

## **THE LANGUAGE OF NEWS MEDIA: PROFESSIONAL OR SLANG**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study of media language has much to offer to the different disciplines on whose territory it touches: linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, semiotics, communication studies, sociology and social psychology. The basic issues of communications research were encapsulated by Harold Lasswell in 1948: Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect? This is compared with a prescription for the sociolinguistic enterprise: Who speaks what language to whom and when? (J. Fishman, 1965). This paper discusses the analysis of common professional language words and slangs used in the writing of the articles (hard news specifically) in the two chosen newspapers in Malaysia. The existence of the concepts of media writing and language use are explored. With the criteria of professional language and slangs taken from the past studies done by Rampton (1998), Davies (2008), Jackson (2010), Johnson and Fox (2011), this text analysis qualitative research analysed 12 articles from the two well-established newspapers; The Star and the New Straits Times (NST) to identify some language features on professional language and slangs used in the writing of the articles. Throughout the whole process of the analysis, The NST is found to use more professional language in their hard news compared to The Star. Hence, both The Star and the NST use limited slangs in writing the hard news articles. This study holds the interest in what media language reveals as a mirror of the wider society and culture.

### **Keywords:**

*Professional Language, Slang, Linguistics, News Media.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'professional' as having the qualities that you connect with trained and skilled people such as effectiveness, skill, organization and seriousness of manner. Furthermore, Allan Bell (1990), a linguist who is himself a journalist, defines 'professional language' as a language of text that contains profession related, rules, standards and arrangement of proper words that results in it being extravagantly hard for people to appreciate and sometimes not understandable. On the other hand, Shirley Johnson and Kelly Fox who wrote the book "What Slang is NOT!", said that slang is not "whatever is new or popular in the way of language". Instead, it has its own dialect like for example "Cohesive, chiefly regional and socioeconomic varieties of a language" and also catch phrases "Cultural phrases that derive their meaning from a cultural reference with which the speaker and listener must both be familiar." quoted from Crystal 1978. In short, Crystal, 1974 & 1980 mentions that jargons "the technical language of a special field and specialized words" and slogans "a forceful, catchy, mind-grabbing utterance, which will rally people to buy something or behave in a certain way" are slangs.

Thus, when it comes to the language presented in the newspaper articles here in Malaysia, there are many differing views that exist in analysing it. Articles in the newspapers must have viewpoint, values and structure that can be analysed. Bell (1990) was much concerned on this and the role of the audience in influencing media language styles, and in understanding, forgetting or misconceiving the news presented to it. Therefore, within the time

that impulse towards efficiency dominated in the discourse on writing, the readers' relationship with the journalist, with the story tended should assume of the same qualities. As a professional journalist the good qualities of good writing are both identifiable and anchored by the professional standards that are beyond dispute.

For that reason, to analyse the quality of formal and informal words used by the journalists in writing the articles for the two newspapers, this study analyses and compares the professional language and slang (words) found in the articles. Perception from a journalist is also taken into considerations to come up with some suggestions at the end.

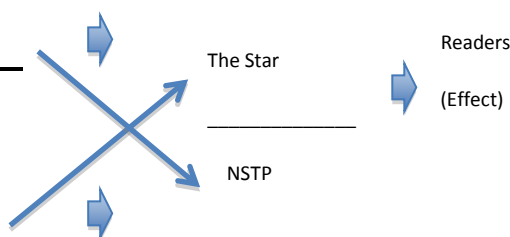
## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Professional Language

- Objectivity Words
- Aesthetic impulse
- Significant/meaningful
- Clear/Efficient

### Slang

- Idiomatic expressions
- Deceitful long
- Biased words
- Jargon



This conceptual framework came into being based on the criteria highlighted by Rampton (1998), Davies (2008), Jackson (2010), and Johnson and Fox (2011). The conceptual framework consists of independent variables (professional language and slangs) and dependent variable (readers) as the outcome of the IV onto the two newspapers (The Star and NSTP).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Based on the above conceptual framework, the objective of this study is to investigate the professional language and slang used in the writing of articles in the two newspapers; The Star and New Straits Times (NST). Besides, this study also contributes to the better understanding of the nature of writing articles for the benefits of the readers. This study is trying to answer these two research questions:

1. What are the words (professional language) found in the writing of articles in?
  - a. The Star
  - b. NST
2. What are the slangs found in the writing of articles in?
  - a. The Star
  - b. NST

The study has its significance because the goal of the project is to find out the varieties and frequency on the usage of professional language and slang in the article of both newspapers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW – PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE AND SLANG**

Davies (2008) in his study highlighted the use of French words in some English newspaper articles can motivate the readers to read the articles because of the stylistic effects achieved via the use of French for an Anglophone audience. Davies also mentioned that the articles of the newspapers are considered as having the professional touch when the dominated words are clear and efficient.

Rampton (1998) continued by adding that aesthetic impulse of words are considered as very appealing and can reach the readers' minds sharply. The range of examples surveyed has demonstrated the variety of ways in which foreign language can be present within an English journalistic text. He did a study on the use of English in Mexican, Spanish and Bulgarian magazine articles in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*.

Jackson, R.P (2010) in his article *Searching for a Voice of Authority in Newspaper Writing* reported that, readers repeated familiar laments about quality of writing: "Dull and uninspired ... too highbrow, nongraphic, unprofessional, wordy and undisruptive. In other words, professional language is defined as having the characteristics of some objectivity and significant words.

As the newspaper also seeks to influence public opinion on various social, political or moral matters, its language frequently contains vocabulary with evaluative connotation, such as to allege (the person who allegedly committed the crime), to claim (the defendant claims to know nothing about it). These cast some doubts on what is stated further and make it clear to the reader that those are not yet affirmed facts. Elements of appraisal may be observed in the very selection and way of presenting the news, not only in the use of specific vocabulary but in syntactic constructions indicating a lack of surety on the part of the reporter as to the correctness of the facts reported or his/her desire to avoid responsibility.

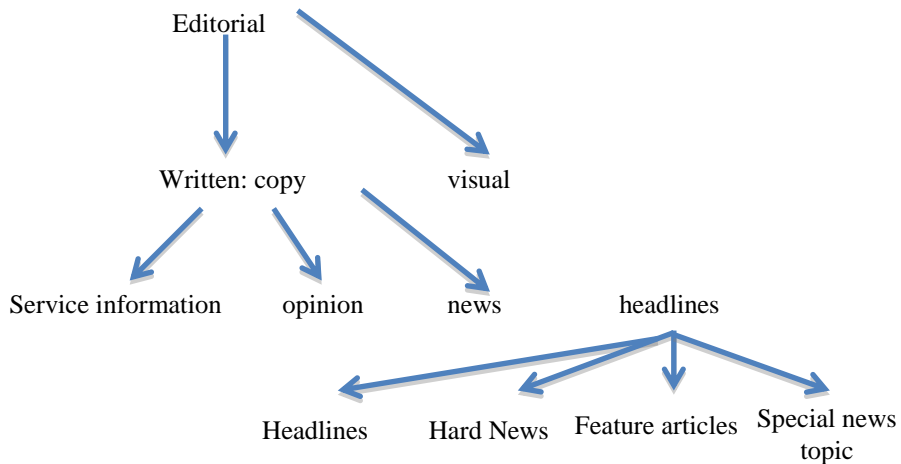
Taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slang>, idioms and slang are similar. Slang in general refers to words that are trendy (in fashion) for a time, so slang changes as time passes. Also, slang may be different from region to region. For example, some slang words in California may be unknown to people in Florida, to say nothing of the difference in slang between England and the USA and other English speaking communities. Idioms often start as slang but get more ingrained into the language and as a matter of fact, many dictionaries now contain many idiomatic words and phrases, as they become a part of our everyday language."

Johnson and Fox (2011) quoted of saying that "slang is the poetry of everyday life". Other than that, Bullard (2007) mentioned that slang was the main reason for the development of prescriptive language in an attempt to slow down the rate of change in both spoken and written language. Latin and French were the only two languages that maintained the use of prescriptive language in the 14th century. It was not until the early 15th century that scholars began pushing for a Standard English language.

