

A Short Study in Perspective on Enhancing Communication Skills (LSRW) for English Language Learners Through Select Journalistic-Print Articles & Radio Broadcasting

Dr. K.S. Vishnu Prabhu Ph.D.
Dr. N. Balaji Ph.D., MACE, FIMSA, FACSc, MBA
Director & Trustee
Sri Narayani Hospital & Research Centre, Vellore, T.N. India

Abstract

The paper's aim is to reach out to the inner most circles of rural India with the specific purpose of enhancing English language learning through usage of print and radio media by English language enhancers. Reportage in English world over has made tremendous impact for over a century now. The prominence of English as a link language to connect masses across all corners in India has undergone tectonic shifts since gaining Independence in August 15, 1947. In the paper, I have taken various articles published in English that are of national importance drawn between the years 1959 and 2009. During these times, India has massively progressed on the lines of agriculture, economy, defense, education and industrialization. During these tumultuous times, significant contribution has been made by English Reportage to abridge India and the rest of the world as well. English Reportage enhances LSRW Skills in English Language much needed for both current generation language learners and the next.

1. Listening (through Radio and TV Dispatches),
2. Speaking (To Communicate – for English Language Learners),
3. Reading (Print Media)
4. Writing (To Practice and Publish).

Reportage in English as an employable skill during the first decades post Independent India was only exclusive to the ones who had access to university education or to the ones who went abroad and returned home armed with degrees.

But, since the beginning of the 21st century, it has been considered as the dawn of Information Age in India. And along with universalization of education and vast increase in the circulation of English Newspapers, current generation of learners in schools, colleges and researchers have found scope in English as a language as strong medium of communication and as a tool for learning for the upcoming new generation of learners as well. English Language learners till today find journalism as a medium to not just read or hear from it but also contribute toward it.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of language in any journalistic medium is not only to relay information as it is but also to inform with style and distinction. English, which was primarily looked at, as the language of the westerners did not confine itself to a boundary of the colonial past? But, spread around in a geometrical fashion with an objective of setting benchmarks that in turn earned reputation when spoken or written.

Since the dawn of Information Age, incidents and circumstances have been relayed immediately as they happen. In terms of information dissemination, the presence of emails, mobile phones, spy cameras and satellite technology have all added new colors to the already existent palate of journalism. And for a country that has evolved with numerous languages, the language of English served as a link language to connect all masses through out the country.

With the advent and exit of the British, the English language came along with it and never ceased since then. Journalists have to carry out a detailed in-depth of analysis almost on any given topic and often cannot be basing on their interest and expertise. They are spread through out the world. Journalists often work under twin-objective parameters. They need to work on fact-finding missions coupled with verification before they could be officially reported.

During the era of Post Independent India, Journalists needed to cover an extensive plethora of events ranging from celebrations to assassinations, celibacy to democracy and speeches to 'Dharnas' in real-time. The use of English language as a tool in reportage to spread news covering all aspects was threadbare for a young and growing democracy like ours.

ENHANCING READING AND WRITING SKILLS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

To begin in a befitting scenario, Rajesh Chavan in one of his letters written to Kushwanth Singh, which appeared in Tehelka in 2001, asked thus

“Is the focus on the English language and consequently, all things western, taking us away from our roots?” To which, Singh replied thus:

“I don’t think the English language is anymore Indian. It is very much part of the Indian linguistic scenario. It has been recognized by the Constitution. It is the only link language we have in India. Any north Indian going down South or any southerner coming North, there is no other language except English in which he can communicate.

We have had the best writers in the language; like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh and many others. They are not only writing well but also are writing about India and telling the world, and they can be compared with the best writers of the language. I think it is best to remember Shri Rajagopalachari, who described English as the greatest gift that goddess Saraswati had given to India”.

MEN AND WOMEN ON THE FIELDS ARMED WITH PENS AND NOTEBOOKS

Journalists reporting in English about the instances that occur in India serve the readers not only in India, though not many at that time (Early 1960’s). But, also enables millions of readers around the world to read and hear about the same. Because, English as a global language pioneered across the globe not only due to the colonial approach of the British world over and particularly in India, But also people who belonged to the elite class from India who studied abroad and came back to use English Language as a tool to communicate with the British.

