

# A Comparative Study of Broadcasting English and Newspaper English:

## A New Approach to Analyzing Broadcasting News<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the style of broadcasting news by comparing it with newspaper news. Newspapers have well-known style characteristics which enable us to get news effectively: namely, the 'Inverse pyramid type.' As for radio broadcasting, it seems the characteristics have not yet been confirmed or delineated. Sekine (1988) indicates that the 'Decreasing Importance' approach is used when editors report news through newspapers whereas radio reporters tend to use the 'Increasing Importance' (1988:45).

In this paper, radio news is compared with the newspaper style by focusing on three points. First, the importance of relay in radio news is analyzed. Second, the linguistic differences between spoken and written news reporting is explored. Third, my observations regarding techniques of introducing the relay are examined. The materials used are BBC Radio 4 broadcast news and *The Times* in the United Kingdom. In conclusion, I suggest the importance of relay in radio broadcasting news and introduce a 'Double-Pyramid Type' approach.

**Keywords:** Radio Broadcasting English, Newspaper English,  
Written and spoken English

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a revision of a presentation at the 2nd International Conference on Speech, Writing and Context at Kansai Gaidai University in August 2003.

## 1. Introduction

Many researchers focus on how people get news from the internet (e.g. Crystal 2001, Dimmick et al. 2004, Xu and Ibrahim 2004, Zillman et al. 2004). However, in fact newspapers and radio remain a significant source of information, and they also deserve to be studied in order to gain a complete understanding of how news works in different media. Especially, the significance of the way relay news works in a way the internet does not in order to convey impact reports, as well as how relay news are inserted in the news reports have not be fully studied. I compare BBC Radio 4 news to articles of *The Times* in the United Kingdom in order to study the delivery of news from the viewpoints of speech and writing. To compare written and spoken news as precisely as possible, I utilized radio news because TV has complicating factors such as videos, photos and bilingual captions.

Newspapers have well-known and recognized characteristics which enable us to get news effectively: namely, headlines, leads, and body. Theories about attention-grabbing strategies in newspapers have existed for many years. Straumann (1935) researched the history of headlines and Mardh (1980) analyzed the structure of the headlines of various types of newspapers, from broadsheet to tabloid papers. However, in recent years, less attraction has been given to the different registers of English.

Turning to the register of English, Biber et al. (1999) classified the English in them according to several categories: 'conversation,' 'fiction,' 'newspaper language,' and 'academic prose;' they researched them with regard to the grammatical differences in the respective categories, using a huge corpus data. They analyze the major situational differences such as interactiveness and online production, shared immediate situations, main communicative purpose/context, audience, and dialect domain. As a result, for an easy example, they explain the difference between conversation and newspapers as follows:

[C]onversation is characterized grammatically by a frequent use of the first person pronoun I and we (referring directly to the speaker) and the second person pronoun you (referring directly to the listener). In contrast, newspaper articles are not directly interactive, are not directed to any individual reader, and often have no acknowledged author. Since there is no specific author or reader to refer to, newspaper text use first

person or second person pronouns comparatively rarely (ibid.: 15).

Thus they demonstrated that the language of newspapers has developed registers of English in recent years.

On the other hand, the characteristics of broadcast news have not yet been confirmed or delineated. One of the reasons may be due to the assumption that the broadcast news can be considered part of the same category as newspapers. However, judging from the distinct characteristics of written and spoken language, it is only logical that they could be different.

The paper compares linguistic style of broadcasting with that of newspapers by focusing on three points. First, the importance of relaying in broadcasting news is analyzed. Second, the differences in broadcast speech and newspaper reporting are explored. Third, I lay out my observations regarding techniques of introducing the relay in broadcast.

## **2. Previous works**

Regarding the difference between speech and writing, there is much research in recent years, such as Halliday (1989), Hughes (1996) and Biber et al. (1999). Leech (1982) analyzes the mode of discourse as a continuum from 'typical' speech to 'typical' writing in the chapter entitled 'Discourse Analysis: Speech and Writing' (shown here as Figure 1) (1982: 133-144). Various types of broadcasting, such as radio discussions, television advertisement and television news differ according to the way they give details. As is clear from figure, television news and newspaper articles are in fact closely related. Leech makes this comparison because television news does have a script although it is spoken, therefore, he argues, reported news is different from natural conversation.

