Rhetorical strategy preferences in newspaper editorials

Albert Agbesi Wornyo

**Abstract:** Newspaper editorials have been found to follow the same structure across cultures but tend to vary in how they realize their rhetorical strategies. Contextual factors are said to influence rhetorical strategies of editorials. This study examines the rhetorical strategies used in the editorials of the Daily Graphic of Ghana and the New York Times of the United States. The study is based on the theory of intercultural rhetoric which proposes that texts vary across cultures. Using the concept of genre analysis, the study was carried out within the classification of newspaper editorials into three schematic structures: namely, the introduction, the body and the conclusion. The results show that the editorials of the Daily Graphic mostly employ the rhetorical strategies of expressing worry about political actions and social issues and proposes a solution to the issues. The New York Times editorials on the other hand question political and social issues, criticize the actions taken and express a necessity for the issues to be addressed. The rhetorical strategies mostly used by the Daily Graphic are attributed to the traditional norms of communication in the Ghanaian society which does not permit criticism of authority while those mostly used by the New York Times are attributed to the exercise of freedom of the press in the American society. The paper concludes that rhetorical strategies mostly used by the Daily Graphic have implications for instruction in journalism and media practice in Ghana.

**Subjects:** Language & Linguistics; Language Teaching & Learning; Literature

**Keywords:** editorial writers; expressing solution; expressing worry; making prediction; rhetorical strategy

1. Introduction

Communication in general is a contextual and cultural phenomenon in the sense that the setting where a particular communication activity occurs influences how the message is constructed and disseminated and how the message is perceived (Neuliep, 2015). It has been established that text construction as a means of communication is also influenced by contextual factors among which cultural thought patterns have been identified as a factor that influences how ideas are organized.
in writing (Connor, 2008). The context within which a text is constructed therefore influences the text.

There are cross-cultural analyzes of texts that have pointed out differences in texts from different settings and the differences have been attributed to differences in which the texts were constructed. Texts used in most of these cross-cultural studies are media texts including newspaper editorials. For example, Zarza and Tan (2016) compared the use of strategic features in American and Malaysian editorials and discovered differences between the newspapers in their style of writing. The differences were attributed to the differences in the cultural contexts of the two newspaper editorials.

There is a number of contextual factors that influence media texts. The socio-political as well as the cultural contexts within which media texts are constructed play a role in understanding the organization of the texts. Liu and Li (2017) in a comparative study of how smog is represented in Chinese and Anglo-American newspapers pointed out that the differences in which the two newspapers represent smog cannot be understood without situating the texts in the socio-political contexts in which they were constructed. Saft and Ohara (2006) investigated how Japanese newspaper editorials used metaphor and other linguistics devices to create a sense of urgency for military action in the aftermath of 9th September. Rafiee et al. (2018) enumerates some contextual factors that influence media texts as cultural contexts, professional conventions and institutional settings, socio-cultural perspectives and socio-cultural status.

Comparative studies of newspaper editorials across cultures have revealed that editorials are sensitive to the socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic contexts in which the writers compose the texts. Watanabe (2021) evaluated how Chinese and Japanese editorials represented the conflict over the East China Sea in their respective favours. The study highlighted how texts from different domains evaluate and represent meaning based on their respective socio-political contexts. Beldarrain-Durandegui (2011) conducted an in-depth comparative analysis of Basque and Spanish newspaper editorials and discovered differences in the strategies that the two editorials use to express writer and reader communality. The findings of the study were linked to a struggle to establish a democracy patterned on Western models.

It is important to note that, as opinion texts, editorials aim at stimulating societal change or influencing public opinion on various issues within the social context in which they are written. This, therefore influences the way the writers compose editorial texts to achieve the desired effect. Hundt et al. (2018) studied how editorials framed conditional citizenship in South Korea by entreating Koreans to accept the reality of multiculturalism. The study reveals how the editorials advocated a change to incorporate migrants into the South Korean society. Stanfield and Rodgers (2017) analyzed the link between newspaper editorials on tobacco control and community characteristics data on tobacco and concluded that editorials might contribute to stimulating change. To point out the deliberate use of language by editorials to achieve specific goals, Eze (2021) analyzed journalistic framing of a change in the date of the celebration of Democracy Day in Nigeria and noted that framing was subjectively organised to achieve a specific goal. This supports an assertion by Belmonte (2007) that editorials comment on social, economical and political topics to accomplish the reader’s acceptance through a string of meticulously crafted textual strategies.

Some recent studies on newspaper editorials have focused on how the writers frame discussions on COVID-19. In a comparative study, Ghani et al. (2022) analyzed English editorials of Pakistan and UK editorials to unearth how they presented the influence of COVID-19 on the lives of the people in their respective countries. The analysis revealed that the two newspaper editorials vary in the way they constructed social meaning linguistically. This highlights how texts from different socio-cultural backgrounds vary in using textual strategies to communicate their messages to achieve desired goals or objectives. Another study on the framing of COVID-19 by editorials in
Pakistan reveals how local and societal values are understood for the purpose of making policy decisions (Aziz et al., 2022).

