

## An Analysis of Rhetorical Devices in English News Headlines from Thai News Media

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### Abstract

Although people say that the newspaper has lost its luster and come to an end, the newspaper journalists continue to write, and the newspaper is still one of the most important news media in most people's life.

This study focuses on comparing and analyzing the headlines of the newspaper through the function, persuasion appeals, and rhetorical devices of 50 headline samples from Thai English news media, and also statistic data from two main daily newspapers published in Thailand, i.e. the Bangkok Post and The Nation. The researcher found that: 1. Logo appeals are mostly used in the headlines of one normal weekday newspaper; 2. Summarize and informative are the most commonly used functions in the headlines of one normal weekday newspaper; 3. There is no direct relation between the section and the type of rhetorical appeals; 4. The six mostly used rhetorical devices in the researcher headline samples are metonymy, metaphor, alliteration, oxymoron, personification, and quotation. The study also implies that a further study into how to use news headlines would help EFL students develop their skills in English, which would be a very meaningful learning. According to this study, the researcher discovered that as Janet Kolodzy explained in her book "Practicing Convergence Journalism: An Introduction to Cross-Media Storytelling", the newspaper does have its strict rules on news language and its use, even in the face of difficulties they always preserve the principles of news which is to inform and not to entertain. It is a worthwhile subject for English learners to research. (Kolodzy, 2013, p120)

**Keywords:** rhetoric, newspaper, headline, figurative language, rhetorical devices, EFL study

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### 1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of modern communication and information technology, people can get the news all over the world through magazines, newspapers, televisions and internet anytime and anywhere. The news has become an important way for people to get information about national politics, international affairs, commerce and finance, sports and entertainment, literature and arts.

However, how do people choose which one to read first from the numerous articles? The answer is "News Topic", or "News Headline". The researcher has observed that a good news headline can attract readers' attention and guide them to continue reading the article. So what is a good headline? It should be concise, novel, and summarize the basic content of the news; but it must or should stick to the principles and rules that govern news media. (Marcoci & Sanda, 2014; N.Tiono, 2003) This would require using some techniques, like rhetorical devices. The rationale of this study is to open a new path for the EFL learners to improve their English since there are not just who, when, where, what or how in a news headline but it can be expressed in various ways, and conveys many information to readers. The researcher hope to use this study to make the EFL learners learn, understand and master the effective methods to achieve the purpose of the study.

According to the summary of previous academic literature, the rhetorical devices commonly used in English headlines are allusion, alliteration, consonance, assonance, metaphor, pun, monotony, personification, parallelism, hyperbole, and oxymoron. Moreover, the Aristotle's persuasion appeals (Aristotle & John H.F., 1926) also play an important role in headlines. They are ethos, pathos and logos. In this study, the researcher will take the news headlines from two main English news media the Bangkok Post and The Nation, and a few other English news report media in Thailand as the data sources, and analyze them in terms of its functions, persuasion appeals and rhetorical devices. The researcher also makes a statistic of daily newspaper to summarize the common uses of persuasion appeals and rhetorical devices in the English media in Thailand.

## 2. Objectives

1. To find out the roles of the rhetorical devices in news headlines;
2. To find out the most commonly used rhetorical devices and persuasion appeals;
3. To examine the reasons and master the usage of rhetorical devices;
4. To show the EFL students how to learn English through news headlines.

## 3. Materials and methods

The researcher collected 208 news headlines, which are divided into two data sets. The first one is 50 news headlines containing rhetorical devices. Most of them are collected from the Bangkok Post and The Nation, and there are a few samples from other Thai English report media such as Thai Visa News and Khao Sod English News. And the second one is 86 news headlines from the Bangkok Post's Monday newspaper and 72 news headlines from The Nation's Monday newspaper.

