From Border to Headline: Linguistic Patterns and Rhetorical Devices in English News Headlines of the Thailand–Cambodia Conflict

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Abstract

Background and Aims: The English-language media in Thailand produces political and diplomatic news content to shape reader perceptions of events while forming their ideological beliefs. The headlines create emotional and cognitive engagement by using specific linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices. The research has two main objectives which aim (1) to identify the frequency of linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices employed in headlines across a sample of media outlets and (2) to analyze the ways in which these linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices contribute to making headlines attention-grabbing and persuasive.

Methodology: This study analyzed 120 political and diplomatic news headlines, purposively selected from four English-language Thai news sources (The Nation, Bangkok Post, Khaosod English, Thai Enquirer) published between June and August 2025. The research used Mixed-Methods methodology which combined quantitative pattern

detection methods with qualitative evaluation techniques to study how language elements create attention-grabbing headlines that affect readers.

Results: The research findings reveal that Framing Effects were the most common linguistic pattern, appearing in 40.83% of instances, followed closely by Emotional Language. These strategies highlight how information was framed and evoked emotional responses to shape readers' perceptions. Other persuasive elements such as social influence, attention-grabbing devices, and stereotypes or biases appeared less frequently but still contributed to the overall impact. Regarding rhetorical devices, Pathos was the most dominant, occurring in 19.17% of cases, supported by Ethos and Logos.

Conclusion: The use of linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices in conflict-related headlines significantly influences readers' interpretations, shapes meaning, and reinforces ideological polarization within media discourse.

Keywords: News Headlines, Linguistic Patterns, Rhetorical Devices

Introduction

The information age demands rapid news consumption through headlines which act as the primary entry point for people to access news to current events. Journalists use specific word choices, sentence structures, and rhetorical methods to create news stories content. The linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices within headlines determine how people understand news stories and their emotional reactions that both deliver information and establish particular viewpoints by emphasizing particular details while minimizing others. According to Ifantidou (2023) headlines function as more than brief summaries because they use persuasive communication to influence readers' logical understanding, emotional responses, and credibility assessment which directs public interpretation and participation.

The 2025 border conflict between Thailand and Cambodia serves as an excellent case to study how language and rhetorical methods function in this situation. The border dispute near Chong Bok became Southeast Asia's border conflicts in recent times when it reactivated historical disagreements about temple ownership. The July 2025 fighting at Prasat Ta Muen Thom and Preah Vihear resulted in civilian deaths and forced thousands of people to flee before ASEAN established a peace agreement on July 28 (The Nation,

Bangkok Post, Khaosod English, Thai Enquirer, 2025). The media outlets in both nations amplified patriotic feelings through their coverage which presented different stories about military defense and aggressive actions and peaceful diplomatic efforts. The news headlines used strategic linguistic and rhetorical methods to create national identity and establish legitimacy in their reporting of events.

The research examines English headlines from The Nation, Bangkok Post, Khaosod English, and Thai Enquirer during June through August 2025 through mixed-methods content analysis. By exploring how language and rhetoric operate in headlines about the 2025 Thailand–Cambodia border conflict, this research aims to deepen the understanding of how media discourse constructs meaning, influences interpretation, and creates ideological framing during political crises. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader discussions on the intersection of language, power, and persuasion in international news communication.

Research Objectives

(1) To identify the frequency of linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices employed in headlines across a sample of media outlets.

(2) To analyze the ways in which these linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices contribute to making headlines attention-grabbing and persuasive.

Scope of the Study

The research analyzed political and diplomatic news headlines which dealt with the Thailand–Cambodia border dispute (June – August 2025). The research studied only English-language official media website headlines. All news categories including entertainment and lifestyle reports were eliminated.

Literature Review

Linguistic Patterns in News Headlines

Headlines in news media employ particular linguistic methods which both deliver information and draw readers while steering their perceptions. The research investigates

through which five fundamental elements headline language shapes what people understand from news.

Attention-Grabbing Devices: Headlines use attention-grabbing devices that include alliteration, puns, and wordplay to make information-dense messages more memorable. The digital media environment has created an intense battle for audience attention which drives content creators to develop creative methods that exploit curiosity gaps (Chen et al., 2015) yet this approach creates problems because it may prioritize engagement over factual accuracy (Tandoc, 2014).