Studies on textual strategies used by editorial writers from different socio-cultural settings are useful because they help to understand the norms and values of the societies in which the texts are constructed. In addition, they reveal the editorial writers’ stance or attitude towards the preservation of such norms and values. In a comparative study of the editorials of the New York Times and the Tehran Times, Bonyadi (2010, p. 335) points out that the rhetorical strategy used by the Tehran Times could be sociolinguistically attributed to the “value of interpretation in a theocratic country like Iran.” The present study compares the editorials of the Daily Graphic and the New York Times to examine their preferences in the use of rhetorical strategies. The purpose of the study is to show that the rhetorical strategies that are preferred by the two editorials reflect the norms and values of the socio-cultural settings of the two newspapers.

2. Literature review
The rhetorical analysis of editorials have been conducted by focusing on the schematic structures of the editorials. These studies have been conducted in line with Swales (1990) genre analysis. The schematic structure of a genre is the typical form of that type of writing. Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans (2002) refer to this as the prototype and Ansary and Babaii (2005) refer to it as the generic integrity of newspaper editorials. For newspaper editorials as a genre, studies have established their schematic structure (Bolivar, 1994; Hoey, 1983; McCarthy, 1991; Van Dijk, 1993). These studies have established that newspaper editorials have three main schematic structures. The first is the introduction of a newspaper editorial which generally provides a summary of a topic. The second structure provides a detailed evaluation of the topic and the last structure provides a recommendation.

According to Bolivar (1994), editorials are structured into the lead (L), the follow (F) and the valuate (V). These three are referred to as the triad. These three parts conform to Van Dijk’s (1992). Van Dijk (1993, 1995) three moves classification of newspaper editorials into the definition, evaluation and conclusion. In a similar fashion, McCarthy (1991) also classified newspaper editorials into three moves as establishing a common ground, making a claim and issuing a counter-claim. Hoey (1983) puts newspaper editorials into four parts as describing the situation, identifying and describing the problem, proposing a solution to the problem and evaluating the proposed solution. The first and the second moves (describing the situation, and identifying and describing the problem) could be merged to form the first structure. This indicates that generally, newspaper editorials have three schematic structures.

With the stratification of editorials into three, the first part performs the function of presenting an issue. Bolivar (1994) refers to this move as the lead, which introduces the topic to be evaluated. Hoey (1983) refers to it as describing the situation, McCarthy (1991) refers to it as establishing a common ground and Van Dijk (1993) refers to it as summarizing the event. In the first structure of an editorial, there is an issue, an event or a topic that is presented and there is an indication that in the presentation of the topic, it is described briefly by way of summarizing to give the reader a fair idea about the topic. This is done to let the reader know the topic that the editorial writer would discuss.

The second part of the editorial referred to as the Follow provides a description of the event or topic introduced in the first part of the editorial. This section of the editorial forms the body where the event is discussed in detail. This part of the editorial has several sub-moves in dealing with the event under discussion.

The third and the last major section or structure closes the topic under discussion. As the closure, it is realised in various styles as giving recommendations or advice or warning (Van Dijk, 1993). It may also propose a solution to the issues discussed or offer a suggestion.
Studies on the analysis of newspaper editorials have confirmed that, universally, editorials have similar conventional structure (Bhatia, 1993) but tend to differ in various ways across cultures. Some of the ways editorials vary include differences in the social functions that they seem to perform (Wornyo & Klu, 2017) differences in their use of hedging across cultures (Sedaghat et al., 2015) and differences in the rhetorical strategies used (Bonyadi, 2012). Some studies have also revealed that editorials tend to vary in various styles (Giannoni, 2006; Sabzevari & Sadeghi, 2013; Yen & Chen, 2008). The way editorials introduce a topic also vary across cultures. For example, it has been reported that German editorials put their argument point first more often than English editorial (Tirkkonen-Condit & Lieflander-Koistinen, 1989).

With reference to the differences in the use of rhetorical structures across cultures, some studies have been conducted using intercultural rhetoric as the theory that underpin the studies. Bonyadi (2010) used the Tehran Times and The New York Times to establish differences in the use of rhetorical strategies between Persian and American editorials. Zarza and Tan (2016) analyzed the New Straits Times and The New York Times to investigate the differences in the schematic structure and persuasive style between Malaysian and American editorials. It was revealed that there are disparities in the style of writing across the two cultures. The differences in rhetorical strategies and the style of the editorials in these studies were attributed to the socio-cultural and socio-political values of their respective countries. In this paper, the Daily Graphic and The New York Times are used to determine the preferences in the use of rhetorical strategies by the two editorials and examine how the rhetorical preferences use relate to the social contexts of the editorials. Connor and Traversa (2014) indicates that the identification of preferred patterns in texts is useful for the purposes of teaching writing. It should be noted that it is not only relevant to teaching but also important for understanding how societal values are dealt with in writing; especially in newspaper editorials.

3. Methodology
The first four months in 2016 form the period within which editorials were retrieved for the study. Editorials published in the two newspapers from January to April 2016 were culled from the websites of The New York Times (www.nytimes.com) and the Daily Graphic (www.graphic.com. gh). For the Daily Graphic, all the editorials were not available on-line so, some of the hard copy newspapers were used. The editorials collected within the chosen period form the data used for the study. Within the period, a total of 100 editorials were collected for the study. The Daily Graphic publishes only one editorial daily but the New York Times publishes several editorials a day. As a result, for the New York Times, one editorial was chosen each day by taking into consideration the most important issue of that day.

The period chosen for the collection of data for the study was based on observation of socio-political activities of the Ghanaian society. An Afrobarometer analysis of the practice of democracy in Ghana indicates that the expression of public opinion and socio-political participation of the citizenry seem to be more vibrant during election years (Armah-Attoh & Robertson 2014). During election year, there are socio-political issues that engage the attention of the media. Based on this, an election year was chosen for the collection of data for the study. Election year in Ghana coincides with election year in the United States of America as Presidential elections in both countries are held every four years. Five recent elections in the two countries are the Presidential elections held in 2020, 2016, 2012 2008 and 2004. Though the most recent election year was 2020, it was dominated by COVID-19 issues that took the attention of the media. The year 2016 becomes the recent election year as the period chosen to collect data for the study.

4. Analytical framework
This study compares two newspaper editorials from two different socio-cultural settings drawing on the theory of intercultural rhetoric which postulates that how ideas are organized in text tend to differ in ways that reflect the cultural thought patterns of the social settings in which the texts
are constructed. The two editorials analyzed in this study are the Daily Graphic editorials of Ghana from English as a Second Language (ESL) background and the New York Times editorials from an Anglo-American setting of the United States. The discourse feature analyzed is the rhetorical strategy of the two editorials. Rhetorical strategy is used to refer to how the general function of a portion of a text is realized. In other words, how the schema or a move is realized. Since newspaper editorials are found to be similar in their general structure across cultures but differ in how the sub-moves are realized, this study focuses on investigating how the two newspaper editorials vary in the rhetorical strategies used in realizing each of the three schematic structures: the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

4.1. The introduction of the editorials

Bonyadi (2010, 2012) has established that there are two sub-moves within the introduction of an editorial. These sub-moves are orientation and criticism. The first sub-move under the introductory move performs the function of “engaging the reader with the topic.” Bonyadi (2010) explains that this move is realised through various rhetorical strategies. He indicates that orientation is not only realised by presenting a summary of the issues as suggested by Van Dijk (1996), but also “by declarative and evaluative sentences, or rhetorical question and other rhetorical strategies” (p. 328). The second sub-move under the introductory section performs the function of “asserting the criticism.” This move is also realized through different rhetorical strategies such as endorsement, criticism and expression of worry.

The function of the first sub-move that Bonyadi refers to as “engaging the reader” is where the editorial writers present the topic to the reader. This is therefore referred to in this study as initiating the topic. The second sub-move “asserting the criticism” is where the editorial writers take a stance with reference to the topic presented to the reader. This sub-move is therefore referred to as stating the thesis. The conclusion drawn from this is that the first schematic structure of editorials has two sub-moves: introducing the topic and stating the thesis. These sub-moves are realized by editorial writers using various rhetorical strategies.

In another schematic analysis of editorials, Zarza and Tan (2016) refer to the first schematic structure of editorials as presenting the case/problem and identified five sub-moves which they called steps under this schematic structure as addressing issue/problem, elaborating issue, mentioning initiation events, providing background information and presenting standpoint. Two of the first four sub-moves, elaborating issue and providing background information identified by Zarza and Tan (2016) are seen as various rhetorical strategies used to realize the first sub-move and other two, addressing issues/problem and mentioning initiation events both refer to the function of initiating the topic. The last sub-move (step) of the five sub-moves (presenting standpoint) is seen as the sub-move that states the thesis. In effect, the five sub-moves identified by Zarza and Tan (2016) are the same as initiating the topic and stating the thesis; two sub-moves.

By putting the two sub-moves together, and determining the rhetorical strategies used to realize them, the framework developed for the analysis of the introduction is presented in table 1 below.

| Table 1. Analytical framework for the introduction of the editorials |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Sub-Moves** | **Realisation** | **No of Editorials** |
| Initiating the Topic | Evaluation of issue |  |
| | Providing background information |  |
| | Summary of event |  |
| Stating the Thesis | By Criticism/Questioning |  |
| | By Expressing Worry/Concern |  |
| | By Endorsement |  |
Table 2. Rhetorical strategies used in the introduction of the GRA and the NYT

| Sub-moves                | Rhetorical Strategy          | GRA (f) | NYT (f) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|
| Initiating the topic     | Evaluation of issue         | 75      | 65      |
| Providing background information |                           | 20      | 20      |
| Stating the thesis       | Summary of event            | 05      | 15      |
|                          | Criticism/questioning       | 21      | 68      |
|                          | Expressing worry            | 57      | 15      |
|                          | Endorsement                 | 22      | 10      |
| Total                    |                             | 100     | 100     |

Table 3. Rhetorical strategies used in the body of the GRA and the NYT

| Rhetorical strategy       | GRA = 1682 No of instances | GRA percentages | NYT = 1726 No of instances | NYT percentages |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Explaining                | 412                        | 24.49           | 486                         | 28.15           |
| Contextualizing argumentation | 185                        | 10.99           | 216                         | 12.51           |
| Reasoning                 | 76                         | 4.51            | 125                         | 7.24            |
| Expressing solution       | 207                        | 12.30           | 32                          | 1.85            |
| Comparing and contrast    | 3                          | 0.17            | 57                          | 3.30            |

Table 4. Rhetorical strategies used in the conclusion of the GRA and the NYT

| Rhetorical Strategies | GRA (f) | NYT (f) |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|
| Making Prediction     | 6       | 15      |
| Providing Suggestions | 7       | 30      |
| Stating a Necessity   | 32      | 38      |
| Stating Warning/Caution | 52     | 10      |
| Stating Hopes         | 3       | 7       |
| Total                 | 100     | 100     |

4.2. The body of the editorials

The body of the newspaper editorial is the second schematic structure of the editorial. The focus of this section is to discuss or evaluate the topic or the issue initiated in the introductory section. The body of the editorial is considered the section responsible for developing the issue or the topic under discussion (Bonyadi, 2010). Bhatia (1993) refers to this section of the editorial as the argument move of the editorial and Zarza and Tan (2016) called it justifying or refuting events. The body of the editorial from various points of analysis is regarded as the section of the editorial where the writer presents the details of the issue or the topic initiated in the introduction by developing content that highlights the issue presented and offers a solution to the problem (Hoey, 1983) or by offering arguments and counter arguments on the issue presented (McCarthy, 1991).

