

Standardization: Speaking and Reading Skills among Rural Students

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Abstract

Students are good in studying and getting involved in classroom activities. They are eager to learn new things with enthusiasm and dedication like learning a foreign language. In the context of India, rural students do not show these characteristics in their early education level. Their performance rate in foreign language is very low or average. After getting sound coaching/training, they usually come off their shell. The reason for the initial failure is lack of awareness and love for L2. However, as our subjects showed, they are ready to imitate more or less like other L2 students.

Key Words: activities – imitation – shell.

Speaking

The early introduction of speaking of language is important for reasons of motivation. Students come to learn a foreign language in high school with the conviction that “language” means “something spoken”. They are often discouraged and they lose interest when they find that foreign language study is presented to them just like other school subjects: learning a whole lot of materials from a book with great focus on writing and memorization. They notice that speaking in the language is not emphasized and is a far distant goal. In this way most of the learners feel hesitant as well as shy to express themselves in foreign language. Moreover, they do not know “an act of speech involves more than knowledge of the code” (William M. River 160).

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Vocabulary items are easily acquired while speaking in native tongue, through acts such as expressing emotion, talking with friends and parents and neighbors. Yet in learning a foreign language, learners do not have this power. They are not able to exercise this skill. Because they lack knowledge and confidence in using words, word formations and structures, they become reluctant to speak and they become voiceless. This may be caused also by their inability to remember learned/memorized words and context.

Illiterate family background is another reason for the inability to speak in the foreign language. Even if they get a chance to utter a few words in L2, there is limited chance to receive any feedback or reply in L2. This sort of meagre chance can close the door of language development. Therefore the learner should take advantage of contexts such as the place, time of the day, type of activity involved, and the relationship among the characters (appropriate age, sex, occupation, and authority pattern) and begin speaking. Sometimes learners of L2 (foreign language) avoid using or mixing of both native and foreign tongues. This will open priority to the mother tongue and will slowly reduce the use of L2. Fluency is not focused upon. Learners could easily use a variety of phrases even in incomplete sentences. However, incomplete, inadequate and irrelevant word practice may spoil the learning interest.

Because of lack of knowledge in basic sentence patterns and sentence structures, learners go away from learning practice in order to avoid jokes about their performance. Without some knowledge in basic grammar, no one can speak or write. If they are ignorant of basic patterns, how can they produce even simple comprehensible expressions? When learners become keen on improving their performance, learning may become an end in itself. In other words, when learners may be intrinsically motivated, second language learning becomes easier. Such learning is a cyclical process. (Devaki Reddy, 108)

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Spoken is the first form of human behavior. Speech is the mirror that reflects one's personality and character. In the act of communication pupils are influenced by environmental cues as well as by intention. But the speech should be fulfilled by the act of comprehension. If the action fails, there is no use of communication. Learners come across fear, least language capability, and they never tempt to interact. Those learners who are active in classroom may easily be able to speak first, but slow learners feel hesitant to open their mouth in between sessions. These sorts of behaviors aggravate slow learning power as well as keep the students away from other students. So training and counseling will be given to these pupils in order to overcome their inadequacies. Nida (*Teaching Foreign Language Skills* 191) maintains that the receiver is often encoding parallel messages as he listens; he is choosing from the alternative meanings the emitter is trying to convey. Rapid fire exchange does not happen in every act of communication. Normally, in the beginning stage of communication for L2 students there are hesitation, pause, much repetition and copying of words.

Listening

Listening plays an important role in learning. Out of four basic skills, it is the most basic root for learners. It enhances the skill to acquire new vocabulary and different usages of various phrases, sentence patterns, and basic grammar. As said earlier slow learners/silent students in the classroom often have “nothing to say” (*Teaching Foreign Language Skills* 192) while facing uncongenial topic even in mother tongue. Therefore feasible topics and easy practice will be given to these students to standardize their speaking and reading skills. Psychological experiment has shown that people are more likely to continue a conversation when other people agree rather than when they disagree (William M River 194). The student with still fragile speaking habits is forced to discuss foreign language's literary concepts and problems. But they do not know both

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the accepted terminology and expression in the target language/L2. They also have inadequate communication in native tongue. So, students are supposed to read widely to enhance vocabulary and understanding of cultural concepts.