For the first data set, the researcher used the method of data analysis, including the headline functions, persuasion appeals, figurative language and content, in order to find out the headline language's common rules. For the second data set, the researcher used the method of statistical analysis and comparative analysis, through statistics to investigate the similarities and differences between the two newspaper headlines to deduce the conclusion.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Some examples of the selected headlines are presented below:

### 1) Bomb jokes aren't funny. (Terry, 2015).

The article describes an aviation farce which a passenger joked about a possible bomb in a passenger's suitcase with Thai Lion Air staff, and they cancelled the flight for security's sake.

Function: The headline uses the keyword "bomb" to highlight and be eye-catching, but it is not very informative and do not cover the main content of the news.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos (fear and curious) to attract readers.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of irony and paradox. A "joke" is something that is said or done to make you laugh. It should be funny; but here it says "jokes aren't funny", which is a paradox. The author informs the reader about kinds of jokes which are not funny. On the other hand, bomb is a sensitive topic that will make people scared. It is not a funny topic in any situation, but the author uses an irreconcilable word "joke" to describe it, which is an irony.

### 2) It never rains, but it pours. ("It never rains", 2016).

The article outlines Thailand's former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's rice scheme's current situation, scholars' attitude to the new constitution draft referendum, and the fracture of friendship between Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and his deputy Prawit Wongsuwon.

Function: The headline uses a proverb to indicate the seriousness of the problem. It is used to attract and be eye-catching, but not summarizing.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of quotation. "It never rains, but it pours" This is an English proverb which means that when one bad thing happens, it is followed by a lot of other bad things that make a bad situation worse. As this news reports, the author wants to show the Thai political tensions.

### 3) Black May? No Way! Post Reporters. ("Black May?", 2016).

The article puts forward the worries of Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon, who worries about a possible repeat of the 1992 Black May massacre on the upcoming referendum day, because the referendum concerns the next candidates for the Prime Minister.

Function: The headline highlights the key word "Black May" to catch the reader's eyes, it is informative and indicative, and it is a macro-function.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos (emotion) to persuade readers.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of allusion, assonance and metaphor. The two words "may" and "way" have the same vowel /eɪ/ which make the headline sound powerful and tuneful. In addition, the term "Black May" is also an allusion and metaphor, it is a common name for the popular protest on 17-20 May 1992 in Bangkok against the government of General Suchinda

Kraprayoon and the bloody military crackdown that followed. There were 52 officially confirmed dead, many disappeared, hundreds of injuries, and over 3,500 arrested.

4) Little Leo wins big. (Agence France-Presse, 2016).

The article reports the results of the Golden Globe Awards 2016 which the movie “The Revenant” and “The Martian” take the trophies for films. And the actor Leonardo DiCaprio wins Best Actor Award for “The Revenant”, becoming the big winner of the year.

Function: The oxymoron words “little” and “big” in the headline are eye-catching and indicative. The macro-function is indicative and eye-catching and the micro-function is to highlight the content and attract readers.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of oxymoron, the oxymoron words are “little” and “big”. The word ‘little’ here does not mean small. It is a term of endearment for Leonardo DiCaprio, and the word ‘big’ here means the movie that Leo acted in and Leo himself won the most awards of all, so, he became a big winner.

5) The ‘Butterfly’ has landed. (“The Butterfly”, 2016).

The article introduces Japan’s DJ Krush bringing his new album “Butterfly Effect” to Bangkok. It also explains why the artist took so long to get the album out.

Function: The headline uses the pretty thing “butterfly” to attract the readers, the author uses quotation marks to indicate that it is not the real butterfly, but it implies one, and that should be the subject of the news.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos (sense) to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of metaphor. The “butterfly” here is not a real butterfly. It is on behalf of DJ Krush’s album “Butterfly Effect”; so the headline refers to the album released. This metaphor makes the object more vivid, and also corresponds with the name of the album.

6) To die or not to die. (Pawit, 2016).

The article gives a unique view on living and dying through an entertaining dark comedy delivered by Thailand-based Japanese playwright and director, Shogo Tanikawa. The story illustrates five strangers who meet online and decide to meet in person at a deserted warehouse full of mannequins and then commit suicide together.

