A Stylistic Analysis of English Newspapers of Assam with Special Emphasis on *The Assam Tribune* and *The Sentinel*

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The Assam Tribune

Introduction

English print journalism gained ground in Assam towards the end of the 19th century .The publication of the first English newspaper, *The Times of Assam* (1895-1947), which started as a weekly edition, added a new chapter in the history of English journalism. This article draws attention to the fact that, how in a state, where English is not the native language, is the practice of writing in newspapers (in a non-native language) be at par with the journalistic style and structure, compared to other National English dailies. In other words, it aims at investigating the linguistic style of English newspapers - both non-extinct and current in Assam - vis-à-vis the change that has come about since the publication of the first English newspaper. However, it is to be mentioned in this context that most of the English newspapers of yesteryears like *The Weekly Express, Nagarik, News Star, North East Times, Eastern Clarion, News Front, North East Observer*, etc., were short-lived and their copies (except *The Times of Assam*) are not available for reference. Therefore, in this paper the discussion would be based on data from *The Times of Assam* (a few issues are available for reference.), *The Sentinel* and *The Assam Tribune* - the latter two, being the most circulated dailies at present.



1. A Brief History

The weekly *Eastern Herald* (1898-1901) existed only for a short period, and dealt with "Politics, morals and society", including provincial and local news and the social evils of the Indian society. It reproduced news items from the then leading national papers like *Pioneer Mail* and *Pioneer*. This reproduction could be called a special feature of this paper.

Though *Eastern Herald* couldn't last long, it paved the way for the publication of a second English paper in Assam in 1902, namely, *The Citizen*, which continued its publication for five years. After this, *The Advocate of Assam* appeared as a weekly paper in 1905. It supported the 'Swadeshi' and 'Swaraj' movements and focused on its attention on politics, agriculture, economics and sanitation. The interests of the people of Assam were given much attention in the columns of this paper. Its tagline was –

"Born of the People

Fed by the People

For Whom should I work

But for the people."

-Bradlaugh

The Advocate of Assam published articles condemning the policy of the government as 'unsympathetic and retrograde'. During that time Indian elites were influenced by economic and industrial development. While voicing against the then existing land laws of Assam it said, "The ryot cannot look upon his land as something which he permanently owns, he feels no abiding interest in it and cares not to improve it to the extent he would have otherwise done". Another short-lived English newspaper, Assam Chronicle was simultaneously published in 1905. Since it couldn't impact the society much, a weekly newspaper, Assam Herald came up in 1912 published by the same editor. At the closure of the fourth decade of the 20th century, The Assam Tribune with R. G. Baruah as its pioneer appeared as a weekly paper since 4th August 1939 and it is under circulation till today. Since 30th Sept. 1946, it started appearing as a daily from Guwahati after being shifted from Dibrugarh. The tag line of this daily at present is "71 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE NATION". Then came Sentinel which started its publication on 13 April, 1983 and is still running, with a tagline, "Of this land, for its people".

2. Approach to the study of stylistic features

The genre of newspaper language (as is written) has been termed as *Journalese* and therefore it is important for the readers to be acquainted with this term. *Webster* defines *Journalese* as- "English of a style featured by use of colloquialisms, superficiality of thought or reasoning, clever or sensational presentation of material, and evidence of haste in composition, considered characteristic of newspaper writing."

Today's journalistic style has the following characteristics (Ref. Ch.5 *Journalism and Mass Communication*)

i) Compact, usually short sentences, every word selected and placed for maximum effect.

ii) Short, terse paragraphs, each complete in itself and capable of being removed without destroying the sense of the story.

iii) Conciseness, directness and simplicity through elimination of unnecessary words and phrases.

- iv) Factual without editorial opinions and dogmatic expressions.
- v) 'Strong' verbs and nouns preferred over hackneyed words and expressions.
- vi) Observance of grammatical and word usage rules.

