Parallel Structure: Influential Tool in Newspaper Editorial Headlines

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Abstract

The editorial of a newspaper is fabricated on an argument influencing the reader to think accordingly. It also promotes critical thinking and at times makes the reader react to an issue. Hence, an editorial is defined as an opinionated piece of news. Therefore creating a standout phrase as the headline of an editorial is of vital importance to persuade the reader to read the editorial. Among syntactic tools, this research determines the use of the rhetorical device, parallel structure, also known as parallel construction or parallel syntax, and their effects in headlines of newspaper editorials. The aim of this research ascertains the use of parallel syntax to emphasize the centre theme the writer attempts to convey, and the objectives identify and analyze parallel structures in a corpus of sixty editorial headlines of two Sri Lankan Sunday newspapers: The Sunday Times and Sunday Island. Adopting the theory of parallelism, this research identifies parallel structures of word orders and phrases. Such headlines comprise of coordinating joining words: prepositions, adverbs, (be) verbs and conjunctions. The phrases also have varied features, such as, elements of comparison and contrast. Faulty parallelism or exceptions without the accepted elements of parallel syntax were also noted in this analysis. The identified features of parallel structures in the headlines of newspaper editorials lead to effects, such as, rhythm, economy, clarity, equality, emphasis and delight. Utilization of such effects creates a balanced and smooth flow of information, persuades and emotionally appeals the reader. Nevertheless the findings of this research specify that parallel structures are used as a tool of advantage, only in 43% of the headlines of newspaper editorials.

Key words: newspaper editorial, headline, rhetorical device, parallel structure, influence

Introduction

The editorial is a vital article in a newspaper that expresses the opinion of the editor or editorial board. Although an editorial can be on any topic, it is usually on a current issue that deals with

the society. In order to gain credibility, the opinion in the editorial must be supported with facts and evidence to validate the same.

Considering the above, the headline of an editorial must reflect what the reader is about to gather in the article. Therefore it should connect with the reader's self-interest on a level of emotion. A great newspaper editorial headline manipulates the key words of the article to trigger a degree of excitement and temptation in the reader to read on the editorial. Hence the headline stands entirely on its own merit, and the reader is not forced to read on to discover its meaning.

The techniques a writer uses to convey a meaning to the reader with the intention of influencing him or her are known as rhetorical devices in the field of linguistics. Among many rhetorical devices, the undermentioned are a few, with headlines of newspaper editorials from the corpus of this research, as the examples:

<u>Alliteration</u>: recurrence of initial consonant sounds – **A <u>high</u> <u>h</u>anded act**

<u>Anaphora</u>: repeats a word/phrase in successive phrases – **<u>he</u> came, <u>he</u> saw, <u>he</u> conjured**

<u>Code Switching</u>: alternating between languages - **<u>Salawa</u>: The fire and the people' sire**

<u>Hyperbole</u>: an exaggeration – **May Day <u>hijacked</u> by politicians**

<u>Metaphor</u>: regarded as a representative of something else – **Putting the <u>houses</u> in order**

<u>Oxymoron</u>: two word paradox – **<u>Darkness</u> at <u>noon</u>**

<u>Parallel structure</u>: similar words/phrases structure – **Economic woes and local elections**

<u>Pun</u>: exploiting multiple meanings– **Fertilizer subsidy; IMF new <u>agri</u> - <u>culture</u>**

<u>Rhetorical question</u>: question asked not to elicit an answer – **Buck stops where?**

Parallel structure is juxtaposition of two or more identical or equivalent syntactic constructions, expressing similar opinions with negligible differences, adopted for rhetorical effect. The analysis of this research is on the usage of the rhetoric device, parallel structure, and the effects, in the corpus of headlines of newspaper editorials.

"I kissed thee ere I killed thee" – Othelo, William Shakespeare; possibly the best example of a parallel structure. Parallel structure means using the same parts of speech to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This occurs at the word, phrase and clause level. Coordinating joining words, such as, conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs and (be) verbs, join parallel structures to create the effect of parallelism.

The first known instances of parallel syntax can be traced back to Aristotle (384-322 BC), Greek philosopher and scientist, in his book titled, Rhetoric. According to him, persuasion is created through parallel syntax by means of repetition. Recapping crucial aspects of an argument through properly created phrases and clauses further embeds the idea, ultimately resulting in persuasion. According to Aristotle, the more ways in which these aspects match, the more persuasive the argument will be (Fahnestock, 2003).

