UNIT 1 RADIO NEWS

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:
- report an event or redraft a press hand-out or agency copy for use in a radio news bulletin,
- discuss how drafting news for radio differs from drafting news for a newspaper,
- draft news items for use in a radio bulletin,
- discuss the difference in presentation of news on radio and in the print media, and
- distinguish between radio news and television news.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

You have studied writing news for the print media and the fundamentals of good writing. Broadly, those guidelines also hold good for radio news. However, radio has its own special characteristics. Its vast reach covers almost the entire country, and it has a big audience. This includes the educated as well as the illiterate; the latter, however, are the greater majority of listeners.

In this unit, we will discuss the manner in which to write news for radio so that it may be easily understood by the listeners. This can be achieved by using simple, easily understood words and expressions as used in daily conversation by the people. We will also consider how news can be written for an audio medium like radio, over which an item is heard only once; and the listeners do not have the facility to refer back to a news item, if they have not followed it in the first instance. Radio news must be easily understood.

In the next unit of this block, we shall study the characteristics of radio features
Activity 1

Do you receive your newspaper at your doorstep early morning every day? If you do, it would be easier for you to do this activity. You are to compare and contrast the news headlines on the front page of your daily with the headlines of the 8.15 a.m. news bulletins on AIR. So tune in to your radio set well in time for the news. Then, answer the following questions.

i) Do the headlines of the newspaper and the bulletin refer to the same topics/issues?

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ii) Specifically, are the words of these two sets of headlines the same?

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iii) Does the order of headlines vary in the two media?

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iv) Do you get more information from the newspaper or the radio with regard to the:

• details of any event?
• range of news items that are included?

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1.2 THE STRUCTURE OF NEWS SERVICES DIVISION OF ALL INDIA RADIO

All India Radio's News Services Division is one of the largest radio news organisations in the world. It works round-the-clock and puts out news for a duration of 38 hours every day. It broadcasts 284 bulletins daily. These include: 146 bulletins from Delhi in Home and External Services, and 138 bulletins from 41 Regional News Units.

AIR's News Services Division is headed by the Director General News, who is assisted by four Additional Directors General and seven Directional Officers (Joint Directors).
Monitoring Service. The last mentioned service monitors broadcasts by foreign radio stations and makes them available to AIR.

Apart from receiving news from news agencies, AIR has over a hundred regular correspondents in the state capitals and other important centres. It also has 232 district-level part-time correspondents spread all over the country. Besides, there are seven Special Correspondents posted abroad.

1.2.1 The Functioning of Radio News Room

Through all these sources, AIR receives three to four lakh words of news items during a 24 hour period. It is the responsibility of the news editors of AIR working in the General News Room in Delhi to examine this copy and select the usable items.

The person who oversees this operation in every shift is called the Editor-in-Charge. He is assisted by a number of Editors. Their job is to carefully read the items which have been picked up for possible use, then rewrite and reduce them according to the merits of the story. After all, the longest radio bulletins, of 15 minutes duration, can only carry a little over 1500 words.

Some people compare a radio bulletin with the front page of a newspaper. Imagine if you were asked to summarize an eight-or-ten page newspaper into just the front page. That is what the radio editors are required to do all the time. Brevity, thus, is the hallmark of radio news bulletins. The charts representing AIR's news network and news flow provide a general overview of the countrywide news network, and the work distribution among domestic and foreign correspondents, part-time and regular correspondents.
1.2.2 Total Output of News on AIR

The table given below will give you an idea of the number of news bulletins that All India Radio puts out in the different languages every day. The duration indicated here is the sum total of the duration of the different language bulletins.
### AIR NEWS: FACTS AT A GLANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count(s)</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of news bulletins</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>38 hrs. 25 mts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of news bulletins from Delhi in Home, External and Regional Services</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>20 hrs. 8 mts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Home bulletins in Hindi</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2 hrs. 35 mts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Home bulletins in English</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2 hrs. 30 mts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Home bulletins in regional Indian Languages</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7 hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of External bulletins</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>8 hrs. 50 mts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Number of External bulletins from Delhi</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>8 hrs. 3 mts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Number of External bulletins from Regional News Units</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>55 mts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c) Number of news bulletins from Regional News Units: 131
   Duration: 17 hrs. 23 mts
   Languages/Dialects: 62
Number of Regional News Units: 41
Number of Regular AIR Correspondents (India): 101
Number of AIR Correspondents (Abroad): 7
Number of Part-time AIR Correspondents: 232

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Answer the following questions in three to four sentences each.
    ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) What is the total number of bulletins put out by the News Services Division of All India Radio from the various radio stations every day?