It would therefore be feasible to see different parts of the newspaper and the type of language used therein and thereby see the variations across different newspapers (here *The Times of Assam, The Sentinel* and *The Assam Tribune*) published from Assam. The different parts are discussed as follows-

Lead: It is the first paragraph or introduction of a news story that gives the summary of the news to follow. Examples are cited below-

1) In view of the resolution passed by the A.I.C.C about hunger-strike and Pandit Jawaharlal's telegram to them asking them to suspend <u>hunger-strike hunger-strikers</u> in Meerut Conspiracy Case have resolved to suspend hunger-strike from tomorrow. (The Times of Assam ;5th Oct 1929)

2) Amid high drama, a <u>Hong Kong bound Air India aircraft</u> was grounded at IGI Airport here <u>today</u> <u>following a call that</u> "two terrorists" carrying explosives were on board but the call turned out to be a hoax, <u>the fifth such incident this week</u>. The Airbus A 310 on a flight from Mumbai to Hong Kong with a halt at Delhi <u>was thoroughly combed</u> by security agencies... (The Sentinel ;PTI Nov. 1, 2002)

3) <u>A Hong Kong bound Air India aircraft</u>, which was detained at IGI Airport here <u>following a call</u> that two of its passengers were carrying explosives, took off this afternoon after security personnel <u>thoroughly combed</u> the plane to find it to be a hoax, <u>the fifth such incident this week</u>.

(The Assam Tribune ;PTI Nov.1, 2002)

4) There is now no difficulty in getting Assamese contractors for any work, whether big or small, so much so that the Assamese contractors are now available even for opening out Tea Gardens and completing them with factory and machinery... (The Times of Assam; 15th June 1929)

5) Panic over the <u>Anna movement</u> has also gripped <u>Dispur</u> that has instructed those <u>at the helm</u> of security affairs of the state assembly and the capital complex to ensure full security...

(The Sentinel 27 Aug. 2011)

6) <u>Sounding the war bugle</u> against all projects that would prove <u>detrimental</u> to the State, the KMSS said that a public convention would be held on July 6 at Lakhimpur and another meet would be held on July 10 at Gogamuk. (The Assam Tribune ;24th June 2008)

Byline: It is the line giving the name of the writer of a story or article.

The Times of Assam	i) A Meerut message of Sept. 29 says:-ii) A local correspondent writes
The Sentinel	iii) A NYT report on Wednesday quoted editors as sayingiv) By our Staff Reporter
The Assam Tribune	v) By a Staff Reporter, Gauhati, Jan2.vi) CORRESPONDENT

Headline: It is the heading or caption of a newspaper article.

- i) Meerut Accused Suspend Hunger Strike
- ii) Breeds Ancient and Modern
- iii) India Lodge Complaint with NZC
- v) India lodge complaint to NZ
- iv) AI plane grounded amid hoax call

vi) AI flight takes off for Hong Kong after being cleared

Inference

In Lead No.1 the term 'hunger-strike' is repeated thrice and 'them' repeated twice in the same sentence without any punctuation, sounds clumsy.

2 & 3 are leads on the same report (from same source PTI) where the underlined terms are common. But the difference lies in the usage of 'grounded' and 'detained' in the two different dailies.

No.4 begins with a statement which is subjective in tone.

In No.5 'Anna Movement' is a newspaper-coined term associated with a special individual (Anna Hazare); and term Dispur (state capital of Assam) is personified in this context.

No.6 uses an idiom (underlined part) which is in hyperbolic sense; and the term 'detrimental' takes the place of rather a simpler word like 'harmful'.

The bylines in all the three newspapers are different as seen.

The headline is one of the most interesting and attractive part of any newspaper and it varies across newspaper to newspaper in terms of structure and style. The quoted headline Nos. (i) & (ii) are in inverted pyramid structure and significantly each of the word begins with upper-case, followed by lower-case.

Nos. (iii) & (v) are on the same report, where the former is double-decked and the latter single. Additionally, the acronyms also vary; NZC refers to cricket while NZ is not indicative of the same even if placed in the Sports page of a newspaper.

Nos. (iv) & (vi) are also on the same report but the former appears in single deck and the latter in three, and which doesn't hint at the reason for 'being cleared', unlike the former, giving the gist of the report.

Advertisements

Advertisements are an integral part of a newspaper. These promote goods and/or services and, in doing so, use less focused words. The features (including picture) are presented in different fonts & styles according to their order of importance. Moreover, the newer editions of newspapers play with words which have a different connotation (as 'DIESEL SHOOTOUT' in Ad iii).

Levels of Style

The two levels of the stylistic features of the language used are lexical and grammatical. Let us take sentences from the newspapers and analyze them under both these levels.

