

Lexical Feature Variations between *New York Times* and *Times Supplement* News Headlines*

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In 2004 *The New York Times* (NYT) launched a weekly *Time Supplement* (TS) with Taiwan's *United Daily News*. This article is intended to explore lexical feature variations between TS headlines and NYT headlines as a discourse strategy, focusing on variations of lexical formality and accessibility. A textual survey and stylistic analysis were conducted on a corpus comprising (i) all the TS news articles published during the eight months ending on October 31, 2008, and (ii) all the corresponding NYT news articles. An attempt was made to establish and analyze the lexical features that characterize TS and NYT headlines. Colloquialisms, idioms, slang expressions, technical terms, and non-English words were found in far more NYT headlines than TS headlines. These lexical feature variations decrease the informality of TS headlines but increase their accessibility to general TS readers, making the writing and reading of TS headlines stylistically less informal or more neutral. Four patterns of dictional variations from NYT to TS headlines were detected: from more to less informal, from first-person to third-person viewpoint, from less to more accessible, and from persuasive to informative. These variation patterns reflect what the headline writers perceive to be the norms for the respective readerships.

Keywords: lexical feature variations, newspaper headlines, *The New York Times*, the *Times Supplement*

1. Introduction

On Aug. 30, 2004 *The New York Times* launched a weekly supplement (henceforth 'the *Times Supplement*') with Taiwan's *United Daily News* (Park 2004). A team of *New York Times* editors and designers prepare the *Times Supplement* from recent *New York Times* news items in consultation with *United Daily News* editors (Park 2004 and Wang 2004). The collaboration between the two newspapers results in the weekly *Times Supplement* in the *United Daily News*, one of the leading Mandarin Chinese newspapers in Taiwan, where English is used as a foreign language.¹ According to *The New York Times* (Park 2004), the *Times Supplement* provides "The *New York Times*' brand of journalism to one of Taiwan's leading newspapers" and "open[s] a new window on world events for Taiwanese readers."

In general, the news articles in the *Times Supplement* (henceforth 'TS') are

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¹ As a matter of fact, only in 2004 did NYT editors consult with United Daily News editors for the editing of the *Times Supplement*. Afterwards, NYT editors have worked on their own without consultation with United Daily News editors (International News Center, United Daily News Group, personal communication, July 30, 2009).

derived from *The New York Times* (henceforth ‘NYT’). Each TS article corresponds to a NYT article in the sense that the former is edited, almost always very lightly, from the latter, but nothing of substance is changed (cf. Shie 2008). The TS article and its corresponding NYT article can be said to report on roughly the same fabula, namely the material or content that is worked into a story (cf. Bal 1997, Ochs 1997, and Toolan 1998). However, many TS headlines differ significantly from their counterparts in *The New York Times*. TS headlines and NYT headlines often show different choices of words that can be ascribed to the same headline writers’ perceptions of and attitudes toward the two different audiences.

The two editions of the same newspaper are published for different readerships in two different discourse communities. Broadly stated, the national edition of *The New York Times* is aimed at ordinary educated readers in the United States. It reaches a relatively affluent group of American readers both in and outside the New York metropolitan area, who are usually fully proficient speakers of English.² On the other hand, the readers of the *Times Supplement* are speakers or learners of English as a foreign language in Taiwan. Each of the two audiences shares a common culture and a de facto official language (English and Mandarin respectively). It is noticeable that, for the purpose of appealing to a different audience, the wording styles of TS headlines are frequently different from those of their corresponding NYT headlines. This paper is concerned with lexical feature variations between TS headlines and NYT headlines. Such a study is interesting because it involves the same group of ENL copyeditors producing stylistically different texts based on roughly the same story fabula for different audiences. The two discourse contexts in question can be summarized below:

1. NYT headlines: ENL copyeditors produce texts for ENL readers.
2. TS headlines: ENL copyeditors produce texts for EFL readers.

Located at the top of a newspaper article, a newspaper headline is a small piece of condensed text that indicates the nature of the body of the article below it. Granted that the headline is usually the last thing to be written among all the sections of a news article, it is the first thing the reader sees. It is meant to (i) catch the attention of the reader and (ii) present or relate to the main points of the article (cf. Bell 1991:189,

² The NYT circulation outside the New York market in the United States is larger than that in the New York metropolitan area (Retrieved July 24, 2009, from http://www.nytimes.whsites.net/mediakit/pdfs/newspaper/NYT_Circulation.pdf). According to the March 2009 demographic profile of the NYT audience provided by Nielsen NetRatings, 84.4% of unique NYT readers are college-educated or above, 30.5% have a postgraduate degree, and the median household income of all the unique audience is \$84,660 (Retrieved July 24, 2009, from http://www.nytimes.whsites.net/mediakit/online/audience/audience_profile.php).

Hudson and Rowlands 2007:148, Reah 1998:13, and Thorne 1997:234-5). As the present author sees it, the former can be viewed as the attention-getting role of the headline. By catching the reader's attention, the headline prompts the reader to read the body of the news story. The latter is the informative function of the headline. It introduces or represents the body of the story by highlighting an important part or aspect of the body. The informative function of newspaper headlines has been questioned in some studies (e.g., Dor 2003, Ifantidou 2009, and Smith 1999) on the grounds that many headlines do not accurately or adequately represent the contents of the articles they introduce.

The present author contends that the discourse function of a newspaper headline is (i) to persuade (namely to catch the reader's attention and prompt the reader to read on), (ii) to inform (namely to present or relate to the main points of the article), or (iii) both, depending on interactions among relevant variables such as newspaper type (broadsheet or tabloid), article genres (hard news or soft news), copyeditors' styles, and different readerships. The discourse function of a newspaper headline to catch the reader's attention means that, in headline writing, discourse style plays a very important part or even takes precedence over substance. To be brief, the discourse style of a newspaper headline functions to gain audience by foregrounding the most salient or interesting aspect of the news article.