2) Who is the head of the News Services Division? Who can assist the head in the daily duties?

3) List the responsibilities of an Editor-in-Charge in the General News Room.

1.3 TYPES OF NEWS BULLETINS

In the previous section, we see in the table that there are three services—Home, External and Regional—provided by the All India Radio and each of these services puts out news bulletins in the regional languages. The External Service Division (ESD) looks after the news bulletins to be broadcast abroad. The Home Service in Delhi originates news bulletins in English and Hindi for broadcast on the national network. Some news bulletins in the regional languages are also broadcast from Delhi in the respective regions.

These categories or types of news bulletins are based on the audience profile. Another basis for categorising news bulletins is their duration. The 15-minute ‘Morning News’ and ‘Samachar Prabhat’ in English and Hindi respectively, which are broadcast at 8.15 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. everyday, include a commentary and headlines in the day's newspapers in addition to the news. There are hourly bulletins of five or ten minutes too, round-the-clock. Special bulletins are aired whenever necessary. Exclusive daily bulletins on sports, reports on the stock exchange, special bulletins during Haj pilgrimage or floods: all these news bulletins are prepared by the News Services Division.
Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Answer the following questions in one or two sentences each.
ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) What is the basis for categorising the different types of news bulletins?

2) What is the necessity for special news bulletins?

1.4 COMPILATION OF NEWS

From chart II given at the end of section 1.2.1, you can see that news items pour into the News Services Division of AIR from its own correspondents situated both within and outside Delhi, from its Monitoring Service from news agencies. Thereafter, this 'newspool' is sorted out into categories. Let us first consider pool copy.

1.4.1 Pool Copy

The AIR News Room in New Delhi feeds news for some 146 Home and External news bulletins. How is that done ensuring uniformity and speed? To meet this requirement, AIR has introduced a system of what is called "newspool", which is prepared in English. All incoming news, after editing, is put into the pool which is split into news categories such as Home, Foreign, Parliament and Sports. Inclusion of an item in the pool means: (a) the news which is broadcast worthy, (b) it has already been written in broadcast style and (c) any linkages and backgrounding required has been done.

The entire pool copy is distributed among all editors compiling different bulletins. Home as well as External. The editors preparing the pool copy also look after the important developing stories and constantly go on revising and updating them. They also prepare round ups of important events and happenings such as riots, floods, disturbances, and whatever is in the news.

The News Room has four shifts during a day and each shift issues its own pool copy, during morning, day time, evening and night.

Compiling editors working on the language bulletins look after a group of bulletins like languages of East and South India. Similarly, the external bulletins are also combined.

1.4.2 Compiling News Bulletins

The compiling editors further select and prune the news items, keeping in view the duration of each bulletin and the interest of the target audience. They prepare the bulletins and, together with the headlines, send them to the Language Units and the External Services Units where they are translated and put out in their languages.

Translation of news bulletins in different languages should not be mere transliteration. These should be re-written keeping in view the diction, style and flow of the language.
should be different. For instance, Ganesh Puja needs prominent place in Marathi bulletin, Durga Puja in Bengali and Id in Urdu, Kashmiri, and Pushtu bulletins.

Activity 2
Are you on the same wavelength as your radio? It is time you made yourself more familiar with radio news. Listen to at least three news bulletins on radio. Then answer the questions that follow.

1) In any news bulletin, was a voice despatch of a reporter used?

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2) Was the despatch from within India or abroad?

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3) Was the subject of the report politics, sports or any other area?
   Please specify.

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4) How many news items were preceded by the phrase “Our correspondent reports?”

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1.4.3 Selecting the Headlines
Having prepared the bulletin, the editor has to decide which items apart from the lead story are to be headlined. There is only one criterion: which are the items that will interest the largest number of listeners. Headline them and that will ensure a good audience for you.

Headlines should be brief. As a rule, they are repeated because quite often many listeners tune in late and only from the repeat headlines do they know the important news of the day.

A word of caution. If you are editing a radio bulletin, you must take care to see that all items which figure in the headlines are included in the bulletin. Sentences that are read after the headlines must give details about the main news items.

