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English Newspaper as an ESL Tool: A Study into Language Veracity

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Abstract: Newspapers are touted to be wonderful treasures of information that can be shared, saved and served to the challenging needs of the society. But, is Indian English newspaper with its significant influence on the ESL learner-fraternity still living up to the expectations in terms of quality of the content, expression and usage? Is there any need for the newspapers to really revamp the kind of language they use? This paper aims to study the issues that are involved in teaching English through English newspaper in an ESL classroom.

Keywords: Newspapers, Teaching tools, LSRW skills, English grammar

Introduction:

English is not only the language of academics, but also career and future. In a country like India, people prefer their mother tongues or local languages for general communication, but English as a second language is extensively used for academic and professional purposes. Students hailing from rural areas are often concerned about their English language and communication skills. In an attempt to improve their standards they rely on means like lectures, grammar books, magazines, newspapers, Radio, TV, and Internet. Among these resources of language learning, newspaper is the cheapest and any learner can afford it and every teacher can use it as an ESL tool in the class room.

Newspaper is one of the significant tools to improve reading efficiency and it also enhances the wealth of general English vocabulary of the learners across the ages. Newspaper-reading, if done on a regular basis, helps in acquiring the syntactical nuances of English sentences.

Research Question: The present paper looks into the different grammatical aspects of the language being used in Indian English newspaper and analyses if it qualifies as a teaching tool in an ESL class room. This paper doesn't look into style, choice of vocabulary and the extent of news covered.

Methodology: For the descriptive study, news-articles are excerpted randomly from an Indian English daily newspaper, The Hindu, dated 23rd, 24th, 28th, and 29th of July, 2014.

About The Hindu:

The Hindu, started in 1878 as a weekly, became a daily in 1889 and from then on has been steadily growing to the circulation of 15,58,379 copies (ABC: July-December 2012) and a readership of about 22.58 lakhs.

The Hindu's independent editorial stand and its reliable and balanced presentation of the news have over the years, won for it the serious attention and regard of the people who matter in India and abroad (www.thehindu.com).

Discussion:

Do learners need to know the rules of grammar in order to communicate? Consider the following sentence.

- He request pen red.

While the above sentence contains two grammatical mistakes – subject and verb agreement - [he -request] and wrong placement of adjective [pen-red] - most English speakers can figure out what the sentence is trying to convey: A male wants a blue pen. In this case, may be, incorrect English grammar does not impede communication. However, such errors doom to fail language learning.

Let us look at the sample news articles excerpted from The Hindu, and analyse them in detail.

Indianism:

Indianism is a word or expression exclusive to English. A large number of Indian words and terms have gained entry into English language, for example, dhoti, lathe-charge, yogi, khaki, pundit, Brahmin, guru, ayah etc. However, there are many words which are yet to be admitted to English, for example License-raj¹, tapanchas², anicut³, podu⁴, iftar⁵ and Adivasis⁶. These words are not frequent in their usage and sometimes difficult to understand, if not exaggerating, even for L1 speakers.

Redundancy:

Redundancy is the repetition of a word or a phrase to express a single thought. Unnecessary repetition of words and expressions is annoying and troublesome, and bothers readers to the core. For example, 'total sum', in which the it is clear that we have to either use 'total' or 'sum' but not both.

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
“Further, he assured that the government would create a corpus fund with contribution from the MSMEs industry.”(7)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Further, he assured that the government would create a corpus with contribution from the MSMEs industry. 2. Further, he assured that the government would create a fund with contribution from the MSMEs industry.
“However, those things are very much in close proximity of the outlet”(8)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. However, those things are very close to the outlets. 2. However, those things are in proximity of the outlet.
“The total sum demanded from each candidate varied from Rs.3.5 lakh to 4.5 lakh.”(9)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sum demanded from each candidate varied from Rs.3.5 lakh to 4.5 lakh 2. The total demanded from each candidate varied from Rs.3.5 lakh to 4.5 lakh

Direct Translations:

Though the fact that Indians learn English as a second language is very well known, the writers or journalists need to take care while presenting or translating their ideas from L1 to English. Language expressions should be free from translational effects. Few sentences are given below for illustration:

Table 2. Direct Translations in Indian English newspaper

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
“Talking to media persons here on Sunday, Mr. Kishen Reddy recalled his ambitions walkathon in protest against the rampant smuggling red sanders during the tenure of”(10)	Talking to media here on Sunday, Mr. Kishen Reddy recalled his ambitions walkathon in protest against the rampant smuggling red sanders during the tenure of
“How did Naidu manage to leave a paper slip at the crime scene attempting to implicate Krishna in murder?”(11)	How did Naidu manage to leave a slip at the crime scene attempting to implicate Krishna in murder?

<p>“But Telangana State was represented by Deputy Minister Mohammed Mahmood Ali and Minister Nayini Narsimha Reddy (Home) and Etala Rajender (Finance). Council chairman K Swamy Good was present.”(12)</p>	<p>But, Telangana State was represented by Deputy Minister Mohammed Mahmood Ali and Minister Nayini Narsimha Reddy (Home) and Etala Rajender (Finance). Chairman of the council K Swamy Goud was also present.</p>
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Missing Articles:

Articles, “a, an, or the,” are used to show whether a noun refers to a specific or a general item. When to omit and when to use articles is really a challenging task for the non-native learners of English and the complex rules of articles confuse and trouble the learners.

