

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG**

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**A STUDY OF LINGUISTIC FEATURES
OF NEWS ITEMS ON BIRD FLU
IN ENGLISH ELECTRONIC NEWSPAPERS**

**Field : THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
Code : 60.22.15**

**M.A. THESIS OF ARTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
(SUMMARY)**

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- *The College of Foreign Language Library, University of Danang*
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

In our world today, the word “health” evokes a major concern for people. Nowadays, people are more and more aware of the impacts of having a healthy lifestyle by updating news on health via different ways such as magazines, newspapers, television, radio, etc, but newspapers which have the longest history are still the most reliable source of information and popular means of communication since the time it came into being. This is because people can read newspapers to update information at anytime and anywhere.

For students, newspapers become a good source of knowledge to help improve their English skills as well as update social issues. However, together with the great development of science and technology, the trend of getting news through electronic newspapers is gaining ground.

The news on bird flu is one of the terrible occurrences that have been attracting widespread public and global attention. According to the The World Health Organisation (WHO), bird flu, also known as avian influenza or avian flu or bird influenza, is an infectious disease of birds caused by type A strains of the influenza virus. It spreads between both wild and domestic birds, and also passes from birds to humans who are in close contact with poultry or other birds. In the report “*H5N1 avian influenza: Timeline of major events*” updated on 25 January 2012 in The WHO, the Asian H5N1 virus was first detected in Guangdong Province, China, in 1996 and its outbreak to many countries in the world has been reported on and off in the media since then. Let’s consider the following sample of

English news items on bird flu at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-22061537> on 10 April 2013:

China H7N9 strain bird flu toll 'reaches nine'

Two more patients infected with the H7N9 strain of bird flu died on Tuesday, bringing the total to nine, Chinese state media has reported.

The two patients were from China's eastern Anhui and Jiangsu provinces, state media said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that there is no evidence that the H7N9 virus is being transmitted between people - most cases come from poultry.

A total of 28 people in China have been infected by the new bird flu virus. China has banned live poultry trading in Shanghai and Nanjing.

On Monday, the WHO said it was in discussions with China about sending a team of international experts to help investigate the new bird flu strain.

The H7N9 bird flu virus is distinct from the H5N1 virus that has caused more than 360 deaths worldwide since it was found in humans in 2003.

Meanwhile, China's state-run news agency Xinhua said that 10 people from five different provinces had been detained over the spread of false information about H7N9.

Some of them had written micro blog posts saying that the virus had been discovered in their province, and some messages had been reposted several times, Xinhua said.

Over the weekend, there were concerns about human-to-human transmissions after the sons of an elderly man who died from bird flu also contracted a respiratory illness. One of the sons died.

However, Chinese officials and the WHO confirmed on Monday that the son's death was not caused by the bird flu virus.

"Although we do not know the source of infection, at this time there is no evidence of sustained human-to-human transmission," Michael O'Leary, the WHO's representative in China, told reporters on Monday.

"We are very satisfied and pleased with the level of information shared [by the Chinese authorities]," Mr O'Leary added.

In 2003, officials were accused of covering up the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (Sars), a disease which infected 8,096 worldwide, and killed 744.

From the sample above, news is in a written text which has systematically linked ideas within paragraph thanks to the use of cohesive devices. Also the passive voice is employed by the writer to denote the consequences of bird flu outbreak. As a teacher of English, I realize the importance of helping students have a better understanding of the features of linguistics in order to improve their skills of English, especially in newspaper styles and broaden their knowledge of social issues. Therefore, "***A Study of Linguistic Features of News Items on Bird Flu in English Electronic Newspapers***" is the title of the master thesis I do wish to carry out. With an attempt to examine news structure, lexical choices, syntactic features and cohesive devices in newspaper language, I do hope that the results of the research will make some contribution to the process

of teaching and learning English. This is the reason that makes me take a serious concern in doing this research.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims

The aim of the research is to carry out a discourse analysis of news items on bird flu (NIBF) in English electronic newspapers in order to find out the features of news structure and typical discourse features. Besides, the findings of the study are expected to increase the knowledge and effective use of these linguistic features in teaching and learning English, especially for journalism.

