

## English Language Pedagogy: Some Issues in Teaching and Learning

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At a national level, English continues to serve as our “window to the world” and thereby function as a language of development. This is so because of the access provided to the growing funds of knowledge in Science, Social Sciences and Humanities. The continuation of English seems important if our science and technology, trade and commerce are to be truly international. As an Intranational link language, English is a promoter of interstate mobility contributing in some measure to national unity and integration. As an associate official language, as the official link between the central government and the governments of the non - Hindi speaking states, an international ‘link language’, the language favored by all India institutions, all- India conferences/ seminars, the legal and banking systems, trade and commerce and defence, English has important functions to serve internally- in addition to its function as our ‘window of the world’. Gokak emphasizes the importance as a means of internal and international communication: “The tendency of regional languages to become the media of university education, though desirable in many ways, may well lead to the isolation of such universities from the rest of India unless there is a link in the shape of an all - India language ...Such a common link can only be English or Hindi....Till such time as it happens, English may be continued”<sup>1</sup>.

At the individual level, English continues to be ‘the language of opportunity’, ‘the language of upward social mobility’ and the language used in transactional interactions. Any individual seeking socio-economic advancement at the national level will find ability in English as an asset. It is clear, therefore, that English has important functions in communications of diverse types. The skills of communication will continue to be at a premium, and teaching will have to try to impart a certain minimal competence in these skills. It is important that we should be able to identify the English requirements of various groups of students precisely, and try to provide for each such group the patterns of courses which will be relevant to the needs of learners. This is important because not all the students will need English to the same level of competence. It is also important that special communities are made available to help the weaker sections of our society to acquire an adequate competence in English so that they do not remain forever disadvantaged in areas of English -based higher education and in terms of social mobility. We must take steps to produce methods and materials designed to help students coming from tribal, rural, and other neglected sections of society who, though gifted and intelligent, feel alienated and handicapped at institutions of higher learning because they have not had

the opportunity of acquiring English as a second language and hence find themselves incapable of using English as a 'library language'. There is a great challenge for our educational institutions:" they must devise tailor-made programmes in English as an instrument of education."<sup>2</sup>

In order to achieve the objectives of teaching and learning English as discussed above, it is essential to design a variety of courses tailored to the needs of consumers; produce new materials (including audio and video materials); introduce function -based training programmes; bring in changes in our attitude to learners and their language, the system of evaluation and methodology of language -teaching. These courses, materials, and methodologies may have to be modified to meet local needs. It may mean changing the educational setup -its physical structure, its atmosphere, its functions, its facilities, its roles and responsibilities. It will also mean modernizing and restructuring the curriculum in the light of the new needs of learners of English in different states in India today. The main focus must shift from teaching as a unidirectional, teacher - oriented, knowledge-oriented activity to learning as an interactional activity, involving sub activities like problem solving, group work, drawing inferences, making generalizations, participating in a variety of other activities. The ultimate objective of all these activities should be to develop human resources - to enable teachers and learners to play their roles effectively, helping learners acquire not only context-restricted and syllabus bound competence in handling English but to attain that level of competence which will enable them to use it effectively according to the roles that they may have to play in a variety of situations. The teaching and learning of English as a second language may be considered as two mutually defining aspects of the same process, for the teacher is not just a giver but also a receiver and the learner is also an active participant. The activity that we call teaching cannot and should not, therefore, be perceived as a unidirectional process of transmitting or pumping information or knowledge from a full vessel into an empty vessel: the human vessels are never full and never empty.<sup>3</sup> Learning language is a process of knowledge and unfolding. The teacher comes in as a facilitator of this process. He manages class-activities, acts as an advisor, supplying the language that students need, and at other times is a 'co -communicator', engaging in the communicative activities along with the students. From this point of view teachers and learners are both participants in an interactional activity which is called teaching -learning. The other determinants of this activity are textual materials (spoken and written) and situational features.

Every teacher ,in the process of teaching, should create an atmosphere, which can help learners 'learn how to learn' and to engage themselves in those activities which produce knowledge which produce

knowledge: defining, questioning, observing, classifying, generalizing etc. Using a language means two things: first, having the ability to make a choice or a network of choices and putting them together, in terms of the linguistic and socio-cultural rules and conventions of the language and second, having the ability to produce texts. Learners must have the ability to operate language as a finite system of rules and use these rules in a variety of socio-cultural settings. The students in India can produce formal essays on literary topics but are not well equipped for using English for transactional purposes. They have been exposed to 'classroom English' or 'textbook English'. What we must keep in mind as language teachers is that exposure to a rich variety of linguistic and socio-cultural material with its focus on 'what to say when and how' is of paramount importance in English language learning. We should organize the teaching of English, keeping in view its roles and functions, or teaching a second or foreign language means preparing learners to perform a set of tasks in a new language used in a new socio-cultural context. We believe that language draws its life giving nourishment from literature and literature uses language as its vehicle. The reading of literary text in the original can be an exciting experience and a powerful stimulus to further effort provided learners have the linguistic competence to capture 'the real thing' which always lies deeply embedded in layers of language. According to Sinclair, "Language and Literature should be related very closely to each other in an English curriculum but essentially kept distinct. The distinctiveness should not be a matter of embarrassment but should be recognition of the complementary nature of the disciplines and exploited in a broad concept of English studies. Wherever the disciplines overlap, both a literary and a linguistic output are valuable and the teaching can profit from each of these, and can attempt to integrate the two." <sup>4</sup>

