English Language Teaching as Door to Communication

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Teacher's Attitude to Speech Forms, etc.

A teacher well conversant with and inclined towards conservative and traditional approach of teaching English as a target language or Second language will lay emphasis on formality of style and the literary classics. As far as spoken English is concerned, the conservatively inclined teacher will also advise the students to avoid as far as possible lazy forms of speech, slang expressions, undesirable dialect and accent. Such teacher will recommend the prestigious form of English written and spoken by middle class people in society.

On the other hand, a teacher of radical temperament does not find any virtue and feels no necessity in propagating and recommending a middle class prestige form of English. He may not feel shy in introducing and recommending all sorts of informal expressions, colloquial and slang terms and phrases, and he may also avoid strict adherence to the rules of grammar.

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Communicative Fluency as an Important Focus

Main concern and objective of radically inclined teacher will be to prepare students to communicate in the target language with or without strict rules of grammar. Historically speaking, rigidly rule bound languages cannot keep pace with the forces of progress and transformation in society. Such languages lose their practical value.

For example, rigidly rule based Sanskrit language is, for all practical purposes no more a living language. There was a time, when Sanskrit was a living language in India.

Constraints of English Teaching and Learning in India

In fact, neither rigid adherence to the rules of grammar nor deliberate neglect of these rules is good for the health of a living language. English is being taught as the Second language in almost all the countries of the world simply because it has shown rare flexibility in accommodating non rigid views regarding teaching of this language as a Second language.

According to some people good English means acquaintance with all sorts of speech forms which are not formal and literary – in this way we may avoid the charge of speaking like a book. In the light of the above discussion, we may recommend a balanced and consensual approach and suggest that it is the duty of the teacher to tell the students to pay proper heed to both conservative position and radical position, and thus prepare the students to communicate with ease and comfort with the reality of life which is the mixture of both conservative and radical views regarding the teaching and learning of English as a target language.

Students' Errors

While learning English as a Second language, the student is bound to make mistakes. Attitude of the teacher to this mistake making on the part of the student is of crucial importance, as far as the element of motivation is concerned. Teacher's attitude may prove an encouraging or discouraging factor for a student of Second language. His attitude may make or mar the career of a Second language learner in the sense that the learner may develop self confidence and overcome the mistake making syndrome or due to frustration give up the idea of learning the Second language.

Tom McArthur observes:

Remove the lines you've inserted. I have difficulty in deleting them.

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If a teacher constantly burdens students and self alike with red ink corrections of written work or the constant stopping and checking of spoken words, then frustration can reach high levels for all concerned. The teacher is signaling strongly that the student is a failure, as opposed to the fact that it takes time and practice to learn Second language. On the other hand, however, the constant avoidance of criticism may create a relaxed approach that one can put almost anything together as long as some sense emerges. Neither of these is particularly useful in real life. (McArthur 1983: 106-107)

A Mid-way Approach and Attitude

Instead of adopting a conservatively rigid and highly punitive attitude, a teacher should perform his duty in a liberal, sympathetic, friendly and encouragingly corrective manner which may exhort the student to put in a lot of labour and effort to learn English as a Second language. In fact, a teacher should neither be too rigid nor too liberal. He/She should develop a middle path between the two extremes of rigidity and liberality so as to maintain the good points of both the extremes and ignore the bad points of these extremes.

Again to quote McArthur who makes a very significant observation when he says:

The student should not be allowed to blunder unnecessarily into mistake making: nor, however, should the path be made too easy and therefore too dull. Additionally life does not work in an entirely bahaviourist or an entirely cognitive way. There are times when simple repetitive habit forming is refreshing and useful, and times when it is deadly dull. There are times when problem solving is exciting and informative, but there are also times when it leads to anger and frustration, because the problem too hard to solve. Balance here, as elsewhere seems to be essential, and also incidentally allows for variety in the class room. (McArthur 1983: 107)

Categories of Mistakes – Competence and Performance

Mistakes can be divided into two categories: competence mistakes and performance mistakes. It is generally seen that a student of Second language may make mistake which arises from a genuine failure to understand and master a systemic element in the Second language.

For example, if a student does not know that the phrase "smalls toys" does not exist in English language and he uses this phrase, we will call it a competence mistake – this mistake shows that the student lacks the knowledge of a particular systemic element in English language. In this case, singular phrase "small toy" and plural phrase "small toys" exhibit change in respect of noun words, that is, 'toy' in singular phrase and 'toys' in plural phrase, but the adjective word, that is, 'small' remains the same in both the cases.

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Thus, it is a kind of competence mistake which the teacher is supposed to bring to the notice of the student. The teacher should also explain that in English a phrase may be in singular or plural form, but the adjective word remains the same in both the phrases. This mistake should not be ignored by the teacher.