Kenwood (1969) in his journal *A Study of Slang and Informal Usage in a Newspaper* explained that the creation of these non-standard usage groups in language (slang) arose through the concept of standardization. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century's lexicographers and grammarians, especially men like Dr. Samuel Johnson proposed that the English language should be purified and "fixed"; that, in fact, it should be standardized for all time. But only dead languages remain lifeless; live languages branch infinitely in all directions. Thus, these Renaissance pursuers of standardization in language ironically created, through

their efforts, the substandard - the slang, informal and other areas not relegated to the "cleansed" version. It was hoped that these vulgarities would thereby drop from use and cease to infiltrate the standard level of language.

**What is news: Defining genres-** In a newspaper, everything other than advertising is called editorial.



(source: Bell, 1990)

The news is seldom a solo performance. News media offer the classic case of language produced by multiple parties. Media audiences are large and multi-layered, ranging from the interviewer whom a newsmaker addresses face to face, to the absentee mass audience, which itself consists of different segments.

### ***EFFECTS OF USING PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE***

Professional language is any text containing difficult words that results in it being extravagantly hard for people to appreciate and not understandable at all. Some of the journalists often use slang words in some of their articles without even noticing it or they did actually notice it but decided to use it anyway. The unenthusiastic part is that when writers use grandiloquent words for the sake of it, because sometimes as writer they have their explanations why they use certain words but also in my opinion, the usage of professional language in newspaper needs to narrow down a bit because not all can understand the same meaning as what the writer trying to say.

### ***EFFECTS OF USING SLANG***

The development of slang begins in social circles, which often brings to mind cliques of teenagers, minorities and soldiers. But not all slang remains characteristic to the group it began in; some types of slang expand across generations and become accepted standard language because social conditions make them fashionable or people have become used to hearing and using them. Young people are notorious for using slang in their speech. Across all races and regions, phrases like "dude, let's bounce, this party is totally bust" can be found rolling off the

tongues of many teenagers, and are often mimicked and made fun of by adults and the media as a sign of immaturity, irresponsibility and unintelligence. We cannot ignore slang, as much as we cannot ignore how we perceive slang. Linguist Michael Adams explains that "When we hear a word or sentence pattern, it undergoes scrutiny, whether we're conscious of it or not: we judge its acceptability according to a certain set of standards; the standards vary according to the vocabulary against which the newer item is measured. "The acceptability being spoken of is of the slang term as an easily accepted word or a comprehensible phrase. We are taught from a young age that slang is improper use of language and many teachers and parents insist that it should not be used at all when they are teaching children grammar and mature social skills.

Rousseau (2007) said that although all circles use slang of one sort or another, we still judge each other based on the slang we use. Some slang has become more mainstream and thus, is more acceptable in various settings. The words "cool" and "hot" have increased in popularity and become widely accepted in most social backgrounds; they are no longer considered as improper as newer slang like "that sucks," to express disappointment or "busted," to describe unattractiveness. Until that point where the majority of society has grown accustomed to hearing the word or phrase on a regular basis and has warmed to it, slang will continue to be viewed negatively, as an inferior part of language."

## **METHODOLOGY**

Following this line of idea, a text analysis (content analysis) qualitative design is done to study the comparison of professional language and slangs in the writing of articles in *The Star*, and *NST*. "Content analysis can be fruitfully employed to examine virtually any type of communication," (Abrahamson, 1983, p.286). 12 articles from both newspapers are analysed.

In terms of reliability, this study used double-coding as means of checking its reliability (Miles and Huberman, 1994) where both researchers code the same field data (inter coder reliability). The validity was established through the emic concept where the culture of writing articles for both newspapers was carefully studied.

