

Short Communication

Semantic excess or new canons? Exploring the print media

Asima Ranjan Parhi

Department of English, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar Arunachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: asim.parhi@gmail.com

Accepted 19 November, 2009

The English print media in India has taken up the growing challenge of subscribing to a postcolonial, deviant use of language and preparing a linguistic model of Indian English. This paper tries to establish the above fact with data from certain national dailies during the late 1990's when actually the print media went through a well perceived change in the use of language. *The Times of India* being the major source of the data provided seemed to be very bold in this regard. Tuned to the demands of a globalised India then, the change affected the earlier 'core-meaning' concept and put extra pressure on the semantic fold which led to greater elasticity and flexibility. In turn, the print media got a face lift by making its language more idiomatic, catchy like a fashion statement; in other words striking a saleable status for the new entries. My paper below states that the borders of semantic possibility have been stretched into an extreme across the newspapers which could further be explored for experimentation and use in the teaching/learning curriculum.

Key words: Canon, catchy, saleable, saffronisation, corporatisation of language, semantic, globalization, ambiguous, postcolonial, trendy.

INTRODUCTION

The content of the English newspapers in India provides a text of our cultural history. It explores a new medium in terms of both a language revolution and cultural renovation. We don't require borrowing the history and culture from outside.

Rather than burdening the learner with loads of other cultures and history through the traditional text books, newspapers appear to have become more accessible and comfortable as alternate textual canon. By exploiting and exploring alternative semantic possibilities, the print media offers models of experimentation and usage. In the IT (Information Technology) age, since the entrepreneurs opt for professionally skilled employees having a market based, pragmatic approach to the English language, we can not afford to ignore the versatility and flexibility of English.

And there is a lot of resourcefulness well perceived in the body of the newspaper. It is locally as well as globally motivated, professionalized and catchy. This paper tries to explore a few areas within the print media affecting such a change in language contributing to new areas of research, curricular shift, using the content of the newspaper as a tool to teach and the respective affiliations that result in this change.

EVOLUTION AND LOCATION OF JOURNALISM

Journalism has been well rooted as an institution by now. It is definitely a point of advantage to journalistic identity. The new breed of journalists is trained with uninhibited style and curiosity. Professionalism has replaced sentimental journalism of pre-independent era. Being a powerful separate organ of Public opinion, watchdog of the country's interests, promoting impartial and fearless voice to the state, journalism has been experiencing freedom from all fronts which makes it easy to dare new usage that can attract readers to the issues with fresh colours. The variety that the political, commercial, sports magazines and those on women reflect cannot simply be effective by being imitative of British English. The English journalism in India evolved as a direct descendant of the British press and imitated its English. The newspapers attempted to provide the government's point of view initially until a vibrant, independent breed of Indians used them as the mouth piece of protest and freedom of the country. After independence the press concentrated more on partition, development and the language almost remained the same, equivalent to the Queen's English. In the 1990's a change became inevitable and got

embedded in the body of the print media to cater to the demands of a highly globalised and trendy body of readers.

All these demand greater vigilance and stability of journalism as a body, licensed to check and alter, see through and amend the nature of things which creates space for new models of expression in particular there by effecting a change linguistically and culturally (Parhi, 2008).

DOMAINS OF CHANGE

Corporatisation

We have entered into the world of computers, internet and cyber space. There is greater space for economy of expression in the advent of the latest technology. The way world communication is influenced by the high technology giants like computers and e-mail, newspapers can not afford to avoid it. In the world of limited time and fast movement, people in the urban, metropolitan areas are in need of messages in codes than sparing time for detailed reading of articles and honey coated phrases of earlier days. The newspapers also respond to such innovations adapting to a corporate lingo:

- a) 'Swadeshi enterprise', titles Farrokh K R Mehta in his article (7 November, 1998, *TOI*). He also writes 'desi entrepreneur' in it. It refers to the fact that certain general notions have to be expressed by economic, global connotations as they rule the world now.
- b) 'Talkathon' (an advertisement of a cell phone refers to unlimited talk on phone), *TOI*, 26 Nov.'01.

A multidisciplinary move

After globalisation no particular subject is independent by itself. Registers from all disciplines jumble together and get validity through the register of journalism. Newspapers in general have been the meeting point of professionals from all departments. The journalist keeps in mind the above fact and creates a medium that can interest the variety of readers. So the technique of journalism has been to an extent analogous to that of fiction. The readers become the market for the product that is the newspaper from the professional point of view. It has to provide space for every type of brain.

- a) Shastri Ramachandran writes in *The Times of India* on 13 November, 1998: "Basu and Bahu, Congress coat and Communist Tail" where he has used a variety of metaphors like Sonia Gandhi; the Indian daughter in law, the the present alliance of political parties. The discipline of politics, poetry (being alliterative) and political satire (the nexus between the two leaders) are taken together. 'Bahu' is a typical Indian way of referring to the daughter in law. So the use is undoubtedly giving importance to

Indian way of expressing the exact notion.

