Understanding Newspaper Language

In the UK we have tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.

Tabloid

* For example, The Sun, The Mirror, The Express, The Mail
* Smaller in size with shorter, less serious articles (typically about celebrities, crime and amusing stories)

Broadsheet

* For example, The Times, The Guardian, The Telegraph, The Independent, The Financial Times
* Larger in size with more serious stories and longer, in depth articles

Headline Language

**Short Words**  
Headlines often use very short words to make an impact. These are sometimes violent words e.g. *Thugs battle*. A thug is a violent person and a battle is a fight (it is a noun and a verb). This headline could also read *Some thugs have been fighting*, however this does not have the same impact as the short headline above.

**Omitted Words**  
Headlines often don't include verbs and articles, for example, *More MP resignations over expenses row*. If we put this into spoken English then the sentence would read *More MPs have resigned over the row about expenses*. This means that Members of Parliament have left their jobs because of the disagreements over what they should be able to claim on expenses.

Another example would be*New flood alert*. This means that there have been warnings that there could be more flooding.

**Word Play**  
A key part of newspaper language is word play. Words with two different meanings in English can be used in an amusing and entertaining way. This is called a pun. For example, *Short-staffed? That's fine by Mr. Sarkozy*. This headline plays with the word short. Short-staffed means that there are not enough staff to do the job. However, this article refers to the fact that during a visit to a factory all the staff he was introduced to were short because he is only 1.7m!

Another example would be *Police found drunk in street*.  This headline plays with the word drunk.  
One meaning is that the Police were found drunk in the street.  The second meaning is that the Police found a drunk man in the street.

**Noun Strings**  
It is also common to have a row of nouns in a headline.  For example, *Prime Minister's traffic headache*. This means that the Prime Minister has had some sort of problem with traffic.

Another example would be *Teenage pregnancy increase.* This means that there has been an increase in teenage pregnancy.

**Alliteration**  
Alliteration is when a sound is repeated. It is often used in poetry as well as newspapers. Newspapers use it to attract the eye and make it more memorable.  For example, *Media makes Madonna Mad*. The 'm' is repeated 4 times.   
**Ambiguous**  
Headlines are often ambiguous making the reader look at the article. If we take the above headline the word 'mad' is ambiguous because it could mean insane or it could mean very angry.  Also, the word drunk is ambiguous in the word play example above.

**Verb Changes**  
Verbs are often changed in headlines. The simple tense is used instead of the continuous or perfect tense and the infinitive is used for the future.  For example, *Brown resigns*. This is used instead of *Brown has resigned.*

Another example would be *PM to visit USA*. This is used instead of *The Prime Minister's going to visit the USA*.

**Referencing and Relative Clauses**

To avoid repetition newspapers use referencing a lot. This is using a pronoun or another noun instead of a name. Next time you read an article find the main subject and see how many different ways the writer refers to this. In the extract of the article below Madonna is also referred to as *the singer*and *she.*Relative clauses are used to give more information about the noun and also save space on the page. In the extract there are two relative clauses, the first tells us that Madonna is in America and the second that she is 50.

**Madonna, who is currently in America, saw red when a photographer got too close. The singer, now 50, shouted abuse before she was led away.**

I hope that this short insight into newspaper language will encourage you to read more articles from English newspapers. With most of them available online it is easy for you to find one that you enjoy. It is also interesting to read the same story from two different newspapers and compare the language and see which you find easier to understand. Good luck and happy reading!