A detailed analysis of the body of editorials analyzed by Zarza and Tan (2016) is considered as the various rhetorical strategies used by editorial writers to develop the body of newspaper editorials. Zarza and Tan (2016) identified five steps (explaining, contextualizing argumentation, reasoning, expressing solution and contrasting) under move 3 (justifying or refuting events) of their analysis. These five steps are considered as the rhetorical strategies used in developing the body of editorials in this study. The analysis of the two newspaper editorials in this study, was carried out
to determine the rhetorical strategies used often by the editorial writers in order to establish the differences in the use of rhetorical strategies by the two newspaper editorials in developing content for the issues presented. The analysis of the rhetorical strategies used to develop content shows the frequency of the rhetorical strategies used in each of the two editorials.

4.3. **The conclusion of the editorials**

The conclusion is the last schematic structure of newspaper editorials. This section of the editorials is analyzed taking into consideration two studies by Bonyadi (2010, 2012). Bonyadi (2010) analyzed the concluding section of two newspaper editorials and found that this section of newspaper editorials is realized through two main rhetorical strategies. These are giving informative comments and presenting directives. The analysis further revealed that informative comments are usually followed by two rhetorical strategies: making predictions and stating a necessity, with a few instances of solely informative comments. The second rhetorical strategy, presenting directives, is usually presented as offering a suggestion or expressing a necessity. The second study by Bonyadi (2012) found additional rhetorical strategies that followed the presentation of directives. These strategies stated hopes, warning and or fear.

Considering the way informative comments are given and how the directives are presented in the two studies (Bonyadi, 2010, 2012), five rhetorical strategies seem to emerge as the means by which the conclusions of editorials are realized. These five strategies are: making a prediction, providing a solution or suggestion, presenting a necessity, stating a warning/caution and giving only informative comments. Bonyadi (2010) indicates that none of the editorials of The New York Times used in his study ended the conclusion of the editorials with the sole offering of informative comments. This means that information comment is always followed by another strategy. The editorials selected for this study were analyzed with reference to these five rhetorical strategies listed except informative comment. In place of informative comment, the expression of appeal was used in the analysis of the data. The last paragraphs of the editorials were usually the conclusion of the editorial text.

5. **Results**

5.1. **The introduction**

Table 2 below shows the results of the analysis of the introduction of the Daily Graphic and the New York Times.

5.2. **Initiating the topic**

The analysis of the introductory section of the Daily Graphic in table 2 revealed that the two sub-moves (initiating a topic and stating a thesis) are present in all the editorials analyzed. The first sub-move of all the editorials are realised by providing a detailed evaluation of the topic. Only five of the editorials presented the topic by providing only a summary of the issue without evaluating the issue. The initiation of the topic by presenting an evaluation of the topic is thus clearly the rhetorical style used by the editorial writers of both the Daily Graphic and the New York Times as the analysis of the introduction of the New York Times editorials, also revealed that the dominant rhetorical strategy used to initiate the topic is by evaluation (found in 65 of the 100 editorials). The other rhetorical strategy used to initiate the topic is by providing a brief summary of the issue to be discussed without the writers using any word that expresses their opinion about the issue. With this strategy, the reader is introduced straight away to the issue under discussion. An example of this is the opening paragraph below.

On Wednesday, officials from Michigan and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency were called before a House committee to explain how they let the drinking water in Flint become poisoned by lead. Also testifying before the committee was a mother of four whose tap water has been so contaminated since early 2015 that her family has had to use bottled water for drinking and cooking and has often showered at friends’ homes outside the city. (NYT, 4 February 2016)
This month, the Supreme Court will consider whether to hear the appeal of Duane Buck, a black man from Texas who was sentenced to die for the 1995 murder of his ex-girlfriend and a man who was with her. There is no dispute about his guilt; the issue is how he ended up on death row. (NYT, 2 April 2016)

5.3. Stating the thesis
The second sub-move was realized by the writers of the Daily Graphic by expressing worry or concern about the topic that has been introduced in the first sub-move. Fifty-seven (57) out of the (100) editorials analyzed realized this move by expressing worry or plea. By expressing worry, the editorial writer avoid a portioning blame to the social or political authorities related to the topics or issues that they are writing about. Only twenty-two (22) of the editorials analyzed realized this move by endorsing the issue presented. The expression of worry or plea is the major rhetorical strategy by which the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic state their thesis.

On the other hand, the second sub-move under the introduction section of the New York Times was realised mainly through criticism by opposing the topic introduced or by questioning the political or social actors connected to the issue or topic introduced. Sixty-eight out of the 100 editorials analyzed used this rhetorical strategy in stating their thesis. Only fifteen editorials stated the thesis by expressing worry or plea and 10 editorials stated their thesis by endorsement of the topic introduced.