1.4.4 Use of Spoken Language in the News Bulletins on Radio
As the news on the radio moves fast without the facility of recall which is possible, though, in the case of newspapers whatever is broadcast must be clear, precise and to the point. Sentences should be short and direct without sub clauses. Brevity is essential as a minute of broadcast time can take about 100 words, thus giving an editor the choice of about 1000 to 1100 words (in a 10-minute news bulletin) to cover world, national and regional news. There is a great constraint of space in radio, hence broadcast news must be big and important and should be put in crisp and easily understood language. Ceremonial items or didactic speeches distract the attention of the listener who can always switch off or change over to some other programme.

Clarity through the use of simple words
should be in words which are common in everyday speech. For example, "The work has started" and not "the work has commenced", "The play has ended" and not "terminated".

There is no place for "officialese" in bulletins (officialese is the language used in official press notes). The words chosen should create visual images in the mind. "Roads are under water" or "The telegraph poles have been uprooted" or "The bridges have been washed away" sound better than "The communications have been disrupted". Words like "hospitalised" or "minimised" have no place in a radio bulletin. Instead say "admitted into the hospital" or "reduced to a minimum"

Short Sentences

While writing news for the radio, you should not use long sentences. Avoid subordinate clauses; they are rarely used in every day conversation.

The attention of an average radio listener cannot be held for long: so the sentences as well as the paragraphs have to be short. Avoid a sentence which is longer than 18 to 20 words. Otherwise, most listeners will not be able to follow it. So, the best thing to do is to split the long sentences. You must always put only one idea into one sentence.

The news items to be broadcast on radio also have to be short, generally not more than 90 or 100 words an item. Some items can be even shorter.

Long items carrying ministerial speeches can only bore the listeners. It requires the mature, professional competence of a good radio or TV editor or reporter to pick up news points in the ministerial speeches and make crisp items out of them.

Present Tense

Wherever possible, use the present tense. Broadcasts on radio should appear to the listener to be happening at that moment. Instead of saying "the new generator was switched on yesterday" say "The new generator has been switched on". Instead of saying "The Prime Minister said today that the country's economy is booming", write "The Prime Minister says the country's economy is booming".
Editors of radio news do not bother too much about rules of written English. They always opt for the spoken language. Too many figures should not be given in radio news. These only confuse the listeners. Where figures become necessary, round them off. Instead of saying, “398,879,968” say “about 40 crores”.

Explain technical and unfamiliar words. For example, the right of Habeas Corpus. This means that the authorities must bring the suspect before the Judge.

Avoid sound clashes such as “the building was built by a local builder”. Instead, say “the storehouse was the work of a local builder”.

The arrangement in news writing is the reverse of the literary style of writing. In the literary pieces, introduction comes first, then the growth of the plot, followed by the conclusion. In news writing, the lead, or the climax, comes first, then other elements of the story in diminishing order of importance.

While drafting an item, read and re-read it to find out what is the news in it. And that is your lead or intro of the story. In radio news, most editors devote quite some time to it. Once you have located the intro, the rest of the item takes shape quickly. Leave optional points towards the end of the story so that if your editors are running out of time, they can delete these without any difficulty.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Answer in about two sentences each of the following questions.
ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) How does writing news for radio differ from writing news for newspapers?

2) Why does radio news take recourse to present tense?

3) What is the role of the newpoo in radio news?

4) What discretion need be exercised by language editors?

5) What criteria need to be followed when drafting headlines?
1.5 ROLE OF GATEKEEPERS AND CREDIBILITY

By this time, you must be familiar with the work of a 'gatekeeper' in compiling, editing and presenting news in the print and electronic media. In the news on radio, the reporters and editors are the 'gatekeepers'. They make important decisions about whether or not a news item shall be reported and also carried on air. Now, we must consider in more detail the role of bulletin editors and radio reporters. Speed is of essence in radio news. The deadlines are much sharper than in the newspapers. With the introduction of hourly news bulletins, any item which is more than 60 minutes old might not be fresh. Consequently, reporting and editing for the radio calls for skills and speed. Events need to be reported as they take place to meet the first available news bulletins, developing stories need to be covered repeatedly adding fresh bits.

1.5.1 Role of Bulletin Editors

Let us now discuss the role of the bulletin editor who is preparing the 15-minute main English news bulletin for the evening. On a given working day, a bulletin editor in the evening may have 45 to 50 items to consider from the day and evening shifts. They will include Home and Foreign news, Parliament news if Parliament is in session and Sports news. The items vary in length, say from 50 to 150 words. Some may even be of 200 words or more.

