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Teaching Paragraph Writing - “Bilingual” Newspapers as Tools

Sr. Mary Lowrencia, Ph.D.

Introduction

The focus of this paper is on teaching college students how to write effective paragraphs using newspapers as a tool. I find from my experience as a college teacher in a rural setting that the problem of the students relate not merely to just communicating ideas but generating them on their own as well. If students were asked to write a paragraph on a given topic, they would have only very few ideas, which would not be sufficient to cover the theme expected in the paragraphs of the essay. So I thought that using “bilingual” newspapers could be of great assistance in helping them to give direction to get ideas. Once the ideas are at their disposal, they could easily attempt to produce a paragraph.

Students from the rural background hail mostly from Tamil medium schools, so their exposure to English is very minimal. Right at the beginning of their college life expecting them to write an effective paragraph, naturally, is a hopeless expectation on the part of the teacher. Ignorance coupled with fear and inhibition obstructs the students’ thinking capacity and the result is their inability to write a paragraph.

It was hypothesized that if ideas were available in Tamil and translation of the same was available in English, mini-composition paragraph writing could be taught and eventually it may lead them to write on their own with confidence.

Experiment

The experiment was carried out in Bharath Niketan Engineering College among the Computer Science Engineering (CSE) students who are mostly from the rural background first generation learners hailing from rural Tamil medium schools. The college is located near a medium-size rural town, Aundipatti in Theni district, Tamilnadu, India.

These students were taught grammar along with their curriculum for one semester. While teaching how to write paragraphs, students were asked to narrate an incident. They found it very difficult to generate ideas because their reading habit was not strong. So the researcher thought of using articles or news items from newspapers, which are within the easy reach of these students, to develop their writing skill.

Reasons for Choosing Newspaper Items

Newspaper is contemporary literature which reflects the lives of the people. It gives insight into the environment and happenings around the world. It also enhances the knowledge and understanding of the world, with a lot of information about various subjects at various levels. This type of literature opens the minds of the students. In addition, this exercise also paves the way for the students to read newspapers every day. Because of these varied reasons I thought that newspapers could be of real assistance in teaching paragraph writing.

Goal: Paragraph Writing

A paragraph is a unit of thought presented in a sequence of sentences. In a paragraph, words and phrases are arranged in a specific way to bring about coherence and cogency of content. A paragraph presents content to result in better understanding.

Design of a paragraph varies according to the writer. Some writers use paragraphs solely on the basis of content highlighting the logical development and expanding one point in depth. Some others may focus purposes of emphasis and variety of expressing the same content in different stylistic ways.

A paragraph may be viewed in terms of progress from the general to the particular. The paragraph begins at a general level, presents particulars and concludes with a statement. However, all paragraphs do not move on as a simple two-level movement of general and particular. Whenever any statement needs further elaboration, a paragraph may adopt additional features.

Narration

Narration is giving an account of an event. It may focus on a conflict, or simply on a description of an event or events. Many events happen in the public, such as road accidents, strikes by labourers, unusual incidents, political meetings, elopement, siege of public places and so on. Narration is concerned with the title, topic, events, order, climax, exciting or pleasing facts, point of view, etc.

When the topic sentence is stated at the beginning of the paragraph, it indicates whether the direction of writing is from general to particular or vice versa. The point of view differs according to the attitude of the writer towards a particular event. Even the use of a single word or

a persistent use of a name or title can easily reveal the point of view of the writer and his or her paragraph. Narration can be factual or fictional. Newspaper stories, life stories, including biographies, histories and some personal stories, etc., may be factual narratives in some broad sense. Fairytales, short stories, novels and so on are fictional narratives, which are imagined by the authors or narrated from traditional sources. Sometimes a short story or a novel can be written as a fact. In this section, narration of an event as done in some selected newspapers is taken up for teaching.

Narrating an Event

Narration of an event can be a pleasant or frightening experience. For example, building a house, a festival celebration, or a courageous act and other such items are pleasant events. But accidents, murders, etc., are examples of unpleasant events.