The discourse style of newspapers headlines operates on at least four linguistic levels, namely phonology (such as alliteration and rhyme), vocabulary (such as technical terms and idioms), syntactic status (such as the passive and the noun phrase as an independent structure), and figuration (such as metaphor and metonymy). But functional varieties of language are most obvious at the level of lexis (Halliday, McIntosh, and Stevens 1964 and Trudgill 1999). For one thing, *free kick* belongs to the language of soccer. For another, the use of the legalistic-sounding adverb *hereby* indicates a formal style. It is for this reason that this article is intended to explore lexical feature variations between *TS* headlines and *NYT* headlines, focusing on variations of formality (e.g., *stomach* vs. *tummy*) and accessibility (e.g., *homicide* vs. *killing*).

The *TS* readers are by and large EFL speakers or learners, who still have some way to go before becoming fully proficient in English. Thus it is assumed that *NYT* copyeditors need to phrase *TS* headlines in a different style. Most of the time they modify or rewrite original *NYT* headlines in such a way that the resulting *TS* headlines are less informal but more accessible to *TS* readers. A textual survey will be conducted to confirm the following two hypotheses: (i) Fewer informal expressions—namely colloquialisms, idioms, and slang terms—are used in *TS* headlines than in their corresponding *NYT* headlines, and (ii) Fewer technical terms

and non-English words are used in TS headlines than in their corresponding NYT headlines.³ The causes and effects of relative occurrence frequencies of lexical features in NYT and TS headlines will be explored as well.

2. Data and methods

This study is based on a corpus of newspaper articles built up by the present author, comprising (i) all the news articles in the *Times Supplement* published by the *United Daily News* in print form during the eight months ending on October 31, 2008, and (ii) all the corresponding news articles in *The New York Times* Article Archive on the website of *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/>). The headlines in the corpus were collected by the present author, who read each news item in the *Times Supplement* in print in its entirety, performed searches through a specific search term (e.g., a full name of a non-famous person or organization that appeared in the TS news item), and found the corresponding news item in *The New York Times* online.

A stylistic analysis was conducted to explore lexical feature variations between corresponding NYT and TS news headlines. The lexical features studied include formality (shown by the use or non-use of such informal expressions as colloquialisms, idioms, and slang terms) and accessibility (shown by the use or non-use of technical terms and non-English words). The analysis began with the identification of the lexical features from the data. Subsequently, the identified lexical features were examined and classified in order to obtain patterns of variations between NYT headlines and TS headlines. The occurrences of the identified lexical features were then calculated. The relative frequencies of the lexical features were utilized to establish the discourse features of the two newspapers' headlines, to make judgments about the functions of the lexical features in discursal and cultural contexts, and to test the two hypotheses stated at the end of the previous section.

More specifically, each two corresponding headlines for the present study were juxtaposed for ease of examination. According to their syntactic structures and semantic contents, each pair of corresponding headlines was categorized as being (i) the same, (ii) roughly the same, or (iii) different. Two corresponding headlines were taken to be 'roughly the same' if they shared the same content words or if there were only one or two different content words which, however, did not cause any notable or substantial differences in lexical styles. The pairs categorized as being different were

³ These five lexical features—colloquialisms, idioms, slang words, technical terms, and non-English words—were derived from the present author's preliminary observation of corresponding NYT and TS headlines before the formal collection of data. Figuration, such as active metaphors and metonymies, is also a possible factor contributing to lexical and stylistic variations between NYT and TS headlines. Such variations cannot be dealt with in the present study because of limited space.

selected for further consideration in light of stylistic variations. To illustrate, the two juxtaposed headlines in (1), (2), or (3) are for two corresponding news articles reporting on the same fabula. The headlines in (1) are taken to be the same, those in (2) roughly the same, and those in (3) different:

- (1) a. How Free Should a Free Market Be?
(*The New York Times*, Oct. 4, 2008)
b. How Free Should a Free Market Be?
(*The Times Supplement*, Oct. 14, 2008)
- (2) a. Single Mothers in China Forge a Difficult Path
(*The New York Times*, April 6, 2008)
b. Chinese Single Mothers Choose a Difficult Path
(*The Times Supplement*, April 22, 2008)
- (3) a. Can You Become a Creature of New Habits?
(*The New York Times*, May 4, 2008)
b. For Creativity's Sake, Leave the Comfort Zone
(*The Times Supplement*, May 13, 2008)

There are 605 pairs of corresponding headlines in the data for this study. Only a small proportion of the pairs (3.8%) are identical headlines. This means that in most cases NYT editors rewrite or modify headlines for TS articles although each of the TS articles and its corresponding NYT article report on roughly the same fabula. Most of the corresponding headlines (86.8 %) were marked as different, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Occurrence frequencies of 3 types of corresponding headlines in the data

Headline pairs	Frequency
Same	23 (03.8%)
Roughly the same	57 (09.4%)
Different	525 (86.8%)
Total	605 (100 %)

The 525 pairs of corresponding headlines categorized as different (henceforth ‘the sub-corpus’) were gathered together for further comparison and examination. Pairs of headlines in the sub-corpus were coded by hand as stylistically distinctive if the two corresponding headlines showed notable degrees of phrasing formality and accessibility in respect to the occurrence or non-occurrence of the following five

lexical features: colloquialisms, idioms, slang words, technical terms, and non-English words. In this way all the cases of relevant lexical features were isolated. In other words, the headlines in the sub-corpus were investigated with attention to the above-mentioned five lexical features. Two passes were made to identify these features in the sub-corpus. The headlines judged as having any of these features were marked for a frequency count for each of the features. The counts will be summarized in the tables in Section 3 and Section 4. The following dictionaries jointly served as a frame of reference to check individual intuition and judgement about lexical feature identification:

1. *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (June 2009 Revisions, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>)⁴
2. *Dictionary.com* (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>)⁵
3. *YourDictionary* (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/>)⁶
4. *TheFreeDictionary* (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/>)⁷
5. *Cambridge Idioms Dictionary* (2006, 2nd ed.), Cambridge University Press

Four of the dictionaries are online ones, which can be searched with greater speed and ease than print dictionaries. All of the dictionaries were used to ascertain whether an expression in the headline being scrutinized is an informal word, idiom, slang word, colloquial expression, or technical term. In these dictionaries, field labels (e.g., *medicine* and *technical*) and style labels (e.g., *slang* and *informal*) were referred to for making judgements about (i) the setting in which an expression is appropriate and (ii) the likely effects on the reader. For example, the field label *medicine* indicates that the expression is used mainly in medical texts, and the style label *colloquial* indicates that the expression is used primarily in informal, spoken language.

