



Teaching Hindi with Comics

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Abstract

The use of images has been a long established practice in Hindi language teaching. However, since 2015, I have also been experimenting with the use of online comics in teaching Hindi and have found that it has had beneficial learning outcomes. In an attempt to understand how comics may help in language teaching, I shall first explore how comic studies by scholars like Scott McCloud (1994) and narrative studies scholars such as Nick Lowe (2000) give new insights into the relationship between comics and narratives and ways to conceptualise language teaching. I shall then situate my own use of comics in teaching and discuss how the use of comics, images and narratives can help to convey non-verbal aspects of socio-cultural communication. I also include a discussion on current limitations on possibilities for studies measuring the impact on learning outcomes of the use of comics in teaching Hindi. I conclude by suggesting three reasons for using comics in language teaching. First, studies of the use of comics in other disciplines have shown favourable learning outcomes. Second, anecdotal observations from Hindi teaching have indicated their value to contextualise the socio-cultural aspects of Hindi language usage for students. Third, that comics can fit into a conceptual model for language teaching involving three elements, scaffolding materials, authentic materials and comic materials as a support to stimulate and motivate students in their language studies.

1 Literature review

There is a long history of the use of combinations of images and narratives in India. Victor Mair showed in his work “Painting and Performance” (1996) that Indian picture-story telling traditions have been an integral part of Indian traditions since ancient times and have been influential in the development of story-telling traditions through Asia. Other authors have also looked at how contemporary folk art is deployed in telling narratives such as Roma Chatterji’s *Speaking with Pictures* (2012). The history of the comics in India has been less well studied but there have been some studies and most have argued that modern Hindi comics developed at the same time as western comics. Since the 1980s, the style and substance of comics has also altered greatly and contemporary Hindi comics now resemble western, American style, comics. This can be clearly seen in series such as *Nāgrāj* which began to appear in 1986 and was in a typical art style of the period and depicted struggles between the Indian superhero and patriots against bandits and cross border incursions from neighbouring countries (Śārmā, 1986). However, by 2012, *Nāgrāj* had become one of a team of superheroes fighting global terrorism under the guise of Neo-Nazi movements in Germany (Miśrā, 2012). Aruna Rao (1999, 2001) proposed that it was in the 1970s that strip comics in India rose to their greatest prominence in the nineteen-eighties and Indian superhero comics reached their greatest popularity in the 1990s (1999). Petersen (2010) also situated this development in relation to the popularity in the post war period of western super hero cartoons and the development of Indian

comics based on the lives of gods, heroes and other characters in the series of comics called “Amar Citra Katha” as discussed in Karline McLain’s “India’s Immortal Comic Books” (2009).

The field of comic studies began to rise in prominence in the 1980s and there has been considerable interest in this discipline since Will Eisner’s pioneering “Comics and Sequential Art” (1985) which first articulated the notion that comics could be studied as a serious story telling medium. A notable development in this field took place in the mid nineteen nineties when Scott McCloud published “Understanding Comics” (1994). This work has become widely known for having provided a theoretical understanding of how sequential panels of images and text provide a unique medium for communication. Notable in this was his analysis of how the spectrum between realistic and stylized art functions to allow readers to identify with characters in ways which are not possible in either purely textual story telling or the telling of stories through photographs or film. In addition, he articulated a theory, which he called ‘closure’ which explains how readers provide links between the individual panels in cartoons by unconsciously resolving the gaps in meaning which link comic panels. In addition, he presented some of the first systematic analysis of how Japanese and Western comic story telling traditions have developed and their distinctive characteristics. Taken together, the insights in this work have become a basis for subsequent academic research into comics as a story telling medium.

Linked to this, there has been interest in the relationship between comics and the communication of culture. One approach to this has been taken by Neil Cohn who has published a number of works including “Visual Language of Comics” (2013) which examined the language of comic story telling from a multi-cultural approach which draws upon linguistics. He employed what he described as two ‘frames’ for understanding how comics work, one the Art Frame he argues is a European framework which sees comics within a universal framework and the other, the Language frame, envisages comics as inherently culturally diverse (Cohn, 2013). The implications of this dichotomy for language teaching is that comics within the Language frame offer a meaningful way to integrate the presentation of language and culture within a language learning context.

In addition, a number of the studies of how distinct cultural values can be depicted in comics have focused on the differences between representations of space and culture in Japanese Manga and in Western comics. Collection of essays such as “Japanese Visual Culture” (2015) edited by Mark W. MacWilliams have contributed to a range of valuable perspectives on how distinct cultural values can be depicted in comics and the ways in which audiences interpret cultural meaning in comics.

