

# Linguistic Features of Newspaper Headlines Regarding the Omani Security Media and their Role in Instilling Moral Values

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## Abstract

The current research paper addresses the linguistic features of newspaper headlines regarding the Omani security media and their role in instilling moral values. It sheds light on two local newspapers (Oman and Al-Watan) and Al-Ain Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye) issued by the Omani police in order to find a solution to the problem of the study, which lies in the fact that the linguistic expressions and styles in the newspaper headlines regarding the Omani security media are not capable of convincing the recipients, and are not in line with the developments in contemporary crimes and issues, and hence they need more development. This paper aims at revealing the linguistic features (clarity, novelty, brevity and elision, numbers, verbs, and subjects) used in the new headline regarding the Omani security media discourse and their role in instilling moral values. The paper also relies on the descriptive approach in analyzing the issue at hand with a focus on the mechanism of content analysis. The paper concludes that the news headlines regarding the Omani security media are not supported by phrases and words that carry moral values or legal principles, which, if they were mentioned in the context, would constitute a deterrent to the reader and contribute to spreading awareness among individuals. This paper contributes to drawing the attention of those in charge of the security media in highlighting the moral aspect and some Islamic values in the language of security media to directly influence the psychological aspect of the recipients.

**Keywords:** Media Language, Security Media, Moral Values, News Headlines, Linguistic Features

## Introduction

Newspaper headlines always send a message to media readers. They are more of a raw material that reflects the content of the topic and represent a source of attraction that

prompts readers to choose the news they look forward to according to their interests and desires. Headlines are also one of the basic criteria in distinguishing one newspaper from another (Al-Hashimi, 2015).

From this standpoint, this study focuses on the language of security media in the Sultanate of Oman and is limited to explaining the linguistic features of the newspaper headlines published in the local newspapers in the Sultanate of Oman and Al-Ain Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye) issued by the Omani police, and the role of these headlines in instilling moral values and religious principles in the Omani society. Before discussing these features, it is important to simply clarify that (Oman and Al-Watan) are two pioneer media means in Oman. In detail, Al-Watan newspaper is the first modern newspaper published in Oman, as the first issue was published on January 28, 1971 (Muhammad, 2014). One year and six months later, Oman newspaper was published on November 18, 1972, coinciding with the country's celebrations of the second National Day. Since then, they have become the two newspapers published daily until the present time (Al-Shukaili, 2018).

In this context, it is necessary to point out that there is a problem that is evident in the contextualization of the headlines related to security media regarding moral values, as they need to be developed and updated. The sentences and phrases that formulate those news headlines are not capable of convincing the recipients (readers), and do not fulfill the intended purpose, as their linguistic styles are not compatible with the current media developments, not to mention that their styles are not commensurate with the reality of contemporary crimes and issues which are constantly increasing despite the Omani security media continuing to broadcast news, materials and awareness messages to warn against them. Therefore, this study seeks to reveal the linguistic features of the news headlines and their role in instilling and promoting moral values. The two newspapers (Al-Watan and Oman) and Al-Ain Al-Sahirah magazine are chosen, as they are the most widely distributed in Oman, in addition to Al-Ain Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye) which is published by the Royal Oman Police.

### **Study Background**

The Royal Oman Police Service relies on publishing its media on local newspapers, along with other means, in order to deliver it to the public. Regarding the news published by the Police Service in the newspapers (Oman and Al-Watan) during the first three months of 2022, it is evident that the media material varies between news, reports, interviews, posters, and further forms of media. The total number of materials presented by the security media reached 214 journalistic articles in the two newspapers, of which 86 articles in Al-Watan newspaper, and 128 articles in Amman newspaper.

Through sorting and examining the material regarding the security media, it is found that most of it is not related to instilling moral values in society, but rather most of it relates to general topics. Upon analysis and extraction of these material presented in the two newspapers, there are only 91 articles related to Islamic values out of the total material presented, i.e. 42.5%, including 63 articles in Oman newspaper and 28 articles in Al-Watan newspaper.

