

# The Study of Lexical Features in English Press Registers

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## **Abstract**

Register is a variety of a language used for a particular purpose or situation and different registers are marked by a variety of linguistics features. This research aimed to investigate the lexical features in two types of press registers that are news reportage and editorial commentary. This study applied a text-based approach in which 10 news reportage articles and 10 editorial commentary articles under the political theme during 2012 to 2016 were selected. To analyse the data, both content and function words were examined. In the news reportage, it was used to serve a narrative function in reporting facts and concise and factual information. On the contrary, argumentation and critique characterized the register of editorial commentary.

Based on the findings, the research showed that most of the content words classified by parts of speech were proper noun, reporting verbs and describing adjectives and adverbs while common nouns, cognitive verbs, evaluating adjectives and adverbs were commonly found in the editorial commentary. For the function words, it was found that first personal pronouns, modal verbs of prediction and suggestion, and conjunctions of addition and suggestion were the word forms which were found significant in the register of news reportage.

In the research, the types of word forms in each register type were markedly different. However, the functional feature of each register played a very important role in their use of the lexical forms and affected the variation of the linguistics features in the two types of the register in press.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background Information

Language that people use cannot stand in isolation because it requires other factors to fulfill its meaning and structure (Agha, 2004). From that reason, it creates a variety of language forms that people use in order to communicate with others in a society. Some users might express the same ideas, but their languages might be represented in different forms depending on purposes or situations that the texts occur. For example, the language used in an apologizing message between friends is different from an apologizing message from a store manager to a consumer because there is the factor of formality which influences the form of language to be formal.

As a variety of language, Halliday defined the term of register as 'a semantic configuration' which cluster semantic features and use in a particular and appropriate situations (as cited in Lukin et al., 2011). Registers is associated with social practices of people in particular communities which means that in order to understand each type of registers, it requires a long process of learning and involvement (Agha, 2004; Biber & Conrad, 2009). For example, some particular words or pattern in scientific pattern were needed to learn and practice. According to Conrad & Biber (2009), they created three analytical frameworks in order to analyze the use of registers in each text which are *situational context*, *linguistic features*, and *functional relationship*. The first framework, situational context, analyzes the elements including channel, participants, purposes, and topics of the text to see how the texts are composed. For example, news reportage is produced by authors of news publishers and sent to readers publicly. Thus, the authors cannot have any interaction with the readers because the texts are sent to anywhere unlike the face-to-face conversation where the participants are able to have some interaction or feedback. The second framework is linguistic features which are analyzed lexically and syntactically to see how the producers of the texts choose the language in each particular situation. For example, there are multiple uses of personal pronouns by teachers and students in classrooms or completed sentences in academic papers. The last framework is a functional relationship which studies how

situational characteristics relate to linguistic features. For example, personal pronouns are used in classrooms for interaction to show relationship between teachers and students. These frameworks will show characteristics of registers in each type.

As in news articles, there are many characteristics; for example, there were the uses of past simple tenses for reporting factual information which happen in the past, and reported speeches for giving presenting the saying of people in the news. Moreover, there are two main types of news divided by the purposes of the authors and the contents which are news reportage and commentary editorial (Reinemann et al., 2011). News reportage is the news that reports current and important events; for example, earthquakes and president election which the purposes are to inform and report fact and information. In the contrary, commentary editorial are news that report fact together with opinions of the authors. As a result of different purposes of the authors, the language use in news reports and commentary editorial are different. News reportage was used to report fact in current situation by presenting the distinctive syntactic features of compound and complex sentences, past simple tense and reporting verbs. Compound and complex sentences were used to present events and information in current situations whose stories are usually narrated in linear order by conjunctions (McCabe & Heilman, 2007). Besides, simple past tense and reporting verbs were used to serve the informative purpose by showing real events in the past and using people's speeches as references (Bible and Conrad, 2009). On the other hand, commentary editorial were aimed to show attitudes of authors toward the issues in current situations by using modal verbs and verb phrases showing modality. From the study of Bonyadi (2011), modal verbs were used to show the author's prediction for actions in the future and to give comments to the events. Additionally, some verbs and phrases such as *seems* and "*That is looking less likely*" that show modality to the contents of commentary editorial as well because these kinds of verbs and phrases show attitudes of the authors who write the texts.