In addition, there have been a fair number of publications on the use of comics in ESL teaching, such as Stephen Cary’s “Going Graphic” (2004) which explored the application of comics to language teaching. In this study, after exploring the theoretical background, Cary looked at questions, activities and resources when using comics in class room teaching practice. Of particular interest here is the range of activities he identified through which comics could be used in language teaching. These included activities like ‘Make-A-Title’, ‘Add-A-Panel’ and ‘Missing Panels’ (Cary, 2004, pp. 72–88) and getting students to role play the characters in comics.

Alongside these mainstream publications, there have been a number of other publications such as Andrew Smith’s “Teaching with Comics” (2006), Jason Rankers study of comics in ESL “Using Comic Books as Read-Alouds” (2007–2008) and David Recine’s “Comics Aren’t Just For Fun Anymore” (2013). The growing popularity of comics use in language teaching can be seen from a 2017 article by Sadam Issa on “Comics in the English classroom” (2017) which advocates a range of ways in which teachers of ESL can incorporate comics into their teaching practice.

Recent work by some authors has also stressed that there are two linked benefits to teaching with comics. First, increased student motivation to study, as comics are perceived as accessible and fun, and second, increased retention of content when studying from comics (Aleixo, 2017a).

Narrative studies provide an insight into how narratives themselves function and I suggest can provide an insight into what role comics and narratives can play in language teaching. Nick Lowe suggests a cognitive model for narratives can be seen through an analogy that reading a narrative is taking place simultaneously on three internal mental screens. On the central screen is the text or

narrative itself as it sequentially read over time. But to the side of this, there is a second mental screen on which we create virtual notes on how the world presented in the story is being built up. Finally, on a third screen we build up a picture like a jigsaw of the finished story as a whole (Lowe, 2000). I suggest this could also be seen as an analogy for what is going on when studying a language course, the central focus is on the story presented in the teaching materials, while the other two screens correspond to the internal mental map that learners create of the rules and structures of the language, and the third screen corresponds to the authentic materials which make up the finished picture of the world as perceived through communication in the target language. Alongside this, Lowe also argues that narratives operate in a manner analogous to a game and that readers unconsciously expect a narrative to be like a game and have a context, rules, characters and events (Lowe, 2006). I suggest that studying a language course may also be perceived by students in the same manner and so to fully engage with them we need to consider how we set up what will be studied. The location is the world view presented in the target language, the rules are those that govern linguistic usage, the characters are how different native speakers use language in different socio-cultural roles and contexts, and the events are the texts and contexts students encounter in their studies which they have to learn in order to gain competence in the language.

2 Authenticity: Language in comics and teaching materials

The issue of authentic materials in teaching Hindi was considered by Susham Bedi in 1995 where she pointed out that due to the range of registers, or parallel styles, in Hindi no single text could be regarded as an authentic representation of Hindi as a whole as there are a range of authentic styles which learners need to learn (Bedi, 1995). Her conclusions were that including authentic materials in instruction was vital but that students needed scaffolding materials around them in order to understand the relationship between different parallel styles and their social-cultural contexts. She described an approach at second year level where 50% of what students studied was what she described as grammar-based and simulated materials and concluded that this was the best solution to incorporating authentic materials into Hindi teaching (Bedi, 1995).

Frieda Mishan argued that authentic materials provide access to the three 'C's, culture, currency and challenge (Mishan, 2005). This approach can be seen in the Hindi teaching context as complementary to Bedi's ideas about the incorporation of authentic materials into Hindi teaching in order to relate language usage to cultural contexts. However, maintaining the currency of authentic materials in Hindi course materials is a challenge and unless the authentic texts and the instructional materials are dealt with separately, there is a possibility for formerly current authentic texts to be left embedded in instructional and simulated materials. The issue of challenge, which Bedi described as difficulty in using authentic materials is also not inconsiderable in a heavily inflected language like Hindi with its complex usage of parallel styles.

The comic based materials described in this study are also used from the beginning of teaching along with a range of authentic materials, drawn from authentic Hindi print media, such as maps, adverts, street signs, film posters and other found materials like product packaging. However, these materials are not described in this study as they are constantly changing. What this study focuses on are the instructional and simulated materials that provide a static course resource base. This separation avoids the problems encountered when current media materials are incorporated into set materials which must then be constantly updated to avoid the anachronous use of no-longer current popular media and maintain the currency of the materials. It should therefore be understood, that the comics described in this study are not presented to students as authentic materials, but as part of the instructional materials, and in Bedi's terms, the simulated materials.