There is therefore a difference between the rhetorical strategies the two newspaper editorials used to state their thesis. The Daily Graphic editorials mainly used the expression of worry or concern in stating the thesis, the New York Times editorials used criticism as the main rhetorical strategy of stating the thesis. The writers express their disapproval of the issues raised for discussion and point out they perceive as the mistake or the fault of the body or authority involved.

The examples below illustrate the rhetorical strategy used by the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic and the New York Times to state the thesis. The whole or part of the initiation of the topic is provided and the the sentence that states the thesis is underlined.

Last Saturday at Bonsu Nkwanta in the Western Region, 60 passengers travelling to Kumasi were robbed at gunpoint by four armed robbers and dispossessed of their valuables, including huge sums of money and mobile phones. During the act, the driver of the bus, as well as some passengers, was shot and injured.

The troubling aspect of the robbery last Saturday is that it did not occur very late in the night as others gone before it. (GRA, 18 January 2016)

When it comes to parliamentary elections, our Constitution is clearly unambiguous about the date when it says that parliamentary election must be held within 30 days of the dissolution of the next Parliament. Whatever the challenges, Election 2016 must come on before the end of the year, as the 1992 Constitution enjoins us to do.

While we are worried over preparations by the Electoral Commission (EC) we are equally disturbed about the platforms on which all the political parties will focus for Election 2016. (GRA, 18 April 2016)

On Wednesday, Officials from Michigan and the federal Environmental Protection Agency were called before a House committee to explain how they let the drinking water in Flint become poisoned by lead.

The crisis in Flint is the result of many failures, starting with governor-appointed emergency managers, who made catastrophic mistakes. It poses an important question for Congress and
state legislatures: When and how should state officials intervene at the local level? (NYT, 4 February 2016)

The world recoiled in horror in 2012 when 20 Connecticut schoolchildren and six adults were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School by a deranged teenager using a military-style assault rifle to fire 154 rounds in less than five minutes. … This is the eminently reasonable point that the parents of the 6- and 7-year-old students cut down at the school are now pressing in Connecticut state court.

The question of whether the lawsuit will be allowed to proceed is at issue because Congress, prodded by the gun lobby, in 2005 foolishly granted the gun industry nearly complete immunity from legal claims and damages from the criminal use of guns. (NYT, 4 March 2016)

6. The body
Table 3 below shows the results of the analysis of the body of the Daily Graphic and the New York Times.

6.1. Explaining
The analysis of the body of the editorials in table 3 revealed that the editorial writers of both the Daily Graphic, and the New York Times develop the body of the editorials by explaining the issue being discussed. Explaining the issue being discussed is an important rhetorical strategy in writing an editorial. Within the body of the editorials analyzed, writers of both editorials devote more than 20% of space to the explanation of the topics raised. The Daily Graphic devoted 24.49% of space to the explanation of the issues raised while the New York Times devoted 28.15% of space to explanation of issues raised. Explaining the issue is done by elaborating the issue presented. This rhetorical strategy aims at acquainting the reader with the issue that is at hand. The issue presented in the introduction is elaborated by providing more details in body of the editorials. The editorial writers attempt to make the issue or the topic they are writing about clearer by describing it in some detail and providing relevant facts to enable the readers to get a clearer picture of the issue. In explaining the issue, the writers use words or phrases that show that additional information is being given about the issue presented. The example below illustrates the use of words and phrases that show that the writer is giving additional information.

This is not the only crisis mishandled in Michigan. The Detroit school system has had a succession of emergency managers appointed by Mr. Snyder, Republican, and his Democratic predecessor, Jennifer Granholm. The district’s debt has increased since its first emergency manager was appointed in 2009, enrollment is shrinking and the schools have grown more dilapidated. (NYT, 4 February 2016)

Since last July, 23 states have tried various ways of cutting money for the organization. So far 11 have succeeded, most recently Florida, where Gov. Rick Scott on Friday signed HB 1411, a sweeping anti-abortion bill that, among many destructive provisions, prohibits Medicaid and other public funds from being used to reimburse organizations that work with abortion providers. (NYT, 28 March 2016)

6.2. Contextualizing argument
In contextualizing arguments, both editorialists provide some details as evidence in order to advance arguments in favour or against the issue presented. The editorial writers of the New York Times tend to devote a little more of space in contextualizing argumentation (12.31%) than the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic (10.99%) of space. In contextualizing argument, the editorial writers provide a factual information about the issue under discussion in order to advance an interpretation of the issue to put it within the context of the argument they wish to advance. An example is provided below.

The United Nations has said that in all, 4.5 million Syrians live in hard-to-reach areas, including 400,000 in 15 besieged towns like Madaya that are denied access to food and medicine. That means the number of people at risk has nearly doubled since the United Nations Security Council ordered the warring parties to allow aid deliveries in 2014. The Islamic State has trapped 200,000 Syrians
in Deir al-Zour, and other insurgents have corralled more than 12,000 people in the pro-Assad towns of Foua and Kfarya in Idlib province. (NYT, 12 January 2016)

6.3. Reasoning
The two editorialists express reasons for accepting or refuting actions taken with reference to the issues being discussed. The editorial writers use reasoning to project their stance about the situation or the action taken. Zarza and Tan (2016) noted, linguistic elements such as because, since, due to, the reason is, for this reason are used by the editorial writers of both papers to express reasoning. Other linguistic elements used to express reasoning by the editorial writers include as a result, have/has led to. Some examples are given below.

