LINGUE
DI
OGGI

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VIEWS IN THE NEWS

A TEXTBOOK

LED
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Contents

Preface and acknowledgment

This book is a series of guided lessons introducing students of *Political Science*, and *Communications* and *Media Studies* to the language of newspapers.

It explores the language of newspapers with the aim of recognising and understanding some basic linguistic strategies, which may be consciously or unconsciously adopted by the reporter, and how public opinion could be constructed and/or influenced by these strategies. Although it is based on British newspapers, many comparisons can be drawn with the Italian press.

Designed as a course book, it leads students through explanations of the linguistic strategies (accompanied by authentic examples and extracts from newspapers) and a series of guided tasks. The text presumes an intermediate level English, and although the authentic newspaper texts have not been manipulated or simplified in any way, they are annotated to help understanding. Difficult wordings are explained and a glossary of terms (indicated in bold print in the text) is found at the end of the book. The exercises and activities in each unit are discussed in full in a *Key and commentary* which is aimed at providing the self-learning student with all the elements necessary to be able to follow the course.

To be able to fully exploit the course-book, students should have a collection of English language newspapers, or access to online newspapers, as many activities involve comparing and commenting on how current issues are presented. Some tasks also require use of a good learners' dictionary, which the student should always have on hand.

All examples of newspaper texts come from British and Australian newspapers during 2005 and 2006, with other examples being drawn from a 2 million word electronic corpus of British newspapers. The few invented examples are clearly indicated.

The reader should keep in mind that there is a transience of names, events and situations in international and national spheres which inevitably date newspaper stories. This transience is part of the very nature of newspaper texts; newspapers are 'old' after just 24 hours. While a text may appear outdated, the events 'historic', and the protagonists forgotten within a very short time, the

language, the reporter's task and the resulting type of text, remain unchanged over much longer time spans.

Both colleagues and students have contributed generously to this publication; the former with their helpful suggestions and comments and the latter with their acute observations, enthusiasm and perseverance.

Introduction
BEHIND THE LINES

We live under a government of men and morning newspapers.
(Wendell Phillips, American reformer and orator, 1811-1884)

Freedom of the press is limited to those who own one.
(A.J. Liebling, American journalist, 1904-1963)

Newspapers are an inseparable part of our lives, but that does not mean that daily newspapers, or *dailies*, are easy to read, easy to unravel, or easy to interpret; in fact, newspaper language is notoriously difficult to understand for various reasons which we shall explore.

We are also going to look at how newspapers are directly linked to ideologies, and can be seen as artefacts of the commercial and political worlds (Reah 2002: 3).

0.1. THE *FREE* PRESS

Stereotypes, clichéd views and barely-veiled opinion are found, tolerated and may be actively maintained in the press. Despite this, Western democracies are seen as having a 'free press', but what does free press mean?

The 1st amendment to the American Constitution, ratified in 1791, states:

> *Congress shall make no law* respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or *abridging the freedom* of speech, or *of the press*; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. [1]

[1] *Il Congresso non potrà fare alcuna legge* per il riconoscimento di qualsiasi religione, o per proibirne il libero culto; o *per limitare la libertà di parola o di stampa*; o il diritto che hanno i cittadini di riunirsi in forma pacifica e di inoltrare petizioni al governo per la riparazione di torti subiti.

However, no definition is offered of 'free press', which nevertheless lies at the heart of democracy. In the UK [2], the concept of 'freedom of the press' is dear to journalists, though it is rarely questioned or defined. In Italy too, this concept is valued. The reader is thus led to ask: What does it mean to be free? How can the press be free?

Task 1: *Freedom of the press*

Can you define the notion of 'freedom of the press'? Do you think it is possible for the press to be truly free? Can a privately owned media conglomerate be impartial? Consider, for example, how private interests may influence the reporting of public events, the opinions expressed in a newspaper, and even the advertising.

0.2. MEDIA MAGNATES

Newspaper ownership may directly affect the news we read, **editorial** [3] points of view and political **stance**. The power to influence the content, point of view and opinion expressed in the paper, and hence the readership, lies in the ownership. What is less clear is the degree of partiality and subjectivity involved in reporting the facts.

Newspaper ownership is a constantly evolving and very complex issue. Currently in Britain, large conglomerates run various national (and also local) newspapers, which means competition is limited. The situation is similar in Italy, although there are many more local papers competing with national ones. British legislation has tried to restrict unlimited acquisition of companies by large organisations, but the situation is still evolving. The result is that several media magnates control the diffusion of news.