The main element in describing the event is time order. The order of time movement is usually serial or sequential, that is, chronological. The events are narrated following the clock time, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, season-by-season, etc. For example, a cricket commentary is given from the beginning of the game until it ends. It can be season by season as in the case of agriculture, beginning with ploughing and ending in a harvest. So serial order starts at one point of time such as 4 o'clock, June 1947, the first week of cold season, etc., and ends at the end of the narration.

Mere chronological narration may not be interesting. If one wishes to name cricket match, one may divide the innings scored from time to time, and present the score serially in different periods, like before lunch, before and after teatime, etc. In such an arrangement, there is no chance of misplacing the score but it also includes features like catches, drops, misfielding, sixes, boundaries, etc., which increase the interest of the listeners.

In narrating a cricket match carefully, the selection of details has to be made before the events are chosen for the narration. One day match also gives details regarding the players' clothing, their reaction to their errors or triumphs, their facial expressions when they fail or succeed in their actions. Such details are introduced in between the main chronological narration, which does not affect the time scheme.

Essential Conditions of Time Order

The most important condition regarding the adoption of time order in narrative writing is that an order is chosen it should be consistently followed, whether it is forward or backward movement. It should not be reversed anywhere in the middle, as it would confuse the reader. To avoid any possibility of confusion, temporal markers like at the same time, now, then, all the time, when, while, before, after etc., may be used to guide the reader to remember the events.

Important Aspects of Narration

There are three important aspects in any narration

- (i) the character,
- (ii) the action and
- (iii) the locale.

The readers grasp the meaning of narration on the basis of relationships among these three aspects. The narration may be told from the point of view of the writer, or from the point of view of some one who is involved in the event.

Narration differs according to the writer's purpose. For example, in narrating an accident, rash driving, bad roads, etc., may furnish the details. If the writer's purpose is to highlight the death of the person, he would concentrate on the bruises, blood loss, etc. If it is rash driving, their concentration would be on speed. The writer should be clear in his or her purpose and the narration details should be planned to support and illustrate a special point. Therefore, the writer should maintain consistent point of view and chronological time sequence.

Exemplification

To check whether the students had understood the concept of narration or not, selected articles from newspapers were photocopied and distributed to the students. A few questions relating to the event/s were put to the students and answers from them were elicited. The answers were analyzed based on the information provided in the article chosen from the newspapers.

Reading the Tamil Version

Students were asked to read the Tamil version of the article silently. Then one of the students came forward and read it aloud to the class. The Tamil version of the article from the daily newspaper *Dinamani* is given below:

மதுரையில் வீடு இடிந்து தாய், மகள், குழந்தை சாவ

மதுரை, நவ. 14: மதுரையில் தொடர் மழை காரணமாக வீடு இடிந்ததில் தாய், மகள் மற்றும் ஒன்றரை வயது ஆண் குழந்தை ஆகியோர் ஞாயிற்றுக்கிழமை உயிரிழந்தனர். மேலும் 3 சிறுமியர் உள்ளிட்ட 6 பேர் காயமடைந்தனர்.

மதுரை எஸ்.எஸ்.காலனி பொன்னிநகரைச் சேர்ந்தவர் முனியாண்டி. தனியார் நிறுவன காவலாளி. இவரது மனைவி உஷாராணி (57). இவர்களுக்கு புஷ்பலதா (24) உள்ளிட்ட 3 மகள்கள் உள்ளனர். இவர்களில் 2 பேருக்குத் திருமணமாகிவிட்டது. இதில் புஷ்பலதா கணவர் கண்ணனுடன் தந்தை வீட்டிலேயே தங்கியுள்ளார். மற்றொரு மகள் சீதாலட்சுமி, அவரது கணவர் மீனாட்சிசுந்தரத்துடன் திண்டுக்கல் பகுதியில் வசிக்கிறார்.

