
A Comparison of Front-page News in Japanese and British Quality Press Newspapers: Cultural Differences Reflected in the Press

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Both teachers and students should be aware that there are a number of interesting and significant differences between Japanese and foreign newspapers — both in the kind of story which is likely to appear on the front pages, and in the style in which front-page headlines and articles are normally written. These 'cultural differences' were the subject of a detailed study of British and Japanese newspapers carried out in 1993. The current article presents in condensed form the previous study's main findings about differences between front-page articles across the U.K. and Japan. It concludes by suggesting certain areas to focus on when comparing and contrasting Japanese and foreign news stories in the classroom.

Newspapers are often used in language classrooms as sources of up-to-date and authentic reading material, and as a means of introducing topics for discussion. In Japan, front-page articles from foreign English language newspapers are especially useful for the latter purpose. The front pages of foreign newspapers usually focus on important international events, or give potentially interesting 'cultural' information about concerns and issues in the country of their origin. Comparing the treatment of the same news stories in the Japanese newspapers, in terms of such things as factual information content and style of reporting, is also a challenging but worthwhile exercise. Indeed, both teachers and students should be aware that there are a number of interesting and significant differences between Japanese and foreign newspapers both in the kind of story which is likely to appear on the front pages, and in the style in which front-page articles are normally written. These 'cultural differences' were the subject of a detailed study of British and Japanese newspapers carried out in 1993. This paper looks at the study's main findings about differences between front-page articles in the two countries, and concludes by suggesting certain areas to focus on when comparing Japanese and foreign news stories in the classroom.

The Scope and Methods of the Comparison¹

The contents of four major British quality papers (The Guardian, The Independent, The Telegraph, The Times) and the three main non-specialized Japanese language national dailies (The Asahi, The Mainichi, The Yomiuri) were compared. The weekday (Monday through Friday) editions of these seven papers were monitored throughout the months of June and November in 1993.

Weekend newspapers were excluded because the differences between the two countries are too great. In Britain the Sunday papers have long been regarded as completely separate entities, and more recently the Saturday papers have also begun to resemble general-interest magazines. In Japan, however, there is actually not that much difference between the Sunday and weekday editions of the papers in question, and Saturday is still a normal weekday as far as the contents of the newspapers are concerned.

For the comparison of front pages, a total of 30 issues (15 from each month) were randomly selected for each of the seven papers. All the items on the front pages were measured, and the amount of space they took up was calculated as a percentage of the total amount of space on the page. In this paper the percentage figures in brackets, which usually follow references as to where and when the article appeared, indicate the amount of space which that article occupied on the front page.

News items were classified into categories according to their subject matter (see Table 1). However, less than half of the articles fitted neatly into a single category. In those cases when it was decided that the contents of an article should be assigned to more than one category, the amount of space was divided approximately into a number of parts, and each part assigned to different categories. For example, a brief article in the Yomiuri on the latest U.S. trade figures and the impact on the dollar-yen exchange rate (June 18th, 3.24% of the page) was deemed to concern both the U.S. and the Japanese economy in a 50-50 ratio. Thus it was recorded as 1.62% in the category of Foreign Countries, and as 1.62% in the category of (Japanese Domestic) Economy. Other articles were not so evenly divided, and there were also articles which were divided into more than two categories according to their content.

Table 1
Average Percentage Content of Front Pages by Month in 1993

	<i>JAPANESE</i>			<i>BRITISH</i>		
	<i>JUNE</i>	<i>NOV</i>	<i>AVERAGE</i>	<i>JUNE</i>	<i>NOV</i>	<i>AVERAGE</i>
Politics	25.71	13.96	19.84	19.32	13.54	16.43
Economics	3.79	10.65	7.22	7.53	4.99	6.26
Crime	1.19	6.34	3.76	3.47	10.51	6.99
Social Issues	2.42	3.22	2.82	3.45	5.79	4.62
Personalities	1.78	0.28	1.03	8.38	3.72	6.05
Sport	—	2.55	1.27	3.81	2.67	3.24
Culture [including Media]	1.23	1.43	1.33	0.08	4.60	2.34
Environment (Int'l Environment)	3.47	3.04	3.25	1.05	0.97	1.01
Foreign Relations	2.44	2.04	2.24	0.18	0.70	0.44
Foreign Countries	7.99	2.40	5.20	1.98	2.89	2.44
International Group (Member)	2.90	5.08	3.99	1.77	1.39	1.58
International Group(Defence)	2.05	0.57	1.27	1.26	0.64	0.95
War / Terroris (Domestic)	1.34	0.20	0.77	8.39	5.61	7.00
Accidents/ Disasters (Int'l)	0.36	2.88	1.62	2.82	5.60	4.21
Miscellaneous Articles	3.94	4.94	4.44	6.41	6.23	6.32
BANNER	2.63	2.63	2.63	8.52	8.52	8.52
ADVERTS	25.39	25.39	25.39	9.14	9.20	9.17
MISCELLANEOUS	11.37	12.50	11.94	12.44	12.42	12.43
<i>Totals</i>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Traditional Priorities on the Front Pages

The front page of a newspaper is usually the first, and often the only thing that a reader looks at. Not only does it serve the important function of establishing which are the most important stories of the day, but it also sets the tone of the whole newspaper.