Sekine (1988) argues that broadcast news and newspapers are different primarily because the 'Decreasing Importance' approach, which is also described as the 'Inverse pyramid type,' is used in newspapers, whereas radio reporters tend to use the 'Increasing Importance' approach (1988: 45). As Figure 2 shows, Sekine points out that newspaper reports begins with the headline and lead, essentially creating a summary of the article, while details are reported in the body. Readers can thus easily obtain a summary of the news, even if they only read the headline and lead.

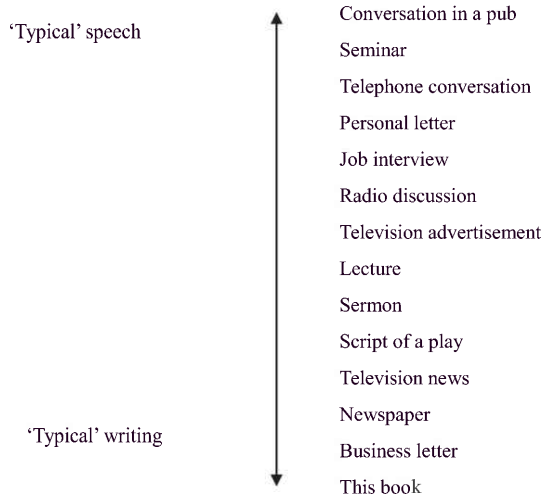


Figure 1 (Leech 1982 : p. 140)

This is why the lead of the newspapers article is often characterized as a ‘Detailed-Packed lead.’ On the other hand, Sekine described the lead of radio news as a ‘Simple, Soft Lead,’ (ibid. : 45). In radio, reporters tend to avoid the kind of long sentences that appear in newspaper leads, because the report is only given once. In order to clearly and effectively convey the information, radio news uses simple, short sentences. Details are reported gradually and there is no emphasis on a summary of the story. As Figure 3 shows, Sekine named has described this concept as one of ‘Increasing Importance’ (ibid. : 45).

In contrast to Sekine (1988), another approach among researchers, in the analysis of radio broadcasts, is utilized by Onoda and Cooker (2003 : viii) as Figure 4 shows. In their work, they treat broadcasting style and newspaper style without difference. They do not distinguish between broadcasting and newspapers, but analyze news

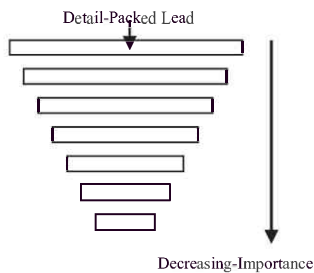


Figure 2 Newspaper  
[Sekine (1988), p. 45]

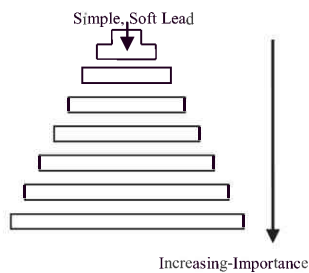


Figure 3 Broadcasting  
[Sekine (1988), p. 45]

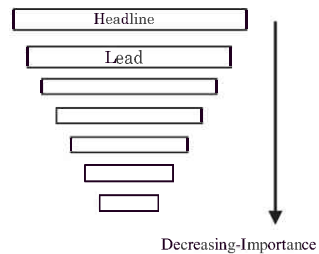


Figure 4 Newsreports  
[Onoda and Cooker (2003), p. viii]

reporting as one category. This leads to several problems: do they have different styles between newspapers and broadcasting in terms of written and spoken English? How is the relay news used in each media?

### 3. Research

#### 3.1. The relay of broadcasting news

First, the relay is one of the most obvious differences between radio broadcasting and newspapers. In broadcasting, a reporter starts with a short report from the studio and switches to the relay of the news from the site where the news is happening. To understand how the relay works differently, I compare the same news item reported in *The Times* in the United Kingdom and on BBC Radio 4 as below. (1a) shows the newspaper sample and number (1b) shows the radio sample. The item is the story of an accident on Mount Everest in May of 2003. I chose this item because the story indicates the clear distinction between newspapers and radio broadcasting.

