



## JOURNALISTIC LEXICON IN ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

**KALYAN K. SATHE**

Department of English

Shri Shivaji Mahavidyalaya, Barshi

(MS) INDIA

### ABSTRACT

*Newspapers have become an integral part of our life. Though there are many other means of communication, newspapers have carved a place for themselves. However, anyone who has studied English as a second language may find the language used in these papers difficult to understand. Headlines in these papers may confuse readers of L2 learners. Even trying to make out name of headlines is also quite a task. These are several reasons for the difficulties faced by readers. One of them, and it is prominent one, is the register used in the papers. The register, according to Shorter Oxford Dictionary (2002,p.2514) is a variety of a language or level of usage, specially one determined by degree of formality and choice of vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax etc., according to the social context or standing of the user'. English newspapers give information about events, and various issues related to society, environment education, economy etc. So vocabulary chosen is typical of the journalistic register. But at the same time to attract readers and pique their interest is also equally important. That's why various devices are employed to coax readers into reading newspapers. One strategy which stands out is their use of vocabulary. Even a glance at headlines is enough to realize that the words used are not usually found in other types of writing, unless one use them deliberately.*

### INTRODUCTION

Newspapers use typically shorter words not only to save space but to make headlines also snappy. a) The use of the words like: cop, bid, dip, blaze, cut, row are short words. They are also effective words with also shades to them. Someone who is not familiar with them and their shades may have some difficulty to understand headlines.

**KALYAN K. SATHE**

1P a g e



One of the striking features of the language used in the papers is the use of shorter words used in them. The words like cop, bid, dip, blaze, cut, fizz, rap, row, etc. are frequently used in them. These words are not only shorter but effective also. Someone who is not familiar with them may be confused to make sense of them.

Another feature of the register is the abundant use of abbreviation. Words are abbreviated in various ways and not in the way they are usually done.

For example, 'month' is abbreviated as 'mth', 'year' as 'yr', 'railway' as 'rlys', Lok Sabha as 'LS', 'FM' means 'Finance minister but sometimes 'FinMin' or 'Finmin'.

Especially, the use of initialism is common but the abbreviations NaMo (Narendra Modi), RaGa (Rahul Gandhi), MMS (Manmohan Singh) are innovative. First letters of a first name and a surname are in higher case and second letters of the same are in lower case. Someone who is not habituated to reading newspapers daily may face difficulty in figuring out this type of abbreviations. Acronyms such as RAW, AIDS, HC, SC, etc. are also used in newspapers abundantly. Clipping is one of the word-formation processes which is exploited a lot by reporters. Part of most of words is cut off, either at the beginning. e.g. (uni)versity, (sub)marine or the end of it. E.g. Maha(rashtra), champ(ion), admin(istration), etc. But more innovative way of forming words is based on the imitation of sounds. For example, 'prez' is for 'president', 'Oz' for 'Aus(tralia)', 'biz' for 'busi(ness)', etc.

Technological development, the spread of the net, cellphone have given rise to a spate of new words. Some of them have taken on new meaning such as 'tweet', 'handle', 'wall', 'mouse', etc. The prefix 'e-', 'un-' have been used to create new words related to computer, the net. For example, 'e-learning', 'e-shopping', 'e-garbage', 'e-commerce', 'unfriend', 'untext', etc.

#### **Loanwords:**

Many more words from other languages such as Marathi, Hindi are borrowed to make news stories spicy. The words such as 'bundh', 'churha', 'jumla', 'gaddar' are some of the loan words found in newspapers. Some of the words used in the papers are not very difficult to guess. If someone is in the habit of reading papers then they cannot rightly guess their meaning unless one is used to this register to decipher their full forms.