Task 2: *Media magnates*

Using the internet, look at some of the world's major daily newspapers and see if you can discover who they are owned by. What are the implications of just a few magnates owning numerous circulations?

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[2] Britain has no written constitution or Bill of Rights; the constitution is partly in conventions and customs and partly in statute. The Act known as the Bill of Rights 1689 deals with the exercise of the royal prerogative and succession to the Crown, while the British legal system provides the basis for other statutes. Parliament also has the power to enact any law and change any previous law.

[3] Words in bold print can be found in the glossary at the end of the book.

❍ Task 3: *People in the news*

There are also many other people involved in news production. Using the internet, and one of the many journalism glossaries on line, or a dictionary, match each of the people in the first column with a job description in the second.

1. columnist	A. a person who supplies information (may also be a report, survey, etc)
2. copy editor	B. the person who decides what news will be included and excluded, and decides the layout of the paper
3. correspondent	C. one of the people involved in overseeing, writing or editing the news
4. editor	D. a person directly involved in the news story as a protagonist
5. editor-in-chief	E. someone who writes regular articles that appear on the same page, usually expressing opinion
6. newsmaker	F. the person responsible for the content, publication standards and ethical conduct in the process of news gathering and presentation
7. source	G. a reporter based in a different location
8. newsworker	H. the person who corrects or edits a reporter's copy and writes headlines

0.3. WHO PAYS FOR THE PAPER?

A newspaper, like any other business, must be economically viable or it will close – 'the free-market operates on one major premise: profit' (Reah 2002: 9). For a newspaper, profit lies in sales and advertising, with the latter depending on the former. The higher the **circulation**, the more lucrative the advertising. Advertisers will not invest in expensive page space if they cannot be guaranteed a high readership, which, in turn, means plenty of potential clients. At the same time readers' needs must be satisfied, otherwise they will desert the paper. If the readership is seeking a certain type of entertainment, opinion or **slant** on events, a profit-seeking paper will try to meet these needs. Above all, it will not want to challenge the interests of the collective readership.

❍ Task 4: *Advertising*

Look through an English newspaper; what percentage of the space would you estimate is taken up with advertising? Where on the page is advertising usually found? Do some sections of the paper have more advertising than others? What are the implications of this?

It is difficult for an editor to satisfy a request to place advertisements for luxury products and at the same time dedicate space to articles reporting poverty. This problem will also dictate page formatting and photographs. A newspaper which reports large-scale devastating pollution caused by a multi-national oil company can hardly expect to receive advertising from that company, or any other that can be associated by reader assimilation with oil companies. Further, how is 'a paper whose editorial policy is to criticise the capitalist and free market system going to attract any advertising at all?' (Reah 2002: 10).

The fundamental question becomes whether any newspaper organisation or owner can afford to publish articles that are hostile to their commercial or political interests.

0.4. CAN NEWSPAPERS BE IMPARTIAL?

And now we are back to where we started! Whether newspapers can be objective and impartial is a thread of this course. As we will see, the newspaper reader is not simply the receiver of new information about recent events. He or she is the receiver of selected information, which may well be selected with an ideological **spin**. This spin is often hidden from all but the expert newspaper reader. As a result most newspaper readers are unlikely to question what they read, and/or do not have the opportunity to make independent decisions, or construct their own points of view.

0.5. *QUALITY* AND *POPULAR* PRESS

The British and Australian newspapers are generally divided into the *quality* and *popular* press, based on their content.

The quality press in Britain traditionally had a larger format, although this is now changing. These papers are called broadsheets [4] and usually include more home and overseas news, political and economic news, with detailed and extensive coverage of sports, finance and cultural events. They also carry fewer pictures and less advertising. British dailies in this category include the *Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Independent*, and *Guardian*.

[4] The term is nautical, synonymous with *broadside* and goes back to the 16th century. Broadside (and broadsheet) refer to the longest side of the ship facing the enemy. The term was then used to refer to any large vertical expanse before being adopted as the term for the large expanse of paper that the *Telegraph*, *Independent* and *Australian* are published on, which measures approximately 38 cm by 61 cm.