கடந்த சில ஆண்டுகளுக்கு முன்னர் முனியாண்டி தனது மனைவியின் கணவன் பழைய வீட்டில் மாடி அமைத்து ஒட்டுக்கரை வேய்ந்திருந்தார். இந்த நிலையில் முனியாண்டியின் கடைசி மகளுக்கு மாப்பிள்ளை பார்ப்பதற்காக திண்டுக்கல்லில் இருந்து இளையமகனும், மருமகன் மற்றும் குழந்தைகளும் மதுரை வந்திருந்தனர்.

வீட்டின் மாடியில் உள்ள அறையில் உஷாராணி, புஷ்பலதா மற்றும் குழந்தைகள் என 10 பேர் தூங்கியுள்ளனர். இளைய மகன் சீதாலட்சுமியின் கணவர் மீனாட்சி சுந்தரம் மட்டும் கீழ் பகுதியில் தூங்கியுள்ளார். அதிகாலை சுமார் 5 மணிக்கு திடீரென வீட்டின் மேல் பகுதி இடிந்து விழுந்துள்ளது.

இதையடுத்து வீட்டின் மேல் பகுதி அறையில் தூங்கிக்கொண்டிருந்த அனைவரும் அலறியடித்தபடி எழுந்து கீழ்ப்பகுதிக்கு மாடி வழியாக இறங்கியுள்ளனர். ஆனால், அதற்குள் வீட்டின் பக்கவாட்டுச் சுவர்களும் இடிந்து விழுந்தன.

இதனால், இடிபாட்டில் அனைவரும் சிக்கிக்கொண்டனர். அவர்கள் மீது இடிந்த சுவர்கள், ஓடுகள் விழுந்தன. உடனே அக்கம்பக்கத்தில் இருந்தவர்கள் போலீஸாருக்குத் தகவல் அளித்தனர். அதன்படி போலீஸார் விரைந்து சென்று மீட்பு பணியில் ஈடுபட்டனர். பின்னர் தீயணைப்புத்துறையினர் வந்து மீட்பு பணியில் ஈடுபட்டனர்.

வீட்டின் சுவர், மேற்கூரை முற்றிலுமாக இடிந்து விழுந்ததில் அதன் அடியில் சிக்கி உஷாராணி,

3 சிறுமிகள் உள்ளிட்ட 6 பேர் காயம்



வீடு இடிந்து 3 பேர் இறந்த இடத்தில் வேறு யாரும் சிக்கி உள்ளனரா எனத் தேடும் தீயணைப்புத்துறை வீரர்கள். (உள்படம்) வீடு இடிந்த போது இடிபாடுகளில் சிக்கி இறந்த (இடமிருந்து) உஷாராணி, புஷ்பலதா, விஷ்ணு.

அவரது மகள் புஷ்பலதா மற்றும் புஷ்பலதாவின் ஒன்றரை வயதுக் குழந்தை விஷ்ணு ஆகியோர் சம்பவ இடத்திலேயே உயிரிழந்தனர். புஷ்பலதாவின் கணவர் கண்ணன், அவரது குழந்தை பிரியதர்ஷினி (5), சீதாலட்சுமி, அவரது குழந்தைகள் திவ்யா (4), காவியா (3) மற்றும் அவரது ஒன்பது மாதக் குழந்தை மணிகண்டன் ஆகியோர் பலத்தகாயத்துடன் தப்பினர். அவர்கள் அனைவரும் மதுரை அரசு மருத்துவமனையில் சேர்க்கப்பட்டு சிகிச்சை பெற்று வருகின்றனர்.

வீடானது முற்றிலுமாக இடிந்து விழுந்த நிலையில் சீதாலட்சுமியின் ஒன்பது மாதக் கைக் குழந்தை சிறிய காயத்துடன் தப்பியது கடவுளின் செயல் என அவரது உறவினர்கள் தெரிவித்தனர்.

இடிபாட்டில் சிக்கிய மீனாட்சி சுந்தரம் நீண்டநேரமாக தனது செல் போன் மூலம் வெளியில் இருந்தவர்களைத் தொடர்பு கொண்டு தன்னை மீட்குமாறு கேட்டுள்ளார். அதன்படி வீட்டின் இடிபாடுகளை அகற்றிய தீயணைப்புத்துறையினரும், போலீஸாரும் அவரை பத்திரமாக மீட்டுள்ளனர்.