Examples:

(i) "... Capt. Benn has the reputation of commanding an impressive personality, being an able Parliamentarian with a capacity for grasp of details. He was one of Asquith's right hand men in the Liberal Party from 1910 to the beginning of the war, in which he has a distinguished record, and is said to be one of the most popular members of every Parliament in which he sat. It remains to be seen, however, how Capt. Benn acquits himself in his new office at this critical moment of Indian history." (*The Times of Assam*, 15th June 1929)

i.i The quoted report starts with present tense, but in the second sentence with the usage of 'was' in the beginning and that of 'has' (present perfect aspect) towards the end creates an inconsistency of tense and aspect. Moreover, in the very sentence the adjective 'distinguished' (as in 'distinguished record') has been applied to a non-human entity which is generally restricted to persons in its common usage, like 'a distinguished person'. There is also a repetition of the relative clause 'in which' (2nd sentence). The first occurrence of the clause creates confusion whether it refers back to the 'Liberal Party' or to 'the war'. The second occurrence (....in which he sat...) leaves a scope of modification like – "... one of the most popular members of every parliament he sat in."

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i.ii Here, *right hand men* implies 'most helpful and reliable men'. 'Captain' is replaced by the short form Capt. Moreover, the expression 'It remains to be seen' is more of a colloquial form than that of standard and is no longer found in modern day newspaper language.

ii) <u>Shillong Notes</u>

... So far, so good; but since midday yesterday our good fortune has changed and incessant rain has stopped all sports' tournaments and became so heavy by evening as to look like affecting the attendance at the Govt. House ball fixed for last night. This, however, did not happen to any great extent, as the downpour moderated shortly before the hour fixed for the dance to begin and most guests were thereby enabled to attend without much difficulty. The ball-room was very prettily decorated with two rows of large hanging baskets of tastefully arranged flowers suspended from the ceiling and extending the whole length of the room and flanked by mural floral decorations." (The Times of Assam, Shillong, 5 June 1929, Correspondent)

ii.i The report has several parenthetic clauses. Though parenthetic clauses are intended to 'add information', the linkages are sometimes structurally lost i.e., confusion arises as to what refers back to what. In the given example '... rain has stopped all sports' tournaments and became so heavy by evening...' does not make it clear whether the rain or the tournament is heavy.

ii.ii The words like- incessant rain and downpour are synonymous and probably intended to avoid repetition of the same word 'rain'. But contrasting this, the term tournament (in sports' tournament) itself refers to sports and therefore it is rather redundant to say "sports' tournament" than simply 'tournament'. However, the last line is too descriptive and therefore loaded with several clauses and this doesn't fulfill the criteria that newspaper language is intended only to give information rather than being too descriptive.

iii) The export of jute goods from India to Egypt will continue to be important in view of the growing Egyptian demand and insufficient production in that country (1) says the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry in a trade analysis.(2)

(The Assam Tribune, pg.7 1962)

iii.i The phrase 'in view of' is archaic and has undergone changes.

iii.ii There is no punctuation between (1) and (2) as in '- says the ...'. The economy of words is not maintained here. For example, 'in that country' could be replaced by 'there'. 'jute goods' has now been modified into 'jute products' as found in today's newspapers.

As a part of stylistic study, especially of newspaper English, there are parameters of 'layers of usage'the literary layer (bookish character), the colloquial layer (lively spoken character and the neutral (universal character) layer. This classification given by I. R. Galperin, 'reflects to a great extent the mobility of the lexical system so characteristic of the English language at its present stage of development'. Owing to the fact that a newspaper enjoys a special freedom and acceptability of using a compact language, neological and connotative words replace a general word used in common prose

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pieces. Moreover, substitution of one word for another is aimed at giving special effect. For example in extracts like-

i) AGP blasts Congress government for misgovernance, graft (The Sentinel, Dec.24, 2012) - uses the word 'blast', connoting a strong tone of criticism.

ii) ... The accident took place when the speedy jeep slipped off the road and turned turtle... (The Assam Tribune, Aug 21, 1981) uses an informal idiom (underlined part) generally associated with boat; but here, it is used in the context of a jeep.

iii) "Gangs of Wasseypur" wowed both critics and audience alike. (The Sentinel, 24th Dec 2012) - substitutes a neutral word like 'impressed' with 'wowed' in order to give an informal effect.

The words given below have been extracted from different newspapers and are categorized on the basis of the 'levels of usage'.

