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The Word Weavers: Newshounds and Wordsmiths by Jean Aitchison. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 257 pp.

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Compared to English literary works, often highly-rated and praised, journalistic works tend to be susceptible to serious criticism and disapproval. In her book *The Word Weavers: Newshounds and Wordsmiths*, Jean Aitchison, one of the eminent scholars in the field of language and the media, explores the validity of the long-standing belief of the inferiority of journalism to conventional English literature by looking at the history of journalism and observing the finely-tuned but not easily recognized grammar of journalistic works.

In Chapter 1, Aitchison problematizes the favoritism towards literary works. She highlights the fact that not only literary writers but also journalists consciously and skillfully "weave" their words into planned patterns. She also points out that the abilities of weaving language are based on unique human linguistic competences: unlike other animals such as birds, dolphins, and chimps, humans can produce language in creative ways, cover an unlimited range of topics, choose how to respond, and monitor their use of language.

In Chapters 2 through 5, Aitchison demonstrates how modern journalism emerged from centuries-old oral traditions of telling stories and investigates the relationships among Greek oral epics, sage saws, folk-ballads, broadside ballads, chapbooks, newsbooks, and newspapers. In doing so, she proposes that the negative attitude attached to modern journalism might be a continuation of the earlier disapprovals of the precursors of modern journalism. Chapter 2 looks at the incorporation of the conventions of Greek oral epics, such as "recurring epithets," "repetition of verses with minor alterations," and "simple syntax" (p. 29) into British sage saws and folk-ballads. Additionally, this chapter touches on the unfair treatment of the British oral tradition by intellectuals who wrongly believe in the superiority of standard literature over oral genres. Chapter 3 deconstructs the mythical espousal of written literature over oral performances by examining the origin of the writing system and the validity of a pure dichotomous view of writing and speaking. She also mentions that speaking and writing are "equal but different" (p. 45), but the distinction between spoken and written styles are not always as clear as normally assumed, providing evidence through the cases of newspaper reportage and emails. Chapter 4 surveys broadside ballads, chapbooks, and newsbooks, which are all the "descendents of the earlier oral tradition" and "predecessors" of modern journalism (p. 213). According to the author, the invention of the printing method in the late 15th century led traditional minstrelsy to be moved into single page papers and to be sold in the form of broadsides, or broadsheets, for the entertainment of and

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provision of information for working class. The tabloids are the direct descendents of these broadsheets. In the 16th century, chapbooks with their increased size and diverse topics replaced broadsheets and became a precursor of the modern magazines and weekend supplements. In the mid 17th century, newsbooks, which dealt with accounts of recent events on a regular basis, continued the tradition of mixing entertainment and information and became the "first true newspaper" (p. 61). The author adds that the negative reactions about modern journalism are not novel phenomena but seem to have been inherited from age-old complaints about its predecessors. Chapter 5 explores the birth and growth of daily newspapers in 18th and 19th centuries, which announces the beginning of modern journalism. Interestingly, the author points out that even in the 18th century, newspapers were regarded as suspicious although they had a positive influence on promoting literacy.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Aitchison directly challenges the common misconception that journalistic works are the products of an effortless and random writing process by introducing the hidden grammar of news story writing. Chapters 6 examines how skillful journalists compress W/H information in the first sentence of news stories and develop the stories using three different types of organizational structures (i.e., "inverted pyramid structure," "hour-glass structure," "focus style" (pp. 105-109)), maintaining balance between personal and relevant macro issues. This chapter also examines the refined grammar of mega-disaster reportage with the example of 9/11 disaster. Chapter 7 presents some typical guidelines for news story writing and the "grammar of headlines" (p. 120). Aitchison points out that journalists are often advised to write clearly and briefly. For instance, for readers' easy and speedy reading, short paragraphs and simple punctuations are recommended. Regarding the composition and presentation of headlines, the author mentions that in order to capture readers' attention in terms of content and style, the contents of headlines include the summary of the first paragraph of a news story and the headlines are printed in large bold capital letters. The author also discusses how the "newsworthiness" of certain information influences its place in headlines, using the example of reports on murders.

In the next two chapters, Aitchison investigates the language of poetry, which is one type of imaginative writing, as an attempt to explore the similarities and differences between literary writers' and journalists' word-weaving skills. Based on her analysis, the author asserts that these two genres of writing are equal but of different nature. Chapter 8 clarifies a common misunderstanding of the nature of writing poetry. According to the author, poets' sensitive and imaginative language use rarely depends on the invention of novel words but is rather the matter of "choosing and arranging words" (p. 158). The author emphasizes that poets as well as journalists work hard to "polish" their words. Chapter 9 looks at how poets and journalists differently exploit metaphors as their word-weaving skills. The author notes that although in both types of writing metaphors are often cleverly and originally used, differences still exist. The author mentions that poetic metaphors tend to be ambiguous in order to invoke various possibilities of interpretations,

whereas journalistic metaphors are likely to be obvious and easy to grasp and are generally used to capture attention or to "liven up" dull sections of newspapers such as sports and politics.

The final chapter of the book articulates the purpose and complex nature of journalistic writing and provides the account for the centuries-old hostility to journalism. Aitchison emphasizes that journalism always exists for the provision of a complex mixture of information and entertainment, and the production and consumption of journalistic works includes highly complicated process comprised of at least five layers (i.e, "event," "decision," "report," "hidden messages," and "assessment" (pp. 199-201)) involving events, journalists, news, and readers. The author further argues that the prevalent criticisms against journalism start from a misunderstanding of its complicated nature and the misapplication of literary conventions to journalistic works as their evaluation criteria.

Aitchison's exhaustive efforts to contest with the common misconceptions of journalistic and literary works are noteworthy in that the book not only contributes to fair evaluation of journalistic works in relation to conventional literature but also demonstrates the importance of empirically grounded investigation of the data in question. Without drawing upon various empirical studies of genre analysis, the author would have not been able to powerfully prove the distinctive nature of journalistic writing as opposed to that of literary writing. Additionally, the inclusion of diverse quotes and various authentic texts ranging from old Greek epics to modern journalistic and literary works help readers to clearly understand the author's arguments and be engaged in the book.

Through its contribution to establishing background knowledge of news writing as a genre, this book also can serve as a useful reference for applied linguists who are interested in implementing genre analysis or corpus-based analysis of journalistic works. First, this book is helpful in providing an understanding the historical background of news writing. Second, it provides some basic information on phrasal, syntactic, and rhetoric structures of news articles. Third, it shows how the grammar of news writing has changed over time. Fourth, it deals with the influence of social and pragmatic factors on the grammar of news writing.

In spite of the above-mentioned strengths, this book also has some limitations. First, in Chapter 3, Aitchison mentions oral performance as the foremost ancestor of news writing and points out the overlap between spoken and written styles in newspaper reportage. The author, however, does not seem to fully explore the influence of oral tradition or spoken style on the grammar of journalistic works, although it is one of major themes the book is devoted to. Second, Aitchison's arguments on the history, the status, and the grammar of journalistic works are mainly applicable to Western news writing. Most of the data she draws upon are products of British or American journal writing. The history, the nature, and the grammar of journal writing in Asian societies, for example, could be significantly different from what Aitchison argues for Western journalism. The possible differences between Western and Asian journalism remains to be explored.

Overall, the accomplishment of *The Word Weavers: Newshounds and Wordsmiths* is that it provides fair evaluation of journalistic writing through an empirically grounded investigation of its history, nature and grammar, clarifying the root of negative appraisals of journalistic works. Readers interested in the history of modern journalism and media language can definitely benefit from this book.