- b) On 19 November, 1998, Edward Zurick writes on *TOI*, "Celluloid Stereotypes of Islam" where he uses an expression like 'Islamically incorrect' that clearly projects the autonomy of the writer as well as putting different subjects (say for example, the world as moral or aesthetic) as if they bear the similar word function and so instead of quoting it as 'Islam thinks it to be morally incorrect' he uses the term as an adverb.

c) "Biharisation of Politics". Here, 'Biharisation' clearly refers to 'criminalisation'. So the word is first used as a trait and speaks of a distinct stereotype.

d) An advertisement of an iron by Usha Company writes "Steamxpress", which is coined for economy and due to the pressure on the writer to imagine a deviating way to attract all kinds of readers and consumers from all parts of the world. In colonial times the newspaper did not have the role of spreading business and advertising ideas. In the changing times it has become itself a profitable business containing separate sections of advertisement, fashion schemes, and in the process a commercialized medium has taken precedence.

The world today is integrated through new market products. The editors of newspapers cannot create attraction for the readers by using old words for certain products. Certain catchy words and phrases enable the customers to get attracted into the details. New products so have better access if they are being launched with new words on the newspaper columns. Flexibility in governing the structures of the parent language has become a necessary step in the present global interaction among people and MNCs/Corporates. So language is amply influenced by the values of globalization (Parhi, 2006).

Assertion

The journalists are in a rush to make Indian English more and more popular and they have the intention of making it a choice for anyone opting different kinds of English. We have come to know about this by the prepared questionnaires that have drawn opinions from journalists, linguists and readers. The Indian creative writing has though taken a firm stand in this regard; it has a limited scope and elitist reach. Newspaper is a part and parcel of many Indians who are even partially educated. So the words incorporated by Indian English novels and poetry may not popularize the trend satisfactorily. The journalistic discourse has shouldered the unique responsibility of handing over the world a peculiar English of our capacity, reach and taste.

It is the projection of our linguistic notions that govern some of the writers who are fast using many Indian words and structures. And when the mainstream newspapers use number of such words and structures freely it certainly is a sign of assertion of Indian usage since they are read across the world too. Indians have come of age

through such massive mention of the words which are very common to all. And when they are repeatedly used, it seems (as the field study reveals) the newspapers have asserted the Indian self to express itself by the kind of English they are comfortable with. To make one's presence felt outside, such a task serves a great purpose. The newspapers also assert their stand on Indian English by reproducing some of the public speeches, interviews of leaders, artists with mixture of Indian, regional or our own idioms well rooted in our peculiar social systems, ceremonies:

Example:

Ex- Cricket Captain Sourav Ganguly as 'Maharaj'. 'Government' as 'gormint' (pronounced so at certain regions). 'Saffron' earlier stood for commitment and sacrifice. Journalism has today turned it to pejorative usage since it has been identified with a particular fundamentalist creed in recent times. So 'saffronising education' has been a catch phrase in journalistic register standing for 'narrowing education' to certain dogmas.

Idiomatic and catchy

'Nuclear Twins' is a title to refer to India and Pakistan (The Telegraph, 25 November, 1998). Jug Suraiya regularly writes for The Times of India and habitually coins words in jocular vein which show journalistic flexibility and attract readers. One such example from his column is "PIOlogy lesson" (22.11.'98) where PIO stands for Persons of Indian Origin. An interview with Mira Nair, film maker, on 24 Nov.'98 in The Times of India is titled as "Salaam Masala Mira" which comes from her film Salaam Bombay, Mississippi Masala and her name Mira. On 25 November, 1998, Pranay Sharma writes in The Telegraph: "Vajpayee reloads Bofors gun." A magazine article writes in bold letters: "Sexpress Yourself". The coinage 'Sexpress' certainly means 'Sexually express'. Whether the term 'Sexpress' gains legitimacy or not is a question for future. At least it attracts, is read and so is acceptable. It is acceptability that guarantees the validity of a language. In turn the world of language validates such needs and legitimizes the deviations in a sphere beyond the textual, strict academic one thereby displaying our assertiveness.

Socio-cultural setting

Every writer is aware of the socio-cultural milieu and ethos he consciously and unconsciously associates himself with.

1) The Times of India on 29 May, 1998 in one of its articles writes "A Nuclear Lesson from Bhasmasura" (Siddhartha Varadarajan). The 'Bhasmasura' episode is

known to the Indians (especially the Hindus) from their childhood which is interesting to share with.

2) The editorial of The Times of India on 6 June, 1998 writes "Sops and Tantrums" which is strange to make out. 'Tantrum', 'Tantrik' are words well associated with tricks related to necromancy and black magic.

