

# A SMITHIAN DISCOURSE INTERPRETATION OF INDIAN NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS IN ENGLISH

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**ABSTRACT**--Editorials are opinion makers of a newspaper which provide a professional manner of argument on a particular issue or problem to promote a critical thinking among the readership. Each editorial varies from the other in terms of several factors- the issues it deals with, the features it makes use of, the way the language is used and how it influences the public opinion. Usually a pro-active solution to the problem or issue to make the condition better is what these editorials aim at. Discourse is a study of how we employ the language beyond the sentences. Discourse modes bridge the gap between the textual sentences and the abstract structure that it presents. Subjectivity, surface structure presentation and the features that the discourse modes have in common are my concerns of study. This paper takes a bird's eye view on the newspaper editorials from various newspapers to see the archetypes involved in it and also read it based on discourse analysis.

*Key words*--editorials, public opinion, discourse analysis, archetype.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Merriam Webster defines an editorial as a discourse from either a newspaper or a magazine that renders the view points of the publishing house. They provide a professional manner of argument on a particular issue or problem to promote a critical thinking among the readership. Usually featured on the editorial page which also publishes letters to the editor inviting letters from the common folk regarding the general issues, opposite is the Op-ed page which frequents the opinion pieces from the ad-hoc writers not directly from the establishment. Concerning the structure, like any other piece of writing, be it an article, or a news story, an editorial has a three-tier structure, comprising an introduction, body and conclusion. Mostly, editorials are unsigned. Tom Clark, the leader-writer of *The Guardian*, says that it will make sure that the reader contemplates the issue at hand more than the writer. Alan Weintraut in a tutorial on 'writing an editorial' categorizes the editorials into four on the basis of their functions- there are editorials that explain/ interpret, criticize, persuade and praise. According to him, a good editorial is a straight-forward explanation of issue/ controversy with a timely news angle, adorned with opinions from the opposition that refute it directly along with the writer's opinion delivered in a professional manner. It should hold back itself from the verbal taunts and other strategies of 'persuasion.'

When we unfold the pages of written history, we can see that Horace Greeley is credited with the introduction of 'Editorial Page' in the American newspaper *New York Tribune* in 1841. It was he who set aside the news reports from opinion writing, giving subjective voices its own room for the first time. Until the late nineteenth century, the US press was sealed with opinionated news stories which were harvested and consumed by the political parties

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of the time. In 1801, Alexander Hamilton started *The New York Post* as a common ground from which the Federalist party declared its perceptions, including the assault on Thomas Jefferson. The astounding success of the first penny newspaper initiated by the young medical student Benjamin Day paved the way for non- partisan reporting.

The Indian history of Newspapers drew its breath with the publication of *The Bengal Gazette* by James Augustus Hickey. It was in Bengali that the first Indian language Newspaper came out, named as the *Samachar Darpan* on May 23, 1818 from the Serampore Mission Press. Later, the regional language Newspapers *Bombay Samachar* (Gujarati) and *Samachar Sudhavarshan* (Hindi) were put out. Because of the effective strategies of marketing and the thriving literacy rate in India, the circulation of regional papers rose to a great limit.

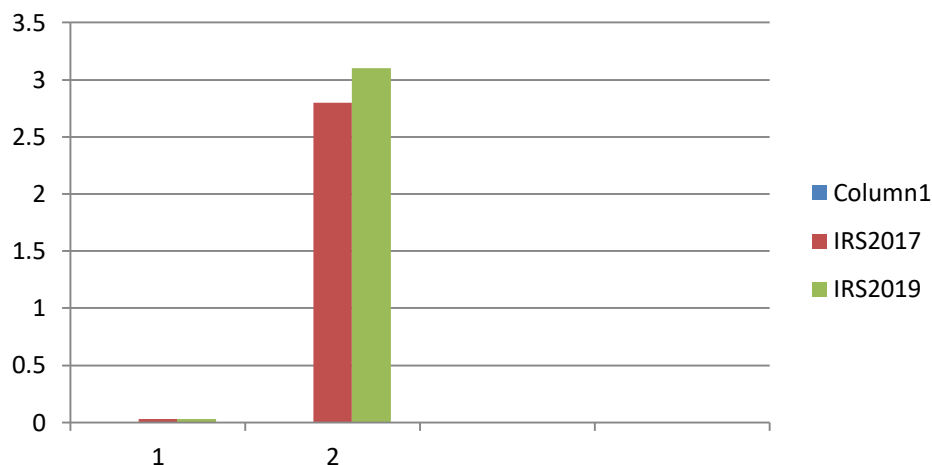
Today, Indian print media, offering a majority of national and international news coverage stands tall in the business world of media. Within three years after the independence, the country hosted 214 daily Newspapers. It is interesting to note that 44 of them were English language dailies. By 2007, India became one among the countries where the world’s most number of Newspaper dailies was published. As of 2007, it occupied the position of the second arena for the world Newspapers. The last one decade witnessed a tremendous change in the field where all the impulsive Newspaper media outlets have an associating news website. According to the Indian Readership Survey 2019, out of 3.1 Crores of readers in India, 2.9% of them read at least a single daily in English. See the table 1.