There are also issues in relation to authenticity in the use of comics themselves in Hindi teaching and the lived experience of the Hindi learners. Language is an integral aspect of comics and Scott McCloud has argued that the relationship between images and words forms a fundamental feature of what constitutes a comic (McCloud, 1994). However, the use of language in comics differs from what might be called 'authentic speech' in that it includes conventionalized representations of non-

vocalised sounds, in English such as ‘Bam’, ‘Whoosh’ and ‘Boom’, and so forth. In Hindi, such abstractions of sounds form a distinct repertoire with sounds like *dhīsum* (दिशुम) ‘bham’ and *khanāk* (खनाक) ‘crack’ (Dey & Bokil, 2015). Comics also involve conventions such as thoughts and speech bubbles which are authentic to comics, but not part of everyday lived speech. The comics designed for the course use such conventions and are in that sense authentic to discourse and communication in Hindi comics.

Many studies of Manga and Anime have also noted that certain visual conventions are culturally bound, and in Japanese comics, symbols such as a character having a sudden nose bleed has a significance which is not found in Western comics. There have been no significant studies of such conventions in Indian comics and it appears that they did not develop a distinct visual repertoire of symbols in this manner. However, Indian comics use Indian cultural symbols which would be understandable to Indian audiences, such as a woman wearing a white sari representing a widow or greetings gestures representing an individual’s membership of a particular religious community. In this sense, then the comic materials presented here also seek to be authentic representations of the ways in which comics represent India traditions and how to recognise the significance of different Indian cultural practices and symbols.

The use of comics in LOTE (Languages Other Than English) teaching has also been a somewhat limited area as far as I can determine. The closest instructional parallels I can identify are from the teaching of Japanese. An example of teaching drawing from pure authentic texts is Mangajin’s “Basic Japanese through Comics” which uses a range of cartoons from Japanese media to illustrate various Japanese usages (Mangajin, 2008). However, this is not a structured teaching text but examples of usages for those who already know basic Japanese. Perhaps the closest parallel to the use of comics in this Hindi course and in another language teaching course is with “Genki: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese” (Eri Bano et. al., 2008). This uses a consistent set of characters in its dialogues which are accompanied by manga style illustrations of the dialogues and exercises.

3 The context of this work

The context for this article is that I have been involved in the teaching of Hindi as a foreign language since the early 1980s, and since 2012, I began to be interested in the possibilities of using comics in the creation of original teaching materials for Hindi. The Hindi teaching materials I developed initially were from text based audio-visual materials, and it has only been more recently that I have started to include illustrations and comics in my materials and teaching.

The key factor in this was that as a part of developing online materials in 2014–2015, I started to consider what I first thought of as storyboarding the Hindi dialogues in the first year Hindi materials. This then developed into an interest in actually creating comic dialogues for the materials.

In 2013, I re-imagined the set of first year materials I had been teaching and changed the back story from a group of non-Indian friends arriving in India to a story about a group of non-Indian and Indian friends meeting in restaurants, cafes and each other’s homes in a western country. The logic for this was in part that this reflected better the lived experience of most Hindi students in Western countries and, in part, it fitted with an idea that relating the materials to a real life context that related to the students might make the materials more accessible. The story then moves to India for the second year level materials when it was thought more likely that students might be able to also make visits to India as part of their studies.

I also redesigned the materials by making the sections in them much shorter. Language teaching textbooks when I began teaching, in the 1990s, normally followed the ‘Teach Yourself’ model and had around 18 or so chapters, each of which had around two long dialogues and around half a dozen or more notes on language forms and exercises. Typical of these was “Teach Yourself Hindi” by Snell and Weightman (1989) which was the published form of the first year Hindi course at SOAS in the 1980s when I was an undergraduate there. At that time, there were around a dozen hours of Hindi instruction each week and the chapters corresponded to what would be done over one or two weeks of study of both in class work and assessed homework activities. In comparison, by 2010, the

number of weekly hours at an Australian university was down to no more than five hours. Under these circumstances, for students to be able to deal with a whole chapter as a conceptual unit appeared to be unrealistic, I therefore abandoned the idea of long dialogues introducing several language points at once and tried to shift to short dialogues of half a dozen lines focused on only one construction at a time. The dialogues were all written in collaboration with native speakers and as part of the process of recording them the speakers were able to have input into what sounded to them authentic speech forms. The audio recordings were then divided into sound files and using HTML connected to the displays of them in pages on the Internet.