Robert Stimson, a BBC correspondent at that time, on his valedictory dispatch titled “Goodbye to India” in 10 March 1949 spoke of the horrors during the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. And it appeared frightening to him because, he was almost just five yards away when the most dreadful incident in the history of Independent era had unfolded in front of his eyes. Stimson added, “*It was a pleasure to interview Gandhi because he had an instinctive understanding of news and was a master of simple colorful English*”.

M.K Gandhi, the Father of India, understood the real importance of English as a language not only to communicate with the Colonial British but also through the power of media he was able to gather the world’s attention to the doors of India. Freedom was never granted to India and it never attained the dominion status until the leaders of our country fought for it and was taken from the clutches of the British. And the language of English played a crucial role in realizing that long driven ambition of India.

STATUS OF THE CIRCULATION OF INDIAN ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS IN 1959

There was an unfortunate turn of events in the first few decades of post-independence era. The stark reality unfolded to an indigestible fact that many of Indians did not realize that the British had left India and that she was no longer colonized. The extensive geographical spread of India was unimaginable even after about the 600 odd princely states were united to form one single dominion as a single nation.

Arthur Bonner, in his article “India’s Masses The Public that cant be reached” wrote on The Atlantic, in October 1959 thus,

“The daily circulation of newspapers in India, with a population of 400 million, is only 3.1 million, and one-third of these papers are in English. The dozen or so English-language papers are extremely important, since 99 per cent of the people are ruled by the 1 per cent who speak English”

At the time of Independence and the immediate decades that followed, there were four major cities: Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. And these cities had the opportunity to have either radio facility or community radio systems. But the rest of the country in majority had no access to information. Language was a further barrier for the people of India to communicate with each other in one single voice. The makers of our Constitution realized that the language of English is vital to connect all regions of the country and hence made it as one of the official languages of India.

ENHANCING LISTENING AND READING SKILLS THROUGH ENGLISH CORRESPONDENCE ON WAR

Articles that appear in magazines and newspapers most often contain minute details of the events that were covered. This is attributed toward extensive reportage because of the long duration of the covering of events is usually involved. And next generation English language learners including ours remind us often to read newspapers or magazines in order to increase vocabulary or improve the technique of sentence formation. Articles relating to Wars and battles do inform readers of the geographical locations where they are fought and bring to light the plight of the fallen soldiers and the innocent people who have lost their lives in the ensuing cross fire.

The threat matrix that exists on two fronts for India has not changed much since the Sino Indian war of 1962. On one front, border issues with China and the other, constant terror attacks being reported to be originating from Pakistan. For the first time, since the partition, India’s national conscience rose to its zenith. Indian Army had to recruit citizens in order to enlist men towards mobilizing the army for the war. It was vital to spread the news across the country that a war was imminent. And until then, one of the most effective ways to spread news and information was by word of mouth.

BBC Journalist Ivor Jones further adds in his dispatch “India Mobilises” on 17th November 1962 stated, “By now, a month after the main Chinese attacks began, the majority of Indians know there’s a war on. Some primitive tribes and peasants away in remote hills and jungles may not have heard, but that’s probably all. Not that the news has spread in the Western way. There are only about a million radio sets here, and the daily sale of newspapers is only about five million. In any case, fewer than a fifth of the people can read”.

The Urban-rural divide was so rampant at the time that the availability of information through newspapers or radio was made available benefitting only to the urban population. It is also interesting to note that Siachen Glacier being the highest battlefield in the world came to be known more among the Indian diaspora only during the Kargil War of 1999 that was fought between India and Pakistan. But in stark contrast, its conditions were reported about ten years ago even before the war had started.

Edward W. Desmond’s “War at the Top of the World” published in TIME Magazine on 17 July 1989 reads “ THE BLAST IS startling, and so is the reverberation that echoes like a landslide. But the sound of artillery - the sound of war - fades quickly in the gigantic stillness of mountain and glacier”. The article is embedded with similes that demand our attention.

English language learners tend to pick words from articles or from radio dispatches to add a stint in the armor of their vocabulary. In this case, the words ‘startling’, ‘gigantic’ are adjectives. The geographical term ‘glacier’ assumes significance because language learners though not physically present to know about it, they culminate information through news dispatches.