	Literary	Colloquial	Neutral
Standard	consigned to flames		cremate
	Retard	Stop	prevent
	Protract	Long	prolong
		Scam	scandal
	kick-off	start/begin	start/begin
	Plea		request
	Asset	property	property
	pall of gloom	gloomy	gloomy
	Sympathiser	supporter	supporter
	Chic	stylish	stylish/fashionable
	Journalist	Scribe	reporter
	Tantamount	Equal	equivalent
Non-standard	Fund	Kitty	Fund
		high-voltage	exciting
		capped	scored
	exchange words/conversation	dialogue	discussion
	Taxi	Cab	taxi
		Lull	calm
		comfy	Comfortable
		scores	so many
		pump in	Allot
	Spellbound	wowed	Impressed

4. Deviation vis-à-vis word and sentence levels

The phenomenon of change in written language, especially in newspapers, can be found both in the word and sentence levels. In so far as the history of English newspaper publication is concerned, it has crossed three centuries- the 19th, 20th, and 21st in Assam, and every century carries certain features along with the inevitable linguistic changes. This is because the coinage of new terms and expressions in colloquial English has influenced the newspaper language in course of time. In the initial stage English newspapers of Assam were found to use a formal language, which required very long sentences. But with the passage of time and the need to economize the number of word-usage in

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modern English newspapers are comparatively simpler in language as intended to be intelligible and attractive to the readers.

4.1 Lexical aspects

There are many words/phrases (including spellings) and expressions of the archaic English newspapers which are no longer in use today. Some of them are listed below.

Word/phrase	<u>Replaced/ modified term/ modified spelling*</u>
compounder Babu	Pharmacist
officiating clerk	clerk
organising manager	manager
lorry	truck
colloquial fluency	fluency of local language
province	state
disquieting feature	disturbing
death-roll	death-toll
p.c/ per cent	%
townsmen	localite
sometime a chairman	former Chairman
put out of action	ineffective
at dead of night	in wee hours
melee	fight
emergent	upcoming
remarkable degree	remarkably
capital remedy	complete cue
perused	detailed examination
in constant succession	constantly

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sympathizer	supporter
speaker	spokesperson
place of occurrence	spot
functionaries	officials
mandap	Pandal
miilennium*	Millennium
dissappear*	disappear
transhipment*	transshipment
Moslem*	Muslim
Quoran*	Quran

4.2 Grammatical features

4.2.1 Cluttering of sentences

The usage of more than required words to convey a message is 'clutter'. Sometimes two consecutive paragraphs may comprise two lines only. However, this cluttering of sentences is evident in most of the English newspapers. Moreover, the object to the respective subject (in a sentence) could be missed out due to cluttering. This is illustrated with an example given below-

i) BJP's national general secretary and party's Assam in-charge (1) Vijay Goel today said <u>that though</u> he was not sure (2) of the exact number of <u>seats that would be won by the BJP in the Assam Assembly</u> <u>elections (3)</u> he was certain <u>that his party would form the next in the State</u>.(4) (The Sentinel)

In this report the underlined portion shows that the intended object (government) is not clear. Here (1) is the complement of the subject (Vijay Goel); (2) is the subordinate clause; (3) is the adjective clause and (4) is the subordinate clause .Again (2) &(4) are embedded clauses. (The Assam Tribune)

4.2.2 Usage of more embedded clauses thus causing ambiguity:

The controversy over <u>what is known as(1)</u> 'Pabbi trial issue'-<u>an echo of the July disturbances of 1960</u> (2)-revived today <u>when the report into the inquiry(3)conducted by Sri A.K. Choudhury, Additional</u> <u>District Magistrate, Gauhati, (4) into the matter</u> (5) <u>was delivered in the Court(6)</u>.

(The Assam Tribune, 1962, pg.7)

Here, the relative clause (1) splits the subject where (2) is its appositive of the NP;(3) is also an adverbial clause for NP .Again (4) is an appositive inserted into the adverbial clause ; Anomaly is also created by insertion of (5) between (3) and (6).

4.2.3. Non-intelligibility of complex sentences

"Geof Pullar and Vijay Mehra causalities in the England and India teams in the Fourth Test match (1) due to sickness and finger injury respectively (2), may soon be fit (3), it was learnt here today from official sources."

