



A Comparative Study of the Patterns of Present Tense in Headlines in Indian English Newspapers

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This paper aims to study the usage of the present tense in the news headlines in the Indian English newspaper. It tries to seek the usage of finite and non-finite sentences and the usage of various tenses across the various Indian English newspapers. For this study, a total of 300 headlines were taken. A set of 75 headlines was randomly taken from the four different newspapers. Of these two newspapers, the New Delhi edition of The Hindu and The Indian Express were taken. The other two Indore edition newspapers, The Times of India and Free Press, were taken. The researcher found that the preferred sentence is finite and the preferred tense is the present tense. Non-finite sentences and other tenses, such as past and future, are used sparingly. New construction of present and past tense combined is also seen in some of the sentences

I. INTRODUCTION

Judy Delin (2008) points out three important elements of a news story: headlines, the lead, and the story. A news story reflects the news values, and a headline mirrors the whole news story; consequently, it represents news values. News values guide news stories in the newspapers. According to Boyed (1994), "news values are the criteria that influence the selection and presentation of events as published news. Spencer and Owens, commenting on news values, say that they are the determining factor behind the news story.

A news headline represents timeliness as one of the news values. In addition to this, Reah documents that newspapers are fleeting texts; in other words, their viability is merely for the day of delivery, not for an extended or longer time. (1998). This timeliness is seen in the form of tenses. Grammatically, tenses are means of locating events concerning time. According to Fowler (1991), the present tense is the choice of the tense to shape headlines. According to Halliday (1985), the register of news uses the present tense. It can be considered one of the most defining characteristics of headlines. Quirk et al. (1985) point out that in news discourse, the present tense is used conventionally to refer to events that occurred in the past. This use of the present tense is known as 'the historical present. A historical present increases the level of immediacy, pertinence, and regency of the news. These elevated levels improve the engagement of the readers. Chovanec studied the use of the present tense in headlines, taking The Telegraph, a British newspaper (2002) Ayman Hamad Reneil Hamdan ·Layla Qais. analyzed the uses of tenses in English newspaper headlines of the Telegraph and The New York Times. Various studies have been conducted on the structure of Hindi headlines. (Chakraborty and Dash, 2019). Narayana and Sunaina Murthy studied different types of nominal headlines in Kannada dailies. (1995) Leelavathi analyzed the language of headlines in Kannada dailies. (1996). Dubey (1989) made the distinction between news story headlines and editorial headlines. Preeti Kapoor studied misleading and ambiguous headlines in the English dailies of Karnataka. (1985). However, no study determines the frequency of the present tense in headlines in Indian English national dailies. The paper aims to study the frequency of the use of the present tense in four newspapers in India. This study tries to find out the usage patterns of finite and non-finiteness and the differences in the use of present and past tense in four English newspapers published in India. A news story reflects the news value, and a headline should reflect the story. A headline mirrors the whole news story; consequently, it represents news values. News values guide news stories in the newspapers.

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II. Method and material

III. This study uses a set of 300 headlines taken from four different Indian English newspapers. The two newspapers are published in Indore, the place of research, and the other two are published in the capital of India, New Delhi. The two newspapers published in Indore are "Free Press" and "The Times of India." The other two national newspapers published in New Delhi are 'The Hindu' and 'The Indian Express.' Seventy-five news headlines were taken from each newspaper and analysed to find their categories. The headlines were divided into two categories: finite and non-finite. The finite headlines were further broken down into categories, like present and past headlines. The non-finite headlines consist of nominal or phrasal categories, and the infinitive headlines

III Results:

In an analysis of 300 news headlines from four Indian English newspapers, it may be confirmed that finite headlines outscore non-finite headlines by a very large percentage.

Table 1 illustrates below

Headlines	Finite	Non-finite
300	241 (80.33%)	59 (19.66 %)

Table 1: The composition of headlines according to finiteness and non-finiteness

The average for Indian newspaper headlines using finite verbs is as high as 80%, and for non-finite verbs, it is merely 20% of headlines. This average is far above the findings reported by Chovanec. The ratio reported by Chovanec is 6:4, 60% for the finite and 40% for the non-finite verbs. It appears that Indian newspapers have a stronger inclination towards finiteness. It also suggests that there is a lopsided usage of finiteness in comparison to non-finiteness.

Table 2 illustrates the percentage usage of finite and non-finite headlines in different newspapers.

