



## The Language of Influence: Analyzing Lexical Density and Readability in Political Editorials Across Leading Newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines lexical density and readability in election-related editorials from five major international newspapers: The Guardian, The Washington Post, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Oberlin Review, and The Los Angeles Times. Lexical density, the ratio of content words to total words, indicates linguistic complexity, while readability scores reflect accessibility. The Guardian exhibits the highest lexical density (60.02%), followed by The Washington Post (58.14%), reflecting a preference for precise, complex language. In contrast, The Sydney Morning Herald has the lowest density (54.74%), suggesting greater accessibility. Readability assessments categorize most editorials as “difficult” or “fairly difficult,” with The Guardian, The Sydney Morning Herald, and The Oberlin Review requiring advanced reading skills due to intricate vocabulary and lengthy sentences. These findings reveal distinct editorial objectives. Newspapers like The Guardian cater to an analytical readership seeking in-depth analysis, while outlets such as The Sydney Morning Herald prioritize readability, potentially appealing to a broader audience. The study underscores the importance of linguistic choices in shaping audience engagement, influencing accessibility, and impacting readers’ perceptions of political content. Varying complexity levels suggest that editorial strategies align with the ideological and demographic goals of each publication.

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### INTRODUCTION

The analysis of lexical density and readability has become increasingly significant in understanding language complexity and accessibility across various domains, including educational materials, scientific publications, and media content. Lexical density, defined as the ratio of content words—such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to grammatical elements, serves as an indicator of a text's informational richness and linguistic sophistication (Amer, 2021). It provides

insights into the inherent complexity of a text and highlights the balance between richness and accessibility, essential for effective communication (Halliday & Webster, 2009).

Readability, which evaluates the comprehensibility of a text for its intended audience, is shaped by factors such as syntax, vocabulary, and sentence design (Rizkiani et al., 2022; Clavel-Arroitia & Pennock-Speck, 2021). Together, lexical density and readability function as complementary metrics that offer a nuanced perspective on the interplay between linguistic complexity and accessibility. These tools are crucial for assessing the effectiveness of texts in delivering their intended messages to diverse audiences.

Research underscores the importance of these metrics in various contexts. For example, in educational texts, high lexical density may present challenges for younger readers, while lower lexical density enhances accessibility and engagement (Amer & Baarah, 2021; Rizkiani et al., 2022). In scholarly writing, lexical density often correlates with the complexity of the subject matter, requiring more cognitive effort from readers (Zhu et al., 2024). Meanwhile, journalistic and opinion writing demands a balance between sophistication and clarity to ensure accessibility while retaining intellectual depth (Zulkornain et al., 2023).

In the case of American presidential editorials, achieving this balance is particularly critical. Editorials serve as a platform for presenting intricate political and social issues to a broad and diverse audience (Hastomo & Aminatun, 2023). Readability plays a crucial role in enhancing public comprehension and engagement with such materials (Ramadhani et al., 2023). However, while high lexical density might attract readers familiar with nuanced political discourse, it could potentially alienate those less acquainted with such terminology (Amer & Baarah, 2021; Clavel-Arroitia & Pennock-Speck, 2021).

Despite the importance of these metrics, the specific analysis of lexical density and readability in American presidential editorials on online news platforms remains underexplored. Existing studies primarily focus on educational texts (Amer & Baarah, 2021; Rizkiani et al., 2022), scientific publications (Zhu et al., 2024), and student writing evaluations (Yang et al., 2023), leaving a gap in understanding these features in journalistic contexts. The goal of the research is to find out how well presidential editorials manage to reach a large readership while still conveying complex, nuanced concept to the analyses conducted by Siregar et al. 2024 and Maufiroh et al. 2024. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the lexical density and readability of American presidential editorials to evaluate their linguistic complexity and accessibility.

By examining these aspects, this research aims to contribute to the broader discussion of media accessibility and the effectiveness of political communication. It investigates how presidential editorials navigate the challenge of engaging a wide audience while communicating nuanced political concepts, thereby shedding light

on the interplay between linguistic sophistication and accessibility in journalistic writing.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research on lexical density and readability has expanded across multiple disciplines, underscoring their importance in elucidating text complexity, Participation of the public, and comprehension. This literature review examines research on lexical density and readability, emphasizing their significance in educational resources, journalistic writing, academic discourse, and their relevance in the analysis of American presidential editorials.

### **Lexical Density and Readability in Educational Contexts**

Numerous studies have examined lexical density in instructional materials, assessing the influence of text complexity on student comprehension and learning results. Amer (2021) analyzed the lexical density and readability of middle school English textbooks in Jordan, indicating that these textbooks often exhibit moderate lexical density, making them both accessible and sufficiently challenging for students. Rizkiani et al. (2022) analyzed Indonesian high school English textbooks, uncovering varying lexical density that rendered the texts appropriate for the target age group. Research underscores the necessity of balancing lexical density and readability in instructional materials to ensure they are both demanding and comprehensible, thereby promoting successful learning (Maufiroh et al., 2024).

Lexical density has a significant influence in educational scenarios, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments. Fadhil et al. (2023) examined Indonesian EFL textbooks, revealing that texts with elevated lexical density can facilitate vocabulary development but may inundate readers lacking enough linguistic skill. Research conducted by Clavel-Arroitia & Pennock-Speck (2021) substantiates this equilibrium, revealing that lexical density influences comprehension and participation in EFL telecollaborative conversations. This research highlights the necessity of regulating lexical density in educational resources, particularly for second-language learners, as accessibility is vital for successful language learning.

### **Lexical Complexity in Journalistic and Opinion Writing**

In journalistic environments, where writings seek to inform and persuade a wide audience, readability and lexical density are essential for assuring accessibility and engaging readers. Zulkornain et al. (2023) investigated readability in news writing, discovering that articles with less lexical density are generally more accessible to the general public, whereas texts with higher lexical density may attract a specialized, knowledgeable audience. Zhu et al. (2024) examined lexical density in scientific papers, concluding that elevated lexical density, although advantageous in specialist situations, may impede understanding for general audiences.

The accessibility of journalistic writing is particularly crucial in opinion and editorial articles, when authors seek to convey intricate concepts to the general populace. Research conducted by Ramadhani et al. (2023) and Sujatna et al. (2023) examined readability in journalistic writing, indicating that texts characterized by high lexical density may dissuade readers lacking familiarity with the subject matter. In American presidential editorials, it is crucial to maintain a balance between accessibility and lexical expertise, since these writings seek to reach a wide audience while articulating nuanced political perspectives (Amer & Baarah, 2021).

### **Lexical Density in Academic and Scientific Texts**

Investigations on lexical density and readability have been crucial in academic settings, especially in elucidating the impact of linguistic complexity on readers' comprehension of scholarly literature. Choemue & Bram (2021) examined the quantity of words in academic journal articles written by ESL and EFL authors, demonstrating that both groups have comparable lexical density, although differ in complexity and diversity. Research indicates that lexical density in academic writing correlates with the complexity of the subject, as demonstrated by Zhu et al. (2024), who discovered that scientific publications in "hard" subjects have greater lexical density compared to those in "soft" disciplines. This highlights the significance of lexical selections in the formation of specialized knowledge.

Subsequent research highlights the significance of lexical characteristics in student writing, particularly in evaluating academic competence. Maamuujav (2021) examined lexical characteristics in the essays of adolescent L2 students, discovering that lexical density, diversity, and sophistication are strong predictors of writing quality. In a similar vein, Yang et al. (2023) investigated lexical richness in EFL students' essays, indicating that lexical density is associated with enhanced writing quality, since students' selection of content terms reflects their understanding of academic language.

### **Lexical Density and Readability Measures**

Diverse indices and computational instruments are utilized to assess lexical density and readability, facilitating quantitative evaluation of text complexity. Putri et al. (2024) utilized the Flesch Reading Ease formula, a standard tool in readability research, to analyze IELTS writing tests, revealing substantial variations in readability scores across distinct degrees of lexical density. Coh-Metrix, an additional computational instrument, has been utilized to assess syntactic difficulty and text readability. Nkhobo & Chaka (2023) study on university students' essays found that elevated lexical density frequently correlated with diminished readability scores, rendering texts more difficult for readers.