## ***SUBJECTS***

The samples for this study are non-human. They are the articles selected randomly from both newspapers. Articles under the category of hard news are selected. They are like world news, politics and business.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

12 articles (six from each newspaper) are selected randomly. The articles are under the category of hard news which by definition is news that deals with serious topics or events. The hard news chosen are world news, politics and business. All the 12 articles are analysed based on the criteria mentioned by the past studies done by Rampton (1998), Davies (2008) and Jackson (2010) for professional language and Johnson and Fox (2011) for slangs.

Criteria highlighted by these researchers are as follows:

Professional Language

- Objectivity words
- Aesthetic impulse
- Significant/meaningful
- Clear/Efficient

Slang

- Idiomatic expressions
- Deceitful long
- Biased words

Words under each criterion are analysed and grouped accordingly. They are labelled as PL1 for Objectivity words, PL2 for Aesthetic impulse, PL3 for Significant/meaningful and PL4 for clear/efficient and S1 for Idiomatic expressions, S2 for deceitful words and S3 for biased words.

**FINDINGS**

***RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE THE WORDS (PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE) THAT CAN BE FOUND IN THE WRITING ARTICLES (THE STAR AND NST)***

Table 1: Professional language found in the writing articles (The Star)

Hard News (The Star)	Articles	Objectivity Words	Aesthetic Impulse	Significant / Meaningful	Clear/ Efficient
World	Iranians 'confess' to killing nuke scientists	✓	✓	✗	✗
World	Using diplomatic means	✗	✓	✓	✓
Business	Prada sales record exceed estimates on higher demand in Asia	✗	✓	✗	✓
Business	Knight-mare Over?	✓	✗	✗	✗
Politics	Dr M: Beware of the hate tactics.	✗	✗	✓	✓
Politics	Don't pass the buck of hudud, Mustapa tells PAS	✗	✗	✓	✗

Table 2: Professional language found in the writing articles (NST)

Hard news (NST)	Articles	Objectivity Words	Aesthetic Impulse	Significant and Meaningful	Clear and Efficient
World	Virus that spies on banks	✓	✓	✗	✗
World	Dust from Asia affects air, health in US, Canada	✗	✗	✓	✓
Business	Its capitalism that drives economies	✓	✓	✓	✗
Business	Smaller Asian economics to feel chill soon, says HSBC	✗	✓	✓	✓
Politics	Raja Petra's posting causes stir	✗	✓	✓	✗
Politics	Pakatan's merdeka slogan 'outdated'	✗	✓	✓	✗

### ***THE STAR***

From Table 1, there are 11 professional language words from almost all categories of professional language mentioned by the past researchers found.

The words match the criteria of PL1 (Objectivity Words) can be found from the world news; Iranians 'Confess' to Killing Nuke Scientist which uses the words "alleged, prepared to murder". The article also has PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) words such as "prefabricated and also sombre". In the other world news, the article Using Diplomatic Means contains PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) such as "escalated", PL3 (Significant or Meaningful) with the word "compromises" and PL4 (Clear or efficient) with words "remarks and opposed".

As for the business section, the article Knight-mare over? The article covers PL1 (Objectivity Words) with words such as "rescuing companies, presaged, technology glitch, software glitch, and vulnerable market", PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) word like "embattled". The second business article in The Star Prada Sales Exceed Estimates on Higher Demand in Asia uses PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) such as the word "amid", PL4 (Clear or Efficient) with a phrase "reported mild slowdown" and PL3 (Significant/meaningful) a phrase, "a like-for like sales".

For the articles that focus on politics Dr M: Beware the Hate Tactics, this article has PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) with words like "populist and subpoenaed", and PL4 (Clear or Efficient) the word is "tenure". The second article under the same category, politics, Don't Pass the Buck on Hudud, Mustapa Tells PAS, phrases such as "government is insincere, flip-flop policies, inconsistency in their decisions and also stumbling block" from PL3 (Significant or Meaningful).

**NEW STRAITS TIMES (NST)**

Table 2 shows findings for the analysis of the six articles from the NST.

For the NST the professional language words found are more than The Star. Altogether they are 14 words found. The words match the criteria of PL3 (Significant or Meaningful) in the politics article for example Pakatan’s Merdeka Slogan ‘Outdated, the phrases like “resembled a slogan, hood-wink the public, and experienced leaders” are found. The other article, Raja Petra’s Posting Causes Stir uses professional language words that match PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) with a phrase “caused quite a stir”, PL3 (Significant or Meaningful) with the word “boasted”.

