With The Times: New Vistas in Vocabulary Development

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ABSTRACT

Newspapers form the most current teaching materials for English Language Teaching (ELT). Apart from teaching basic language skills, English language newspapers can also be used to develop the vocabulary of Indian learners of English as Second Language (ESL). Some ELT practitioners have provided tips on how newspapers can be used effectively to teach English in the Indian context. In this paper, I will attempt to assess whether this rich resource can be tapped to introduce the semantic aspects of neologisms in the Indian classroom. This paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will explore the potential for teaching different aspects of vocabulary through newspapers. In the second part, I have found some lexicographical aspects in newspapers. I have also suggested some classroom activities.

Keywords: Dictionaries, ELT materials, newspapers, neologisms, vocabulary development

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers, being economical and easily available, are a source of interest for the English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners. Being authentic texts, they can be used not only to teach skills such as reading and writing, but also to develop the vocabulary of Indian learners of English as Second Language (ESL). Taking into account the importance of Indian newspapers in English in vocabulary development of ESL learners, I will attempt to show through this paper how they can be used an effective tool to teach minor forms of word formation. I will also try to see whether this rich resource can be tapped to introduce semantic aspects of neologisms. At times, updated editions of the dictionaries reach the market late and from there to college libraries. When the acquaintance of neologisms to the ESL learners through dictionaries is delayed, newspapers may fill the gap and function like dictionaries. I will attempt to locate the lexicographical aspects of
some words in newspapers which are useful for vocabulary development.

**STUDIES ON THE TEACHING OF VOCABULARY**

Teaching vocabulary through tasks is not new to ESL teachers (Allen, 1983; Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1986). In the Indian context, several practicing teachers have reported their classroom experiences. Considering the current research and practices of teaching vocabulary, Anuthama (2010) explains three innovative classroom practices of teaching vocabulary—the ripple effect, using colour to teach vocabulary and the word wall approach. Sheikh (2011) also makes some suggestions to the teachers with regard to enhancing their students’ vocabulary. In the discussion on techniques of teaching vocabulary Bernabas (2011), emphasizes on contextual teaching of vocabulary items such as collocations and phrasal verbs, among others. Kohli (2012) shares some classroom experiences of dealing with the challenges encountered by learners, and provides strategies to develop the vocabulary of Indian learners. Working with the students of Post-Graduate Diploma in Business Management, Pillai (2013) shares the results of interactive teaching methods such as games to develop their vocabulary.

Some researchers have also shown how newspapers can be used as authentic materials to teach English in India. Making use of supplementary materials such as medicine labels, old railway timetables and newspapers, Kushwaha (2008) illustrates how tasks can be developed using these low cost materials to teach English to ESL learners. Jadhav (2011) develops support materials to teach English using cartoons, newspaper middles, crossword puzzles, anecdotes, proverbs, etc.

**VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH NEWSPAPERS**

English language newspapers can be very effective in teaching basic language skills as well as in developing the vocabulary of ESL learners. In an empirical study carried out by Lee and Morrison (1998) to verify the role of newspapers in developing autonomous language learning skills, newspaper articles were considered both as learning and practice materials. Sanderson (1999) has shown how almost every aspect of a newspaper—news headlines, editorials, cartoons, articles, matrimonials, classifieds, TV guides, weather forecasts and horoscopes—can function as ELT material. While exploring how newspapers can be used to develop English language skills at all levels of learning and taking into account the main ingredients of newspapers, Mehta (2010), and Patil & Choudhury (2012) suggest classroom activities to enrich the vocabulary of the ESL learners through the use of newspaper middles and cartoons.

Along the lines of these exploratory studies, in the present research I will consider
the potential of newspapers as a tool to teach minor forms of word-formation, especially neologisms. I will also analyze some lexicographical aspects in Indian newspapers in English which are useful for vocabulary development. The Indian daily *The Times of India (TOI)* is considered here as an example and almost all the references in this research paper are taken from the newspaper headlines, articles, cartoons and jokes of the *TOI, Sunday Times of India (STOI)*, and the supplements - *The Speaking Tree* and *Times Life*, Pune.

