Use of determiners in newspaper media media essay

This study aims to examine how different strategies and processes are used in sociolinguistics, as a way of adjustment of the writer's manner of address, in relation to his or her perception of the addressee; focusing on the use of determiners. The hypothesis for this study is therefore: fewer determiners will be deleted from the newspapers considered ' up-market' (Group 1), than the amount deleted from those newspapers considered ' mid' and ' down-market' (Group 2).

This is a complex process of change within the dynamics of conversation and writing.[1]It is often said that convergence seems to be the rule in media language. For instance, phonological features in radio broadcasting showed that presenters use measurably more informal pronunciations in stations which primarily address lower class, less educated, and younger listeners.[2]As far as newspapers are concerned, the followed classic hypothesis of convergence has been made by S. Hall, who claims that there is reciprocity of producer/reader of which he called the ' public idiom' of the media. However, this does not mean that the readers actually speak what they read or listen to, but there is evidence to suggest that a convergence takes place and that each paper makes its own convergence toward what it sees as a mode of discourse acceptable to its readership.[3]

Background Research

Bell has carried out research into determiner deletion;[4]that being words found within the English Language that limit the meaning of a noun and comes before a descriptive adjective modifying the same noun (e. g. the, a, an, this etc.).[5]Several studies show that the deletion of articles in such phrases distinguishes tabloids from broadsheet British Newspapers. These

are correlationswith assumed class and education and the deletion of determiners seems to imply modernity, populism, and journalistic raciness.

Ryden and Bell[6]both investigate the use of noun phrase name appositions in the language of newspapers, and in particular the spread of phrases like ' Opposition leader Neil Knock' with the descriptive noun phrase without a determiner preceding the title. This format is relatively recent and is, in Britain, largely but not entirely restricted to the two categories of mid-down market papers

The influence of the reader in newspaper style is supported by the research carried out by Bell[7]and Jucker[8]. Bell, in his studies on naming expressions, states that this practice was more common in papers like The Sun, The Mirror, and The Express than in The Telegraph, The Guardian and The Times.

After studying the deletion of determiners Jucker divided British newspapers into three categories: up-market; The Times, Financial Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Daily telegraph, midmarket; Daily Mail, Daily Express, down-market; Daily Mirror, The Daily Star, and The Sun. He found that determiners were deleted more often in ' down-market' papers than in ' mid-market' papers, while there were very few deletions in style with a certain type of reader.

Methodology

Many considerations were taken in terms of which method would be best to use in order to carry out the investigation into the use of determiners in the media. The first decision that had to be made was which branch of the media

would be used as a source for the study. The options ranged from television programs, magazines, internet websites, radio and newspapers. The choice of newspapers was made based primarily on access to previous research, mentioned in the above ' Background Research' section of this report. The fact that a similar study had been carried out byBell et al. in the comparison of determiner usage between the different types of newspaper gave a good basis on which to base this study. Added to this is the intrigue of whether the results obtained will have a similar outcome to those obtained by these linguists twenty years ago.

The next step was to realise that in order to study determiners, a content analysis was the only possible method that could be used. It was also the same method used by Bell et al. in their study. However there are many advantages and disadvantages of using this process that led to many limitations to the practical side of the study. It is fairly time consuming which can often limit the researcher to a smaller sample than a less time consuming method. The chance for a margin of error is increased particularly if relational analysis is used. This study does require a level of relational analysis; that being the assumption of what, by today's standard of English, counts as a missing determiner and what does not; which limits the validity of the results, especially if the intention is to directly compare the results found by Bell et al. It is also difficult to computerize and therefore the results obtained have to be manually automated which adds to the total time consumption that using a digital content analysis could perhaps have avoided.

On the other hand there are many advantages to using content analysis such as the fact that it can combine quantitative and qualitative operations through the ability to see clearly the context of the deletion or inclusion. This method also has very few ethical issues as it is available to the public and no permission is needed in order to access it. It is also a very unobtrusive means of analysing the use of the English Language. It is also reliable as this study has been done before and can be repeated by the same or other researchers.

The study therefore began firstly by selecting a number of different newspapers to compare. This was done by initially selecting an equal number of British papers that are considered up-market newspapers, i. e. The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, and an equal number of 'mid-downmarket'[9]newspapers such as The Daily Mail, The Sun and The Daily Star. The six papers aforementioned were picked from those available from the University Shop on campus, with each category of newspaper represented and to be used in comparison with each other. They were then grouped into the retrospective classes: Group 1 included The Times, The Daily Telegraph and The Guardian; Group 2 included The Sun, The Daily Mail and The Daily Star. The hypothesis, that fewer determiners will be deleted from the papers in Group 1 than the amount deleted from Group 2, was then decided upon.