As the accepted authority on the evolution of the English language, the *Oxford English Dictionary* is a scholarly dictionary based on historical principles. Its entry

⁴ The *OED Online* (June 2009 Revisions) offers quick access to the materials contained in the 20-volume *OED* (2nd ed.), 3-volume additions series, and all the new materials released quarterly since 1993 (Retrieved July 20, 2009, from <http://oed.com/about/oed-online/>).

⁵ *Dictionary.com* is a multi-source dictionary search service. The dictionaries that appear on Dictionary.com include *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed.), *Webster's New Millennium Dictionary of English*, *WordNet 2.0*, *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law*, and so on (Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://dictionary.reference.com/help/about.html>).

⁶ *YourDictionary* is based on *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, and so on (Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.yourdictionary.com/>).

⁷ *TheFreeDictionary* is a multi-source online dictionary and encyclopedia with an idiom component. It cross references the contents of *Wikipedia*, *Columbia Encyclopedia*, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, the *Acronym Finder* database, several dictionaries of English idioms, several financial dictionaries, several legal dictionaries, and many more (Retrieved July 22, 2009, from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sources.htm>).

structure is very different from that of a dictionary of current English. Thus, in addition to the *OED*, the present study still needs to refer to other dictionaries which cover more present-day meanings and usages than those of past times. In particular, the *OED* does not have an idiom component. Neither does it give idiom labels to idioms in current English. Other dictionaries have to be consulted to determine whether an expression in the data for the present study should be treated as an idiom.

3. Formality

Styles can be characterized as varieties of language ranging on a continuum of formality from highly informal to highly formal (Chambers 1995, Joos 1967, Labov 1984, Trudgill 1992, 1999). Formal styles are used in serious or official situations (e.g., academic papers and political speeches), and informal styles in relaxed or private situations (e.g., casual conversations among peers, instant messaging, and friendly e-mails). But language users do not respond blindly to the particular degree of formality of a particular situational context. They are able to adjust the level of formality of a situational context by manipulation of stylistic choice (Trudgill 1999). Thus in the same newspaper, the wording of headlines varies in formality owing to different subject matters. Similarly, a *TS* headline and its corresponding *NYT* headline, granted that they deal with the same incident or state of affairs, are frequently different in lexical style. This can be seen from Table 2, which summarizes the frequency counts for lexical features concerning formality.

Table 2. Lexical variations between NYT and TS headlines: Formality

Lexical Features	Only NYT	Both	Only TS	Total
Colloquial expressions	90	10	7	107
Idioms	64	10	11	85
Slang expressions	17	1	3	21
Total	171	21	21	213

It can be seen from Table 2 that in the sub-corpus for this study (namely the 525 pairs of different headlines for corresponding articles dealing with the same fabula):

1. 100 *NYT* headlines contain a colloquial expression (90+10).
2. 17 *TS* headlines contain a colloquial expression (10+7).
3. 74 *NYT* headlines contain an idiom (64+10).
4. 21 *TS* headlines contain an idiom (10+11).
5. 18 *NYT* headlines contain a slang expression (17+1).

6. 4 TS headlines contain a slang expression (1+3).

These figures are further presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Lexical features of NYT and TS headlines: Formality

Lexical Features	NYT	TS	Total
Colloquial expressions	100	17	117
Idioms	74	21	95
Slang expressions	18	4	22
Total	192	42	234

The degree to which formal or informal expressions are used is a major factor that determines the formality of an English text. Dictional features that distinguish informal from formal language, as far as the headline data for the present study are concerned, include frequent use of colloquial, idiomatic, and slang expressions. Variations of these three lexical features are discussed in the following two subsections.

3.1 Formality: Colloquial expressions

As shown in Table 3, there are far more NYT headlines than TS headlines (100 to 17) that include colloquial expressions. Colloquial expressions include contractions (e.g., *it's* and *can't*), colloquialisms (e.g., *fellow* and *pretty good*), interjections (e.g., *well* and *uh*), pause fillers (e.g., *you know* and *sort of*), and pronouns in the first and second persons (such as *I*, *we*, *you*, *our*, and *us*) referring to the writer or the reader. All these are lexical traits attributed to synchronous oral communication. The headlines in the sub-corpus that had any one of these informal features were marked as containing a colloquial expression, as in the following NYT headline (4a), which is more colloquial than its TS counterpart (4b) :

(4) a. Women, Repeat This: Don't Ask, Don't Get

(*The New York Times*, April 6, 2008)

b. Women Need to Learn to Ask for What They Want

(*The Times Supplement*, April 22, 2008)

It is well known that contractions, colloquialisms, pause fillers, and interjections frequently occur in an informal text. On the other hand, formal English creates an objective tone by avoiding these informal dictional features. Thus it is concluded that,

where there are variations in the use of colloquial expressions, *TS* headlines are less informal than *NYT* headlines because the former contains far fewer colloquial expressions than the latter. The fact that such *NYT* headlines use far more informal expressions can be attributed to the psychological distance between the writer and the reader. Distance communicates interpersonal relationships (van Leeuwen 2008:138). *We keep our distance* from strangers. We are *close to* our dearest. And we *work closely* with our partner. Familiarity with the addressee is in inverse proportion to the psychological distance between the addresser and addressee, which varies directly with the linguistic formality. In other words, the more familiar the addresser is with the addressee, the more informal the language the addresser uses will be. Both *NYT* headlines and their corresponding *TS* headlines are written or re-written by *NYT* editors. Since *NYT* editors and *NYT* readers share the same culture and de facto national language, the psychological distance between the two is shorter than that between *NYT* editors and *TS* readers. For this reason, *NYT* headlines are frequently more informal than *TS* headlines. The headlines in (4) above are typical examples, with (4b) in a neutral or relatively formal style and (4a) in an informal discourse style.

