

Language Matters: Challenging Bias in the News

Dismantling linguistic prejudice and media bias

PART 01 Authentic Model Text Analysis

Text: A Letter to the Editor regarding a local news headline.

To the Editor,

I am writing to express my concern regarding yesterday's headline: *"Non-native speakers struggle to integrate due to broken English."*

The phrase "broken English" is biased and harmful. It suggests that people who are learning English are "damaged." In my community, many of us speak multiple languages, which is a strength, not a weakness. The media should use more respectful language, such as "emergent bilinguals" or "English learners." Using words like "struggle" also creates a negative stereotype. We must choose words that show the resilience of our neighbors instead of focusing only on their challenges.

Sincerely,
Amara Diop

Analysis Questions:

- Word Choice:** Why does the writer dislike the term "broken English"? What alternative does she suggest?
- Cultural Reflection:** In your home country or community, how does the news describe people who speak different dialects or foreign languages? Is the description usually positive or negative?
- Structure:** How does the writer transition from identifying a problem to suggesting a solution?

PART 02 Vocabulary Bank

Task: Below are three biased headlines. Rewrite them using neutral, humanizing, or respectful language. Use the vocabulary bank to help you.

Vocabulary Bank:

- Instead of "Swarm/Flood":* Arrive, seek safety, travel.
- Instead of "Illegal":* Undocumented, unauthorized.
- Instead of "Problem":* Challenge, situation, complex issue.
- Instead of "Refuse to learn":* Are in the process of learning, prioritize.

- Original:** "Huge wave of immigrants floods the city center."

Your Version: _____

- Original:** "The problem with people who speak bad English at work."

Your Version: _____

- Sentence Frames for your critique:**

- The news media should not use the word "_____" because it sounds _____.
- Instead of saying "_____" reporters could say "_____."
- It is important to use respectful language because _____.

PART 03 Independent Writing

Prompt: Write a short email (100-150 words) to a news station. Identify a specific type of linguistic bias or a stereotype you have seen in the media (e.g., how people with accents are portrayed, or how certain neighborhoods are described).

Requirements:

- State the specific word or phrase that is biased.
- Explain why it is harmful or unfair.
- Suggest 1-2 better ways to describe the situation using modals (*should*, *could*, *ought to*).

PART 04 Editorial Revision & Peer Review**Checklist:**

- ☐ Did I state the problem clearly in the first paragraph?
- ☐ Did I use at least two modals for suggestion (e.g., "The media *should*...")?
- ☐ Did I use respectful and professional vocabulary?
- ☐ **Peer Review:** Exchange your draft with a partner. Does your partner's email explain *why* the language is biased? (Yes/No).

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Writing practice worksheet.



TIME

20-30 MINS



OBJECTIVE

To enable learners to identify linguistic prejudice in media and write a formal critique suggesting inclusive alternatives.



GRAMMAR FOCUS

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- Modals for Suggestion (should, could, must) and Adjectives for Tone

KEY VOCABULARY

ARRIVE SEEK SAFETY TRAVEL

UNDOCUMENTED UNAUTHORIZED

CHALLENGE SITUATION

COMPLEX ISSUE

ARE IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

PRIORITIZE

"HUGE WAVE OF IMMIGRANTS FLOODS THE CITY CENTER."

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"THE PROBLEM WITH PEOPLE WHO SPEAK BAD ENGLISH AT WORK."

Procedure

1. Deconstruction (15 mins):

- Read the "Letter to the Editor" aloud.
- Discuss the term "broken English." Ask students: "Have you ever felt judged for your English? How did it feel?" This validates their emotional and cultural experience.
- Focus on the structure: *Identify the bias -> Explain the harm -> Suggest a change.*

2. Joint Construction / Imitation (20 mins):

- Work through the headline rewrites as a class.
- Focus on the "Vocabulary Bank." Explain that "swarm" or "flood" are metaphors used for insects or disasters, which dehumanizes people.
- Practice using modals (*should/could*) to soften the critique while remaining firm in the suggestion.

3. Independent Construction (20 mins):

- Students write their own emails.
- Differentiation:** For students struggling with ideas, provide a "News Clip" (e.g., a photo of a headline) to react to. For advanced B1 students, encourage them to discuss the *impact* on the community's reputation.

4. Revision (10 mins):

- Peer review focus: Ensure the tone is professional. In professional English writing, criticizing the *language* used is often more effective than attacking the *person* who wrote it.