Regarding the fields covered by these articles, it is found that 20 articles deal with the field of drugs, 17 articles deal with the field of civil defense, 11 articles deal with the field of traffic, while 10 articles deal with theft crimes, 7 articles deal with smuggling cases (both human trafficking and fraud); 5 articles for each of them, 3 articles deal with prisons and inmates, and 13 articles that deal with various security topics.

As for Al-Ain Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye), which is the official mouthpiece of the Royal Oman Police, and through studying the topics represented in the study sample (157, 158, 159, 160, 161), it is clear after the sorting and analysis of the topics it covers that they vary between news, articles, polls, investigations, interviews, and sports news, in addition to some separators between pages in the form of posters that include pictures, drawings, and educational phrases. The share of news in these issues is the highest percentage of the total topics, as 85 news items are reported in all the mentioned issues, in addition to 47 articles, and the rest of the topics vary between 6 polls, 6 separators (posters), 5 sports news, 5 investigations, and 4 other topics.

The problem of the study is manifest in the language of the security media used in newspaper headlines, which is not capable of convincing the recipients (readers) and is not consistent with the development taking place in contemporary crimes and issues, which plays a vital role in the rise of some crimes. To address such a problem, it is necessary to scrutinize the language of the Omani security media used and its style. Therefore, this study sheds light on the structures and sentences used in newspaper deadlines and other linguistic features, since the headline phrase is the source of attraction for the reader, and through it the reader determines whether to read the text or bypass it.

There are some previous studies that dealt with the importance of drafting the newspaper headline sentence, and other studies that focused on the cultural role of the security media, including Osman (2021) which pinpointed the challenges of drafting news headlines in the Sudanese newspapers during the period (2007-2021), which shed light on the shortcomings that accompanied the structure of news headlines in the Sudanese newspapers. Osman (2021) aimed to correct linguistic, grammatical, and morphological mistakes using an analytical approach and recommended the necessity of good professional preparation for journalists, proofreaders, directors, and publishers.

Dardouna (2017) aimed at studying the sentence structure in the language of news headlines in Arab newspapers and sought to explain the sentence structure in the language of news headlines used in the Arab press in general, and to discuss the changes that occur in its structure using an analytical approach in the transformative generative theory. Dardouna (2017) concluded that the changes that occur in the syntax of the news headline include deletion, substitution, and arrangement rules, with the aim of influencing the recipient.

In the same vein, Suleiman (2017) studied the cultural role of security media and aimed to identify the cultural role of security media in shaping culture and security awareness among members of society, and demonstrated the role of security media, through its various means, in spreading culture and security awareness within the society, the matter which led to deepening the relationship of public participation with the security institution. Suleiman (2017) concluded that the security institution should adopt a strategic media policy with a philosophy that is based on the role of the security media in spreading the security culture regarding various events in society, and a deep understanding of the media influence.

The current study generally aims to explain the linguistic features of selected newspaper headlines in the Omani security media and their role in instilling moral values. The study also aims to detect the linguistic features (clarity, novelty, brevity and elision, numbers, verbs, subjects, and adjectives) used in selected news headlines in the Omani security media discourse and their role in instilling moral values.

The study also depends on a qualitative approach as it relies on a descriptive method in analyzing the issue in hand. It further provides content analysis as a tool for studying the

linguistic features of selected newspaper headlines in the Omani security media and their role in promoting moral values.

The researcher chose news headlines of police articles published in local newspapers during the first three months of 2022, and in Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye) during the period (January 2020-January 2022) as a sample for this study.

As previously mentioned, the study aims at discussing the linguistic features of newspaper headlines in the Omani security media and their role in instilling moral values. To achieve this goal, the paper conducts the following:

First: collecting all the headlines in all press materials issued by the Royal Oman Police in Oman and Al Watan newspapers during the period covered by the study, and then sorting them according to the connotations of moral values.