The popular press or 'populars' are also known as tabloids [5] (also 'gutter press' and 'redtops') as they are smaller in size, about 'half sheet' in format. In these papers we find bold headlines, large photographs and more advertising. Generally, they tend to concentrate on local news, the personal perspective of the news, feature stories, with reports of recent sensational and 'juicy' events, often involving celebrities. However, their political influence should not be underestimated. The language of the tabloids is also much more colloquial, and the readership is generally working class. The tabloids include the *Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Star*.

This distinction is not so clear-cut in Italian papers, where the bigger/smaller formats are not an indicator of the distinction between *quality* and *popular* press.

There are also papers which fall between the two categories, broadsheet and tabloid, and are known as middle-range tabloids. They include papers such as the *Express* and the *Daily Mail* with a readership which is generally considered to be from the middle classes.

The readership of tabloids and broadsheets falls into quite distinct socio-economic groups, and thus the content of the papers will appeal directly to these group interests, an important factor of newspaper writing which will be discussed in the following units. A witty [6], though fairly accurate classification of English newspapers is that:

The Times is read by the people who run the country;
The *Mirror* is read by the people who think they run the country;
The *Guardian* is read by the people who think about running the country;
The *Mail* is read by the wives of the people who run the country;
The *Daily Telegraph* is read by the people who think the country ought to be run as it used to be;
The *Express* is read by the people who think it is still run as it used to be;
The *Sun* is read by those who don't care who runs the country as long as the naked girl on page 3 is attractive.

(adapted from Natalya Predtechenskaya)

Maybe Italian papers can be classified in the same way …

[5] The term 'tabloid' refers to the compressed size of these papers, which are about half the size of broadsheets. *Tabloid* was originally a trademark term for (compressed) medicinal tablets patented by the company Burroughs, Wellcome & Co. in 1884.

[6] *witty* = clever, displaying a quickness of mind and intended to provoke laughter.

Key and commentary

Task 1: *Freedom of the press*
Freedom of the press is the guarantee that news-gathering organisations will not be hindered, or coereced by state interference in their publication and distribution of the stories, photos, editorials etc, that they see fit.

However, it is clear that it is difficult to be truly free, especially for privately-owned companies. They must also be profitable: advertising sales will depend on where the ads are placed on a page, customer sales will depend on interesting content. If the same conglomerate has business interests in other areas, it would be very difficult for the paper to report on those areas objectively.

Task 2: *Media magnates*
In Britain, the *Mirror Group Newspapers* and *News Corporation* (Murdoch) own large numbers of papers and magazines. In Italy too, you will find that the major papers are all part of consortiums. Today, it is almost impossible for a newspaper to survive independently; competition is very tough and to succeed a newspaper needs strong financial backing. Obviously the paper will not take a stand against its own interest. Stories may avoid certain issues, and promote others – again in the interests of the consortium. Given that making a profit is the principal aim of any business, revenue from advertising and sales may inevitably take precedence over altruistic news reporting.

Task 3: *People in the news*

1. E.	2. H.	3. G.	4. B.	5. F.	6. D.	7. A.	8. C.

Task 4: *Advertising*
You will have noticed that about 25-40% of total page space is advertising, with tabloids having more advertising than broadsheets. Given that news reporting usually occupies only the first pages, this means that more space is devoted to advertising than to news reporting.

Full-page advertising, if present, is usually on the left hand page, half-page ads are usually at the bottom of the right hand page, and column-wide ads are

found on the outer edges of the paper. These positions are based on their efficacy in attracting reader attention. The news sections of the paper have more general advertising; most people read the news (world and local) but not everyone will continue to read the TV, sport and financial sections. Advertising in these sections tends to be more specialised, that is, goods and services that are related to those areas.

Unit 3
WHAT THE HEADLINES SAY

Some people make headlines while others make history.
(Philip Elmer-DeWitt, journalist, b. 19??)

Journalism largely consists of saying 'Lord Jones is dead'
to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive.
(G.K. Chesterton, British author, 1874-1936)

The most easily recognised characteristics of headlines are the bold print and the telegraphic – and at times sensational – wording which attract our attention. You may also have noticed that the headlines of British papers are often cryptic and very difficult to understand, compared with Italian papers. This unit will consider the **lead**, as well as the headline, which together form the nucleus of the story (as seen in Unit 2).