**NEOLOGISMS**

Neologism refers to a newly coined word or expression. Newspapers carry a number of neologisms such as “Attractology” (*Times Life*, 2017) and “Poplomacy” (*TOI*, 2018). In fact, every part of a newspaper plays an active role in creating neologisms. Cartoons, jokes, news headlines and news items provide ample teaching materials for every aspect of vocabulary, from affixation to minor forms of word formation including clippings, blends, borrowings, etc. This has been studied by several researchers in the mass media. Nam et al. (2016) studied 938 words in the Korean mass media over a span of ten years, from 2005-2015, for their inclusion in the dictionary. They concluded that only 27 per cent of neologisms are consistent in usage. With the view that neologisms are a means of updating the lexicon, Kadoch (2013), studied the frequency of occurrence of neologisms in two British dailies—*The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*, from the end of 2011 to the first two months of 2013. Kadoch analysed various ways of creating neologisms in present day English; both as major and minor forms of word formation. He noted that compounds are the most productive word form followed by blending.

Amul cartoons in the newspaper regularly come up with neologisms such as “Natwarious” *The Times of India*, 2014) and “neutralicious” *The Times of India*, 2015), which provide ESL learners with nutritious food for learning.

![Figure 1](TOI, 2015)  
![Figure 2](TOI, 2014)
The “Laughing Tree” column from the newspaper supplement *The Speaking Tree* helps teachers and learners of English to clear the confusion related to the spellings and meanings of words. Two examples are given here. “Be Generous” (*The Speaking Tree*, 2016) takes us through the words *excepted, accepted* and *expected*, while “Missing Appendix” (*The Speaking Tree*, 2016) demonstrates the usage of the two meanings of the word *appendix*.

![Figure 3](The Speaking Tree, 2016) ![Figure 4](The Speaking Tree, 2016)

“Laughing Tree” also helps the teacher to introduce the learners to blends, e.g. *seenager* (*The Speaking Tree*, 2017), meaning senior teenager.

**Minor Types of Word Formation**

Some examples of minor forms of word formation are given in the following table:

**Table 1  
Minor examples of word formation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blends</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chocolicious</td>
<td>(Oct 23, 2013, p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>save-cation</td>
<td>(Times Life, Dec 29, 2013, p. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grandacation</td>
<td>(Times Life, Jan 26, 2014, p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gyntimidated</td>
<td>(Times Life, Feb 9, 2014, p.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group-cation</td>
<td>(Times Life, Aug 7, 2016, p. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee-Bops</td>
<td>(Aug 7, 2016, p. 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘stantastic’</td>
<td>(Sept 13, 2016, n.p.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘brangelina’</td>
<td>(Sept 21, 2016, p. 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘sanTina’</td>
<td>(Oct 29, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trumponomics</td>
<td>(Jan 30, 2017, p. 13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glocal</td>
<td>(Times Life, Aug 16, 2017, p. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hanxiety</td>
<td>(Times Life, Jan 14, 2018, p. 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACRONYMS

Almost every page in a newspaper carries a number of acronyms. This is because space constraints compel the section editors to use short forms, abbreviations and acronyms. Acronyms such as AMMA, BRICS, GOBAR, KAUSHAL, MUDRA, NOTA, SAKSHAM, SEBI, USTAAD may be helpful to students who are preparing for competitive exams.

SAMPLE TASKS

All the lexical items discussed so far can be used to help the ESL learners develop their vocabulary. Some sample tasks that help the learners to do this are:

Scan the newspapers given to you and perform the following tasks.

1. Make a list of neologisms ending with -acation, -icious, -ship.
2. Identify the blended words in Brangelina, gymtimidated, haxiety and SanTina.

