

News Reports and Language Learning: An Overview of Etiquettes and Hurdles

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ABSTRACT

English newspapers/broadcasts are considered perfect language learning tools as the reports are scripted with utmost clarity and precision. Considering the fact that language is about making sense of real-life issues, the nexus between the two is perfectly executed in news reports. This paper aims at discussing the role of newspapers in language learning and the hurdles that may be encountered by learners during the reading process. This paper also deals with 'Behaviourism' is the first language learning theory, propounded by J.B. Watson in 1913.

Keywords: news, language, reading, learning, reports, habit, behaviour.

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“A report is a description of an event or experience or a study of problems or issues usually in the written form, prepared for the information of someone else” (Pillai et al, 127). There are several types of reports such as newspaper reports, messages, minutes of meetings, business reports and scientific reports. The report is written in such a way that the person using it gets the required information easily and quickly. This is possible only when the writer of the report has a very good understanding of the subject and the needs of the reader. The contents of a report should be logically arranged and presented in an interesting manner. A good report will be always very brief.

Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to review a sample of the literature relating to News Reports and Language Learning. The scope of this review is

to attempt an examination of the full range of the literature, but a sampling of important and influential works. This review of literature serves to highlight the importance of news reports and language learning.

According to Preethi (2020), newspapers give scope for readers to understand the content better, easier, and more interesting as they have a lot of choices in Reading.

Anitha Devi (2013), expressed those newspapers can be designed in such a way to develop reading comprehension, grammatical skills and vocabulary skills and writing skills and critical analysis.

According to Parupalli Srinivasa Rao (2019), to improve the language skills of the learners, the modern teachers of English have been trying numerous techniques, methods, and approaches to meet the requirements of their learners. The use of mass media as a teaching tool in the English Classroom has increased significantly at all levels.

Parupalli Srinivasa Rao (2019), stated that the teachers have to use all the available authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, storybooks, movies, radio, tv ads, songs, label products, bus or train timetables, realia like phones and dolls so that the learners show more interest towards their learning.

Parupalli Srinivasa Rao (2019), expressed that there is no hard and fast rule to follow a certain newspaper, but the aim of the second or foreign language learners must be concentrating both on the news as well as developing the language skills which are the most important ones in learning a foreign language.

English news reports are considered perfect language learning tools. There are many reasons behind this consideration. News reports are scripted with utmost clarity and precision. A perfectly scripted news clipping can potentially be one's personal English classroom. Because, language is about making sense of real-life issues, the nexus between the two is executed perfectly in news reports. Hence, it is not surprising, learners consider these reports as the most essential language learning tool.

“The most significant thing regarding news reports is the reporter will aim at providing all essential details in a brief manner so that the reader who is in a hurry gets the details at a single glance” (Pillai et al, 127). A lot of people read their morning newspaper at the breakfast table or on their way to their place of work. A newspaper report is built like an inverted pyramid. Beginning with the most important point of the story it gradually builds up details. The first paragraph of the report should contain the most important details of the story. This paragraph is called ‘intro’ in the journalistic

jargon. It is otherwise known as ‘lead’. A ‘kicker’ is the headline that is placed on top of the main headline. A ‘caption’ is the description of the printed photograph. ‘Verso’ is the left side page of the newspaper and ‘recto’ is the right side one.

The report will be always very brief. Quite often it is divided into short paragraphs. Verbs in the active and passive voices are used. The language used will suit the subject of the report. The report is structured in such a way that it can be stopped at the end of any paragraph. It would look complete even then.

Several aspects of the news reports often pose a great difficulty for the readers to proceed with their reading further and prove to be a major impediment in understanding the content. There may be many reasons attributing to this condition, and a few are listed here and accounted for. The techniques that are used by the media personnel to keep the language on par with the international standards turn out to be the impediments for certain readers in understanding the reports. The following are a few:

Reporting Verbs:

While reporting speeches and press conferences of important people, the reporter will use various reporting verbs. The following are some of the instances:

Prime minister: India has no intention to go to war with neighbouring countries.

