

English Language Teaching in India- An Overview

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The East India Company established in 1600 A.D for business and imperialistic purposes reduced several small kingdoms in India to a single entity under British control. For effective and persevering administration, participation from the Indians was necessary. The language of the ruler became the ruler of languages. By 1717 Danish missionaries had opened two charity schools in Madras. In 1818, the Bishop of Calcutta founded a college to produce young preachers and to impart knowledge of the English language to the Hindus and Muslims. In 1823, Mount Stuart Elphinstone urged the opening of schools for teaching English and the European Sciences. Motivated by this impulse, he set up a school in the following year. By this time the recommendations of Lord Macaulay (1833) had been in circulation; it became the all-known aim of the Britishers to produce more clerks and typists from the Indians for their different offices. Thus, under the British rule, English became the lingua franca of the educated class in India. Lord William Bentick's (March 7,1835) and Lord Hardinges's proclamations (1844) regarding the promotion of Indian interest in English Literature and language, along with European culture and sciences, strengthened further the position of English in India. Apart from producing clerks; English education was to create a medium of communication to come to terms with the best in cultural terms, it is a medium for the study of arts and sciences, and further the vocational or professional interests, like law, medicine, engineering and technology.

In order to bring about effective administration, the British took interest in the geography, culture and languages of India. Captain James Rennell brought out The Bengal Atlas in 1779, the culmination of more than a decade's effort, the first modern Atlas of the province. Duplicating Rennell's effort in other British controlled territories, especially in the Deccan and Mysore, the British set about mapping the intellectual, cultural and historical dimensions of the territories. By 1800 number of texts in English- grammars, dictionaries teaching aids, phrase books and translations of literary works, digests and compendiums, which facilitated colonization and explained the acquisition to the company's servants in India as well as informed the scientific community in England.

Before the founding of Hindu college in 1817, there was a lot of public debate in Calcutta and England over the purpose of colonial education by Britishers and Indians . A director of the East India Company opined that they had lost America by their own folly of allowing schools and colleges and should not repeat the same in case of India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1823said that the Sanskrit system of education would be best suited to keep the country in darkness, he took cudgels on behalf of English education for Indians and against the Orientalists. The Anglicist-Orientalist controversy came to be resolved by Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minutes on Education". It said "we must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour , but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect". This class consisted largely of the urban elite. Many of them were immigrants with a lot of landed property in the interior districts, but came to the city in lure of office jobs in the expanding British administration, the key to which was a knowledge of English. For the sons of elite families, there was the Hindu College where they acquired a

command of the English Language and its literature and science almost equal to the schools in Europe. The impact of this change was that the Indians had mastered the colonizer's language and began to adopt it as a medium of expression.

Language is not only a medium of communication, it is also a marker of identity. It structures our universe and according to some philosophers such as Wittgenstein, it delimits the structure the structure of our thought, it is through language we acquire knowledge and the conceptual structures that inhabit our minds often have linguistic correlates associated with them. Certain biological, structural, social and psychological aspect influences the perception of language. It is language, and not dialect that has a script, literature and grammar and is marked by its large scale acceptance. Dialects may have systematic grammars, but for lack of social, economic and political power, they are stigmatized. For example, Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithali, all of which known to be roots of the standard khari boli hindi are stigmatized as dialects. This stereotype is rooted in the power relationship of a society. Language spoken by the underprivileged members of a society like farmers, workers, tribals, slum dwellers are considered as 'dialects' and not 'standard language'. It is important for us to realize that the elite are vested with power to standardize its speech by means of publication of newspaper periodicals, dictionaries books..etc, by enforcing it as a means of instruction at all levels of education . In India there has been an increasing mystification and deification of English socially and pedagogically. It is meant for a special group of people taught in prestigious public or convent schools, upwardly mobile urban population with cosmopolitan exposure. These people have access to better jobs with high salary, and the knowledge of the English Language opens doors to trade commerce and work, which remain otherwise closed to vernacular medium. However, the case is not so throughout the country. The English Language restricted to a few privileged has often been a matter of resentment throughout the nation. A lot of public debate, demonstrations with nationalist zeal has erupted to go back to roots and use the vernacular medium for all official purposes and medium of education and instruction. Those who fought for the dignity of the country, saw in English Language the continuation of the colonial rule in India. However, in South India, Hindi was seen as a threat of North Indian supremacy over South. The elite section of society was evidently in favour of English, but Hindi was declared as the language for all official purpose in the Constituent Assembly of 1949. English was given the status of associate language for fifteen years . The day(26 January, 1965), English was supposed to be abolished approached, there were widespread riots all over the country, the upholders of hindi failed to establish Hindi as the only official language and further antagonized people all over the country and created a fear of imposition of Hindi.