After the newspapers were selected the specific details of how this content analysis would be carried out was then agreed upon. It was decided that two articles would be analysed from each of the six papers; one regarding a political subject and the other focussing on sport. This was done in order to

firstly observe if there was any difference between the uses of determiners between the papers and then secondly if there was a difference within the different papers when the subject matter was different. It was clear that in order to increase the validity of this research the newspapers analysed would have to all be taken from the same date and then the articles chosen were to be about the same topic within politics and sport. The newspapers were therefore collected for analysis on the 6th May 2010 and the similar stories of the day in the two subject areas were then analysed. It was decided that the headlines and tag lines of all the articles would be included in the study. However it was recognised that headlines in general tend to have determiner deletions as standard.

After the articles were selected the exact process of working out the determiner deletion was decided upon. Firstly the article word length was counted and recorded, then the entire article was analysed and all the determiners within the article were highlighted and totalled. Then a second analysis of each article was carried out in order to locate where the determiners were missing in accordance with Standard English practice. [10]These would again be totalled and recorded in a spread sheet where the number of determiners which have been deleted would be calculated as a percentage of the total determiners that could have been used in the entire article.

Although every measure has been taken to improve the reliability, validity and practical issues posed by any method of research, this study is not without its limitations. Firstly not all the variables can be controlled. Firstly, the sex of the journalist whom had written each article is not being taken

into account. This means that the results obtained could be reduced in validity, due to the fact that gender could have an influence over the amount of determiners used within the articles. In a similar vein, the age of the journalist is also unknown, which could similarly have an impact upon the amount of determiners used or deleted. It is also a fairly subjective study and it is likely that some determiner deletions could be overlooked depending upon the researcher carrying out the study. Due to the time consuming nature of this method as aforementioned the sample size had to be kept quite small to three newspapers of the two different categories. This reduces the representativeness of the study as not all newspapers have been analysed. Added to this, only one newspaper considered mid-market has been used alongside two considered down market which means the sample is not as representative as it could be. Therefore it is probably unlikely that any generalisations can be made from this study – only suggestions.

Results

The table of results and bar graphs for this study can be found in Appendices 1. 0 – 2. 2.

Discussion

As stated in the hypothesis it would have been expected that this study would produce results similar to those presented by Bell in 1991, though possibly not so polarised and extreme, with up-markets exhibiting the least amount of determiner deletion and mid-down markets the highest. When looking at the sum of the combined averages for up-market newspapers and the mid-down market newspapers it can be seen that the up market

newspapers had the combined average determiner deletion of 31. 9% and the mid-down market newspapers had the combined average determiner deletion of 44. 17%. This suggests that the hypothesis that ' fewer determiners will be deleted from the newspapers considered ' up-market' (Group 1) than the amount deleted from those newspapers considered ' mid' and ' down-market' (Group 2)' is supported by the results found.

The newspaper with the highest average deletions was the mid-market newspaper, The Daily Mail, with an average of 15. 97% determiner deletion. However, very surprisingly the up-market newspaper, The Guardian, came out with the second highest average percentage of determiner deletion, at 20. 78%. Not only is this unexpected because it is an up-market newspaper, but also because The Guardian's politics article had the highest determiner deletion percentage within the entire study. Based on the premise that up-markets are aimed at a higher and more educated social class than mid-down markets, and also that politics articles are likely to draw a more sophisticated readership than sports articles, it was anticipated that the former type of newspaper would use a more standard form of English with a lower percentage of determiner deletion. In addition to this, it was presumed that sports articles would also have a higher percentage of determiner deletion than articles written about politics but this was not found to be the case with many of the newspapers.

The Daily Telegraph was the paper that supported the hypothesis the most as it came in at the bottom with only 6. 09% deletion for its politics article, and this is what was supposed would happen taking into account Bell's study and findings. Nevertheless, it was The Daily Telegraph's sports article that

actually came in with the lowest amount of deletion, with only 3. 88%. This finding was unforeseen, but it may be that the journalist writing the politics article for The Daily Telegraph wished to make it snappier so as to attract a larger audience, and believed that deleting determiners would achieve this effect. The Times supports the hypothesis as its sports article contains 15. 7% of determiner deletion, but only 7. 34% in its politics issue. It is also relatively near the bottom of the table as would be expected, considering it is one of the chosen up-market newspapers. The Times was in fact the newspaper that Bell found had the least amount determiner deletion in 1991, with only 5%. However it has been found that as time has passed journalists from both types of papers tend to use determiner deletion as much as each other. It is perhaps now the case that they are less concerned with targeting a very specific audience and more so with selling newspapers. It seems to be mid-down market papers that have changed the most. Bell found that they all had 73% deletion of determiners or above, whereas this study has found that the highest percentage of a mid-down market newspaper is 20. 48% from The Sun. Perhaps these newspapers are trying to make themselves appear less mid-market, and appeal to a more sophisticated audience.

Improvements

If this study was to be performed again there are a few ways in which it could be improved. Firstly, as two members of the group worked out the percentage of determiner deletion there is immediately going to be a difference in results as deciding where determiners should be and have been deleted is a subjective process. It is not always clear and so perhaps if this were to be replicated each member of the group should work out the

percentage from all papers and then compare the findings, working out the average percentage of deletion.

Using a larger sample would also be beneficial as one article may not be representative of the whole newspaper, and so there may have been anomalies within the results. The articles chosen were all of varied lengths and so this could have affected the results. It may be that articles tend to have the most determiner deletion at the end and therefore the longer an article is the higher percentage of deletion. It could even be possible that the journalists' articles that were chosen to be analysed could have previously or aspired to be a writer for the other type of newspaper, and so arestill writing in that style. This is possibly something that could have been researched to ensure the articles used in this study were written by the same types of authors and were truly representative of the whole paper's style. Moreover, there was no focus in the study on one particular sex and therefore next time a comparison between male journalists writing for up-markets and female journalists writing for the same type of paper could be looked into and compared against mid-down market newspapers. It would be interesting to discover whether females for example chose to delete more determiners than males.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has supported the hypothesis but only to an extent. It has found a very mixed set of results; with some papers supporting the hypothesis and others challenging it. Whilst it was found that a mid-down market newspaper did have the highest average percentage of determiner deletion what was most surprising was that The Guardian has the second

highest average percentage of determiner deletion, which would very much suggest that times and the styles attributed to each type of newspaper have changed drastically in the twenty years since Bell performed his study. This may possibly be due to the fact that newspaper sales are continually declining, and so both types of papers are trying to appeal to a wider audience. As suggested by Roy Greenslade, ' print can't compete with 24-hour news on television and radio,'[11]and so they need to do all they can to up their sales. If up-market newspapers for example continue to focus on an upper-class audience then they are seriously limiting their number of potential buyers, and so buy removing determiners they make their articles snappier and more accessible to a larger audience. It is also possible that the complexity of the issues reported on in up-market newspapers actually makes it harder to cut out determiners, and therefore the political issues have a higher amount of determiner deletion because their authors try a lot harder to do so. Finally, the results obtained by this study imply that the percentage of determiner deletion could depend more on the journalist writing the article, as opposed to the type of newspaper they are writing for.

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Appendix 1. 0

A Table of Results

Newspaper

Type

Article Subject

% Deletion

Average

Combined Average

Article Word Count

No. of Determiners

No. of Deleted Determiners

The Guardian

Up-market

Politics

20. 78%

15. 39%

870

154

32

Sport

10. 00%

795

140

14

The Times

Up-market

Politics

7. 34%

11. 52%

727

109

8

Sport

15. 70%

634

121

19

The Telegraph

Up-market

Politics

6. 09%

4. 99%

31. 90%

800

115

7

Sport

3. 88%

827

103

4

The Daily Mail

Mid-market

Politics

16. 03%

15. 97%

799

131

21

Sport

15. 91%

878

132

21

The Sun

Mid-market

Politics

20. 48%

14. 37%

767

83

13

Sport

8. 25%

587

97

8

The Daily Star

Down-market

Politics

19. 10%

13. 84%

44. 17%

694

115

22

Sport

8. 57%

836

105

9 Appendix 2. 0

A Bar Graph Depicting the Results of Determiner Deletions between the

Types of Newspapers and Subject Matter

Appendix 2. 1

A Bar Graph Depicting the Results of Average Determiner Deletions between

all Newspapers