Apart from providing examples for understanding minor types of word formation, English language newspapers in India generally include news about preparation of new dictionaries by researchers/practicing teachers, surveys of online dictionaries, the publication of new dictionaries and their reviews. For example, in the Kolhapur Special supplement of The Times of India, Pune edition, a news item by Mulla (2007) mentions that around 150 compound words, from Dr. Ambedkar’s English writings have been included in the dictionary of English words under preparation. Some of these words are deep-seated, hero-worship, blood-king and counter-claims.

NEW WORDS IN THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Newspapers also provide information of new entrants in the Oxford English dictionary. Following are the headlines of the news items indicating new entrants in English dictionaries.

The news items also mention the inclusion of words such as ‘beatboxer’, ‘scissor-kick’, erap shoot’ and ‘bookaholic’.

2. “Indian kitchen goes global, keema, papad now English words” (TOI, 2015)


The news item not only mentions the inclusion of 240 plus words of Indian origin in the latest edition of the Oxford English dictionary, it also gives the meanings of some of these words. These words are: *Jugaad* (a colloquial term for a fix), *Kitty party* (a social gathering, mainly of women), *Videshi* (of foreign origin) and *mixie* (a food mixer). Along with digitally relevant words such as *bloggy* and *bloggabble*, we also find a lexical set of words derived from Tweeter—retweet, tweetable, tweetheart, tweeterverse and tweetup.


The news item mentions the origin of the acronym YOLO meaning “you only live once”, gives the usage of *Merica* and the meaning of *clicktivism*. *Merica* (a truncated form of America) is often used ironically to draw attention to stereotypical American ideals, institutions, or traditions. The word *clicktivism* describes the use of social media and other online methods to promote a cause.

5. “Aiyoh! It’s there in the dictionary!” (The Hindu, 2016)

**WORD OF THE YEAR**

Newspapers also update their readers with regard to the “word of the year”. The news items not only list these words, but also provides their meanings. Following are some instances. (The newspaper clippings are appended to this paper.)

a. Xenophobia: Online lexicon’s word of the year (TOI, 2016).

According to this news item regarding Dictionary.com’s word of the year, the site defines xenophobia as “fear or hatred of foreigners, people from different cultures, or strangers.”

b. “‘Post-truth’ is Oxford lexicon’s word of the Year” (TOI, 2016)

The feature lists ten words over the last ten years, from 2007 to 2016. It also gives the meanings of words such as adulting, Brexiteer, Latinx, coulrophobia, hygge, and woke. For instance, *Brexiteer* is a person in favour of the UK withdrawing from the European Union, and *Latinx* is a person of Latin American origin or descent, used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to *Latino* or *Latina*.

c. “Was 2016 a dream or a nightmare? It was SURREAL” (TOI, 2016)
The column not only gives the origin and meaning of the word “surreal”, which is described as “Merriam Webster’s word of the year”, but also mentions the meanings of words such as bigly, assumpsit, revenant and feckless, among others. For instance the word revenant reads: Leonardo DiCaprio played one in a movie. It describes one that returns after death or a long absence.

a. “Why ‘youthquake’ is word of the year” (TOI, 2017)

In the news, “Why ‘youthquake’ is word of the year”, Jennifer Schuessler (2017) mentions the words of the year chosen by Merriam-Webster and Cambridge Dictionary. She also provides the meaning of the Oxford Dictionary word of the year for 2017 “Youthquake” as: “a significant cultural, political or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people”.

b. “Aadhaar” is Oxford’s first Hindi word of the year 2017 (TOI, 2018).

The news item also mentions other shortlisted Hindi words of the year such as notebandi, swachh, vikas, Yoga and Bahubali.

**THE MEANINGS OF WORDS IN ARTICLES**

In the following examples, the articles give the words related to a term as well as their meanings. In the article “are you in a Textationship?”, Nona Walia (Times Life, 2016) gives a list of words such as benching, layby, ghosting, zombieing and cupcaking, along with their explanations. Some news items may give differences between words such as wooing and dating.