Based on the different functions of news reportage and commentary editorial as discussed above this research aims to investigate the lexical features of news reportage and commentary editorial and the research question is what types of lexical features characterized the two registers.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Data Collection**

A text-based approach was used as a main approach in this study. Moreover, 10 articles in the news reportage and 10 commentary editorials under the political theme were analyzed in this study. Two types of news were chosen from two online publishers which were New York Time and CNN. The chosen news reportage and commentary editorial were in duration of 2012 to 2016 because this research would like to see registers in news one period in order to avoid changes of writing styles. The two news reportage articles and two commentary editorials were chosen in each year and the contents in politics were randomly selected.

### **2.2 Data Analysis**

This study aimed to examine the lexical of news reportage and commentary editorial. It focused only on the analysis of the lexical items which were both content words including nouns, verbs, adjective and adverbs, and function words including pronoun, modal verbs and conjunctions. From the finding of lexical features, it will see the characteristics of news reportage and commentary editorial, and the use of lexical features will reflect the function of the two news.

## **3. Findings**

In order to analyze registers of news reportage and commentary editorial, lexical features and purposes of the news were analyzed. The lexical features found in the news reportage and commentary editorial can be classified into two groups according to their types. They are content words including nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and function words which are pronouns, modal verbs and conjunctions.

### 3.1 Content Words

Word types	Subtypes	News Reportage		Editorial Commentary	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Nouns	Proper nouns	91	56.52%	16	24.22%
	Common nouns	70	43.48%	50	75.8%
Verbs	Reporting verbs	126	84%	7	20.6%
	Cognitive verbs	24	16%	27	79.4%
Adverbs	Describing adverbs	26	50.98%	16	23.53%
	Evaluation adverbs	25	49.02%	52	76.47%
Adjectives	Describing adjectives	246	73.4%	132	47.8%
	Evaluating adjectives	89	26.6%	144	52.2%

Table1: Content words in news reportage and commentary editorial

#### Nouns

Nouns are words referring to entities that may be either agents or recipients of the actions. Two types of subject nouns which are common nouns and proper nouns were analyzed in this study. According to the findings, 56.5% of subject nouns used in news reportage were proper nouns and 43.5% were common nouns. Moreover, the author's use of proper nouns in news reportage aimed to report specific and concise information because if the authors use other nouns to refer to the specific names, there might be some readers who have different cultural background misunderstand the concepts easily as shown below,

(a) "Ms. Merkel briefly spoke to the news...". From the example, "Merkel" refers to person name which is understandable for all readers.

On the other hand, 75.8% of subject nouns used in commentary editorial were common noun and 24.22% were proper nouns. Common nouns were used to present the ideas or opinions about events or issues in current situations. Therefore, common nouns were used in commentary editorial rather than proper nouns which were mostly found in news reportage where

it is significant to argue some issues.

(b) “The second reason we should take in more refugees is a matter of responsibility.”

The above example showed that the authors started the topic of the sentence by using a common noun ‘reason’ to present an idea that they were trying to convince the readers.

### 3.1.1 Verbs

Verbs are used to show expressions and states of being. This study analyzed two types of main verbs which were reporting verbs and cognitive verbs. In news reportage, it was found that 84% of verbs were reporting verbs and there were 16% of cognitive verbs. Reporting verbs consisted of two types which were verbal reporting verbs and non-verbal reporting verbs which can be seen below:

(a) Verbal reporting verbs: *say, add, tell, claim, speak and ask*

(b) Non-verbal reporting verbs: *write and note*

Moreover, the authors used reporting verbs to report factual information or speeches from people in the events, and to make references. For example, “Obama said, “The failure of House Republican to pass a darn...” According to the example, a reporting verb was usually followed by a direct speech because the author wanted to give a reference to the readers in order to show evidence of reliability and to avoid showing personal opinions.

Commentary editorial, however, showed opposite findings. Cognitive verbs were found the most at 79.4%, and reporting verbs were found at 20.6%. There were 5 types of cognitive verbs including knowledge, application, synthesis, analysis and evaluation whose examples were shown below.