(1a) Everest helicopter crash kills two as mass tourism *mars anniversary*

The mangled wreckage of a helicopter that crashed on to the slopes of Everest on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of man's first conquest was cited by veteran climbers yesterday as a tragic example of how the mountain has been turned into a holiday resort.

The two men killed in the crash will not be added to the roll of honour of those who lost their lives attempting Everest, but their deaths have marred today's planned festivities.

The Russian-built Mi17 is now a familiar sight at Everest's Base Camp, ferrying wealthy climbers to the start of their expedition. It is seen by critics as a symbol of how package tour companies are trying to conquer Everest.

Before yesterday's crash, Sir Edmund Hillary, who led that first successful ascent, argued that the mountain is no place for people "who pay a fortune to have others drag them up the mountain" and urged the authorities to close it to climbers for a while. The Nepalese authorities insisted that the crash had nothing to do with the record numbers at Base Camp.

Witness said that the blue and white helicopter clipped a stone hut as it came into land, suggesting that pilot error was to blame. Many of the trekkers, whom Sir Edmund argues have no right to be there, were among the first to reach the crashed aircraft. Climbers and

sherpas managed to pull free six of those on board... (*The Times* 29, May, 2003)

(1b) Two people died and five others were injured when a helicopter crashed near the base camp on Mount Everest. The accident marred preparations to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first ascent of the mountain. The helicopter was on its way into the camp to pick up some climbers when it plunged into a glacier. Our correspondent at Everest base camp, Jane Hughes, saw the accident:

SOUND OF HELICOPTER

HUGHES: We watched the helicopter fly low over base camp before it disappeared behind a ridge and crashed into the glacier in a thick cloud of smoke.

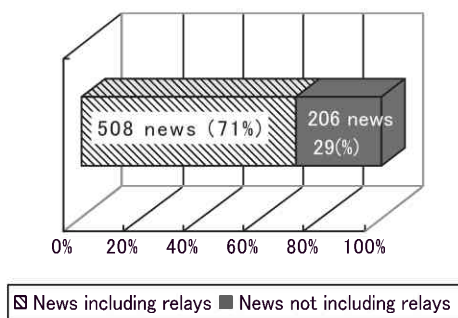
SOUND OF VOICES

HUGHES: Miraculously the aircraft didn't explode. Its wheels had apparently caught the edge of a stone shelter as it came into land. I arrived on the scene to see the helicopter crumpled on its side with parts strewn across the glacier.

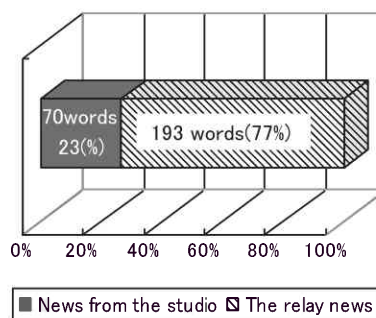
A witness: ... This is a really terrible scene. I'm standing next to one of the wheels of the helicopter and just down below me it's crashed in the sort of Glacial river. There are people stretchering people out of the helicopter and the noise you can hear behind me is a second army helicopter which is hovering, it can't actually land, and there are some Sherpas carrying somebody over to that helicopter.... (BBC Radio 4, 28, May, 2003)

The first line of (1a) is the headline and the second line is the lead. This long sentence continues into the body. In contrast, (1b), the BBC Radio 4 broadcast, begins with short sentences giving the details of the story from the studio before switching to relay from the accident site. In this relay, Jane Hughes, the correspondent, reports the accident and furthermore a witness speaks about the terrible scene.

Presently, almost all radio news items broadcast include a relay. Figure 5 shows the rate of the news reports that include relays and those without relays. The materials were collected from BBC Radio 4, twice daily from their 8 AM news and 6 PM news broadcast for a month in 2003, beginning on May 11th and ending on June 10th. I divided all news in each broadcast into items according to their topics. There are 714 items in total, and of these 508 include relays. This accounts for 71 percent of all news collected and analyzed. There are only 206 items which do not include relays, and those are primarily the regular daily City and Dow Jones financial reports. As is clear, relay appears to play a significant role in radio broadcasting. In



**Figure 5** News including relays compared to news without relays for a month in BBC Radio 4



**Figure 6** Rate of the average of the words of the relay of one article in 508 news items broadcast on BBC Radio 4

newspapers, of course, reports from the news site often appear, but they are utilized to create an eye-catching headline or in explanation of the details. The role of relay news in newspapers is thus much different from the integral role played by relay news in radio broadcasting. I will examine how relay news is different from and why it is used below in 3.2.