English was instrumental in Nationalist propaganda. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Subhash Chandra Bose used English extensively in their writing. Even creative voices like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan and Raja Rao all wrote in English. To device a standard English which was one of the concerns of elite community. In the 1966 report of the Education Commission of India, it was made necessary that to complete the first degree course, a student must have adequate command of English in expression and understanding. English therefore became the most useful language in higher education and a very important means of exposure to the world.

India is a multilingual society and any monistic solution would not work. English was increasingly associated with wider opportunities, library language and international contact. However, the growing importance of English was not only challenged by Hindi propagandists, but more minority and tribal languages were claiming their share in the state's education and power structure. The government therefore had to introduce a three-language formula in 1961. It tried to accommodate the interests of group identity (mother tongue and regional identity), national pride and unity (Hindi) and technological progress, scientific knowledge and administrative governance (English). The objective behind the three language formula was to make the Hindi-speaking states learn a language from the south, east or west India as the third language. But they chose Sanskrit. West Bengal and Orissa too chose Sanskrit. The Southern states resented that they were forced to learn a North Indian language while the reverse was not true. Many saw in the Hindi enthusiasm dangerous signs of Aryanisation. Therefore the Eastern and Southern states increased the importance of English. Tamil Nadu and Mizoram decided on a two language system- native language and English.

For teaching English anthologies of English poets, playwrights and short story writers were prepared to introduce Indian learners to the literature and culture of the world. Translation was a very reliable tool for English language teaching. The missionaries, with their aim of converting people to Christianity began teaching English to educated people on the ethical values associated with Christianity. The primary purpose initially was to spread European knowledge among superstitious Indians and English was a medium to achieve this goal. To achieve this, bilingual approach seemed inevitable. Bilingual teachers were trained to translate well known English texts into Indian languages. Macaulay's proposal that English would henceforth be the language of government, education and advancement and therefore all funds appropriated for education would be employed to further English education alone. The missionary schools which were seen operating since the nineteenth century included the Bible, Paley's Natural Theology, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Bacon's Novum Organum, Plato's Dialogue, Milton's Paradise Lost, Richardson's Selection from the British Poets, Pope's Illiad by Homer, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth, Addison's Essays and Johnson's Lives of the Poets. It is worth noting that English studies in India coincided with the beginning of the declining status of classical literary studies in England.

Traditional methods of learning other languages in India were based on the Kavya (literature) and Vyakaran (grammar), and the grammar translation method formed the basis of studying classical languages like Sanskrit and Persian. So in order to learn and acquire an understanding of another language; interpretation of texts with the help of a dictionary and grammar for the rules of inflection and syntax and memorizing large parts of canonical texts was in vogue. Similar methods and materials for teaching of English as a foreign language were employed. According to the annual report of the college of Mohammad Mohsin, Hooghly of 1941, it was instructed that a small portion of each day would be devoted to translating a portion of English into Bengali and vice versa. If the said practice was done continually for two years, the learner would have acquired the ability to translate easily from Bengali or English newspapers.

Grammar was a separate discipline by itself, and rules of grammar and their application formed a part of examination question paper. It was assumed that children

needed to be taught grammar, instead of allowing them to infer automatically from the spoken language itself.