This means as well the comics which illustrate the dialogues have turned out to be around a page or so, around six to ten panels and it has been possible to storyboard the story in a way that makes it as accessible as possible. When writing this paper, I have had three major questions in mind: why use comics, what are the benefits and what are the limitations?

4 Why use comics?

In a sense the answer to why use comics is obvious, it makes them accessible in the same way as most people see comics as more accessible than text alone. However, there are a number of conceptual theories about how comics function which may indicate that they are particularly suitable for language teaching.

The first key factor is the ease with which readers identify with characters in comics. Scott McCloud (1994) has argued that comics have a range of advantages over just texts in telling stories; in particular, the very fact that the characters are cartoons means that it is possible for readers to make a connection with them in a way which is not possible if we use realistic photos. McCloud illustrated this by showing that if he drew a realistic portrait of himself, it gave you a very specific reference for who was talking to you, but if he drew a generic geeky professor, it meant that many more people could associate the character with a professor they knew (McCloud, 1994). This was, he argued, actually a key aspect of how people read comics. While the settings can be quite realistic, the actual characters are normally drawn in a stylized way, as it allows people to identify with the characters. Using comics thus allowed me to create versions of the characters in the story which people could imagine themselves and their friends into. This process sets comics apart from video materials or photographs. Comics give agency to readers, they have to actively imagine themselves into the characters and imagine how the drawings relate to reality so they can follow the story.

The second key factor is that comics make it possible to illustrate the contextual usage of language. As I was making the comic panels, I began to see how it was possible to make drawings which illustrated demonstrative constructions like 'this is' and 'that is' and to show how language related to practice in a way which was more direct than describing it in words. The benefits were more extensive as well as readers of comics recognise conventions like thought bubbles and gestures, so it was possible to illustrate aspects of what characters were thinking as well as what they are saying.

The third key factor was that comics allow for the presentation of texts as 'chunks' rather than sentences. This is done through the line breaks in speech bubbles which make text readable and pronounceable, and is an aid in comprehension. This is a superior way to represent how speech is uttered in 'chunks' rather than the use of conventional punctuation in sentences which is often not noticed by readers when quickly reading a block of text.

The fourth key factor is that comics convey in a unique manner information about socio-cultural contexts for communication. When teaching Hindi, learners need to understand how characters who are from different communities, genders and ages communicate. There are numerous aspects of Hindi grammar and levels of address and speech register which reflect who is speaking to whom and in what context. In texts, it is possible to explain such contextual usage in words, such as, 'this is how an older man would speak to a younger woman', but in comics, the contextual use of language is far more vividly depicted by showing in a speech bubble how an older man addresses a younger woman.

The fifth key element is ‘closure’, the process by which comic readers unconsciously connect the images, events and texts in different panels in a comic to create a sequential story. I argue that this process is analogous to the idea of ‘information gap’ which is found in language teaching. Just as the demands of the comic narrative demand that readers should be able to create a meaningful narrative from the panels, so too language teaching comics need to create a sense that to understand the narrative depicted in the comic panels, readers must also understand the text in the speech bubbles. In other words, the ambiguity about how the comic panels visually relate to each other should make readers want to find out how the speech bubble texts explain the visual relationships.

I suggest that these five elements in the use of comics in language teaching can make a valuable contribution to language teaching. Comics facilitate student identification with language learning materials, understandings of contextual meanings, the ways in which speech is spoken in ‘chunks’, the socio-cultural aspects of communication and, most of all, make students want to engage with how language relates to what they can see going on in images.

5 The use of comics in interactive online learning environments

Since 2015, I have also been exploring whether comics can make a contribution to teaching Hindi as parts of new ways in which students can interact with teaching materials in asynchronous and synchronous learning environments.

My hypothesis was that student learning could be enhanced by giving them access to versions of the comics they could interact with by clicking on comic panels and listening to the Hindi being spoken, or by reading the Hindi text in the speech bubbles. They were also given access to interactive materials where by selecting texts or buttons or inputting texts they could solve problems such as which texts or sounds relate to which images and how sequences of words correspond to meaningful forms of speech. Through multi-media online materials, it was possible to present combinations of sound, text and image which were likely to be of benefit to students. In addition, I wondered whether the tactile aspect, clicking, selecting or touching on screen elements in order to hear sounds, or make other events take place, might also enhance learning.

In order to be able to make anecdotal observations of how students used the materials and whether this delivered any benefits, I set aside class time in 2015 and 2016 as a form of ‘language lab’ in which I was able to observe how students used the online materials in real time. This turned out to be beneficial to the students, as they were able to point out things they thought might improve the experience, and to myself as I was able to observe how my ideas about how the students would use the materials varied from how students actually used the online materials.

My first observation was that students focused on how the activity worked, not its content. In general, they interacted with online activities as if each was a puzzle which could be solved by understanding how its interface worked rather than something to help to learn a language from. I also observed the more complicated the interface, the less attention they paid to the language forms in the activity in their desire to solve the puzzle. The parallel I suggest is that of something all students are very familiar with: levels in a computer game.

In response, I then explored what would student responses be to a simple consistent interface which contained a random element related to language usage, so that the puzzle was solved by understanding the language forms rather than understanding the interface.

Some online language learning tools, such as DuoLingo, also rely on the idea of using only a small number of simple interfaces for a limited number of variant activity formats. I then tried to develop a series of similar forms of activities which had simple interfaces like DuoLingo. However, I then observed that while some students found these useful, others got bored with them very quickly.

My conclusion was that this was a basic issue with asynchronous interactive online learning materials, unless they are like a computer game in which players can get engaged in a convincing narrative, they rapidly become boring. That is to say an interactive learning activity will only be

genuinely absorbing when it can form part of a kind of game Lowe has suggested lies at the heart of a narrative.

The second issue I observed was the need for activities to be complete in themselves. Watching student interaction with the activities and answering student questions about how they worked focused my attention on the need to integrate the activities with the language topics. Unless both were presented as one ‘page’, a single computer screen, students would get lost in looking for where to find out what to do rather than doing the activities. Considering this problem in terms of narrative, it also clear that if, in order to understand a passage in a story, we had to constantly refer back to a kind of crib guide to who does what in the story, this would not satisfy most readers. My conclusion was that this was a second basic issue with online activities, they needed to be satisfying and complete in themselves and yet still form part of a developing story.

My third observation was that the lack of an ability to physically write in Hindi script in online activities was a critical problem with them. Text input through typing is also initially very problematic in Hindi, as it conflates two problems, learning Hindi script and learning how to type in Hindi. It would therefore be preferable to have students use handwritten Hindi. However, whilst in theory pen input is now widely supported in practice, its implementation is still (in 2018) very ad hoc. Also text recognition for some languages, such as English, Japanese and Chinese, is also much better supported than it is in Hindi. So currently, expecting asynchronous activities to accept handwritten Hindi input is still a problem, but when this does become reliably available, it will greatly enhance the utility of online asynchronous activities. In the second year of experimental observations, I tried using the online materials as a support to print and handwritten activities. My anecdotal observation would be that this was a better use of the online materials than having all the interaction online.

My conclusion from this was that students need to have a sense of agency in the creative aspect of writing their own texts and that students rapidly lose interest in passive online learning where they can essentially only select options.

Finally, my fourth observation was that the lack of speech recognition was a shortcoming in automated online activities. Currently, the best speech recognition support widely available for Hindi is found in Google Docs. However, there are major problems in how this works for language teaching; it only works on sentences and automatically corrects errors in any input which it can recognise, and simply rejects any other input. Due to this, I am still trying to assess how text generated by this means can effectively be integrated into Hindi teaching. My current conclusions based on my observations of students’ use of asynchronous online activities is that this is a promising area to investigate but there is still much work that needs to be done to see what really works in this space for Hindi learners.

6 Examples of using comics in teaching Hindi

In the following sections, I present a series of examples of how comics can be used in teaching Hindi. Through this, I will explore the rationale for the use of comics, ways they may be used in class, and possibilities for their use in asynchronous online study activities.

6.1 Illustrations in vocabulary development

The use of comic style illustrations in teaching vocabulary, and Hindi vocabulary, has a long history. An outstanding example of this is the “English-Hindi Oxford Picture Dictionary” by E.C. Parnwell. This was part of a series of Oxford University Press India picture dictionaries. The illustrations were by the prolific Tamil illustrator Jayaraj Feranando and depicted his stylized images of India of the 1970s (Parnwell, 1977). Despite being somewhat dated, they continue to attract and amuse students and present a picture of a distinctively Indian world. It is also notable that most contemporary Indian Picture dictionaries, such as the Dorling Kindersley Hindi-English “Bilingual Visual Dictionary” use generic photographs of very specifically Western imagery and do not evoke in users any sense that what they are seeing is a distinctly Indian environment (Sinha, 2008).

The rationale for using images in teaching vocabulary is that it makes it easier to associate objects and the words for them. Cartoons as the images for concrete nouns due to the stylized nature of the images allows them to stand for general concepts, such as man and woman, but be sufficiently recognisable to be appropriate for an Indian context without being so precisely rendered as to raise issues of exactly what sort of a person is being represented. It is also possible to represent typical Indian household items such as certain types of cooking pots and plates which will also need to be contextualised for Hindi learners, if they are not familiar with such everyday Indian things.



Fig. 1. Images for man, woman, vehicle, *kaṛhāī*, and *thālī*.

It is also possible through comic images to illustrate more abstract vocabulary concepts and in some cases to avoid issues like what the precise boundaries of India are while still being able to use a map to symbolise India.



Fig. 2. Images for: hour, yes, no, India and nations.

In asynchronous preparatory activities, students can study materials online in which they can see the images, click on them to hear the sounds of the words and see their written forms. Students' responses to this are normally positive, as it means that they can get a better sense of the relationship between words and their meaning than just from words and their translations. This avoids possible pitfalls in setting up vocabulary with a one to one translation such as sage=rishi, which may lead to some students conflating the herb sage with an ascetic seer, but will not happen when there is an image of a sage. However, using images also brings to the fore issues such as the difficulty of distinguishing concepts such as house and home and in such cases further explanations of Hindi understandings of the differences between such terms are needed.

In classes, the same cartoons can then be used in different ways. They can be shown to the class on a data projector screen and then whole class activities can be practiced, such as pronouncing the words as they see the objects. Alternately, forms of guessing game can be played, such as students trying to write down the words for the images they see and then checking with their neighbours whether they have written the right word down, or completing a print out of the images which need labelling. Cartoons can also be printed out on cards and then games can be played with them, such as students receiving a random card and then having to ask others in group work what word relates to the images on the cards. In addition, if there are stacks of cards with the Hindi words as well cards with the images on, students can play forms of game like snap where they have to identify which word goes with which image.

It is also possible to set up online forms of activities involving identifying words and images. These can include guessing games, matching games and labelling activities. One such activity can be played with online flashcards as in this example.

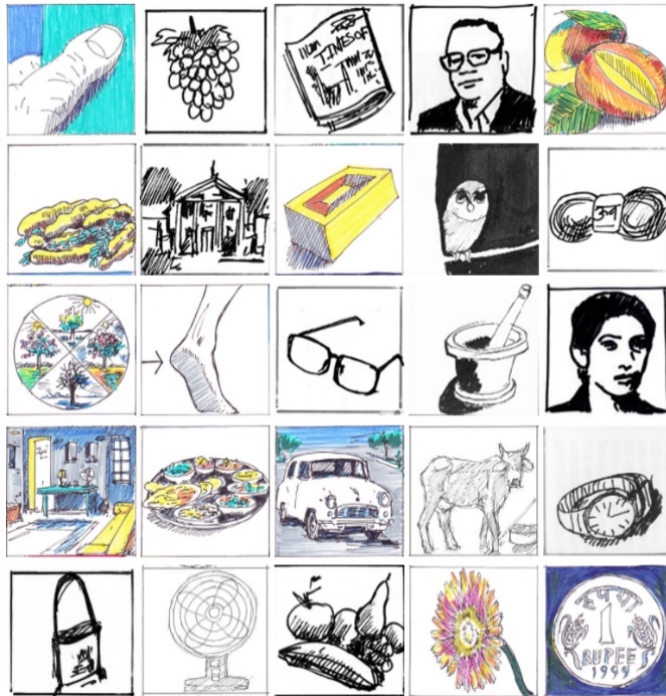


Fig. 3. Quiz 1: Vocabulary items - click on the words to listen and see the meaning
(see: <http://www.bodhgayanews.net/quizwords01.html>)

In addition, it is possible to set up mock quizzes from which students will be able to self-test if they are progressing in their learning of vocabulary which is being taught in the course.

6.2 Demonstrating address levels and gender agreements

One issue which is important in teaching Hindi is to get students to understand how Hindi has three address levels for intimate, informal and polite contexts, and how this influences the choices of pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to show the address level being used. One way of doing this is to use textual expositions, but the use of cartoons makes it possible to literally illustrate how people of different genders, ages and status address each other. This is clearly an area in which the use of comics enhances the accessibility of the teaching materials. In the following image, you can see that people of different ages are interacting and the Hindi they speak is being influenced by this.



Fig. 4. Dialogue 20 – showing address levels in pronouns verbs and adverbs
(see: <http://www.bodhgayanews.net/topic020.html>)

There are three ways in which comics can be used in teaching issues related to this. First, in preparatory work, as students can access the materials in the online textbook, they can observe and listen to the dialogues and see how address levels reflect contexts. Second, during in class activities the cartoons can be projected as a basis for whole class activities, they can also be printed out and used in small group and pair practice activities. In addition, versions of the comics without the text in the text bubbles can be used in class activities. One of the first things I noticed when I introduced comics in 2015 was that, if given a comic with empty speech bubbles in it, students would want to fill in the speech bubbles with what should be in them. So, this created a new class activity, copying dialogue and creating new dialogues to go with the comics. In addition, in 2016, I began to start classes with giving handouts of comics with the Hindi text in at the beginning of classes and found students are much more ready to do initial pair work speaking and translating the dialogues, if they are given it in this form than if they are given the dialogues as text alone. Students then also suggested themselves that what they would like to do was to write their own dialogues into the speech bubbles and create alternative dialogues from those which are supplied.

For asynchronous practice activities, I also designed a form of activity where students were presented with the comic panels but the lines of dialogue had been randomly shuffled and then they had to unshuffled the dialogue, which was a good practice to see if they were able to understand the correct syntax for what was being said the cartoon speech bubbles.



वह कीजिए आपका जी. बटुआ है?

माफ़

<< Select text to match image, select answer to check Reset >>

Fig. 5. Unscramble dialogue activity
(see: http://www.bodhgayanews.net/mobile_dialogs.html)

6.3 Demonstrating singular and plural direct and oblique forms

Another issue when teaching Hindi is to get students to engage with the way that all nouns in Hindi are either masculine or feminine. In addition, most possessive pronouns and adjectives in Hindi are inflected to agree with the gender, number and case of nouns. In class, this complicated aspect of Hindi is often taught by using objects and saying out loud how to say their singular and plural forms and demonstrating how to inflect their singular and plural forms dependent on case. Examples often include showing and saying things like ‘the books are in the bag’ and the ‘the boxes are in the box’, and so forth. The use of comics allows students to see visual representations of such situations where these kind of inflections of words have to be used in an intuitive and authentic context.



Fig. 6. Dialogue 28 showing singular and plural noun forms
(see: <http://www.bodhgayanews.net/topic028.html>)

6.4 Demonstrating conjunctions

Another good example of how comic imagery can be helpful in teaching Hindi is that comic conventions, such as thought bubbles, can be used when teaching some parts of speech. Thus, when teaching 'X or Y' characters can be illustrated thinking of choices, and likewise 'neither X nor Y' can be illustrated as well as 'also X' and 'only X'. This last set of examples is also a good illustration of how, unlike video or photographs, cartoons actually offer a very useful way to express some ideas which is not natural when using other media.

I noted in class that this was a striking example of how students immediately 'read' the comic conventions of communication and even without reading the text got the sense of what the comic panel was meant to indicate through the use of images and thought bubbles.



Fig. 7. Dialogue 27 showing a range of conjunctions and particle usage (see: <http://www.bodhgayanews.net/topic027.html>)

6.5 Understanding Hindi verb conjugations

Students of Hindi need to learn the ways in which verb conjugations show agreements with number, gender and tense. Teaching this often starts by presenting examples as used in authentic speech and then providing scaffolding, including paradigms for verb conjugation. In addition, I have now experimented with using interactive comic imagery to present a virtual model of the verb conjugation. The interactive element in this model was that only by selecting valid combinations of pronouns, verb stems, verb endings and auxiliary verbs is it possible to create complete example sentences.

This was also an example of where trying to visualise how verb conjugation worked in Hindi led to a way to present it which is helpful to students learning this aspect of Hindi which initially sounds complex to Hindi learners. In practice in class, it was also a useful resource and allowed for a teaching session which followed this sequence:

- Starting with listening to authentic spoken examples in the class room context;
- Presenting the related dialogue (See: <http://www.bodhgayanews.net/topic037.html>);
- Getting students to say related simple sentences to each other;
- Presenting the conjugation page to the students and showing how correct sentences appear when selected;
- Getting students to do individual reinforcement activities where they copy out correct sentences and augment them from statements like 'I see' to 'I see you';
- Ending by getting student to share some of the sentences they have made with the class.

I would suggest this shows another way in which cartoons can be integrated into Hindi teaching.

