



THE INGREDIENTS OF RECIPE WRITING STYLE: AN ESP PERSPECTIVE

ZEB ANSARI¹ Prof. SAMI RAFIQ²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India,

²Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (2002), India

¹zebansari71@gmail.com; ²samirafiq10031@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

Globalization has created a new mass of people who are not only interested in learning English for the sake of social ornament, prestige or status but also for its usefulness in the market place. This demand for English to suit particular needs has led to the development of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) e.g. Business English, Scientific English, Legal English etc.

Globalization has also contributed in creating awareness and demand for cuisines of different culture, generating proliferation of literature on food in both print and electronic media. Cookbooks continue to be produced and purchased at an unprecedented rate. This explosion in supply of culinary texts warrants that the producers of such text should carefully assess the needs of the consumers (readers, viewers) and deliver the product that satisfies the demands of the target audience. Recipes are not merely a set of orderly instructions rather recipe writing is a creative process. The recipe writing style is one of the most important elements in this process. The paper outlines and discusses the ingredients of successful recipe writing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization propelled by advancement and technology has created an integrated world and English has acquired a unique status as a 'global language' in this process. In the wake of this, professional, occupational and vocational needs of the learners resulted in the development of English for a particular or specific purpose (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). This led to the production of specialized literature in the form of magazines, articles, dictionaries and books related to different fields like science, law, business, culinary texts etc (Paltridge and Starfeild, 2014).

Recently, there has been proliferation of literature on food that comprises of special food

magazines, regular food columns in prominent newspapers, exclusive food channels and websites related to food. This explosion in the production of culinary texts due to high demand indicates the huge potential that exists in this sector.

Traditionally, recipe writing was the domain of professional chefs and cookbook authors. But, as the online world expanded literally thousands of people with no background knowledge and requisite skills, just because they are computer savvy have become food writers or recipe writers. As a consequence, the line has blurred between professional and non professional writers leading to production of recipes that hardly engages the interest of the readers (Jacob, 2010). Food writing

or recipe writing is one of the richest forms of writing whose constituents are clarity of expression, style, voice, accuracy, knowledge of structure and rhythm of language like any other good writing.

The primary motivation of this paper is to flesh out the philosophy and essential ingredients of recipe writing style drawn from writings of leading experts in the field like Barbara Gibbs Ostmann, Jane L. Baker, Dianne Jacob, representative food related websites and recipe writing manuals.

2. The Philosophy of Recipe Writing

The Oxford English dictionary defines recipe as “a statement of the ingredients and procedure for making something, especially a dish in cooking.” However, according to Harvey Steiman, cookbook author, radio show host, and magazine editor; “Recipes are not just a set of instructions; they are indeed a creative process”; for both the writers and users (quoted in Barbara and Bakes, 2001). Therefore, good food writing should involve the incorporation of all the five senses, whereas many newcomers focus only on how food tastes and skimps on other senses. Moreover, Judith Jones, one of the most respected cookbook editors says one should write recipes with some real feeling, not with a formula. In the same vein (Ostmann and Baker, 2001), suggest that before launching oneself into writing, one should be cognizant of the underlying philosophy also. In particular they suggest the following:

- a) *Know your audience*: How one writes a recipe depends on the cooking experience of the target audience i.e. their level of understanding and sophistication e.g. Recipes for children, Culinary Illiterates, basic home cooks or professional chefs need different approaches.
- b) *Clarity, conciseness and Consistency*: Recipes should be made as clear and easy to read, understand and follow as possible without elaborate explanations and long complicated sentences. But this should not sacrifice completeness of a recipe
- c) *Put it in plain English*: Many cooking terminologies are easily

misunderstood. Therefore, describe them in simple words that are understood both by novice and experienced cooks e.g. “braise” – “simmer, covered”.

- d) *Prepare a personalized style guide*: The standard guidelines of writing a recipe should be followed with one’s own personal style for the author’s voice to shine through which will charm and entice the reader.

3. The Essential Ingredients of Recipe writing Style

The writing style is a way of using language keeping in view the target audience. There are myriad ways of writing a recipe as a result it is a quagmire. Despite this, the survey of the literature reveals that most top-notch recipes and guidelines provided in recipe writing manuals and books on language of food such as (Barbara and Bakes, 2001), Jacob (2010); Senyei (2012) and Dan (2014), by and large, consist of the following standard ingredients:

The Title: Consumers prefer titles that are simple, descriptive, interesting, attractive, informative and inviting as well as one that clearly describes the finished dish.

The Head note: The headnote or introduction to the recipe is what draws a reader into the recipe and gives it a personality. Most modern cookbooks add headnotes to ignite interest, alert the reader to peculiarities, special techniques or ingredients, presentation or preparation, or just to tell about the recipes’ history or origin.

The Ingredients List: The following universally accepted rules regarding listing of ingredients have to be taken into reckoning by the producers of culinary texts:

- All ingredients should be listed before the method.
- List each ingredient separately.
- List the ingredients in descending order according to order of preparation
- Spell out every term completely instead of using shortenings e.g. grams, tablespoons etc.

- Break up ingredient list into subheadings like “Filling”, “Topping” etc. to help simplify lengthy recipes.
- Be specific about ingredient amounts. It is advisable to give two different measurements e.g. 1 cup yolk (about 14).

The Recipe Method: Be complete, clear and concise. Use simple, standard preparation techniques that are easily understood by the readers:

- Write the directions in order of preparation.
- Make sure the divided and reserved ingredients are properly used.
- Do not repeat the part of preparation steps that have already been given in the ingredients list.
- If advance preparation is required at a later step, mention this early in the directions.
- Readers prefer numbered steps as it is easy to keep track of and makes it appear more simple and orderly.

The Yield: Every good and complete cookbook must include a yield for every recipe. It should be provided both in number and size of servings. It should be placed either at the beginning, under the recipe name, or at the end usually on its own line.

Notes: Use a note at the end of a recipe to provide additional information that doesn't appear elsewhere in the recipe. It includes information like tips on alternative ingredients, or equipments or techniques, tips on storage or reheating, varieties of serving suggestions for using leftovers etc. But, what is important is to limit the notes to one or two items.

Variations: If possible and desired then a variation should be included at the end of the recipe but, its constituents should not be substantially different otherwise, a new name might be given to it.

Nutrition Information: It can be included in the form of a simple sentence that gives the calories at the end of the recipe or as a detailed chart with specific mention of the different nutrients.

Grammar: Most modern and popular international cookbook authors instruct the writers to adopt short, straightforward, and declarative sentences. Tight writing applies to recipes just as it does to

other forms so unnecessary or redundant words should be dropped.

Punctuation: Capitalization is one of the thorniest issues in recipe writing. Before beginning, preferred style regarding the use of capitals should be checked. Another important element is punctuation mark. Commas are generally used to separate each element in a single sentence e.g. Bake for 45 minutes, or until a knife inserted near the centre comes out clean.

Pictures and photos: Colour graphics or pictures should be included for its visual effect, as we all know “a picture is worth a thousand words”.

Finally, before finalising a recipe, careful reading and proofreading is required. Further, it is suggested that the recipe should be read for one final time for logic, commonsense, some easy-to-miss typing error while running a checklist of the standard components and the ingredients of style.

4. Conclusions

Recipe writing is no different from good writing. As no universal formula can be prescribed for good writing; same is the case with recipe writing. The writings of experts can merely provide a set of mental checklists that can help in successful recipe writing. The prescriptions of the experts should be supplemented with the need assessment and analysis of the target audience. The identification of needs of culinary text readers will be an illuminating area for further research.

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