But if a student knows that the phrase "smalls toys" does not exist in English language, and due to tiredness, nervousness, pressure of the moment, or some other reasons, such as, a kind of interference from the home language, the student makes mistake of using the phrase "smalls toys", we may call it a performance mistake and not a competence mistake.

The Role of the Teacher in Helping to Eliminate Errors

At this moment, the role of the teacher is of crucial importance, because if a teacher harshly rebukes the Second language learner, the latter may get frustrated and a sort of self disgust engulfs his whole being – the student feels angry because it was not a competence mistake; it was a performance mistake, and that too under certain phenomenon of unavoidable nature. At this moment, the teacher's attitude should not be negative and rudely critical; on the other hand, the teacher should sympathise with the genuine pressure of the moment and help the student in overcoming the nervousness during the act of performance.

Performance and Competence May Not Be Identical/Equal in the Target Language

Perhaps performance and competence may never be identical or equal even in one's own language of early childhood experience, mother tongue. But this is certainly true when it comes to comparing these features as applied to the target language.

From the above discussion, we may safely infer that, in general, performance of foreign learner may not equal his competence in the target language. While studying a Second language the students learn certain usages in their study material. They learn the right use of these usages through the practice in formal exercises. They also read these usages in books, magazines, newspapers etc. But sometimes, under certain pressure, they fail to produce flawless performance; therefore, a lot of practice and exposure in real life situations is must so that the learners are able to cross mistake barrier in performance that faces everybody while acquiring flawless performance ability in a Second language.

While judging the competence and performance of a Second language learner we have also to keep this fact in mind that certain mental and articulatory sets and aspects of the home language, sometimes do assert themselves, and due to this natural and unavoidable phenomenon of interference, Second language learner may commit either competence or performance mistakes.

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Under these circumstances, a Second language learner should not get disheartened. He should never become a victim of self disgust and inferiority complex.

Example from Target and Home Languages

For the benefit of both teachers and learners, we may give a few examples of both Second language, that is, English and home language, that is, Hindi in the case of Haryana students so as to highlight the difficulties of the Second language learners. While learning English as a Second language, a Hindi speaking student has to face numerous difficulties in attaining competence and proficiency in the use of Second language.

Language systems of Hindi and English differ in many respects. For example, in Hindi, for the act of going, we say, "Mein jata hun, hum jate hain"; and in English for the same action we say, "I go, we go." As far as subject is concerned, 'I' stands for 'Mein' and 'We' stands for 'Hum', and the Hindi speaking learner faces no difficulty in grasping the language system of English because the systems of both Hindi and English concur in respect of 'Subject' of the of the sentence.

In both languages, while writing and speaking, 'Subject' is placed at the beginning of a sentence or speech. But as far as the verb is concerned, there is difference of a peculiar nature. In English 'go' stands for both 'I' and 'We', but in Hindi 'jata hun' is the verb form for 'mein', that is, 'I', and 'jate hain' for 'hum', that is, 'We'. Again in Hindi we say, "Mein hockey khelta hun, hum hockey khelte hein"; and in English for the same action we say, "I play hockey, we play hockey." In these sentences 'Subject' is placed at the beginning in both the languages but as far as object of the verb is concerned, it is placed after 'Subject' in Hindi, and after 'Verb' in English.

In Hindi 'Verb' is placed at the end of the sentence after the Object of the Verb, but in English 'Verb' is placed in the middle of the sentence, before the Object of the Verb. Thus the learner faces difficulty in grasping the pattern in English which has both similarity and dissimilarity with corresponding pattern in Hindi.

As far as adjective is concerned, in English we say in singular form "big building" and in plural form "big buildings", but in Hindi we say in singular form "burra bhavan" and in plural form "burre bhavan". In English it is the noun form which denotes difference between singular and plural, that is, 'building' and 'buildings' respectively – 's' added to 'building' causes the plural form of the same, but in Hindi it is the adjectival form, that is, 'burra' and 'burre' which denotes the sense of singular noun and plural noun in the sentences given above. Thus, 'bhavan' stands for both singular and plural nouns, but its singularity and plurality depends on the adjectival forms 'burra' and 'burre' preceding it. In fact, a learner of English belonging to Hindi speaking

areas faces numerous difficulties because, as the above examples show, there are numerous dissimilarities between the language systems of English and Hindi.

It is also important to note that in Hindi we write what we speak, and vice versa, that is, vowel and consonant sounds during the act of speech find definite shape in written form of Hindi – speech sounds and their written forms coincide with each other but, in English written form is different from the speech form that is vowel and consonant sounds used in speech form of English do not have definite shape in written form of English.

No Two Language Systems are Ever Alike

We have to keep in mind that the language systems of any two languages are never alike and a Second language learner has to face numerous difficulties while mastering the target language. Level of proficiency in competence and performance depends on the ratio of similarities and dissimilarities between the language systems of home language and target language; thus, more similarities lead to more proficiency level in competence and performance.