Parallelism occurs at various levels of linguistics: syntactical, phonological and semantics. In syntax, parallelism is established using words, phrases and clauses, as per the examples given below; contrasting with faulty parallelism, for more clarity. In addition, extended parallelism is found in novels and humorous stories, where parallelism is repeated at length.

Parallelism of words depicts the same part of speech, such as, noun or verb, in juxtaposition. The nouns (gerunds): 'reading', 'jogging' and 'watching' of sentence (i) create parallelism; whereas sentence (ii) has faulty parallelism due to mixing the nouns (gerunds) 'jogging' and 'watching' with the infinitive verb 'to read'.

Parallel:(i)   He likes <u>reading</u>, <u>jogging</u> and bird <u>watching</u>.

Faulty :(ii)   He likes <u>to read</u>, <u>jogging</u> and bird <u>watching</u>.

Similarly, parallelism of phrases illustrates the usage of phrases, such as, infinitive verb phrases or prepositional phrases, in combination, as detailed below:

<u>Infinitive Phrase</u> - The phrases with infinitive verbs, 'to learn' and 'to understand' in sentence (iii) create parallelism; whereas Sentence (iv) has faulty parallelism as it has a combination of the infinitive verb, 'to learn' and the noun (gerund) 'understanding'.

Parallel: (iii)   <u>To learn</u> is <u>to understand</u> the world.

Faulty : (iv)   <u>To learn</u> is <u>understanding</u> the world.

<u>Prepositional Phrase</u> – Sentence (v) comprises of two prepositional phrases (underlined) using the preposition 'in'; whereas sentence (vi) does not conform to parallelism as it has a combination of the prepositional phrase, 'in the closet' and the noun phrase 'the garage'.

Parallel: (v)   He found his cleaning supplies <u>in the closet</u> and <u>in the garage</u>.

Faulty : (vi)   He found his cleaning supplies <u>in the closet</u> and <u>the garage</u>.

The aim of this research is to establish the extent of parallelism in the headlines of newspaper editorials. The primary objective is to analyze the corpus of sixty editorial headlines of the two

weekly English newspapers of Sri Lanka, Sunday Island and The Sunday Times, to ascertain their structure or word order. The secondary objective is to identify structures of parallelism in the corpus of headlines, and to analyze deviations or faulty parallelism.

Literature Review

Readers and listeners prefer coordinate structures to be parallel, according to the studies of Frazier and his colleagues conducted in 1984 on the effects of parallelism on processing. They further revealed that the second conjunct of two coordinated phrases, clauses or sentences, is read faster when it is parallel to the first conjunct in terms of syntactic structure, as per the examples given below:

(i)   The tall gangster hit John and the short thug hit Sam. (parallel)

(ii)   The tall gangster hit John and Sam was hit by the short thug. (non-parallel/faulty)

This facilitation in processing [sentence (i) being parallel is faster when reading compared to sentence (ii)] is dubbed as 'parallelism effect' (Carlson and Horn, 2013).

Considering newspaper editorials, they are a kind of opinion texts that are different from the other types of discourse, in that they are supposed to present evaluations and comments on the news events already reported in the newspapers (Dijk, 1995). Hence the need to formulate influential headlines to capture the attention of the reader, which would in return persuade him/her to read on.

In the journalistic profession, headlines play an important role in writing news stories. Editorials are of four types: approving editorials, assessing editorials, warning editorials and problem-solving editorials (Gunesekera, 1989). These types are given below with examples from the corpus of this study, for analysis:

(i)	approving editorials	-	Important role **for** oversight committees
(ii)	assessing editorials	-	Independence **and** beyond
(iii)	warning editorials	-	Constitution making **while** economy collapsing
(iv)	problem-solving editorials	-	No quick fix **for** traffic jams

Approving editorials tend to use positive adjectives, while problem-solving editorials begin with negative terms, which anticipate the difficulty of the problem. Further, certain elements are found

only in certain types of editorials, such as, suppositions and hypothetical events which occur usually in assessing or warning editorials (Gunesekera, 1989). Despite the varied types of newspaper editorial headlines, parallelism is evident in the abovementioned examples. Conjunctions ('and' and 'while') and a preposition ('for') join the two parallel word/phrase orders of the abovementioned headlines. This justifies that parallelism is a tool that could be utilized when forming headlines, regardless of the type of editorial.

In the grammatical analysis of languages, words are assigned to word classes on the formal basis of syntactic behavior, supplemented and reinforced by differences of morphological paradigms, so that every word in a language is a member of a word class. Word class analysis has long been familiar in Europe as 'parts of speech', and since medieval times grammarians have operated with nine word classes/parts of speech: Noun, Verb, Pronoun, Adjective, Adverb, Preposition, Conjunction, Article and Interjection (Robins, 1968).