1.2.2. Objectives

The objectives of the research are:

- To describe the discourse features of NIBF in English electronic newspapers in terms of their news structure, lexical choices, syntactic features and cohesive devices.
- To suggest some implications for teaching and learning English as well as English for journalism.

1.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study concentrates on the investigation of some linguistic features of news items on bird flu in English electronic newspapers in terms of structure of news, lexical choices, syntactic features and cohesive devices.

In spite of various means of publishing this kind of news items, our scope of investigation is limited to news items in 8 well-known English electronic newspapers in the USA and the UK such as the BBC News, the Guardian, the Huffington Post, the Mirror, the New York Times, the Telegraph, the US News and the Washington Post.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the study above, the research tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is the generic structure of a news item on bird flu in English electronic newspapers?
2. What are lexical choices and syntactic features and cohesive devices of NIBF in English electronic newspapers?
3. What are some possible suggestions for teaching and learning English as well as using English for journalism?

1.5. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The research includes five chapters: Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 (Theoretical Background), Chapter 3 (Methods and Procedure), Chapter 4 (Discussion and Findings) and Chapter 5 (Conclusions and Implications).

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In attempting to understand language, many well-known scholars such as Halliday and Hasan (1976), Quirk (1985), Allan Bell (1991), Biber et al (1999), Beaugrand, R. And Dresler, W. (1981), etc have made a significant investigation into the linguistic features of language.

In Viet Nam, many linguists have made considerable contribution to this field:

Diep Quang Ban (2003), Tran Ngoc Them (2006), Cao Xuan Hao (1991), Nguyen Minh Thuyet and Nguyen Van Hiep (1998)

Additionally, doctoral dissertations and master theses raised some issues related to this field: Phan Van Hoa (1998)'s, Pham Thi Thu Huong (2011), Phan Thi Hoai Thanh (2012).

With respect to newspapers, Pham Do Quyen (2001), Le Thi Phuong (2011), Le Thi Hoai Tam (2011), Tran Cao Thao Nguyen (2011) and Le Thi Thao Anh (2012) gave complete look at linguistic features of different discourse.

From the studies presented above, the authors studied the lexical features, syntactical features and cohesive devices in many kinds of discourse but there is no evidence that any research on NIBF has been taken into consideration. Therefore, “A Study of Linguistic Features of News Items on Bird Flu in English Electronic Newspapers” will be conducted with the aim of contributing a minor part to this field.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Text

a. Concepts of Text

Text in this thesis is viewed as 1) a language in use for communication, (2) a language unit which has meaning, unity and purpose, (3) a semantic unit which is written of words, phrases, sentences, so its linguistic feature analysis should be approached from the semantic perspective expressed and coded in words, phrases and structures.

b. Features of Texts

According to Beaugrande & Dressler [3, p3], text is established as a communicative occurrence, which has to meet seven standards of textuality: *cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality*. If any of these standards are not satisfied, the text is considered not to have fulfilled its function and not to be communicative”.

2.2.2. Cohesion and Coherence

Coherence has been applied to the concepts and relations underlying its meaning and to some general overall, interrelatedness in the text. In other words, coherence has been defined as continuity in meaning and context in a discourse.

2.2.3. Newspapers and Electronic Newspapers

2.2.4. News in Electronic Newspapers

a. What is news

The general notion of news, meaning new information about events, things or persons

b. Structure of news

There are 3 main parts in a news item:

Headline, Lead and Body which is clarified by Van Dijk [41]. It has been traditionally compared to an inverted pyramid.

2.2.5. Defintions of News Item on Bird Flu

2.2.6. Bird Flu Overview

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.2. RESEARCH METHODS

With the aim of achieving the set goal, several methods are simultaneously employed such the descriptive method, the analytic method, the inductive method.