The use of first- and second-person pronouns in *NYT* and *TS* headlines deserves further discussion. Informal texts are often written in the first person. They are characterized by first- and second-person pronouns referring to the writer and the reader. These pronouns tend to imply subjectivity and make the reader aware of the writer's presence in the text. By contrast, a more objective tone can be achieved by using impersonal language independent from the writer and reader. Thus frequent use of first- and second-person pronouns referring to the addresser and the addressee can be taken to be common informal or colloquial expressions. High occurrence frequency of first- and second-person pronouns in spoken discourse has been observed in empirical research. In comparing oral and written texts in large corpora, Yates (1996) counted the use of pronouns and observed that more than twice as many pronouns in the first and second persons are used in spoken discourse than in written communication. Although *NYT* headlines are in the written mode, they are frequently characterized by colloquial expressions, including first- and second-person pronouns.

The frequent use of first- and second-person pronouns in *NYT* headlines is owed to the first-person mode of narration, in which the narrator (who is also a participant in the story) conveys the story, gives opinions, or makes suggestions, as exemplified by the following *NYT* headline (5a):

- (5) a. Hey, Big Spender, Flying My Way?
(*The New York Times*, July 13, 2008)

b. Upscale Hitchhikers Join Private Jet Set
(The *Times Supplement*, September 9, 2008)

In such a headline, first- and second-person pronouns serve as linguistic indicators of the narrative viewpoint. They prompt the reader to enter the story world from the real world. By simulating the face-to-face communication, they can shorten the social and psychological distance not only between the writer and the reader but also between the reader and whatever is being narrated or described.

As the present author sees it, the theory of Meetings of Minds formulated by Oatley (1999) applies to the narrative viewpoint of newspaper headlines. According to Oatley (1999:445), there are two types of meetings of minds in reading narrative. The first type of meeting is of a reader as spectator, who becomes an observer of characters in the story world. In this type of meeting in the story world, the reader comes to know something of the characters but does not affect them. But at the same time he can certainly feel emotions of sympathy in his meeting with characters of the story world. The second kind of meeting involves a reader as identifier. When this happens, the reader identifies with a protagonist or with a narrator (See also Oatley and Gholamain 1997). The meeting of identification is a case of empathy, where the reader not only sympathizes with the protagonist or narrator but identifies with and becomes that person in the story world. Point-of-view in narrative technique is the most direct means of varying the extent of the reader's identification and empathy as compared with his observation and sympathy. Third-person narrative favors spectating, while first-person narrative is conducive to identification (Oatley 1999). More empathy is directed towards characters in a first-person narrative than in a third-person narrative.

The first-person viewpoint is used more often in NYT headlines, whereas the third person viewpoint more frequently in TS headlines (Shie 2008).⁸ While writing in the third-person viewpoint, the journalist or copyeditor is showing a small piece of the world rather than telling a story of that piece of the world. The third-person story reader becomes a spectator of the scenes of the story world. The headline of the story can be thought of as a slice of story that makes the reader seem to be watching something broadcast live from the spectator stance. On the other hand, first-person

⁸ Based on a corpus of 463 pairs of corresponding headlines (or 926 news articles in which those headlines occur), Shie (2008) explored textual variations between TS headlines and their corresponding NYT headlines in light of extratextual audience perspective factors. A textual survey was conducted to identify differences attributable to audience perspectives. Corresponding headlines were considered perspectively distinctive provided (i) that they highlighted different parts or dimensions of the fabula, (ii) that they were written from different narrative viewpoints, or (iii) that they were composed from different thematic viewpoints so that the theme-rheme structures of the corresponding headlines were reversed. The present paper includes a part of the research by Shie (2008) related to the first- and third-person modes of narration in news headlines.

headlines favor the role of the reader not only as spectator but also as identifier. The reader can identify with a participant in the news story. As noted earlier, such identification is a type of empathy, in which the reader does not merely sympathize with the story participant but becomes that person as well.

According to the frequency count presented in Shie (2008), the literary technique of first-person viewpoint is frequently adopted by NYT headline writers as well. Founded in 1851, *The New York Times* is one of America's greatest newspapers. From 1917 to the time of the present study, *The New York Times* had won 101 Pulitzer Prizes for journalism, by far the most of any news organization (Perez-Pena 2009). The first-person dramatic viewpoint is feasible for NYT headlines in that their readers in general are educated native speakers of English (see Note 2 to Section 1). And yet the general TS readers are speakers or learners of English as a foreign language, who make efforts to comprehend the text message encoded in the foreign language rather than easily empathize with participants in the news story. The first-person headlines intended to bring about identification and empathy would seem too demanding for general TS readers. It is necessary for these readers to take on an exotic point of view to make sense of, if not to identify with, the first-person news headline. Therefore, it is conceivable that TS headline writers usually turn to the third-person viewpoint, in which the EFL users or learners' English input materials—such as textbooks, reports, and encyclopedias—are normally written or compiled.