In addition, in Figure 6, the 508 radio news items which included relays in Figure 5 are analyzed. The words are counted and the stories segmented into news from the studio and relay news, and then the average number of words per segment are given. The number of words in news items from the studio is 70 on average, accounting for roughly 23 percent of total words in each story. Thus, the number of words in the relays, 193 on average, accounts for 77 percent of all words. This graph indicates the importance of the relay and the prominence it is given in broadcast news. In fact, broadcasting news depends on the relay because such reportage has an effect of repetition and confirmation of the importance of the news through the presence of the reporter on the scene. Listeners hear element of the story which they might fail to catch during the report from the studio, but at the same time the material is not repeated.

### 3.2. Speech and Writing

In this section, the story (1a) and (1b) are analyzed to compare speech and writing by using concepts from Hughes (1996). Hughes drew a comparison between speech and writing commentaries on a boxing match. She conceptualizes two samples she uses in terms of 'action versus evaluation' (1996: 105), and rephrases

the concept as ‘immediacy and distance’ (ibid.:107). Hughes explains them as follows. In (2), sample 25 is a speech sample, and sample 25a is a writing sample.

- (2) Sample 25 gives a stronger sense of individual action happening through time in a linear manner, whereas the written version, Sample 25a, incorporates evaluative statements within the presentation of the action. (ibid.: 105)

This idea of ‘action versus evaluation’ appears to correspond to the contrasts between broadcasting and newspaper reports. In the samples (1a) and (1b) I here introduce, similar analysis can be done. The italicized parts of (1a) show ‘distance’ from the accident and there are ‘evaluative statements’ in the article. On the other hand, the relay part of (1b), especially after line five, creates immediacy by using the sound of the helicopter and the voices of people on the scene who witnessed the accident. Example (1b) is clearly focused on the action.

I turn now to a detailed analysis of the words used in the news of (1a) and (1b). As Figure 7 shows, in (1a), the reporter begins to explain the accident by using descriptive words such as ‘helicopter crash’ and ‘kill,’ but go into more depth and analysis by looking at the reasons and ramifications of the accident. For example, they evaluate the scene with objective distance, stating, ‘It is seen by critics as a symbol of how package tour companies are trying to conquer Everest.’ The newspaper report (1a) clearly shows more ‘distance’ and ‘evaluation.’

action	evaluation
helicopter crash kills	mars anniversary The mangled wreckage of a helicopter... was cited ... as a tragic example...turn into a holiday resort. as a symbol of how package tour companies are ...
The two men killed in the crash	will not be added to the roll of honour of those... Sir Edmund Hillary, ... , argued that the mountain is no place for people ... The Nepalese authorities insisted that the crash had nothing to do ...
Witness said ...helicopter clipped a stone hut	suggesting that pilot error was to blame

Figure 7 Action versus evaluation in the newspaper article of (1a)



On the other hand, as Figure 8 shows, in (1b), the studio announcer also explains the accident using the words such as ‘died,’ ‘injured’ and ‘a helicopter crashed’ but she provides very little evaluation, saying only ‘mars preparation.’ She simply gives the details of the helicopter crash and then switches to the relay. In the relay, the correspondent reports by describing the scene with words such as ‘watched the helicopter,’ ‘crashed’ and ‘crumpled’ and she adds extra details like ‘thick cloud of smoke,’ ‘its wheels’ and ‘with parts.’ Next, they switch to a witness who retells the story by repeating the words ‘terrible scene,’ ‘crashed’ and ‘the wheels of the helicopter.’ As for adverbs, in (1b), ‘miraculously,’ ‘apparently’ and ‘actually’ are used, but there are no such words in (1a). Thus in radio broadcasting (1b) focus on what was happening at the site of the accident and describes the scene itself in detail by the use of both the speech of a correspondent and a witness. The adverbs used also gives the feeling of immediate live reports.