Another important feature of this register is the use of idioms. One comes across headlines having one or two idioms on a page. These idioms are sometimes tweaked a little to create dramatic effect and attract the attention of the readers. If the reader is not very familiar with



idioms and their meanings, they cannot work out the meanings of the idioms in Usually ESL readers are not taught what idioms mean, how they are lexically fixed. That's why, these readers find idioms not only difficult to guess but a bit offputting as well. According to The New Oxford Dictionary of English (2002, p.908), an idiom means, 'a group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of individual words'. So a fixed expression called an idiom behaves like a lexical item. Idioms are lexically fixed and not a word is added to or omitted from them. The meaning of idioms is different from the individual words and their meanings. They have figurative meaning and sometimes they even flout grammatical rules, which makes them all the more complicated for ESL readers.

Headlines with idioms are also different from everyday English in some ways. They seem ungrammatical, unacceptable and incomplete. That's why many readers have to struggle to make sense of headlines. Newspapers use them and sometimes tweak them, to rouse the interest of readers and they are tricked into reading a news story. If newspaper headlines had been bland and pedestrian then they would have failed to whet readers' curiosity.

ESL readers are not encouraged and initiated into reading newspapers and that's why they find headlines difficult to understand. They may be oblivious to this register, especially vocabulary used, a play on words, or pun, which may be a stumbling block in their way.

Some idioms have been used in the papers over and over again. One of the idioms always used is 'put on hold' (TOI, 9Nov 2016, p.19). This idiom is always used to tell about the postponement of a project, or a plan, etc. The word 'postpone', which is a formal word, usually not used in the papers, though its meaning is the same. Instead of it, the idiom 'put something on hold' is used. The word 'postpone' sounds stylistically a bit stiff. On the contrary, the idiom sounds dramatic and colourful. The verb 'put' collocates with the prepositional phrase 'on hold' which cannot be replaced by any other verb and a noun phrase similar in meaning.

Another idiom frequently used in English newspapers in India is 'under the lens' or 'under the scanner'. These idioms are used to give information about persons who are carefully watched. The idiom is based on the equipment scanner, before this idiom, 'under the lens' was more common in the papers. But both the idioms are fashioned on the idiom 'on the radar', and the meaning of this is extended to talk about certain suspicious activities of a person.

Another idioms used in The Times of India are: 'learn a lesson' (7Dec 2016, p.20), 'get rid of' (9Dec 2016, p.16), 'turn upside down' (9Dec 2016,p.7), 'all eyes on someone or something' (1Dec 2016, p.17)



In the Indian Express, following idioms are frequently used 'set eyes on' (7Dec 16,p.7), 'make a mark' (7Dec 16, p.15), 'shed light on (27 Oct 16, p.10), 'join hands' (4Nov 16, p.3)

Apart from the idioms given above, there are some idioms that often present a tough problem for the ESL readers. These idioms which are difficult to figure out can be called 'opaque'.

One such idiom is 'a red herring' (IE, 14Dec16, p.9). The adjective 'red' means a type of colour and 'herring' is a kind of small fish with silvery scales. But 'a red herring' is an idiom and hence the adjective 'red' cannot be replaced by some other colour adjective such as 'blue'. 'Herring' cannot be replaced by 'tuna'- a type of fish. The words 'a red herring' together make an idiom which means 'something that distracts attention from a real issue' (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: 2012 p.1042). There are other idioms that begin with the adjective 'red' such as 'red tape', 'see red', etc. The adjective in 'red tape' or a noun in 'see red' cannot be replaced by some other colour words. So the meaning of individual words does not come to help to figure out the meaning of these idioms.

Idioms are also twisted or tweaked in the newspapers which make the understanding of the idioms complicated. Sometimes the use of poetic devices e.g. pun in the idiom makes idiom very tricky and too recondite to decipher.

One headline in the TOI is the best example of pun on the word in the idiom. The headline goes like this: 'Tiger not out of woods'

Readers on reading the headline can understand literal meaning. They may think that the headline is about the tiger that may have been hiding in the woods and the forest officers are waiting for him to come out of the jungle.