It is for these reasons that the Daily Graphic lauds the government for its attempt to reverse the trend the Development of Skills for Industry Project (DSIP) in Ada. (GRA, 9 March 2016)

Ghana is recognised within the international community because of the excellent role its security forces play in peace-keeping missions across the world. (GRA, 20 January 2016)

Road safety campaigns should be launched because during periods such as Easter, a lot of people travel across the length and breadth of the country, and in order to cash in on the volumes of passengers, drivers tend to throw all caution to the wind and are at their careless best, ignoring all road signs. (GRA, 23 March 2016)

6.4. Expressing solution
The editorial writers of the Daily Graphic seem to devote more space to the expression of solution than the editorial writers of the New York Times. The expression of solution is 12.30% in the Daily Graphic against 1.85% in the New York Times. It is realized by the editorial writers reiterating solutions proposed by others as well as the writers proposing what should or could be done to solve a challenge or an issue raised. Proposing a solution or presenting a solution, the editorial writers suggest a way out in dealing with the situation at hand in a polite manner without imposition. The analysis shows that this is commonly used by the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic. Words and phrases such as the paper thinks, believes, suggests, pleads, urges were used to signal the expression of solution by the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic. The following examples illustrate the expression of solution.

The Daily Graphic thinks that in the interest of free and fair polls in the country, the EC should do something urgent to build trust between it and all the political parties and their supporters. (GRA, 9 January 2016)

The Daily Graphic believes that it is time to take the bull by the horn by adopting a multi-prong approach to solving the country’s sanitation problems, including the provision of adequate equipment to ensure proper collection and disposal of waste. (GRA, 9 February 2016)

There may be a good argument that the two ranchers in this case, Dwight Hammond and his son, Steven, were punished unreasonably harshly for their crimes. But the way to have this argument is through peaceful means, such as the original protesters were doing, or as the Hammonds themselves chose to do—by reporting to prison and asking President Obama for clemency. Every day, citizens around the country sue or otherwise challenge the government over alleged violations of the law or the Constitution, and they do it without a rifle in their hand. (NYT, 6 January 2016)

6.5. Comparing and contrasting
The editorial writers of the New York Times use comparison while comparison is hardly used by the writers of the Daily Graphic. In writing editorials, comparison is a rhetorical strategy used to show the gravity of the situation or the issue at hand. By likening the issue being described to a known situation or issue with a higher magnitude, the writers tend to paint a vivid picture of the situation.
or the issue at hand. Some examples of comparison and contrast used by the editorial writers of the New York Times are presented below.

Many economists regard carbon taxes as the simpler and more elegant solution, and cap-and-trade systems like the one that failed in the United States Congress as complex and hard to explain. (NYT, 19 January 2016)

Some medical experts likened the toll to the H.I.V. epidemic in the 1990s, but with this difference: Then, H.I.V. deaths were mainly centered in urban centers; now, rural areas have higher drug overdose death rates than large cities. (NYT, 25 January 2016)

7. The conclusion

7.1. Making prediction
The results of the analysis of the conclusion section in table 4 revealed that prediction is one of the rhetorical strategies used by editorial writers but it is not frequently used. It was used only 6 times (6.0%) in the Daily Graphic and used 15 times (15%) by editorial writers of the New York Times. In making a prediction, the editorial writers attempt to foretell future consequences of certain actions or future consequences if a certain action is not taken. The examples listed below illustrate how the conclusion is realised by making prediction.

In reiterating the importance of dialogue in situations like the one that confronts the country presently, we urge the parties to remain at table and jaw-jaw until all the issues have been resolved amicably. The Daily Graphic thinks that anything to the contrary is objectionable, as it will lead to turmoil on the industrial front. (GRA, 29 January 2016)

We believe that if we adopt that approach, people will become more responsible when they are dealing with issues of the environment and our lives would be preserved. (GRA, 17 February 2016)

7.2. Providing suggestion
The result in table 4 showed that the editorial writers of the New York Times prefer the use of suggestions in the conclusion to the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic. In the New York Times, suggestion was used for the conclusion 30 times constituting (30%) while the use of suggestion in the Daily Graphic was only (7%). This rhetorical strategy is used by editorial writers to provide alternative ways or means to be considered in dealing with the issues or the topic in question. Below are some examples of the use of suggestions in the conclusion of editorials.

The Daily Graphic rather prescribes a plugging of the many loopholes in the collection of all the taxes that are in force and ensuring vigilant monitoring of the institutions that are mandated by law to collect such taxes and revenue for the state. (GRA, 14 January 2016)

It is seldom wise to rely too heavily on a single study; nevertheless, the study in the New England Journal of Medicine offers data that doctors and patients should consider. (NYT, 18 January 2016)

7.3. Stating a necessity
The expression of necessity is the major means by which editorial writers of both papers write the conclusion of the editorials. The percentage use of the necessity in both papers indicates Daily Graphic (32%), New York Times (38%). This is a rhetorical strategy that is frequently used by both editorials. Stating a necessity in the conclusion of newspaper editorials is an exercise of authoritative voice by editorial writers giving directives about what needs to be done. Some examples of the use of necessity in the conclusion of the editorials are given below.
We believe, though that the community policing concept holds the key to bringing back our lost communal spirit and ensuring our safety and so it must be rejuvenated at all cost. (GRA, 13 February 2016)