Function: The headline highlights the word “die” to catch the reader’s eyes, and uses the quote to attract the readers, it is a micro-function.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of quoting; “to die or not to die” is a quote adapted from “to be or not to be” of ‘Hamlet’, a play written by William Shakespeare. The author, by referring to famous quotes, enhances the subject and persuasion of the article, leaving a deep impression on readers.

7) Police throw the book at Saphan Kwai bar owners. (“Police throw the book”, 2016).

The article reports that police who raid two bars in the Saphan Kwai area have filed 13 charges against the owners and managers of the establishments.

Function: The headline is informative and indicative, it is a macro-function.

Appeal: The piece uses logos (fact) to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of metaphor. “The book” is the entire collection of laws and penalties, and the author uses “throw” to express the severe punishment for illegality.

8) Thai Lion Air spreads wings at home, in region. (Boonsong, 2016).

The article tells about the 2016 development plans of Thai Lion Air, it will add five more jets and enlarge its domestic network this year, including Trang, Khon Kaen and Phitsanulok. For the international network, there are Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, Beijing and Fukuoka routes in the plan.

Function: The headline is informative, indicative, and also summarizing.

Appeal: The piece uses logos to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of metonymy in the sense that the authors compare the aircraft to the birds, so “spreads wings” means extending the flight routes.

9) A Galaxy far away. (Amornrat & Suchit & Agencies, 2016).

The article talks about the Samsung Note 7 smartphone that is banned by many airlines because its battery may cause an aviation safety issue. For that reason, Samsung will recall the phone and fix the battery problem as soon as possible.

Function: The headline is informative and indicative, but not summarizing, it is a macro-function.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of allusion and metonymy. The headline employs the prologue of the movie STAR WARS, which has a signature device featured in every film of the series “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away....” But the allusion here just works with the audience who know the movie. “Galaxy” here is also a metonymy referring to the Samsung new smartphone Note 7, but not the stars grouped in the universe.

10) Mirror Mirror on the wall, who is Marcus Evans? (AFP, 2016).

The article reveals information of a reclusive multi-millionaire, Marcus Evans. During the Rio Olympic Games, Marcus Evans is wanted in Brazil over an alleged ticket scam for the Rio Olympics, but there is so little known about him not even his look, age and voice. Nevertheless, there is still some information available, such as he has a company named Marcus Evans in United States, he tries to buy the Daily Mirror tabloid twice, he also donates to support the Lib Dems, and etc.

Function: The headline is informative and attractive, but not summarizing.

Appeal: The piece uses pathos to persuade.

Figurative Language: The news headline uses the rhetorical devices of quotation. “Mirror Mirror on the wall” comes from the famous Disney movie “Snow White and the seven Dwarfs”, and the original sentence is “Magic Mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest one of all?” The author quotes the sentence to attract the readers and make it more interesting.

## 5. Discussion

1) What appeals are used most in the headlines of one normal weekday newspaper?

**Table 1** Bangkok Post Daily Newspaper

Appeal Section	Pathos	Logos	Ethos	Subtotal
National	4 (44%)	5 (56%)	-	7
Asia	1 (17%)	5 (83%)	-	5
World	3 (25%)	9 (75%)	-	12
Opinion	2 (29%)	5 (71%)	-	6
Sports	2 (22%)	7 (78%)	-	9
Business	6 (32%)	13 (68%)	-	19
Life	5 (36%)	9 (64%)	-	14
Asia Focus	7 (50%)	7 (50%)	-	14
Total	30 (33%)	60 (67%)	-	86

**Table 2** The Nation Daily Newspaper

Appeal Section	Pathos	Logos	Ethos	Subtotal
Thailand	2 (28%)	3 (43%)	2 (28%)	7
Asean Plus	-	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	5
World	7 (58%)	4 (33%)	1 (8%)	11
Opinion	3 (43%)	4 (57%)	-	5
Sports	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	-	15
Business	4 (27%)	11 (73%)	-	15
Arts/Expression/Culture Alive	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	-	7
Asean Economic Communication	-	7 (100%)	-	7
Total	29 (39%)	42 (56%)	4 (5%)	72