3) A journal, Politics India (vol-11, No.12, June, 1998) on its cover page boldly writes "Awakening the Kundalini" on the Pokhran tests where the use of the word kundalini is synonymous with the magician, saint of earlier days and the rituals related to them highlight a cultural affiliation.

4) On 25 October, 1998 Anita Katyal (*The Times of India*) writes, "RSS propagating Hindutva through Text books". "Murli Manohar Joshi fails to lend a Saffron halo to the education system" and again, "One of their deepest desires is to go to Mecca for a darshan of a Shivling". All the above deviations both come out of the social, cultural context in which these news items, articles are designed.

5) March 2, 1998 *TOI*; Ratan Manilal (columnist) hints at 'Mandalisation' and 'Yadavisation' to denote the conflicts in UP and other places. The words come out of the politics of caste.

6) "Toasted Kofi" (March 2, 1998, *TOI*).

7) Terms like "Janata Darbar" (PM's Janta Darbar) and "Sangh Parivar" are popularised by today's journalism only which comes from the political wings.

8) Madhu Kishwar in The Times of India writes on August 2, 1998: "Being Indian also demands living at the mercy of a whole army of 'Sarkari Parasites'. Our 'Maibaap Sarkar' understands only two codes: a 'ghoos' from below or a 'Sifarish' from above".

Poetic structure

Most of the captions, titles of news items and especially the editorial heading are found to be deliberately alliterative, containing a specific patterning, rhyming sound between the words. This poetic use of the words in news papers is certainly fulfilling the purpose of an alternative text which can be best manipulated in educational curriculum. The English newspapers in India retain that medium and tone which in return teaches certain poetic, alliterative modes of English. It tries to establish the fact that the new entries match well with a poetic, patterned model which can be well utilized for teaching literature and in particular poetry to young learners ((Parhi, 2009, Table 1).

Ambiguity

It is observed that in all the cases above apart from the alliterative and poetic structures of the entries an ambiguous form is clearly emerging in the greater interest of the learners. This sort of ambiguity can be seen as a deliberate method by the practitioners of journalistic fraternity to experiment and explore fresh avenues in the

Table 1. Poetry to young learners

Items	Sources
Sushma Surprise to Sonia Suspense (N+N+N+N)	The Telegraph, 19.8.'99
Poll Panel Props PM Press Party Class: N N N N N N	The Telegraph, 19.8.'99
On the Bomb with Aplomb	TOI, 19 Aug '99
Kareena too has got the Karisma	TOI, 20 Aug '99
Sense and Censorship	Editorial, TOI 27 Aug '99
Policing the Police	TOI, 27 Aug '99
Poll and Push	Editorial, TOI, 24 Aug '99
Frightening Figures	Editorial, TOI, 24 Jan '97
Pope and Pop	Editorial, TOI, Dec '96
Gender Mender	Editorial, TOI, 22 Nov '96
Plato and Pop	Editorial, TOI, 20 Nov '96
Critique of critics	Editorial, TOI, Nov '96
Doctored Degrees Luckless Laloo Pop goes Politics	Editorial, TOI, 17 Nov '96
Dil Does Dhak Dhak Interview with for Madhuri Dixit (film actress), (with code mix)	Editorial, TOI, 29 Dec '98
Dance with the Dragon	V.V. Paranjpe, Editorial, TOI, 5 Feb '99

areas of English language studies. Ambiguity in this sense leads to a kind of syncretism evident in Indian socio-cultural life and establishes a meaning of its own.

Parhi AR (2006). "Towards The Anti-Canon: A Brief Focus on Newspaper English in India". SHSS. Ed.T.R.Sharma.IIAS, Shimla 8(1): 143-154.

The Times of India, New Delhi. The Hindu, New Delhi. The Hindustan Times, New Delhi. The Telegraph, Calcutta. The Indian Express

CONCLUSION

It can be observed that the data collected above along with the strategy utilized in their incorporation create a valid method in teaching of English non-canonically. We as Indians are local and cosmopolitan, ethnic as well as mainstream, subaltern and elitist. The kind of English floated in India today is reflective of our potential for our chase into the world, into power and stability. Writers as well as readers are subject to numerous factors, affiliations. They are tendentious and subjective. There has been a movement deliberately to explore new boundaries of a language. There has been tremendous effort on the part of the writers to cater to all kinds of readers, especially people who find strict academic notion of a language too conservative and restrictive. The readers are crazy for new knowledge, ideas, fresh language for variety and fashion. English is no more the formal, institutionalized medium. It is cooked for the mass and takes a flexible shape to accommodate all kinds of aspirations of the trendy modern reader. The print media offers innumerable avenues in terms of further research which will certainly pave way for broader curricular change and description of Indian English linguistically.

REFERENCES

- Parhi AR (2008). Indian English through Newspapers. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
 Parhi AR (2009). 'Authentic Texts and Pedagogy: A Model'. Ed. R. Narayanan. www.mj.al.org. Modern J. Appl. Linguist. 1(3): 194-209.