

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

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## **An Analysis of the Lack of Primary English Language Skills among the Technical Students of Hindi Speaking States**

**Reenu Kumar, M.A., M.B.A., Ph.D. Candidate**

### **Introduction**

As literature relating to the subjects of science, engineering, technology and medicine is available mostly in English language, English language skills are important for the students who study technical subjects. Technical students are required to learn English for discussion, conversation, interviews and presentations.

India has considerable numbers of English speakers. However, more number of people know and use English as a second language in South and East India as per the Census reports. In north India too, a good number of people use English as a medium of verbal communication in the proximity of the capital city Delhi, which is a political, industrial, educational, economic and technological hub. But in the states such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Bihar there are no significant numbers of people who possess at least some primary English language skills. These states are collectively known as Hindi speaking states as Hindi and its many dialects are used as the primary medium of communication.

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This paper describes the present status of English language skills among the students who pursue engineering and technology courses in the Hindi speaking states.

### **Difficulty with Comprehension**

Students enrolled in technical colleges are expected to possess certain primary English language ability that is further polished, refined and enhanced by the lecturers and professors during their study. But students of Hindi speaking states do not demonstrate the required standard in speaking, listening, reading and writing English language. Students of these states are unable to comprehend and interpret the texts and passages due to poor vocabulary. They are unable to understand the instructions, comprehend and extract information, and follow the instructional discourse provided by lecturers because of poor listening skills. They are unable to do the classroom assignments satisfactorily and also unable to produce written text with content and format because they lack required grammatical skills and proper words to express themselves for writing the text on their own.

### **Deficiency in Writing and Pronunciation Skills**

The students are deficient in writing skills as the subject and field demand. Their spoken part is also weak. Their pronunciation is unacceptable. They are often confused with the pronunciation of z, s and sh. Some have gliding qualities in uttering some vowel sounds as the root of many Indian languages is Sanskrit. Some cannot distinguish between aspirated sounds.

In order to speak correct language, one should have an idea about the phonetics of that language. The pronunciations of our mother tongue comes naturally to us but it is would be difficult to speak correct pronunciation of the second language without learning the basics of the phonetics.

The students of the Hindi Speaking states didn't learn phonetics in their high and higher secondary schools which make their speaking either funny or horrible. Though students perform grammatical exercises in schools, they are not acquainted with prosody or paralanguage, i.e., stress intonation, accent, power, pauses, pitch and articulation.

It is true that most of the students complete their course in English and the result of the exams is also comparatively higher than other than their exams in the other subjects of the curriculum but the purpose of learning English is not achieved. Several lecturers or professors don't want to take pains to improve students' learning skills. Furthermore, in technical colleges, semester system is adopted and professors have to complete the syllabus within six months along with revisions which also make the task difficult.

As the students lack basic English language skills, written work becomes time consuming due to which the class remains engaged in writing notes only that diminishes the objectivity and productivity of course content.

### **Problems with the Syllabus**

In order to develop and enhance English language skills, technical universities included the subjects such as communication skills and communicative language and language laboratory in their curriculum. But the course content framed by technical universities demands certain basic knowledge of English language and functional grammar that students of Hindi speaking states lack. Sometimes students enroll in Spoken English classes available in the open market which claim to enable the students master the language in a few months. But students seem to forget that proficiency in any language is not an overnight task. It requires endless efforts, persistency and perseverance as Rome is not built in a day. Perhaps the contribution of English spoken classes cannot be underestimated. At least they induce and motivate the students towards language learning process. It is said that tallest structures are built on strongest foundation and we wish to build skyscrapers. If the base is weak, how could we erect tall, huge and strong buildings?

### **Reasons for Deficiency**

The reason for deficiency can be viewed from two perspectives: From the students' point of view and from the point of view of the structural aspects of the language itself.

From the students' point of view, the first and foremost reason for the lack of language skills is the immense effect of Hindi language that students have from their early childhood.

