newspaper has its own unique styles of making the news headlines, nonetheless; investigating news headlines can be valuable for understanding the strategies employed by headline writers.

The Bangkok Post has been providing its audiences with a good command of English - with news updates or information on various global events ranging from the economy, society, and politics to sports. It offers many sections, such as General News, Business News, World News, Sports and Features, and also gives the readers an opportunity to voice their opinions on pressing issues. With the credibility of the Bangkok Post, many studies have been conducted in terms of its language and influence on society on several news sections (Charuchinda, 2003; Waelateh, 2003; Nitsaisook, 2017 : Online). However, there are few studies on sports news. To address this knowledge gap, the researcher decided to explore the linguistic features of news headlines related to the business news headlines found in The Bangkok Post newspaper.

Meanwhile, The Financial Times is a British daily business newspaper that also covers other interesting news stories that might attract or impact readers. Likewise, The New York Times (NYT) is one of the longest-running newspapers in the USA covering various sections offering readers with its professional level of language. These three newspapers have served as reliable sources of information for readers both in their respective countries and globally. This study compares the blessings of its business with studies of language properties and styles.

Given their significant roles, the researcher decided to conduct a comparative study of headline writing in business news from The Bangkok Post, The Financial Times, and The New York Times. This study aims to benefit individuals in terms of exploring the diversity of language used in business journalism, providing insights into effective economic news communication in today's interconnected world.

## **Research objectives**

1. To investigate the techniques used in writing business news headlines in The Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and The Financial Times.
2. To analyze the frequency of occurrence of various headline-writing techniques in business news across The Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and The Financial Times.
3. To compare the frequency of occurrence of each headline-writing technique in business news among The Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and The Financial Times.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Population and Sample**

The study used purposive sampling to select business news headlines from the electronic versions of the three newspapers—The Bangkok Post, the New York Times, The Financial Times. While

the Bangkok is the only English newspaper in Thailand, the New York Times and the Financial Times are headquartered in USA and UK respectively. Despite their different locations, these three newspapers share the same groups of audiences-business people or well-educated ones. The Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that the selected headlines are representative of the specific time period and relevant to the research objectives. The sample included headlines published from August to October 2023, with a total of 700 headlines including The Bangkok Post: 255 headlines, The New York Times: 273 headlines, and The Financial Times: 172 headlines. The sample size represented approximately 30% of the business news published each day, resulting in about 2-3 business news headlines per day per newspaper. The period from August to October 2023 was chosen to provide a manageable yet comprehensive dataset that reflects a range of business news events. This timeframe ensures that the study captures variations in headline writing due to different business cycles, economic events, and editorial practices. The study, by examining 700 headlines, aims to provide a robust dataset that provides meaningful comparisons and reliable conclusions about the techniques of headline-writing that are usually used in business news across different newspapers and regions.

### **Research Instruments**

The primary instrument for this study is a coding sheet developed to capture various headline-writing techniques used in business news headlines. The techniques for data analysis are based on established theoretical frameworks from the works of Reah (1998), Mardh (1998), Metcalf (2013), and Fredrickson and Wedel (1991). These frameworks were chosen because they provide comprehensive insights into the elements of headline writing, ensuring a robust and well-founded analysis. Therefore, the followings are framework that are integrated for data analysis:

1. Loaded Words: Words that carry strong emotional or connotative meaning to elicit a response from readers.
2. Omission of Auxiliary Verbs: Removing auxiliary verbs to make headlines shorter and more direct.
3. Nominalization: Using nouns instead of verbs to make the headline more compact and formal.
4. Short Synonyms: Using shorter synonyms to save space and make headlines more impactful.
5. Present Tense for Past Events: Using present tense to describe past events, giving a sense of immediacy.
6. "To" for Future Events: Using the infinitive form to indicate future events concisely.
7. Use of Commas for "And": Replacing "and" with a comma to save space and quicken the pace of reading.
8. Use of Colons for "Says": Using colons to attribute statements or quotes efficiently.
9. Omission of the Verb To Be : Leaving out forms of the verb "to be" to create concise headlines.
10. Idioms: Using idiomatic expressions to add color and familiarity to headlines.