Readability tests are progressively included into digital and automated writing tools in practical applications. Previous research investigated Automated Writing

Evaluation (AWE) tools, concluding that these systems enhance readability by directing writers towards more straightforward grammar and vocabulary (Oktarin et al., 2024; Waziana et al., 2024; Zulkornain et al., 2023). Arshad et al. (2023) corroborate this, having analyzed machine-learning models for readability evaluation, and demonstrate that readability indices improve text accessibility by offering objective metrics of complexity.

### **Lexical Density and Readability in American Presidential Editorials**

Although many studies have examined lexical density and readability across other domains, research focused especially on American presidential editorials is scarce. Editorials uniquely require the communication of intricate concepts to a diverse audience, merging accessibility with linguistic skill. Prior research in journalistic writing, including works by Amer & Baarah (2021) and Sujatna et al. (2023), underscores the necessity for editorials to maintain a judicious equilibrium between informative substance and readability, as elevated lexical density may hinder reader understanding. The research conducted by Kembaren and Aswani (2022) revealed that articles in *The New York Times* possess a high lexical density (surpassing 50%) and low readability scores, suggesting that a college-level education may be necessary for adequate comprehension of the material.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the lexical density and readability of American presidential editorials in digital publications. This aims to demonstrate how these editorials preserve linguistic complexity while guaranteeing clarity and accessibility for a general audience. This research will enhance current discourse regarding the significance of linguistic complexity in political communication and the necessity of readability in promoting public comprehension and involvement in political matters (Siregar et al., 2024; Fadhil et al., 2023).

### **METHOD**

The current research employs a qualitative text analysis method to explore the lexical diversity and readability of American presidential editorials in diverse online newspapers. This method aligns with similar research examining text complexity in educational and journalistic contexts, as seen in studies by Amer (2021) and Rizkiani et al. (2022) on the lexical density and readability of educational materials. These studies emphasize the importance of text accessibility, particularly when communicating complex information to a broad audience.

The qualitative method involves the collection of descriptive data, pattern analysis, and interpretation of meaning. The focus is on data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification (Miles et al., 2014).

Five editorials will be deliberately chosen from prominent media outlets published on October-November 2024, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, *The Guardian*, and *Los Angeles Times*, ensuring

relevance to recent presidential policies. Each editorial will be analyzed qualitatively to explore how language choices affect their lexical density and readability. According to Clavel-Arroitia & Pennock-Speck (2021), balancing lexical density and readability is vital for achieving both informational richness and accessibility in media content.

For lexical density analysis, the study will employ Ure’s approach stated in Ngan & Thao (2016), which calculates the ratio of word count to the number of words. This method was also used by Amer & Baarah (2021) to examine the informational richness of English textbooks. Lexical Density Tool (LDT) such as “Analyze My Writing” will assist in identifying and categorizing content and function words. The qualitative interpretation will focus on how varying degrees of lexical density impact the clarity of complex editorial content.

The readability analysis will entail assessing sentence difficulty and vocabulary, utilizing readability indexes such as the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level and Gunning Fog Index, as recommended in studies by Putri et al. (2024). The focus will be on interpreting the relationship between readability scores and the accessibility of political commentary for a general audience.

$$RE = 206,835 - (1,015 \times ASL) - (84,6 \times ASW)$$

**Table 1. Flesch Reading Ease Scale**

No	Reading Ease Score	Description	Reading Grade
1	0-29	Very Difficult	College Graduate
2	30-49	Difficult	13 - 16 grade
3	50-59	Fairly Difficult	10 - 12 grade
4	60-69	Standard	8 - 9 grade
5	70-79	Fairly Easy	7 grade
6	80-89	Easy	6 grade
7	90-100	Very Easy	5 grade

Finally, findings will be interpreted to assess whether high lexical density aligns with lower readability, potentially indicating content that requires greater cognitive engagement from readers. This approach is informed by similar analyses in educational and journalistic texts, where lexical density and readability are correlated with audience comprehension (Ramadhani et al., 2023). Limitations include the subjective nature of editorial themes, which may influence generalizability beyond the chosen publications. This research aims to shed light on the balance between linguistic complexity and accessibility in political editorials, enhancing understanding of effective public communication in media (Siregar et al., 2024).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

This analysis examines the lexical density of election-related editorials from five prominent foreign newspapers: *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Oberlin Review*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. Lexical density is defined by the amount of content words (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) to the whole word count.