3.3. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLES

100 samples of NIBF collected from 8 English electronic newspapers in the USA and the UK such as the BBC, the Guardian, the New York Times, the Mirror, the Huffington Post, the Telegraph, the US News, and the Washington Post (from 2006 to 2013) must have 4 parts: Headline, Lead and Body, in which the average length of the Body ranging from 200 to 400 words.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION

The data collected for this study was from 8 English electronic newspapers (from 2006 to 2013) in the USA and the UK such as the BBC, the Guardian, the New York Times, the Mirror, the Huffington Post, the Telegraph, the US News, and the Washington Post. The choice for these newspaper publications is hinged on recency as well as the quality of the news delivery by the reporters.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the research was done in tandem with the research questions. The news items on bird flu selected for the analysis are in the form of written texts in English electronic newspapers. After collecting and clarifying the data, I examined the structure of news, lexical choices in NIBF. In analyzing the syntactic

features, I took into consideration the sentence patterns, passive voice and reported speech. Aslo, I looked through the selected sample to find out the use of cohesive devices in NIBF. The frequency occurrence of each part was displayed in tables with percentage terms. The results were discussed and evaluated from the frequency of each category.

3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. STRUCTURE OF A NEWS ITEM ON BIRD FLU

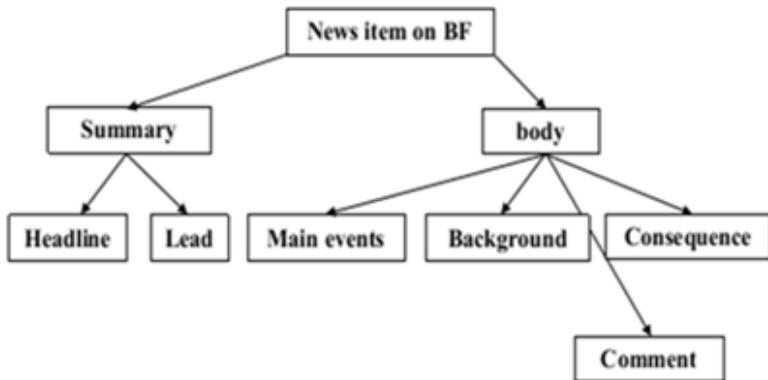


Figure 4.1. Structure of a news item on BF

Here is an example of a news structure by Van Dijk:

<p><i>Background Information</i></p>	<p><i>The plane was headed for Ciudad Constitucion about 60 miles (97km) south of Loreto, Mr Enriquez said. Efforts to contact the pilot had failed.</i></p> <p><i>There was no immediate information about the passengers on the flight.</i></p> <p><i>David Korenfeld, director general of Mexico's National Water Commission, warned Tropical Storm Octave was expected to bring "significant rainfall" on Monday night into Tuesday.</i></p> <p><i>The storm has maximum sustained winds of 50 miles (85km) per hour, according to the US National Hurricane Center.</i></p> <p><i>It said the storm was expected to weaken and become a tropical depression by the time it nears the Mexican Peninsula.</i></p>
<p><i>Consequences</i></p>	<p><i>More than a hundred people died in Mexico as a result of Tropical Storms Manuel and Ingrid last month.</i></p>

S	<i>Headline</i>	<i>Mexico plane missing as Tropical Storm Octave</i>
U		<i>news</i>
M		<i>A small plane carrying at least 14 people has gone</i>
M		<i>missing in north-western Mexico, according to</i>
A	<i>Lead</i>	<i>officials.</i>
R		<i>The plane disappeared after it took off from</i>
Y		<i>Loreto in Baja California Sur state.</i>
B	<i>More details of</i>	<i>Bad weather caused by Tropical Storm Octave,</i>
	<i>the main event</i>	<i>which was approaching the Mexican coast, has</i>
O		<i>reportedly hampered search efforts.</i>
		<i>Seven states, including Baja California Sur, have</i>
		<i>declared a state of alert ahead of the storm.</i>
D		<i>"A Marine plane was going to go out but the</i>
		<i>conditions right now are no good for the search,"</i>
	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Reuters news agency quoted Carlos Enriquez,</i>
Y	<i>from people</i>	<i>head of Baja California Sur emergency services,</i>
	<i>involved</i>	<i>as saying.</i>
		<i>"We've suspended things until the conditions</i>
		<i>change."</i>

4.2. LEXICAL CHOICES IN NIBF

4.2.1. Lexical Items Relating to Bird Flu

4.2.2. Compounding

4.2.3. Acronyms

4.3. SYNTACTIC FEATURES IN NIBF

4.3.1. Sentence Patterns in NIBF

a. Sentence Patterns in the Headline

Table 4.3. Sentence Patterns in the Headlines of NIBF

<i>Types</i>		<i>Occurrence</i>	<i>Rate</i>
Sentence Headlines	Statement	47	47
	Complex Sentence	28	28
	Elliptical Sentence	8	8
	Question	3	3
	Compound Sentence	1	1
Phrase Headlines		13	13
Total		100	100%

According to Quirk [35, p.53], the common declarative structures of statements were analyzed in such patterns as SVO, SVA, SVC, SVOC and SVOA.

Table 4.5. Patterns of Statement Headlines in NIBF

Patterns	Occurrence	Rate
SVO	12	25
SVC	2	4,5
SVA	5	11
SVOA	27	59,7
SVOO	1	2,3
Total	47	100%

As for phrase types, Quirk [35, p.1238] also distinguishes two constituents: the head and the modification. The modification can precede or follow the head, correspondingly named pre-modification and post-modification.



Pre-modification + Head noun

- (1) (2)
- (4.44) Bird Flu Concerns [144]
(1) (2)
- (4.45) H7N9 Bird Flu [35]
(1) (2)

Pre-modification + Head noun + Post modification

- (1) (2) (3)
- (4.48) Better Flu Vaccine On The Horizon [139]
(1) (2) (3)
- (4.49) The Horizon Guide to Pandemic [141]
(1) (2) (3)

The Lead

b. Sentence Patterns in the Lead

Table 4.6. Sentence Patterns in the Leads of NIBF

Types	Occurrence	Rate
Simple Sentence	3	3
Compound Sentence	2	2
Complex Sentence	95	95
Total	100	100%

c. Sentence Patterns in the Body

Table 4.7. Sentence Patterns in the Body of NIBF

Types	Occurrence	Rate
Complex Sentence	1765	98,7
Compound Sentence	22	1,3
Total	1787	100%

4.3.2 Passive Voice

The passive voice is formed by the following structure by Quirk [35]:

**Subject passive + Verb passive (be/get + p.p) + optional Agent
(by-Phrase)**

Cited below are some examples from the data set that contained passive voice:

(4.63) *Two cases **were reported** in the central Henan province, while the others were seen in and around Shanghai, where the virus first appeared in February.*

[73]

Apart from the popular construction above, the passives in NIBF sometimes go with modal verbs *should, must* following the construction below:

**Subject passive + Modal Verbs (should/must) + Verb passive
(be + PP)**

For instance:

(4.68) *"Aggressive intervention to block further animal-to-person transmission in live poultry markets, as has previously been done in Hong Kong, **should be considered**," Kwok-Yung Yuen of the University of Hong Kong, who led the study, told *The Lancet*. [69]*

The use of passive voice in NIBF can be summarized in the table below:

Table 4.9. Passive Voice in NIBF

Passive	Occurrence	Rate
With agent	37	7,3
Without agent	472	92,7
Total	509	100 %

4.3.3. Direct Speech and Indirect Speech

The distribution of direct and in direct speech can be summarized:

Table 4.10. Direct and Indirect Speech in NIBF

Types	Occurrence	Rate
Direct speech	345	72,3
Indirect speech	132	27,7
Total	477	100 %

As for the positions of the reporting clauses in NIBF, they can occur in three positions: initial position which shows the reporting clause preceding the reported clause as in (4.70); medial position as in (4.71) and final position in which the reporting clause is put after the reported clause as in (4.72). This can be summarized in the table below:

Table 4.11. Positions of Reporting Clauses in NIBF

Positions of Reporting Clause	Occurrence	Rate
Initial	141	40,8
Medial	185	53,6
Final	19	5,6
Total	345	100 %

Here are some examples:

(4.70) *The Government's acting chief veterinary officer, Fred Landeg, **said** yesterday: "Data suggests that it's closely related to*

outbreaks in the Czech Republic and Germany, which does suggest a possible wild bird source. [127]

(4.71) *"In 2004, when H5N1 hit the market, it needed months to recover," said Feng Zijian, vice director of the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. "The impact of H7N9 will continue to be felt in the upcoming period. We just don't know how long this bird flu will last."* [97]

(4.72) *"We thought that people would try to avoid domestic chicken, and have more preference for imported chicken, but this is not the case. Across the board, people are being more cautious," said Sarah Li, director of the USA Poultry & Egg Export Council's Hong Kong office.*

[156]

The syntactic Features in NIBF can be summarized as follows:

Table 4.12. Syntactic Features in NIBF

Types of Sentences	Occurrence	Rate
Simple Sentence	57	2
Complex Sentence	1892	67
Compound Sentence	28	1
Noun phrase	8	0,2
Passive Sentence	516	17,8
Direct & Indirect Speech	477	12
Total	2975	100 %

4.4. COHESIVE DEVICES IN NIBF

4.4.1. References

a. Personal Reference

The analysis of personal pronouns and possessive adjectives

b. Demonstrative Reference in NIBF

The analysis of the determiners, the definite article and the adverbs

c. Comparative References in NIBF

The analysis of particular comparison which compares things in terms of quantity and quality.

The Summary of References in NIBF

Table 4.13. Summary of References in NIBF

R	TYPES		Occurrence	Rate
E	Personal References	<i>Personal Pronouns</i>	502	52,9
F		<i>Possessive Adjectives</i>	43	4,5
E		<i>Total use of Personal References</i>	545	57,4
R	Demonstrative References	<i>Determiners</i>	236	24,8
E		<i>Adverbs</i>	30	3,3
N		<i>Neutral determiners</i>	46	4,8
C		<i>Total of Demonstrative References</i>	312	32,9
E	Comparative References	<i>General Comparisons</i>	0	0
S		<i>Particular Comparisons</i>	91	9,7
		<i>Total of Comparative References</i>	91	9,7
	<i>Total</i>		948	100%

4.4.2. Ellipsis

There are not many cases of ellipsis as these phenomena tend to be more common in spontaneous speech, Quirk [35, p.855]

4.4.3. Conjunctions

a. Additive Conjunctions

The analysis the use of “and” and “or” in adding information

b. Adversative Conjunction

The analysis of “but” and “however” in expressing the contrast.

c. Causal Conjunction

The analysis of “so” and “therefore” in expressing the cause/reason

d. Temporal Conjunction

The analysis of the conjunction “before” and “since” in knitting the preceding and the following information in terms of time.

4.4.4. Lexical Cohesion in NIBF

The analysis of *reiteration* which involves the repetition of a lexical item in terms of three sub-classes: repetition, synonyms.

The Summary of Cohesive Devices in NIBF

Table 4.16. Summary of Cohesive Devices in NIBF

Types of Cohesion	Occurrence	Rate
Reference	948	50,1
Ellipsis	23	1,3
Conjunction	288	15,2
Lexical cohesion	632	33,4
Total	1891	100%

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to outline a theoretical tool kit for the linguistic analysis of news discourse and then used it in the field by analyzing news items based on a theoretical framework. The study was carried out to get a full understanding of the typical features of this kind of news. With this aim, I have set up major goals for the thesis; i.e. to investigate and find out the linguistic features of NIBF in terms of the news structure and their typical discourse features. The findings below are presented in each category.

As for the structure of news in NIBF, the result of the findings shows that the common structure in NIBF is as follows: **Headline**, **Lead** and **Body** are the three main parts of the news besides the supplementary of optional factors such as the time, the name of reporter, hyperlinks, etc. The **Summary** consists of **Headline** and **Lead** which summarize the news item. The **Body** deals with main events, background information, consequences and comments of people involved or of the reporter himself.

At the lexical choices, one important finding is that the news is engaged on the extensive use of lexical items relating to bird flu as well as abbreviations in terms of compounding and acronyms. It is worth stressing that these features contribute to the success of the news since they make the news concise, more informative and impressive.