Both (1a) and (1b) quote the comments of the witnesses, however, the way they use such quotations is different. In (1a), they use indirect speech and provide evaluation with the quotations, saying ‘Witness said that ..., suggesting that pilot error was to blame.’ In (1b), they broadcast the real speech of a witness who relates their experience without a script, so she uses natural conversation markers like ‘the sort of or ‘people *stretcher*ing people’ which are typical patterns of casual conversation, which affect on reporting of the scene. The word, *stretcher*ing, is not typical but actually improper English an example of noun used as a verb. The unique use of a noun that should not really be a verb suggests the excitement of the witness in the

speaker	action	evaluation
the studio announcer	died    were injured a helicopter crashed The accident	mars preparation
the correspondent	We watched the helicopter disappeared    crashed thick cloud of smoke didn't explode    crumpled its wheels    with parts	
a witness	terrible scene it's crashed    hovering <i>stretcher</i> ing people the noise	

**Figure 8** Action versus evaluation in broadcast news of (1b)

fact that her words start to fail and she created new language usage to describe the scene. The words in the newspaper report imply 'distance', whereas the words in broadcasting imply 'action' and 'immediacy'. Vocabulary used in each style thus also has characters shared written and spoken English.

The spoken technique is effective. In fact radio news, unlike natural conversation, both from the studio and via relay, have scripts that are written by specialists. However, the scripts are different from the articles of the newspapers. Furthermore, in radio they sometimes use witnesses reporting without scripts, creating more vivid and dynamic images of the scene. Radio news differs greatly from newspaper reports in focusing on 'immediacy' or 'action.' Halliday (1989) shows the difference between speech and writing as 'one of DENSITY,' saying 'written language is dense, spoken language is sparse' (1989 : 62). He also compares them as either a 'SYNOPTIC view' or a 'DYNAMIC view' shown as (3) below.

- (3) The written language presents a SYNOPTIC view. ... the written language encodes it as a structure or, alternatively, as a chaos - but either way, as a **thing** that **exists** ... . The spoken language presents a DYNAMIC view. ... In the spoken language, phenomena do not exist; they **happen**. (Halliday 1989 : 97)

The idea of dynamic and synoptic view also corresponds to the contrast between broadcasting and newspaper reports. Thus broadcast news and newspaper articles differ greatly because of the nature of speech and writing.

### 3.3. Introducing the relay

Here, the techniques used for introducing the relay are analyzed. In line 4 of (1b), the phrase, 'Our correspondent at Everest base camp, Jane Hughes, saw the accident' offers a discernible pattern of introducing the relay. Example (4) is another example of a pattern often utilized to introduce the relay.

- (4) The Prime Minister has emphatically denied allegations that he authorised the leaking of Dr David Kelly's name, as the main source for the BBC's reports about the government's handling of intelligence dossiers before the war in Iraq. Mr Blair was speaking to journalists on board his plane, on the latest leg of his Asian tour. Earlier, he'd faced more questions about Dr Kelly's death, from university students in the Chinese capital Beijing.

*Our Political Correspondent, Laura Trevelyan, is travelling with the Prime Minister, and sent this report from Hong Kong.*

TREVELYAN: An enthusiastic crowd of students at Tsinghua University in Beijing greeted Mr Blair this morning. He told them not to be afraid and to ask whatever they liked in the question and answer session. And, unused to questioning their own leaders in this way, they took him at his word. This was the polite but pointed question posed by one journalism student. (BBC Radio 4, 22, July, 2003)

This news is about Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit to Hong Kong, as reported by the correspondent who accompanied him. The italicized part of (4) shows a discernible pattern which also appeared in (1b). Newspapers have eye-witness reports of the correspondent as well, but they typically use verbs such as 'report' or 'say' in order to factualize the news. Newspaper reporters are expected to use vocabulary measurably different from the text in broadcasting. In broadcasting, if only neutral language is used, listeners may lose interest. They thus are signals to the presence of the eye-witness reporters on the news site.

Below, in (5), (6), and (7), are given other examples of introducing relays in the same hour's BBC Radio 4 news. They clearly demonstrate the various patterns used to introduce relay within the same broadcast. Collectively, the relay introduction patterns convey the reporters' presence at the scene by using verbs like 'listen,' 'talk,' and 'look at,' in the present perfect progressive tense. This grammatical tense indicates that the correspondents have continued to watch or listen to the scenes in the sites and that they convey the latest, hot news from real immediate scenes. It gives listeners a share of the feeling of being at a live scene.