(a) Knowledge verbs: *learn and recognize*

(b) Application verbs: *change, show, provide, protect, apply, indicate, and demonstrate*

(c) Synthesis verbs: *conduct and cope*

(d) Analysis verbs: *confirm, examine, manage, operate, and point out*

(e) Evaluation verbs: *support, justify, determine and judge*

In commentary editorial, cognitive verbs were used to report mental actions or thinking processes rather than physical actions. The authors used this type of verbs in order to apply information in the news and then analyze or put opinions. For example, “*Politician must operate in political environment.*” The author presented an opinion in politics and suggested the idea to the politicians by a cognitive verb ‘operate’.

### 3.1.2 Adverbs

Adverbs function as verb modifiers which provide properties of action. There were two types of adverbs in this study which were describing adverbs and evaluating adverbs. Describing adverbs give more detail; for example, frequency, time and place of the actions in news. Unlike evaluating adverbs, they showed opinions and perspectives of the authors toward the actions. The examples of describing adverbs and evaluating adverbs were shown below:

(a) Evaluating adverbs: *firmly, differently, aggressively, well, simply, and sufficiently*

(b) Describing adverbs: *now, already, often, nowadays, then, and down*

From the findings, it showed that in news reportage describing adverbs were counted at 50.98%, and evaluating adverbs at 49.02%. Describing adverbs were used to illustrate pictures toward the actions reported in news reportage. Due to the fact that news reportage was presented through the written forms, it was significant to modify the actions presented in news to show how the actions in terms of frequency, time and place were completed. With that reason, describing adverbs were used to make readers understand the actions in news reportage clearer; for example, “*The discussion between the candidates often unfolded in a staccato of statistics, making it difficult to follow.*”

On the other hand, adverbs used in commentary editorial were evaluating adverbs which were found at 76.47%, and describing adverbs at 23.53%. Moreover, evaluating adverbs can convince readers to take author’s sides because they can clearly show positive and negative feeling in readers’ minds; for example; ‘*Rick Perlstein skillfully recounts the era that was shaped by the scandal...*’ An adverb ‘*skillfully*’ showed that the author would like to show a positive concept toward the action of the agent to make readers feel that this opinion was better than the other.

### 3.1.3 Adjectives

Adjectives are noun modifiers which give attributes to the nouns. There were two types of adjectives characterized the language used in the two registers which were describing adjectives presenting factual information and evaluating adjectives presenting opinions and perspectives of authors, and the examples of the two types can be seen below:

(a) Describing adjectives: *economic, political, national, criminal, vice-presidential, electoral and second-term, etc.*

(b) Evaluating adjectives: *destructive, unethical, great, hard-core, common, good, dynamic, odd and serious*

In news reportage, there were 73.4% of describing adjectives and evaluating adjective were found at 26.6%. Furthermore, describing adjectives were used to modify nouns by presenting factual information to make clear and concise information. For example, evaluating adjectives in the following sentences show the fact about politics; *'Political opponents of Ms. Merkel'* and *'the first presidential debate'*. Describing adjectives is similar to describing adverbs that both aimed to give factual description of nouns and verbs that were presented.

In commentary editorial, adjectives that were frequently used were evaluating adjectives at 52.2% and there were describing adjectives found at 47.8%. Evaluating adjectives were related with the points of views of the authors since they were coined from personal perspectives not from factual information. These adjectives can guide the readers to have the same perspectives as authors. From that reason, evaluating adjectives served the same purpose as it has in evaluating adverbs which aim to evaluate nouns and show perspectives of authors. For example, it can be seen in these examples: *a good-hearted people* , *„Washington was keenly aware of the destructive nature of political parties"* and *„it would be foolish for the United States..."*



