



## NOMINALIZATION AS A COHESIVE DEVICE IN BRITISH NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS

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### Introduction

The present paper shows the results of a corpus-based study of the language of British newspaper editorials. As Westin (2002, 135) observes, “the main purpose of editorials is to contribute to the molding of public opinion on current affairs. Therefore, they ought to have an argumentative structure. The authors do not need only factual evidence to support their arguments. They also need linguistic means to serve the factual evidence in as convincing way as possible”. And this is where nominalization as a text cohesive device of newspaper language comes into view. Nominalizations are usually connected with the texts that require language economy and high information density. They are used for embedding as much information into a few words as possible. To quote the popular definition proposed by Quirk, “Semantically nominalizations are thus usually related to a verb, such as *involvement* to *involve*, but they can also be related to an adjective, such as *darkness* to *dark*. They are usually nominal phrases derived from clauses” (Quirk et. al. 1985, 1288). Banks (2003, 129) argues that there are a number of options available in a language creating nominalized forms of processes, though not all options are necessarily available for a individual verb: 1) nominalizations which are morphologically identical with agnate verb (e. g. *haul, estimate, change*); 2) nominalizations which have no agnate verb, but which nevertheless indicate a process (e. g. *growth, preference, reading*).

Kress (1983, 129–134) shows that nominalizations can therefore be used for ideological purposes. To manipulate the reader, the central actions are often expressed in nominal form thus omitting the actor and leaving the reader in doubt. “By expressing an event in nominal form it is at once taken out of time, and therefore be readily assimilated to ‘timeless’ sets of categories. The event is taken out of the world of the specific, concrete, and placed in the world of the general, abstract” (Kress 1983,77).



The study of newspaper language from a text linguistics perspective does not seem to have attracted much attention, however. Thus the aim of the study is to analyze British newspaper editorials with regard to lexico-grammatical cohesive device – nominalization. The analysis of texts is concerned with the linguistic forms of texts and the distribution of different linguistic forms. Nominalization is a linguistic form and at the same time cohesive device which is heavily used in accounts or narratives about ‘global economy’. Fairclough (2003, 12–13) postulates that, “instead of representing processes which are taking place in the world as processes (grammatically, in clauses or sentences with verbs), they are represented as entities (grammatically, through nominalization, i.e. transforming a clause into a nominal or noun-like entity)”.

### **Materials and Methodological considerations**

Before compiling a corpus for the textual study of newspaper editorials, at least two questions have to be answered: firstly, what newspaper(s) to choose for the study and, secondly, what period to cover. The analysis is based on a corpus of 300 editorials drawn from on-line up-market British newspapers *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Daily Telegraph* in the period from January 1, 2009 to December 1, 2009. The term “up-market” as distinguished from “mid-market” and “down-market” was used by Jucker (1992) in his popular social stratification of English newspapers. The majority of the “up-market” newspapers (e.g. *The Times*, *the Daily Telegraph*, and *The Guardian*) are, mainly, aimed at the upper middle-class readers, “mid-market” newspapers (e. g. *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mail and Today*) at lower middle-class and skilled working-class readers, and “down-market” newspapers (e. g. *The Daily Mirror*, *The Star*, *The Sun*) at working class readers. Thus the newspaper editorials were random-sampled by selecting titles of newspapers first and then selecting the nominalizations used in the corpus under investigation.

As the focus of this study lies on newspaper editorials, their argumentative structures were researched within a framework of textual analysis. To cite Fairclough (2003, 15), “Textual analysis is a resource for social research which can enhance it provided that it is used in conjunction with other methods of analysis”. Thus the collected examples were analyzed by employing critical discourse analysis and transformational methods.

The critical discourse analysis is based on the pragmatic approach proposed by van Dijk (1985; 1998) and Fowler (1991). In his discourse analysis, van Dijk postulates that a purely linguistic analysis is not sufficient in describing all the “aspects of meaning and reference of discourse” (1985, 103). One of the purposes of a discourse that can be used to describe its deeper meanings is ‘discourse coherence’, where it is crucial to understand “sequences of propositions rather than isolated sentences (ibid. 107–108). ‘Coherence’ is therefore not merely a matter of grammar and sentence ordering, and the readers or listeners in a communicative situation have to use their universal or individual ‘scripts’ of the world knowledge to fill in possible information gaps. For a certain discourse to be understandable, there is not only the need for a



'local coherence' (the microstructure level), but also a "global semantic structure or macrostructure" (ibid. 115). The interpretation of the micro- as well as the macrostructure of a discourse is based on individual experiences, belief systems, attitudes or personal opinions, and the interpretation of both can therefore differ among individuals (ibid. 117). The critical discourse analysis overlooks nominalizations and their transformations as having a substantial impact on the way a text is perceived by the readers or listeners.

Fowler (1991) sets to examine the role of linguistic structures in the construction of ideas in newspapers, with the presumption that language is not neutral, but a highly constructive mediator. He points out that the selection of news is a complex process based on professional routines, editorial stances and subjective criteria of a journalist. Therefore, "Anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position" (Fowler 1991, 10). This ideology becomes visible in the language, and hence Fowler establishes some tools for a discourse analysis. One of these is the concept of 'transitivity', which assigns the roles of agent and patient to different participants and is therefore 'ideologically significant' (Fowler 1991, 71–76).

Nominalization allows eliminating information like participants, time or modality. The transformational method was employed to show the relationship between the underlying proposition and the respective nominalization. The present model is in keeping with the principles of generative semantics, which postulates that the base component of a grammar generates the semantic representation of the sentence, which is converted to surface structure directly. In my work, the proposition is the underlying structure of the nominalization. The proposition is not an abstract construction: linguistically it is realized as a clause. Consequently, the nominalization is 'materially' related to the clause; semantically it is related to the propositional content of the clause. Thus the direction of my analysis is from the proposition to the nominalization and from the nominalization to its textual functions.

### **Theoretical prerequisites**

With regard to the relationship between nominalization and text variations, a number of studies show that nominalization is a distinguishing marker of register. Chafe (1982; 1985), Halliday (1985), Halliday and Martin (1993) postulate that nominalizations are used for exposing ideas and integrating information into fewer words. Biber (1986) maintains that they tend to co-occur with passive constructions and prepositions and thus interprets their function as conveying highly abstract information.

Newspaper editorials represent a fairly formal style. Biber (1988, 172) distinguishes between explicit and situated text types. Newspaper editorials could be classified as explicit – the writer has to express his/her ideas clearly and support them by means of explicit examples or arguments to persuade the reader. To put in other terms, we can speak of two-level cohesiveness: deep and surface, or implicit and explicit.



A great deal of research on media language, written as well as spoken, has been made, especially during the last few decades. Many different aspects have been studied. The content analysis, often with a sociological or ideological emphasis, has been carried out. Krippendorff (1980), for example, has concentrated on class-dependent news production. The sociolinguistic aspects of newspaper language are treated in the works by Bell (1998) and Jucker (1992), who studied the influence by the audience on the linguistic choices that the author of a newspaper text makes, while Kress (1983, 120–138) showed how it is possible for an author to manipulate the audience by choosing the appropriate linguistic variant. Fowler (1991, 91–109) and Metge (1998) discussed gender and discrimination in British newspapers in general.

Many researches (e. g. van Dijk 1998, Bell 1998) have investigated newspaper language from a general stylistic point of view, among others Crystal and Davy (1969, 173–192), who compared two newspaper articles, one from *The Times* and the other from *The Daily Express*. Others Ryden (1975, 17–39), Axelsson (1998), Jucker (1992, 207–250) concentrated on a specific linguistic feature. Jucker, for example, looked at noun-name appositional phrases and Axelsson (1998) studied the use of contractions.

Though there are not many explicit theories of editorials as a media genre, research on newspaper editorials, the genre chosen for the present study, has also been carried out. Van Dijk (1998) studied the argumentative structures and strategies in two British editorials: *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*. Westin (2002), investigated the language change in English newspaper editorials during several decades.