A language teacher should not ignore the results of linguistics, the psychology of human learning, the age and education of pupils, or the personality and capacity of the individual student. A scientific approach to language teaching applies the best that is known to each particular class and its students. When a better way to teach something is reported, the teacher incorporates it into his courses, just as a physician incorporates it into his practice new and more effective ways of treating each disease as reported in medical literature. The language teacher must know the target language well enough to be imitated by his students. For the nonnative speaker this means using freely not only the significant sounds syntactical constructions, and general vocabulary but also many, though not necessarily all, of the details of pronunciation and idiomatic expression of native speech and writing. This level of proficiency for teachers is higher than that needed for purposes other than teaching. The nonnative speaker will have to devote a great deal of effort to the achievement of this level and to maintaining his proficiency

once achieved. Proficiency in the target language includes the four skills: understanding, speaking, reading, and writing but not translation and interpretation, which are separate professional skills essential for the interpreter but not for the language teacher as such.

Although a single variety of the language is fully adequate for speaking, the teacher should understand the various major dialects. He should of course be able to adapt his speech to the situations and contacts normally expected of an educated teacher, including changes of form required by social distinctions. "Learning a second language is more than learning a description of it."<sup>5</sup> The process of speaking and listening is involved, and this process combines linguistic and psychological as well as other elements.

Scientific" does not mean perfect or omniscient. A scientific approach to language teaching uses scientific information; it is based on theory and a set of principles which are internally consistent. It measures results. It is impersonal, so that it can be discussed on objective evidence. And it is open, permitting cumulative improvement on the basis of new facts and experience. Teach listening and speaking first, reading and writing next. This principle is the basis for the audio - lingual approach. From linguistics we know that language is most completely expressed in speech. Writing does not represent intonation rhythm, stress, and junctures. This principle does not mean that we should teach only audio-lingual mastery. It implies that deciphering written material without knowing the language patterns as speech is incomplete, imperfect, or inefficient. This principle applies even the goal is only to read." Having mastered the basic constructions of the language orally, the student can expand his reading capacity to a higher level of achievement than if he sticks to deciphering script."<sup>6</sup> Although more experimental evidence is needed to disprove this claim, a tactical advantage supports this teaching principle. Students who have mastered the language orally can learn to read more or less readily by themselves.

Speech cannot be invented by the student; it has to be imitated. Poor models produce poor imitations. Good models do not guarantee good imitations, but they are necessary to permit good responses. Students have a much shorter memory span in a foreign language in their native one. When examples or models are given in the foreign language, they may not be heard correctly, or even if they are, they may be forgotten in seconds. The student cannot use the examples to understand the grammar to create other sentences by analog because he does not remember them. The extra effort needed to memorize dialogues in a foreign language enables the student to use them as models and to proceed with further learning.

Establish the patterns as habits through pattern practice. Knowing words, individual sentences, and rules of grammar does not constitute

knowing the language. Talking about the language is not knowing it. The linguist, the grammarian, and the critic talk and write about the language; the student must learn to use it. To know the language is to use its patterns of construction with appropriate vocabulary at normal speed for communication. Understanding or even verbalizing a pattern may help a student to learn it but will never take the place of practicing the patterns through analogy, variation, and transformation to establish them as habits. Teach the sound system structurally for use by demonstration, imitation, props, contrast, and practice. Partial attempts, props in the form of articulatory clues, and minimal contrasts to focus sharply on the phonemic differences eventually result in satisfactory responses, but to increase facility and fluency, practice becomes indispensable.

Keep the vocabulary load to a minimum while the students are mastering the sound system and the grammatical patterns. The attempt of many students to concentrate on learning vocabulary at the beginning is misguided. Linguistics shows that words, no matter how many, do not constitute a language. The most strategic part of a language for use is the system of basic patterns and significant sound contrasts and sequences. Every effort should go into teaching these elements; hold the vocabulary load at first to the words needed to manipulate the patterns or illustrate the sounds and contrasts.

Translation is not a substitute for language practice. Arguments supporting this principle are (1) that few words if any are fully equivalent in any two languages, (2) that word-for-word translations produce incorrect constructions. Psychologically, the process of translation is more complex than, different from, and unnecessary for speaking, listening, reading, or writing. Furthermore, good translation cannot be achieved without the mastery of second language. We therefore, teach the language first, and then we may teach translation as a separate skill, if that is considered desirable. A language is a structure of communication. Communication engineers call noise any disturbance in the communication channel. Using an inappropriate dialect or style interferes with full communication and constitutes "noise" of a sort. Teach the meaning content of the second language as it has developed in the culture where the language is spoken natively. A language is the most complex index to the culture.

Teach primarily to produce learning rather than to please or entertain. This principle is based on the observation that classes that are the most entertaining are not always the most effective. It is also based on the analogy with medical science. In developing a new drug, for example, no thought is given to whether it has a pleasant taste. Results and absence of side effects are the decisive criteria of goodness. Once the drug is found effective, it is put into palatable form, but effectiveness

comes first. In language teaching we have not yet reached this stage of scientific precision. It is common to discuss materials and techniques on the basis of whether or not the student or the teacher finds them interesting, without sufficient regard for effectiveness. In a scientific approach, the amount of learning outweighs interest. Once the effectiveness of a technique is demonstrated, working to make it more palatable, more absorbing, more interesting, is in order, but not before, and certainly not as a substitute for effectiveness in terms of learning.

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