There are four language skills- listening, speaking, writing and reading. The first two are natural. When a child is born, it hears the language spoken by its mother and other members of the family and community. The child then tries to imitate the speech sounds that it has heard for a considerable period of time. Therefore it is important that the child listens to a language being spoken so that it can speak the same later on. So, it can be said that language begins with the ear. One who can hear will speak. But writing and reading require training and practice to develop these skills. The spoken language is marked on paper using certain visual symbols. Each language has its own writing system. Most Indian languages are written exactly the way they are pronounced. But in English there is a constant lack of consistent relation between sound and spelling. The spelling of English have not undergone change since the fifteenth century as their pronunciation has. This makes getting a grip of English spelling more difficult.

Constant exposure to the mother tongue enables the child to speak after a certain period of time. This natural process of acquisition is not the same in the case of a person who learns a second language. Moreover, the firm basis of the linguistic system of the second language interferes with the learning of the system of the second language. The learner of the second language must be provided with the adequate exposure to listen to the second language. Modern inventions like film, television, radio, internet provide adequate exposure to this language. Careful listening of correct English from media or records will provide a good model for the learner. In the classroom it would be nice for the teacher to use familiar vocabulary while speaking, but also introduce words and vocabulary that are unfamiliar. Interaction with the students in English will help them come out of their shell.

Eugene A. Mida in his paper 'Selective Listening' defines language as essentially a motor-auditory phenomenon which requires our auditory sensitiveness along with our capacity to assimilate things heard. 'Selective listening' implies certain features and concentrating attention on them. These features are phonetic features- namely the principal intonational characteristics, important consonants, vowels; this enables one to master the sound system of the language; vocabulary – learners must repeatedly listen to certain dialogues, speeches to become acquainted with the structural system of the language, morphology and syntax or grammar- the learner must first listen to common and simple structures of grammar and commit them to memory.

The learner having listened to English adequately must try to communicate in English. Most lower income families or middle class families or in rural families, the learners are alone in their knowledge of English, their situation does not provide them with opportunities to practice communicating in English at home. In class there should be oral compositions, dramatizations of certain speech or dialogues to give students room for practice of the language.

Reading to learn a language should at first be aimed at improvement of vocabulary, understanding of phonetics i.e the sense of sound-letter correspondence, analysis of words and sentences. After the learner has had sufficient oral practices, they are initiated into writing, composition, exercises that help in training the learner.

When two or more language groups come in proximity to one another for any reason, there is a necessity to learn one another's language. In ancient Rome, before the children were sent to school, the children were taught Greek, by living in direct contact with the language. Greek slaves were employed for this purpose. The Roman children learnt Greek and Roman simultaneously. This tradition of learning continued till the middle Ages when Latin became the language of good education. Latin was primarily learnt through imitation of a native speaker, but with the decline of Rome, Latin became a dead language. Grammar exercises and bilingual dictionary were used to teach Latin. With Renaissance, trade, commerce and social relationship increased. To meet this demand it was necessary to learn languages. The teachers exposed the learners to the language by talking to them about topics of everyday interest. The learners were then asked to reproduce the speech. The learners were then asked to memorise conversations and sentences. This method was far from perfection. It made extensive dependence on the learner's memory, as well as included all the deficiency associated with the learner, limited vocabulary, limited linguistic sense.

In the 16th and 18th century, educationists came up with certain methods to teach Latin, already a dead language. Roger Ascham in his book The School Master promoted the translation method. The teacher would read Cicero's speeches in class and then translate them in English; the English version would be further translated into Latin. The original Latin text would then be compared to the translated one. William Bath (1664-1714) too stressed on translation method and gave importance to vocabulary. Michel de Montaigne (1535-1592) believed that the best way to teach a foreign language was to understand the mind of the people who use that language. He advocated travel as means to come into contact with the people whose language he is learning. Comenius (1592-1670) inspired by Bath produced a bilingual dictionary of eight thousand words. He also presented the learners with pictures, so that they might think and say. John Locke (1632-1740) supported the translation method. Lot of translations were printed one after another, this printed material was used to teach Latin. Later, influenced by Montaigne he advocated the natural method of exposing the learner to the language to be taught. Teaching of grammar was postponed until a certain proficiency in the language was obtained.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, grammar translation method became a popular method for teaching a foreign language. First, the meanings of the words are explained to the learner. The passage is read and then the passage is translated into the native language. The teacher then explains the grammar items in the mother tongue. Rules of grammar are well learnt and exercises based on grammar are solved. But this method is good for teaching a dead language. Learning a dead language is an intellectual discipline and is a key to the ancient literature. However, this method is not conducive to teaching a living language, because the learner remains passive.