It is also noticeable that almost all the first-person NYT headlines in the sub-corpus for this study are feature headlines, which are more difficult to comprehend than a straight headline. Feature headlines catch the reader's attention by asking a question or highlighting a single highly interesting or unusual detail extracted out of the body of the news story. It is often necessary to read the subsequent body text to understand a feature headline. On the other hand, straight headlines tell the reader the main topic of the story, and hence are easier to understand (Fredrickson and Wedel 1984:59-61). Dor (2003:698) has a similar view, according to which a feature headline "triggers frames and belief systems in the reader's mind, and, then, gets resolved in the ensuing text." Since almost all the first-person NYT headlines in the sub-corpus for this study are feature headlines, the shift from the NYT first-person to the TS third-person viewpoint helps TS readers get the main point of the story and comprehend the story more easily. If they have to make sense of the headline containing semantically underdetermined information, they will be less likely to be attracted to the body of the story.

3.2 Formality: Idioms and slang

A number of criteria have been proposed to assist in identification of idioms, including non-compositionality, conventionality, fixedness, informality, and figuration. Non-compositionality or semantic opacity is the feature most often ascribed to idioms (as in Aitchison 1987, Chomsky 1965, Fernando 1996, Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor 1988, Grant and Bauer 2004, Jackendoff 1975, Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow 1994, and O'Grady 1998). The meaning of a typical idiom is not the sum of its constituent parts. Thus in this paper idioms are considered to be multi-word expressions whose meanings cannot be predicted from knowledge of the meanings of their component parts. All the multi-word opaque expressions counted as idioms in the sub-corpus (e.g., *look the part* and *outside the box*) are included in the *Cambridge Idioms Dictionary* or in the idiom component of *TheFreeDictionary* or labeled as 'idiom' in at least one of the five dictionaries listed in Section 2.

Slang is vocabulary with attitude (Eble 2004). It normally appears in the form of a single word or compound word. Slang expressions are highly colloquial and vulgar, considered as below the level of standard educated speech (the *OED Online*, September 2009 Revisions). Frequently particular to members of a subculture or an in-group, slang words are often used as a symbol of the shared identity of their users (Coleman 2004). All the expressions counted as slang in the sub-corpus (e.g., *dude* and *repo man*) are labeled as 'slang' in at least one of the five dictionaries listed in Section 2.

Most English idioms are informal expressions in everyday spoken language (cf. Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow 1994). So are all English slang expressions. As Table 2 and Table 3 have shown, both idioms and slang expressions occur in more NYT headlines than TS headlines (74 to 21 and 18 to 4 respectively). This further ascertains that, where there are variations in dictional formality, the wording of TS headlines is by and large less informal than that of NYT headlines.

Native speakers encounter idioms more often than non-native speakers (cf. Abel 2003), which provides a rationale for NYT copywriters' more frequent use of idioms in NYT headlines than in TS headlines. More importantly, socio-cultural factors motivate the use of idioms and slang in NYT headlines but reduce their occurrences in TS headlines. English idioms and slang expressions involve native speakers' shared knowledge and cultural models. These conventionalized expressions add to the communicative potential and contribute positively to the appeal of NYT headlines. Many English idioms or slang expressions originated from a shared cultural heritage and thus can evoke the knowledge schema containing the concept or activity they refer to. For example, the idiom *back to square one* means 'to go back to the

beginning.’ According to the *OED Online* (June 2009 Revisions), this idiom most likely originated from children’s games such as ‘hopscotch’ and ‘snakes and ladders.’ Many native English speakers, due to their cultural background, are familiar with these childhood games. Thus the idiom can easily evoke the schematic concept ‘square one’ in the English user’s mind.

Idioms and slang expressions are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural norms of a particular speech community (Prodromou 2008:28). Granted that they can not be interpreted using the meanings of their component words and relevant grammatical rules, they are easily understood by native speakers and incorporated into their colloquial fluency. Such culturally shaped formulaic sequences are more often than not stored and retrieved whole from the memory at the time of use (Wray 2000:465). However, their semantic opacity and cultural specificity pose a peculiar difficulty to foreign language learners. Some English idioms and slang have direct translations in Mandarin Chinese (the de facto official language of TS readers). But others, such as *back to square one*, do not have parallels in terms of meaning and linguistic construction. Since foreign language users may not be familiar with the shared knowledge or cultural heritage with which an idiom or slang expression is involved, they are likely to misunderstand the meaning of that formulaic sequence. Consider, for example, the idiom *on a collision course* in the following TS headline (6b) along with the corresponding NYT headline (6a):

(6) a. Amid the Gloom, an E-Commerce War

(*The New York Times*, October 12, 2008)

b. In Tight Economy, eBay and Amazon on Collision Course

(*The Times Supplement*, October 28, 2008)

Below is an excerpt of the body of the news article in question:

For eBay and Amazon, the twin giants of e-commerce, the financial meltdown has arrived at a particularly crucial time. After years of claiming that their businesses were complementary, not competitive, the companies are now on a collision course. [. . .] Indeed, the balance of power in e-commerce seems to be shifting faster than anyone expected. Just three years ago, eBay had 30 percent more traffic than Amazon. Today, its total of 84.5 million active users is barely ahead of the 81 million active customer accounts that Amazon reported in June. Amazon has exceeded eBay in other measures as well. [. . .] Lately, small merchants and their trade organizations say, the outreach has become even more direct. The Professional eBay Sellers Alliance said that

Amazon recently offered to waive some fees for the 800 members of the group, an organization of eBay power sellers, to woo them to its platform. Because Amazon also sells many of the same products as its merchants, executives at eBay predict that competitive tensions will emerge as the Amazon Marketplace grows.