Table 1 and 2 are calculated from the English daily newspaper, Bangkok Post and The Nation. From the tables for both Bangkok Post and The Nation, we can see that logos is the most used appeal in a

normal weekday newspaper. In the Bangkok Post, there are 30 news headlines or 33% that use pathos, while there are 60 news headlines or 67% that employ logos appeal, which is double from the number of pathos. Similarly, in The Nation, there are just 4 news headlines or 5% appeal to ethos, 29 news headlines or 39% appeal to pathos, while there are 42 news headline or 56% appeal to logos.

This result comes from two reasons. The language of journalism requires objectivity and rigor, especially for the news report, its logic, reason and fact, logos appeals. Another one is its limitations, the journalists have to track all aspects of the news of the nation and the world for the whole day, and they made the newspaper in a race against time, so appeals to logos is the most suitable and easiest way to write the headlines than the other two.

2) What kinds of functions are used most in the headlines of one normal weekday newspaper?

According to the results of the previous section, appeals to logos are the most commonly used in the headlines of one normal weekday newspaper. As we reiterate that logos are used in citing facts, it presents something in a logical way to convince the audience. So the headlines which used appeals to logos will mostly summarize the news content and the related information. On the other hand, readers always read the headline first, so summative and informative headlines can help them to scan at a glance and find out their interest news or information quickly.

3) What's the relation between newspaper's section and appeals?

**Table 3** Appeal and Section Relation Collection from 50 News Headlines

Appeal Section	Pathos	Logos	Ethos	Subtotal
General/National	6 (67%)	3 (33%)	-	9
Business	7 (54%)	6 (46%)	-	12
Sports	5 (71%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	7
Weather	3 (100%)	-	-	3
Life/Entertainment/Culture/Art/Travel	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	-	15
Politics	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	-	4
Total	36 (69%)	15 (29%)	1 (2%)	50

From the table, we can see the use of appeals to pathos (36 news headlines or 69%) is more than appeals to logos (15 news headlines or 29%), and also in each section. But there are premises that these 50 news headlines are randomly selected, and not collected by the specific time or other rules. All of them are selected for the condition of use of rhetorical devices. So, the relation between sections and the types of appeals cannot be found.

**Table 4** Appeal and Section Relation Comparison between the Bangkok Post and the THE NATION

Bangkok Post	THE NATION	Pathos		Logos		Ethos	
		Bangkok Post	THE NATION	Bangkok Post	THE NATION	Bangkok Post	THE NATION
National	Thailand	4 (44%)	2 (28%)	5 (56%)	3 (43%)	-	2 (28%)
Asia	Asean Plus	1 (17%)	-	5 (83%)	4 (80%)	-	1 (20%)
World	World	3 (25%)	7 (58%)	9 (75%)	4 (33%)	-	1 (8%)
Opinion	Opinion	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	5 (71%)	4 (57%)	-	-
Sports	Sports	2 (22%)	9 (60%)	7 (78%)	6 (40%)	-	-
Business	Business	6 (32%)	4 (27%)	13 (68%)	11 (73%)	-	-
Life	Arts/Culture Alive /Expression	5 (36%)	4 (57%)	9 (64%)	3 (43%)	-	-
Asia Focus	Asean Economic Communication	7 (50%)	-	7 (50%)	7 (100%)	-	-
Total		30 (33%)	29 (39%)	60 (67%)	42 (56%)	-	4 (5%)
		59 (36%)		102 (62%)		4 (2%)	

As we see, the sections setting of two newspapers are similar, or corresponding; appeals to logos are more commonly used than appeals to pathos and ethos in all sections. The results suggest that there is no inherent connection between the newspaper's sections and the types of appeals. The editor chooses the suitable appeals as needed for the news content, but not for the news section.