❍ Task 1: *Bungled headlines*

Newspapers can sometimes bungle [1] headlines, leading to amusing, or ambiguous, interpretations. Can you find two interpretations for the following? (The words underlined may help you)

1. *Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead*
2. *Iraqi Head Seeks* [2] *Arms*
3. *Kicking Baby Considered to be Healthy*
4. *Miners Refuse to Work after Death*
5. *Milk Drinkers are Turning to Powder*
6. *Queen Mary Having Bottom Scraped* [3]
7. *Stolen Painting Found by Tree*
8. *Two Sisters Reunite after Eighteen Years at Checkout Counter* [4]
9. *Two Soviet Ships Collide - One Dies*
10. *New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group*

[1] *to bungle* = to make a hopeless mess of something.
[2] *to seek* = to look for.
[3] *to scrape* = to use a sharp metal tool to remove material.
[4] *check out counter* = where you pay for your shopping at a supermarket.

3.1. HEADLINES

The large font size and skeletal wording of the headlines attract attention and underline the urgency or importance of a story. At least one of the **W's** (*when?*, *where?*, *who?*, etc) will be mentioned to entice the reader to go on to read the entire article, which is obviously one of the main purposes of the headline.

The headline is also the newspaper's opportunity to establish its **angle** (and **stance**) on a story, and signal its significance to the readership. It summarises the most salient aspects of the reported event in terms of **newsworthiness,** which are then developed in the lead, and in the story satellites.

The headlines are written by the editor, or subeditor, not the reporter. This reveals something of the importance of the headline in terms of the coherence of the entire page structure, and the newspaper as a whole.

CASE: CINDERELLA

As you have seen, stories can be reported from many possible points of view, and the fairy-tale *Cinderella* is no exception. Possible headlines, reflecting different angles on the story could be:

- *Rags to riches!* (angle: Cinderella's changed social position; from a poor servant she becomes a princess)
- *A dream come true* (angle: a young woman's dream of marrying a prince)
- *Family feud as prince finds bride* (angle: a story focussing on the unhappy family situation that Cinderella will leave behind when she marries)
- *Palace party leads to love story* (angle: a gossip story based on how Cinderella met the prince)
- *Royal wedding!* (angle: the continuous interest in royal weddings)
- *The luck of losing a shoe* (angle: how the banal or irritating situation of losing a shoe could have extraordinary consequences)
- *Animal Rights raid royal rats* (angle: the abuse of animals which are made to pull carriages)

And many more, including the topics of magic, social inequality, etc.

3.2. THE LEAD

As can be seen in *Figure 2*, the opening sentence, or **lead**, of a story overlaps the headline to some extent. The print is usually bolder and/or larger than the rest of the story and it will repeat, extend, and elaborate further the **W's** mentioned in the headline, as well as adding further **W's**, in particular *when?* and *where?* It may also preview other information that the rest of the story will describe in greater detail in the satellites.

The lead may be preceded by a by-line which names the reporter or the source of the story, for example a news agency (such as Associated Press, Agence France Presse, Reuters, etc), and sometimes a location.

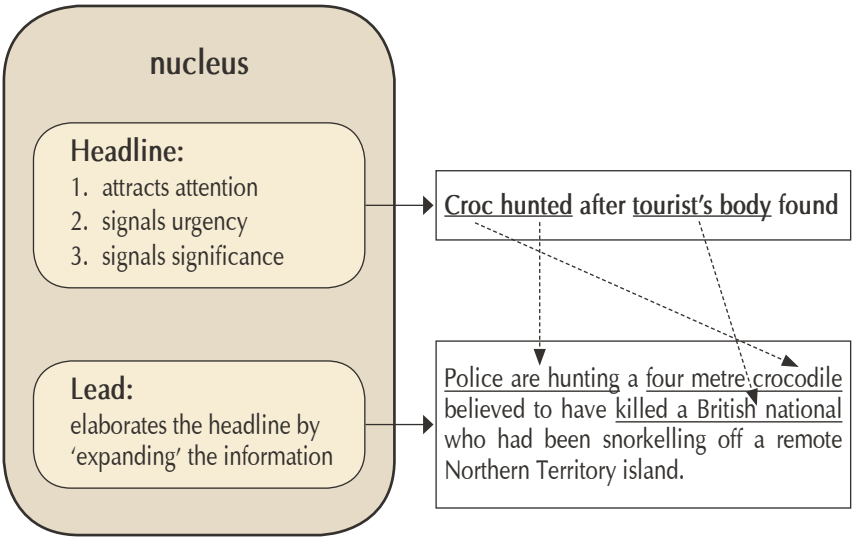

Figure 2 – Headline and lead (see page 29 for the complete story).