(5) ... Our correspondent, David Bamford, *has been listening to the debate at the UN:* ... (ibid.)

(6) ... Our correspondent, Jon Brain, *has been talking to passengers.* ... (ibid.)

(7) ... Our diplomatic Correspondent, James Robbins, *has been looking at the historical reasons for the country's collapse:* ... (ibid.)

In fact the BBC Radio Corporation has a news style guide which can be accessed through the Internet<sup>2</sup>. This guide emphasizes specific skills such as utilizing voice reports. Example (8) is extracted from the section 'Introducing the relay' of the Style Guide. As the italicized part of (8) indicates, 'An introduction should stimulate the

appetite'. It is clear, then, that this is a key point of broadcasting news.

- (8) As we make more and more use of voice reports and actuality, so the skill of introducing them becomes more important. *An introduction should stimulate the appetite*, making it easy to understand the audio without stealing its thunder (BBC News, Radio News Style Guide).

This technique of introducing the relay, used especially in radio news, is quite unlike the techniques used in BBC television news broadcasting. Introducing the relay in radio, as the excerpt above demonstrate, aims to have the effect of stimulating listeners' interest and encourage their imagination of the news site. Thus, in radio the technique of introducing the relay plays a significant role in connecting studio news and the relay from the news site. This analysis is integral with Hughes' concepts of 'immediacy' and 'action.' This transition is especially important when it is unaccompanied by images, which in television instantly shifts the story.

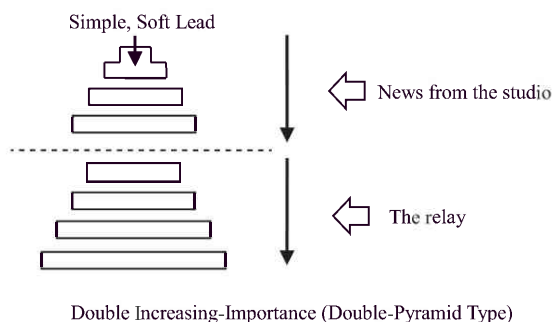
### 3.4. The style of broadcasting

A comparison of the data collected by the author with Sekine (1988) and Onoda and Cooker (2003) reveals several important features. Sekine suggested the material shown in Figure 2 and 3, stating that the style of newspapers is Decreasing-Importance whereas that of broadcasting is Increasing-Importance. In broadcasting, however, as shown above, the relay is a significant aspect of reporting, which serves to repeat the news in another way and confirm it. In Figure 3 on broadcasting approaches, it seems the relays are underestimated and they have thus been the subject of scant attention. On the other hand, Figure 4, drawn from Onoda and Cooker (2003), suggests that the broadcasting style is equivalent to the newspaper style, this approach neglects characteristics of speech, such as the length of sentences or 'immediacy' described by Hughes (1996).

From my analysis, it is clear there is another pattern in broadcast news, which consists of two parts. I describe this as Double Increasing Importance or a Double Pyramid (shown in Figure 9). In this style, listeners can stop listening to part of the

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<sup>2</sup> BBC News, Radio News Style Guide,  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/radio\\_newsroom/1099302.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/radio_newsroom/1099302.stm),  
accessed 26 December, 2015.



**Figure 9 Broadcasting**

story, as readers can skim in the newspaper style, and they can also continue listening if they are interested. Radio broadcasting style has a pattern similar to the characteristics of a natural conversation, in which the topic is covered from a variety of angles, in order to enable the listener to understand the key features of the story with or without details. This is quite similar to the function outlined earlier for headline and leads in the newspaper.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Even with the heavy recent focus the internet as a new source, the characteristics of broadcast news are beginning to be confirmed and delineated. Broadcast news has measurable characteristics different from newspapers on the point of the ways in which speech and writing are integrated and utilized. In radio news the relay in particular has an integral role. It focuses on immediacy and action. The technique of introducing the relay plays a significant role in connecting studio news and the relay from the news site. Utilizing previous concepts described by Hughes, I have here outlined a further analysis of the style of broadcasting English and I have described an additional news concept, that of, to be designated as Double Increasing Importance or the Double Pyramid.

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