Sr. No	Newspaper	Total number of Headline	Finite	Non-finite	Ratio
1	Free press	75	64	11	8.5: 1.4
2	The Indian Express	75	63	12	8.4: 1.6
3	The Times of India	75	57	18	.6: 1.8
4	The Hindu	75	55	20	.3: 2.7
	Total	300	239	61	.9: 2.1

Table 2 finite and non-finite headlines in different newspapers.

Free-Press: The Free-Press has the highest ratio of 85% in comparison to the other three newspapers. It has the highest number of finite headlines.

The Indian Express: The Indian Express comes second in terms of the usage of finite headlines. It stands at 84%. In comparison to the free press, the ratio is just 1% lower.

The Times of India: The Times of India is third in terms of the use of finite headlines. It is 76%.

The Hindu: The Hindu has the lowest number of finite headlines. The ratio is 74%.

Non-finite Headlines

The highest ratio of non-finite verb usage is for The Hindu; the ratio stands at 20%, and for The Times of India, it is 18%, which is the second highest. The third rank goes to the Indian Express, which stands at 16%, and finally, the last position is occupied by the Free Press, which stands at roughly 15%.

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Usage - Different Tenses

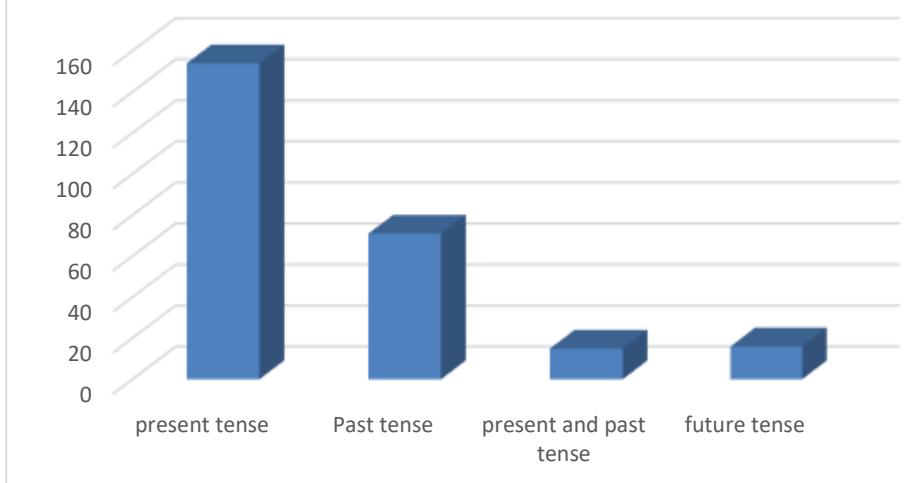
**Fig:** 1 total use of Present, Past, and Present – Past and Future tense in all newspapers

Figure 1 indicates the usage of different tenses across the four newspapers. The present tense has the highest standing at 154 instances, the past tense has an instance of 71, the present and past have an instance of 15 times, and the future tense has an instance of 12.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of the usage of various tenses in 'The Hindu.'

Sr. Number	Tense	Finite			Non-finite			Total
		Sentential	%	Nominal	%	To infinitive	%	
1	Present	32	53	9	50	6	50	50
2	Past	18	30					18
3	Present and past	2	3.33					2
4	Future	5	8.33					5
	Total	60	100	9		6		75

Table 3 Different tenses in the Newspaper 'The Hindu'

Table 3 indicates that the use of the present tense in news headlines is slightly above fifty percent. The use of past tense accounts for one-third of the total finite headlines, i.e., 60. We also find a new category where both present and past tense occur together and constitute a paltry 3.33%. Although the English language does have a future tense, we find the use of the will as an auxiliary verb representing the future tens

Table 4 shows the break- up of the usage of various tenses in **The Times of India**

Sr. Number	Tense	Finite	Non-finite	Total

		Sentential	%	Nominal	%	To infinitive	%	
1	Present	42	72.41	8		9	52	59
2	Past	13	22.41					13
3	Present and past	2	3.44					2
4	Future	1	1.72					1
	Total	58	100	8		9		75

Table 4 Different tenses in the newspaper 'The Times of India.'