We reiterate the need for the National Road Safety Commission and all stakeholders in road safety to make constant education on the use of the roads a priority. Those who break road traffic rules must also be made to face the full rigours of the law. (GRA, 23 March 2016)

The European Union also needs to increase funding to improve services for these children. The trafficking networks must be broken, and any perpetrators of crimes against children must be apprehended and punished. (NYT, 10 February 2016)

7.4. Stating warning/caution
This is the major means by which the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic express the conclusion of the editorials. More than half of the editorials of the Daily Graphic analyzed used warning/caution (52%) to conclude the editorials. The use of warning/caution to end the editorials is hardly used (10%) by the editorial writers of the New York Times. The use of caution as a rhetorical strategy by editorial writers make them sound less authoritative.

We urge the striking groups to be patient and resort to dialogue with the government to have their concerns resolved. (GRA, 1 March 2016)

The Daily Graphic appeals to all the political parties to co-operate with the Electoral Commission to put in place a credible voter register that will be acceptable to all. (GRA, 19 January 2016)

7.5. Stating hopes
This strategy is the least used by both editorials as the conclusion. Perhaps editorial writers are more interested in addressing the political or social actors involved in the issues that they write about than to express their feelings about the future. These are some examples of the use of hope as the conclusion of the editorials analyzed.

It is our hope that the almighty God will give us the strength to bear with the pain of this loss. (GRA, 11 February 2016)

And since charity, they say begins at home, it is our expectation that henceforth our development processes will be carried out in such a manner that caters for today’s needs, not forgetting those yet to be born. (GRA, 15 February 2016)

8. Discussions
The analysis of the two newspaper editorials confirms the prototypical structure of editorials as indicated by Bhatia (1993). The two newspaper editorials from two different socio-cultural settings exhibit similarities in their generic structure. Despite the similarities with regards to the general structure of the two newspaper editorials, the analysis revealed some differences in the rhetorical strategies of the two newspaper editorials.

The analysis of the introductory section of the two editorials revealed that both editorials exhibited two sub-moves which are the initiation of the topic to be discussed and the statement of the thesis which is the stance or the declaration of the writer’s position. Most of the editorials employed use evaluation of an issue or event in the initiation of the of the topic. This confirms Van Dijk’s (1996) observation that the introduction of editorials presents the issue to be discussed but the presentation of the information is partly evaluative.

The second sub-move of the introductory section which is the statement of the thesis or the stance of the editorial was realized by the editorial writers by expressing worry or concern, by criticism or
questioning the issue under discussion and by endorsement of the issue introduced. The analysis showed that the editorials of the Daily Graphic express the thesis or the stance of the paper by expressing worry or concern, while the editorials of the New York Times state the thesis mainly by criticism or questioning the event introduced. The editorials of the New York Times were found to be critical of the social and political issues that the editorials discussed. The existence of critical voice and argumentation in the New York Times confirms previous studies that established that American text in general is direct and argumentative. Zarza and Tan (2016) compared the editorials of the New York Times and the New Straits Times of Malaysia and concluded that the New York Times editorial is more authoritative because of the American tradition of freedom of speech and the independent nature of the press and journalistic practices. In a study that compared American editorials with Persian editorials, Homayounzadeh and Mehrpour (2013) discovered that majority of American editorials fall under media argumentative exposition.

The editorial writers of the Daily Graphic, on the other hand, expressed worry about the social and political issues discussed by the editorials. The expression of worry as the main means of stating the thesis by the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic could be explained with reference to the socio-cultural norms in Ghana. According to Yankah (2012) communication in contemporary Ghana is influenced by norms of traditional society which do not permit public criticism of authority. From the point of view of Yankah (2012) media practice in Ghana to some extent seems to be regulated by certain cultural foundations where people in authority are not supposed to be questioned or criticized in a harsh manner but rather in a manner that shows a lot of politeness. Yankah (2012) points out that the media in Ghana are torn between the modern concept of free speech and journalistic practices that allow argumentation and criticism of authority versus the apologetic traditional norms. This is what Adiko (2012) has expressed as the lack of a critical voice in the writing of Ghanaians. This is what might have accounted for lack of criticism in the editorials of the Daily Graphic.

The analysis of the body of the two editorials revealed that the writers of both editorials devote much space to explaining the issue (GRA 24.49%) and (NYT 28.15%). But the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic spend more time expressing solution to the issue 12.30% than the editorial writers of the New York Times, only 1.85% The expression of solution by the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic is done in a cautious manner using words like “The Daily Graphic thinks”, “The Daily Graphic believes” “The Daily Graphic pleads.” This is in line with Yankah (2012) assertion that the traditional society in Ghana adheres to a careful choice of words as part of its ethnography of communication. As a result, any choice of word that is perceived to be offensive is said in euphemisms and polite disclaimers to avoid being disrespectful to authority. The editorial writers are therefore being careful not to violate the value of showing decorum to people in authority and the readers.

The results of the analysis of the conclusion section of the editorials indicate that the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic use mainly warning or caution to end the editorials. The use of warning/caution by the Daily Graphic editorials in the conclusion may be a reflection of the socio-cultural norms of politeness in the socio-cultural setting of Ghana. The cultural foundation of communication in the traditional Ghanaian society is that traditional society aims at preserving social harmony and maintaining social structures through the use of language in a manner that encourages social decency (Yankah, 2012) to the extent that efforts are made to acknowledge power relationships through the use of deferential honorific and courteous ways of addressing persons who are elderly or hold positions of authority in the society.

