

## REPORT SECTIONS IN ENGLISH MAGAZINES: AN ALTERNATIVE READING MEDIA FOR THE ENGLISH IMPROVEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

One of the factors that can boost the students' vocabulary expansion of English rapidly is reading. As the students are limited to reading texts provided in their daily English class, they may find it is boring to read English passages. They can get maximum benefit from their reading, the teacher may encourage the students to choose for themselves what they read and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement (Harmer: 2007). It would be a good idea if they are introduced to more varied genres of reading text, say, English newspaper and magazines. Besides these texts provide more up-to-date discourse, they are also easily obtained. Moreover, newspapers and magazines are authentic in terms that they are not simplified reading texts as the students find in the classroom. With an extensive activity of reading these kinds of materials they are trained to cope with the same kinds of reading that are encountered by native speakers of the target language (Ur: 1996).

Key-words: reading, vocabulary expansion, reading text, newspaper, magazine

In this article, the writer is introducing several aspects related to the magazine articles such as the types, the viewpoints and/or perspectives, and finally the special report, a typical part of today's newspapers or magazines especially for the students who are interested in more exposure to a wider variety of English texts available around us and hopefully for the English teachers who are keen on finding more resourceful reading materials for the enrichment of their daily teaching practice.

To begin with, let us see the variety of magazine articles. The great number and wide variety of occurrences happen every day, and many types of articles are written based on them. Although a writer may not need to classify his article each time he begins writing, we, readers, need to be aware of the availability of different types of articles in magazines. There are many types of articles, and new types may keep arising.

The types of magazine articles can be roughly described into twelve types based on the content (Writers' Encyclopedia). First, *informational article* is one that primarily contains facts. Second, *how-to article* is an article that describes the method to accomplish something. Third, A *service article* is an article about a consumer product or service. Fourth, a *personal experience* article is an article that, like what the name suggests, tells an experience, especially special, meaningful or entertaining, of a person. A success story belongs to this type. Fifth, the *interview article* is article based primarily on an interview with one person. Sixth, the *think article* is one that contains an analysis of facts, events or trends, as the writer perceives them. Sixth, the

*historical article* is an article that contains a historical account of events. Seventh, the *travel article* is article that tells the travel experience. It may focus on the beauty of a place or the excitement of traveling to a certain place. Eight, *spot-news article* is an article about a piece of current news described in depth. Ninth, the *expose article* is article written as the result of the writer's intensive research and investigation. It may include a factual element of shock. Tenth, a *seasonal article* is one that is written about a holiday, season of the year or timely observance. Eleventh, the *inspirational article* is an article about the successful efforts of an individual or group to improve a situation that affected them. Different from success story, this type of article often has a philosophical or religious theme. Twelfth, the *humorous article* is article about a topic with good humor, and it is said to be one of the most difficult kinds to write.

Furthermore, we need to know that there are two basic types of mass media writing; they are news story and feature story. News story is the fundamental form of writing for the mass media. It is said to be news story as it has news value. News value consists of any of seven elements: impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, uniqueness and currency. News value has an impact quality, meaning that the event written in the news affects people's lives. The news that does not have such an impact is said not to have news event; thus, it has no news value. News value also depends on the recency of the event; that's why; a journalist is always under pressure of a deadline. Another news value is prominence. Often an activity, program, or

another casual happening becomes an event if it is done by the prominent people such as a famous public figure and a celebrity. The people belonging to the latter are called the “newsmakers” even if they only do something very casual and trivial. Next, by proximity, the events that occur close to home are more likely to have news value than the same events that occur elsewhere. If the story contains two opposing or competing forces, it is more likely to have news value because it draws attention. Another attractive quality is the uniqueness of a story. When the news presents something unique such as something bizarre or unusual, it has more potential to attract readers’ attention. Finally, the news that bears current interest of the readers often has news values. For example, the time approaching to the change of millennium and sometime after the moment, the discussion of Y2K in many mass media still held attention a lot of people. In short, any of the seven elements of news value must be present in news story. Even there are attempts to enrich a story that has already had news value from different perspectives such as the ones in the special report sections in many different publications in the world. This can add the quality of the news value.