**Table1: THE GROWTH OF READERS FOR ENGLISH DAILIES IN INDIA**

Read in Last 1 Month	ALL INDIA		URBAN		RURAL	
	IRS 2017	IRS Q1 2019	IRS 2017	IRS Q1 2019	IRS 2017	IRS Q1 2019
Any Hindi Dailies	17%	17%	21%	21%	15%	15%
Readers in Crores	17.6	18.6	7.6	8.0	10.0	10.6
		+1.0 Cr		+0.4 Cr		+0.6 Cr
Any Regional Dailies	19%	20%	28%	28%	15%	15%
Readers in Crores	20.3	21.1	10.3	10.6	10.0	10.5
		+0.8 Cr		+0.3 Cr		+0.5 Cr
Any English Dailies	2.7%	2.9%	6.5%	7%	0.6%	0.7%
Readers in Crores	2.8	3.1	2.3	2.6	0.5	0.5
		+0.3 Cr		+0.3 Cr		+0.0Cr

IRS Q1 2019 consists of Q2, Q3, Q4 2017 and Q1 2019

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**Figure 1:** the growth of readers for english dailies in india

Discourse is a study of how we employ the language beyond the sentences. As textual units, Discourse modes bridge the gap between the textual sentences and the abstract structure that it presents. Subjectivity, surface structure presentation and the features that the discourse modes have in common are my concerns of study. This article aims at identifying the editorials from various Indian English newspapers belonging to various discourse modes as explained by Carlotta S Smith in the work *Modes of Discourse* and also examines the various features of each of these modes identified and thirdly, it analyses the above discourse on the basis of discourse analysis put forward by the writer.

Discourse is explained by Michael Foucault as “an entity of sequences, of signs, in that they are enouncements.” In simple terms, discourse is a spoken or written communication. Novels, short stories, biographies, newspaper articles, arguments etc come under this umbrella term. Since these genres serve different purposes and possess different structures, they require different methods of analysis at the level of larger units or passages. It was the Centennial Professor of Linguistics at the University of Texas, Carlotta S Smith who offered a new approach of studying discourse passages by introducing the concept of ‘discourse.’ She categorized five modes of discourse accordingly in her seminal work ‘Modes of Discourse.’ They are the modes of narrative, report, description, information and argument. Though the linguistic correlates differentiate these modes, she contends that, passages in literary discourses belong to any of these modes.

Following are the key ideas of *Modes Of Discourse* that will be explored through various editorial examples selected and then present multiple analysis of passages in which all of them are exhibited.

#### 1. Situation Type

Sentences vary according to the situations that it offers. According to Smith, Events and States are the basic situation types employed in the universe of discourse along with General Statives and abstract entities.

#### 2. Text progression

Smith explains several tenets of textual progression among the discourse modes. In a narrative inter-related situation, dynamic events advance narrative time whereas in reports, forward and backward time progress and Speech Time related situations can be witnessed. Though the time is static in Description, the text moves on in a

spatial manner. The atemporal modes of Information and Argument ‘progress by a metaphorical path through the domain of the text.’(Smith, 13).

### 3. Subjectivity

It means the writer’s mind or text participant. For each meaningful communication, the presence of a Responsible source should be felt.

### 4. Surface Structure Presentation

It includes those features that structure the information in a sentence, usually into a topic, and detail the focus and background. It depends on ‘syntactic surface structure, the linear and grammatical position of phrases.’(Smith,13).

## II. ANALYSIS OF THE PASSAGES

For the multiple analysis of different discourse modes, editorials from various Indian English Newspapers – *The New Indian Express*, *Times of India*, *The Hindu* and *Hindustan Times* are selected. They are examined in the light of Smithian modes of discourse- Report, Narratives, Description, Information and Argument.

### *Editorial 1*

The editorial passage published in *New Indian Express* on 05<sup>th</sup> March 2020 which is presented as a report details how the Corona virus epidemic creates dismay for the state as well as the individual. Even the heading (**‘Responding to the coronavirus epidemic without panic’**) is suggestive of the theme. The editorial then goes on to elaborate the preventive measures the government has already taken and is also conscious while warning the readers that the individual hygiene is of utmost importance in the fight against this deadly virus. There is a shift in the mode of discourse in the fourteenth sentence to the narrative. Since the passage uses third person narration, the participant and the narrator are different. The third person pronoun woven into the passage conveys subjectivity. The topic phrase typically is the subject in s-v-o sentences. Change in tenses (past perfect in the fourth sentence, ‘had crossed’ and again present tense is used in the fifth sentence, ‘is the worst’) and spatial locations are common in a report. For instance, in the above report, the location shifts from India to China and comes back. The passage does not follow the order of occurrence; instead it depends on the reporter and his views. Speech time directs the report mode as we see in adverbs like already, now etc. and the time is clearly specific when the reporter says ‘Since Tuesday,’ ‘On Wednesday’ etc.