Framing Effects: The specific linguistic elements of headlines such as verb choice, attribution of agency, and metaphorical expressions reveal particular aspects of stories which direct public understanding by using syntactic and rhetorical structures to interpret information without editorial commentary (Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Emotional Language: Research by Berger and Milkman (2012) shows that emotional headlines with high arousal levels generate more shares than headlines with neutral language. The combination of emotional language with psychological responses leads to better memory retention and enables people to express their identity (Papacharissi, 2016). The application of emotionally charged language in headlines leads to both better sharing rates and increased memory retention but it also produces exaggerated content that sparks outrage and social division (Hasell & Weeks, 2016).

Stereotype and Biases: News headlines use linguistic elements to preserve social order through stereotypical language which emerges from particular word selection and grammatical structures. Research shows that passive voice usage in news reporting continues to reinforce gender and racial discrimination by making powerful figures less accountable while placing blame on vulnerable populations (Van Dijk, 1993; Henley et al., 1995).

Social Influence: Social media platforms have transformed headlines into interconnected nodes of discourse which spread through sharing and commenting activities to enhance their agenda-setting power and enable public issue reframing. The process of digital sharing enables public opinion to shift at a faster pace because it speeds up the traditional media effects (Kwak et al., 2010; Hermida et al., 2012).

Ultimately, linguistic patterns in headlines are far more than stylistic choices — they shape how readers see and feel about the world. The clever play of sounds, emotionally charged words, and subtle framing devices pull readers in before they even realize it, guiding their curiosity and emotions toward certain interpretations.

Rhetorical Devices in News Headlines

Writers and speakers use rhetorical devices as linguistic tools to achieve effective communication while persuading their audiences and creating better engagement. The devices in language create more expressive communication which makes difficult concepts easier to understand and remember through these aspects: emotional and logical appeals, rhythmic and visual effects (Pradit, 2023; Zhou, 2017). News headlines require rhetorical devices to both grab readers' attention and show them how to understand the content.

Journalistic headlines contain rhetorical devices which implement the three classical persuasive methods of Pathos and Ethos and Logos. The combination of detailed statistics and emotional storytelling in news reports creates Pathos effects which generate sympathy and moral awareness in readers. The use of authoritative sources in headlines establishes credibility which strengthens reader confidence in the presented information. News discourse relies on Logos to present factual data which supports objective reporting through logical reasoning and factual accuracy (Zhou, 2017; Prateepchaikul, 2010). The fundamental elements of successful headline writing depend on these three persuasive appeals which work together to create effective language that engages and educates readers.

The core appeals of headlines receive additional support from various rhetorical devices which enhance their effectiveness. The use of enumeration through statistical progression helps readers understand the extent of crises better while activating their thinking and emotional response. Through antithesis political narratives gain depth and complexity when they present opposing concepts like readiness for conflict against the pursuit of peace. The structured parallelism in language creates memorable and persuasive effects through its rhythmic patterns. Through irony readers discover hidden contradictions between what appears real and actual truth which leads them to question

and think critically. Through sensory language in imagery political conflicts become concrete and emotionally powerful scenes (Pradit, 2023).

Major media outlets use rhetorical devices extensively according to empirical studies of their headline corpora. The most common device used in headlines is quotation because it adds credibility through direct references and rhetorical questions create reader engagement by asking questions. The headline impact receives additional depth through stylistic variety because alliteration and hyperbole and metonymy and oxymoron and personification appear frequently in headlines (Pradit, 2023; Zhou, 2017).

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that English-language headlines about Thailand-Cambodia political matters use rhetorical devices together with various linguistic patterns to create their content. The strategic combination of factual reporting with persuasive communication in political news headlines enables public perception formation through emotional guidance and trust reinforcement and logical interpretation which enhances both headline clarity and diplomatic impact.

