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UNCOVERING THE SYNTAX OF NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF THE STAR, THE STRAITS TIMES, THE SUN, AND THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Muhammad Nasiruddin Aziz^{1*} & Chai Moo Hung²

^{1,2} Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor

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Corresponding Author:
nasiruddinaziz@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study compared the syntax of journalistic pieces, particularly the features and syntactic patterns of newspaper editorials. Four English newspaper editorials were analysed via the two research questions: (i) *How are the sentences in The Star, The Straits Times, The Sun, and The Wall Street Journal editorials syntactically structured?* and (ii) *How do the syntactic structures of the sentences from the four editorials written in different contexts compare to one another?* A total of 100 clauses from The Star (Malaysia), The Straits Times (Singapore), The Sun (the United Kingdom), and The Wall Street Journal (The United States) were qualitatively analysed using by Morenberg's syntactic model. The results revealed that the syntactic patterns of the clauses were highly varied and not at all formulaic, indicating considerable originality as the writers went beyond the basic patterns via the employment of dissimilar optional syntactic constituents. Several notable similarities were observed in sentence voice, sentence mood, and the expansion and recurrence of the syntactic patterns identified. The comparison has also yielded two dissimilar features namely, the use of subject ellipsis and the use of conjunctions placed at the beginning of sentences. These features highlight the potential consistency and distinctiveness between the newspaper editorials.

1. Introduction

Language as opposed to what many people believe is more than just a medium for information transfer. Its impact and influence at a deeper level go beyond what is generally realised in certain domains. This has been illustrated by Austin's (1956) discussion on how things are done using words, Malinowski's (1994) depiction on how phatic communion is used for social functions, and Grischecko's (2013) assertions on the use of direct and indirect speech acts as an approach to linguistic manipulation. One domain that exemplifies this function of language is news media, where language is used to mould, shape, and create the reality that humans at large perceive. This is made possible by the ideologies and beliefs inculcated and reinforced through the strategic use of language in news media. The considerable influence of discourse and media has been put forth by many scholars (Hudson, 1984; Van Dijk, 1995; Schudson, 1996; McNair, 1998; Fairclough, 2006; Ar, 2015; Zhu, 2017). One form of news media with this influence is editorials, by which public opinions are intentionally expressed and constructed (Van Dijk, 1995; Belmonte, 2009). Editorials use language within texts to inculcate certain beliefs or values, which Baillie (1996) asserts, will eventually influence readers' opinions on certain issues or events.

This unique attribute of language to shape opinions is made possible by the manipulation of certain aspects. One of which is syntax, which according to Tallerman (2014), investigates word classifications as well as order and structure in phrases and sentences in a language. This aspect of language, according to Van Valin (2001), is the centre of human language as it conditions and determines the different ways how words (i.e., meaning-bearing elements) can be put together to bring about different meanings. One instance of the manipulation of syntax was shown by Thompson and Klerk (2002) who observed the use of passive voice to ease the inculcation of opinions in editorials, achieved through the exclusion of the agent which could become an interference. As asserted by the scholars, by deleting the identity of the agent, one may come up with authoritative opinions while coming across as ostensibly factual and objective. Apart from that, the use of indicative, imperative, and interrogative sentences (also known as sentence mood) were also observed to place profound influence on readers.

Despite being the subject of interest of many previous studies, editorials have only been found to be studied from the diverse perspectives or standpoints including rhetorical strategy (Vázquez y del Árbol, 2005; McCabe & Heilman, 2007; Ansary & Babaii, 2009; Belmonte, 2009; Bonyadi, 2012; Fartousi & Dumanig, 2012), embedding of ideology (Bonyadi & Samuel, 2013; Ar, 2015) as well as media framing (Smith & Wakefield, 2005; Johnson, 2017; Zhu, 2017). As a result of the review of these studies, it was found that other than Thompson and Klerk's (2002) minor linguistic discoveries, none has examined editorials from a syntactic viewpoint. This gap was hence addressed by the present study.