❍ Task 2: *Same story, different headlines*

The following groups of headlines regard the same stories. What are the different angles on the stories proposed by the papers?

A. Story about the release of the 'two Simonas' who were held hostage in Iraq:

1. *Spies 'brokered* [5] *$1m hostage ransom deal'*
2. *Freed hostages bring a moment of joy*
3. *Italians shrug off* [6] *claims that $1m was handed over to free women aid workers*
4. *Two Simonas freed 'for $1m ransom'*
5. *Rome paid ransom of $1m to free women*
6. *Freed Iraqi hostages raise hopes*

[5] *to broker* = to do business through an agent, or middle-man.
[6] *to shrug off* = to take no notice of, to disregard as unimportant (often with the gesture of raising the shoulders).

B. The first day of the Winter Olympics in Turin, 2006 (see reference to these stories on page 31)
   1. *Let the Games begin – and keep your fingers crossed*
   2. *Protesters at Olympics face 'zero tolerance'*
   3. *Games get down to business after theatrical opener*
   4. *Security tight as Winter Olympics get under way*
   5. *Dopes* [7] *on the slopes*
   6. *Things can go downhill very fast*
   7. *Fire on ice*
   8. *Flame lit as Games begin*

3.3. THE DISTINCTIVE LANGUAGE OF HEADLINES

The reader may have difficulty understanding headlines, as they very often presume a high level of cultural or background knowledge which language students, and even many native-speakers, may not have. Headlines such as:

Clark denies deal on release of spies

Sunset clause [8] *too long: Evans*

make little sense unless the reader has been following the event, or has some background knowledge of the people involved and the circumstances.

It is not always easy for the headline-writer to reconcile facts and attention-seeking devices, or avoid ambiguities of the type seen in Task 1. The specialised vocabulary of headlines tends to be unusual, sensational and brief with extensive use of rhetorical devices such as **metaphor**, **metonymy**, and alliteration (Morley 1998).

3.4. ATTENTION-SEEKING STRATEGIES

Some linguistic features are adopted which make headlines particularly memorable and effective. Bell (1991), Morley (1998) and Mardh (1980), analysing the distinctive characteristics of newspaper headlines, have identified the typical linguistic features as:

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[7] *dope* = an idiot.

[8] *sunset clause* = the provision in a statute allowing a law to terminate after a certain date, unless explicitly extended.

- the omission of words;
- the use of short, loaded words;
- nominalization; the frequent use of complex noun phrases in the subject position;
- the use of gimmicks (**puns**, word play and alliteration).

We shall look now at some of the characteristics of this particular language.

3.4.1. Omission

For economy of space, headlines abbreviate by omitting certain words (see *Case: Omission* below), which is the source of one of the greatest difficulties in understanding headlines.

CASE: OMISSION

Some typical cases of the omission of words in headlines are:

- [*The*] *Two Simonas* [*were*] *freed* [*for a*] *'$1m ransom'*
- [*Some*] *Screams* [*were*] *heard on* [*the*] *Caroline murder night*
- *Australia relied on* [*some*] *stars* [*who were*] *not in* [*the*] *team:* [*Mr*] *Lara*
- [*An*] *explosion kills 24 passengers* [*who were*] *on* [*a*] *bus fleeing* [*the*] *wrath of* [*Hurricane*] *Rita*
- [*The*] *Diver* [*who was*] *killed by croc* [*has been*] *identified*
- [*President*] *Bush* [*is*] *likely to name* [*the*] *2nd nominee next week*

The words omitted are usually **function words** which are essential to the grammatical structure, but do not carry intrinsic meaning, e.g.:

- articles (*the*, *a*, *an*);
- relative pronouns (*who*, *which*);
- determiners (*some*, *this*);
- verbs and auxiliaries (*is*, *are*, *were*, *have*);
- titles (*Mrs*, *Lord*, *Sir*).

On the other hand, **content words** (nouns, main verbs, adjectives), which are necessary to express meaning are not eliminated. The omission of words attracts the reader's attention in the same way as sensational words by making the resulting headline 'stronger', that is, well-chosen 'loaded' words (see section 3.4.2) are not 'diluted' in redundant text.