### **Creating and evaluating the quality of tools**

In terms of validity and reliability, relying on well-established theoretical frameworks, the study is not only based on solid research foundations, which makes the findings more trustworthy but also allowing multiple raters and checking for inter-rater reliability, ensuring that the results are consistent reliable. Finally, in terms of comprehensive understanding, the analysis of various headline-

writing techniques provides an insight view of how different language and style elements are used in different newspapers and situations.

#### **Data Collection**

The data collection procedure for this study involves the following steps:

1. Accessing archives of three newspapers: The Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and The Financial Times.

2. Purposively selecting Business news headlines from the specified period, which is August to October 2023. After purposive sampling, a random method was employed to finalize the selection of specific news headlines, ensuring a fair representation while maintaining randomness in the final sample.

3. Each headline was examined and coded according to a pre-designed coding sheet, ensuring a structured and consistent approach to data collection. The use of a coding sheet ensured that the analysis remained objective and that each headline was evaluated based on the same parameters, facilitating a clear and organized collection of data.

4. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, the study incorporated inter-rater reliability measures. Three English lecturers, including one native English speaker, will act as inter-raters. They were independently code the headlines, and any item agreed upon by at least two inter-raters will be accepted as valid.

#### **Data Analysis**

**Quantitative Data Analysis:** The initial step in the data analysis process was to count the occurrences of each identified technique within the selected headlines. Following the counting process, the frequency of each technique was determined. Additionally, the percentage of each technique was calculated in relation to the total number of headlines analyzed.

**Data Presentation:** After analyzing the frequencies and percentages, the dataset analyzed was categorized into a table format including employing content analysis, which allows for a straightforward and visually accessible way to convey the results.

**Content Analysis:** In addition to the quantitative analysis, the content analysis was conducted to provide a deeper understanding of certain techniques that are used. This analysis involves examining the context and nuances of each headline, looking beyond mere frequency to understand the purpose and effect of the headline-writing techniques.

**Comparative Analysis:** The final step in the data analysis process was a comparative analysis of the use of different headline-writing techniques across the three newspapers. This analyzes details of the similarities and differences in the application of these techniques found The Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and The Financial Times. The comparative analysis aims to identify patterns and trends in headline writing within each newspaper contributing to a deeper understanding of the editorial practices and stylistic choices that characterize each newspaper.

#### **Research Result**

Based on the framework of 10 news headlines writing techniques-loaded Words, omission of auxiliary verbs, noun phrase, short synonyms, present simple, "to" for future events, use of commas for "and", use of colons for "say", omission of verb to be and Idioms, the following are the findings.

**Table 1: Headline Writing Techniques in the Bangkok Post**

No.	Headline Writing Technique	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	loaded words	149	38.21
2	present simple tense	130	33.33
3	idioms	35	8.97
4	omission of auxiliary verbs	27	6.92
5	"to" for future events	25	6.41
6	comma for "and"	16	4.10
7	omission of verb "to be"	5	1.28
8	short synonym	3	0.77
9	colon for "say"	-	-
10	nominalization	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>390</b>	<b>100</b>

According to **Table 1**, out of 10 headline writing techniques, the use of loaded words, the persuasive terms to grab a reader's attention and convey a strong sense of urgency or importance, is the most used one with an occurrence of 149 times (38.21%). The use of the present simple tense, accounting for 33.33%, came in second, followed by present simple, the omission of auxiliary verbs (f=35, 8.97%), idioms (f=27, 6.92%), omission of verb "to be" (f=25, 6.41%), "to" for future events (f=16, 4.10%), comma for "and" (F=5, 1.28%) and short synonym (F=3, 0.77%). Two techniques – the use of colon in place of the word "say" and the use of nominalization, were not observed in The Bangkok Post.

The followings are examples of some techniques found in The Bangkok Post.