Second: revealing the linguistic features of the verbatim of news headlines issued by the Omani security media and their role in instilling moral values through the analyzing the styles used in formulating the sentences and phrases by sorting and dividing them into specific fields, then studying them to examine their relationships with each other and their semantic purposes.

As for collecting data, the applied method depends on extrapolating media texts contained in local newspapers and in Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye), which had a moral value connotation. The paper used two analytical tools for collecting data: induction and content analysis, where the researcher, to obtain the information, extrapolates the methods and linguistic formulations that are mentioned, along with the expressions in books and linguistic references and in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, and their parallels with the methods included in the media discourse in the two newspapers (Al-Watan and Oman) and in Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye).

### **Study Findings Discussion**

News headlines in newspapers are of great importance, and they are the first thing that the reader looks at and draws his attention. Therefore, newspapers must be innovative and creative in drafting headlines in order to attract the reader and arouse his interest in reading the topic that falls under the headline, as the latter is considered a summary of that topic in a few easy words. It simply contains a large amount of information in an attractive way for the reader.

There are several linguistic features that must be found in a news headline in order to attract the attention of recipients (readers) to reading the news story or the topic in general. Among the most prominent of these linguistic features is novelty, clarity, objectivity, suspense and excitement, soundness of language, and brevity, in addition to the use of the present tense verb instead of past and imperative (Osman, 2021).

Applying these features to the titles used in the Omani security media discourse, they are as follows

### **Novelty and its Connection to Moral Values**

Choosing the news headline and taking its novelty and attractiveness in its formulation into consideration plays a pivotal role in the success of the editorial text among readers (Osman, 2021). Therefore, the newspaper editor must take into account innovation and the choice of modern ideas when drafting news headlines, because recent information and news are what the reader is eager to know. On the other hand, using the same style of wording headlines causes boredom and alienation for readers.

Taking the news headlines that were formulated in the Omani security media discourse during the study period into consideration, whether those headlines were in local newspapers or in Al-Ain Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye), it is evident that they lack innovation to some extent, and most of them are formulated in the same style. For example, when presenting news about the arrest of perpetrators, whether in thefts or other cases, the same phrases and words are repeated. In details, there are some repeated styles in the field of thefts (the arrest of a shop thief), (the arrest of three people who robbed 12 shops), (the arrest of three accused of stealing 8 shops), (the arrest of two Africans on charges of fraud), and (the arrest of impersonating police officers and forced theft). The same applies to smuggling operations. For example, there are repeated styles such as (the arrest of four drug smugglers) and (the arrest of five expatriates in a drug case), (the arrest of drug smugglers and infiltrators in Dhofar), and (the arrest of 4 drug and khat smugglers in Muscat and Dhofar).

The aforementioned news headlines lack innovation in verbatim, as they tend to adhere to similar styles and structures, not to mention repeating specific words, as they begin with the word "arrest" followed by the news itself. However, if the editors had paid attention to the feature of innovation, they would have been better at attracting the reader to the headlines by using words different from what they are familiar with. The same applies to the substitution process in the sentence. For example, instead of (drug smugglers arrested), it may be replaced with (drug smugglers thwarted), or (drug smugglers in police custody), and other new styles and structures, or it may include the exact quantity in the headline, in which the latter starts with a number or weight that indicates the size of the seized quantity, and hence is written in the headline so that it becomes more attractive to the reader.

### **Clarity and its Connection to Moral Values**

Unclear news headlines are difficult to grasp and deter the reader from reviewing the text and reading it. On the other hand, a clear headline is easy to understand and is devoid of any verbal and moral complexity. Because news and journalistic topics are directed to the whole society not only to a well-educated group, easiness and clarity must be taken into account. In the analysis process, it is found that the news headlines in the Omani security discourse in the local newspapers are clear, easy and far from any verbal or moral complexity, and the language used in them is easy and clear, and is understood by all audiences of all segments and levels. For example, the news headline which reads (The General Administration for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Organizes an Awareness Lecture) is clear, easy, and direct, not to mention that it is easily understood by everyone and does not need any interpretation. Likewise, the rest of the news headlines such as (The Coast Guard arrests 4 smugglers in Dhofar) and (An awareness lecture on traffic safety in Dhofar) are easy and clear.