**Table 2. The Content Words and Lexical Density of Editorials**

No	Editorial	Noun	Adjective	Verb	Adverb	Total Words	Lexical Density
1	The Guardian	34.98%	8.97%	12.92%	3.15%	1238	60.02%
2	The Washington Post	35.27%	6.33%	12.27%	4.26%	780	58.14%
3	The Sydney Morning Herald	31.26%	9.15%	10.36%	3.97%	1234	54.74%
4	The Oberlin Review	30.52%	8.87%	12.25%	4.65%	940	56.28%
5	Los Angeles Times	32.68%	7.39%	11.99%	5.25%	606	57.31%

The findings demonstrate that lexical density, characterized as the proportion of word content to total words, varies significantly across the five newspapers, reflecting distinct editorial approaches in election coverage. *The Guardian* exhibits the highest lexical density (60.02%), reflecting a style that prioritizes specificity and detail, presumably attracting readers seeking comprehensive opinions on politics. *The Washington Post* maintains a comparable density, indicating a balanced methodology that integrates comprehensive reporting with accessibility. Conversely, *The Sydney Morning Herald* exhibits the lowest lexical density (54.74%), indicating a more simplistic reporting approach, likely aimed at a general audience that prefers simple and accessible information.

*The Los Angeles Times* and *The Oberlin Review* exhibit moderate lexical density, indicating they serve an audience desiring a balance of depth and accessibility. The variations in lexical density underscore differing editorial practices and suggest ideological subtleties. Publications with higher density, such as *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, may cater to a more analytical, progressive readership, whereas lower-density content like *The Sydney Morning Herald* may attract a more neutral or mainstream audience. Lexical variations can affect readers' perceptions of election information, where richer language may convey completeness and less dense language may enhance accessibility.

**Table 3. The Readability of the Editorials**

No	Total Words	Total Sentence	Total Syllables	ASL	ASW	Readability Score	Description of Style
1	1251	71	2146	17,88	145,12	43,83	Difficult
2	776	43	1222	18,31	133,22	55,3	Fairly Difficult
3	1234	58	2005	21,59	137,45	47,79	Difficult
4	941	39	1591	24,49	143,03	39,31	Difficult
5	614	35	1021	17,8	140,67	48,36	Fairly Difficult

The readability assessment of the five editorials reveals varying levels of linguistic difficulty that align with the reading capabilities of the intended audience. Editorial 1, possessing the maximum word count of 1,251, achieves a readability score of 43.83 and is classified as "Difficult." This results from an ordinary Sentence Length (ASL) of 17.88 and an Average Syllables per Word (ASW) of 145.12, suggesting that the lengthy sentences and intricate vocabulary may pose difficulties for the ordinary reader. Editorial 2 has a word count of 776 and a readability score of 55.3, classifying it as "Fairly Difficult." Despite having a comparable ASL of 18.31, its diminished ASW of 133.22 suggests a less complex vocabulary, rendering it marginally more accessible than Editorial 1. Editorial 3 comprises 1,234 words and possesses a readability score of 47.79, categorized as "Difficult." The ASL of 21.59 and ASW of 137.45 indicate a complicated sentence structure and extensive vocabulary, requiring proficient reading skills. Editorial 4 is classified as one of the most difficult, with a readability score of 39.31, an average sentence length (ASL) of 24.49, and an average syllables per word (ASW) of 143.03. The high complexity suggests that it is intended for readers with strong academic proficiency due to its specialized language. Finally, Editorial 5, the shortest at 614 words, scores 48.36 on readability and falls under "Fairly Difficult." While it has an ASL of 17.8, the ASW of 140.67 still points to advanced vocabulary, though it remains more accessible than Editorial 4.

**Discussion**

A qualitative descriptive analysis indicates that the linguistic style and editorial decisions of each newspaper mirror its intended audience and ideological position. Of the five newspapers, *The Guardian* has the highest lexical density at 60.02%, prominently featuring nouns at 34.98% and verbs at 12.92%. This density highlights a style centered on specificity and clarity, presumably appealing to readers desiring comprehensive, analytical reporting. The extensive use of adjectives indicates a methodical approach to political discourse, consistent with *The Guardian's* progressive position and implying a commitment to contextually rich, investigative content that resonates with a liberal audience appreciative of thorough analysis.



