
Why are newspaper headlines in the present tense?

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 07-08-2008 12:43

Anyone know how that convention came about?

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tense?

Posted by evilC - 07-08-2008 12:45

Spearmint Rhino wrote:

Anyone know how that convention came about?

....and, given their 'present tense-ness', why they don't also say "...behiiind yooouuuuuu!!!"?

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tens

Posted by King Mob - 07-08-2008 12:45

Some light reading that may be of interest

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tens

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 07-08-2008 12:50

King Mob wrote:

Some light reading that may be of interest

As far as I can see, that article merely notes that newspaper headlines tend to be in the present tense. It doesn't explain the reason or the history.

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tens

Posted by King Mob - 07-08-2008 12:57

"These characteristics tend to place the event in a dehistoricised, static present. It is thus possible to read these headlines both as a comment on a current situation and as a description of perennial attitudes. Particular events or reactions are included in a series or class of events, creating unfounded generalisations. Comments about the behaviour or attitudes at a particular time are thus transformed into statements about unchanging characteristics - in this case, about national characteristics..."

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tens

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 07-08-2008 13:04

King Mob wrote:

"These characteristics tend to place the event in a dehistoricised, static present. It is thus possible to read these headlines both as a comment on a current situation and as a description of perennial attitudes. Particular events or reactions are included in a series or class of events, creating unfounded generalisations. Comments about the behaviour or attitudes at a particular time are thus transformed into statements about unchanging characteristics - in this case, about national characteristics..."

That starts off as a description of the effect the present tense-ness has on the reader (as opposed to the rationale behind using it), then degenerates into a load of meaningless wafflewank.

I mean, thanks and everything, but that's not what I was looking for.

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tens

Posted by G.Man wants a hyphen - 07-08-2008 13:27

I don't know about the origin of the convention, but I gratefully use it to make use of shorter words in a headline.

I suspect the answer to your query is what you probably suspect anyway: that headline in the present tense headline sounds more immediate than it would in the past tense. Which was probably a useful device in times when some news were really old ("from our correspondent, by Air Mail"); the convention allowed such news to appear fresh.

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tens

Posted by King Mob - 07-08-2008 13:37

<http://img98.imageshack.us/img98/9852/headlinelx6.jpg>

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tense?

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 07-08-2008 13:46

Good work!

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Re:Why are newspaper headlines in the present tense?

Posted by Ant van Oviedo - 07-08-2008 22:20

Isn't it just that the present simple tense is the main narrative tense? "A man walks into a pub..." That must have something to do with it. Mind you, headlines are a linguistic law unto themselves, with no articles or auxiliary verbs and a peculiar use for some otherwise ordinary words (blast, probe, shock, storm etc.).

At least we don't go in for incorrect comma usage like the Yan...our American friends.

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