The works of educationists who advocated a direct contact with foreign language speakers in meaningful situations gave rise to the "Oral Method", "Natural Method", "Phonetic Method" or "Direct Method" by the beginning of the 20th century. The central idea of direct method is the association of words and sentences with their meaning through demonstration, dramatisation and such other means and not by the use of mother tongue. Suppose the lesson deals with the life of people in a foreign land. The class is shown a picture depicting a certain situation or activity of the foreign land. The picture illustrates a certain area of vocabulary.

The teacher in the foreign language describes the picture to the learners; and then asks questions, then a reading passage is given and every word is explained. Then the attention of the learners is drawn to the structural pattern of the language. Otto Jespersen (1890-1945) in his book How to Teach a Foreign Language emphasized the primacy of speech and reading as the preliminaries of language study. He does not insist on teaching grammar formally, instead the learner should discover the facts of grammar after careful study.

Twentieth century witnessed a need to communicate with others in a foreign language. This led to a growing need for language teaching which led to the foundation of “aural-oral approach”, “aural-linguistic approach” or ‘structural approach’. Language to them was speech, not writing. Written form is the graphic representation of speech and it is artificial. Language was considered to be a set of habits. A child acquires the language of his group just as he acquires the habits and customs of the group. So behaviour of the group and the cultural habits formed a part of language teaching. Language teaching is about language as spoken by the native, not its grammar. Classics formed the teaching material for language teaching, but the new approach used the colloquial language spoken by native speakers in different situations.

In the modern method of language teaching, the listeners listen to the teacher and then learn by mimicry and memorization. The learners then can enter into dialogue into one another and even apply their own vocabulary. Repeated practice of such dialogues in groups will aid the learner to learn better. After several oral exercises, the learner should be introduced to printed materials and after he has attained a firm grip a firm grip on the structure, he can move on to reading. After mastering the basic structure of the language, the learner should be encouraged to express himself.

It is believed that the English language has three hundred basic structures and if these structures are mastered, then the language is learnt. It was believed that the structural approach would solve the problems in teaching English as a second language. Many countries came under the influence. But the influence soon passed due to the lack of properly trained teachers. The Modern Language Association believes that a teacher should have proficiency in the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing, ability to analyse the language, culture and professional preparation. A teacher must know what to teach and how to teach. In this respect, linguistics and psychology are essential to language teaching.

A hurdle that teachers face when they teach a foreign language is the interference of the mother tongue of the learner. The teacher has to find out the cause for it and address the issue. The teacher will have to have an understanding of the mind of the student- the aptitude, attitude, interest, intelligence etc, to devise a method that will enable the learner to learn better. This calls for creation of problematic situation where the learner is compelled to hit upon plans to solve the problem, so that learning may take place.

A language is learnt not just for communication, but also for mental development along with emotional and moral development. A good language teacher will have to be aware of this aspect and understand the emotional and moral life of the students, to give them proper guidance. Psychology therefore helps the teacher to

encourage the students and motivate interest. Psychology can therefore be said to be of great importance in designing method and technique.

