A PRELIMINARY COMPARISON OF AMERICAN AND UZBEK NEWS WRITING

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Background

Of all the countless genres of written communication made available to us in our daily lives, news-related articles are among the most important. The purpose of this article is to provide topically relevant and interesting information to the public in a clear, reader-friendly manner, explicitly focusing on the main facts and details about the people, places, and events targeted in the reports. As such, certain grammatical generalizations can be made about the genre of news writing. For example, news articles often contain more noun phrases than verb phrases compared to genres of spoken communication and even other genres of written communication (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan, 1999). From a stylistic standpoint, news writing is unique compared to other types of writing because of its purpose and strict guidelines within the field of journalism (e.g., Associated Press [AP] style for reporting in the United States).

Applied linguists have involved news writing in a variety of studies in order to analyze word frequencies, themes of articles, and more (Webb & Nation, 2013). However, most of these studies have featured news articles based in only one country. The purpose of our preliminary study is to conduct surface-level lexical, grammatical, and stylistic comparisons among two sets of English newspaper articles derived from American and Uzbek news sources (i.e., two articles from

Uzbekistan Today and two articles from US News & World Report for a total of four articles). Specifically, we seek answers to the following questions:

- To what extent are the articles lexically and grammatically similar?
- To what extent are the articles stylistically similar?

It should be noted that we carefully use the term *preliminary* here to emphasize that our study is an initial test of sorts grounded in curiosity, and from this point, a great potential exists for further studies to be conducted in this area. Ultimately, our results revealed several similarities between the two sets of articles. In this paper, we have outlined the methods, results, and limitations of our study.

Methods

The first step of this study was to select which articles from which newspapers would be compared. Initially, the Tashkent-based newspaper *Uzbekistan Today*(*UT*)was an obvious choice, as it is the most widely circulated English language newspaper in Uzbekistan. We examined several issues of *UT* in search of articles that contained universal topics or themes even though many of the names and places featured therein might be localized. Two articles entitled "An Artist without Borders" and "Cell Phones Help Healthcare" which report on a local artist and how health tips can be disseminated through text messages, respectively, were eventually chosen. From there, the task of finding two American newspaper articles became more concentrated. First, to increase the reliability of a lexical comparison between two texts, it is crucial that the number of running words in each text is similar if not identical (Nation & Webb, 2013), so finding articles with a comparable word count was our top priority. Second, we searched for articles that contained art-related and health-related themes, as we desired topical consistency between the two sets of articles, and we also sought to make sure that the two articles came from the same newspaper to help ensure stylistic consistency. As a result, we found two articles from the online version of *US News & World Report*(*USNWR*) (www.usanews.com) entitled "Brazilian artist Vik Muniz turns his attentions to the soccer ball with new documentary" and "Cellphones can Change Global Health for the Better," respectively, which report on essentially the same themes and have a similar word count to their counterpart articles.

Once the articles were finally selected, we had to decide on the comparison criteria. This, of course, yields infinite possibilities, as there is a seemingly endless

number of different lexical and grammatical features that could potentially be compared. Because our study is, once again, preliminary, we opted to keep it simple for the time being. In terms of lexical features, we chose to compare the word frequencies of the most common words in the English language (K1 and K2 words, or words on the list of the 1,000 most common words and the list of the 2,000 most common words, respectively), the frequencies of words from the academic word list (AWL), and the number of shared words and word families between the two sets of articles. These were calculated using the Compleat Lexical Tutor online software—specifically the VocabProfile (Web VP) and RANGE (Nation & Heatley, 2002) programs. In terms of grammatical features, we chose to compare the number of sentences in each text, the average number of words per sentence in each text, and the number of prepositional phrases in each text. Prepositional phrases were chosen because they complement the high number of noun phrases typically found in news articles.These were all counted manually by one of the authors. In terms of stylistic features, some general observations were noted.

Results

The results of our study involving a comparison of lexical features are summarized in the tables below:

Table 1: *A comparison of select lexical features between the first two English news articles about art from Uzbek and American sources*

Title of Article	Source	Word (Token) Count	K1 Word Count	K2 Word Count	AWL Word Count	Word Families	Shared Tokens & Families
"An Artist without Borders"	UT	759	587 (77.3%)	22 (2.9%)	47 (6.19%)	236	436 (57.8%) tokens; 78 (24.8%) families
"Brazilian artist Vik Muniz…"	USNWR	737	513 (69.6%)	46 (6.2%)	34 (4.6%)	255	

*The RANGE Program cannot calculate word families for unlisted words

Table 2:*A comparison of select lexical features between the second two English news articles about cell phones and healthfrom Uzbek and American sources*

Title of Article	Source	Word (Token) Count	K1 Word Count	K2 Word Count	AWL Word Count	Word Families	Shared Tokens & Families
"Cell Phones Help Healthcare"	UT	440	286 (65%)	45 (10.2%)	58 (13.2%)	150	256 (57.5%) tokens;
"Cellphones can Change…"	USNWR	488	338 (69.2%)	41 (8.4%)	43 (8.8%)	182	71 (32.1%) families

*The RANGE Program cannot calculate word families for unlisted words

The results of our study involving a comparison of grammatical features are summarized in the tables below:

Table 3:*A comparison of select grammatical features between the first two English newsarticles about artfrom Uzbek and American sources*

Title of Article	Source	Word (Token) Count	Sentence Count	Average Number of Words/Sentence	Prepositional Phrase Count
"An Artist without Borders"	UT	759	30	25	123
"Brazilian artist Vik Muniz…"	USNWR	737	23	32	90