## 3.2 Function Words

Word types	Subtypes	News Reportage		Commentary Editorial	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Pronouns	1st personal pronouns	1	0.44%	95	45.9%
	2nd personal pronouns	1	0.44%	2	1%
	3rd personal pronouns	233	99.2%	110	53.1%
Modal Verbs	Prediction	41	57.75%	44	47.3%
	Ability	18	23.35%	20	21.5%
	Suggestion	4	5.63%	17	18.3%
	Permission	5	7.04%	5	5.4%
	Obligation	3	4.23%	7	7.5%
Conjunctions & Transitions	Addition	39	29.5	45	25.1%
	Time	41	31.1	43	24%
	Contrast	24	18.2	44	24.6%
	Result & Reason	4	3	12	6.7%
	Condition	1	7.6	7	3.9%
	Comparison	14	10.6	20	11.2%
	Example	0	0	5	2.8%
	Conclusion	0	0	3	1.7%

Table 2: Function words of news reportage and commentary editorial

## 3.2.1 Pronouns

Personal pronouns were used to refer to people or things. Moreover, there were three types of personal pronouns which were first personal pronouns, second personal pronouns and third personal pronouns. In news reportage, third

personal pronouns were mostly found at

99.2% , unlike first personal pronouns and second personal pronouns which were found at 0.4% each. Third personal pronouns include the pronouns 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they' which can be seen in the examples below:

(a) "**He** (*John Boehner*) had decided only that morning to announce his plans to resign from Congress"

(b) "**they** (*polices*) are policing the parade route, where onlookers will gather to watch floats, bands, and the president travel..."

(c) "**She** (*Carolyn D. King*) said, however, that "federal courts should not inject themselves into such matters of prosecutorial discretion."

(d) "**it** (*the Department of Justice*) disagreed with the ruling and plans to seek review from the Supreme Court."

This lexical feature was used for narrating stories by referring to people that are not in the situation. Third personal pronouns can avoid showing the author's opinions because if they used first personal pronouns, it might show their opinions toward the issues. From the example (b), the third personal pronoun "they" was used to refer to people and to show a third point of view.

In commentary editorial, only two types of personal pronouns found which were first personal pronouns found at 45.9% and third personal pronouns at 53.1%. Third personal pronouns used in commentary editorial were to refer to people in the news that the authors want to argue or discuss. Another type of pronouns was first personal pronouns whose examples can be seen below:

(a) "**I** understand it's hard to talk policy right now..."

(b) "**They** are now in our care"

(c) "**You** might have seen the story portrayed in the Holocaust Museum"

First singular personal pronouns were used to refer to the first speaker. Additionally, first personal pronouns were used to show the author's positions toward the topics they are talking about as in the example (a) where a pronoun 'I' was used to refer to the author. Another first plural personal pronoun often used in the second register was the pronoun "we" because the authors wanted to make an involvement between readers and

authors and to convince readers to be in the same side as authors as shown in the example (b) which a pronoun 'our' was used to refer to both authors and readers.

### 3.2.2 Modal Verbs

Modal verbs were used in order to create modality in the clauses, for instance prediction, suggestion, ability, permission and obligation. In news reportage, modal verbs of prediction were found the most at 57.75% and the second most was ability found at 23.35%. The examples of the two types were shown at the sentences below:

- (a) "Justices will weigh a challenge to state's law"
- (b) "Official told CNN that money would go to securing appropriate space"
- (c) "the official hinted that Obama could act alone if necessary"

Modal verbs of prediction including 'will' and 'would' were aimed to show actions that would happen in the future. From the examples (a), (b), it can be seen that modal verbs of predictions can occur both in a main clause and a noun clause. In addition, another type of modal verbs was modal verbs of ability such as "can" or "could" from the example (c) to show ability of people in news which can be considered as fact.

In commentary editorial, there were three types of modal verbs including prediction found at 47.3%, ability 21.5% and suggestion 18.3% whose examples were shown below:

- (a) "those children will arrive soon."
- (b) "we can certainly take more refugee."
- (c) "we should push to establish "safe zone"

Modal verbs of prediction were used to express the certainty or uncertainty about future events as in the example (a). Modal verb of ability was another type that was mostly used among the commentary editorial; the use of modal verbs of ability was similar to those in news reportage as it aimed to show ability. However, in commentary editorial modal verbs of ability tended to be used in persuasive tone as it can be seen in the example (b), the example showed that the author used modal verbs of ability in order to convince readers that they have an ability to help refugees. The last type of modal verbs was suggestion. Modal verbs of suggestion were aimed to give suggestion not only to the people in the topics the

authors are talking about, but also to the readers who read the news. From the example (c), the modal verb 'should' was used to show suggestion from the author's opinion.