The minute details covered in the articles related to war also included abstract terms that can only be felt. Words like “national pride”, “prestige” and “plight” dominated the scenario. They portrayed both the good and evil aspects of the war just like two sides of a coin. In this context, never before the country has seen such steep rise in nationalism and patriotism. Much of it though spread around through community radio systems and by virtue of word of mouth, the world watched in with utmost attention.

REPORTAGE DURING CRISIS AND DISASTERS

Disasters don’t operate on their own. A chain of events triggers them and in their final moments they appear in a fatal blow resulting in massive destruction and most often followed by huge loss of lives. People suffering under the duress of disasters, tend to communicate and enquire of their loved ones. The need for Centralized communication takes the center stage. All issues related to Grievances, Rehabilitation and Undertaking Measures are all confined to modes of Communication.

Pablo Bartholomew’s coverage on the Bhopal Gas Leak Incident in 1984 shocked the world at large. It also depicted the horrors of an innocent child being buried after a leak of more than 40 tonne of highly toxic waste from the Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal, India, in 1984.

Sudip Mazumdar’s article, which appeared on Newsweek, the Magazine in 17 December 1984, titled “It Was Like Breathing Fire” reported, “*Most of Bhopal was asleep when disaster struck. After the leak started, as many as 200,000 people ran through the city streets, coughing, screaming and calling out to each other. At about 2 a.m., the pesticide factory’s siren went off. Thinking a fire had broken out, hundreds rushed towards the plant – straight into the path of the deadly gas. The train station was littered with the bodies of railroad employees and red-uniformed porters. The junction was paralyzed for twenty hours, making it impossible for survivors to flee by train. Those wealthy enough to own cars gathered their families and tried to escape. But many drivers were blinded by the gas, and there were scores of accidents*”.

The article underscores two important narratives. The first narrative is that the title by itself is suggestive of the fact that a disaster unfolded. And when Swapan Saha, a sociologist was interviewed about the incident he mentioned ‘*It was both a burning and a suffocating sensation,*’ he further added that “*it was like breathing fire*”. This aspect of assuming a major idea from which an article’s content could be closely guessed based on a title itself makes Journalism a conducive medium for English language learners. From the interviewee’s point of view, he was expressing his views with photographic memories when he had spoken to the interviewer.

The Hindu reported “On the morning of 26th December 2004, a new word entered the dictionary of most Indians. It was ‘Tsunami’”. ‘Tsunami’ traditionally a Japanese word entered the lives of billions across Asia and the millions who lost their lives and who were affected by it. The unusual and ruthless force at large washed away and consumed millions of people across India, Indonesia and Thailand and many other countries around the world.

The world stood in horror and united under one banner for a common unified purpose in order to rescue and save millions stranded by it, in what was seen as one of the biggest rescue and rehabilitation operations in the history of mankind. Due to extensive reportage and further to changes in the Indian context, the government formed the National Disaster Response Force” (NDRF) for the purposes of response, rescue and rehabilitation purposes. Chennai, Cuddalore, and Nagapattinam in India suffered huge casualties and it tested the full brut force of India’s recovering capabilities.

REPORTING ON INDIAN ECONOMY IN 1991

The famous phrase “*Nobody can grab a free lunch in today’s world*” had its origins way back in 1991 when the India’s financial system had to be restructured. The current account deficit (CAD) at that time ranged between 6 and 10 billion US dollars. Often Journalists covering news on finance and economy tend to report in simple English words in order to ensure that the common mass understand the issues involved in a lighter tone.

India had to open its markets to the outer world to attract investments in India. And until that time we followed an economy based on socialistic principles. And in the year 1991, we moved to a capitalist economy and thereby opening doors to other countries to invest in India and vice-versa. ‘Market reforms’ were the key words that dominated the news coverage in the last years of the 20th century.

David Housego’s interview with Dr. Manmohan Singh, who was the Finance Minister at the time, added fresh impetus on finance and market reforms. In an interview titled “India’s Financial Architect” which appeared in Financial Times in September 2 1991, Dr. Singh said, “*We can’t assume that the market will take care of our problems. They are millions outside the market who live on the edge of subsistence. They cannot be dealt with through the market mechanism*”.