### Research findings

Editorials are composed under rather strict space constraints. A nominalization allows a notion which is verbal in origin to be inserted into an idea unit as if it were a noun (Chafe 1982, 39). Consider the following example:

(1) *A fresh wave of postal strikes is set to held across Britain in an escalation of bitter Royal mail dispute, it has emerged. The move would cause further disruption to mail deliveries, which are already facing big delays because of this week's stoppages. (Postal strike: three more days of action next week in *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 October 2009)*

The nominalizations *an escalation of bitter Royal mail dispute*, *The move*, *further disruption*, *mail deliveries*, *this week's stoppage* applying the transformational method might be derived from the respective propositions: *Royal mail dispute escalates bitterly*, *X moves*, *X disrupts further*, *X delivers mail*, *X is caused to stop for a week*.

Consequently, most nominalizations can be re-written as a phrase or a clause. Some are more difficult to denominalize, however. Take for example *widespread public opposition to a rise* in (2) from *The Guardian*:

(2) *Ministers are expected to pave the way for an increase in student tuition fees, despite widespread public opposition to a rise. Pressure is already mounting on Labour and the Conservatives to sanction a significant increase <...>, with some universities calling for fees to double. (Ministers expected to pave way for increase in tuition fees in *The Guardian*, 09 November 2009).*

The nominalized proposition might be reworded into the following clauses: *the public opposes in a widespread manner* and *X rises*.

Nominalizations depersonalize the agent. Due to the fact that so much information is compressed in a single word or phrase, the use of nominalizations can cause ambiguity or obscurity. For example:

(3) *British theatre is bucking the recession, we are told – but only by embracing hoary old classics, says Mark Lawson. A preference for recognizable <...> brands is a routine effect of a reaction but, this time, the safety-catch has been applied even more tightly. At the moment, there is not a single play in the West End being staged for the first time. Crucially, given that this – theatrical busyness is being billed as resistance to the – financial crisis, the economics underpinning it are highly suspect. (London theatre is far from immune from the credit crunch in *The Guardian*, June 23 2009).*

All the nominalizations in the above example depersonalize the agents in this way leaving the reader in uncertainty. As *X recess*, *X prefers*, *X catches safely*, *X resists* where the reader has to answer to a question *who* himself. Consider one more example:

(4) *It is the harvest of the century in Bordeaux, with exceptional weather conditions producing grapes so fine that dogs are turning vegetarian to eat them. That, at least, is what the region's wine-makers would have you believe as they lavish praise on this year's pickings. But the claims have prompted wry smiles from French critics and drinkers, <...>. (Critics doubt French wine-makers' boasts of a vintage year in *The Times*, 8 November 2009).*

The verbs *pick*, *smile*, *claim* were nominalized so instead of performing the verbal function within a clause, *pick*, *smile*, *claim* are used as nouns. The nominalizing of verbs disconnects the participant who did the picking, smiling, claiming – “people” – from the action that they performed by condensing that transitive relationship from the clause into a single, general noun. This example of nominalization illustrates the sort of transformation that generates many event categories in the news.

The process of composing is not simple, but at some stage it emerges as the very practical matter of putting one word after another, one sentence after another. Words and sentences must be produced in some kind of sequence that leads the thought of the reader. Each word or sentence relates in some way to what has preceded and points to what is to follow. Typically we begin with a general statement which is then followed by sentences that respond to the general statement, i. e. we move from ge-



neral information to specific information. This kind of text, or a supraphrasal unity, is referred to as synthesis. Consider:

(5) *In the latest British Journalism Review, the American investigative journalist Danny Schechter compares financial reporters to correspondents who were “embedded” with US and British forces in Iraq <...> Property advertising became a big source of revenue. Journalists will recoil at Schechter’s suggestion that advertisers could influence reporting. (Crash course in economics in *The Guardian*, 12 February 2009)*

(6) *The defining issue of our generation will be humanity’s response to the challenge of climate change. That belief underpins the decision by Guardian News and media (GNM) to place sustainability firmly at the top of our editorial agenda, and to invest accordingly. (World reportage in *The Guardian*, 27 July 2009).*

Journalists often opt for the nominalizations as a starting point of a clause. For instance:

(7) *China’s ballooning influence over global markets was highlighted in dramatic style yesterday <...> The drop in Shanghai contributed to what has been a 20 per cent plunge in the main Chinese bourse since August 4, which technically puts Chinese shares in a bear market <...> The Shanghai fall was driven chiefly by domestic worries over government policy and slowing credit growth. The sharp drop, said brokers, had badly wounded international confidence <...>. (Shanghai fall raises doubts over China’s great recovery in *The Times* August 9, 2009).*