### 3.2.3 Conjunctions

The last function word found were conjunctions which were used to combine two actions syntactically represented in different clause. From the findings, it was found that there were two main types of conjunctions which were time and addition. Firstly, conjunctions of time were found at 31.1% in news reportage. In addition, conjunctions of time could be served to present the stories and to show sequences of actions. For example, the author used a conjunction 'after' to show a sequence of the actions which can be seen in this example: „*Central Rome appeared oddly empty only days **after** shoppers had filled many streets.*“ Furthermore, the second type of conjunctions was addition which were found at 29.5%. This type was used in news reportage for adding more detail and information to complete the content of the events; for example, the author reported factual information and then added more detail to support the previous information by using a conjunction 'and' in this sentence. “*He said he had worked with Democratic legislators in Massachusetts. **And** he said that he would do the same thing on his first day in the Oval Office.*”

In commentary editorial, there were three types of conjunctions and transitions found in commentary editorial: addition (25.1%), contrast (24.6 %) and time (24%). Conjunctions of additions were used to link two clauses and ideas together. For example, the author reported an example saying that, “*Already coal stocks are up **and** those companies are cheering.*” A conjunction 'and' was used to connect clauses which was similar to conjunctions in news reportage as it was aimed to give more information. The second type was conjunctions of contrast in this example, “***But** the United States -- the country most to blame for dangerous warming to date, and the second-biggest annual polluter -- just elected someone who thinks this solid science is a "hoax."*” It can be seen in the example above that the author used a conjunction 'but' to create argumentation. Furthermore, they were used in order to show arguments to against an oppose idea. Due to the fact that the main purposes of commentary editorial were to persuade and oppose some actions in current situations, conjunctions of contrast were used to serve this function. The last type

of conjunctions was time. Moreover, their purpose was similar to news reportage as they were used in order to show the sequence of actions as it can be seen in this example: “*There’s only so much carbon we can pump into the atmosphere before we’re screwed.*”

#### 4. Conclusion

Registers	Nouns	Verbs	Modal verbs	Pronouns	Adjectives	Adverbs	Conjunction
News reportage	Proper Nouns	Reporting Verbs	Prediction , ability and permission	Third personal pronouns	Describing adjectives	Describing adverbs	Addition and time
Commentary editorial	Common Noun	Cognitive verbs	Prediction, ability and Suggestion	First and third personal pronouns	Evaluating adjectives	Evaluating adverbs	Addition, time and contrast

Table 3: Summary of lexical features of news reportage and commentary editorial

In this study, the variety of the lexical features were determined by the narrative function of the the register of the news reportage and the argumentative function of the commentary editorial. The lexical features of news reportage were proper nouns, reporting verbs, describing adjectives, describing adverbs and conjunctions of addition and time. For example, the results showed that almost all of the pronouns used in news reportage were third personal pronouns because the news were needed to be neutral, and the authors would like to focus on the agents of the actions as the topic of the event. These lexical features were specific and were aimed to show straightforward and factual information. Besides, some lexical features including describing adverbs and adjectives that were mostly found in news reportage were used to describe the characteristics and performances of the agents. These lexical features were aimed to give factual descriptions to the agents and their actions to avoid misunderstanding for all readers with different backgrounds and to maintain the informative purpose of news reportage. If the authors do not use specific names of the agents, some readers might not understand who the agents in the news are.

In commentary editorial, the lexical features showed the characteristics of giving opinions and make some arguments by presenting the fact about the news first and then argue those ideas. The authors of commentary editorial usually used these lexical features including common nouns, cognitive verbs, first personal pronouns, modal verbs of prediction, ability and suggestion, and conjunctions of addition, time and contrast. These lexical features showed that the authors wanted to show their positions in the topics and create the guideline to the readers to view in the same side as theirs. It can be seen that first personal pronouns and third personal pronouns were used in the same amount because commentary editorial presented the information of the current situations and was used to make some arguments on the view of the authors. From that reason, it can explain why some lexical features in commentary editorial were found almost the same in number.

## 5. Discussion

Register or the language that is used in a particular situation is influenced by several elements including channels, participants or topics. From the results of this study, it showed that the authors in each type of the news articles compose the texts under each particular purpose and choose their language that can serve their goals of communication. This showed how authors put awareness in news reportage in order to avoid showing opinions especially in a political theme because their word could reflect readers' thoughts and perspectives. The authors' words were the main influence that could lead readers to put their judgment toward the issues. Therefore, the authors when writing political news should have a high awareness in composing each news articles. For example, a language in a news article about the presidential election contains fact and neutral tone. If authors use a language that shows any opinion and judgment, it might reflect the decision of readers toward this issue. Lexical features including reporting verbs, describing adjectives, third personal pronouns, modal verbs of prediction and ability and conjunctions of addition and time which all of them showed the most significant characteristic of news reportage.

On the other hand, authors in commentary editorial have a different condition in choosing their languages because the content should be able to convince readers to believe in their views. The purposes of commentary editorial were to persuade and make

argumentation; therefore, the language was used to show opinions and make some judgment of the authors. There were lexical features including common nouns, cognitive verbs. In terms of pronouns, the authors used first personal pronouns and third personal pronouns for referring to people and showing author's position and the involvement between authors and readers. Apart from the uses of pronouns, there were adjectives, adverbs, modal verbs of prediction conjunctions of addition and time that were used both for argumentative and informative purposes. Due to the fact that the authors first presented the information about the topics they were talking about, and then put the arguments toward those ideas. Therefore, commentary editorial show the argumentative purpose rather than informative purpose. From that reason, it showed in the results that there were quite similar number in the use of some lexical features such as first personal pronouns and third personal pronouns because the authors would like to inform the actions of the agents who were not in the news and to show their opinions toward the news.

News reportage and commentary editorial are different due to the purpose of the authors in order to send the texts to readers and their expectation from what reader will react to the contents they made. In news reportage, authors' intention are to report fact and information; however, authors' write commentary editorial not just to inform readers about the fact, but they want to persuade readers to have the same ideas or show criticism toward the issue which is the government in this case. Moreover, each text can have more than one purpose as it was found in the study that there were almost same among of lexical use in commentary editorial; for example, first personal pronouns and third personal pronouns. Authors in commentary editorial switch their purposes of the text from an informative purpose to persuasive or argumentative purpose. Due to the form of commentary editorial, the contents are started with information on the issues that the authors are going to present to let readers have the same basic understanding, and then switch to persuasive or argumentative purpose to express their opinions. From that reason, it explains why there are the same amount of numbers in the findings.

From the work of Farrokhi & Nazemi (2015) which studies about the rhetoric of newspaper commentary editorial, the author should organize the text and the language use to have a meaningful context, so there were many rhetoric devices in news report to show specific

meaning in each text. That point of the previous study came to an interesting point found in this study that is not a single linguistic features characterizes each register, but the combination of linguistic elements, both lexical and syntactic features of the language as can be seen in the following sentence of news reportage;

*“Obama said that he hoped Boehner’s successor would recognize that political differences should not come at risk of shutting down the government.”*

From the example, there were a proper noun, a reporting verb, a third personal pronoun, a modal verb of predication and a describing adjective. Therefore, it can be seen that within a sentence there was a combination of various lexical features in order to serve the communicative purpose of news reportage. In commentary editorial, the authors also presented their opinions by combining several lexical features that were related with persuasive purposes to make sentences or any larger unit as in the example;

*“Surely, we as Americans are capable of coming up with creative solution.”*

From the example, there were an evaluating adverb and adjective and first personal pronoun to create persuasive tone that can convince readers to believe in their points. Moreover, the lexical features; for example, a first personal pronoun ‘we’ and adjectives ‘capable’ and ‘creative’ were used in the sentence above to persuade readers as the pronoun made an involvement with the readers and evaluating adjectives described the nouns based on the positive point of view of the author.

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