The second type is feature story. There is no essential difference between feature and news story. The main difference lies in the emphasis. It gives more details and description as the feature story writers assume that the readers have more time to read and deserve an interesting side of an event that may not be covered in the news story type. This type varies in styles and structures. Stovall proposes three kinds of feature story. The first type is anecdotal feature. In the anecdotal feature, the article presents quotations, anecdotes, and facts that collaborate to create an interesting piece of news. The second is suspended interest features. This kind of feature story tries to give an effect that works like a short story. The writer of this kind of feature can skillfully lead readers through a series of paragraphs and embrace them into the story plot until the unexpected ending. The last is question and answer. The article begins with an explanatory paragraph and is followed by question and answer dialogs to the end. It is an effective to show the readers an unfiltered use of the interviewee’s language. In short, feature story seems to give more relaxed style and more detailed descriptions, assuming that the readers have more time to read, than news story does. Hence, more craftsmanship in writing is required besides the ability to present factual accounts. It can be concluded that this type of story is more likely found in magazines, while the news story style is more adopted by newspaper writers although in some part of the daily newspaper feature stories can be found, especially in the middle pages. Even one of Indonesian leading daily newspapers,

*Kompas*, presents a series of feature collection in its special issues such as the commemoration of 100 years of Bung Karno and the Indonesian economic review, in which it presents a series of feature stories from notable politic and economic authorities.

There may be other types of articles accommodated in magazines as the creativity of the writers develops. Many magazines demand different types of articles in one issue as it can accommodate the needs of a wide variety of audience. The types previously mentioned can help a writer structure his work and accommodate the needs of the editors of the magazines.

It is important to note here that the article in the magazine is factual piece of writing. It is written more for the purpose of giving information or presenting news. However, its factual quality is still strong although there is freedom of using some narrative dialog or anecdote made up by the writer, for instance, in the introduction. It is common as an article is not fiction although it might contain semi-fictional anecdotes or imaginary dialog to illustrate certain points in conveying the information.

Beside the types of the magazine articles based on the contents, there is another important aspect of the articles, that is, point of view or viewpoint. It is the way the writer perceives an event or an issue. The choice of point of view determines the voice of writing and impacts the way the writer develops the story. Point of view is the perspective from which a narrative is presented; it is analogous to the point from which the camera sees the action in cinema. Point of view in writing an article is like a camera in TV and movie. The camera direction indicates that the audience sees the scene as if they were looking through the eyes of the actor in that scene. In photography, it is called angle. The angle that is formed from a certain camera position can be used to highlight a dramatic scene. In writing, the point of view is employed by the writer to facilitate his approach to the topic of his writing. It can also be used to create a certain effect on the readers as the choice of viewpoint influences the way the readers look at the topic. It is also defined as the person through whose eyes the reader is seeing the story. Those eyes might belong to a character, or to a non-character narrator, that is, a narrator who isn't in the story.

The point of view in many fictions belongs to one or more characters but in essays the point of view is a non-character narrator, who is often the author herself. A non-character narrator is also referred as the omniscient third person. To clarify the issue of point of view, let us see the points of view employed in narratives as narrations have more facility to employ different points of views.

There are two broad categories of viewpoint, objective and subjective viewpoints. The objective

viewpoint is one where the narrator relates facts but avoids emotion, and *subjective viewpoint* is one where the narrator incorporates a character's thoughts and emotions into the storytelling. The reader thus shares in the character's emotional life. The first type is mostly used in essays while the latter in fictions.

Viewpoints can also be categorized in terms of the narration method. The first type is first-person point of view. With this manner of writing the writer makes use of the pronoun "I" so that the reader can experience events through the viewpoint either of the main character in a piece of fiction or through the nonfiction writer himself. This method is not only well applied in fictions. In nonfiction, this manner can be applied to create better effect when writing about personal experiences, inspiration, and nostalgia. The second type is third-person point of view. In this method of narration, the author follows only what the main character sees, hears, feels and thinks. The description of the storyteller plays a very determining role to tell the story. The third type is the *omniscient viewpoint*, an author can relate the perceptions of any of his characters or detach himself from them to serve as narrator. The *detached viewpoint*, on the other hand, lets the reader sense that he is watching the story as it unfolds; the author gives descriptions and impressions, but never through the perception of a character. Finally, almost the same as this type of viewpoint is the *multiple-character viewpoint*. This is used to tell a story from the perspectives of different characters, one at a time. Unlike works using the omniscient viewpoint, this viewpoint stays with one character for a considerable length—for example, a chapter in a novel. This technique is useful when the story must make an extreme change of scene.

Not only in narratives, in essays, the variation of using point of view can enliven the account. The coverage of point of view is not only on the way the writer perceives an event, whether it is from the first, second or third person, but it also covers the perspective how an issue or event is told. An issue might be seen from its historical perspective. The perspective the writer takes also describes the attitude toward an issue. Hence, an article can be perceived from its perspective. Point of view tends to refer to the involvement of a writer in a story, whether he sees an event from the first, second, or third person, and perspective refers more to how his whole perception is on the event, whether he sees it from historical, political, economical, or even psychological perspectives.