A major factor influencing the make-up of the front pages is where the newspapers are sold. Most British and American newspapers are now bought in newsagents, bookshops and other retail outlets. Since a large number of readers do not even place a regular order, an interesting or striking front page could be enough to persuade a customer to change his allegiance. In Japan, however, there is not the same urgent need to attract readers since the vast majority of sales are by subscription.

When the first modern Japanese newspapers appeared in the late nineteenth century they were simply a single large sheet folded in half to make four pages. The first two pages were reserved for political and economic news. News about crime, personalities, sport and social issues appeared on the third page, which was known as the *shakai men* [Translation: social page]. This tradition still largely persists even today with the 'social news' usually found on two or three pages at the back of the newspaper. The lack of a similar tradition in Britain and the USA may well be part of the reason why the press is sometimes criticized for over-emphasizing crime and other social problems in these two countries.

Given this historical background, it was not so surprising to find almost twice as many crime stories on the front pages on the British papers in 1993 (see Table 1). In fact, the number of Japanese front-page crime stories would have been much lower had it not been for the extraordinarily large number of articles concerning cases of political bribery! There were also nearly twice as many articles relating to social issues and problems, and almost three times as many sports stories.

However, despite the Japanese newspapers' tradition, in recent years stories about unusually disturbing or shocking crimes have often forced their way on to the front page, and there is also a recent tendency for articles about the Japanese national teams' successes in international competitions such as the Olympic games or the soccer World Cup to appear.

Different Styles of Headlines

Front-page headlines in the British papers often seem much more dramatic, and have a tendency to contain stronger and more emotive language than headlines in the Japanese papers, which are almost always succinct and factual. There are several good reasons why this should be the case. Firstly there is the important difference in where the newspapers are bought. Since the majority of British quality papers are now bought on a daily basis from newsagents and bookshops, a dynamic or unusual headline could be enough to persuade the casual reader to buy. There are also important cultural differences at work. The Japanese public seems to value and respect formality much more than the British; to be more accurate, it expects to find formality and reserve in its long-established quality newspapers. The papers for their part are very concerned to be seen as responsible and as neutral as possible, since that is their accepted role in Japanese society. Tied in with this there is also the oriental trait of trying to avoid making contentious statements or appearing over-dramatic. There are also differences in the type of language which is thought to be authoritative or interesting or, simply, worth reading in the two countries.

Newspaper headlines are almost by definition concise and to the point, and the Japanese certainly prefer theirs to be as succinct and information-laden as possible. This probably has a lot to do with the national preference for things that are compact and tidy. The Japanese have had to become skilled at using limited space in their daily lives and they have long been associated

with miniaturization and simplification, as exemplified in traditional arts such as *bonsai*, *ikebana* and *haiku*. Furthermore, the Japanese language itself, with its use of *kanji* (morphographs/logographs with stylized pictographic and ideographic elements) borrowed from Chinese centuries ago) and a strong tendency to abbreviate almost everything — including even ‘loan words’ from other languages — lends itself very well to expressing a lot of ideas in a short headline. A good example of this sort of factually-packed headline was the Mainichi’s headline about the Ramsar Treaty Conference on June 15th (7.86%). In the closing stages of this conference on the preservation of the world’s wetlands, the participant countries agreed set up a formal system for assessing the amount of environmental damage which any new construction project would create. However, there was some debate about whether this system should be made compulsory. All of this information was successfully crammed in to the Mainichi’s headline, *asesu houseika gimu to sezu*. [Translation: Formal assessment system to be introduced, but not to be made compulsory].

The British public seems to prefer headlines which are dramatic, humorous or even provocative, rather than informative. An article about the alteration of lyrics in a new Disney movie after complaints from certain ethnic groups produced the amusing headline, “Disney censors lyrics after Arabs carpet Aladdin” in the Independent (November 23rd, 7.58%). After none of the British football teams managed to qualify for the 1994 World Cup the Guardian’s dramatic headline was “World ends for British soccer” (November 18th, 28.02%). They may even use long and cumbersome headlines for a near-poetic effect, such as, “As thousands flee, the dead must lie where they fall in the bloody fields of Travnik” (Times, June 9th). Such a headline would be extremely unlikely to appear anywhere in the Japanese papers, let alone on the front page.

However, the Japanese papers tend to use sub-heads a lot more than the British papers. Since these sub-heads are similarly information-packed, this effectively enables them to put even more information in their headlines. The bigger stories regularly have two, and occasionally three sub-heads. Often the size of type used for these sub-heads is almost as large as that used for the main headlines, making it difficult to know which is which. In the British papers sub-heads are much more rarely used—even with the big stories there is very seldom more than one — and they are invariably in much smaller type than the main headline.