**Loaded words:** "Hotel faces staff shortages" (14 Oct 2023) and "Move seeks to hike ingredient exports" (11 Aug 2023). Face and seek are both loaded words carrying strong implications use to grab readers' attention. The former refers to confront something while the later means trying to get something.

**Present Simple:** "Agency turns to culinary tourism" (11 Aug 2023) is a present simple tense used to give a sense of immediacy and relevance.

**Omission of Auxiliary Verbs:** "Legal tactics used to minimize tax" (9 Aug 2023). Instead of using the full sentence "Legal tactics are used to minimize tax," the writer chooses to make it short to save the space on the headline by omitting a helping verb.

**Idioms:** "Banks put the brakes on loan growth" (2 Sept 2023). To put the brakes on something means to slow down or stop an activity. "Cyber security agency sets its agenda" (13 Oct 2023), to set its agenda is to decide what subject other people could discuss and deal with. These catchy idioms are more likely to grab readers' intention than common words.

**Omission of Verb "To Be":** "Egat against further power bill cut" (4 Aug 2023) and "Chinese buyers gradually cool on Thailand as destination" (15 Aug 2023). For both headlines, verbs to be, which are main verbs, are omitted.

**Table 2: Headline Writing Techniques in The Financial Times**

No.	Headline Writing Technique	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	loaded words	147	40.61
2	present simple tense	131	36.19
3	Idioms	49	13.54
4	omission of auxiliary verbs	17	4.70

5	"to" for future events	12	3.31
6	comma for "and"	5	1.38
7	omission of verb "to be"	1	0.28
8	short synonym	-	-
9	colon for "say"	-	-
10	nominalization	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>362</b>	<b>100</b>

According to **Table 2**, the most dominant technique observed was the use of loaded words with 147 occurrences (40.61%), followed by present simple tense (f=131, or 36.19%) and idioms (f=49, 13.54%). Three techniques—comma for "will", colon for "say" and nominalization - were not found in The Financial Times.

The following are examples of the techniques found in the newspaper:

**Loaded words:** "China's renminbi hits 16-year low after exports tumble in August" (6 Sept 2023). Tumble means falling or decline but it gives more emotional meaning to something likely to happen quickly or be in crisis.

**Idioms:** "Investors raise red flags over Arm exposure to China risks" (23 Aug 2023), to raise red flags means to warn of anything dangerous to happen.

**Omission of Auxiliary Verbs:** "Low-rise residents flooded by massive cladding costs" (7 Aug 2023), the helping verb of "are" was left out in the headline. The full sentence should be "Low-rise residents are flooded by massive cladding costs."

**"To" for Future Events:** "Sweden to boost defence spending by 30% as Nato membership draws closer" (11 Sept 2023), instead of saying "Sweden will boost...", the writing made it shorter and punchy saying "Sweden to boost ..."

**Table 3: Headline Writing Techniques in the New York Times**

No.	Headline Writing Technique	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	loaded words	156	49.21
2	present simple tense	111	35.02
3	idioms	28	8.83
4	omission of auxiliary verbs	11	3.47
5	"to" for future events	8	2.52
6	comma for "and"	3	0.95
7	omission of verb "to be"	-	-
8	short synonym	-	-
9	colon for "say"	-	-
10	nominalization	-	-
<b>Total</b>		<b>273</b>	<b>100</b>

Based on **Table 3**, the use of loaded words is the most frequently deployed technique with 156 occurrences (49.21%). Interestingly, four techniques are not observed in the New York Times, namely; omission of verb "to be", short synonym, colon for "say" and noun phrase. The present simple tense is the second most common technique, appearing in 111 headlines (35.02%). Idiomatic expressions were used in 28 headlines (8.83%) and the omission of auxiliary verbs was found in 11 headlines (3.47%). The substitution of "to" for "will" was found with 8 occurrences headlines (2.52%) while the comma for "and" technique had 3 occurrences (1.10%).

Some examples are as follows:

**Loaded words:** “A spending Boom Fuels Russia’s Wartime Economy, Raising Bubble Fears (31 July 2023). As a loaded word, fuel means to worsen or to intensify while bubble fear, a loaded phrase, refers to concern about economic problems likely to crash.