As for the World news section, article Dust from Asia Affects Air, Health is US, Canada has PL3 (Significant and Meaningful) with words “emission, desertification, and also solar dimming”, PL4 (Clear or Efficient) and the phrase is “first-of-a-kind and solar radiation”. The other world news article Virus that spies on banks has PL1 (Objectivity Words) with words like “can spy on, capable of attacking critical infrastructure and stirred”, PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) such as “espionage and cyber-espionage”.

As in the business articles, the article Smaller Asian Economies to Feel Chill soon, says HSBC has PL3 (Significant and Meaningful), with a phrase like “a bumpy ride”, PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) such as “a slump”, PL4 (Clear and Efficient) has a phrase “trade-dependent economies”. Another article It’s Capitalism that Drives Economies, it has PL1 (Objectivity Words) with words “stagnation, adoption of capitalism and also admirable traits”, and PL2 (Aesthetic Impulse) such as the word “pedigree and moribund” .

**RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: WHAT ARE THE SLANGS FOUND IN THE WRITING OF ARTICLES (THE STAR AND NST)?**

Table 3: Slangs found in the writing of articles (The Star)

Hard News (The Star)	Articles	Idiomatic Expressions	Deceitful Language	Biased Language	Jargon
World	Iranians ‘confess’ to killing nuke scientists	X	X	X	X
World	Using diplomatic means	X	X	X	X
Business	Prada sales record exceed estimates on higher demand in Asia	X	X	X	X
Business	Knight-mare Over?	X	X	X	X
Politics	Dr M: Beware of the hate tactics.	X	X	X	X



Politics	Don't pass the buck of hudud, Mustapa tells PAS	✗	✓	✗	✗
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Table 4: Slangs found in the writing of articles (NST)

Hard news (NST)	Articles	Idiomatic Expressions	Deceitful Language	Biased Language	Jargon
World	Virus that spies on banks	✗	✗	✗	✗
World	Dust from Asia affects air, health in US, Canada	✗	✗	✗	✗
Business	Its capitalism that drives economies	✗	✗	✗	✗
Business	Smaller Asian economics to feel chill soon, says HSBC	✗	✗	✗	✗
Politics	Raja Petra's posting causes stir	✓	✗	✗	✗
Politics	Pakatan's merdeka slogan 'outdated'	✗	✗	✗	✗

From Table 3 and Table 4, it can be summarised that, both newspapers use very little of slang words in their writing. Slang word for The Star newspaper is found in the politics article that comes from the category of deceitful language 'busted' and 'the buck of and as for the NST, the detected slang word 'blogger' which is also from the politics article and comes under the category of idiomatic expressions.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

From the findings, the NST uses more professional language than The Star in writing the hard news articles for the newspaper. This is positive and can be recommended to teachers and lecturers out there who have the interest to use newspaper articles as tools in their classroom. The finding is similar to Davies (2008) where he mentioned that the articles of the newspapers are considered as having the professional touch when the dominated words are professional because it creates a clearer and more efficient outcome. As for the slang words, both

newspapers where the 12 articles are selected, use very little slangs. These words are used just to make the articles sound more bombastic and enhance the interest of the readers. As Bullard (2007) mentioned that slang was the main reason for the development of prescriptive language in an attempt to slow down the rate of change in both spoken and written language. The findings of the study is irony. Now we know why the NST is lesser popular compared to The Star. As mentioned by the Dr Samuel Johnson in Kenwood's (1969) article, the effects of having slang words in the article are to make the article colourful and interesting. With minimum or even no slangs in the article resulted in the article to be boring, not catchy and less mind grabbing. All in all, positively, having more professional language words in the newspaper articles is positive in order to improve the language and expand the vocabulary of the readers, while having articles that contain interesting *slangy* words could motivate the young readers to have fun reading the newspaper while grabbing words that are put together.

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