“Children continually imitate and practice the sound and pattern of the language and form habit of correct language use. They learn about the predictable patterns and primary features or the basic structure of the language spoken to them. To a certain extent they also acquire vocabulary of the language which is further enriched by repetition of ordinary events and experiences that provide frequent exposure to a limited number of words. At school children learn how written language differs from spoken language.” (*How Languages are Learned* by Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada, Third Edition).

This continuous reinforcement is coupled with the environment as a result they acquire commendable command over the language that they have learnt primarily. In states such as UP, MP, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Rajasthan, people mostly interact in Hindi language in speaking as well as writing, so students develop Hindi language skills frequently.

### **Lack of Basic Environment to Practise – Lack of Material Means, Rural Background**

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The second important reason for the lack of English is the lack of basic environment required for developing English language skills. In Hindi speaking states there are two media of instruction for students. Students at the primary level may use Hindi as the medium of study or English as the medium of study. Students from English medium schools do not find much difficulty in pursuing their higher studies, provided they have not been instructed by content area teachers or para-educators. “Furthermore, the environment and family background play a vital role in the learning process. In these states majority of the people are farmers and have poor background in education”. (*MJAL*, Vol: 1:1 February 2009, Teaching English as a Second Language In India – A Review by Murali, M.)

“Since majority of the students is from village or small town areas, the parents are farmers and uneducated. They survive and sustain on nature and rain. Hence, the students belong to such background are mentally discouraged due to the family condition.” (*MJAL*, Vol: 1:1 February 2009, Teaching English as a Second Language in India – A Review by Murali, M.)

Moreover, income of the majority of the families is not adequate as most of the students are from joint families where dependent members are more than that of earning ones. Other reason is the infrastructure, viz., school building – classrooms, laboratories, playgrounds are not adequate as required and Hindi medium students are almost compelled to attend their classes under trees.

### **Difference between Academic and Conversational English**

The third notable deficiency for English language acquisition in these students is “the difference between academic and conversational English. English we learn in India is direct, formal and written style. The written form of English is different from the spoken form. Whereas written form includes grammatical form, morphology, syntax and discourse and excludes the fragmentary sentences, the slang and words not accepted in day to day colloquialisms, the spoken part is more or less different. The spoken form comprises of slang, jargons, metaphorical and idiomatic language, phrasal verbs and the full range of lexis. In schools, students mostly interact with the language through written texts which is more artistic and precise. This shatters the confidence of the students when they have to speak. On the other hand, technical students are required to have the adequate knowledge of English language so that they may discuss, converse, interview and give oral presentations in English only.

### **Individual Differences in Second Language Learning**

The next significant reason for lack of primary English language skills in technical students of Hindi speaking states is the individual differences in second language learning. “A good language learner is one who learns languages more quickly than others. Researches reveal that even in first language acquisition, the rate of development varies widely. The rate of learning a

language depends on the variables such as intelligence, aptitude, the ability to learn quickly, learning styles, personality, attitude and motivation, psychological behavior, identity and affiliation with ethnic groups, and learning beliefs.” (*How Languages are Learned* by Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada, Third Edition).

### **Most of the Teachers are not Primarily English Language Teachers**

Another noteworthy reason is that these students receive much of their studies or instruction from content area teachers or para-educators who have not had appropriate preparation of professional development to address their second language learners. This situation obstructs their academic success. The instructor or teachers not only require more preparation to work with Hindi medium students but also need to know the type of instruction that is most effective for these students. The educators of these states are not taking serious look at their instructional programs. Further English should not be taught as a content subject. English is not similar to other subjects such as History, Chemistry or Mathematics. The teachers have not understood that teaching a language involves practicing language skills and the text book is merely a tool to help the teacher with a context to initiate the activities.

### **To Conclude**

To conclude, English language is vehicle for international communication and forms basis for constructing cultural identities. There is no reason to believe that any other language will appear within the next 50 years to replace English. One cannot neglect the acquisition of English language skills for the fulfillment of personal needs as well as for molding professional career.

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