*The Washington Post* exhibits a lexical density of 58.14%, indicating an analytical yet accessible style. The work exhibits a noun density of 35.27% and a lower adjective density of 6.33%, indicating a balance between thorough reporting and readability, thereby appealing to a varied audience. This strategy enables *The Post* to provide comprehensive insights for discerning readers while remaining approachable for those who want simpler analysis. The significant prevalence of verbs (12.27%) and adverbs (4.26%) reinforces an active depiction of political events, consistent with its balanced, somewhat liberal position aimed at engaging a politically informed audience.

*The Sydney Morning Herald* shows the lowest lexical density (54.74%), indicating an editorial style prioritizing simplicity and accessibility. With a reduced proportion of nouns (31.26%) and verbs (10.36%), the coverage seems geared toward clarity, targeting a broad audience seeking straightforward information. The slightly higher percentage of adjectives (9.15%) suggests descriptive but accessible language, appealing to readers with varying levels of political interest. This strategy aligns with *The Herald's* likely intent to maintain neutrality and accessibility, drawing in a wide readership that values readability over complexity.

*The Oberlin Review*, with a lexical density of 56.28%, adopts a balanced approach that is instructive while not overly difficult linguistically. The work exhibits noun (30.52%) and verb (12.25%) density indicative of a style that attracts readers engaged in political discourse, while maintaining clarity and accessibility. The judicious use of adjectives and adverbs reflects a clear editorial tone that prioritizes clarity over profundity, appealing to readers who favor fair reporting devoid of excessive complexity.

*The Los Angeles Times* achieves a moderate-to-high lexical density (57.31%), suggesting a style that balances precision with readability. Its high adverb density (5.25%) indicates a narrative that emphasizes action and detail, appealing to readers who favor dynamic storytelling. With a noun density of 32.68% and a verb density of 11.99%, *The Times* seems to balance detail with accessibility, targeting a readership that values informative yet engaging coverage.

The distinctions in lexical density within these articles indicate underlying ideological biases. Publications such as *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, characterized by elevated lexical richness, emphasize comprehensive investigative journalism, presumably appealing to politically active, frequently progressive readers who value nuanced analysis. The reduced density in *The Sydney Morning Herald* suggests a more neutral or mainstream position, appealing to a wider audience through clear language. The editorial selections of *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Oberlin Review* achieve a balance, providing content that is both accessible and adequately comprehensive for discerning readers. The variation in lexical density among these newspapers not only indicates stylistic choices but may also influence public perceptions of political matters. Readers exposed to more intricate

language may see political news as sophisticated and comprehensive, while simpler language may improve accessibility but potentially diminish engagement for informed audiences.

The findings also reveals that the editorials are generally complex, classified as either "Difficult" or "Fairly Difficult," suggesting they target a well-educated audience. Editorials 1, 3, and 4 stand out as particularly challenging, likely intended for readers with advanced reading abilities and familiarity with specialized vocabulary. In contrast, Editorials 2 and 5, while still difficult, may be accessible to readers with intermediate literacy skills. This pattern reflects a deliberate choice to cater to a professional or academically oriented readership, utilizing a language level that appeals to readers proficient in handling complex texts. The varied readability levels indicate an editorial style that presumes and possibly promotes a higher-than-average reading capability within its audience.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals significant differences in lexical density and readability among election-related editorials from five major newspapers: *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Oberlin Review*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, with higher lexical density, offer detailed content suited for readers seeking in-depth political analysis. In contrast, *The Sydney Morning Herald* prioritizes readability, appealing to a broader audience. Readability scores show that most editorials require advanced reading skills, while publications like *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Los Angeles Times* balance clarity and accessibility with informative content. This highlights the impact of editorial language choices on public engagement and comprehension of political information.

However, the study's focus on English-language newspapers limits its representation of global editorial styles. Additionally, the qualitative analysis may be influenced by subjectivity in interpreting editorial themes. Future research should explore lexical density and readability in non-English-language publications and across various media platforms. Further studies could examine how these linguistic factors affect reader engagement and the effectiveness of political communication in fostering public understanding.

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