Differences in Shared Coverage Headlines

There were, in fact, very few news stories that were covered simultaneously on the front pages of both countries’ papers during the time of this study. With an average of just over 15% of the Japanese papers’ and less than 13% of the British papers’ front pages given over to news from foreign countries there was actually very little room for overlap. There is also a natural geographical bias towards neighboring countries to be taken into consideration. However, one international disaster which did make the front pages of all of the papers except the Guardian, was the large-scale bush-fire which caused billions of dollars of damage in the Los Angeles suburb of Malibu at the beginning of November. The British newspapers’ headlines all included fairly emotive or dramatic vocabulary such as “wildfire sweeps through homes” (Telegraph), “ravaging” (Independent), and “billion dollar.....fires” (Times). Both the Telegraph and the Times mentioned the “film stars” in their headlines. However, in the Japanese headlines there was very little sense of the drama of the situation. The Yomiuri and Mainichi both used a commonplace verb *semaru* [Translation: approach] in their headlines. (Mainichi: *semaru yama kaji* [Translation: Mountain fire approaches], Yomiuri: *umi ni semaru yama kaji* [Translation: Mountain fire approaches the coast]). The Asahi headline contained more information about the location: *rosukinkou daika futatabi* [Translation: Big fire again in Los Angeles suburb]. Only the Mainichi mentioned the movie stars, and that was in a small sub-head: *sutaara mo hinan* [Translation: Stars flee LA suburb].

Similar differences were seen in headlines about international events. In 1993 the civil war in Somalia was causing concern in most developed countries, but the British papers carried front-page articles on the war much more frequently than did the Japanese. However, on June 18th, both the Mainichi and Asahi had room for the big story of the UN Peace Keeping Force's decision to search out and arrest General Aidid. Once more the headlines in both papers were very similar and very straightforward. The Asahi reported, *aidido shougun taku senkyo* [Translation: General Aidid's residence occupied], with a sub-head which added, *kokuren butaitaihou no kamae* [Translation: UN Forces in Somalia prepare to arrest him]. The Mainichi had a much smaller article with a main headline which was even briefer than the Asahi's: *aidido tei senkyo* [Translation: Aidid's palace occupied]. Its sub-head simply stated the fact that 60 lives had been lost in the operation. In the British papers, on the other hand, there was more emotive language, but less factual information. Instead of using Aidid's name both the Independent and the Times referred to him as the "Somali warlord". None of the British papers mentioned the occupation of Aidid's residence in their headlines, but the Independent referred to the UN troops' search as a "hunt", a word which suggested not only a dramatic life-or-death pursuit, but also that General Aidid was being viewed as some kind of quarry.

Domestic Politics Headlines

During the period under study, Japanese politics were turbulent and one might well have expected the dramatic events in the Japanese political world to produce some memorable front-page headlines. However, this was not the case. On June 15th the opposition parties formally agreed to draft the vote of no-confidence in the Miyazawa Cabinet which would bring down the Government and effectively put an end to the so-called 'system of '55' which had dominated post-war Japanese politics. However, the Asahi's headline on the next day simply stated, *yatou asu ni mo naikaku fushinninan* [Translation: Opposition parties to draft a vote of no confidence in the Cabinet (as early as) tomorrow]. The Mainichi had a similar headline. There was something of a growing sense of urgency in the headlines of the next few days as it became clearer that the LDP, Japan's traditional party of government since the last war, was finally breaking up, and that there would have to be a general election. But the headlines did not touch on the potential long-term significance of the events, nor was there much emphasis on the leading political figures involved in the crisis. Ensuing coverage was remarkable not just for its similarity but also because they presented the reader with little more than facts which very few people could have had failed to have noticed by the time the papers arrived.

In Britain during this period there was no single day which could really compare with the political significance of the events in the Japanese Diet. However, there were some dramatic events in the House of Commons on June 9th when Mr. Norman Lamont used his resignation speech to launch a bitter verbal attack on Prime Minister Major and his Cabinet. The main headline in the Guardian on the following day concentrated on the personalities involved, and used metaphorical language to suggest the intended effect of the speech, "Lamont strikes at Major's heart". The Times also used metaphorical language in its headline: "Lamont's bitter revenge casts shadow over Major's survival". The Independent's headline was a straight comment on the political repercussions of the speech, "Lamont fuels doubts over Major's leadership." Although there are good reasons to suppose that many people would not have been aware where, when or why Lamont had made his speech, the British papers' headlines assumed that readers were already cognizant of these facts. Instead of giving more facts they tried to build up the drama of the event, and to give some the reader some angle on the significance of the speech.

In another eventful day in Parliament, in November the House of Lords embarrassed the

Government by exercising their right to reject the bill to privatize British Rail three times. In effect the passage of the bill was simply delayed and there was neither a serious constitutional crisis nor a disaster for John Major's Government, which was able to stay in office for its full term. However, the Times' headline suggested an epic struggle: "Tories battle with Lords over rail bill". The Guardian also used a similar metaphor: "Rebel Lords retreat over BR". Sub-heads in the Telegraph and Times both highlighted the same kind of confusion and panic in Parliament that the Japanese papers played down during the crisis in June (Times: "Commons turmoil after defeat"; Telegraph: "Ministers face chaotic scramble to rescue privatization plan").