Previous Studies

Pradit (2023) examined 100 news headlines from BBC and CNN to discover that quotations and rhetorical questions appear most often while quotations help establish credibility and rhetorical questions create reader interest through curiosity. The research demonstrates how these devices create both authoritative news headlines and interactive reading experiences. Zhou (2017) examined Thai English news headlines to show that metonymy and metaphor and alliteration and oxymoron and personification and quotation function as essential rhetorical tools which enhance headline visibility and persuasiveness. The research demonstrates how rhetorical techniques boost headline credibility and reader interaction through qualitative studies of their effects on public understanding and communication success. Ifantidou (2023) studied the emotional effects of alliteration and metaphor in news headlines which make content more memorable and attract readers. Kongthai (2017) and Mazlan (2025) examined how to create dense information through short noun phrases and ellipsis and strategic vocabulary selection.

Konnikova (2014) and Banerjee and Urminsky (2014) demonstrated through experiments that headlines which integrate informational content with affective and

cognitive elements successfully draw readers in and shape their understanding of the information. Zhou (2021) and Finkbeiner (2024) and Salih (2012) demonstrated how headlines serve as interpretive prompts which use pragmatic and rhetorical functions to guide readers toward deeper meanings while influencing their perceptions and shaping their understanding of news content.

Across these works, linguistic and rhetorical devices emerge not as mere embellishments but as precise instruments designed to capture attention, influence interpretation, and shape expectations. Together, they provide a strong foundation for analyzing how English-language headlines about Thailand-Cambodia relations use such techniques to sway perception and diplomatic narratives.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative content analysis and qualitative textual analysis, to investigate linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices in English-language headlines about the Thailand–Cambodia conflict. For the quantitative data, Microsoft Excel was employed to compute frequency distributions for each category.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of English-language headlines from Thai media on Thailand–Cambodia relations. A purposive sample of 120 headlines was drawn from The Nation, Bangkok Post, Khaosod English, and Thai Enquirer, representing both mainstream and independent viewpoints. The data, spanning June to August 2025, covered periods before, during, and after the peak of border tensions.

Although publicly available, the data required ethical attention to accuracy, context, and potential bias. Transparency was maintained in data selection and interpretation to minimize bias and ensure credible analysis.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

A headline analysis checklist was developed from the combination of Pradit (2023) and Zhou (2017) frameworks. The checklist organized linguistic patterns into five categories: attention-grabbing devices, framing effects, emotional language, stereotypes

and biases, and social influence; rhetorical techniques: ethos, pathos, logos, quotation, antithesis, parallelism, irony, imagery, and rhetorical questions.

Data Analysis

The first objective (Quantitative Data) involved studying the frequency of different linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices which appeared in headlines from different media sources using a representative dataset. The pre-established categories were used to evaluate the rhetorical and linguistic aspects of each headline. The frequency and percentage distribution of each technique were determined to establish which methods appeared most frequently across different media platforms. The research data underwent quantitative analysis through descriptive statistics which produced tables that presented results using frequency counts and percentages.

The second objective (Qualitative Data), the selected headlines used a structured method to detect linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices which matched established evaluation criteria. Each technique was analyzed to determine how it produced emotional appeal and tension and suggestiveness in the headlines. Qualitative data were used to show how language components in the headlines simultaneously attracted readers while structuring the conflict story.

Results

The research results follows the structure of two sections which align with the study objectives. The first section conducts a quantitative evaluation of linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices which appear in Thai–Cambodian border conflict headlines to identify the most prevalent media strategies. The second section examines the qualitative aspects of these features which generate attention value through persuasive effects and emotional responses and cognitive engagement. The research shows how writers choose their words and writing techniques to generate particular reactions from readers when presenting conflict-based material.

Table 1: Quantitative Analysis of Linguistic Patterns

Linguistic Patterns	Framing Effects	Emotional Language	Social Influence	Attention-Grabbing Devices	Stereotypes & Biases
Amount (N)	49	33	18	12	8
Percentage (%)	40.83	27.50	15	10	6.67

The data in Table 1 indicates that framing effects were the main pattern at 40.83% because news headlines determine how readers understand the conflict. The analysis shows that emotional language (27.50%) appears often because it includes words which create sympathy and need immediate response. The research indicates that social influence and attention-grabbing devices appear in 15% and 10% of cases, but stereotypes and biases appear least frequently at 6.67%. This finding suggests that news headlines tend to rely more on framing techniques and emotional appeals rather than sensational or biased language to influence readers' perceptions.