The idiom *on a collision course* may have its appeal to American English speakers on the ground that *Collision Course* is the title of a well-known album, film, and novel, representing a notable slice of American culture. The connotation of conflict is apparent to those who are aware of either the idiom *on a collision course* or the well-known title *Collision Course*. But this is not the case with many TS readers. The headlines in (6b) and the above except of the news article indicate that the foreground information of the news article is concerned with the competition or conflict between eBay and Amazon. Unfortunately, the idiom *on a collision course* in the TS headline was translated by a *United Daily News* translator inaccurately, if not mistakenly, as 越走越近 *yuè zǒu yuè jìn* ‘get closer to each other’, which appeared in the *Times Supplement* on October 28, 2008. The *OED online* (June 2009 Revisions) interprets *collision course* as meaning “a course that will end in collision.” In a similar vein, *TheFreeDictionary* defines *be on a collision course* in the following words “if two people or groups are on a collision course, they are doing or saying things which are certain to cause a serious disagreement or a fight between them.”⁹ Therefore, in the situational context of the news story, the idiom connotes some kind of conflict, which the Chinese translation 越走越近 *yuè zǒu yuè jìn* ‘getting closer to each other’ fails to convey. This indicates that even a professional translator could possibly misunderstand the intended meaning of a target language idiom in context. TS readers, who are mostly English as a foreign language speakers or learners, might be more likely to misinterpret idioms in English newspaper headlines. For this reason, in rewriting the NYT headlines for TS readers, NYT copyeditors use fewer idioms to make the TS headline more accessible to the target audience.

The pair of corresponding headlines in (6) has been given in this paper to illustrate the accessibility of an English idiom to TS readers. In that pair of headlines, an idiom is used in the TS headline, but not in the NYT headline. In the sub-corpus for this study there are only 14 (11+3) pairs of such headlines, where an idiom or slang expression occurs in the TS headline but not in the NYT headline (See Table 2). On the other hand, as many as 81 (64+17) pairs of headlines in the sub-corpus were found to have an idiom or slang word only in the NYT headline (See Table 2). Here is an example:

⁹ Quoted July 2, 2009, from <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/collision>

- (7) a. Cameras Roll, and Faith Hasn't a Prayer
 (*The New York Times*, September 26, 2008)
- b. Skeptics Turn Lens on Power of Faith
 (*The Times Supplement*, October 14, 2008)

The word *prayer* in the above NYT headline (7a) is a slang term meaning “a chance to succeed.”¹⁰ The headline is for a news article about director Larry Charles’ new movie “*Religulous*,” which satirizes organized religion and stirs the nonreligious to unite, with the title of the film derived from the words *religious* and *ridiculous*. The news value is foregrounded in the headline by, among other things, using the slang word to relate to the unusual or surprising aspect of the story. Such a headline is easy to catch the NYT readers’ attention, but not accessible enough to the TS audience owing to the slang term. Thus the slang term is used in the NYT headline, but not in the TS headline.

Taken together—where there are variations in lexical formality—colloquial, idiomatic, and slang expressions are used in NYT headlines at a much higher frequency than in TS headlines. These lexical features apparently correlate with the general formality of TS headlines and NYT headlines, the former being less informal than the latter. In addition, readers’ English proficiency is also an explanatory variable for the general formality. In a quantitative analysis of advanced oral interlanguage, Dewaele (2008) has found that language proficiency has a significant effect on style choice in a corpus of advanced French interlanguage. Lower levels of proficiency are linked to less informal styles. In other words, less proficient foreign language speakers use less informal styles. The lower degree of informality in their language production has been attributed to their stylistically neutral language input and lack of authentic interactions in the target language (See also Tarone and Swain 1995 and Shie 2008). The results of the present stylistic survey are consistent with the generality that less proficient speakers use neutral or less informal styles. It is apparent that NYT copyeditors need to write TS headlines in the style most familiar to TS readers. Since TS headlines are less informal than their corresponding NYT headlines, other things being equal, TS headlines are arguably more accessible to general TS readers than NYT headlines.

According to the theory of audience design (Bell 1984), stylistic variations occur normally in response to the audience. The lexical formality shifts between NYT and TS headlines can be considered to be the result of an adaptation to the linguistic styles or features of the audience. Different degrees of lexical formality correspond to the linguistic styles of different audiences. The textual survey for the present paper

¹⁰ Quoted July 8, 2009, from the *OED Online* and *YourDitionary*.

revealed that NYT headline writers write differently in line with the target readership. Given that the headline writers, the theme of the discourse, the subject matter, and the discourse genre are the same, the most plausible interpretation of the lexical formality shifts is that NYT headline writers attune their writing to the norms for the respective readerships. By doing so, the NYT headline writers express intimacy or solidarity with the target audience and hence draw a broader range of readers.

4. Accessibility: Technical terms and non-English words

Technical terms and non-English words increase the sophistication of journalistic texts, and hence make them less accessible to general TS readers, who are EFL learners or speakers. On the other hand, these sophisticated expressions can engage NYT readers' attention and interest and challenge them to make sense of the headline.

Some NYT headlines are characterized by technical terms, such as *flip* (in finance) and *Scrabulous* (a virtual knockoff of the Scrabble board game). These specialized words or phrases are used in headlines chiefly to impress. In addition, like the use of slang words, the use of technical terms can signal to readers in a specific profession, discipline, or hobby that the writer is a member of their group. In speaking their language, the writer is expressing his/her solidarity with them. It is important that the general readers have the specialized knowledge the technical term evokes, which is the common ground or mutual knowledge essential for meetings of minds in reading news articles. For example:

(8) a. In the E-Mail Relay, Not Every Handoff Is Smooth

(*The New York Times*, June 15, 2008)

b. No Proof E-Mails Arrive

(*The Times Supplement*, August 5, 2008)

The NYT headline in (8a) contains a specialized term: *handoff*, which is used to describe American football plays. It refers to an offensive maneuver in which a ball is handed directly from one player to another without leaving the first player's hands first.¹¹ In (8a) the term *handoff* is a metaphor for the traversing of an e-mail from one mail router to the next. The main point of the news article is that, like letters, e-mails can go missing. When senders of e-mail messages do not receive a reply, they wonder whether their e-mails are ever received. An e-mail usually hops several times as it traverses one mail router to the next. However, each mail router can see only as far as

¹¹ According to the *OED Online* (June 2009 Revisions), the American football term *handoff* refers to the action of handing the ball to a nearby teammate or an instance of this.

the next hop. Once it hands off responsibility, it has no way to track the message's progress. NYT readers are more able to see the analogy between American football handoffs and the traversing of e-mails by virtue of the fact that American football is the most popular sport in the United States. It is well-known that the Super Bowl has become the most-watched American television broadcast. In other words, there is sufficient common ground between the headline writer and general NYT readers as far as (8a) is concerned. But American football has received far less recognition and coverage in Taiwan. Therefore, general TS readers cannot comprehend the analogy as easily owing to their relatively limited background knowledge in this respect. Instead, they are more likely to prefer less effortful processing of the headline in (8b), which is composed entirely of common words.