The issue of medium of instruction in schools is a complex one. Some support the introduction of English as the medium of instruction for all. The post-independence linguistic reality was that a large number of English medium schools were set up mostly in cities and large towns, but the village and remote areas continued to remain confined to their vernacular medium. Most often proficiency in English allowed doors to better and lucrative jobs, opportunities for higher education and a greater vertical mobility financially and socially. Educated only in vernacular medium, often students from rural areas face embarrassment and difficulty in pursuing higher education and better jobs. Their success comes to them after a great deal of struggle. This has resulted in a huge rural urban divide. Linguistic debates triggered apparently by nationalist concerns is a veiled attempt to keep the rural folk from being aware of their disadvantage, and to maintain a balance in terms of opportunity between rural and urban population. These contribute to gaining political mileage, because apparently nationalism and lack of knowledge of English, go hand in hand. Also, this measure keeps a large section of people in the dark, thereby reestablishing the power of the privileged. However, there have been protests against such clever agenda. When the Left front government refused to introduce English at the primary level, open protests were made alleging that children of politicians would be educated in English medium schools, would go abroad (possibly to the United States of America- their ideological opponent) while the citizens deprived of exposure would be forcefully confined to their space with no hope of change in their environment.

Common people are aware of the positive role of English in India. They realize that English is an important vehicle for gaining knowledge, national unity and promotion of international trade and commerce. English is the only language acceptable in South, understood in the East and West and connects the whole of India. One cannot wish away the importance of English in science and technology. Internet technology has further increased the exposure to English and communication on socializing websites are mostly done in English. For practical purposes in everyday life, English continues to be of far greater importance. Some are of the opinion that Hindi does not have the richness that English has. What can be conveyed in a single English sentence requires fifteen Hindi lines.

English as a colonial power is a matter of the past. It is an international language and an Indian language and a window to the world. Knowing English broadens the horizon and increases experiences of the world. In terms of education, English is the most common aspect of all education. It has been a common binding factor in a diverse country like India. English is no one's mother tongue, everybody is equal when it comes to learning it for different purposes. As early as in 1938, Raja Rao in his foreword to his novel Kanthapura, experimented with the novel, and made English take on the cadence of Kannada, with its rambling narrative tone, as spoken by the women of Kara district in Karnataka. The novel is one continuous narrative without any divisions into chapter or section. Raja Rao says that as long as thought continues, words flow, when thought stops, the words halt. He uses the form of a 'sthalapurana', to tell the history of a village caught up in the Gandhian movement as told by an old woman, thus subverting the usual generic expectations of the form of a West European novel.

Even before post-modernism made its presence felt, Raja Rao integrated myth with history, realism with fabulation, linear narration with a cyclic notion of time. Raja Rao owns in his foreword “One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word ‘alien’, yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up, like Sanskrit or Persian was before – but not of our emotional make up”. Raja Rao was the first to express and work out a strategy to negotiate the twin claims of language and culture. The premise that writing in English implies a betrayal to cultural values does not hold true. Writers who write in English, do so because, no matter what language they speak in, they find their writing competence only in English. Indian writing in English which began in the 1930’s resulted in a boom of publication of novels in English, which achieved widespread popularity. Literary works in English have not only found a global market place; but has come to be identified as essentially Indian. Aijaz Ahmed points out in *In Theory* that a new urban culture was developing for which literary documents produced in English is a national document. The regional works are considered minor and are easily forgotten. Although, English is not an Indian language, it has certainly become the language of literary sophistication.

Demands of economy, trade, commerce, education, medical needs and removal of social inequality and thrust of social homogenization, necessitate the acceptance of English, the language of upward social mobility. Internet revolution has deepened the impact of English. It is spoken in many upper middle-class homes, words in English have percolated to the lower class of society- the vernacular equivalent of many English words are unknown to many- clothing, social kinship, entertainment are all being shaped by international exposure and hence English forms a part of everyday common jargon. This is an irreversible process, many might not be in favour and criticize the change, they might ask for public examinations to be in Hindi or do away with English aptitude test completely or argue in favour of Sanskrit, but the preferred language in all walks of life is English. Teaching English might not be that difficult after all. An eagerness to learn the language is evident everywhere, and few other infrastructural difficulties can be easily dealt with.

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