### SPECIAL REPORT SECTION

One of the typical features found in many magazines is the special reports. Special report section is a

section in one issue of a magazine that discusses one common topic and usually consists of several articles devoted to the topic. Notable newsmagazines such as *Newsweek* and *Time*, always feature special reports in every issue. Each special report edition does its coverage in depth. It may have several featured news or articles discussing one same topic with different approaches (at least this can be read from each title, for example, in one issue featuring the crash between a US spy plane and a Chinese fighter, *Newsweek* wrote on its cover 'Collision Course with China')—whether from its historical, economic, or cultural angles (*Newsweek*, April 16, 2001). This special report consists of five articles related to the topic: *After the Showdown, A Crash in the Clouds, How the Two Nations Match Up, Beijing's Next Big Battle*, and *Face to Face with China*. Another example is taken from *Newsweek's* special report on September 15, 1997. It presents a long special report section devoted to the event of Lady Diana's death, 'Farewell Diana'. The section consists of 17 articles discussing the issues related to Diana, for example, her short biography, her relationship with the other royal members and people involved in her life, her death, and her funeral ceremony.

The wide coverage of topics in a special report section is due to different perspectives used by different writers in viewing one particular event. Related to perspectives, Renkema (1993) states that information can be presented from several different perspectives. Furthermore, he compares the different perspectives or points of view in a text to different angles taken by a camera in the cinematic art. There are three approaches in discourse to study this matter: they are (1) vision (sociologically-inspired research into the ideological perspective), (2) focalization (oriented research into the narrator's perspective), and empathy (syntactically-oriented research into the speaker's attitude).

The different perspective entails different approaches toward an event and it results in a comprehensive coverage of a topic, so that the presentation of a special report can be more interesting and in depth. Take a look at Table 1 below. It shows the richness of perspective on one similar topic. The articles are taken from *Newsweek*, April 7, 1997, on the mass suicide by the cult "Heaven's Gate" in California.

In addition, there are possibly more perspective the reader can find in any special report section such as social, economic, political, legal, historical, organizational, geographical, technological, financial, biographical, and personal (Suryanto, 2006). And, interestingly, among the articles in one special report section, there may be an article that functions as a rebuttal article among the other articles that discusses a trend. It is like the balancer of opinion.

Table 1. Richness of a Topic in Terms of Perspectives

Article	The Title of the Article	Brief Descriptions of the Content	Perspectives
1	The Next Level	The account about the emergence of the cult until the time the mass suicide happened	Chronological perspective
2	A Last Stop before Heaven	Brief pieces of information chronologically arranged from the time the cult purchased a farm until the time they used it for the suicidal ritual	Historical Perspective
3	Blaming the Web	The account of how the cult use the internet to spread their beliefs	Technological perspective
4	Christ and Comets	The account about the cult's belief	Ideological perspective
5	Sensing Trouble in the Skies	The account of how the cult connects the celestial objects (especially comets) to their beliefs	Scientific perspective

**FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH CLASSES**

The knowledge of the nature of the English magazine above is very important in many aspects. Firstly, in English reading class, especially in advanced levels, the teacher can introduce this type of writing discourse, where one topic is discussed in several different articles is important. The students can learn the perspective of each article. They can learn that one topic can be richly seen from different ways. Secondly, the teacher can also emphasize that this writing type is authentic reading material from the field of journalistic. This is positive for the students' motivation as many students are more interested in current issues, especially those having cultural or political aspects commonly offered by journalistic texts. Thirdly, the exposure to the different vocabulary, grammatical forms, and discourse presentation from what they commonly encounter is valuable to their reading competence. Moreover, text structure awareness has a strong impact on efforts to improve reading instruction. The introduction of rhetorical patterns in a text is essential to their reading skill improvement. Fourthly, the additional results about heading or title making for the article can be used as one of interesting point in the discussion of reading comprehension classes. The mastery of this discussion can relate the students' background knowledge or schemata as some interesting titles or headings are usually connected to other already-known piece of knowledge.

Furthermore, in writing class, the teacher can teach the students in intermediate English learners the existence of different perspectives to a single topic in writing because it can broaden the students' possibility for writing with creativity. There is limitation, of course, in introducing this type of writing discourse. The limitation of the use of

vocabulary and grammatical structure of mass media is they are complex and sophisticated, especially to learners of English as the Second Language. In addition, the additional results about heading or title making for the article can also be of enrichment material in teaching writing.

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