

Did Leads Really Disappear from News towards the End of War?

- Formation of the Lead in the Pioneer Days of Radio News and Its Transformation Process during World War II -

Hiroyuki INOUE

(Summary)

In the early days of radio broadcasting, how to write the lead, or the opening paragraph of a news story, was a major issue for broadcasters. Historical data show that Japan Broadcasting Corporation, which did not gather news by itself at that time, rewrote manuscripts provided by news agencies into radio news script that would be easier to follow when listened to. Since the headlines of the manuscripts provided by agencies were written in an abbreviated style as in newspapers, it was necessary to significantly rephrase the original text. In doing so, writers cited expressions from the body to cover the shortfall, which often resulted in repetition of phrases in the lead and the body. In the context of discourse structure, repetition does emphasize the message and facilitate listeners' understanding, but, at the same time, it can lead to redundancy. In order to verify whether these leads were actually used in radio news, the author conducted a quantitative survey on oldest existing news scripts, including some audio recordings, from three periods: 1937, 1941, and 1943. As a result, it is revealed all the scripts in 1937 had leads, but just a little over than a quarter of scripts in 1943 did so. The scripts with leads were mainly for news of importance such as announcements by the Headquarters of the Imperial Japanese Army, especially reports of Japanese Army's military gains. Radio news used leads for coverage on victorious military campaigns or the facts that would give hope for the course of the war, but they tended to omit leads in the scripts for stories that were deemed irrelevant and reports on the facts that the authorities did not want to accept to keep engaging in war. There is a statement found in post-war materials that major stories did not use leads during the final stage of war, which suggests that when the war situation deteriorated and there were few reports that the authorities wanted to inform the public of, broadcasters also had few stories to emphasize and became less able to sustain the news-telling style using the lead. Another possible reason for the decrease in scripts with leads is that broadcasters probably tried to avoid "gilding the lily" by adding leads because the first sentences of manuscripts provided by news agencies were, in effect, in a form of summaries of the stories.