

Some Skills for Mastering Newspaper Language



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The social importance of the press is determined by two main aspects: the first one being quantitative, reflecting the range of its huge and diverse audience, and the second dealing with the specific influence of the media on each individual.

The specific features of the language structure of the quality newspapers are analyzed from two angles. On the one hand, by measuring the scale and the intensity of the language influence on the general reading public, on the other hand, by considering the specific features of typical press language.

During the 19th century more and more newspapers and magazines began a campaign for social and political reforms as a method of attracting mass audiences.

Newspaper and magazine editorials exerted some influence, but even more important was the ability of news stories to focus public attention on social problems and political corruption.

It took the English newspaper more than a century to establish a style and a standard of its own. And it is only by the 19th century that newspaper English may be said to have developed into a system of language media forming a separate functional style.

The specific conditions of newspaper publication, the restrictions of time and space, have left an indelible mark on newspaper English. For more than a century writers and linguists have been rigorously attacking “the slipshod (careless, not exact) construction and the vulgar vocabulary” of newspaper English, serious though they may be – it is a style with a definite communicative aim and its own system of language means. But not all the printed matter found in newspapers comes under newspaper style. The modern newspaper carries material of an extremely diverse character. On the pages of a newspaper one finds not only news and comment on it, press reports and articles, but also stories and poems, crossword puzzles, chess problems and the like.

The newspaper also seeks to influence public opinion on political and other matters. Elements of appraisal may be observed in the very selection and way of presentation of news, in the use of specific vocabulary. The headlines of news items, apart from giving information about the subject matter also carry a considerable amount of appraisal, thus indicating the interpretation of facts in the news item that follows. But, of course, the principal vehicle of interpretation and appraisal is the newspaper article, and the editorial, in particular. Editorials are characterized by a subjective handling of facts.

They have much in common with classical specimens of journalistic writing and are often looked upon as such. However, newspaper evaluation writing unmistakably bears the stamp of newspaper style.

Thus, it seems natural to regard newspaper articles, editorials included, as coming within the system of English newspaper style. But it should be noted that while editorials, as a rule, carry a considerable amount of information, the ratio of informative and evaluative writing varies substantially from article to article. To understand the language peculiarities of English newspaper style, it will be sufficient to analyze the following basic newspaper features:

1. brief news items;
2. advertisements and announcements;
3. the headline, and
4. the editorial.

Newspapers provide relevant connections to curriculum and the world community. Students who read newspapers regularly become familiar with many writing models that form a basis for communication in a society. Newspapers extend students' understanding and literacy beyond their classrooms. They will integrate newspaper use by relating to their role of a member of a chosen society. They will demonstrate higher level thinking skills by analyzing articles. By developing newspaper-reading strategies students will build their personal and civic connections.

The term newspaper language is generally defined as an instance of a particular journalistic reality – that is, the specifics of general language in its definite realizations in the most intensive area of public communications. The notion “newspaper language” characterizes the types of communication conditions, which reveal the particular autonomous function of standard language.

In the contents of the two basic newspaper genres – information and commentary, language is realized both by the system of language signs in their denotative function, and by representation of language signs referring to themselves, the former being characteristic of mainly informative texts and the latter – of commentaries.

One of the most important features of newspaper text is “attractiveness”, which can be introduced by various stylistic realizations of language, by intellectual strategies like puns or plays on words, unexpected usage of metaphors, polysemy, etc... All these language means are positive factors in the development of the diversity of newspaper texts on the one hand, and can serve as linguistic markers for collaboration between the society and the information policy on the other.

Another important feature of the newspaper text is its headline. Newspaper headlines must be short and impactful. Short words are quickly read and fit into a small space in the newspapers.

A headline must prepare the reader for the article to follow. So it must be to the point. At the same time it should be short and appeal to the attitudes and interests of the intended reader.

In order to improve the students' comprehension of the language of headlines some activities are suggested:

- a. The headlines from several short articles are removed and jumbled up. Then the students try to match the headline to the articles.
- b. One word is removed from the headline. After reading the article students try to supply it.
- c. A headline is selected and the students try to guess the content of the article. Alternatively they can be asked to suggest as many stories as possible that the headline would match.

The most important activity is analyzing a news article. Before trying to read, understand and analyze a newspaper article, students must be given newspaper clichés. The student will analyze a news article by understanding the magnitude of the story, the comprehensiveness of the information and reliability of the sources.

- a. Distributing newspapers we ask the students to select an article for analysis. For comprehensiveness of information we use the questions: "Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?"
- b. Then pass to the magnitude of the event in the story with the help of the following questions:
 1. Is it international, national or local?
 2. What is its impact, how many people were affected by it?

The next step will be finding out the reliability of sources.

- a. Is there any author's name?
- b. Who the information in the article comes from (examples: lawyer, doctor, neighbor, police officer, etc.)

Then comes the student's personal reaction: What do you think of this article? (The students are asked to give at least three sentences).

On the path of understanding the newspaper article the following activities will be useful.

A number of incidents are taken from the article and listed in a different order from that in which they occurred. The students rearrange the list to show the correct sequence of events. This activity can be used as a starting point for focusing on the organization of the text.

Students are very much interested in dealing with puns and puzzles, i.e. playing with meaning.

- a. Puns on words with two different meanings where both meanings are relevant to the story. E.g. the heading 'It's the sole clue'. It is a story where the sole (only) clue to whom had carried out a theft was on the sole or the shoe.
- b. Puns or words which are pronounced in the same way, but which have different spellings and different meanings. Both meanings are relevant to the story. E.g. 'Weight for it!' a story where a man has to wait before he can collect winnings from a bet concerning his weight.
- c. Students are asked to make up their own examples, using homophones in the same way.
- d. Another activity is teaching the students to read and understand classified ads. In this case, newspapers in other languages can be used for comparison, e.g. the local

newspapers.

- e. In some cases, for students with reading difficulties, the key articles should be read aloud, discussed and highlighted for relevant information.

Thus, working on a newspaper and becoming readers of English newspapers is one of the best ways for students to develop their language skills. Moreover, they will become confident of their communication capability, they will be able to describe and explain ideas and events more accurately and make other uses of the knowledge gained through the press.

References:

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Լրագրային անգլերենի տիրապետման հարցի շուրջ

Հոդվածը վերաբերում է որոշ մեթոդական կիրառումներին՝ անգլերենը ուսանողներին ավելի մատչելի դարձնելու համար: Այն անդրադառնում է մի շարք լսարանային վարժությունների, որոնք կնպաստեն այդ ոճն ավելի լավ ըմբռնելուն: