PRAGMATIC DRAWBACKS OF EMPLOYING ROOTS AS A VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT TOOL

Ninad R. Vitekar

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad

Dr. Pradnyashailee B. Sawai

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government College of Arts and Science, Aurangabad, Maharashtra

ABSTRACT

The first principle of *Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language* is that the linguistic *sign*, which is made of a *signifier* and a *signified*, is arbitrary. Despite the arbitrariness, we see a fair amount of uniformity and logic in the lexicography as most of the words are derived from their root forms. Employing vocabulary building techniques using root forms has been a predominant method in English Language Teaching in India. The idea behind this pedagogical approach is to minimize the efforts of a student in vocabulary development process and increasing her ability to derive meanings based on her knowledge of root forms. These roots contribute as seminal components to form *groups of words* and a semantic pattern can be seen in most of the words in these *groups*. Yet, it has been observed that words based on the root forms do not always follow a linear semantic path. Some words tend to deviate in meaning as opposed to the semantic pattern in rest of the words based on that particular root form.

  Most of the words in these groups can be semantically traced back to the 'source' (i.e. the root form), but there are some words whose traceability could seem a bit far-fetched. Many a time, no logical explanation can be given while connecting the morphology and the semantic pattern. Also, most of these words are subject to semantic variation according to the *context*.

  This research paper analyzed some of the Greek and Latin root forms in order to highlight the eccentricities for further discussion. Surprisingly, semantic eccentricities were found in almost each of the discussed root forms. The study was concluded with the proposal of undertaking a vast research of such root forms and to suggest an alternate vocabulary development tool.

KEY WORDS: *Semantic Connection, Pragmatic Eccentricity*

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Vocabulary development has acquired a wide scope in the fields like pedagogy, etymology, morphology, lexicography, semantics, semiotics etc. A lot of work is done in the area of Vocabulary development through roots. The focus of most of this work was on the native speakers and their vocabulary development. But there is a lot of scope in the study of pragmatic fluctuations of the words derived from a single root form. No special attempt has been made to develop an innovative pedagogical approach to tackle the confusion arising from these pragmatic fluctuations of words and their roots.

INTRODUCTION

When a teacher implements the 'root forms' technique as a vocabulary development tool, a student expects to be able to derive the meaning of a word if she happens to be familiar with the meaning of the root form of that particular word. This can be quite a gamble as the meanings of the words are not always likely to follow the same pattern. A student might derive a completely unintended meaning. This necessitates a meticulous study of the semantic pattern of roots. This paper aims at enlisting a number of words and their roots in a tabulated form. Words which follow the semantic pattern and show a strong semantic connection with the root are tagged as "strong". The ones which are moderately close to the root form are tagged as "moderate". And words which have no evident connection (inclusive of far-fetched connections) are tagged as "weak". Some common words which are subject to multiple meanings are further subcategorized in the table. It is to be noted that not "every" meaning is dealt with and meanings based on general, day-to-day usage have been discussed. The tabulated list of words is followed by a detailed commentary.

DISCUSSION

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection with explanations
A.	aster/astro (star, star-shaped)		
	Astronomy	the branch of science which deals with celestial objects, space, and the physical universe as a whole.	STRONG (Study of stars)
	Astrophysics	the branch of astronomy concerned with the physical nature of stars and other celestial bodies, and the application of the laws and theories of physics to the interpretation of astronomical observations.	STRONG (Physics of stars, celestial bodies)
	Asteroid	a small rocky body orbiting the sun. Large numbers of these, ranging enormously in size, are found between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter, though some have more eccentric orbits.	STRONG (Star-like, Resembling a star)
	Asterisk	a symbol (*) used in text as a pointer to an annotation or footnote.	STRONG (the sign resembles a small star)
	Astronaut	a person who is trained to travel in a spacecraft.	STRONG One who travels into stars (i.e. space)
	Monaster	a building or buildings occupied by a community of monks living under religious vows.	WEAK (Far-fetched connection)

	Disaster	a sudden accident or a natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life.	WEAK (Far-fetched connection)

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection with explanations
B.	**Vis** **(see, look at)**		
	Vision	the faculty or state of being able to see.	STRONG
	Invisible	unable to be seen.	STRONG
	Television	a system for converting visual images (with sound) into electrical signals, transmitting them by radio or other means, and displaying them electronically on a screen.	STRONG (Device on which pictures are seen from far away)
	Visitor	a person visiting someone or somewhere, especially socially or as a tourist.	STRONG (One who comes to see)
	Revise	reconsider and alter (something) in the light of further evidence.	STRONG (To see to again)
	Visage	a person's face, with reference to the form or proportions of the features, Countenance	MODERATE
	Advise	offer suggestions about the best course of action to someone.	WEAK (Far-fetched meaning)

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection with explanation
C.	**Ject** **(thrown)**		
	Projector	a device that is used to project rays of light, especially an apparatus with a system of lenses for projecting slides or film on to a screen.	STRONG (Which throws forth)
	Object	a) Noun. -a material thing that can be seen and touched. b) verb. -say something to express one's opposition to or disagreement with something.	a)WEAK b) Moderate
	Injection	an instance of injecting or	STRONG (Throwing inside)

		being injected.	
	Eject	force or throw (something) out in a violent or sudden way.	STRONG Throw out
	Dejected	sad and depressed; dispirited.	MODERATE (Thrown down by destiny)
	Conjecture	an opinion or conclusion formed on the basis of incomplete information.	WEAK
	Subject	a) Noun. - branch of knowledge studied or taught in a school, college, or university. b) Adjective. - likely or prone to be affected by (a particular condition or occurrence, typically an unwelcome or unpleasant one).	a) WEAK b) WEAK

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection and explanations
D.	**Fect** **(to make ,to do)**		
	Perfect	having all the required or desirable elements, qualities, or characteristics; as good as it is possible to be.	STRONG (Thoroughly made)
	Defect	a shortcoming, imperfection, or lack.	STRONG (Not made right)
	Effective	successful in producing a desired or intended result.	MODERATE (Able to get things done)
	Infect	affect (a person, organism, etc.) with a disease-causing organism.	STRONG (Make way into the body)
	Affect	have an effect on; make a difference to.	MODERATE Done towards
	Confection	an elaborate sweet dish or delicacy.	WEAK (far-fetched connection)
	Refectory	a large room in a monastery, college, school, etc. where meals are eaten.	WEAK (far-fetched connection)

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection and explanations
E.	**Ver** **(Truth)**		
	Verdict	a decision on an issue of fact in a civil or criminal case or an inquest.	STRONG ('true' saying, or 'truth' said by a jury)
	Verify	make sure or demonstrate that (something) is true, accurate, or justified.	STRONG (to make sure something is 'true')
	Veracity	Noun: a)conformity to facts; accuracy. b) habitual truthfulness.	STRONG
	Very	Adverb: used for emphasis	STRONG ('truly')
	Verisimilitude	the appearance of being true or real.	STRONG
	Veracious	speaking or representing the truth.	STRONG
	Veritas	Goddess of truth	STRONG

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection
F.	**Path** **(Feeling/Suffering /Disease)**		
	Sympathy	feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune.	STRONG
	Empathy	the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.	STRONG
	Pathos	a quality that evokes pity or sadness.	STRONG
	Pathology	the science of the causes and effects of diseases, especially the branch of medicine that deals with the laboratory examination of samples of body tissue for diagnostic or forensic purposes.	STRONG
	Pathogen	a bacterium, virus, or other microorganism that can cause disease.	STRONG
	Pathetic	arousing pity, especially through vulnerability or sadness.	STRONG
	Apathy	lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern.	STRONG
	Psychopath	a person suffering from chronic mental disorder with abnormal or violent social behaviour.	STRONG
	Sociopath	a person with a personality disorder manifesting itself in extreme antisocial attitudes and behaviour.	STRONG
	Antipathy	a deep-seated feeling of aversion.	STRONG

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection
	Hum (ground) **(Latin: Humus)**		
	Exhumation	the action of digging up something buried, especially a corpse.	STRONG
	Humble	having or showing a modest or low estimate of one's importance.	MODERATE
	Humiliate	make (someone) feel ashamed and foolish by injuring their dignity and pride.	MODERATE
	Posthumous	occurring, awarded, or appearing after the death of the originator.	WEAK
	Humility	the quality of having a modest or low view of one's importance.	MODERATE
	Humus	the organic component of soil, formed by the decomposition of leaves and other plant material by soil microorganisms.	STRONG
	Humic	relating to or consisting of humus.	STRONG

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection
G.	Verse (Turned)		
	Averse	having a strong dislike of or opposition to something.	STRONG
	Converse	engage in conversation.	MODERATE
	Irreversible	not able to be undone or altered.	STRONG
	Reverse	a) move backwards. b) make (something) the opposite of what it was.	a) STRONG b) STRONG
	Obverse	a) the side of a coin or medal bearing the head or principal design. b) the opposite or counterpart of a fact or truth.	a) WEAK b) MODERATE
	Universe	all existing matter and space considered as a whole; the cosmos. The universe is	MODERATE

	believed to be at least 10 billion light years in diameter and contains a vast number of galaxies; it has been expanding since its creation in the Big Bang about 13 billion years ago.	
Adversary	one's opponent in a contest, conflict, or dispute.	STRONG
Versus	against (especially in sporting and legal use).	STRONG
Anniversary	the date on which an event took place or an institution was founded in a previous year.	MODERATE
Conversation	a talk, especially an informal one, between two or more people, in which news and ideas are exchanged.	MODERATE
Verse	writing arranged with a metrical rhythm, typically having a rhyme.	WEAK
Diverse	showing a great deal of variety; very different.	STRONG
Version	a particular form of something differing in certain respects from an earlier form or other forms of the same type of thing.	WEAK

	Root and its words	Word meanings/definitions	Semantic Connection
H.	Cogn/gnos (knowledge)		
	Cognition	n. the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.	STRONG
	Recognize	v. identify (someone or something) from having encountered them before; know again.	MODERATE
	Cognizant	Adj. having knowledge or awareness.	STRONG
	Precognition	n. foreknowledge of an event, especially as a form of extrasensory perception.	STRONG
	Cognoscenti	n. people who are especially well informed about a particular subject.	STRONG
	Incognito	Adj. & adv. (of a person) having one's true identity	MODERATE

	concealed.	
Agnostic	n. a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God.	WEAK
Diagnosis	the identification of the nature of an illness or other problem by examination of the symptoms.	MODERATE
Prognosis	a) N. the likely course of a medical condition.	MODERATE
	b) N. a forecast of the likely outcome of a situation.	STRONG

As we can see, a majority of the words do follow the semantic pattern. Meanings can easily be traced back to their root forms. However, this traceability is not so linear in words like Disaster, Confection, Refectory, Conjecture, Subject, Visage, and Advise. An etymologist can still identify the link between the roots and these eccentric words. For example, Dis<u>aster</u> can be identified as an "event which happened because of a bad(dis) star (aster)". The learner has to have the background knowledge of Greek mythology to identify this etymological connection. This background knowledge is called a *schema* or a *frame* (George Yule, Pragmatics). A pedagogue cannot expect his student to have this *schema* as there are going to be cultural differences. Similarly, in the word Refectory, an etymologist can say that "a place which 'makes' one new again" is a Refectory, i.e. a dining hall. But this conclusion is derived after thorough research based on specialized knowledge. An English Language Learner cannot always invest his time in gaining this specialized knowledge.

Many a time, students undertake learning English, keeping in mind a motive, for which they seldom have a lot of time. So, this daunting task of developing a comprehensive vocabulary needs to be faster and more accurate. Developing the vocabulary through the study of root forms can be a faster approach but this does not always lead one to an accurate or close meaning. (Meanings are subject to contextual variation and hence there can be no "accurate" or a single meaning of a word. This research, however, will deal with the proximity of intended meaning according to the context.)

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FUTURE STUDY

A comprehensive vocabulary is a prerequisite to get a firm command on English language. As far as English Language Teaching in India is concerned, students look forward to learn English in order to climb the success ladder as high as possible. A number of government, semi-government recruitment examinations, job opportunities, academic achievements await the Indian youth. English has become a seminal part of such examinations and eligibility criteria. As the competition is getting fiercer, the level of difficulty is increasing day by day. One cannot expect to succeed in these areas without having a comprehensive vocabulary. As many of the aspirants run short on time, there is a need of a faster way to gather as many words as possible. Employing roots as a vocabulary development tool can sure be faster way yet if one thinks in the purview of a big picture, it proves to be deceptive. This method needs some serious amendments and a new improved technique should be developed.

Vocabulary development is a never ending task as there are a myriad words to be deciphered. Also, meaning is subject to change as per the time period, the context, and the individuals. Many words have been added into the lexicon and many are waning into oblivion day by day. Many words take up an entirely new semantic form as the context changes. This study is supposed to be limited only to the contemporary meanings of words which can be directly applied to present situations. This study may not aim at finding techniques to master each and every word out there (which is quite an impractical task).The focus of the study should be to regard the use of teaching root forms in order to increase the retention of learned words as much as possible and to facilitate techniques of deriving the meaning of unknown words. Also, the study of etymology may be regarded as a mere guideline to the study of root forms.

A more extensive study of the roots and the words with respect to these pragmatic eccentricities would give us a clearer idea and would be instrumental in the advancement of a better vocabulary development method. Also, a more varied distribution of the units

for semantic connections will be helpful in the formation of a more elucidated analysis.

REFERENCES

1. Yule, G. (1996). Pragmatics. Oxford university press
2. Dornyei, Z. (2007). Research Methods in Applied Linguistics. Oxford university press
3. Malshe, S., Inamdar, H., Soman. A, (1982). Bhashavidnyan: Varnanatmak aani aitihaasik. Padmagandha Prakashan
4. Joshi, P. (1998). Subodh Bhashashastra. Snehavardhan publishing house.
5. Malshe, M. (1995). Aadhunik Bhashavidnyan: Siddhant aani upayojan. Lokvangmay Gruha
6. Chaskar, A. (2009). Doing Research in Literature and Language. Vaibhav Publications
7. Grundy, P. (2008). Doing Pragmatics. Hodder Education
8. Matthiessen, C., Teruya, K., Lam, M. (2010). Key terms in systemic functional linguistics. Continuum international publication group
9. Frawley, W. (1992). Linguistic Semantics. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
10. Verma, S. (1996). Systemic Grammar: Form and Function. Booklinks Corporation
11. Halliday, M.A.K., Matthiessen, C. (2004). An introduction to functional grammar. Hodder Education
12. Kishore, B. Instant Vocabulary Builder. New Light Publishers
13. Lewis, N. (1979) Word Power Made Easy. Goyal Publishers & Distributers Pvt. Ltd.
14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Greek_and_Latin_roots_in_English
15. http://www.membean.com/
16. https://www.learnthat.org/
17. https://wordpandit.com/