The peculiarities of these news items also lie in their syntactic features. As the reporter is obliged to be brief but concise,

he naturally tries to cramp all his facts into the space allotted. This resides in using the simple sentences taking up 53% in the headlines to grab the readers' attention. However, in order to convey more detailed information of the deadly bird flu to the readers in a concise way, the complex sentences are more significantly used in the body of NIBF with 1765 occurrences accounting for 98,7%. Besides, passive voice with 17,8%, although, is not in a prominent position in the findings, its utilisation in emphasizing the impact of bird flu has as strong an effect as the use of some other features. Reported speech is also an indispensable tool in the "source" stage which contains original comments from the official authorities or experts involved. Taking up 12%, direct and indirect speech are used to express the objectivity and reliability of the news.

As regards cohesive devices, the study focused on four kinds of cohesive devices that are reference, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion, but reporters have a strong tendency to use references and conjunctions. The reference is dominant. Among three sub-categories of reference devices, personal reference is used with the highest percentage of 52,9 %. The use of possessive adjectives takes up 4,5 % whereas no cases of possessive pronouns are found in the collected data. In the line of lexical cohesion in NIBF, repetition is very commonly employed with 67,8% and followed by synonyms with 32,2 %, but there is no case of superordinates in the data set.

In brief, the aforementioned observations are about the linguistic features of news items on bird flu in English electronic newspapers in term of lexical choices, syntactic features and cohesive devices.

Hopefully, this study contributes a minor part to the linguistic analysis of news discourse.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

Any research on linguistics is for two main purposes. First, the research supplies readers with overall view of the problem. Secondly, it orients readers towards language teaching, learning and using, especially for journalism.

For language teaching

The findings of this study can be a useful source for teachers in teaching English. For example, with reference to teaching how to write a piece of news a framework of news, vocabulary relating to the topic as well as appropriate syntactic structures must be considered carefully. As for enriching students' vocabulary on specific topics as well as knowledge of social issues, this study might be useful.

For language learning

For learners of English, they are enriched with the bulk of vocabulary as well as the linguistic features which support their study, research, or knowledge of social issues. Additionally, through the findings, learners can master how to use language in specific field to obtain the best effectiveness in their study.

For language use for journalism

For journalism students, especially Vietnamese ones, who are trained to write news in English should be provided with a theoretical framework at discourse level in order to write good news items on social issues in general and on bird flu in particular. Using correct language, especially lexical choices in news writing is also

very important because it is one of the decisive factors which directly influence the effectiveness of the news. Moreover, electronic newspapers have gained ground in recent years. Once a piece of news is uploaded, it is available not only for Vietnamese readers but readers in the world. Therefore, the study hopes to bring about one more reference to Vietnamese reporters to have a deep understanding of linguistic features of news discourses to write well-captioned news items of international stature. In other words, the acquisition of knowledge on the choice of linguistic variables such as lexical choices, syntactic features, and cohesive devices in NIBF will serve as a means of educating both novice and expert writers of news items on the acceptable rhetorical practices in their disciplines. In brief, it is worth pointing out that the study's outstanding contribution is realized most especially for journalism .

5.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In spite of the fact that a lot of efforts have been made to complete the study, it cannot help having certain limitations due to the lack of time, reference materials as well as my limited linguistic knowledge.

Firstly, the number of selected articles for analyzing is not numerous, 100 samples are taken from 8 English electronic newspapers in the USA and the UK. Secondly, I focused on the linguistic features in terms of the structure of news, lexical choices, syntactic features and cohesive devices. Therefore, there might be other linguistic features which I have not examined.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The need for further research is heightened by the fact that there is sparse work on specific topics in media genres. This is an indication of how much work on news items in media discourse remains undone. It is hoped that the suggestion explicitly or implicitly made here will enable further research and motivate other researchers to continue to explore other sub-genres of online media genres. A number of other studies can, therefore, be conducted to contribute to investigate in this field. These may be considered for further research:

1. A study of the sociolinguistic and pragmatic features in English news items on bird flu.
2. A study of the semantic features and stylistic devices in English news items on bird flu.