Formality, Facts and Impartiality

The differences in approach to formality, factuality and impartiality suggested by headlines is reflected in the content of articles as well. The beginning of a news item in the Japanese papers almost invariably follows a rigidly set pattern. Reports from overseas always begin with the name of the city where they were written, followed by the date and the writer's name or some other source reference. Domestic news stories do not usually carry the writer's name, unlike in the British papers, but the opening sentence almost always refers to a date and place and the main theme of the article. In longer articles the main theme is usually summarized in a short opening paragraph which is physically separated from the rest of the text.

There are no such rigid conventions in the British papers. In practice the opening sentences of most articles does serve to introduce the story, but a date or place is not always as clearly stated as in the Japanese papers. Often articles begin with a dramatic sentence clearly aimed much more at immediately grabbing the reader's attention than at establishing reference points. The Independent's report on the latest developments in the hunt for a 'serial killer', which made the front pages of all four British papers in the middle of June, began, "One homosexual will be killed every week, police have been told by a serial killer who has murdered five times" (June 17th, 15.61%). One of the many reports from the Bulger trial began, "He appears as a tiny, lone figure, scarcely discernible amid an everyday scene from a shopping mall." (Independent, November 4th, 6.18%)

The Japanese papers take impartiality and respect so far that they would be unlikely to attach a judgmental adjective to an individual's name. Yet a Times' article about the latest scandal involving the Tory party and Mr. Asil Nadir actually began with the sentence, "An embittered Asil Nadir, the fugitive businessman at the heart of a row over Tory party funding..." (June 18th, 20.33%)

The Japanese papers make a very deliberate attempt to separate factual information from comment and supposition. In this way they could be said to try to be more openly impartial than the British. Many of the main front page stories in the Japanese papers are structured in a way which seems to be designed to segregate fact from comment, and to give the reader the maximum amount of information. The Mainichi's leading front page story about allegations of falsified research data at Tokyo University Hospital was a good example of such a formally structured article. The main facts of the story were summarized in an opening paragraph: a group researching into a new drug to treat pancreatic cancer was accused of deliberately tampering with test results by senior officers of the surgical department at the same hospital. The main part of the article concentrated on explaining the type of errors that had been found in the group's findings. It was only in a separate smaller article with the headline *izuteki de wa nai* and with a smaller sub-head, *Uchida kyouju kataru* [Translation: Not deliberate, Professor Uchida says] that there was any attempt to make any kind of judgement about the allegations, and even then there was little more than short quotes from both sides. A second smaller accom-

panying article gave additional information about the history of the research group explaining its prestigious position in the Japanese medical world. During the Japanese political crisis in June the main articles in all three papers were little more than factual accounts as well. With other big stories, too, comment was included separately.

In the British papers, however, comment is often an inextricable part of the article itself. On June 15th the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Clarke made his first important speech on the state of the economy before an audience of London dignitaries and senior businessmen at the Guildhall. On the following day it was covered on the front pages of the Guardian, Telegraph and Times. Although in their main articles all three papers stayed very close to the Chancellor's actual words, there were still quite significant differences in the tone of the reports. The Telegraph opened its report (22.49%) with a very positive sentence: "A significant shift in the balance of Tory policy-making in favor of business, economic growth and improving people's living standards was signaled last night..." However, in the Guardian (45.29%) the Chancellor's positive start was not seen as having much substance. The article opened by saying that Mr. Clarke had "sought to put a fresh optimistic gloss on economic policy." Later in the Telegraph article Mr. Clarke was again described in positive terms as having "confirmed" that he was "keeping open the option of tax increases." But in the Guardian this particular option was seen as a very negative choice, to be avoided at all costs, but one which the Chancellor had been unable to deny completely: he had "refused to rule out further increases in taxation." Furthermore, both the Guardian and the Times included accompanying articles about reactions to the speech in the political world. In the Guardian's case (9.15%) in particular it was not separated out from the main article or introduced as editorial comment, even though the paper's left-of-center political standpoint was clearly evident in several places. According to the article the speech had been met with "suspicion on the (Conservative) Right" and the City was "skeptical" about the new Chancellor's abilities. It also took the opportunity to mention that "John Major's leadership is still wobbly". The Times article (11.82%) appeared to be independent comment by a well-known political journalist, but it also showed the paper's sympathy for the Conservative Party in phrases such as, "green shoots of economic thinking" and "a move back towards common sense".

Going into Detail

British newspapers usually try to present their readers with a cross-section of the big news stories of the day on their front pages. However, there are times when one story is so important that it almost completely dominates the page. In Japan this is also generally true, with the proviso that there is a traditional bias towards political and economic news. This practice means that there is not sufficient space to go into very much detail in front page articles; instead the reader is referred to follow-up stories or continuations on the inside pages. However, in those cases where the editors do decide to go into slightly more detail for whatever reason there are noticeable differences in the type and amount of detail which is presented. In general the British papers seem to prefer to use details to set a scene or capture the mood of an event, or just to entertain or amuse the reader. In the Japanese papers, on the other hand, more detail seems to mean simply more information, and often the information is so detailed or specific that it seems slightly out of place on the front page.