The word order can be identifies at different levels, such as, phrase level, clause level and sentence level. For example, Subject + Verb + Object, is the word order of a basic sentence in English language, as follows:

Mohan had rice. = **Mohan** + **had** + **rice**

Subject   Verb   Object (word order)

Proper Noun   Verb   Noun   (parts of speech)

Therefore it is evident that a word order comprises of Parts of speech. Table 1 given below shows newspaper editorial headlines of the corpus of this study, which display parallel word orders or parts of speech, to justify parallelism:

Table 1: Parallel Word Orders

Adjective	Noun	Preposition	Adjective	Noun
Important	*role*	*for*	*oversight*	*committees*
Historic	*victory*	*for*	*investigative*	*journalism*

In the abovementioned headlines, the preposition 'for' functions as the joining word between two parallel word orders, namely, adjective + noun, to form parallel structures. Some headlines also 'focus on a secondary event or a detail'. In this case, the headline puts another emphasis on the news story and can 're-weigh the news values' (Bell, 1991). This reference to 'some headlines'

can be analyzed with emphasis on parallelism, utilizing the headlines of the corpus of this study, as per Table 2.

Table 2: Emphasis on the News Story

Adjective	Noun	Conjunction	Adjective	Noun
(i) *Economic*	*woes*	***and***	*local*	*elections*

Adverb	Adjective	Noun	Preposition	Adjective	Noun
(ii) *No*	*quick*	*fix*	***for***	*traffic*	*jams*

Adverb	Article	Noun	Conjunction	Adverb	Article	Noun
(iii)*After*	*the*	*deluge*	***and***	*before*	*the*	*next*

In headlines (i) and (iii) above, the parallel structures are joined with the conjunction "and', whereas the preposition 'for' joins the parallel structures of headline (ii). It is evident that parallelism provides order and symmetry to the abovementioned headlines along with rhetorical emphasis and effect. A sense of comparison and contrast is also noted in headlines (i) and (iii), due to the parallel nature of the vocabulary used in the parts of speech. Hence, headlines of this nature possess rhythm, equality and clarity, and they subsequently add value and emphasis to editorials (Bell, 1991).

Research Methodology

The corpus comprised of editorials from two Sri Lankan leading weekly English newspapers, namely, Sunday Island and The Sunday Times. These newspapers were preferred based on an oral survey carried out among the first year (2016) Social Sciences and Logistics Management undergraduates of the General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana. The aim of the questionnaire was to determine the readership of daily and weekly English newspapers. This quantitative survey revealed that out of the newspapers purchased and/or read (at the university library or elsewhere), The Sunday Times (32%) and Sunday Island (28%) were leading in comparison with Sunday Observer (21%), Daily Mirror (17%), Daily News (16%), and Sunday Leader (16%), being the other leading daily and weekly Sri Lankan English newspapers.

The primary data comprised of thirty headlines from each weekly newspaper, namely, Sunday Island and The Sunday Times. This corpus of sixty headlines with editorials was accumulated manually, within the period, 3rd January to 10th July 2016. Data collection was carried out grouping the shortlisted headlines into five categories, such as, headlines with parallel single words, parallel phrases, elements of lists and faulty parallelism that can be repaired. For the purpose of

comparison, a couple of headlines that lack parallelism were also considered for the analysis. The secondary data were gathered by reading, comprehending and exploring the theoretical background and literature review, which provided many aspects of parallelism in the analysis of headlines.

Data Analysis

The examples in Table 3 are headlines with regard to parallel structures of single words:

Table 3: Parallel Words

Noun (Proper Noun)	Conjunction	Noun (Proper Noun)
(i) *Embilipitiya*	***and***	*Homagama*
Noun	*Preposition*	*Noun/Proper Noun*
(ii) *Darkness*	***at***	*Noon*
(iii) *Terror*	***in***	*Nice*
(iv) *Lessons*	***from***	*Brexit*

Headlines (i) mentioned above, uses the conjunction 'and' to join the parallel nouns (proper nouns); whereas prepositions: 'at', 'in' and 'from', are used to join the parallel nouns in the headlines (ii), (iii) and (iv). These joint elements or parallel nouns, suggest completion of the first item or noun by the second noun. Therefore clarity and equality between the two nouns is set up through parallelism of this nature.