**Idioms:** “From Detroit to Hollywood, New Union Leaders Take a Harder Line” (18 Aug 2023), to take a harder line is to have a more aggressive stance on something.

**Omission of Auxiliary Verbs:** “Target’s Sales Hit by Pride Month Merchandise Backlash” (16 Aug 2023), the full sentence should be “Target’s Sales are Hit by Pride Month Merchandise Backlash”.

**"To" for Future Events:** “Biden to Restrict Investments in China, Citing National Security Threats” (8 Aug 2023), “to” was replaced by “will” to show future action and to make the headline short and efficient.

**Table 4: Comparison of Headline Writing Techniques in the Bangkok Post, Financial Times, and the New York Times**

No.	Techniques	Bangkok Post (%)	Financial Times (%)	New York Times (%)
1	loaded words	38.21	40.61	49.21
2	present simple	33.33	36.19	35.02
3	idioms	6.92	13.54	8.83
4	omission of auxiliary verbs	8.97	4.70	3.47
5	omission of verb “to be”	6.41	3.31	-
6	"to" for future events	4.10	0.28	2.52
7	comma for “and”	1.28	-	0.95
8	short synonym	0.77	1.38	-
9	colon for “say”	-	-	-
10	nominalization	-	-	-

**Table 4** presented the comparison the use of news headline writing techniques among The Bangkok Post, The Financial Times, and The New York Times. Their most used technique and also the top 4 technique were the same. The most dominant one was the use of loaded words. The New York Times has the highest usage of loaded words (49.21%) while The Financial Times (40.61%) and The Bangkok Post (38.21%) came in second and third respectively. The use of present simple was also ranked second in all three newspapers with The Financial Times getting the most occurrences of 36.19%.

Interestingly, two techniques–colon for ‘say’ and nominalization - were not observed at all in any of the newspapers while the use of Common for “and” was not found in The Financial Times either.

Some examples are as follows:

**Loaded words:** “At Asian Wedding, Cash is King” (12 Aug 2023, The New York Times) “Italian bank shares slump after Meloni hits lenders with surprise windfall tax” (8 Aug 2023, The Financial Times) and “New premier pledges to cut electricity bills” (1 Sept 2023, The Bangkok Post). King, slump and pledge are loaded words. The meaning of King is not literal but it shows power and dominance while slump and pledge refers to a sharp decline in price and a strong promise respectively.



**Idiom:** China's Stalling Economy puts the world on notice (11 Aug 2026, The New York Times), China's sluggish economy will weight on global trade, western groups warn (28 Aug 2023, The Financial Times), Thailand feels the force of cyber-attack (1 Sept 2023, The Bangkok Post). Put the world on notice, weight on and feel the force are idioms. To put someone/something on notice means to warn. To weigh on someone/something means to make them worried. To feel the force of something means you are going to experience the bad or good result of somethings.

**Omission of Auxiliary Verbs:** For Single Women in China, Owning a Home is a New Form of Resistance (23 Aug 2023, The New York Times), SoftBank deal values Arm at \$64bn (18 Aug 2023, The Financial Times) and Digital sentiment improves in Q2. (8 Aug 2023, The Bangkok Post).

## Discussions

### 1. The News Headlines Writing Techniques in Business News in the Bangkok Post, The New York Times, and the Financial Times

Based on the framework of 10 news headlines writing techniques - loaded words, omission of auxiliary verbs, nominalization, short synonyms, present simple, "to" for future events, use of commas for "and", use of colons for "says", omission of verb "to be" and idioms, eight of them were deployed by the Bangkok Post while the Financial Times and the New York Times have used seven and six respectively.

The top 4 techniques-loaded Words, present simple, idioms and omission of auxiliary verbs-were used by all the three newspapers were the same as loaded words being the most used one. Although all the three newspapers are broadsheets and in formal business reporting, they rely heavily on loaded language.