Role of Individual and Group Experience

Both individual and group experience of teachers and learners while teaching and learning target language in class room in controlled situations will enable us to know, analyze and investigate the difficulties in teaching and learning the Second language. At the same time, exposure of learners to outside the classroom surroundings and interaction with the native speakers of English will prove highly useful for learners as far as their performance is concerned.

Ample amount of interaction with native speakers, and if native speakers are not available, interaction with groups of people as proficient as native speakers who are well conversant with the formal, informal, oral, written, slang, colloquial, literary, and idiomatic aspects of the target language, will prove beneficial because the main purpose of any language is to enable a person to interact with other people of the same language.

Level of Teachers' Competence and Performance in the Target Language

It is also important that the teacher should be competent enough to make use of all those approaches and methods which are relevant, required, useful, contemporary and in vogue, in the best interests of the learners of target language. A teacher should prepare his teaching material and plan his strategy from among the contemporary approaches and methods of Second language teaching. A teacher should avoid the dogmatic approach of sticking to one approach and method only and avoiding other approaches and methods. A teacher should never forget that every

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approach and method, howsoever old and ancient it may be, contains some precious gems and pearls for the benefit of Second language learners.

Advantages to Native Speakers!

It is also generally seen that no one minds very much if a native speaker makes mistakes in writing or speech simply because the native speaker is generally treated as infallible in the use of home language, but if the mistake, howsoever minor and negligible, is detected in the speaker of a non-native language, he is laughed at, snubbed, ridiculed as if the fellow had committed a serious blunder in the use of Second language. This type of double standard on the part of native speakers while judging the competence and performance of native and non-native speakers is highly injurious to the morale of the non-native speaker and dampens his enthusiasm for learning the Second language.

Pressure on Foreign Language Learners from Extra-linguistic Forces

With the advent of the age of globalization towards the last quarter of the twentieth century, English language teaching in developing countries of Asia and Africa as Second language has become of paramount importance, because scientific and technological teaching in these countries has been spreading at a very fast pace. Scientific and technological subjects require proficiency not only in grammatical aspects but also communicative aspects of English. Proficiency in the communicative properties of language enables the students to comprehend how the language system is used to express scientific facts and concepts.

Regarding the sad plight of language learners H. G. Widdowson argues:

Students and especially, in developing countries, who have received several years of formal English teaching, frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language, and to understand its use, in normal communication, whether in the spoken or written mode.(Widdowson 1987: 117).

Pressures within India

As far as India is concerned, as a result of globalization since recent past, enormous increase in educational opportunities has taken place, and quite a large number of students are entering universities and technical institutions to take up technical and engineering subjects which can only be studied satisfactorily if the students are able to read text books in English efficiently – only then they will be able to communicate in the spoken or written mode successfully. They must attain competence in sentence making, and at the same time they should attain proficiency

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in performance, that is, they should be competent enough to communicate effectively and logically.

Situational English Clubbed with Structural Practice

While teaching English as Second language, the general approach is to combine situational presentation with structural practice. It is argued that situational presentation of language items in the classroom proves helpful in making the meaning of these items clear and easy to learn for the students. After situational presentation these language items are practised as formal structures by means of exercises. With the help of quite a large number of formal structures and exercises, the students are able to retain the formal structures of language in their memory. In this way, it is argued that the learner attains competence in Second language by means of controlled performance.

The Need to Perform Communicatively

But this approach simply imparts only the ability to make correct sentences. In fact, there are two different kinds of meaning language items stand for. One kind of meaning is that which language items have as elements of the language system, and the other kind of meaning is that which they convey when they are actually used in acts of communication.

Present approach of teaching students, how sentences are formed, should also include the systematic teaching of communicative functions of language. For example, affirmative sentences are not always used as statements and interrogative sentences are not always used as questions. One language item or linguistic form is, generally, prone to fulfill quite a large number of communicative functions. It is also significant to note that one communicative function can be fulfilled or performed by a variety of linguistic items or linguistic forms.

Systematic teaching of communicative value of a language is of paramount importance for communicating successfully and logically the thing we want to place before other people. Let us take science stream. While dealing with the students of the science stream, we teach them linguistic form like the present tense and the passive forms, but it will be better if we go by the Communicative Approach and concentrate on communicative acts which a scientist generally performs: they are definition, classification, generalization, deduction, and so on.

Grading for Communicative Competence and Performance

To form large communicative units, grading can be done like this: first generalization, then observation and so on. Generalization stands for definition; observation stands for illustration;

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and next we reach the stage of a unit of communication. This type of grading forms a very common unit of communication in scientific discourse. For example:

Generalisation: Metals expand when heated.

Observation: Railway lines get longer in hot weather.

Unit of Communication: Metals expand when heated. Railway lines, for example get
longer in hot weather.