In the above interview, one could decipher the mind of the interviewee. The writer realizes that the words spoken by Dr. Singh were carefully chosen. To further make things easier for the reader to understand the context behind Dr. Singh’s words of choice, the writer implores on it and comes out with the views of his own.

To set things straight, Housego argued, “*His other problem is that he is part of a government that is itself a minority administration and is riddled with dissension. It is to offset these factors and to provide a guarantee of the continuity of reform that he is keen that India should seek a further loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under its Extended Fund Facility, which could provide India with \$5 Billion to \$7 Billion over three years*”.

The reality that surrounded Mr. Singh’s predicament is that he was part of the government that was in minority and that market reforms he envisioned could always be tested at the floor of the parliament house before becoming a reality by itself. The excerpts from the article clearly portray that the market reforms are bound by political decisions and the will power that is inextricably attached to it.

ENHANCING LSRW SKILLS THROUGH INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND VICE VERSA

Investigative Journalism in theory and reality does not confide to closed spaces in the gamut of Journalistic studies. Instead, it remarkably reflects major themes opened to its surrounding. Journalism dealing with core issues has been witnessing tectonic shifts due to changing times in the fast moving world amidst the evolving modern marvels of science.

Investigative Journalism involves detailed analysis of inextricable relationships between the causes and effects of human experiences. There is no prescribed protocol or predetermined frame of mind for a comprehensive work of investigative journalism to be established. It requires courage and complete dedication to be part of it and survive efficiently. Because, journalists often report from the harshest conditions possible known to mankind and sometimes stay over for years in unknown terrains to collate information and thereby get their works published.

One such incident that assumes significance is the Mumbai Terror Attack in 2008, wherein; about 166 innocent people lost their lives. Terrorism in the 21st century is an international industry. And every type of weapon they imagine is available in the black market of the third world.

Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark were one of the key investigative journalists who covered the incident and published a book titled “The Siege: The Attack on the Taj”. They depicted a scene about Will and Kelly the couple who stayed in the Hotel who shut themselves behind closed doors when the siege was being undertaken.

Adrian and Cathy argued, “*Explosions rolled down the corridor like a massed band. Glass splintered somewhere on the third floor and wood snapped. It sounded as if a boot had been planted through a partition wall and was now being twisted and flexed*”.

Investigative Journalists are by far armed with the full extent of LSRW skills.

1. **Listening:** They have to interview dozens or hundreds of people depending on the circumstances.
2. **Speaking:** Ability to gather information from the people depends on the reporter’s speaking and convincing capabilities.
3. **Reading:** Reports drawn from local sources (of the place) is vital for information to be fool-proofed.
4. **Writing:** Ability to present facts coupled with detailed reporting.

TECHNIQUES THAT COULD BE INCORPORATED FOR CLASS ROOM ACTIVITY/LEARNING THROUGH PRINT MEDIA:

- **Vocabulary Building:** Learners can be dictated words daily (two words – with their meanings and its usage) from the passages in the articles and they could be written down on small strips of paper in pencil. Memorizing these words along with word pronunciation could be followed thereafter on a

timely basis.

- **Developing Listening Skills:** Passages can be read by students/learners from print media sources and the rest of the classroom can be drawn to listening mode. Questions based on the passage could be asked by the English language enhancers and answered by the learners.
- **Attention Span Exercises:** Pictures from the Print Media could be utilized for the purposes of observation and jotting down or paraphrasing. This exercise could be very effective for sentence structuring/formation.
- **Imitation Exercises:** Speeches from world leaders through radio could be broadcasted to language learners and they can be asked to reciprocate the same. This method in effect could be useful for rise and fall (intonation).

SCENARIO OF CIRCULATION OF INDIAN ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS IN 2009

According to the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) of the first quarter in 2010, the total number of English Dailies that are being circulated and read in India stands at eight million. But there are some important factors to be considered with reference to the growth of English Newspapers in India.

Since the dawn of Information Age between the years 2000 and 2008, the rise and growth in percentage of English newspaper readers in English has been startling. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Report published in June 2010, between the years 2008 and 2009, the percentage of growth in the rise of circulation of newspapers in India stood at a staggering growth of 45% as against 29% in China and 34% in South Africa.