Report : The Prime minister today **declared** that India had no intention to go to war with neighbouring countries.

Minister : It is not true that our prime minister is visiting Italy next week.

Report : The minister **denied** reports that the Prime Minister visiting Italy next week.

Minister : It is important that we should take urgent steps to check the fall in standards of education

Report : The minister **emphasized** the need to take urgent steps to check the fall in standards of education

Minister : India doesn't approve of the recent sanctions by the United States

Report : The minister **condemned** the recent sanctions by the United States

While many consider reports as tools for language learning, they also find it a bit difficult to understand them as well.

Usage of idioms and Phrases:

Idioms and phrases are far widely used in newspapers to present the points very crisply. They are believed to drive the ideas of the author in a better way with few words. What is conveyed by idioms and phrases can be conveyed through other expressions, but only with lengthy sentences and more words? Eventually, the report will turn to be verbose. The writers of the report will be eternally in want of space. Hence, they write with frequent idioms and phrases to make sentences short and crisp.

The following are a few examples:

- Cry to stop the demolition of monument **falls on deaf ears**. (A request that was not listened to)
- Pro Saddam crowds **took to the streets**. (The crowds show that they are against something by going to a public place and

shouting, often carrying signs and placards)

Vocabulary:

Scriptwriters in India use unfamiliar vocabulary in reports. The reasons may be to make the readers learn new words every day, to make an impact, to remain a great source of vocabulary or to keep on par with the international standards.

Examples:

- Varsity medicos go on stir.
- The economy recovers but polity regresses.
- Cabinet nods for women reservation bill.
- Lawmakers' allowances to hike.

Usage of Phrasal Verbs:

The scriptwriters use phrasal verbs with the view to make the report lively and colourful. A phrasal verb is a combination of the main verb and a preposition. When read separately, it may be misleading.

Examples:

PM **calls on** president (Visits)

Minister vows to **look into** bad conditions in hospitals (investigate)

Referencing and Relative Clauses:

Newspapers use referencing and relative clauses quite often to avoid repetition of usages. It is all about using another noun or a pronoun instead of a name. Relative clauses are used to give more information about the noun and also save more space on the page.

Examples:

- 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.

- Floyd Mayweather beats McGregor in the 10th round. The **American pugilist** retained an upper hand over the Irish in the 30-minute-long bout.

The following pages consist of a study conducted among English enthusiasts regarding news reports and their role in language learning. The study also aims at identifying the etiquettes in language learning through news reports and hurdles faced by the learner. An attempt has been made to find out suitable solutions to improve the situation. For this study, the data has been collected from 75 enthusiastic undergraduate students studying in arts and science colleges located in the Tirunelveli district. A structured questionnaire through Google Forms with the backdrop of the Behaviourist Theory was circulated and their opinions and ideas about news reports and language learning were elicited

The results were tabulated methodically so that it would be easy to determine inherent facts or meaning. The data collected for this study were carefully edited, systematically classified and tabulated. The researcher focused on organizing recurring patterns and condensing the mass of data into categories. Students were expected to mark their responses on a five–point scale. They were also given an option to give reasons

as to why they chose a particular answer.

Results regarding their gender show, out of the 75 respondents, 66.7% are female and 32% are male. One respondent preferred not to reveal the gender. When they were asked about their discipline, out of the 75 respondents 46.7% are from the science discipline, 28% belong to the arts discipline, 21.3% are from the engineering discipline and only 1.3% are from the commerce discipline. Regarding the qualifications of the parents 41.3% of the parents have completed Higher Secondary 29.3% have completed Degree, 12% have completed PG Degree and 17.3% are illiterate. When enquired about their opinion on Difficult Vocabulary being a major impediment in the process of reading a newspaper, 50% of the respondents agreed, 22.7% of them are neutral, 6.7% have strongly agreed to the factor and 2.7% of respondents have strongly disagreed. When the question was raised on their favourite topics helping them to get along with the newspaper reading, 58.7%, of the respondents have agreed. 22.7% of the respondents strongly agreed with the factor. 12.3% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. 5.3% of the respondents have disagreed with the factor and 1.3% of them have strongly disagreed.