To uncover how newspaper editorials are syntactically structured, this study formulated two research questions: (i) *How are the sentences in The Star, The Straits Times, The Sun, and The Wall Street Journal editorials syntactically structured?* and (ii) *How do the syntactic structures of the sentences from the four editorials written in different contexts compare to one another?*

2. Literature Review

2.1 Editorial Authorship and Publication

Editorials unlike other newspaper articles are not written by a single person. According to a Slate article "Who writes unsigned" (1999), editorials are often produced by a small group of writers through much debate and discussion about the topics at hand. This is because; editorials

are simply representative of the collective stance of the newspaper or the entire editorial board, not individual reporters or editors, ("Who writes unsigned", 1999; Clark, 2011). Hence, this is why editorials are usually left unsigned. The logical reason behind this is differing opinions are better addressed through the practice of having multiple writers get together to produce the editorials (Kelly, 2015).

In terms of roles, editorials generally are a text type that aims to express and construct public opinions while also reflecting authors' native cultural-linguistic backgrounds (Van Dijk, 1995). Belmonte (2009) highlights the definitive role of editorials in determining public opinion. Besides, editorials grab the attention of the governing body, urging them to take certain actions or respond to issues addressed. One way to do this, according to Belmonte (2009), is through editors' negative evaluation in editorials which generates frustration among the readers, hence pressuring for an immediate action from the government to solve issues at hand. The influence of news media on policy agenda has been the topic of interest many times (Baillie, 1996; Smith & Wakefield, 2005). Wallack et al. (1999) found editorials to be constantly referred to by state legislators to keep abreast with current issues. The undeniable roles of editorials in newspapers in raising awareness of various issues hence require much dedicated attention. Having acknowledged these critical roles, it is therefore crucial for editors to produce impactful editorials that subtly represent the standpoint of the newspaper while also keeping the readers hooked (Singh & Singh, 2006). To do this, editors must be critical and objective when analysing opinions and evidence by using the language that does not compete with the real issues or intentions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Materials

The materials of the study were the four newspaper editorials produced in different linguistic contexts. With a focus on the editorials and the syntax used, the study aimed to uncover the ways editorials were produced in different settings in which English was used: one in which the language has the status as the second or official language (Malaysia and Singapore) and another where English is the first language (the USA and the UK).

Hence, four newspaper editorials were compared to determine syntactic patterns produced in different contexts. The editorials were taken from four English newspapers namely The Star (Malaysia), The Straits Times (Singapore), The Sun (the UK), and The Wall Street Journal (the USA). These newspapers were selected based on the number of copies (i.e. circulation) that were distributed in their respective countries.

Table 1
The circulation of the selected newspapers

Newspaper	Country	Total Circulation (as of 2019)
The Star	Malaysia	248,559
The Straits Times	Singapore	383,600
The Sun	The United Kingdom	1,480,337
The Wall Street Journal	The United States	1,180,460

The selection of these newspapers was based on the model Three Circles of English, proposed by Kachru and Nelson (2006).

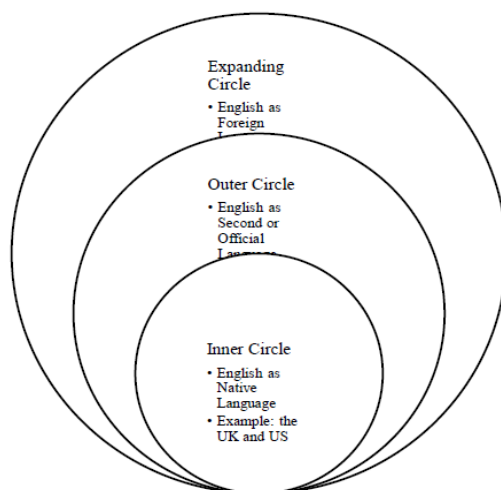


Figure 1. Three circles of English by Kachru and Nelson (2006)

As shown in figure above, English in the Inner Circle is used as the native language, or first language like in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). In Malaysia and Singapore, English as a second or official language falls into the category of the Outer Circle. The linguistic background of both countries is similar since both are the members of the Commonwealth and English is extensively used in professional settings.

As the first objective of the study was to examine the structure of sentences, clauses used in the four editorials were analysed. In total, the study analysed 100 clauses: 28 clauses from The Star "A little kindness" (2018); 17 from The Straits Times "US must focus" (2018); 14 from The Sun "Vilification of Jews" (2018); and 41 from The Wall Street Journal "Short-term ObamaCare" (2018). The sample was considered adequate as the study was exploratory. As the sole intention of the present study was to syntactically analyse such text type, the four (4) newspaper editorials were hence selected without considering the issues or themes covered. The editorial pieces were sampled within the same month, following the guidelines by Creswell (2007).