புறம்போக்கு நிலத்தில் கட-

டி பழைய வீட்டின் சுவர் மீது மாடியை அமைத்துள்ளனர். இதனால் சுவர்கள் பலமிழந்து காணப்பட்டுள்ளன.

இந்த நிலையில் தொடர்ந்து மழை பெய்ததால் சுவர் மேற்கூரையின் பாரம் தாங்காமல் மண் சுவர் இடிந்து விழுந்திருக்கலாம் என போலீஸார் கருதுகின்றனர். வீட்-

டுச்சுவர் இடிந்த சம்பவம் கேள்விப்பட்ட மதுரை மாநகர் போலீஸ் கமிஷனர் பி.பாலசுப்பிரமணியன் அதிகாலையில் சம்பவ இடத்தைப் பார்வையிட்டார். பின்னர் காயமடைந்தவர்களுக்கு ஆறுதல் கூறி அவர்களுக்குரிய மருத்துவ உதவிகளை மேற்கொள்ளுமாறு போலீஸாருக்கு உத்தரவிட்டார்.

இறந்தவர்கள் குடும்பத்துக்கு அரசு ₹ 2 லட்சம் நிதி உதவி

எஸ்.எஸ்.காலனி பகுதி பொன்னிநகரில் வீட்டின் சுவர் இடிந்து விழுந்து இறந்தவர்களது குடும்பத்தினருக்கு தமிழக அரசின் சார்பில் ₹ 2 லட்சம் நிதி உதவியை மாவட்ட ஆட்சியர் சி.சாமராஜ் ஞாயிற்றுக்கிழமை வழங்கினார். நிதி உதவி வழங்கும் நிகழ்ச்சிக்கு மாநகர் துணைமேயர் பி.எம்.மன்னன் முன்னிலை வகித்தார்.

மேலும், வீடு இடிந்ததில் உயிரிழந்த உஷாராணியின் கணவர் முனியாண்டி, புஷ்பலதாவின் கணவர் கண்ணன் ஆகியோருக்கு ஆட்சியர் சி.சாமராஜ் உள்ளிட்டோர் ஆறுதல் கூறினர்.

தெற்கு வட்டாட்சியர் அலுவலகத்தில் நடைபெற்ற நிகழ்ச்சியில் வருவாய் கோட்டாட்சியர் எஸ்.சுகுமாரன், வட்டாட்சியர் அ.சுமலசேகரன், மாவட்ட மக்கள் தொடர்பு அலுவலர் ரா.அண்ணா, ஆட்சியரின் நேர்முக உதவியாளர் மோகன்தாஸ், மாநகராட்சி மேற்கு மண்டலத் தலைவர் நாகராஜ் ஆகியோர் கலந்துகொண்டனர்.

Three of family killed as house collapses



The remains of the house that collapsed during early hours of Sunday claiming three lives of a family in Madurai. (Inset) The victims Pushpalatha, Ushrani and Vishnu: **Express**

Express News Service
Madurai, November 14

THREE members of a family were killed as their house collapsed in Ponni Nagar in Ponmeni Pudur in Bypass Road here in the early hours of Sunday. One was rescued from the debris by the Fire and Rescue Services personnel.

As many as 11 persons were staying in that two-storey building which collapsed at 3.45 am on Sunday. Usharani (55), her daughter Pushpalatha (24), and grandson Vishnu (1) were killed in the incident.

Except her son-in-law Meenakshisundaram (30), all others were sleeping in the first floor of the house. Except for the trio who succumbed and the one caught between the debris, all others

made their miraculous escape and survived the accident with minor injuries.

As soon as Meenakshisundaram communicated through his mobile phone to the Fire and Rescue Services regarding the accident, they rushed to the spot from Thideer Nagar and launched their rescue operation at the site.