Like narratives, Reports also present: Events and States, and in some cases, General Statives. Here, Speech Time relates the situations and text advances as time progresses. The tensed verbs, modals, and temporal adverbs are the linguistic cues for such change. The passage below brings into light events and states. Out of the 17 sentences in total, 11 present events.

### *Editorial 2*

The editorial titled **‘Passage to English’** on the significance of English education in India published in *Times of India* on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2008 exemplifies the information mode which presents information in a non-polemical manner, supported by newspaper and magazine articles, evidences, official records, discussions etc.

What makes informative mode different from descriptive mode is the emphasis of particularity for the latter concentrates more on specific events, persons, situations etc. According to Smith, the mode is atemporal and progression is metaphorical in the text domains. The writer does not give a clue regarding the time. Introducing statives, the passage gives an in-depth study of English education. The Primary Referent is the subject in most sentences of the passage but is replaced by the noun pronoun (it) at the end of the first paragraph itself. In one or two sentences, Primary Referent is not seen when the writer deviates from the main topic. The editorial begins in a conversational manner and details on the mushrooming of English medium schools in India. The number of English medium schools has been tremendously increasing day by day. The editor is also enthusiastic while talking about the infinite number of job opportunities that it offers in addition to the cultural functions that it performs. He associates the financial situation of the Indian states with the opportunities of English education. The editorial ends on an optimistic note that English education will definitely aid in crossing the boundaries between the states.

### ***Editorial 3***

The editorial '**The quest for true gender equality**' that came out in *Hindustan Times* on March 6, 2020 is highly thought-provoking and it actually exhorts the readers to recognise the necessity of true gender identity. Though the constitution prescribes gender equality, it is mostly violated especially in the domestic scene. When society consents the heterosexual relationships alone, it indirectly permits the assault against the weaker sex. In conservative society, this kind of brutality is a norm. The writer cites the examples from two recent movies of Bollywood- *Kabir Singh* and *Thappad* to establish his point of view. The writer points out that the latter liberates the female protagonist from the clutches of masculine nobility. This female action is a beginning, a new beam of hope according to the writer. Ultimately, what the editorial argues is the same thing – recognise the inner strength with in every woman.

This editorial exemplifies an argument. An argument is a text that brings forth either a claim, or support or a disagreement with some issue or idea. This passage begins in present tense and continues to be so throughout the end. No change in tense can be witnessed. An argument introduces proposition, facts and general statives. There are nine propositions and two factual sentences in the passage. Events and states are backgrounded in an argument. The above argument is rich in propositions and miserable in factual details. The author is strongly present here. The location does not change but remains constant ('Indian Society').

### ***Editorial 4***

From the very first glance of it, a reader can understand that the editorial '**Unequal, unsecular: On Citizenship Amendment Bill**' about the citizenship amendment bill passed in Indian parliament came out in *The Hindu* on December 10, 2019, is in descriptive mode. It gives an over-all view of the bill and does not advance the narrative. The time is static here and the reference time occupied by all the sentences in the passage are the same. Spatial progression through lines can be felt here for the readers are taken to different locales in the description. (for instance, 'Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan', 'Myanmar and Sri Lanka'). The situations express both events and states. The editorial is pertinent in substantiating the main features of CAB and how it opens its doors to certain categories while marginalising a few others. The bill meticulously refers to the previous notifications from the home ministry suggesting that the bill is just an extension

of the previous steps in the same direction. The writer does not fail to comment on the common arguments raised against the bill from the various parts of the country and also laments on the hapless situation of Indian constitution which visualizes equality in the name of law and the failure of secularist thinking in the country.

**Table 2:** From the analysis of the editorials from various newspapers, following details can be elucidated in the form of a table. See the table below.

<b>Number of the editorial</b>	<b>Mode of discourse</b>	<b>Features of the discourse mode found in the editorials</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Narrative and Report</b>	<b>states</b>	<b>events</b>	
		<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Information</b>	<b>Primary referents</b>		
		<b>5</b>		
<b>3</b>	<b>Argument</b>	<b>propositions</b>	<b>facts</b>	<b>General Statives</b>
		<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Metaphorical locations</b>		
		<b>5</b>		

### III. CONCLUSION

From the various examples of editorials examined, it is very much obvious that the Smithian discourse modes characterize the passages. At the same time, it is curious to note that not a single passage can be found in narrative mode alone. Since the editorials are opinion makers, a narrative alone won't make sense. Among newspaper editorials, it's possible to find shifts in modes of discourse. Time is an archetypal element involved in these modes, as Smith confirms its significance 'on a linguistic basis' through her characterization.

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