Hindi Express << >>

How to say in Hindi: 'I go, I used to go, I am going, I used to go' etc.

हिन्दी में कैसे कहते हैं मैं जाता हूँ, मैं जाता था, मैं जा रहा हूँ, मैं जा रहा था वगैरह

Click on one word from each column, meaningful combinations appear below.





			
मैं	देखती	हूँ	
मैं	जा -	ता	हूँ है हैं हो
तू	देख -	ते	था थे थी
यह वह	सुन -	ती	थीं
हम	बोल -	रहा	
आप तुम		रहे	
ये वे		रही	

Fig. 8. Verb conjugation activity for past and present imperfect and continuous tenses (see: <http://www.bodhgayanews.net/conjugation.html>)

7 What are the benefits of using comics?

As indicated above, there are a number of possible indicators for the benefits of using comics in teaching. These include:

- Making ideas more accessible. An indication of the validity of such an approach is the commercial viability of publishing works such as “The Manga Guide to the Universe” (Kenji et. al, 2011) which is part of a series of ‘Manga Guide to...’ series of books published in Japan.
- Greater possibility of recall of information by students when presented with information as a comic as reported in a study by Paul A. Aleixo and Krystina Sumner (2017).
- Creating memorable images which help in the memorisation of typical Indian artefacts and abstract concepts as illustrated in section five above. Anecdotally, I have also noticed that the first image and sound presented in a sequential online resource is typically memorised quicker than subsequent images and sounds, so a word like ‘newspaper’ is learned quickly as it comes at the start of a vocabulary learning list.
- Providing a method for the demonstrations of the contextual nature of language usage in Hindi by indicating the speakers and contexts in which communication is taking place. This can then be used to complement the use of roleplaying in skits and plays.

Taken together, I would argue these are all indications of the possible benefits in using comics as part of the repertoire of resources used in the teaching of Hindi.

8 What are the limitations?

There are number of important questions I would like to be able to examine.

- Does the benefit of using comics justify the work involved in creating them?
- Does the use of comics deliver better learning outcomes?
- Does the use of comics lead to better student retention?
- Does the use of comics attract new students?

Unfortunately, for any quantitative studies of Hindi learners, we would need a larger student cohort that is currently studying Hindi in Australian universities at the moment to make such studies meaningful. It is impossible to eliminate the variables in the current small class sizes, typically around twenty or so people in class, and variations in outcomes may be as much due to background and motivation as in any way related to teaching materials or teaching practices. Due to this, I have not yet had the opportunity to do quantitative studies of the impact of introducing Hindi comics.

Initially, when I began to develop online materials and comics, the aim was to test materials before creating ePub versions to be used within the universities' dedicated learning environment. As a side effect of using an online platform, I have also been able to access the web logs for usage of the site since June 2015. A quantitative analysis of such online usage would also be difficult as, without data on the background of learners, there would be no reliable way to measure the outcomes of the usage of the materials on the website.

The best approach to overcoming this limitation in research on Hindi teaching would be to broaden the research base to include Hindi learners in a research network over multiple institutions.

9 Conclusion

My conclusions about the use of comics in teaching Hindi are that it is an interesting and important area which merits further consideration.

First, that studies of the literature on theoretical approaches to the study of comics, narrative studies, and EFL pedagogy are all indicative of the possibility that comics and narratives can play an effective part of teaching Hindi as a foreign language.

Second, that quantitative studies on the use of comics in teaching social science subjects have indicated that their use leads to greater comprehension and retention of what is being taught (Alexio, 2017; Alexio & Sumner, 2017; Saddam, 2017).

Third, observations that simulated dialogues presented as a comic narrative allow learners to understand the relationship between speakers, speech forms and contexts in a way that is more accessible than dialogues in only text and audio formats.

Fourth, that it is a valid hypothesis that students are better able to identify with comics than they are with photographic or cinematic materials as comics facilitate them visualising themselves and their associates as the characters in the comics.

My conclusion then, after having started to employ these materials since 2015, is that they represent a useful development in Hindi teaching. I believe that what is now needed is to explore two avenues for further development. First, the possibilities for creating a broader base for research networks into Hindi teaching to allow for quantitative examination of the effectiveness of different teaching materials. Second, to explore expanding the use of comics at first year levels and the possibilities for using authentic Hindi comic materials at higher levels. The implication of this, I suggest, is that there is a possibility that if more comics and story-telling can be introduced into teaching materials and classroom practice, it may lead to improved teaching and learning outcomes.

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