Since they knew that Meenakshisundaram was alive, the rescue process was carried with proper care so as not to render further damage to the one who was struck in the debris.

Divisional Fire Officer K Karupiah told **Express** that the operation lasted for almost 3 hours.

The use of Heavy Earth Movers were deployed at the site and the debris were

removed with care. At the end of 3 hours, the rescue personnel reached Meenakshisundaram and brought him out with minor injuries.

According to Commissioner of Police P Balasubramanian, the basement and the roofing of the house had got weakened over the period of time.

With the recent heavy downpours, the seepage in the walls and in the basement had further damaged the house and it led to the collapse claiming lives of 3 persons, including the one-year-old boy. He also conducted spot inquiries along with Divisional Fire Officer.

District Collector C Kamaraj said that the District Administration will give a solatium of ₹2 lakh to the nearest kin of the victims who were killed in this accident.

The news item in English is taken from *The Indian Express*.

Reading the English version

After reading the Tamil version of the article, the English version of the same article was given to the students to read silently. The photocopy of the English version of the article is given above.

Both *Dinamani* and *Indian Express* are published by the same company. The Tamil and English versions, though published as independent newspapers, usually share a lot of same news items, especially relating to regional/district affairs. Thus, a news item on an event in a town in Tamilnadu may contain the same content in both the versions. Even the order of items presented in the Tamil and English versions may be similar, if not identical. This provides us with a number of news items published every day and throughout the year with similar content and similar order of narration. Students can read Tamil and then the English version and thus are better equipped with an understanding of the content.

After the silent reading, one of the students read the news item in English aloud in the class. The article was discussed with the students. Often such discussions were carried out in mixed language situation, using both Tamil and English. As already stated, almost all students in the college are from the rural areas, have studied using the Tamil medium and many of them are first generation learners. This necessitated using bilingualism in the class. If the students did not know the meaning of a word or a sentence while writing the paragraph in English, they referred back to the Tamil version to get the meaning.

Then the students were asked to narrate the same incident in writing and they were able to write much better than before. The result shows that using newspapers, especially those that are interconnected because these were published from the same companies, could be an effective tool to develop their writing skill.

A Student Sample writing is given below.

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In wednesday, there was an accident in madurai. Three members were killed by in this accident. In that day, Mr. Balasubramanian and his relations are stayed in his house. His son and daughter and son in law and their childrens took rest on the first floor. He and his grandson and his wife ~~are~~ ^{slept} ~~slepped~~ in the ground floor. The first floor was broken down and during this incident first floor come down and ~~colloided~~ with the brokened house. Mr. Balasubramaniam communicate with the mobile phone with police. And police came to the spot and removed the persons. By this accident Mr. Balasubramanian's wife and his daughter and grandson ~~were~~ ^{were} died on the spot. And grandson was one year old. By this accident police commisioner said that, the basement of the house was so weak and it got damaged for the rain. This is the reason for that accident.

The above write-up shows that the errors committed were few in number. The student was able to narrate the event in a proper order. He had some difficulty with the use of prepositions (a very common error committed in colleges in metropolitan cities as well in India), some difficulty with the tenses, etc. He used passive voice, where active voice would have been most appropriate. There was some difficulty with auxiliary verbs as well. His capitalization and punctuation could be further improved. We can add several others to the listed features. However, it should be noted that he has developed a good sense of narration and has expressed the core content adequately well. We easily notice that fluency in English (both at the speaking and writing levels), which has been the major handicap of students coming from the Indian languages medium schools throughout the country, is helped greatly in this “bilingual” teaching of writing.

I would like to take the results tentative, but very encouraging. I believe that, with active involvement of the teacher in this process, these students will graduate with adequate writing skills and that this adequacy will get reflected also in their speaking, listening and reading skills.

View Students as Active Participants

For a meaningful learning to take place, learners should be seen as active participants. The curriculum should be built in such a way that the language tasks, materials and resources would help the students to build up their own ideas. The teacher’s job is to create an environment to make the students to participate in the learning process.

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