However, some of the news headlines in Al-Ain Al-Sahirah magazine (The Watchful Eye), especially in the articles, may be unclear, and their relationship to the article is indirect. For example, the phrase (Security Suitability) which is used as a headline for a legal article that talks about the discretionary authority of the policeman while exercising his work and performing his duties and obligations. At first glance, neither the meaning is clear to the reader, nor the type of headline and its topic, especially when the reader is not familiar with the legal field. The reader may have to seek clarification from specialists in this field, even though Al-Ain Al-Sahira magazine (The Watchful Eye) is not a specialized legal magazine, but rather addresses the general public and those who are interested in police and security aspects. There are also some articles with headlines that are not very clear, and this may be



for the sake of excitement and attraction, but this ultimately affects the clarity feature, as the title (Blue Window Crimes) was for an article that talks about electronic fraud and its danger on society, but the title is somewhat ambiguous and far from direct understanding, which inevitably affects the process of persuasion among readers and the communication of the moral value that is intended to be instilled in the audience.

### **Brevity and Ellision and their Connection to Moral Values**

Brevity and ellision are amongst the main principles upon which the news headline is established in order to convey information and news in the fewest number of words in order to save the reader's time. The use of brevity and ellision is common in the Omani security discourse when writing headlines in local newspapers to avoid mentioning names, rather using titles and positions. For example, instead of mentioning "Inspector General of Police and Customs" in the full form, it is shortened to "The Inspector General", as well as the names of departments affiliated with the police. For example, (the General Traffic Department) is not mentioned in full, but is directly abbreviated (the Traffic is organizing an awareness exhibition), and instead of using (Royal Oman Police), it becomes (the Police is hosting a Gulf delegation).

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the headlines of Al-Ain Al-Sahira magazine (The Watchful Eye) are not summarized, but rather are written in full forms. For example, "The Inspector General" is mentioned in full in most cases (Inspector General of Police and Customs), and if there is a room for brevity, it is limited to "Inspector General", may be because the magazine is already the mouthpiece for the police force, and in this case it tends to mention the full job title.

In a nutshell, brevity may be a positive element in attracting readers, but what is generally observed is that this feature is not clear in the Omani security discourse, and only occurs when titles are mentioned, and is limited to the headlines of local newspapers, not the magazines, as mentioned above. As for moral values, there is no brevity or ellision, which results in rigidity in style and redundancy in wording.

### **Numbering and its Connection to Moral Values**

Through observation of the headlines included in the Omani security media discourse during the study period, there are a multiple use of numbers. In details, more than 40 news headlines appeared in news related to the security media in both (Oman and Al-Watan) newspapers, and they were diverse among different fields, and were also mentioned in different styles and structures. Sometimes, headlines are written through the use of mathematical numbers, for example (The Coast Guard arrests 4 smugglers in Dhofar), (Arrest of Asians in possession of 60 kg of narcotic substances), (Arrest of 3 accused of robbing 12 commercial stores in North Al-Batinah), and (Civil Defense and Ambulance deal with 20 reports. Concerning the detention of vehicles in water bodies in Muscat).

Other times, headlines are written in letters, for example (Five expatriates arrested in a drug case), (Four narcotic smugglers arrested), (Three accused of robbing eight shops arrested), (About twenty-one tons of narcotic substances and two million psychotropic pills seized), and (Arrest of two citizens involved in a fraud case).