Technical terms are used in NYT headlines far more often than in TS headlines. Table 4 shows that 40 (35+5) NYT headlines, compared with only 7 (5+2) TS headlines, have a technical term in them:

Table 4. Lexical shifts between NYT and TS headlines: Accessibility

Lexical Features	Only NYT	Both	Only TS	Total
Technical terms	35	5	2	42
Non-English words	6	0	0	6
Total	41	5	2	48

Non-English words were also found to occur, although occasionally, in NYT headlines. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the United States, about 85 percent of high school graduates have completed some foreign language study.¹² Thus non-English words are intelligible to NYT readers to a certain degree. As shown in Table 4, 6 NYT headlines contain non-English words, which, however, do not exist in TS headlines in the sub-corpus at all. Loan words such as *paparazzi* and *tsunami* were excluded from the count on the grounds that they have become English common nouns and have been included in contemporary English dictionaries. Non-English words are used to create an exotic ambiance in NYT headlines and attract the reader's attention and interest. For example:

- (9) a. 'Vert Acres'? France Sees the Joy of Being Stuck in the Sticks
(*The New York Times*, April 27, 2008)
- b. French See the Rewards of Rural Life
(*The Times Supplement*, May 6, 2008)

¹² Source: National Center for Education Statistics, USA. Special analysis 2007: High school coursetaking. Retrieved May 19, 2009, from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2007/analysis/sa02c2.asp>

The corresponding headlines in (9) are for a news story about a hit movie dealing with a French city slicker, who was sent off to a small town in northern France, lived among country folks there, and was quickly won over by their hospitality. The NYT headline in (9a) contains the French word *vert* and the informal English expression *the sticks*, whereas the TS headline in (9b) is composed entirely of general English words. Granted that *vert* is also an English word, it is a specialized term used in heraldry for ‘the tincture green.’ The word *vert* in (9a) should be thought of as a French nontechnical word for ‘green’ modifying the noun *acres* in the frame of an English noun phrase.¹³ In most cases, the use of non-English words and specialized terms adds to the technicality and formality of a text. But non-English words in NYT headlines are words in a second foreign language to TS readers. Very few Taiwanese people have learned a second foreign language. In 2009 there were more than 700,000 high school students in Taiwan,¹⁴ all of whom took required English courses. However, as of February 2009, only 3,566 high school students in Taiwan enrolled in a French language class, and only 1,152 high school students in a German language course.¹⁵ Thus it can be said that very few Taiwanese readers understand non-English words in NYT headlines. Comprehension is the first step toward attention. An unintelligible headline cannot perform its intended function. Thus non-English words do not occur in the TS headlines in the sub-corpus for this study at all.

To summarize, technical terms and non-English words occur in 46 (41+5) NYT headlines in the sub-corpus for the present study (See Table 4). These sophisticated textual elements reduce the accessibility of the NYT headlines to non-native English speakers or learners. In order to make the TS headlines at a level of difficulty accessible to general TS readers, NYT copyeditors refrain from using such sophisticated expressions when they modify NYT headlines. Accordingly, technical terms and non-English words occur in only 7 (2+5) TS headlines in the sub-corpus (See Table 4). More common expressions are used in the TS headlines instead of the sophisticated expressions in the corresponding NYT headlines so that the general readers are more able to comprehend and more likely to be attracted by the TS headlines.

¹³ According to the *OED Online* (June 2009 Revisions), the plural noun *acres* is used rhetorically by modern writers for lands and fields.

¹⁴ Source: *Statistical Yearbook* compiled by Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. Retrieved May 19, 2009, from

<http://win.dgbas.gov.tw/dgbas03/ca/yearbook/ch4/4-6+.xls#a29> and from <http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/lp.asp?ctNode=3120&CtUnit=1049&BaseDSD=34>

¹⁵ Source: Ministry of Education, R.O.C. Retrieved May 19, 2009, from

<http://www.edu.tw/HIGH-SCHOOL/index.aspx> and from http://www.edu.tw/files/site_content/B0037/97_學年度第二學期_1.xls

5. Persuasive and informative headlines

As noted in Section 1, the present author holds that the discourse function of a newspaper headline is (i) to persuade (namely to catch the reader's attention and prompt the reader to read the body of the news story), (ii) to inform (namely to present or relate to the main points of the article), or (iii) both. And yet some authors (e.g., Ifantidou 2009 and Leon 1997) claim that newspaper headlines function as an attention-getting rather than information-providing device since headlines do not accurately represent the articles they introduce. In other words, newspaper headlines are persuasive rather than informative. A contrasting case is that of the *TS* headlines explored in the present study, which represent the kind of newspaper headlines with their word style neutralized so much so that they can be considered much more informative than persuasive.