Table 2
Number of clauses from the newspaper editorials

Newspaper	Article Title	Number of Clauses
The Star	A Little Kindness Goes a Long Way	28
The Straits Times	US Must Focus on Getting Trade Right	17
The Sun	Vilification of Jews by Labour Begins at the Very Top- and Jeremy Corbyn Must Be Held to Account	14
The Wall Street Journal	Short-term ObamaCare Relief	41

3.2 Methods

The present study adopted a descriptive research design with the intention of describing the syntactic structures of newspaper editorials. As discussed in the previous section, the study of newspaper editorials from the perspective of syntactic analysis had not been attempted by previous researchers. Instead, most of the previous research examined the rhetorical and framing strategies that the media employed. Only Thompson and Klerk (2002) described linguistic uses in magazine editorials. This study is hence in line with Dulock's (1993) assertion that a descriptive study is the most useful design for a study to take when dealing with a topic that is not greatly known or understood. According to Dulock (1993), descriptive research generally studies the portrayal of an individual, a situation, or a group which entails a systematic and accurate description of the characteristics of the subject of interest. In the present study, the characteristics of the research subjects (i.e., the four newspaper editorials) were syntactically analysed, categorised, and calculated for frequency counts before being eventually compared.

To critically describe the syntax of the selected editorials, the study employed a collective case study, which essentially involved multiple case studies. In the case of the present study, the analysis of the four newspaper editorials was to uncover and compare the syntax of this text type from two different contexts in which English is used as the first (by the native speakers of English) and second or official language (by those who are non-native users of the language). To do this, the study conducted an embedded analysis of the specific aspects of a case, as proposed by Yin (2003). The syntactic patterns and features were the specific aspects of the newspaper editorials that were examined. This was done by employing Morenberg's (2013) model of syntactic analysis as the guiding framework of the study. The syntactic analysis of the newspaper editorials was based on Morenberg's six (6) different verb types of namely Intransitive Verb (VI), Linking Verb (VL), Transitive Verb (VT), Two-Place Transitive Vg Verb, Two-Place Transitive Vc Verb, and VBe Verb. These verbs identify the obligatory constituents that are used to form complete sentences. They are summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3
Morenberg's (2013) six verb types

Type of Verb	Formula				Constituents That Follow
Intransitive verb (VI)	NP VI				None
Linking verb (VL)	{	NP	VL	NP: PredN Adj: PredAdj	} A noun phrase or an adjective
Transitive verb (VT)	NP VT NP: DObj				A noun phrase
Two-place transitive verb (Vg)	NP	Vg	{	NP: IObj NP: DObj NP: DObj {to/for} NP: IObj	} Two noun phrases or a noun phrase and a prepositional phrase
Two-place transitive verb (Vc)	NP	Vc	{	NP: ObjComp AdjPh: ObjComp InfPh: ObjComp	} A noun phrase or an adjective phrase or an infinitive phrase

VBe verb	NP	VBe	{	NP: PredN Adj: PredAdj Adv: PredAdv	}	A noun, an adjective, or an adverb phrase
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The formulas or patterns however can be expanded using optional elements or constituents including the following:

Table 4
List of optional constituents

Abbreviation	Constituent
PrepPh	Prepositional phrase
NP	Noun phrase
AdvCl	Adverb clause
InfPh	Infinitive phrase
RelCl	Relative clause
NRM	Non-restrictive modifiers
PresPartPh	Present participial phrase
NomAbs	Nominative absolute
Appositive	Appositive
NCI	Noun clause

In the present study, the optionality of these constituents is indicated through the use of brackets. Figure 2 below illustrates the tree diagramming of Sentence 1 from The Sun:

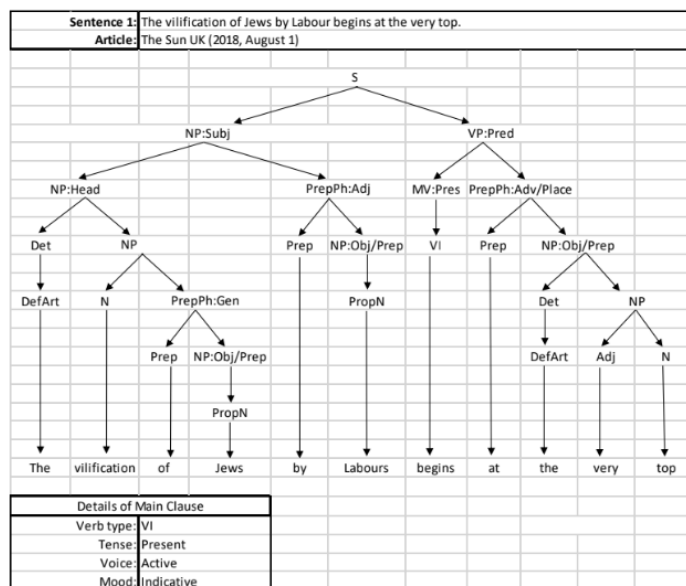


Figure 2. Tree-diagram guided by Morenberg's (2013) model

With the pattern NP VI (Adv), the sentence is headed by the noun phrase “The vilification of Jews by Labours”, followed by the intransitive verb (VI) “begins” and prepositional phrase “at the very top” which functions as an adverb of place.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the syntactic analysis of “A little kindness” (2018) from The Star (Malaysia); “US must focus” (2018) from The Straits Times (Singapore); “Vilification of Jews” (2018) from The Sun (the UK); and “Short-term ObamaCare” (2018) from The Wall Street Journal (US). The results and discussions are to answer the following research question:

RQ1: How are the sentences in The Star, The Straits Times, The Sun, and The Wall Street Journal editorials syntactically structured?

In order to identify the syntactic patterns used in the editorials from the four newspapers, a total of 100 clauses were analysed via tree diagramming guided by Morenberg's (2013) model and its six (6) verb types namely (i) intransitive (VI), (ii) transitive (VT), (iii) VBe, (iv) linking (VL), (v) two-place transitive Vc, and (iv) two-place transitive Vg verb.

The following table presents the patterns containing Intransitive Verbs (VI) from all newspaper editorials. In total, 10 dissimilar patterns were identified, varying in the use of optional elements indicated in brackets. All these patterns were active in voice. In terms of mood, only one pattern was in interrogative mood whereas the rest used the indicative.

Table 5
Syntactic patterns containing intransitive verbs

	“A little kindness” (2018) from The Star			“US must focus” (2018) from The Straits Times			“Vilification of Jews” (2018) from The Sun			“Short-term ObamaCare” (2018) from The Wall Street Journal		
Syntactic patterns containing VI verbs	1.	NP	VI	1.	(Adv)		1.	NP VI		1.	NP VI (Adv)	
	(Adv)	(NRM) ³		(AdvCI)	(NRM)	NP	(Adv) ¹			(Adv) ¹		
				VI (Adv)	(Adv)		2.	(AdvCI)	NP	2.	NP VI (Adv)	
				2.	NP (Adv)		VI (Adv)			(Adv)	(Adv)	(NRM)
				VI (Adv)						3.	NP VI (Adv)	
				3.	NP VI					(Adv)	(Adv)	(Adv)
				(Adv)	(NRM)					(AdvCI)		
										4.	...(Conj)	NP
										VI...	²	
Total Patterns	1			3			2			4		

¹Patterns used more than once

²Compounded sentence

³Interrogative sentence

Although most patterns were used only once, two were found to have multiple uses, namely NP VI (Adv) and NP VI (Adv) (Adv), which were respectively extracted from "Vilification of Jews" (2018) from The Sun and "Short-term ObamaCare" (2018) from The Wall Street Journal. Sentence 1 below is an instance from The Sun editorial which contained the NP VI (Adv) pattern.

"The vilification of Jews by Labour begins at the very top" ("Vilification of Jews", 2018).

In the sentence, the noun phrase or NP *"The vilification of Jews by Labour"* precedes as the subject and is followed by the intransitive verb *"begins"* which is then described by the adverb *"at the very top"* in the form of prepositional phrase, functioning as an adverb of place.