As previously mentioned, the newspaper editor resorts to numbers out in order to attract the readers to read the news. The same applies to the editor in the security media, who also resorts to this style in order to attract the readers, highlight the issue at hand, and reinforce the message that he wants to convey to the public. Using the style (21 tons of

narcotic substances seized) undoubtedly draws the reader's attention to reading the news, as well as (two million psychotropic pills seized). This shows the scale of the problem and the seriousness of the issue, especially since the reader at this time tends to use the language of numbers more. From this structural standpoint, the used style actually enhances the moral values of members of society by showing the scale of the disaster through numbers, which requires the removal of emotions and subjectivity in highlighting the truth and in explaining the problem and its gravity.

### **Verbs and their Connection to Moral Values**

There is always a tendency in journalism towards decreasing the use of verbs in newspaper headlines, and increasing in their use within the text, news texts, and opinion columns that express the subjectivity of the editor. The higher the percentage of verbs in the news headlines, the closer they are to the literary style that is dominated by the subjectivity of expression (Osman, 2021).

If headlines depend on verbs, then the verb that indicates the present or future is used, while the past verb is not mentioned. In addition, the imperative verb is also not preferred unless the context requires quoting from the statements of some of the characters mentioned in the text (Abu Zaid, 2011).

The newspaper headlines in the Omani security media discourse did not deviate from the aforementioned trend. It is noted that all the verbs included in the news headlines are written in the present tense. For example, (The prisons conclude a reform program for 30 inmates), (The police honors its members who obtained excellent in the Diploma of Human trafficking), and (The Coast Guard in Dhofar rescues crew of a burnt boat).

As of the use of verbs in newspaper headlines, it is important to point out that relying on active verbs in the headline is more lively and attractive than passive verbs, because active verbs clarify to the reader the ambiguity that may be absent in some titles (Osman, 2021). The headlines in the Omani security discourse are styled with active verbs not passive ones, as there is no headline stated in the passive form. It is always (the police organizes), (the police arrests), and (the civil defense rescues), (the police participates). This style contributes to inciting the reader to read the news, whether the news is related to moral values or anything else. News headlines found to be related to moral values are formulated with present tense and active verbs.

### **Subjects in Security Discourse**

The use of subjects is widespread in the headlines of the Omani security discourse, especially in local newspapers. It is noteworthy that most news headlines begin with a gerund subject, for example (Seizing Cybercrimes on a limited basis in the Sultanate of Oman), (Empowering police personnel in defensive driving), (Ten people injured in a commercial store fire), and (Death of a citizen in Bahla), (9 infiltrators arrested for entering the country illegally).

Newspapers usually resort to using subjects instead of verbs in headlines to achieve brevity, as verb suffixes such as the subject and object are eliminated if they are transitive, especially when there is no need or necessity to add them. The importance here lies in showing the action itself represented by the subject and not the verb. This feature is used in the headlines of security discourse, and it undoubtedly contributes to instilling moral values.

### **Sentences used in Security Media Headlines**

Journalists and media professionals have mentioned that headline sentences are divided into three categories (simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences). Complex sentences are the most common of the three types of sentences in formulating newspaper headlines, followed by compound sentences, then simple sentences (Osman, 2021).

Some have explained that complex sentences can contain in their composition more than one idea in the smallest number of words, and therefore they are more appropriate than the other two types of sentences. A study pointed out that (the purpose of using a complex sentence is to be brief, and that is a desire on the part of the editor to shorten Information in two sentences or one complex sentence (Al-Nahhas, 2010).

Compound sentences and complex sentences appear in the headlines of the Omani security discourse. As for simple sentences, they never appear in the news, but rather in a few topics in Al-Ain Al-Sahira magazine (The Watchful Eye) and in (The Policeman's Supplement). Among the complex sentences formulated in news headlines in local newspapers is (a noticeable decrease in scores Heat starting Wednesday .. National Early Warning: Return of the impacts of the Al-Azm Canyon and expectations of widespread rain on Tuesday), and (Civil Defense warns against crossing the valleys and calls for protecting children from pools of water).