Table 2: Quantitative Analysis of Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical Devices	Pathos	Ethos	Logos	Enumeration	Parallelism	Antithesis	Irony	Imagery
Amount (N)	23	19	16	14	13	10	9	8
Percentage (%)	19.17	15.83	13.33	11.67	10.83	8.33	7.50	6.67

The data in Table 2 reveals Pathos stands as the most common rhetorical device used in headlines since it appears 19.17%, to create emotional connections with readers. The text contains 15.83% Ethos and 13.33% Logos which demonstrate credibility-based and logical reasoning. The analysis shows that Enumeration (11.67%) and Parallelism (10.83%) appear moderately in the text, but Antithesis (8.33%), Irony (7.50%), and Imagery (6.67%) appear least frequently which indicates that stylistic devices have less impact than emotional and rational appeals.

The study identifies which linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices appear most often in headlines to reveal how news organizations display the Thai-Cambodian border conflict. The analysis depends on understanding how these techniques appear in order to move forward with the following stage which investigates their operational processes

in headline generation and their effects on reader emotional responses and mental activities.

To address Objective 2, the research investigates how these components function together to create a feeling of urgency and tension which keeps viewers engaged during conflict-related discussions.

Qualitative Interpretations

Linguistic Patterns

1. Framing Effects

Headline: "*Thailand launches operation 'Trat Pikhat Pairee 1' in response to Cambodian assaults*."

The headline uses Framing Effects to create a particular public perception through its presentation of Thailand's military operations as well-organized and legally valid and protective in nature. The statement "launches operation… in response to Cambodian assaults" demonstrates Thailand as a responsible actor who conducts operations with both moral integrity and strategic and ethical and diplomatic conduct. The headline presents a professional image through its focus on organized military operations and defensive measures against foreign attacks. The framework shows Thailand as the superior nation in both diplomatic and ethical terms while backing up its defense of national security. The headline achieves more than basic news reporting because it shapes public understanding through its intentional storytelling approach which demonstrates Framing Effects in journalistic rhetoric.

2. Emotional Language

Headline: "*Updated: Nine Thai civilians killed, 14 injured in Cambodian attacks*."

The headline uses Emotional Language through its combination of "killed" and "injured" to create shock and grief and moral outrage in readers. The declaration shows Cambodia as the attacking force while showing the human cost of war to create an immediate feeling of danger and personal link. The emotionally charged language in this headline creates a stronger bond with readers while building their emotional backing.

3. Social Influence

Headline: "*UN Security Council to Hold Emergency Session on Thailand-Cambodia Border Clashes*."

The headline demonstrates Social Influence because it presents a worldwide authority taking action which confirms the significance of the conflict. The wording establishes that these events should be treated as international matters which supports official actions and builds trust with readers. The headline uses this approach to position the situation within a wider social and global framework which shapes how readers understand the story.

4. Attention-Grabbing Devices

Headline: "*Thai-Cambodia Border Erupts: Strategic Areas Targeted in Renewed Conflict*."

The headline demonstrates Attention-Grabbing Devices through its use of the verb "erupts" which paints a clear picture of fast-paced and powerful events. The first lines establish an immediate feeling of danger through their intense wording which starts the story with a sense of urgency. The strategy develops a memorable and emotionally powerful headline that focuses on essential conflict elements.

5. Stereotypes and Biases

Headline: "*Cambodia pretends to end conflict, prepares for unconventional warfare (analysis/op-ed)*."

The headline employs Stereotypes and Biases to create a deceptive impression of Cambodia through its implication that the nation has deceitful motives in its activities. The statement divides its moral and strategic views by showing Thailand as better than Cambodia while depicting Cambodia as an aggressive state. The strategy converts complex news stories into a fundamental "us versus them" structure which directs readers toward particular evaluation points. The research examines the methods through which news headlines about conflicts use rhetorical devices to create attention-grasping headlines. The analysis examines how classical appeals and stylistic devices create persuasive effects that strengthen emotional power and credibility and enhance textual influence.

Rhetorical Devices

1. Pathos

Headline: "*Updated Nine Thai civilians killed, 14 injured in Cambodian attacks.*"

The headline uses Pathos to create emotional impact by showing the number of civilian deaths which makes readers feel sad and angry. The detailed numbers in this report create emotional responses in readers because they transform statistical information into a powerful message that evokes feelings of sadness and moral outrage.