In this example (1) is a modifier for the main clause "Geof Pullar and Vijay Mehra may soon be fit ..." But the consecutive occurrence of parts (2) and (3) creates confusion to locate the cataphora. In other words, the subordinate clauses (1) and (2) occur between the subject and the complement

4.2.4 Usage of Figures of Spee	ch
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Figure of speech	Example	Gloss.	
Metaphor	Flagship	most important or leading member of a group	
	reel life	on-screen life	
Metonymy	Press/newsmen/scribe	People writing for newspapers	
	Kitty	Fund	
	Grass-root	Primary	
	wee hours	early morning	
	Person	face	
	counterpart	A person or thing having the same function or characteristics as another	
Euphemistic term	pass away/expire/ no more	to die	
Idiom	•	b be involved in too many things; to have no many tasks going to be able to do any of them well	
	rule the roost	be dominant	
	leave in the lurch	to leave someone in a difficult situation	
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	helm of affairs	the ruling party/government	
	remain in force	valid	
	egg on urge on	cause to act	
Religious		estation of a Hindu deity (especially Vishnu) in n or superhuman or animal form	
	Jehad	A holy war waged by Muslims against infidels.	
Hyperbole	high voltage contest battled against each other	Exciting contest Fought against each other	
Periphrasis	tie the nuptial knot military equipment	Marry Weapons	
Slang	Сор	Police	
	Info	Information	
	Savvy	Someone who understands	
	Coke	Coca-cola/cocaine	
	Snap	Expression of dismay, surprise, joy, etc.	
	Ace	Excellent/great	
	Bucks	Money	
	Proxy	Agent/middleman	
	Haywire	Crazy	
Competation		חזת	
Connotation	saffron party	BJP	
	The Black Caps	the New Zealand cricket team	
	Oz	Australian cricket team	
	Didi	Mamta Banerjee	
	The Men in Blue	Indian cricket team	
Bonsai format of cricket T20 cricket Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:8 August 2013			

American nemesis

Serena Williams

Verbal dual

Debate

Personification: ... another severely injured in the *ill-fated* vehicle has since been shifted......

.....*Dispur* that has <u>instructed</u> those at the helm of security affairs.....)

.....separatism and regionalism which are raising their ugly <u>heads</u>

....Chemotherapy narrows woman's **<u>reproductive</u>** window.

.....Malcolm's resume not exactly cause Bolt <u>sleepless</u> nights.

4.2.4 Parallelism

This device matches 'phrase against phrase, clause against clause' .Additionally, it helps in ellipsis because of the underlying logic of parallelism, the reader can easily fill in the gaps from his own recognition of the 'common denominator of the series'. Following are examples of this kind.

i) AGP has blamed the Tarun Gogoi led Congress government for its failure to check <u>corruption</u>, <u>solve</u> <u>illegal foreigners' problem</u>, <u>create employment avenues and develop the State in all sectors</u> during the 12 years of its rule.

ii) Yuvraj batted well in the first game, while Dhoni and Raina got a few in the second.

4.2.5 Grammatical connotation of nonce terms

There are expressions which are used for certain grammatical purposes, i.e. behaving as another part of speech, deviating from a general category. The illustrations (taken from newspapers) given below are indicative of this.

i) <u>Go-Manmohan</u> chorus; Anna-fever (the underlined parts serves as an adjective)

ii) Euro <u>bailout</u> package worth 110bn for Greece Okayed. (The underlined word, though a verb, acts as modifier 'package'.)

iii) Anna fever grips Dispur. (Anna is a proper noun but, here, acts as modifier for 'fever')

iv) ... former Telecom Minister who has been <u>charge-sheeted</u>......(the underlined word is a derived verb form for noun 'chargesheet')

v) The Indian women's cricket team rode on a disciplined <u>bowling performance</u> to register a <u>10-run</u> <u>win</u>... and inflict a 3-0 whitewash on the visitors here today. (The first underlined expression is a noun with 'disciplined' as its modifier; the second underlined term again is a modifier for 'win' of the dependent clause.)

The analysis of an English newspaper unfolds the usage of different stylistic devices, both lexical, grammatical or lexico-grammatical. The publication of English newspapers of Assam, since its inception in late 19th c. has not been linear till the emergence of The Assam Tribune and The Sentinel. Currently these two dailies serve the purpose of letting the people (especially the non-native speakers) know the day to day happenings and the affairs of the state through the voice of the local writers, correspondents and reporters. Apart from it, the occasional usage of local terms gives a native flavour, a feature found in National English dailies as well. Moreover, the significant features of the newer newspaper editions include the substitution of archaic word for new, usage of different figures of speech, the simplification of sentences along with the element of colloquialism, etc., making the newspapers intelligible and enjoyable for the readers.

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