The examples in Table 4 are headlines that depict structures of phrases:

Table 4: Parallel Phrases

Adjective	Noun	Conjunction	Adjective	Noun
(i) *Economic*	*Woes*	***and***	*Local*	*Elections*

Adjective	Noun	Preposition	Adjective	Noun
(ii) *Important*	*Role*	***for***	*Oversight*	*Committees*
(iii) *Historic*	*Victory*	***for***	*Investigative*	*Journalism*

Noun	Verb	Adverb	Noun	Verb
(iv) *Constitution*	*Making*	***while***	*Economy*	*Collapsing*

Uniformity is noted in the headlines (i) to (iii) above, due to the parallel phrases being a combination of two parts of speech, namely, Adjectives and Nouns; whereas the parts of speech combined in headline (iv) are Nouns and Verbs. The joining words differ due to the usage of a

conjunction (and), a preposition (for) and an adverb (while). Nevertheless readability is improved through these structures, due to their repetitive nature and rhythm.

Headlines (v) and (vi) of Table 5 given below are complex, when compared with the parallel phrases discussed above.

Table 5: Complex Parallel Phrases

Adverb	Article	Noun	Conjunction	Adverb	Article	Noun		
(v) *After*	*the*	*deluge*	***and***	*before*	*the*	*next*		
Noun	Preposition	Article	Noun	(be)not	Noun	Preposition	Article	Noun
(vi)*Sauce*	*for*	*the*	*goose*	***is not***	*sauce*	*for*	*the*	*gander*

In the headline (v), each parallel structure has a combination of three parts of speech, an Adverb, an Article and a Noun. In contrast, headline (vi) has parallel structures with four parts of speech, such as, a Noun, a Preposition, an Article and a Noun.

In addition, the parallelism in headline (vi) is also seen as repetition of not only the same parts of speech, but also the same words: "sauce for the". This pattern emphasizes the ideas whilst creating a pleasing rhythm.

The equilibrium mentioned above, helps readers to understand what they are reading, as they know what to expect and can clearly see the connections between ideas. It decreases the load of information needed to be processed by the reader, facilitating effective comprehension. Therefore such intentional repetition sticks in the minds of readers, which would aid them to recall later. In return such parallelism is persuasive and emotionally appealing to the reader.

Deviations are found in the undermentioned headlines (vii) and (viii), in terms of parallelism being used partially, wherein only the parts of speech Adjective and Noun display a parallel structure. Nevertheless, to an extent, these headlines too, emphasize the meaning and likeness of information. Repetition of the Adjective "old" is also noted in headline (viii), for more effect.

Table 6: Parallel Phrases with Deviations

Adverb	Adjective	Noun	Preposition	Adjective	Noun		
(vii) *No*	*quick*	*fix*	***for***	*traffic*	*jams*		
Adverb	Preposition	Article	Adjective	Noun	Conjunction	Adjective	Noun
(viii)*Back*	*to*	*the*	*old*	*days*	***and***	*old*	*ways*

Only the headline in Table 7 given below conforms to the category, elements of lists or in a series, wherein a series of the same parts of speech, Pronoun and Verb, are repeated in the form of a chain.

The pronoun, 'he', is repeated thrice, and this adds a balance to the headline. This effect intensifies the meaning or the idea of the headline.

Table 7: Elements of Lists

Pronoun	Verb	Pronoun	Verb	Pronoun	Verb
He	*came,*	*he*	*saw,*	*he*	*conjured*

Further, using parallel syntax between two clauses is known as an Isocolon, and when among three clauses it is known as a Tricolon. As the third clause of the abovementioned headline is not the same length as the first two, it is considered as a Tricolon.

The problem with many awkward-sounding headlines or faulty headlines is they lack parallelism. Three such headlines are in Table 8, before and after being repaired or amended to establish parallelism. Unlike headlines (i) and (ii), headline (iii) is given two options.

Table 8: Faulty Parallelism

(i)	*Article*	*Noun*	*Conjunction*		*Pronoun*	*Noun*	
Faulty	*The*	*disaster*	*and*		*its*	*aftermath*	
Repaired	The	disaster	and		**the**	aftermath	
(ii)	*Adjective*	*Noun*	*Noun*	*:*	*Adjective*	*Noun*	*Verb*
Faulty	*War*	*crimes*	*probe*	*:*	*Double*	*Standards*	*exposed*
Repaired	War	crimes	**probed**	:	Double	Standards	exposed
(iii)	*Adjective*	*Noun*	*Determiner*	*Preposition*	*Adjective*	*Noun*	
Faulty	*VIP*	*security;*	*what*	*about*	*citizens'*	*security?*	
Repaired I	VIP	security **!**	citizens'	security**?**			
Repaired II	VIP	security	**versus**	citizens'	security?		