#### 4) What kinds of Rhetoric Devices are most commonly used in News Headlines?

**Table 5** Rhetoric Devices Collection from 50 News Headlines

Rhetorical Devices	Amount	percentage
Metonymy	13	18%
Metaphor	9	13%
Alliteration	8	11%
Oxymoron	7	10%
Personification	6	8%
Quotation	6	8%
Consonance	5	7%
Allusion	5	7%
Irony	4	5%
Paradox	2	2%
Rhetorical question	2	2%
Assonance	1	1%
Onomatopoeia	1	1%

After statistics and analysis, the results revealed that the five types of rhetorical devices that were commonly employed in news headlines include metonymy (18%), metaphor (13%), alliteration (11%), oxymoron (10%), personification and quotation (8%); followed by consonance and allusion (7%), irony (5%), paradox and rhetorical question (2%), the last is assonance, onomatopoeia, repetition and pun (1%).

Anyway, no matter what kinds of rhetorical devices use in a news headline, their ultimate purpose is to make the language become special for eye-catching or attract the readers. For example, alliteration, consonance, assonance and onomatopoeia use sound effects; metonymy, metaphor and personification stimulate the reader's imagination; oxymoron, paradox, pun, irony and rhetorical question may arouse the reader's curiosity and interest. So we can use various rhetorical devices to enrich the headlines.

#### 5) Using headlines in EFL learning environments.

One aim of this study is to provide recommendations for teaching EFL. So, the researcher has provided the following recommendations:

- A. As studies have shown, there is a 4,000 word requirement for basic fluency in reading in any language. (Nation, 2014; Testyourvocab.com) Therefore, the researcher suggests using Newspapers to help develop fluency in reading.
- B. The researcher also recommend the following English Newspaper to read:
  - a. Newspaper of record: The Guardian (British English), The Daily Telegraph (British English), The New York Times (American English), The Washington Post (American English).
  - b. Tabloid: Daily Mail.
  - c. Industrial Newspaper: Financial Times (Economic), The Economist (Economic), National Geographic (Natural & Science), Nature (Natural & Science), Scientific American (Natural & Science).
- C. In addition, the following reading steps should be used to help improve fluency:
  - a. Extensive reading.
  - b. No dictionary on first reading.
  - c. Bilingual reading.
  - d. Voice reading.
  - e. Keep reading.

- D. Finally, teachers can use headlines from newspapers to help EFL students develop their understanding of semantics and figurative language by:
- a. Analyze the functions of news headlines.
  - b. Analyze the characteristics of news headline language.
  - c. Analyze persuasion appeals of news headline.
  - d. Analyze rhetorical devices of news headline.
  - e. Expand the English cultural knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

In the river of human communications history, the newspaper has played a huge role in promoting information communication and social development. However, with the development and expansion of the new media, such as internet, mobile phone, and on-board television, the reader of the traditional newspaper has decreased; we can theorize that one of the main causes is the loss of young readers, and new media becoming the main window for young readers to access information. (Clark, 2016) It is often observed that young people, as the most active groups in the society, have a life and work style that is a trend of social developments. Undoubtedly, young readers will be the new force of future development of the newspaper; therefore, based on this researcher's observations and analysis, in order to attract more young readers, the newspaper itself must be "young".

No matter what kinds of changes occur to the newspaper to keep attracting readers, there is one thing that will not change: it will stick to principles and keep to its rule. A newspaper that departs from the principle of informing, no matter how special it is, will come to an end. Only insisting on fairness, justice, truth and rigorousness, will get the reader's favors and build their hard won fame and brand.

For the future research suggestion, the researcher has: (1) Surveys of readers to analyze effectiveness of rhetorical devices of headlines. (2) A discussion about how to bring news headlines into the EFL student classroom through teaching. (3) A study of English headlines translation skills and techniques.

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