In audio-lingual approach, vocabulary learning is given a minor role until the student has some control of the basic structural patterns and is able to express himself freely within a limited area of language. But vocabulary for any specific interest is soon acquired when circumstances demand it. Once students have acquired a small basic vocabulary, this can be used for giving practice in structural manipulation which is fundamental to any form of communication – in speech or writing. Thus they are in need of good practice to train them and modify their language skills. While comparing with urban area students, the rural pupils do not learn foreign language with full interest because they may not be ready to spare time, and/or they may be less interested.

Reading

Rural area learners have lack of interest/difficulties in using reading skills. Sometimes they are unable to read polysyllabic words with exact pronunciation. Simultaneously they fail to understand what they are reading, despite willing to read printed works. Only a few students have good reading skills. A reading demands three levels of meanings: lexical meaning (semantic content of the words and expression), structural and grammatical meaning (driving from interrelationship among words and parts of words, or from the order of words), and social – cultural meaning (the evaluation which people of the student's own cultural background attach to the words and groups of words he is reading (ibid 104-112).

Yet these learners may not know the strategy of reading and not fully understand the meaning of words. They skip from word to word just as they may read in their mother tongue,

which reduce their power of comprehension and take them away from the core meaning of foreign language because every language has its own uniqueness and cultural background. Readers are to read in order to reflect, respond and perform in the need of hour, especially, for most tertiary level learners in the Indian context as they prepare to become globally employable (Peter Francis129).

Illiterate family background is another barrier of reading because chances are not available in such context which would enable students to correct their mistakes. If a student is forced to read in the foreign language, he finds himself adrift in a flood of expressions he has never before encountered. Reading skills enable readers to turn writing into meaningful texts and achieve the goals of independence, comprehension and fluency (*Soft Skills* 127). While reading in foreign language, learners are unable to produce or get exact words because of lack of listening skills. Besides, the learners' poor memory of words makes them to pronounce the word in native tongue instead of L2. Learners do not give prominence to imitation that enriches the power to memorize and will help them learn any language to read correctly/exactly. In puppetry stage human beings are trained to imitate everything as a tape recorder which is the natural gift of men. Through memorizing method one can acquire the skills of delivering and pronouncing words. Like kids are telling what parents speak / behave in front of them with full interest and energy without knowing the meaning and grammar of the sentence (Brown), the learner sometimes observes the native speakers' delivery and imitates the same. Thus imitation and interest play vital role in learning. The learner's struggling to read can be overcome. Large number of people in a room is another reason for poor listening. They may not be heard due to noisy situation in the classroom. Most of the native languages are spoken inside the campus and are connected with native culture.

Reading is sometimes referred to as a passive skill, but if we exercise the abilities for fluent direct reading with comprehension of meaning, we shall see the reader in far from passive role during this activity. Therefore the student is trained in certain aspects of reading so that he gradually acquires sufficient skills to be able to continue on his own. This sort of training will help to avoid hindrances in polysyllabic words and word accent. The group memory is helpful to avoid the pitfalls of unfamiliar sound-spelling combinations, vocabulary, structure and even tense forms. Sometimes parts of story will be read in unison by the class after the teacher, and teachers can encourage asking question that include spelling, pronunciation, long words, and word formation. Some words may be explained in the foreign language in footnotes, and a monolingual foreign language dictionary will be available on the teacher's table for consultation. This will discourage the students from seeking native- language equalities for every unfamiliar element they encounter.

Growth of Teaching and Learning English

In the present scenario, teaching and learning English is fast growing in our nation. "Our country is facing new kind of divide- between the English haves and the English have-nots" (Amol Padwad 20). Students with poor learning skills try to avoid the sight of their tutor. They are not ready to face the tutor because of questions and assignments. As "nothing comes nothing" (**King Lear**), tutor will not give much importance to those pupils. Moreover, all the learners should come out from bondages which tied them for years, through unawareness, lack of interest, listening and false assumptions. Nevertheless, standardization in foreign language is impossible unless the learner and tutor join together with cultural background and sensibility.

Conclusion

Thus rural area students are now considered with low standard in both speaking and reading skills. Once they avoid speaking and reading, they lose the opportunity to master speaking and reading in the foreign language. If they turn away from speaking/interacting/communicating with L2, how will they get opportunity to do both? This will result in poor and inadequate mastery. The ideal way to enrich both speaking and reading skills is to let them learn in an adequate manner, realize their mistakes, and practice constantly.

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