News-articles without proper articles of English grammar, confuses the readers and learners.

Table 3. Missing Articles in Indian English newspaper

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
<p>“...Madhu, private company employee, died on the spot.”(13)</p>	<p>Madhu, a private company employee, died on the spot.</p>
<p>“Mr. Murasawa said that nearly 200 plants in Japan with same technology were yielding good results with...”(14)</p>	<p>Mr. Murasawa said that nearly 200 plants in Japan with the same technology were yielding good results with....</p>
<p>“It is totally arbitrary decision,” said an official.”(15)</p>	<p>It is totally an arbitrary decision,” said an official.</p>
<p>“One of the camera man got into argument with Mr.Srihari while the official pleaded with the rest to move aside or perch on top platform.”(16)</p>	<p>One of the camera man got into an argument with Mr.Srihari while the official pleaded with the rest to move aside or perch on the top platform.</p>
<p>“That will also put an end to the fact that Indian parliament does not have</p>	<p>That will also put an end to the fact that Indian parliament does not have an LoP,</p>

a LoP, which will weaken the democratic system,” said the former speaker.”(17)	which will weaken the democratic system,” said the former speaker.
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Prepositions:

“Preposition is a word which typically comes in front of a noun-phrase, for example of, in, with in *of milk, in the building, with all the good intentions I had at the beginning of the year.*”(18)

Table 4. Prepositions in Indian English newspaper

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
“...has been extended up to July 23.”(19)	... has been extended to July 23.

Missing Punctuation

Proper punctuation helps in understanding the write up better. For example, “d like to thank my parents, Ayn Rand and God.” Without a comma after "Rand," the writer has a mighty unusual parentage. (20)

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
“...what is the use of such institutions. If this is the quality, what should a new state like Telangana showcase?” avers Telangana CM.”(21)	What is the use of such institutions? If this is the quality, what should a new state like Telangana showcase?” avers Telangana CM.

Inconsistent Tense:

Maintaining the same tense throughout a clause is a good practice. Unwarranted and irrational changes in tense greatly confuse the readers.

Table 5. Inconsistent Tense in Indian English newspaper

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
<p>“Glasgow: India’s shooters continued their good showing at the CWG on Sunday as Shreyan Singh (silver) and Mohammed Asab (Bronze) bagged medals in the women’s and men’s double rap events respectively. Punam Yadav wins a bronze in the 63kg women’s weight lifting event.”(22)</p>	<p>Glasgow: India’s shooters continued their good showing at the CWG on Sunday as Shreyan Singh (silver) and Mohammed Asab (Bronze) bagged medals in the women’s and men’s double rap events respectively. Punam Yadav won a bronze in the 63kg women’s weight lifting event.</p>

One of the:

In phrases like, “Pistachio is one of the few flavors that appeals to me,” use the singular form for the verb "appeals" because its subject is "one," not "flavors." (23)

Table 6. Using ‘One of the’ Indian English newspaper

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
<p>“One of the camera man got into argument with Mr.Srihari while the official pleaded with the rest to move aside or perch on top platform.”(24)</p>	<p>One of the camera men got into argument with Mr. Srihari while the official pleaded with the rest to move aside or perch on top platform.</p>

Typo graphical errors:

A typographical error (often shortened to typo) is a mistake made in the typing process (such as spelling, misuse of tense or leaving out a word) of printed material (25).

Table 7. Typographical Errors in Indian English newspaper

Incorrect Sentence	Improved Version(s)
“Screening, awareness and lifestyle modifications are a must for a health liver,” Dr. Mainsha adds.”(26)	Screening, awareness and lifestyle modifications are a must for a healthy liver,” Dr. Mainsha adds.
“They pointed out the singer had received the highest civilian award Bharat Ratna at the same time, and gave given media interviews, indicating he was sound.”(27)	They pointed out the singer had received the highest civilian award Bharat Ratna at the same time, and given media interviews, indicating he was sound.
“Ganesh festival will be commencing on August 29 z Vinayaka Chaturthi and culminate with immersion of idols on Sep 8.”(28)	Ganesh festival will be commencing on August 29 with Vinayaka Chaturthi and culminate with immersion of idols on Sep 8.

Conclusion:

The credibility of a newspaper lies in its language and content, language being its body and content being its life. Syntax and semantics both go hand in hand. Syntax without Semantics is senseless and Semantics without syntax is useless.

The study revealed that grammatical errors are being overlooked frequently. But, readers and learners consider the grammatically incorrect articles to be less credible than the grammatically correct articles. Teachers, concerned about their students, might be willing to overlook one or two mistakes of any magnitude, but they will begin to question integrity when they notice numerous mistakes.

Grammatical mistakes may not hamper communication. But, over a period of time, learner’s repeated exposure to incorrect grammar can lead to fossilization which may be tough to unlearn. Inaccessibility seriously undermines one’s ability. Eventually, a learner’s dream to achieve big may not be fulfilled due to unchecked incorrect grammatical resources.

Based on the findings, it is advocated that journalists should care to present and editors must publish grammatically correct text if they are to remain authoritative sources for engaged and informed readers. It is equally important for an ESL teacher to be proactive while exercising the selection of newspaper as an ESL tool.

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