3.4.2. Loaded words

Many words used in headlines are not found elsewhere in the language. They have evolved because of their brevity and colour. We have already seen a

crocodile referred to in more colourful terms as *croc*, and a disease as a *killer bug* [9]. The tabloids make greater use of shorter and more sensational words, which have become a feature of their style. They are also more economical, that is they occupy less space. For the same reason, words like *as* are preferred to the longer *at the same time as*, *when*, *while*, for example: *Flame lit as Games begin* and [*He*] *denies taking drugs as MP*.

❍ Task 3: *Short words*

Match a headline word in the first column with a more usual English word in the second. (v. = verb, n. = noun). The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. axe (v.)	A. robbery, burglary
2. alert (n.)	B. attempt
3. ban (v.)	C. assistance
4. raid (n.)	D. cut
5. aid (n.)	E. disturb, disagree strongly
6. probe (n.)	F. argument, disagreement
7. clash (v.)	G. warning of danger
8. back (v.)	H. investigation, enquiry
9. row (n.)	I. give support
10. bid (n.)	J. prohibit, forbid

Headlines (of tabloids, in particular) often use sensational and emotionally charged lexis, with **connotations** that go beyond the literal meaning (see Unit 4). This exaggeration has an important role in enticing the reader to continue reading:

Screaming axeman attacks two pilots

Bush signs up to terror pact with Pakistan

Monster in the classroom

Others rely on bold headlines, for example: *Outrage!*, or *Exodus!* where a single well-chosen and emotionally charged word pre-empts the readers' feelings or summarises the event.

3.4.3. Noun phrases

Headlines also create incisive, effective and economical texts by creating **noun phrases** (NPs), where **modifiers** add further information to the noun, including descriptive detail. The noun (called the headword) is the last word in

[9] The denotational meaning of *bug* is an *insect*, or a *microbe*.

the 'chain' (with double underlining in the examples) while all the preceding words have an adjectival function, e.g.:

Russia backs Kyoto environment pact (the agreement for environmental control signed in Kyoto)

PM defeats Iraq troops pull-out call (the call to pull troops out of Iraq)

Another distinctive technique of headlines, linked to noun phrases, is **nominalisation**, which permits a noun (e.g. *a murder*) to be used instead of the verb (*to murder*). In this way the 'verb' can also become the headword and be described further by adding an adjective (noun phrases are in square brackets).

[*Passenger panic*] *at 30,000 feet* (passengers panicked …)

[*Jailed Iraqi abuse soldier*] *in tears* (the soldier who abused …)

The flexibility of English, where many words can be nouns and verbs, makes this possible, with the advantage that the resulting phrase has fewer words, but more importantly, can be accompanied by **modifiers** describing the noun.

Noun phrases can be very difficult to decode for both native and non-native readers; they rely on the accompanying story and background knowledge to provide an elucidation, e.g.:

Glitter vile jail dodge. [10]

3.5. GIMMICKS

There are various well-known strategies or gimmicks which headline writers can use, many concerned with creating ambiguity. The resulting plays on words, or **puns**, have a double sense, as the writer implies a second meaning, which is linked to the context of the article (see Partington 1998, Reah 2002). These plays on words are rarely found in Italian papers, partly because of the nature of the Italian language [11]. Plays on words are often based on well-known quotations and include:

[10] The story refers to Gary *Glitter* (ex-rock star), imprisoned for pedo-pornography offences, trying to avoid (*dodge*) being transferred to a worse (*vile*) *jail*. Note that the adjective *vile* could apply to *jail* or *avoidance* (it could also be implied that *Glitter* and the *offences* are *vile*).

[11] An example would be *Brandelli d'Italia* which appeared before the football World Cup (June 2006) referring to the many injuries afflicting the Italian team, while echoing the first words of the *Inno di Mameli*.

- homophones: where the spoken forms have the same pronunciation, e.g. *site* and *sight*, but the written forms are different; or a single sound may be changed or substituted;
- homonyms: words with more than one meaning, (e.g. *arms* – weapons or body part, see Task 1 no. 2), again creating a pun;
- intertextuality: reference to familiar phrases which are already known to the reader, many coming from film and book titles or the words of songs.

In these **puns**, the substitution, alteration, or play on words, must not change the phrase so drastically that the reader cannot recognise it.

Other gimmicks in headlines include:

- metaphor: a comparison established between two apparently unrelated subjects;
- alliteration: the repetition of sounds, usually consonants;
- rhyme: words which rhyme, or echo, and often make a comment at the same time.