Political Reporting

During this period, June 19th was the only day on which a single story almost completely dominated the front pages of the Japanese papers. Each paper also carried follow-up stories on the dissolution of the Diet and the crisis in the LDP party on at least four inside pages. The front page articles all gave a full account of how the Government had failed to defeat the no-confi-

dence vote, with both the Mainichi and Asahi publishing tables showing exactly how members of each political party had voted. There was also some discussion of the suitable dates for the general election, and the prospects of new parties emerging. There were very few direct quotes from leading politicians, although the Yomiuri did include a few short lines from one of the leading LDP rebels, in which he briefly explained why he had voted with the opposition. Both the Asahi and the Yomiuri included lengthy articles from their respective political editors (Asahi 10.52%, Yomiuri 13.77%). It was only in the Asahi's article that there was any real sense of the importance and excitement of the day's events. The language used was strikingly frank as it directly addressed the disillusioned majority of the Japanese electorate. The article stated that, in view of the continued failure of political reform, it was not surprising that the Japanese public were now saying to the politicians: *baka ni suru na* [Translation: Stop making fools of us]. The article then went on to declare that there was now a chance of really big changes in the political system, and called upon the electorate to voice their complaints and help to bring about these changes at the forthcoming election. Although the Asahi, at least, did try to build up the significance of the day's events, what was most conspicuously absent from all three accounts of the day's proceedings was any description of the atmosphere in the Diet, or the mood of the politicians involved in these dramatic events.

This is in sharp contrast to the way in which events in the British Parliament were usually reported in the British papers. When the House of Lords held up the Government's controversial Bill to privatise British Rail at the beginning of November, all of the British papers covered the events in some detail. However, there was actually very little detail about which chapters of the legislation the Upper House had objected to most strongly. Instead there was a great deal of description of the mood of the House, with expressions such as "angry peers", "anxious whips", "frantic re-arranging" and "constitutional confusion" punctuating all the reports. There were also plenty of quotes from all the parties' spokesmen. The Guardian also carried a 'sketch' of the day's proceedings in the Lords written by the well-known political columnist, Matthew Engel, which contained descriptive passages such as, "The scene was absurd: a group of has-beens and never-wases, ...seated on benches apparently borrowed from an ill-advised pub refurbishment of the 1970's." (November 4th, 11.44%).

Given the restrictions on front-page space, the Japanese papers' inclusion of factual details can often seem excessive. When the political reform bills were being debated in the Diet at the beginning of both June and November, for example, all the papers went into quite a lot of detail about the proposed changes in the electoral system. Still, given the low turn-outs at Japanese elections, and the general lack of interest in politics which most opinion polls continue to show, it must be questionable as to how many people were actually interested enough to read this kind of detail.

In other cases the Japanese front pages contain detail when one would expect to find comment in the British papers. One example of this was the Asahi's reporting of the Hosokawa administration's handling of the opening of the rice-market. An article on November 12th informed the reader of exactly when and where the first consignments of overseas rice would be arriving in Japan, but it was not accompanied by any comment on the significance of the events. In contrast to this, the debate over the British Government's proposals to change the state benefit entitlements of single parents — or the "lone parents storm" as it was called in the Independent (November 10th) — was widely covered in all the British papers in November. But, in fact, there was very little to report in terms of what the Government was actually proposing to do.

Accidents and Disasters

In the British papers accidents and disasters are normally given a dramatic treatment. All the British papers had extensive front-page coverage of the coach crash in Kent in which ten Ameri-

can tourists were killed. Long articles included quotes from rescuers, police officers, hospital workers, and even a priest. There were vivid descriptions of how the motorway embankment had been churned to mud as rescuers had struggled to free passengers trapped in the overturned coach. There were also accounts of touching scenes of reunion. Although the articles tended to skirt over the direct causes of the crash, they all referred to the fact that the scale of the accident had fueled the debate over whether the wearing of seat belts should be made compulsory on motorway coaches. They all mentioned that one Government Minister, Mr. Robert Key, was calling for immediate legislation. (Ironically eight days later in another motorway crash eleven children and their teacher, who were all not wearing seat-belts, were killed.)

In Japan there was only one accident which made the front pages during this period. At the end of November, the Asahi was the only Japanese paper to cover an accident on the so-called 'Japanese Rhine' when a pleasure boat overturned. The article (November 29th, 26.15%) reported that all 30 passengers had been thrown into the water, eleven had been slightly injured, but that only one was still missing. It included the name, age, address and occupation of the missing man. It also briefly referred to the local police's analysis of the direct cause of the accident: *kani sho no shirabe nado de wa, yuuransen ga kyofuuka de fudan yori migi yori no kousu ga zure, kawa chuu no iwa ni butsukatta*. [Translation: According to the Kani Police, strong winds blew the pleasure boat off its usual course on the right-hand side of the river into rocks in the center] The article went on to give the precise depth of the water at the point where the accident occurred, and also referred to a report from the Gifu weather bureau that unusually strong winds of 8 meters per second had been recorded at the time of the accident. There were no quotes from anyone involved in the accident, nor any attempt to describe the scene.