Although a *TS* headline and its corresponding *NYT* headline are for the same story *fabula*, they frequently show different choices of words. In general the wording styles of *NYT* headlines are more flexible than those of *TS* headlines. The wording of *NYT* headlines can be more formal (e.g., technical terms) or informal (e.g., slang words) than the norm, while that of *TS* headlines is more or less restricted to the neutral range of the register. This can be seen from Table 2 in Section 3 and Table 4 in Section 4. *TS* headlines usually use more common English words that the audience can grasp more easily. Such common words, which are neither very formal nor very informal, apply to a wide range of discourse contexts and belong to the nucleus of the English lexicon. On the other hand, there exist in *NYT* headlines far more English words that occur in a relatively restricted range of discourse, namely colloquial expressions, slang words, idioms, technical terms, and foreign words. The stylistically neutralized wording of *TS* headlines is much in keeping with general Taiwanese readers' English proficiency level.

In the Roman rhetorical tradition, style was divided into the following three levels according to rhetorical purposes: grand, middle, and plain (cf. Cicero 1921 and Benoit and Benoit 2008). The grand style aims to move, the middle style to please, and the plain style to teach. Different types of vocabulary and diction are considered appropriate for each stylistic level. Lexical choices in the grand style are vivid or striking. Unusual and impressive words are strategically used to create intensity and dramatic mood conducive to persuasion. The middle style is halfway along the scale, consisting of words that are not so ornate. At the other end is the plain style, which is used when clarity is the most important consideration, as is the case with typical academic prose. Words in the plain style are typically standard and neutralized in formality, intended primarily to inform. They are relatively lucid to ensure that the

reader can comprehend the message conveyed as easily as possible.

The textual survey for the present study reveals that, where word choices are concerned, NYT headlines tend to be constructed in the grand style for the purpose of engaging the reader's attention and interest, while TS headlines tend to be written in the plain style with a view to conveying information efficiently. The words used in TS headlines are typically in a neutralized style of formality and easier for TS readers to grasp. In contrast, NYT headlines are more vivid and impressive in lexical features. They frequently tilt toward either one of the two extremes rather than the middle of the formality scale. This means that lexical features of NYT headlines as attention-getting devices are usually absent from or significantly reduced in their corresponding TS headlines. Accordingly, TS headlines are more informative than persuasive, while NYT headlines are more persuasive than informative.

6. Conclusion

In this study an attempt has been made to establish and analyze the lexical features that characterize TS and NYT headlines. The textual survey and stylistic analysis have supported the two hypotheses proposed at the end of Section 1. Colloquialisms, idioms, slang expressions, technical terms, and non-English words have been found in far more NYT headlines than TS headlines in the sub-corpus for this study. These lexical feature variations decrease the informality of TS headlines but increase their accessibility to general TS readers, making the writing and reading of TS headlines a stylistically less informal or more neutral context.

Four patterns of strategic variations between lexical features of NYT and TS headlines have been detected: from more to less informal, from first-person to third-person viewpoint, from less to more accessible, and from persuasive to informative. The pattern of formality variations correlates with particular distributions of colloquialisms, idioms, and slang expressions in corresponding headlines. The pattern of viewpoint variations is due to the particular distributions of first- and second-person pronouns in corresponding headlines. And the pattern of accessibility variations reflects the particular distributions of technical terms and non-English words in corresponding headlines. These stylistic variations account for the major discourse functions of NYT and TS headlines: NYT headlines are more persuasive than informative; TS headlines are more informative than persuasive. It is what the headline writers perceive to be the norms for the respective readerships that shape the four variation patterns. They are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Patterns of dictional variations between NYT and TS headlines

Variations	NYT	TS
Formality	More informal	Less informal
Viewpoint	First person	Third person
Accessibility	Less accessible	More accessible
Major function	Persuasive	Informative

The discourse styles of the headlines of the two editions of the newspaper are shaped in large part by the readership for which news articles are written. Different audiences lead to differences in textual formality. Where there are lexical formality shifts, the wording of TS headlines (NS-NNS communication) is less informal than that of NYT headlines (NS-NS communication), rather than vice versa. The use of informal expressions such as idioms and slang in NYT headlines is often motivated by English-related cultural models, which, on the other hand, reduce the occurrences of informal expressions in TS headlines. The formal or informal nature of headline texts can be achieved by using or avoiding lexical traits attributed to synchronous oral communication.

In the literature, different degrees of linguistic formality have been discussed, primarily with respect to their appropriateness in context. Instead, the present paper has explored their motivation and effectiveness to different readerships. The relatively neutral-style wording makes TS headlines more accessible, while the greater informality of wording—including the use of first- and second-person pronouns to provide the first-person perspective—makes NYT headlines sound anecdotal and hence shortens the psychological distance between the news article and the reader. In addition, the accessibility of headline texts can also be increased by avoiding technical terms and words in a second foreign language. Such stylistic management helps to perform the discourse functions of a headline to attract the reader's attention and interest and to present or relate to the main point of the body of the story. Future research can be conducted to elicit data from TS readers to further explore the actual effects of lexical feature variations.

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《紐約時報》與《台灣紐時周報》新聞標題 之詞彙特色轉換

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2004年《紐約時報》與《聯合報》合作開始發行《台灣紐時周報》。本文探討《紐約時報》與《台灣紐時周報》新聞標題之詞彙特色轉換策略，專注於文體之正式程度與難易度。語料為2008年3月至10月間前後共8個月出版之《台灣紐時周報》全部的新聞標題及相對應之《紐約時報》標題。運用文本調查、文體分析的方式確立《紐約時報》、《台灣紐時周報》標題之詞彙特色。結果發現口語詞彙、成語、俚語、專門用語、非英語字詞出現在《紐約時報》標題之頻率均遠高於出現在《台灣紐時周報》標題之頻率，降低了《台灣紐時周報》標題言談情境之非正式程度，使其傾向於中庸之正式程度。同時也發現下列四項從《紐約時報》到《台灣紐時周報》之標題詞彙特色轉換模式：非正式程度降低、第一人稱轉為第三人稱、難度降低、從誘導轉為告知。這些轉換模式反應出標題作者對讀者的基本認知。

關鍵詞：詞彙特色轉換、新聞標題、《紐約時報》、《台灣紐時周報》