The next verb type observed to be used across the four newspaper editorials was Transitive Verb (VT). Upon comparing to other verb types, the patterns containing this verb type were found to be most used within The Star, The Straits Times, The Sun, and The Wall Street Journal editorials, with a total of 38 varying patterns presented in Table 6 below. Similar to patterns containing VI, most patterns used the active voice, portrayed in the indicative mood. Almost all patterns were not used more than once, with an exception for patterns NP VT NP ... and ... NP VT NP (Adv) (of which were subordinate clauses which were compounded with main clauses), identified from The Wall Street Journal editorial "Short-term ObamaCare" (2018).

Table 6
Syntactic patterns containing transitive verbs

	"A little kindness" (2018) from The Star	"US must focus" (2018) from The Straits Times	"Vilification of Jews" (2018) from The Sun	"Short-term ObamaCare" (2018) from The Wall Street Journal
Syntactic patterns containing VT verbs	1. (AdvCl) NP VT NP (Adv) 2. (Adv) NP VT NP (Conj) NP 3. (Adv) NP VT NCI (NRM) 4. NP VT GerundPh 5. ... (Conj) NP VT NCI ¹ 6. NP (Comp) VT NCI 7. NP VT NP (Conj) NP 8. (Adv) NP VT NP (Adv)	1. (Adv) (NRM) (Adv) NP VT NP 2. NP (Adv) VT NP (Adv) (Adv) (NRM) 3. (AdvCl) NP (Adv) VT NCI 4. NP (Conj) NP (NRM) VT NP (Adv) 5. NP VT NP (Conj) NP	1. NP VT NP (Adv) 2. (Conj) (NP) VT NP (Adv) ³ 3. (Conj) (NP) VT NP (Conj) (NRM) ³ 4. NP VT NP (Adv) 5. NP VT NP NP (Conj) NP (NRM) (NRM) 6. (Conj) (Adv) (Adv) NP VT NCI ⁴	1. NP VT NP... ^{2,7} 2. NP VT NCI (Adv) 3. NP (Adv) VT NP (Adv) 4. (Adv) NP VT NP (Adv)... ² 5. ...NP VT NP (Adv) ^{2,7} 6. NP VT NCI ⁷ 7. (Adv) NP VT NP (Adv) 8. (Conj) NP VT GerundPh (AdvCl) 9. NP VT NP (AdvCl) 10. (Conj) NP VT (Adv) NCI

				11. (Conj) NP VT NP
				12. NP (Adv) VT NCI
				13. NP VT (Adv)... ⁶
				14. (Adv) NP VT (Adv) (Adv) (AdvCI) ⁶
				15. NP VT NCI (NRM)
				16. VT NP (Adv)... ⁵
				17. NP VT (Conj) VT NP... ²
				18. ... (Conj) (Adv) NP VT NP (Adv) ²
				19. NP VT NP (Adv)... ²
Total Patterns	8	5	6	19

¹Compound main clause

²Compound sentence

³Subject ellipsis

⁴Interrogative sentence

⁵Imperative sentence

⁶Passive sentence

⁷Patterns used more than once

From the analysis of the patterns containing VT verbs, one interesting finding that the study uncovered was the use of subject ellipsis in The Sun editorial "Vilification of Jews" (2018) as seen in patterns (Conj) (NP) VT NP (Adv) and (Conj) (NP) VT NP (Conj) (NRM). To illustrate, Sentence 7 from the editorial below is one instance of a pattern consisting of this feature.

"Or see the "hand of Israel" behind Islamist murder" ("Vilification of Jews", 2018).

In the sentence above, the subject "Corbyn" introduced in preceding sentences, was dropped (hence why NP was indicated in brackets in the said pattern). Transitive verb "see" is followed by the noun phrase "hand of Israel" and described by the adverb of place "behind Islamist murder" in the form of a prepositional phrase. The use of subject ellipsis is consistent with Aziz and Chai's (2019) findings on the use of the syntactic feature in the editorials from the similar newspaper, despite being asserted to be used in informal writings like diary entries (Aziz & Chai, 2018). It is argued that this seems to be the unique style of writing used by The Sun writers.