Humor and Variations in Style

Almost all the news items on the Japanese front pages are written in very formal language with the emphasis on facts. The only variation from this style is to be found in the regular 'editorial columns' (see below). In the British papers, on the other hand, the style in which an article is written tends to vary according to the subject matter and, as can be seen in the preceding sections, facts often do not seem to be as important as capturing the mood or atmosphere of events.

Given the British love of humor it was not surprising to find that, in addition to the regular cartoons, a considerable number of front page articles were of a fairly humorous nature. Most of these appeared in the Guardian, which seems to like to have at least one amusing article on its front page every day. Both the Guardian and the Independent picked up the story of a German entrepreneur's plan to open up a former East German prison camp as an unusual kind of theme park (November 10th). The Guardian also had the story of a haulier who was so enraged when a cricket ball went through the window of his lorry that he drove onto the cricket pitch whence the ball had come to make his feelings known to the astonished players (June 22nd, 4.58%). There was also the story of the vicar who was calling on his parishioners for subscriptions, which had the headline "And now let us pay..." (November 23rd, 6.54%). The Times gave a mildly humorous treatment to the cricket ball tampering case on November 16th, with the headline, "Lawyers on a sticky wicket". The Telegraph reported the amusing fact that the same artist had received awards for the best and worst entry for the annual Turner Prize, with the latter award actually being more valuable in monetary terms (November 24th, 8.6%).

What was perhaps slightly more surprising was that often quite serious subjects were also given fairly humorous treatments on the front pages of the British papers. The Japanese papers solemnly reported that the Maastricht Treaty officially came into effect on November 1st, with the Yomiuri including a feature article on the event on its front page written by the editor of the Economist magazine (20.45%). The Guardian was the only British paper to mention the significance of the date. But its short article headlined, "Silent birth of Europerson" (November 2nd, 8.23%) homed in

on the British public's general apathy towards this historic event.

Relations with foreign countries are also invariably dealt with very seriously in the Japanese papers. However, the Telegraph's front page article on EU Finance Ministers' criticism of a plan to cut unemployment by increasing job-sharing (June 21st, 7.02%) became the report of an amusing slanging match between M. Jacques Delors and the British Chancellor Clarke. Clarke described Delors' plan as "folly", but Delors was quoted as saying, "I don't feel the need to win against my colleagues. Perhaps we should build a cricket pitch outside for Mr. Clarke".

Crime is also another serious issue in the Japanese press, but the British papers often see its funny side, even on their front pages. When an 80-year-old former army general attempted to repulse a burglar who had broken into his home, the Telegraph reported the struggle as a kind of comical boxing-match (November 9th, 12.55%). A serious case of drug-smuggling, uncovered at a Spanish airport, was given a similarly light treatment in the Guardian on June 7th (5.25%). The story of the British mountain climbers who had failed to inform the Nepalese authorities of their attempt on Mount Everest and were forced to pay massive fines provided plenty of opportunity for puns in the Telegraph, beginning with the headline, "Everest's illegal climbers pay high price" (November 8th, 6.4%).

On the Japanese front pages, however, there is very little humor to be found at all. Even the captioned photographs of natural or traditional scenes, which are used to brighten up the front pages of all three papers, are almost never chosen for their humorous content. A rare exception to this rule was the Mainichi's coverage of an unusual fashion contest that took place in Tokyo (November 23rd, 18.63%). The idea of the contest was to design working clothes of the future, and it had the title, *shigoto ga tanoshiku naru* [Translation: Clothes to make work fun]. Most of the article was taken up with three large photographs which featured a waitress' outfit, complete with numerous multi-coloured napkin-holders on the front and a missing left trouser leg. But even in this case there were no jokes as such; readers were left to make up their own mind about it all.

The British papers also seem to like to adapt the tone and type of language used in an article to fit the subject matter. In an amusing parody of the popular press' reporting style, the Times' headline after the England football team had lost an important World Cup qualifying game was, "Tabloids put boot in to Taylor" (June 4th, 6.71%). The report went on to mention the "sickening thud of tabloid boot on manager's face following the 2-0 defeat." When the manager finally gave up his position in November the Telegraph similarly used very colloquial language in its headline, "Graham Taylor quits over World Cup flop" (November 24th, 25.38%).

On the rare occasions when sport appeared on the front pages of the Japanese papers the reports were as factual and serious as any others on the page. All three papers had brief articles on the Yakult's victory in the 'Japan Series' baseball. The opening paragraph of Yomiuri report (November 2nd, 12.06%) included the fact that the final game in the series had started at 1:03 pm precisely, and that Yakult had won the game 4-2, and the series 4-3. It went on to mention in what innings the points were scored and noted that Mr. Kawasaki, the Yakult pitcher, had been declared the 'Most Valuable Player' in the series. The Mainichi and Asahi reports were similar.