Compared to the Comparative Analysis of Headlines Writing Techniques in FIFA World Cup 2022 by Thongsombat (2023 : Online), the use of idioms was found the most in the Bangkok Post, the Metro and the New York Times. It shows that the styles of headline writing in business news and sports news are different and the writers need to find practical ways to reach their respective target groups. While an idiom, which is a group of words, has a more forceful meaning than non-idiomatic expressions according to Reah (1998) a loaded word conveys beyond its literal meaning with more emotional weight or significance.

The use of present simple tense is another widely used feature and it was ranked second in all three newspapers with The Financial Times getting the most occurrences of 76.16%, followed by the Bangkok Post (50.98%). It aligns strongly with the study of the use of the present simple in five of the best newspapers by circulation in the English language by Badawi and Albadri (2022). They found that the present simple tense is the most frequently used in English-language headlines because it can both make the news fresher and serve as a great marketing technique.

Meanwhile, the omission of auxiliary and verb to be were more often in the Bangkok Post than in The Financial Times and The New York Times. In his study of the Analysis of Parts-of-Speech Distribution and Omission Patterns in The New York Times and The Guardian, Alzahrani (2018) also reported that articles and auxiliary verbs were found to be the most frequently omitted items. Without auxiliaries and verbs to be, the headlines are so short and concise that they can put on the limited space in the newspaper.

Interestingly, two techniques-colon for 'say' and nominalization-were not observed in any of the newspapers. 'say' and nominalization not often used in the news headlines. As for the use of colon for 'say', it is was common in old media like print media while new media prefer more



dynamic words. Nominalization is not popular because it makes the headline longer. It sometimes is more complex and harder for readers to understand.

## **2. Broadsheet newspapers against Business newspaper**

While the Bangkok Post and the New York Times are regarded as broadsheet newspapers to cover various news stories, the Financial Times has focused in business fields. Nonetheless, according to the findings, they are not much different in terms of news headline writing styles because they share the same goal of grabbing the readers' attentions as quick as possible. With the use of loaded words, they are capable of luring the readers and employing the simple sentence, which shows immediacy. The only difference among the three newspapers would be their technical terms to attract their target groups.

## **3. Local newspaper against Global newspapers**

Found in 1946, The Bangkok Post is now Thailand's only English newspaper and its target groups are expatriates living in Thailand and also well-educated people. Meanwhile, The Financial Times and The New York Times, headquartered in UK and USA respectively, have been well recognized among the world's leading newspapers. Despite their differences in terms of the publishing location and target markets, all the three media have employed the same strategies in conveying messages to the readers.

## **Knowledge from research**

The findings offer valuable insights for language learning. Teachers and students should be encouraged to use the news headlines as an educational source. As authentic materials, the headlines will give them not only up-to-date information about world economy or daily events but also the language aspect. They can study how present simple tense is constructed and used in the news headline and it can be applied for their study. Also, the use of passive voice in the news headline where the auxiliary verb is omitted can be discussed. Moreover, an article and a full stop are not used in the news headline. Importantly, using this authentic material, the students will learn new vocabulary and make a good use of knowledge to be applied in their daily life.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Recommendations for the application of research findings**

In terms of news literacy development, the news headline writing techniques will show not only information or fact but also writers' bias or tone. We can learn from the words how the writers feel about the news story. Interestingly, the same news event might be conveyed and published differently by the media. Sometimes, bias can be also identified. Studying news headline writing styles, we will find it easier to grasp information and to decide whether we will believe it.

### **2. Recommendations for the next research**

This study has focused on business news from the newspapers in three countries in different continents. It showed that there was slightly different when the news headline writing techniques were taken into account. Their popular techniques were loaded words, present simple tense, idioms and the omission of auxiliary verbs. It would be interesting if other areas of the news headlines including sports news and political news will be conducted. There might be some differences since their target groups of audiences are not the same. The next study should also be conducted to compare between broadsheet newspapers and tabloid newspapers or between the digital media and print media. As the trend goes, the study of AI-generated headlines is

recommended. With that, we might know whether AI can replace human as an editor or a journalist.

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