Apart from subject ellipsis, the use of coordinating conjunctions (including *yet*, *but*, or and *and*) to start sentences was another interesting finding identified through the analysis. To be specific, this

use was only observed in The Sun editorial “Vilification of Jews” (2018) and The Wall Street Journal (US) editorial “Short-term ObamaCare” (2018), the two newspapers which are produced in countries where English is the first language (i.e., countries in the Inner Circle). This, however, was not found in the other two editorials which were in the Kachru and Nelson’s (2006) Outer Circle (i.e., Malaysia and Singapore). Thus, this could be one potential difference or distinctiveness between the newspaper editorials written in both groups.

The third verb type used in the four (4) editorials was VBe verb. Patterns containing this type were also found to be frequently used, only second to VT verbs. By way of illustration, 34 different patterns were identified throughout The Star, The Straits Times, The Sun, and The Wall Street Journal editorials. This is summarised in Table 7 below:

Table 7
Syntactic patterns containing VBe verbs

	“A little kindness” (2018) from The Star	“US must focus” (2018) from The Straits Times	“Vilification of Jews” (2018) from The Sun	“Short-term ObamaCare” (2018) from The Wall Street Journal
Syntactic patterns containing VBe verbs	1. (Adv) NP VBe NP 2. (Conj) NP VBe NP (AdvCl) (NRM) 3. NP VBe Adj (AdjComp) (NRM) 4. (AdvCl) NP VBe Adj (Adv) 5. VBe NP NP (NRM) ² 6. (Adv) NP VBe Adj (AdjComp) 7. (Adv) NP VBe PrepPh (Adv) 8. NP VBe NP ² 9. (Adv) VBe NP NP (AdvCl) 10. NP VBe NP 11. NP VBe Adj (AdjComp) ²	1. (Adv) (AdvCl) NP VBe NP (Conj) NP 2. NP (Adv) VBe Adj (AdjComp) 3. NP (NRM) VBe Adj 4. NP VBe (Adv) NP 5. (NRM) NP VBe NP 6. (AdvCl) NP (Adv) VBe NP 7. (AdvCl) NP VBe NP	1. NP VBe NCI (AdvCl) (NRM) 2. NP VBe NCI ¹ 3. (Conj) VBe NP Adj (Adv) ²	1. NP VBe Adv (Adv) (Adv) 2. ... (Conj) VBe Adj (AdjComp) ⁴ 3. NP VBe Adj (AdjComp) ¹ 4. NP VBe (Adv) NP 5. (Adv) NP VBe Adj (AdjComp) 6. NP VBe InfPh ¹ 7. ... (Conj) (Adv) NP VBe Adj ⁴ 8. ... (Conj) NP VBe InfPh ⁴

	12.	NP	VBe				
	NP ... ^{1,3}						
	13.	...					
	(Conj)	(Adv)					
	(AdvCl)	NP	VBe				
	NP (Adv) ³						
	14.	(Conj)					
	NP	VBe	PrepPh				
	15.	NP	VBe				
	NP (Conj)	NP					
	16.	NP	VBe				
	NP (Adv)						
Total Patterns	16		7		3		8

¹Patterns used more than once

²Interrogative sentence

³Compounded main clause

⁴Compounded sentence

Three patterns, in particular, were found to be used more than once namely NP VBe NP ... in The Star "A little kindness" (2018) as well as NP VBe Adj (AdjComp) and NP VBe InfPh in The Wall Street Journal "Short-term ObamaCare" (2018). Sentence 20 exemplifies the use of pattern NP VBe InfPh:

"It is to stay on ObamaCare" ("Short-term ObamaCare", 2018).

Expletive "It" which functions as the subject heads the VBe verb "is". To make up a complete sentence, the infinitive phrase "to stay on ObamaCare" then follows as the object complement.

The fourth verb type used in editorials was Two-Place Transitive Vc Verb, which accounted for a minor use of five patterns which were all in active voice and indicative in mood, as presented in the following table.

Table 8
Syntactic patterns containing two-place transitive Vc verbs

	"A little kindness" (2018) from The Star			"US must focus" (2018) from The Straits Times			"Vilification of Jews" (2018) from The Sun			"Short-term ObamaCare" (2018) from The Wall Street Journal		
Syntactic patterns containing Vc verbs	1.	NP	Vc	1.	NP	Vc NP	1.	(NP)	Vc NP	1.	NP	Vc NP
	NP InfPh			InfPh			NP (AdvCl) ¹			NP (Adv)		
	2.	NP	Vc									
	NP		Adj									
	(AdjComp)											

Total Patterns	2	1	1	1
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¹Subject ellipsis

Surprisingly, another use of subject ellipsis was found in The Sun editorial "Vilification of Jews" (2018), observed through the pattern (NP) Vc NP NP (AdvCl) in Sentence 8 below:

"Or call Hamas terrorists "brother" after they have helped slaughter Jews"
("Vilification of Jews", 2018).