In the British papers plain or vulgar language seems to be deliberately used to catch the reader's eye and add a sense of immediacy to the article. Two days after Norman Lamont's resignation speech in the Commons, the Times carried the headline, "Lay off me, warns Lamont, or there's worse to come" (June 11th, 25.15%). This was not actually a direct quote from Lamont, but the paper's own down-to-earth summary of the gist of his reaction to the criticism he had received from other Conservative Party members. Other articles seem to be written in irreverent language for comic effect, such as the Independent's story about the Norwegian Minister who had annoyed feminists by getting pregnant while in office. The article began, "Norway's feminists have got their blue stockings in a twist..." (November 5th, 5.33%). At other times a common

expression is simply the easiest and most direct way of getting the information across, as in the Independent's headline, "Jail ships lined up to relieve cell crisis" (Independent, November 2nd, 15.76%).

It is rare for any colloquial language to appear in any of the Japanese front-page news items. The Mainichi report on the results of a survey on wedding expenses was one of the exceptions. It was also unusual in that it contained a mildly amusing cartoon image of a wedding couple standing by their cake (June 21st, 16.30%). Most of the article was a purely factual analysis of the figures, but it did use the slightly colloquial word, *yahari* [Translation: as you might have guessed], to add a touch of levity when referring to the fact that people in the Tokai region spent more on their weddings than people in any other region: *ichiban gouka na no wa, yahari 'toukai' datta* [Translation: It was no surprise to find that the poshest affairs are in the 'Tokai' district].

Front-page Feature Articles

Although the British papers do occasionally include front page 'sketches' of dramatic events in the Houses of Parliament or in courtrooms, it is not their practice to carry any kind of feature articles on their front pages. However, about a fifth of the Japanese front pages included special feature articles. These typically took up around 15% of the page, and were either 'one-offs' or, more often, parts of a series. The Yomiuri ran a five-part series on reforming the Japanese tax system (November 2nd-6th), and the Asahi had a three-part series on the re-birth of Japanese politics (June 21st-23rd). These articles provide a wider angle on important stories but, despite making greater use of quotes from people directly concerned in the issues, they are still written in basically the same formal style as the other news items on the page.

Japanese Newspapers' Front-page 'Editorial Comments'

In the Japanese papers it is only in the regular front-page columns of 'editorial comment' that there is any variation from a serious, formal tone. All three Japanese papers have regular columns of 'editorial comment' on their front pages. The Asahi's is entitled *tenseijingo* [Translation: vox populi, vox dei], the Mainichi's is *yoroku* [Translation: off record] and the Yomiuri's is *henshuutechou* [Translation: editorial jottings]. However, the term 'editorial comment' is used somewhat loosely in this case. Although the columns are written by senior editorial staff, they do not always contain comments on the major stories of the day. In fact, the range of subject matters and the style in which they are written is quite unlike any of the other news items on the page. All three papers devote very similar amounts of space to these columns (Averages: Asahi 5.24%, Mainichi 4.69%, Yomiuri 4.10%). There are also many similarities in both style and content. There are no regular columns of any type on the front pages of the British papers and editorial comment only very rarely appears there.

During this period approximately a quarter of these columns were effectively additional editorial comments on the big issues of the day. In the columns of all three papers, but most especially in the Mainichi, there were some instances of the use of sarcasm to poke fun at the Miyazawa Government's failure in June. The Mainichi's June 3rd column began by talking about fossils formed by great and sudden flooding, and then moved on to the latest find of pre-historic animal remains in Gifu Prefecture. Suddenly in the last paragraph it turned on today's politicians, who were described as being so light-weight, as they flit from one position to another, that their footprints would be impossible to find even with the aid of a microscope. Instead, the analogy continued, all that can be seen these days are the fossilized remains of defeated politicians caught up in the political deluge. The following day's *tenkoehitogo* in the Asahi started out by examining the various uses of the verb *hineru* [Translation: twist around] which has various obscure meanings especially in tradi-

tional *haiku*. However, the latter half of the column made puns about how the politicians are “twisting around” the reform bill to suit themselves; these days, it concluded, it is not just those with “twisted minds” who are angered by their antics. The Mainichi’s June 23rd *yoroku* was the most brutal in its condemnation of the LDP. It began by talking about how scientists now consider man to have evolved through various stages, and around 30,000 years ago *shinjin* [Translation: modern man] appeared. But, it continued, when we look at the faces of politicians like Kanemaru, Takeshita and Miyazawa it is laughable to think of them being the result of the evolution into ‘modern man’: *anna kao ni naru ka to omou totamaranaku okashiku naru*.

On other occasions these columns begin with levity but later take on a more serious tone. The Asahi used an amusing conversational style in the *tenseijingo* of June 26th which began with two people talking about the large number of vending machines in Japan compared with other countries. However, when the conversation addressed the issue of whether vending machines should continue to dispense alcohol it received a much more sober treatment. Even issues which one might think would lend themselves easily to a comic treatment are usually dealt with seriously. The *tenseijingo* of November 22nd dealt with the issue of how Japanese wives should refer to their husbands in Japan. In the British papers one might well have expected any number of facetious suggestions but the Asahi was cautiously respectful of the views of those modern wives who no longer wish to refer to their husbands as *goshujin*, which translates literally as “masters”. Similarly in the Yomiuri on November 3rd there were no jokes about the increasing number of people who are taking up walking as a hobby; instead walking was solemnly endorsed as being a good way to stay healthy, enjoy nature and communicate with other like-minded people.