The New York Times on the other hand uses the expression of necessity in the conclusion of the editorials. The expression of a necessity connotes giving directives or a command. The use of directives by the editorial writers of the New York times can be attributed to the exercise of freedom of speech and the freedom of the press in the American society. On the other hand, the statement of warning/caution does not impose a command on the individual or political actors involved in the issues that are written about by the editorial writers. This may explain why the editorial writers of the Daily Graphic choose to use the statement of warning/caution in order to show politeness to the political actors or figures involved, rather than suggesting what they should do. Moreover, the use of warning/caution by
the writers of the *Daily Graphic* is directed towards the reader as well as the political actors to establish solidarity between the paper and the readers and this makes the paper a unifying force because it plays the role of a national newspaper in Ghana and seeks to foster national unity.

9. **Pedagogical implications**

Students of Communication and Media Studies in ESL settings are taught journalistic writing which involves the teaching of journalistic genres such as news reports, review articles and editorials. According to Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans (2002) students in ESL and EFL settings do not have the linguistic complexity that Anglo-American speakers of English have to handle language issues in specific discourse settings. Studies that analyze language use in texts that belong to specific genres and reveal linguistic element involved in the composition of specific genres are useful to students who are being trained to become professionals in writing such specific genres. This study therefore has pedagogical implications as far as teaching students of Communication and Media Studies how to write journalistic genres is concerned.

Samples of newspaper editorials and studies that have analyzed how editorials are written are useful to both instructors and students for teaching and learning purposes. The exposure of students studying Communication and Journalism and media practitioners to how media texts are composed will help enhance their writing skills to become better writers. The findings of this study are useful to both practitioners and students of Communication and Journalism.

It is also important to highlight the need for critical journalism in the writing of editorials. This is relevant to the training of students of Communication and Journalism. Students need to be trained in how to use critical voice in a manner that is acceptable.

10. **Conclusion**

This study confirms that generally, newspaper editorials have a generic rhetorical pattern but differ in their preferences for the rhetorical strategies that are used to engage their readers. The analysis of the introduction of the editorials reveals that the writers differ in the rhetorical strategies used in stating the thesis. It was found that the writers of the *Daily Graphic* editorials use the expression of worry as the major rhetorical strategy to state their thesis while the editorials writers of the *New York Times* state the thesis mainly by criticism or questioning the events or issues being discussed. The use of worry to state the stance of the writers is influenced by norms of the Ghanaian traditional society which does not permit public criticism of people in authority as opposed to the socio-cultural environment of the editorial writers of the *New York Times*. Within the body of the editorials, the expressions used by the editorial writers of the *Daily Graphic* lack straightforwardness and rather depict politeness; emphasising the editorial writers' conscious or unconscious strive to preserve the societal value of trying not to offend a person in authority. The use of warning/caution by the *Daily Graphic* editorials in the conclusion section resonates with the foundation of communication in the traditional Ghanaian society which encourages the use of language in a manner that aims at preserving social harmony and maintaining social structures. On the whole, the rhetorical strategies used by the editorial writers of the two newspapers were influenced by their respective socio-cultural settings and reveals how the writers contribute to the preservation of the norms and values of the society.

### Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

### Author details

Albert Agbesi Wornyo
E-mail: awornyo@yahoo.com
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1142-658X

1 School of Communication and Media Studies, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Citation information

Cite this article as: Rhetorical strategy preferences in newspaper editorials, Albert Agbesi Wornyo, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* (2022), 9: 2146636.

### References

Adika, G. S. K. (2012). Language Centre teaching, critical voice, and the construction of knowledge. In H. Lauer & K. Anyidoho (Eds.), Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities through African Perspectives Vol.II (pp.1493-1502). Sub-Saharan Publishers.

Ansary, H., & Babai, E. (2005). The generic integrity of newspaper editorials: A systemic functional
Symposium of Critical Discourse Analysis, Language, Social Life and Critical Thought, Athens. https://www.discourse-in-society.org/edi
torial.htm

Watanabe, H. (2021). The discursive construction of the international dispute over the East China Sea: A multimodal analysis of evaluations in online newspaper editorials in the Chinese and Japanese press. Media Asia, 48(1), 34–57. https://doi.org/10. 1080/01296612.2021.1881282

Wornyo, A. A., & Kiu, E. K. (2017). Intercultural rhetoric analysis of the daily graphic and the New York Times: A micro-genre analysis. Gender and Behaviour, 15(2), 8942–8954. www.ajol.info/index.php/gab/article/
view/163370

Yankah, K. (2012). Free speech in traditional society: The cultural foundations of communication in contemporary Ghana. In H. Lauer & K. Anyidoho (Eds.), Reclaiming the human sciences and humanities through African Perspectives (Vol. II, pp. 1067–1095). Sub-Saharan Publishers.

Yen, A., & Chen, L. (2008). Enhancing business language skills through editorial reading: A genre analysis approach. In M. A. Stroke (Ed.), JALT 2008 conference proceedings. Tokyo: JALT.

Zarza, S., & Ton, H. (2016). Patterns of schematic structure and strategic features in newspaper editorials: A comparative study of American and Malaysian editorials. Discourse & Communication, 10(6), 635–657. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481316674754