Just like Sentence 7, this particular sentence contained the use of subject ellipsis through the exclusion of the subject "Corbyn", indicated in preceding sentences.

As for the other two verb types of Linking (VL) and Two-Place Transitive Vg Verb, both were found to be only used once across the four newspaper editorials. This is summarised in Table 9 and 10 below.

Table 9
Syntactic patterns containing linking verbs

	"A little kindness" (2018) from The Star	"US must focus" (2018) from The Straits Times	"Vilification of Jews" (2018) from The Sun	"Short-term ObamaCare" (2018) from The Wall Street Journal
Syntactic patterns containing VL verbs		1. NP VL NP		
Total Patterns	0	1	0	0

As the pattern NP VL NP was used in The Straits Times editorial "US must focus" (2018), NP Vg NP NCI was observed to be used in its counterpart (refer to Table 10). This makes the two verb types to be the least-used patterns in the said texts.

Table 10
Syntactic patterns containing two-place transitive Vg verbs

	"A little kindness" (2018) from The Star	"US must focus" (2018) from The Straits Times	"Vilification of Jews" (2018) from The Sun	"Short-term ObamaCare" (2018) from The Wall Street Journal

Syntactic patterns containing Vg verbs				1. NCI	NP Vg NP
Total Patterns	0	0	0	1	

RQ2: How do the syntactic structures of the sentences from the four editorials written in different contexts compare to one another?

Upon dissecting the clauses, the present study also identified notable similarities across The Star, The Straits Times, The Sun, and The Wall Street Journal editorials. The first similarity was the frequent inclusion of indicative sentences.

As shown in Figure 3 below, a significant proportion of the clauses (92 out of 100 clauses) were declarative sentences written in an indicative mood. Six clauses were interrogative sentences, most were from The Star editorial "A little kindness" (2018). Only one imperative sentence was found across the four editorials. Keeping in mind that these editorials were all published in the Opinion column, it is interesting that the use of this sentence mood was found to be predominant. It is argued that is a covert way for these newspaper editorials to express their stand on the related issues by appearing impersonal or factual, to achieve what Belmonte (2009) asserts, as "the role of determining public opinion". In the editorials, it is argued that this particular role is subtly achieved through the use of modality or modal verbs.

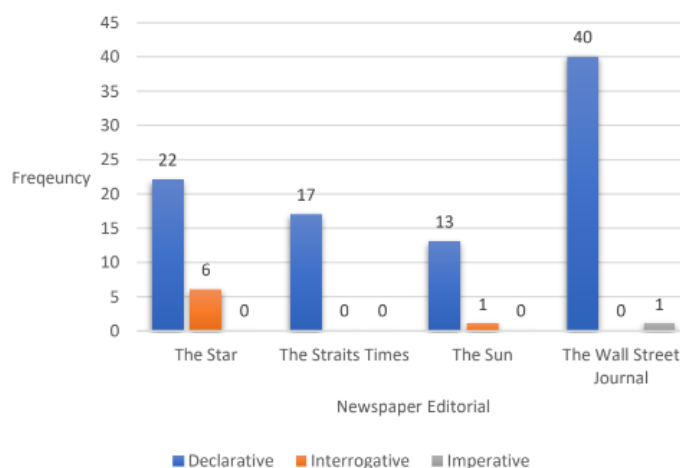


Figure 3. Sentence mood

In terms of voice, almost all clauses were in the active voices: only two from The Wall Street Journal editorial "Short-term ObamaCare" (2018) were found to be different, based on the syntactic analysis. This is summarised in Figure 4 below.