These instances also gain weightage with the following two narratives. One narrative is that the readership has been remarkably increasing through subscriptions. And the other, though the print media is being threatened by the influence of digital media, Print media does not confine itself to traditional choices bound by boundaries but is ever evolving with new illustration designs and earmarks huge potential for advertising spaces which also fuel our economy.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- Strong medium for English Language Learners (Enhances LSRW Skills)
- Economical and a hub for bountiful information
- Could be recorded or saved for future references

Weakness

- Learners could easily lose interest if the articles are lengthy and it is time consuming. (Reduces Reading Capacity)
- Figures and tabulations do not find prominence for the common mass
- Further clarifications deem necessary with even key words (because of the lack in clear meaning or foot notes)

Opportunities

- A potential medium for learning and unlearning (through learning and presenting or publishing) Vital for Speaking and Writing Skills.
- Pictorials and illustrations added to the articles would demand the attention span of the learner.
- A hub to spread one's ideas through out the world through creativity and artistic rendition of one's writing or reporting. (Invokes the Creative Consciousness)

Threats

- Digital marketing and online journalism like blogs are updated on minute-by -minute basis (especially and news and scores). Only information is culled and no major scope for listening or reading the complete information.
- Interactive media is fast becoming popular. (Time bound TV or Internet activities offers scope only for
- Impact of Social Media and Mobile Phones (Words get shortened unnecessarily and diminishes the scope for the apt usage of English Language).

MAJOR FINDINGS DRAWN FROM THE SELECT ENGLISH ARTICLES AND DISPATCHES MENTIONED IN THIS STUDY

- In the First few decades between 1959 and 2009, we find that due to the lack of information dissemination through newspapers and radio, much information was passed on by the virtue of word of mouth and therefore was confined to being spoken or listened.
- During the intervening years of the 50 years in study, English Reportage on Wars and Disasters have united the common clan of India under one banner for the prospect of

communicating with each other.

- In the early 1990's when India opened itself to the world markets, the advent of science and technology became the focal point. Television Technology and Internet Access started its inward journey into India.
- Early years of 21st Century witnessed Major Changes toward Analysis found in Articles (exclusive to topics usually involving works between days and months) to Analysis found in Books (inclusive of various topics usually involving months to years).
- The steep rise in from Print Media in News (Eg: The Front Line) to Digital Media (Eg: NDTV).
- The transfer of Trends from Digital Media to Interactive Media (LIVE Streams of Incidents to Investigative Journalism).

CONCLUSION

The paper clearly discusses about enhancing LSRW skills through Select English Reportage for English Learners and also depicts major events that occurred and were covered in articles and radio dispatches between 1959 and 2009. English Reportage as a medium available as a scope for employment is huge and rewarding. To gather the required LSRW skills, one could utilize the journalistic medium itself either through print media or the impact of television that dominates most of the first years in the 21st century. Techniques devised above could improve efficacy of English language learners. Further, English language enhancers could utilize these techniques with real time live examples from print and radio journalism. Speakers and Writers often need to undertake two points of view: One, from a 'Bird's Eye View' and the other, from a 'Worm's Eye View'. The Bird's eye view is common to most of us. In terms of comprehending information, it is from a general and outer perspective. It becomes important to analyze issues from a macro point of view while reporting. And the other, from a first person's view and accounts. And it is vital to analyze from a macro point of view.

English language learners tend to proceed in a learning cycle with respect to learning through print or mass media. First, they read or hear from a specified source and scan for words for improving one's vocabulary. Second, the meaning of the scanned words are drawn from dictionaries and then recorded for learning purposes. Mass Media however immensely popular it has become, it requires men and women to be on the ground to report. And for news and information to be reported effectively, it is important for the journalists to verify it before tabling it. And the Language of English as a medium for reportage forms the epicenter of journalism and becomes one of the focal points for many English language learners not just in India, but the world over as well. And for India to strive and excel in the world of global competence, arming English Language's LSRW for English Language Learners is vital to that effect at the least for about another fifty years to come. Journalism as a medium not only serves to disseminate information to the common mass but also provides a platform for enhancing communication skills to language learners. English Language Learners belonging to the current generation of India could greatly utilize the base of Journalism for not just enhancing their own communication (LSRW) skills but it could also pave way for the next. Often referred to as the GEN NEXT!

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