There are also times when the columns seem to wander casually from one subject to another in a style vaguely reminiscent of the traditional *zuihitsu* style of writing that came into Japanese from Chinese. One Mainichi *yoroku* (November 23rd) began by discussing the weather, moved on from discussing life insurance to the story of Cardinal Richelieu’s cat having been left money in the Cardinal’s will, and finished with the tongue-in-cheek observation that next door’s cat may be more of a philosopher than you might think. The subject of the Yomiuri’s *henshuutechou* on November 12th was children’s lullabies. It talked about a well-known guitarist who had become one of the leading experts on the subject, travelling around the country giving lectures and recitals. The column included lines from obscure songs in the original dialects. The Asahi’s *tenseijingo* column of November 24th consisted of the writer’s personal thoughts on the life and works of Wordsworth, having begun with an apology for a minor error in an earlier column about the British poet.

As well as serving the purpose of presenting the responsible, sensible face of the Japanese press, the regular columns also have the equally important function of helping to break up the monotony of formal and serious reporting on the front pages.

Some Implications for Language Learning

Newspapers are a common source of up-to-date and authentic reading material. They are also used as a means of introducing topics and providing key background information for discussion, a technique that is quite popular in the EFL classroom in Japan. The front pages of such newspapers usually focus on important global, regional, and national events.

In terms of possible cross-cultural and cross-linguistic insights, comparing and contrasting headlines from overseas newspapers with those of the students’ own national press can add considerable and useful content to the EFL classroom. For example, comparing and contrasting headlines across cultures in terms of such things as factual information, content, emphasis and style of reporting can prove to be a challenging but ultimately worth-

while exercise. Headlines are such an obvious aspect of newspaper production, presentation and reception that they are often taken for granted. However, headlines play an important part when a reader scans a newspaper. When scanning headlines, the headlines' content, language and style draw and focus that reader's attention. If interest is sparked, schemata are activated, thus preparing the reader to read in depth in order to learn and interpret new information from the article. In part, this is where cross-cultural and cross-linguistic issues can arise, since culturally determined differences in expectations can complicate and problematize even fluent reading processes and the construction of meaning in them. This is equally true of the style and content of the articles themselves, where differences between the British and Japanese approach to reporting may be a barrier to understanding. It must also be remembered that many EFL students are NOT fluent readers of their FL, and their reading processes might be 'short circuited' and distracted from comprehension more easily by unexpected differences in the ways the news is presented. This might be even more true for EFL learners in Japan, where students often think of EFL texts as authoritative sources of target language for teacher-led translation classes, where the texts have been chosen to provide examples of language structures and vocabulary, rather than as sources of real world information.

In short, although there are seemingly strong surface similarities in the front-pages of Japanese and British quality-press newspapers, there are important differences, both obvious and subtle, between them of which readers need to be aware. Given their expectations of what is 'proper' in news reporting, commentary, and editorial comment as is found in Japanese newspapers, the Japanese student of English may well be surprised, confused, or even disturbed by such things as colloquial language in British articles and slang and puns in headlines. Furthermore, the combination of commentary with reporting in British articles may be disconcerting for a Japanese reader who is used to a more rigorous separation of fact from opinion in front-page news and commentary. There is an advantage in such materials, though, in that learning to discern fact from opinion is an essential reading skill, so articles from the British press can provide useful reading material for developing this important ability. In addition, the way news is reported and the stories that are carried say something about both the people who report the news and those who read it, making newspapers a source of potentially interesting information about the culture, attitudes, concerns and issues of these people. Either way, the Japanese student of English (as well as the English student of Japanese!) will likely benefit from being sensitised to the differences in approach between the press in the two countries.

Conclusion

In this study the differences between Japanese and British quality-press front-page news reporting were discussed. Differences in style and content were noted in almost every aspect, from the style and content of headlines to distinctions (or lack thereof) between factual reporting and commentary and thus the impartiality the writer (and by implication, the newspaper) assumes. In general, the Japanese quality press was found to maintain a much stronger distinction between fact and commentary when reporting the news than the British papers studied. Another notable difference was in the preference for dramatic, humorous or even provocative language in headlines and articles in the British front-pages that is rare in their Japanese counterparts. Both for the teacher and learner of English or Japanese as a foreign language, awareness of such differences, often overlooked, is important.

About the Author

Chris Bond has taught English at various schools and colleges in Aichi Prefecture, Japan, since 1984. In 1993 he became fully qualified to teach Japanese in British schools. He also successfully completed an M.Phil. in Japanese studies from the University of Wales in 1999. He is currently principally employed by Tokai High School in Nagoya. He can be contacted by e-mail at <c-bond@tcp-ip.or.jp>.

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