The repaired headlines with parallel structures are more consistent, concise and repetitive than the faulty headlines. They are also more clear and readable. Hence, such headlines are easier to understand and subsequently appeal the reader.

Discussion and Conclusion

Headlines have an internal structure which allows habitual newspaper readers to interpret them without difficulty. Unlike the advertising language which has more in common with the language of poetry; headline writers, in general, try to make their work ear-catching, but do so in a comforting and semi-formulaic way (Aitchison, 2006). The rhetorical device, parallelism, helps the editorial writer make a portion of his/her work stand out from the rest of the newspaper. Since
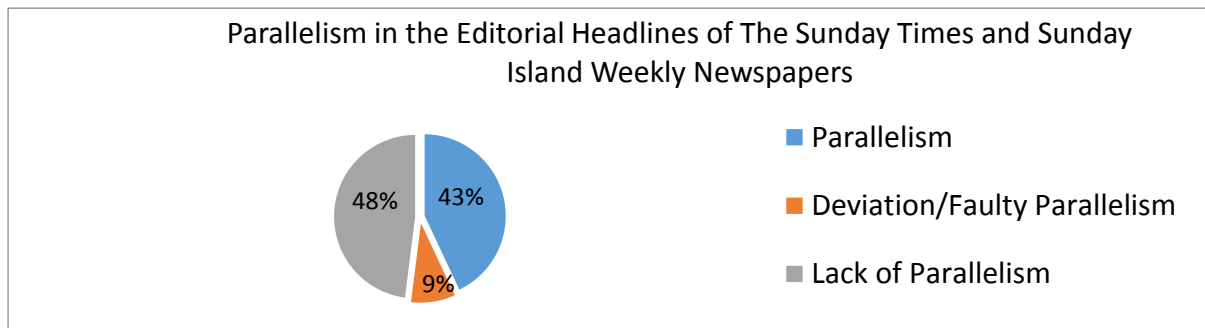
a newspaper editorial is opinionated, recapping crucial aspects of the opinion(s) in its headline further embeds the idea into the reader, resulting in persuasion.

The editorial writers of the corpus of both, Sunday Island and The Sunday Times newspapers, have opted for parallelism in 43% of the headlines, as in Figure 1. Parallel words, parallel phrases and elements of lists were noted, collectively. Parallel words were mostly found in the Sunday Island editorials, whereas parallel phrases were mostly found in The Sunday Times editorials. In addition, it is observed that the editorial headlines of the Sunday Island newspapers are comparatively shorter and precise than that of the editorial headlines of The Sunday Times; the latter being more lavish with words, hence more informative.

Figure 1: Proportions of Parallelism and Other Devices

It is observed that 9% of the headlines of the corpus deviates from parallelism, also called, faulty parallelism, as in Figure 1. Nevertheless they can be repaired or altered to conform to parallel structures. Thereafter, with the correct choice of parts of speech and words, such headlines will eventually have the capacity to influence the readers more effectively.

The analysis also reveals that the writers have aimed at not only to inform the readers of the topics

Parallelism in the Editorial Headlines of The Sunday Times and Sunday Island Weekly Newspapers

- Parallelism
- Deviation/Faulty Parallelism
- Lack of Parallelism

of the editorials, but also to express the preferred ideology of the editorials by using parallelism; which tool or rhetorical device is subsequently instrumental in influencing the reader. In view of the above, although limited in number (43%), editorial writers of both, Sunday Island and The Sunday Times newspapers, have employed parallelism to enhance the persuasive force of the headlines. The parallel structures of the corpus increase the readability of the writers' creative word patterns, which eventually lead to influencing the reader to read the editorial.

In terms of limitation, although the two newspapers, Sunday Island and The Sunday Times, are among the top weekly newspapers in terms of readership in Sri Lanka, further research should be carried out on other newspapers too, to ascertain the use of parallelism. Studies of such nature

would reveal the other discourse conventions of the newspaper genres, as well. When analyzing the corpus of the headlines of the newspaper editorials, the researcher noted the prevalence of other devices, such as, inversion, noun phrase, prepositional phrase, adjectival phrase and noun possession.

The researcher is of the opinion that the younger generation does not pay much attention to the editorial of a newspaper, despite its advantages in terms of improving vocabulary and the reading skill. Hence it is suggested to equip teachers and students in the ESL (English as the Second Language) classroom, at upper school and university level, with knowledge on the discourse conventions used in headlines of newspaper editorials, so that it would be a boost to use this media discourse, as a teaching device.

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