This is in addition to (Civil Defense carries out many rescue and evacuation operations and recovered vehicles. Heavy rains and sweeping valleys occurred in the northern governorates as a result of (Al-Azm), and the atmosphere is returning to stability today).

Another example is (Confirming that suspicious activities on social media are under surveillance, The police warn of tricks to promote and trade drugs through electronic platforms - controlling cybercrimes on a limited basis in the Sultanate of Oman - relying on community awareness ... and monitoring children is a family duty - criminals follow many tricks to tempt Young people with fake names and pictures).

Additionally, there are many compound sentences in news headlines in the Omani security discourse, for example (Tropical Cyclone Shaheen and the Omani penal legislation system). (Al Ain Al Sahira Magazine, No. 161, 2022).

Another example is (The virtual world is very wide and welcoming. Set your children's directions to protect them from deviation) (Al-Ain Al-Sahira Magazine, Issue 159, 2022).

On the other hand, substitution is common in the sentences used in news headlines and in the language of journalism generally with the purpose of inciting excitement and attraction. For example, (Equipped with the best technologies and methods of training, qualification, and spreading awareness, 11 traffic safety institutes in various governorates) (Carried out by a gang from outside the country.. Two citizens are involved in a fraudulent crime, and the police warns), (The circumstances of the incident are under investigation, 6 deaths and 8 missing in the collapse of a marble quarry in Ibri).

### **Summary of Findings**

*The results of the study indicate that*

1. The headlines that include moral values were in fact news and topics highlighting the efforts of the police force and were not used as a direct awareness message to follow Islamic values or moral principles and did not include vocabulary that has moral connotations. Rather, they referred to a topic related to Islamic behavior and values, such



as the issue of thefts, drugs, etc., so the readers who follows this news only understands it as any news transmitted to public opinion.

2. The linguistic features contained in the headlines of the Omani security discourse, whether in terms of vocabulary such as numbers, verbs, and subjects, or in terms of sentences of their complex, compound, nominal and verbal types, or in terms of introduction and delay, are following and being influenced by what is common in the language of journalism and the language of media in this era. However, this style lacks reinforcement with phrases and words that carry moral values, and it also lacks some legal phrases that, if they were mentioned in the context, would have constituted a deterrent for the reader and contributed to spreading awareness among individuals.
3. Brevity in the news headlines may be a positive factor in the process of attracting readers and drawing their attention, but what is generally observed is that this feature is not clear in the Omani security discourse, and it occurs only when titles are mentioned and is limited to the headlines of local newspapers, not the magazine. However, when talking about moral values, there is neither brevity nor elision, which results in rigidity in the writing style and redundancy in wording, which greatly contributes to alienating the reader.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this study and its highlighting of the importance of linguistic feature manifested in newspaper headlines in the Omani security discourse and their role in instilling moral values, the study demonstrated that newspaper headlines must be exploited to a great extent in order to contribute to spreading good values and morals and influencing the behavior of public opinion and changing their attitudes. In conclusion, this study opens a door for future studies in the security or linguistic field. Accordingly, the study recommends the following:

1. Conducting studies on the role of newspaper headlines in educating society about the gravity of various widespread crimes, especially contemporary crimes that destroy societies, such as the scourge of drugs, psychotropic substances, and fraud crimes. This stems from the fact that headlines are the basic pillar of the news that attracts the reader or repulses him from reading it.
2. Conducting a future study to investigate appropriate styles and phrases for news headlines that address children directly and are concerned with instilling moral values in them, especially in printed supplements intended for children.
3. Conducting a study on the semantic levels and linguistic dimensions of news headlines published by security institutions, and considering whether they contain phrases of deterrence and punishment, in addition to Islamic words and the Holy Qur'an, due to the importance of the linguistic dimension in conveying the media message and its direct impact on the recipients.

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