There is a play on the word 'tiger'. Tiger is a name of a golf player and a tiger means a wild animal belonging to cat family which lives in a forest. This is a type of pun which is called 'homographic pun'. A pun or paronomasia is a play on words which exploits the vagaries of language.

Homographic pun uses two words which are spelled and sound the same, but have different meaning. As there is a pun on the word 'tiger' and the idiom used has the word 'woods' in it, the headline sounds not only dramatic but eye catching. The idiom 'out of woods' means 'not out of difficulty or danger.' So the figurative meaning of the headline is 'the golf player Tiger is not yet out of difficulty'. If a reader goes on reading the story then they may guess the meaning of the headline but still the idiom 'out of woods' is difficult to understand on its



own. The idiom is tweaked in the context of Tiger's difficulties. Unless this play on words is revealed along with the idiom used, there is no any way to understand the 'linguistic jugglery' in the headline.

Another headline about the face-off between the government and the SC bench over the vacant posts of judges. The idiom used, though tweaked a little, to describe this confrontation was 'on a clash course' (TOI, 19Nov 16, p.1). This tweaked idiom is based on the idiom 'on a collision course'.

More interesting example of a tweaked idiom was found in the Indian Express. One article in the paper was titled as 'Off the Black Mark' (28Nov 16, p.10).

Unless one knows the original idiom, one cannot know how the idiom is tweaked and why the word 'black' is inserted in it, which is not in the original idiom. The meaning of the idiom 'off the mark' is 'not exact or accurate in a guess, statement, etc.

'missed the target'- If the tweaked idiom is provided with a context then its meaning becomes apparent. The article is about the impact of the demonetization and its impact on black money. But the author is of the opinion that this move has not hit the target and it is wide off the mark. The adjective 'black' refers to black money which is not hit as it was intended. So the word 'black' is cleverly inserted in the idiom to suggest that the demonetization has not affected all the black money.

In the Indian Express, there was one headline in which the word 'win' was repeated three times. 'win-win' is an idiom and it means 'advantageous or satisfactory to all parties involved.' This headline was used to inform about India's win against New Zealand in the third test. First two had won by the Indian team. So when it won the third test, the headline was 'win-win-win' situation (IE, 12Oct 16, p.12) to convey Indian team's victory. The third 'win' is not in the original idiom but added to suggest the third victory by adding one more to the idiom 'win-win-.

## CONCLUSION

ESL learners will understand newspapers headlines if they are helped to break up headlines and showed their structure in the context. Encouraging them to look for interesting headlines is also one of the ways of making them understand idioms so that on their own, they would be able to make sense of them and even use them in spoken language.



Students come to know what 'journalese' is and how the journalistic writing is used creatively even doing away with grammatical rules. Sometimes these rules are bent so as to suit the journalistic register. This will definitely help ESL readers to know idioms and used them and differentiate everyday English from journalistic English.

To enable them to analyse phrases, or idioms, student should be given a lot of practice of working out the meaning of idioms or phrases. They should be given many sentences in which these idioms or phrases have been used. This will help them work out the meaning of idioms and phrases in addition to developing their competence to figure out a contextual meaning of them. With practice, students will arrive at correct meaning of idioms or phrases.

## REFERENCES

- Burrass, R. Writing at Work: A Guide to Better Writing in Administration, Business and Management. London: Routledge. 2002. Print.
- Fishman, J.A. Sociolinguistics: A Brief Introduction. Newbury House. 1971. Print
- Flesch, R.F The Art of Plain Talk London and New York: Collier-Macmillan 1962. Print.
- Fowler, H. w. A Dictionary of Modern English Usage. 2nd Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1968. Print.
- Heuristic. (n.d.). In Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. Retrieved 2005, from <http://www.mw.com/dictionary/> Web.
- Orwell, G. Politics and the English Language. Reprinted in Selected Essays. Harmondsworth:Penguin Books. 1957. Print
- Partridge,E. Usage and Abusage: A Guide to Good English. 8th edition. New York to Good English 8th British Book Centre. 1965. Print.
- Indian Express
- The Times of India