**Figure 5** (Times Life, 2016)

In the article, “Lunchbox”, by Amin Ali (Times Life, 2017), the change in the meaning of the English word “tiffin” has been highlighted in the box.

**Did You Know?**

Tiffin is a variation of the English slang tiffing, meaning “having a little drink”. The word got Indianized and become tiffin during the days of the Raj.
In another article by Nona Walia (*Times Life*, 2018) “The ‘Sisu’ within you”, the meaning of this Finnish word has been given separately in an ellipse.

‘Sisu’ actually means your strength lies in your gut, literally. When someone has ‘sisu’, it means he or she encompasses extreme perseverance and dignity in the face of adversity.

**LEXICAL SETS OF NEOLOGISMS**

Newspapers can also help ESL teachers and learners with lexical sets. In the examples considered here, the terms related to relationships, health and wellness, pop culture and travel are not only listed but also explained. Although such neologisms can also be found on online sources such as [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com) and Wiktionary, they are not grouped as lexical sets.

In the list of words describing relationships, there are terms such as sharenting, dadzillas, flirtationship, etc. (*Times Life*, 2013). Parents are referred to as sharents and dadzillas are domestic super-dads, who usually drop their kids to school, attend PTA meetings, change nappies, cook and do household chores with masculine obsessiveness as their wives go to work. Similarly, in the list of travel words (*Times Life*, 2013), we come across words such as save-cation, braincation, and babymoon, and their meanings.
VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CARTOONS

Teaching English language through cartoons is not a new idea. Cartoons, may be used to explain lexicographical features such as definitions of words, or words often confused with one another. Some examples include: definition of the grammatical term ‘proper noun’ (TOI, 2017), words or spellings often confused (TOI, 2017) and words with multiple meanings, e.g, “charge” (TOI, 2018).

![Figure 8 (TOI, 2017)](image1)

![Figure 9 (TOI, 2017)](image2)

POLL LINGO

The feature “P-ictionary” (TOI, 2014), gives a glossary of election-related A-Z terms such as incumbency, undercurrent, psephologist, NOTA, and X-clusionary.

![Figure 10 (TOI, 2014)](image3)

This poll lingo defines the political terms in a sarcastic manner. For example, the word zamanat has been explained as “the security deposit that thousands of generous, public-minded candidates leave behind with the EC (Election Commission) after they have had their few weeks of wholesome family entertainment.”

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SOCIAL MEDIA LINGO

In a news items by Medha Dutta (TOI, 2015), readers are acquainted with the meanings of words such as selfie, bestie, and duckface alongside Shakespeare’s contribution to English vocabulary.

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ETYMOLOGICAL INFORMATION OF WORDS

“The pie story” (TOI, 2017) not only provides the evolution in the meaning of the word pie over the centuries, but it also describes the usage of the phrase “a finger in every pie”. In another instance (TOI, 2017), readers are acquainted with the use of the words groupfie and selfie. It explains selfie as “short for self-portrait”.

NEW AGE ACRONYMS AND SLANGS

In the feature “BRB After checking Oxford Dictionary” (TOI, 2016), learners are acquainted with Oxford English Dictionary updates of acronyms such as deffo (definitely), BRB (be right back), AFK (Away from the keyboard), SYS (see you soon). In addition, the meanings of slangs such as “Stupid O’clock” (a time of the day that is extremely early or late) and “Listicles” (online newspaper or magazine articles presented in the form of a list) are also provided. Similarly, through “The Laughing Tree” column in The Speaking Tree supplement, learners are
acquainted with texting acronyms such as LOL, WTF, IDK, LY and TTYL (The Speaking Tree, 2018).