2. Ethos

Headline: "*UN to hold emergency meeting over Thai-Cambodian border clashes.*"

The headline establishes credibility through its reference to the United Nations because this organization holds worldwide respect as a trusted authority. The announcement of an "emergency meeting" creates a sense of urgency which strengthens both the news credibility and the reliability of its source.

3. Logos

Headline: "*Cambodia suspends all fuel and gas imports from Thailand from June 23.*"

The headline demonstrates Logos through its presentation of particular commodities and a specific date which enables readers to analyze the situation logically and understand the direct consequences of the action.

4. Enumeration

Headline: "*Thai-Cambodian Border Clash: 14 Dead, Scores Injured, Thousands Evacuated.*"

The headline employs Enumeration through a list of death tolls and injury numbers and evacuation figures to create a sense of escalating disaster. The combination of multiple facts creates a dual effect which appeals to both rational thinking and emotional response.

5. Antithesis

Headline: "*Army 'ready' but Thailand seeks peaceful solution on Cambodian border.*"

The headline uses Antithesis to show how military preparedness exists in opposition to the search for peace. The word "but" shows the opposing forces between

aggressive military action and diplomatic efforts which Thailand employs through its dual approach of defense and restraint.

6. Parallelism

Headline: "*Thai Army addresses border conflict with Cambodia; condemns landmines.*"

The headline demonstrates Parallelism through its two symmetrical clauses "addresses border conflict" and "condemns landmines" which produce a rhythmic effect and clear understanding. The identical structure of the two clauses strengthens the Thai Army's dual approach of action and moral commitment which makes the message more convincing.

7. Irony

Headline: "*Cambodia pretends to end conflict, prepares for unconventional warfare (analysis/op-ed).*"

The headline uses irony to show how fake peace gestures coexist with military preparations for war. The discrepancy between what appears to be true and actual reality creates doubt which leads people to question and evaluate things critically.

8. Imagery

Headline: "*Clashes Erupt Between Thai and Cambodian Troops Along Disputed Border Area.*"

The headline uses Imagery through the forceful verb "erupt" which creates a sensory experience of immediate violence. The headline converts abstract warfare into a concrete and intense visual representation which strengthens both emotional involvement and storytelling power.

In summary, the results show that Thai–Cambodian border news headlines use emotional language and framing methods to influence how readers interpret information. The combination of Pathos, Ethos, and Logos along with enumeration, parallelism, and imagery creates persuasive effects that draw audience attention. Social influence together with unconscious biases determines how readers see things which leads to emotionally compelling stories that make conflict reporting extremely interesting.

Research Discussion

Linguistic and Rhetorical Strategies

The three fundamental elements of successful headlines consist of framing methods, emotional terminology, and persuasive devices according to Entman (1993) and Berger & Milkman (2012). The three elements of Pathos generate emotional reactions while Ethos builds credibility through quoted sources and Logos presents factual information (Zhou, 2017; Pradit, 2023). The combination of enumeration, parallelism, and imagery in writing produces three fundamental effects which enhance reader focus and retention and boost the persuasive power of content. Quotations and rhetorical questions further strengthen credibility and curiosity.

Absence of Rhetorical Questions and Quotations

The results show no occurrence of rhetorical questions or quotations because English-language Thai journalism follows specific stylistic conventions. The use of rhetorical questions in political and diplomatic headlines is discouraged because it produces unclear meaning and weakens authority while quotations get omitted to keep headlines direct and easy to understand. The use of declarative and factual language prevails in Thai English-language news outlets because they want to maintain credibility and fast delivery of information during critical times such as the Thailand–Cambodia conflict according to Pradit (2023) and Zhou (2017).

Research Suggestions

The research shows how conflict news uses linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices to create emotional involvement while building authority and shaping national identity. Future research needs to study these patterns and devices in more detail because this study only examined a limited number of them. Practically, journalists should be aware of the ideological impact of their choices, and training in ethical reporting and media literacy can promote balanced coverage. The method enables scholars to study how language shapes public understanding in environmental news and economic news and other fields.

Limitations

This study was conducted within a three-month time window and analyzed content from only four news outlets, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the research did not include social media headlines or posts, where linguistic patterns and rhetorical devices may differ substantially.

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