

Problems Faced by Indian Students in Learning English Due to Cultural Hurdle

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Abstract

The present paper discusses the importance of creating awareness about the social context of the language to be learnt and acquiring cultural hold during the acquisition of second language learning. The present study analyses the failure of both the English language trainers and the learners to see the necessity to create a cultural ambience inside the classrooms. Cultural etiquettes, moods, and attitudes of the English language are equally important while teaching or learning. The inability to realise, use, and implement it has resulted in giving a “cultural shock” to the learners. The learners viewing the language as a lifeless thing in a detached manner has given rise to learning either emotionlessly by cognitive techniques like rote method or failing to get the edge and thus, ending in social withdrawal.

The paper brings out a few cognitive methods that have failed to work out in the classrooms over the decades. There is a dire necessity to improve the condition of teaching and the mindsets of educators by playing over the socio-cultural contexts and integrate language with culture.

Keywords: Acquisition, Cultural etiquettes, Cultural shock, cognitive techniques, socio-cultural

Language and Culture are two sides of the same coin. Culture, according to Cambridge Dictionary is “the way of life, customs, and beliefs of a particular group of a particular group at a particular time.” Language, which is a system of communication, arises out of the beliefs and customs that are practised. Both, therefore, can be said to be interdependent. Investigating the relation between culture and language, Christopher Spackman deduced saying that “Culture is to humans what water is to fish-that surrounds us...It is experienced through language because is inseparable from culture” (2008, 3). Hence, learning of a language begins with the schooling of the particular system of life involved in the language.

Acquiring or acquisition of a Second language or foreign language starts with the connection of First language that looms large on the mind of the learner. The involvement and interference of the first language cannot be negated completely. The learner of the Second language impulsively and

sub-consciously brings his or her own experiences of the first language to the forefront. Consequently, a gap between the language and the learner appears to build and makes the process of learning tricky and difficult. The learner fails to either perceive or misunderstand the character of the language in terms of skills and experiences. The learner ought to be told that the traditional character of the first language cannot take over the place during acquisition of second language learning.

The Indian system of learning the second language, i.e. English, begins at a school age in the form of learning by rote or memorizing a chunk of words and sentences. The traditional method of ELL is taught through Grammar Translation method, translating the first language into second language, Direct Method, and the Audio-Lingual Method. All these methodologies have failed to transplant the skills and the experiences of the English language into the native Indians. This practise has, in fact, resulted in distancing the native speakers in India from English language learning process and increased the levels of misunderstanding in the minds of Indian learners.

Both the instructor and the learner escape the concept of bringing and involving culture along with the language learning process. As Laray Barna explicates in the essay *How culture shock affects communication*, that is “there is no true way to entirely prevent culture shock, as individuals in any society are personally affected” (2009, 14) by the interference of first language, its “accents,” and “grammatical constructions” (Farabi, 73). Moreover, the English tutors in India believe that “second language learners of English are better off if they learn ‘standard’ English that could be used everywhere, that is, a language without any cultural context” (Li, 2007).

According to Macionis and Gerber, the learner, though fascinated in the beginning associates and regards English language as strange and difficult. Later, out of the unpleasant experiences during listening, reading, writing and speaking, treats English language as “offensive” with a deep sense of “hostility” (Farabi, 7) towards the instructor and the language. It slowly results into helplessness and distances the learner in the classroom and the learner behaves with timidity, appears drowsy, distracted, “disoriented” (Farabi, 73) and bored. The learners, even after spending years of study over second language, are found to have limited vocabulary and poor spoken skills. They end up fearing for being incorrect and consequently, are not in a position to compete in the race of job market that demands good communication skills in English.

Indian second language learners, who are uninformed of the cultural barriers, must learn to unfold and relocate themselves in the apparatus of culture of English language and “learn the culture in which the language is embedded” (Li, 2007).

Learning a new language while living in the culture involves coming to terms with new ocean you are swimming in. this acculturation which can have two meanings. The general meaning is just the process or act of adjusting to a new culture. (Spackman, 4)

So, rather than applying cognitive theories that stress on the behavioural pattern and test the thinking of the learner, the learner should concentrate on interacting with English language through socio-cultural practices of English language in Indian contexts. The practical enactment of the language should surface in ELL classrooms. Both the educators and the learners have to create an atmosphere and see where the culture of first language intersects with the cultural values of second language and gradually reduce the use of first language as that may increase the cultural differences and bring out variations.

Barriers like Grammar translation, learning a language for the sake of examinations, not giving a chance for creative thinking, allowing the traditional formula of passive listening and not questioning the hierarchy, and insufficient and inappropriate cultural parameters taken into consideration should be avoided. All these modes of learning and teaching stand as cultural hurdles for an English language learner in India. The English language teachers can overcome the above-mentioned obstacles by developing a resource material that incorporates socio-cultural involvement with English language. Creating an aura for speaking skills in English language than writing and listening skills and bringing more of the native experiences in second language can remove some of the problems faced by the Indian learners. Last but not the least, practical implementation and field projects will energise and increase the competency of the learners of English language. In the above case use of ICT, Virtual classroom, online tests, field surveys are likely to enhance and develop English language skills.

Hence, as Kazar in his research paper puts forward, “there is a pressing need to integrate cultural understand into the curriculum” by means of “literature, classroom discussion, questions posed to teachers and fellow classmates, and role plays in dramatic arts” that would help in making English language learning “more accessible and practical” (39).

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