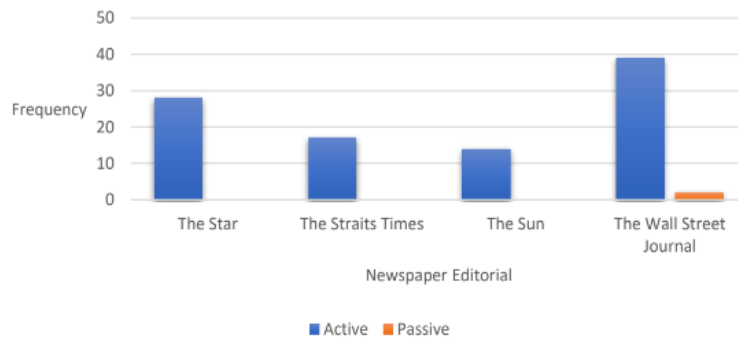


Figure 4. Sentence voice

Apart from that, another notable similarity shared by the four newspaper editorials was in the syntactic patterns. A significant majority of the patterns (indicated in the earlier part) were expanded past the basic ones outlined by Morenberg's (2013) six (6) verb types. Besides, these patterns were hardly repeated more than once, hence indicating writers' different ways of expanding their structures to express their stand. When comparing with Bordbar et al.'s (2017) and Lorenzo-Dus and Izura's (2017) studies on the syntactic patterns of compliments (which were found to be highly formulaic), the writers of the editorials were found not to be formulaic at all, signalling considerable originality in their writings. This could be attributed to the wide range of topics and issues that newspaper editorials discuss, consistent with the referential nature of the text type. As a result, a wider range of sentences and vocabulary repertoire was observed. Additionally, unlike compliments which function as a solidarity device, newspaper editorials, as highlighted by Van Dijk (1995) and Belmonte (2009) perform a bigger role, particularly in shaping public opinion. This explains the extensive use of the dissimilar features exemplified in the earlier section. Furthermore, the originality of the four newspaper editorials could also be attributed to the Slate article's "Who writes unsigned" (1991) and Clark's (2011) revelation that editorials are produced in a group of writers, not an individual author. Considering that "A little kindness" (2018) from The Star, "US must focus" (2018) from The Straits Times, "Vilification of Jews" (2018) from The Sun, and "Short-term ObamaCare" (2018) were all left unsigned, the present study speculates that each editorial could have indeed been written by an editorial team to represent their respective publication as a whole.

5. Conclusion

In short, the study examined newspaper editorials from the angle of syntax. The syntactic analysis guided by Morenberg's (2013) model as the theoretical framework found that the four editorials- "A little kindness" (2018), "US must focus" (2018), "Vilification of Jews" (2018), and "Short-term ObamaCare" (2018), taken from The Star, The Straits Times, The Sun, and The Wall Street Journal shared some notable similarities while also comprising their own distinct features. It is argued that the shared similarities are attributed to the relentless globalisation. However, the differences which set them apart, are likely due to the contexts in which English is used. This finding appears to be compatible with the finding on the potential consistency and distinctiveness highlighted by Streeter (1969), particularly in the genre of newspaper editorials.

Editorials, as discussed in the introduction, have a far-reaching role in shaping public's opinion: despite this huge revelation, no scholarly work has been found to specifically dedicate much focus on language use (i.e., syntax) which ultimately enables the inculcation of certain features including

media framing, myth, and ideology that together project today's reality. This was the gap that the study fulfilled in the body of knowledge. As a way forward to build on the findings of the study, future research that intends to linguistically examine similar text type is hence recommended to carry further investigation in the area of syntax with larger samples from other contexts, so to further verify the findings obtained. This would enable greater generalisation for a better understanding of the manipulation of syntax, particularly in editorial pieces. This was one major limitation that not only the study but also other qualitative studies have faced. However, considering that the present study was an exploratory attempt to investigate this understudied area in newspaper editorials, the approach was thus deemed to be appropriate. Other than that, future research could also employ Morenberg's (2013) model in the analysis of the syntax of other text types or genres. The analyses could further develop the Morenberg's (2013) model or propose another model for the analysis of text to develop writing expertise especially in second and foreign language contexts.

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Authors Contributions

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest associated with this publication.

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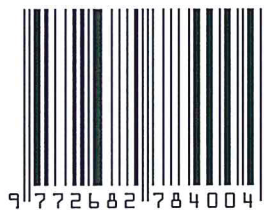
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