Table four represents the usage of the different tenses in the headlines. This table again highlights the more frequent use of the present tense in the finite headline category. In the case of 'The Times of India', one can notice that the usage is almost equal to seventy-five percent of the total usage. The past tense is around twenty-three. The combination of the past and present is merely three percent, and the future is less than two percent.

Table 5 shows the break- up of the usage of various tenses in **The Indian Express**

Sr. Number	Tense	Finite			Non-finite			Total
		Sentential	%	Nominal	%	To infinitive	%	
1	Present	45	67.16	3	37.5	5	62.5	53
2	Past	18	26.86					18
3	Present and past	3	4.47					3
4	Future	1	1.49			1		1
	Total	67	100	3		5		75

Table 5 Different tenses in the newspaper 'The Indian Express.'

Table 5 clearly indicates the overwhelming use of the present tense in 'The Indian Express' over other tenses. The frequency of the present tense is much higher than any other tense. The usage frequency is close to seventy percent, and that of the past tense is below thirty percent. The combination of the past and present is around five percent, and the future is very low, standing at less than two percent.

Table 6 shows the break- up of the usage of various tenses in **Free Press**

Sr. Number	Tense	Finite			Non-finite			Total
		Sentential	%	Nominal	%	To infinitive	%	
1	Present	35	55.55	7	58.33	5	41.66	47
2	Past	22	34.92					22
3	Present and past	3	4.76					3
4	Future	3	4.76					3
	Total	63	100	7		5		75

Table 6 demonstrates a heavy use of the present tense in the news headlines of 'Free Press'. The present tense occurs more than 55 times in comparison to other tenses. The past tense is close to 35 percent. The combination of past and present is very close to five percent, as is the future tense.

Discussion

The non-finite headlines, i.e., nominal and to-infinitive, have a low proportion in the total composition of the news headlines. For The Hindu, the nominal headlines stand at nine, which is the highest. The Hindu is followed by The Times of India; here, the nominal headlines are eight in number, followed by Free-Press,

which has seven nominal headlines. The last one is The Indian Express, which has only three headlines. The highest occurrence of nine to-infinitive headlines is found in 'The Times of India; in the case of The Hindu, they are six in number. Both Free-Press and The Indian Express have five infinitive headlines.

The analysis of newspaper headlines in Indian English newspapers shows that finite headlines are much more common than non-finite headlines. The most frequent tense used is the present simple tense. Out of 300 headlines, It has an instance of 154. The next most used is past tense. It has an instance of 74. The results also indicate a new combined category of present and past, with an instance of ten. The number of news headlines in 'The Hindu' and The Indian Express is two and three, respectively. A similar pattern is seen in Free Press and The Times of India. The numbers stand at 3 and 2. This combined category of the present and past tense, though small in number, poses interesting queries. A small number of future-tense headlines can be seen in Indian English newspapers. It has an instance of 10. The Hindu' has the highest future headlines at five. 'The Hindu' is followed by Free-Press at three. Both The Times of India and The Indian Express are at one each. The frequent use of the present tense can be attributed to the fact that the present tense makes the story fresh and vivid so as to gain the reader's attention. The results point out a perceptible use of finite headlines at 80% and a very low use of non-finite headlines, which stands at merely 20%. The wider preference for finite headlines can be due to a number of factors. First, readers may prefer to read more finite headlines instead of non-finite ones. For Indian readers, finite headlines provide a better sense of the news, its location, and timing. Secondly, for Indian readers, non-finite verbs could be challenging. They may find it difficult to interpret the semantics of the non-finite. The non-finite verbs include the infinitive, the present participle, and the past participle. Their usage may sound cognitively obscure to Indian readers. Thirdly, the writers of the headlines are more comfortable with finite verbs, or they prefer a 'tensed sentence' to a non-tensed sentence. Finally, it may be possible that news pertaining to the future is fewer in number than news relating to the present. The findings established by Chovanec are 6:4, and if it is taken as a criterion of the ratio of finite and non-finite, the Indian scenario widely differs in this context. All four sample newspapers show a marked deviation from Chovanec's findings. The average ratio of finite headlines for Indian newspapers is 80%. This average is far above 6, the ratio of finite for the British News headlines. Similarly, the non-finite ratio also stands below the average ratio of 4 for the British News headlines. The instance of the present tense is very high. As far as the usage of the past tense is concerned, it is mainly used in news relating to crime. This kind of news pertains to unlawful activities, the arrest of criminals, people dying in an accident, or the breaking of a fire.

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