Table 4:*A comparison of select grammatical features between the second two English news articles about cell phones and healthfrom Uzbek and American newspapers*

Title of Article	Source	Word (Token) Count	Sentence Count	Average Number of Words/Sentence	Prepositional Phrase Count
"Cell Phones Help Healthcare"	UT	440	23	19	59
"Cellphones can Change…"	USNWR	478	19	25	58

Regarding stylistic elements of the articles, a few general observations can be made. First, all four articles contain several appositives to elaborate on certain

noun phrases (e.g., people) and several relative clauses. Second, both American news articles use contractions that were not part of direct quote. Third, both Uzbek articles include punctuation (i.e., periods and commas) outside of the end quotation mark after a direct quote, and one Uzbek article (i.e., "An Artist without Borders") uses double quotation marks within direct quotes instead of more customary single quotation marks. Fourth, while both American news articles adhere to AP style, only one of them (i.e., "Brazilian artist Vik Muniz turns his attentions to the soccer ball with new documentary") includes a lowercase title, which is more customary. Finally, both Uzbek articles were generally consistent with AP style overall, barring minor exceptions; for example, the article "An Artist without Borders" uses people's first names and surnames as they are mentionedthroughout the article multiple times instead of only referring to them by surname after the first time, which is customary in AP style.

Discussion

In the case of our preliminary study, we see that some aspects of the register of news writing are universal. While some stylist elements varied between the Uzbek and American articles, similarities abounded in the lexical and grammatical spheres.

Regarding the first research question, in terms of lexical features, it is noteworthy that over 57% of word tokens were shared between articles in both sets. In the articles about art, approximately 25% of word families (i.e., one out of every four) were shared, and in the articles about health, approximately 33% of word families (i.e., one out of every three) were shared. This can likely be attributed to the fact that the pairs of articles compared shared the same overall topic and themes (i.e., art and health), which increases the chances of certain topical vocabulary over the span of multiple articles. Of course, a significant number of shared words in each case were common function words including pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions, which appear in the K1 list. Another noteworthy observation is that the percentage of academic words in the Uzbek articles exceeded the percentage of academic words in their American article counterparts (i.e., 1.3% more academic words and 1.5% more academic words, respectively). Such formalities might be attributed to the some of the linguistic and cultural gaps between Uzbekistan and the English-speaking United States.

In terms of grammatical features, we initially mention that both articles contain a plethora of noun phrases and prepositional phrases, which is, as

previously mentioned, characteristic of the news writing register. All articles also have a relatively low number of sentences and, consequently, a relatively high average number of words in each sentence, the lowest being 19 and the highest being 32. The American articles, incidentally, contained more words in each sentence on average than their Uzbek article counterparts. Both Uzbek articles contained more prepositional phrases than their American article counterparts, yet there was nearly an equal number of them in articles about health (59 and 58, respectively). The similarities in the grammatical features of the articles are likely due to the writers' intentions to adhere to the conventions of news writing as opposed to the fact that both sets of articles shared topics and themes.

Regarding the second research question, there were overall stylistic similarities that can once again be attributed to the conventions of news writing. However, as mentioned before, the Uzbek articles were not completely consistent with AP style. Lastly, it cannot be determined exactly whether the fact that the Uzbek articles contained punctuation outside of end quotation marks was a stylistic choice or a mechanical error on behalf of the authors.

Conclusion

Over time, the number of English-medium newspapers and other periodicals in Uzbekistan will likely increase. *Uzbekistan Today* is a prime linguistic example of how globalization and shifting national interests are affecting Uzbekistan. In fact, it can likely be assumed that many journalists who write for this publication spent a significant amount of time in western English-speaking countries or at least studied and analyzed western publications at their universities, hence the similarities that exist between the Uzbek and American articles which were compared. This will prove to be an interesting and research-worthy trend to follow in the years to come. Indeed, some research has already been conducted in this sphere, and the number of futures studies is potentially vast. The implications behind such research could provide further insight in the fields of both TESOL and journalism and yield many benefits to those in nonnative English-speaking countries such as Uzbekistan whose careers involve written communication in the English language.

Limitations

Practically every study contains limitations, and ours is no exception. First, the most apparent limitation is our small sample size of articles and periodical

sources. As we mentioned before, our study is preliminary—an initial experiment—which is why, coupled with time and logistical constraints, we opted to start small by comparing only two sets of articles. Depending on the scope of one's study involving the comparison of multiple texts, the higher number of texts typically yields a more reliable analysis.On this note, we concede that the scope of our initial study comparatively lacks depth, as we intentionally chose to only focus on a limited number of lexical, grammatical, and stylistic features. Future research might prove beneficial in addressing a greater variety of features (e.g., grammatical comparisons at the phrasal level rather than the word level).Second, we recognize the discrepancy in the word count in both sets of articles (759 to 737 and 440 to 478, respectively). Again, because we restricted ourselves to finding articles pertaining to the same topic within the two specific publications, it was highly difficult to find articles with an exact or near exact word count.

Third, we must consider potential human and computer errors or inadvertent miscalculations.As mentioned before, one of the authors manually counted some of the grammatical features (i.e., number of sentences and number of prepositional phrases) in the four articles himself, and while he reread each article multiple times, it is still possible that he miscounted these features. Finally, it should be noted that there are some limitations with using the RANGE software; however, because our study had no major focus on vocabulary load or grammatical features at the phrasal level, this did not affect it.

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