Let us suppose that you are the editor and you have 4,000 to 5,000 words of news. A 15-minute bulletin can carry only 1,500 to 1,600 words. This can vary depending on the newsreader who is reading news that evening. The pace of reading varies among newsreaders. This means that you will have to leave out less important items of the ‘day pool’ which will have gone in the day bulletins and further reduce the evening items.

Preparing the News Bulletin

Let us assume that you select 15 or 18 items to go into the bulletin. How do you decide the order of items in your bulletin?

There is no hard and fast rule. The first major decision you have to take is: what will be the lead of the bulletin? Generally, home stories are given preference. But if there is some foreign news, for example the death of a foreign VIP, overthrow of any foreign government, or a major air disaster naturally that becomes the lead. But then what goes after that? If there are other important foreign stories that day, they can go in the first bunch and the home stories can come in the second and the third bunch or “breaks” as they are called in the news room. A “break” in a bulletin comes after about five minutes and is meant to give a little pause, which gives welcome rest to the newsreader as well as prepares the listener for more news to follow. Generally, editors prefer to end the bulletin with sports news or with a human interest story.

1.5.2 Role of Radio Reporters in News, Interviews and Commentaries

Earlier in this unit, we talked about AIR’s regular correspondents, part-time correspondents and special correspondents posted abroad. No good radio organisation can function without a team of trained, competent correspondents of its own. A case in point is Mark Tully’s contribution to BBC’s service in India.

In addition, all radio organisations also subscribe to news agencies. But the main subscribers of news agencies are newspapers. So, the news agency copy is done in newspaper style and has to be redone for use in radio bulletins. A radio organisation needs its own correspondents to do stories in the radio style so that these can go straight into the bulletins. Radio reporters keep radio bulletin timings in mind and work to meet their deadlines.

Voice Despatch

Apart from giving scripted stories, an important part of a radio reporter’s job is
Writing for Radio and Television

to give voice despatches which have become an essential part of radio bulletins in the developed countries. The purpose of a voice despatch in the correspondent’s voice is to supplement, add colour and authenticity to the basic news. An eye-witness account or an on-the-spot report complete with background sound can be very convincing. Writing a voice report is different from writing straight news. In a voice report you can add something to the news that is more personal.

Unfortunately, in most of the developing countries, it is not so. Our radio bulletins still continue to be mainly scripted and a voice despatch is provided only rarely. In India and in most other developing countries, reporter’s voice despatches are generally used in Radio Newsreel and scripted items go in the news bulletins. In the developed countries, the distinction between a radio bulletin and radio newsreel has disappeared. They however maintain this distinction in their external bulletins. The developing countries on the other hand, produce news bulletins quite distinct from newsreels.

Interviews and Commentaries

Radio reporters and even editors often have to do interviews for news or news-related programmes such as Radio Newsreel, or commentaries such as Spotlight and Current Affairs Programmes. Unlike newspaper interviewers, radio reporters must have a clear idea of the duration of the recorded interview they want to have with an author, an actor or artist or a politician. They should be able to brief the interviewees about it in advance. The questions have to be brief and pointed; one question at a time. The interviewer has to carefully listen to the answers and then follow them up with further questions. The interviewer must learn to put searching questions without being offensive.

Credibility

While doing a commentary script or a report, give a total picture, the good and the bad; whether you are writing about a project, a factory, a strike, a VIP visit or anything else. The listener will like to have from you an unbiased picture. It is this fairness and accuracy in news and other programmes which gives credibility to a radio organisation.

It is true that the electronic media in India and other developing countries are still under government control. That itself imposes certain constraints in the free functioning of radio and television. In India, the Prasar Bharati law has been passed by Parliament. The Act provides for the electronic media being entrusted to an Autonomous Corporation. One does not know how and when that will happen. But whether the electronic media remain directly under the government or are entrusted to an autonomous corporation, the quality of their programmes will essentially depend on the professional competence of the staff, editors, reporters and producers. Also, their ability to stand up against pressures and produce their programmes fairly and fearlessly. It is only by doing this that radio
and television organisations all over the world have become increasingly autonomous in their functioning and earned the respect and admiration of their audiences.

During the last 60 years or more, radio in India, first under the British and later in free India, has played an important role as a medium to educate, entertain and inform the people. It has promoted arts, literature and drama. Even in the field of agriculture, it made a significant contribution by propagating an improved variety of rice, which later came to be called “radio rice”. In times of crises, such as wars with Pakistan and China, or floods or drought, the radio, has provided timely information through its news bulletins and other programmes.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Answer the following questions in one or two sentences.
   ii) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) In what way are deadlines sharper for radio than for the print medium?