The following are the few examples of the collected data:

Do you think dictionaries help in better understanding of the English news reports?

Table 1

Sl. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Female	50	66.7
2	Male	24	32.0
3	Prefer not to say	1	1.3
	Total	75	100.0

When the respondents are enquired regarding their opinion on dictionaries helping them in better understanding of the English news reports, the majority (54.7%) of the respondents have agreed. Some (33.3%) respondents have strongly agreed with the factor. 10.7% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree. There are also some respondents (1.3%) who have disagreed with the factor and there are no respondents to strongly disagree.

Do you think dictionaries provide assistance in enriching vocabulary?

Table 2

Sl. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Agree	48	64.0
2	Disagree	2	2.7
3	Neither disagree nor agree	25	33.3
4	Strongly agree	0	0
5	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Total	75	100.0

The majority (64%) of the respondents have agreed to the assertion that Dictionaries are providing assistance in enriching their vocabulary. Some (33.3%) respondents are neutral as they neither agree nor disagree. 2.7% of the respondents have disagreed with the factor. There are no respondents who have strongly agreed and strongly disagreed.

One should not give up listening to broadcasts in English/reading English newspapers even when nothing is understood.

Table 3

Sl. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Agree	36	48.0
2	Disagree	1	1.3
3	Neither disagree nor agree	22	29.3
4	Strongly agree	15	20.0
5	Strongly disagree	1	1.3
	Total	75	100.0

When enquired about their opinion on not giving up listening to broadcasts in English / reading English newspapers even when nothing is understood, the majority (48%) of the respondents have agreed. Some (29.3%) respondents have neither agreed nor disagreed with the factor. 20% of the

respondents have strongly agreed. There are also some respondents (1.3%) who have disagreed with the factor and finally, there are 1.3% of the respondents who have strongly disagreed to this.

Editorials are rich in language, and they are the next level to move on after getting comfortable with news reports

Table 4

Sl. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1	Agree	46	61.3
2	Disagree	2	2.7
3	Neither disagree nor agree	7	9.3
4	Strongly agree	20	26.7
5	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Total	75	100.0

When enquired about their opinion on the assertion, editorials being rich in language and they are the next level to move on after getting comfortable with news reports, the majority (61.3%) of the respondents have agreed. 26.7% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the factor. 9.3% of the respondents have neither agreed nor disagreed. There are also some respondents (2.7%) who have disagreed with the factor and finally, there are no respondents who have strongly disagreed to this.

Conclusion

It was proposed that learners would repeat the methods they get to know and try to use them in their language usage until it becomes a regular basis in life. Behaviourists, therefore, think that learning a language, especially a second language (L2) should be learnt through extensive drill and practice. They consider learning a language as a set of mechanical habits which are formed through a process of imitation and repetition.

The analysis of the data proves that the learners

despite difficulties in reading/listening to news reports/broadcasts, firmly want to hold on to reading/listening to news reports/broadcasts. The following are the ways to overcome the difficulties and have a better understanding of newspaper language are also suggested:

- Favourite topics may be selected at the initial stage. This won't let the reader's enthusiasm sap away and will prove to be a motivational factor.
- Learners should always have a dictionary by their side as a behaviour/habit. Difficult words and expressions may be underlined. After the completion of reading or listening to (or then and there) the broadcast/report the words and expressions may be referred to in the dictionary. It would be better to note down all such expressions and their meanings separately.
- The process of listening or reading should not be given up even if nothing is understood. It must be repeated. When one keeps on

doing this, the mind adjusts itself to the new habit. When one can come over this phase, it can be understood that the learning begins and moves on at a good speed. It must be made sure that the reader survives in this important phase.

- When the learner continues to do these activities as a drill, the difference becomes more evident. Once the language in the news reports becomes a comfort zone the focus may now be shifted to editorials and other high profile news articles.

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