Task 4: *Gimmicks*

What strategies are used in the following headlines to attract the reader's attention? To help you, each headline is followed by a reference to the context of the story.

1. *Rose is a cereal killer* (female killer serves prison breakfasts)
2. *Cocaine Kate a caring mother, says ex* (Kate Moss drug scandal)
3. *Crime of the times* (the latest fashion in theft is i-pods)
4. *My fur lady, Zara the bohemian* (how the Queen's grand-daughter was dressed)
5. *Cruz a lucky boy then* (actress Penelope Cruz's new boyfriend)
6. *Banned aid for schoolgirl* (school would not bandage girl's cut finger)
7. *She's Sienn in the dark* (actress Sienna Miller playing with a torch)
8. *Passenger panic at 30,000 feet* (jet has engine trouble)
9. *Posh and Shove* (Victoria Beckham getting angry at fashion show)
10. *Purrfect Pawtraits* (pictures of readers' cats)

3.6. VERBS

We have seen that headlines, for reasons of space, tend not to use **finite verbs** (i.e. verbs in the past, present or future tenses) auxiliary verbs or adverbs. In these cases, there is no time reference. Alternatively, the verb may be incorporated in a noun phrase by class-shifting, or **nominalisation**, becoming a 'dynamic noun' (see section 3.4.4 above). Sometimes, however, the verb is present.

Task 5: *Verbs in headlines*

Which forms of the verb are found in the following headlines?

1. *Mother, 67, confesses to killing her Down's son*
2. *Screams heard on Caroline murder night*
3. *Bird flu' could kill 150 million*
4. *Huntley gets 40 years*
5. *Bush likely to name 2nd nominee next week*
6. *We didn't have sex*
7. *Oxford to give outsiders equal say on future*
8. *Car killer given life*
9. *Dutch rail firm to apologise for deporting Jews*
10. *Lenin may be laid to rest at last*

As you have seen, headlines do not usually say when an event happened; it is the **lead** which will anchor the story in time with a generic reference, e.g. *yesterday* or *last night* (which will be elaborated further in the satellites, see Unit 2); nor are the verb forms useful in specifying *when?* The verbs in headlines normally appear in one of the following forms.

- The present simple, a 'timeless' tense, is the one most often found, and is used where a past tense might be expected, e.g. *Officer saves 9 men in riot*. The story following this headline recounts a past event, in past tenses. This type of headline does not summarise the story, but is a 'teaser'. The present continuous is rarely found.
- The past participle is used to signal the passive form, e.g. *Hospital head suspended* where the agent has been ellipted (see Unit 7). The auxiliary verb *be*, if present (e.g. *Senior civil servant is sacked*), is usually in the present tense. The past participle is also a device for foregrounding the effects of an event, or what happened, rather than the people involved, e.g. *Buried alive!*
- The infinitive is used to refer to the future, e.g. *Ministers to give AWB statements*. It is preferred to the predictive *will*, or present continuous, because it occupies less space.
- The future can also be referred to by means of mitigating tenses – modal verbs and the conditional, e.g. *Airport walkouts could spread*. These are less common and are used, where necessary, to disguise conjecture and to moderate commitment to the truth of the statement.
- Other tenses which appear are normally in the form of quotes, or presumed quotes, reflecting spoken language. These are very common in tabloids, e.g. *Kate: I've been a real dope*, or *Neighbours? We don't really want to know*.

Key and commentary

Task 1: *Bungled headlines*

The amusing ambiguities of these headlines (retrieved 12.01.2002, http://www.alphadictionary.com/fun/headlines.html) are caused by the 'telegraphic' language which aims to be as brief as possible. As the number of words is reduced, the possible interpretations and ambiguities increase, sometimes with unfortunate results.

1. *Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead* – it would be safe to presume that if it is a cemetery, the occupants are already dead. The story was probably that hundreds died in a typhoon which was particularly violent in the area around the cemetery.
2. *Iraqi Head Seeks Arms* – it appears to be saying that the head of an Iraqi person is looking for two arms (possibly a couple of legs and a neck as well). The writer intends to say that the leader of Iraq is looking to buy war weapons from other countries.
3. *Kicking Baby Considered To Be Healthy* – if you kick a baby it is a healthy (good) thing to do. The writer wishes to say that when a baby kicks in the womb it is a sign of good health.
4. *Miners Refuse to Work after Death* – after a miner has died it is very difficult for him to work! The story is about a strike which was called after a miner died in a work accident.
5. *Milk Drinkers are Turning to Powder* – people who drink milk are suddenly reduced to powder. The intended meaning is that people are now choosing to drink milk which is not fresh but in powdered form.
6. *Queen Mary Having Bottom Scraped* – a queen is having a delicate operation on her backside. The reader needs to know that the 'Queen Mary' is a ship, which is currently having repair work done on her keel.
7. *Stolen Painting Found by Tree* – this tree was very clever, it helped the police find a painting. Clearly the correct interpretation is that someone found the painting next to the tree.
8. *Two Sisters Reunite after Eighteen Years at Checkout Counter* – it is suggested that the sisters spent 18 years waiting at a checkout counter. The reporter should have written that they reunited at a checkout; it was 18 years since they had seen each other.

9. *Two Soviet Ships Collide - One Dies* – it is implied that one of the ships died after the collision, while clearly it is a sailor who died after the collision of the two ships.
10. *New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group* – it seems that they need even larger or fatter people to study. Instead they are looking for a test group with more people in it.

Task 2: *Same story, different headlines*

A. These headlines refer to the release of two Italian hostages in Iraq, 2004. Stories 2 and 6 concentrate on the positive angle, i.e. that there is joy about their release. The angle of 1, 2, 3 and 4 is instead on a ransom payment (strongly denied by the Italian Government), a destabilising suggestion. All propose the payment as a fact rather than a possibility. Story 1 says that spies were involved, creating a very negative implication. In 3, the claims were *shrugged* off implying that they were unimportant, and the money was *handed over*, rather than *paid*, suggesting illegality; that a large amount of cash was paid in shady circumstances. Stories 4 and 5 are based on different angles of the purported payment; 4 connects the payment to the hostages as a 'price', and 5 to the Italian Government.
B. These headlines about the opening of the Winter Olympics, Turin 2006, were from the news pages. The stabilising, favourable aspect is found in stories 7 and 8 (both from Australian papers with limited involvement in the event), which refer to the opening ceremony. Story 3, generally stabilising and favourable is less secure, implying that the real business of the games is very different from the opening ceremony.

There is a hint of potential destabilisation, or fear that something may go wrong generally (1, 6), because of unwanted interruptions (2), security infringements (4), or doping scandals (5).

Task 3: *Omission*

1. D.	2. G.	3. J.	4. A.	5. C.	6. H.	7. E.	8. I.	9. F.	10. B.

Task 4: *Gimmicks*

1. Homophone: *cereal* is pronounced in the same way as *serial* killer.
2. Alliteration: repetition of the C, K sound.
3. Rhyme (crime/time), also a play on words recalling the idiom *a sign of the times* a rather ominous suggestion that the situation will not improve.
4. A pun based on Intertextuality: *My Fur lady* echoes *My Fair Lady* (musical film based on the play 'Pygmalion', where a girl is transformed into a mem-

ber of high society). Zara, the Queen's grand-daughter, thus a member of high society, wore a fur jacket to a charity event.

5. A pun based on a homophone: *Cruz* plays on the words *Who's*. The utterance is typical of baby language.
6. Homophone: *banned aid* (help refused) = *bandaid* (cerotto).
7. Homophone: *Sienn* (actress Sienna Miller) sounds the same as *seein*(*g*); the accompanying picture shows her playing with a torch at a publicity event.
8. Alliteration: repetition of the P sound.
9. Homophone: *Push* (Posh Spice or Victoria Beckham) *and shove* is to push rudely from behind, in this case because she was angry. There is also intertextuality, as well known phrases are recalled.
10. A pun based on a homophone: *Purrfect* plays on the word *purr* (what cats do when they are content) and is pronounced in the same way as *perfect*. *Pawtrait* (pronounced as *portrait*) plays on the word *paw* (zampa). There is also alliteration in repetition of the P sound.

Task 5: *Verbs*

Headlines 1 and 4 are in the present simple tense, although the meaning is 'past' in the context of these headlines.

No. 2 and 8 use past participles, i.e. the passive voice, omitting the auxiliary verb and the agent.

No. 6 is in the active form of the past simple, refers to past events, and presumes to quote someone directly involved.

No. 5, 7 and 9 use the infinitive to refer to the future.

No. 3 (conditional) and 10 (modal) use mitigating forms.