2) Who selects the ‘leads’ and the ‘breaks’ for a news bulletin?

3) What makes reporting for radio more difficult than for the newspapers?

4) What is the contribution of a voice report to a news bulletin?

1.6 ROLE OF NEWSREADERS

So far we have been talking about the role of Editors in drafting news items and preparing a radio bulletin. What about the role of the newsreader who presents the news to the listener? Actually, a newsreader has an important role to play. A well-edited bulletin can be marred by bad newsreading. At the same time, a poorly edited bulletin can be lifted up by a good newsreader. The older generation of listeners recall how in the past they remained tuned in to AIR just to listen to newsreading by Melville de Mellow even when there may not have been much hard news in a bulletin. Attention must be paid to the speed of reading; it should not exceed 100 to 120 words a minute; Newsreaders can definitely be a guide to young listeners on correct pronunciation. A good voice, diction and pace of reading, giving pauses at the right points, make it worthwhile
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check Your Progress 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note 1. Answer the following questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Compare your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What is the role of voice despatches in radio news bulletins?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) If you were the news editor... what phrase would you prefer to use in the bulletin:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 'caparisoned elephant and stumps'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 'stumps were down' and 'day's play'?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.7 CHALLENGE TO RADIO FROM TELEVISION

Today, radio is facing a big challenge from television and has been pushed into the background, especially in the metropolitan cities. In the developed world, say the U.S., Japan and Europe, where television is far more developed than in India, radio has made some adjustments in its programmes and found new areas for itself where it is doing well. In all these countries, radio news is still the fastest means of communication. There is another reason why radio in India, including radio news, should not carm out a similar dance for itself. Radio editors, reporters and newscasters have to accept the challenge posed by television and give to their listeners prompt, well-balanced and interesting news bulletins and news-related programmes. Radio needs to give latest local information to those who need it: housewives need to know about the market rates; motorists need to know about the state of roads. The weather conditions are as important for pilots or gliders or ham gliders and the like as for other citizens including agriculturists. The radio medium indeed has much potential.

### 1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed newswriting for radio. We gathered that writing news for radio differs from writing for newspapers. Words used on the radio have to be simple and the sentences short so that listeners can follow the news without any difficulty. There is a need for brevity and clarity. We then moved on to discuss newsmaking functions and steps in the process of news bulletin preparation.

We have talked about the role of radio reporters and news editors, voice despatches by correspondents, news commentaries, the need for speed and the sharpness of deadlines for radio.

### 1.9 FURTHER READING

- Cohler, David Keith, *Broadcast Journalism*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, USA.
1.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1) A total of 284 news bulletins are put out daily by All India Radio. This includes 65 bulletins on the External Services. There are 131 bulletins on the Regional Services.

2) The Director-General News is the head of the News Services Division. The DG (News) is assisted by four Additional Directors General. There are seven Joint Directors too.

3) The Editor-in-Charge oversees the selection of news items from the pool copy. This is done with the assistance of other editors. The rewriting of the selected copy then begins.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Duration of news bulletin and the audience profile.

2) For timely information during war, floods or other disasters; to update oneself in peace-time; for example, details of Haj proceedings for those residing in India and interested in the latest information.

Check Your Progress 3

1) In radio there is greater constraint of space as compared to a newspaper. Thus brevity is important. Also simplicity of language is essential as the listeners cannot refer back to what has been broadcast; they either understand the item or forget it.

2) To create the impression that whatever is being reported is happening now; also you do not use words like 'quote' or 'unquote' in the news to signify what someone has said.

3) Inclusion of an item in the news pool means that (a) the item can be broadcast (b) it has been written in broadcast language (c) whatever linkages are required or whatever should be dropped has been done.

4) Proper translation and not 'transliteration'; also the needs of the region of the language have to be taken care of.

5) Headlines should be short and direct, giving the gist of the story.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Speed of reporting to update every news item in the subsequent hourly bulletins. To provide the latest developments at the earliest.

2) The news editor selects which news items will be 'leads' and which will be included in subsequent breaks.

3) Radio has sharp deadlines and reporters have to cover events as they take place.

4) A voice despatch adds colour and gives credibility to radio reports.

Check Your Progress 5

1) News readers are the real presenters. They should read the news at proper speed and with the correct diction.

2) 'Decorated elephant', and 'end of day's play'. The other phrases go well in running commentaries.