THE WORDS ‘LOST’ AND ‘FOUND’

While reporting on a project, a team of linguists at the University of York, UK, gives the meanings of eighteen lost words in the column “The ‘Lost’ Words” (The Times of India, 2017). Some of them are given here:

Peacockize = To pose or strut ostentatiously
Merry-go-sorry = A mixture of joy & sorrow
Ambodexter = One who takes bribes from both sides
Percher = A person who aspires to a higher rank or status
Downsabel = Applied generically to a sweetheart, “lady-love”

The feature “Are you one of these notable types?” (The Times of India, 2016) introduces the terms related to notebandi in India such as “queuepids”, “cashless virgins”, “the note-worthies”, “the white-washers”, “the remonetisers” and “change-makers”.

HOMOPHONES IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

In one of the features “To kiss is to piss in Sweden” (TOI, 2016), readers are acquainted with words that sound the same, but have different meanings in different countries.

Figure 14 (TOI, 2016)
WORDS AND IDIOMS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

A feature on words that describe emotions but are difficult to express in other languages, (The Times Special, 2017), gives the meanings of words such as Shinrin-yoku, Wabi-sabi, Natsukashii’ (Japanese), Yuan bei (Chinese), Saudade (Portuguese) and Sehnsucht (German). For instance, Shinrin-yoku (Japanese) means “the relaxation gained from bathing in the forest, figuratively or literally”. Similarly, in one of the articles, Joeanna Fernandes (TOI, 2017) gives the meanings of some untranslatable Indian idioms such as Lethi (Oriya), Pond Paaka and Naeka (Bangla) and Saand (Marathi and Hindi). According to the article, saand is “Literally a stud bullock, but refers to a layabout who is absolutely irresponsible and not fit to take familial responsibilities”.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The use contemporary lexical items make vocabulary development an enjoyable exercise for ESL learners. Some tasks that involve the use of newspapers to introduce lexical items to ESL learners include:

1. Read the news items given to you and complete the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indian Words Included in the Oxford English Dictionary</th>
<th>Oxford’s Hindi Word of the Year</th>
<th>Oxford Lexicon’s Word of the Year</th>
<th>Merriam-Webster’s Word of the Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scan the newspapers given to you and perform the following tasks.

2. Write the different meanings of the word charge as indicated in the following cartoon.

![Figure 15 (TOI, 2016)](image-url)
3. Explain the difference between the following words:
   a. Excepted and expected
   b. Wooing and dating
   c. Parents and sharents
   d. Selfie and groupfie
4. Trace the origin of the word *selfie* and explain its full form.
5. Make sentences using the following words: *Google, like, tweet, WhatsApp*, both as nouns and verbs.
6. Write the meanings of the following words:
   a. Ambodexter
   b. Bestie
   c. Bookaholic
   d. Brexiteer
   e. Percher
   f. Psephologist
   g. Seenager

**CONCLUSION**

There are various special purpose dictionaries such as *Dictionary of Spelling, Dictionary of Word Origins, Dictionary of Pronunciation* and *Dictionary of Abbreviation*, to name a few. However, barring pronunciation, also an important lexicographical aspect, a newspaper clarifies various other aspects of words such as spelling, meanings, etymology, words often confused, acronyms, usage of words, and even meanings of emojis (*TOI*, 2017). Moreover, all of these are illustrated pictorially in headlines, news items, features, jokes and cartoons. With the focus on the semantic aspect of vocabulary, newspapers can hence be used like dictionaries in the English classes. Nowadays, ESL teachers and learners often consult online dictionaries through their smart phones to look up a word. In the absence of print dictionaries (Advanced learner’s or pocket), and also when mobile phones are not allowed, newspapers can be handy for classroom purposes.

**REFERENCES**


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not begin with e-. iToons [Cartoon]. Pune: TOI, p. 15.


APPENDIX

a.

Figure 16 (TOI, 2016)  Figure 17 (TOI, 2016)

b.

Figure 18 TOI, 2017)

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