Not frequently the journalist opt for explicit nominalizations, when the source verb the nominalization is derived from is found somewhere in the text. Consider the following example:

(8) *<...> This crisis started in the United States, but the fact that everyone in the world is or will be affected by it demonstrates how life has changed, and that we are living in a communicating and interdependent world. <...> the position of the City of London has changed. <...> the world has changed. <...> the fact that the long-term changes in the global economy were happening before 2008 and will continue to happen <...>. (London calling: we are on your side in *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 February 2009)*

As can be seen in the example above, the word combination *the long-term changes in the global economy* presents the nominalization of the preceding propositions. This bridge between propositions establishes a semantic link.

### Concluding remarks

The high frequency of nominalizations in editorials is due to lack of space or even may be of time. The style of writing editorials needs a certain device for talking about abstract ideas. We may generalize that the more detached, depersonalized, static, compact, abstract, and implicit the text is meant to be, the more nominalizations



are used by a journalist. Furthermore, the precise lexical choice is a measure of information density. It can be assumed that in British up-market newspaper editorials, nominalizations are markers of information density rather than of explicit reference.

However, since the language of the editorials illuminates the language used in society, the results of the study can be used in a broader linguistic context in so far as they are also applicable to other newspaper genres.

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### NOMINALIZACIJOS KAIP RIŠLUMO PRIEMONĖ ANGLIŠKŲ LAIKRAŠČIŲ VEDAMUOSIUOSE STRAIPSNIUOSE

#### Santrauka

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** *nominalizacija, vedamieji straipsniai, kritinė diskurso analizė, transformacija, depersonalizacija.*

Šio straipsnio tikslas yra išnagrinėti nominalizacijas kaip teksto rišlumo priemones angliškų laikraščių vedamuosiuose straipsniuose. Pavyzdžiai buvo renkami iš laikraščių *The Guardian*, *The Times* ir *The Daily Telegraph* internetinių variantų nuo 2009 m. sausio iki 2009 m. gruodžio. Iš viso peržiūrėta 300 straipsnių. Argumentinės straipsnių struktūros aprašytos pasitelkiant kritinio diskurso analizės ir transformacinį metodus.

Nominalizacijos paprastai siejamos su tekstais, kuriuose svarbu kalbos ekonomiškumas ir didelis leksinis tankis. Atlikus tyrimą paaiškėjo, kad laikraščių vedamieji straipsniai atstovauja formaliajam stiliui. Pasitelkiant nominalizacijas, veiksmožodinės konstrukcijos transformuotos į tokias, kurios funkcionuoja kaip daiktavardžiai. Be to, nominalizacijos gali nuasmeninti agentą. Vietoje kito kalbos vieneto renkantis nominalizaciją daug informacijos turi būti sutalpinta į vieną žodį ar frazę, todėl tokie atvejai gali būti suprasti dviprasmiškai arba ir visai nesuprasti. Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad kuo objektyvesnis, nuasmenintas, statiškas, kompaktiškas, abstraktus bei implicitiškas tekstas turi būti pateiktas skaitytojui, tuo daugiau nominalizacijų žurnalistas pasitelkia.



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### Summary

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The present paper shows the results of a corpus-based study of the language of British newspaper editorials. Nominalizations are usually related to the texts that require language economy and high information density. The aim of the study is to analyze British newspaper editorials with regard to the cohesive device – nominalization. The analysis is based on a corpus of 300 editorials drawn from on-line up-market British newspapers *The Guardian*, *The Times*, and *The Daily Telegraph* in the period from January 1, 2009 to December 1, 2009. The argumentative structures of newspaper editorials were researched within a framework of discourse analysis. Thus the collected examples were analyzed by employing critical discourse analysis and transformational methods.

The results demonstrate that newspaper editorials represent a fairly formal style. A nominalization allows a notion which is verbal in origin to be transformed into a notion which is substantival. Moreover, nominalizations may depersonalize the agent. Due to the fact that so much information is compressed in a single word or phrase, the use of nominalizations can cause ambiguity or obscurity. We may generalize that the more detached, depersonalized, static, compact, abstract, and implicit the text is meant to be, the more nominalizations are used by a journalist.