Here is an example of Syllogism:

Generalisation: Smoking is injurious to health.

Observation: Mohan should stop smoking.

Unit of Communication: Smoking is injurious to health, therefore, Mohan should stop
smoking.
                                    Or
Metals expand when heated.
Copper is a metal.
Therefore Copper expands when heated.

Presentation

Presentation of science items through the method of Syllogism is the proper and appropriate way of combining sentences into communicative units of scientific discourse. On the other hand, action chain sequence sentences do not combine to create a communicative unit. For example:

1. I am going to eat an apple.
2. I am eating an apple.
3. I have eaten an apple.

Sentences given above do not perform the act of deductive reasoning. At the most they simply teach us sentence making. They don't combine to create a communicative unit.

Pay Attention to Various Instruction Types

In India, we are teaching English as a Second language. We suggest that our teachers should pay great attention to Content Based Instruction (CBI) and Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

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which are actually based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). While teaching English in schools and colleges and universities, we should focus on real communication and the exchange of information.

Ideal situation of Second language learning should be like this: subject matter of language teaching should be content rather than grammar or function or some other language based unit of organization. Content here means subject matter from outside the domain of language.

Highlighting the communicative value of language teaching Widdowson remarks:

I would argue . . . that a foreign language can be associated with those areas of use which are represented by the other subjects on the school curriculum and that this not only helps to ensure the link with reality and the pupil's own experience but also provides us with the most certain means we have of teaching the language as communication, as use, rather than simply as usage. (Widdowson 1978: 16)

TBLT

Notion of task is the core of TBLT. Purposeful activities and tasks are performed through emphasis on communication and meaning. Tasks may be: reading a map and giving directions, writing a letter or report or reading a set of instructions and directions, conducting a telephone conversation, discussing and solving a complicated problem or puzzle or riddle. In other words, we may say that TBLT promotes the concept of Communicative Language Teaching. Skehan makes a significant observation in this regard:

Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome; tasks generally bear some resemblance to real life language use. So, task-based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language.
(Skehan 1996b: 20)

CBI

As regards Content Based Instruction it means that we should shift our focus from merely teaching language system to Content Based Instruction. In other words, syllabus for Second language teaching should be organized around content. Krahnke defines it as follows:

It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught. (Krahnke 1987: 65)

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Aspects of TBLT

Willis rightly remarks that TBLT is a logical development of communicative language teaching (Willis 1996). Quite a large number of principles of CLT Approach have been incorporated in TBLT, such as activities that involve real communication are essential for language learning; activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks to promote learning; language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

TBLT provides a lot of opportunities for language learning through the syllabus based on various tasks and activities. According to Jack C. Richards:

Engaging learner in task work provides a better context for the activation of learning processes than form-focused activities, and hence ultimately provides better opportunities for language learning to take place. Language learning is believed to depend on immersing students not merely in "comprehensible input" but in tasks that require them to negotiate meaning and engage in naturalistic and meaningful communication. (Richards 2001: 223-224)

The Omnipresent Home Language

While teaching a Second language, one must keep in mind the learner's home language system, that is, structures and patterns and grammatical items, and the way the home language system works in a variety of communicative actions. Teacher should also find out similarities and dissimilarities between the system of home language and the system of Second language.

First, the teacher should lay emphasis on the similarities between the systems of the home language and the Second language. For example, we should take the following similarity between the language system of Hindi as the first language and the language system of English as the Second language.

For example: in Hindi we say: "Mein khelta hun." In this sentence first there is subject 'Mein', and then there is verb "khelta hun." Now in English for this act of speech we say: "I play." First there is subject 'I', and then there is verb 'play'. Thus the above example shows total and complete similarity between the structure of the type of sentences which take subject first and then immediately take the verb. Now, let us move further and find out dissimilarity in the same structure when it expands. In Hindi for example, we say: "Mein hockey khelta hun." Structure is: Subject- 'Mein', Object of the Verb- 'hockey,' Verb- 'khelta hun'. But in English we say: "I play hockey." The structure is Subject- I, Verb- 'play', Object of the Verb- 'hockey'. Thus, dissimilarity is obvious, that is, the structure in Hindi is Subject+ Object of the Verb+ Verb; but in English the structure is Subject+ Verb+ Object of the Verb. The teacher should move from similarities to dissimilarities in the home language and the target language because it is very easy

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to absorb the similarities between the language systems of two languages, but it takes more time and motivation in absorbing the dissimilarities between the language system of two languages.

How About Efficient Reading and Appropriate Reading Pronunciation?

As far as efficient reading of the text of the target language is concerned, it has to be kept in mind that the correct pronunciation of the vowel and consonant sounds of the target language is of paramount importance, particularly in spoken form of the target language. For example, standard form of pronunciation of the British English is the Q.P. or R.P.

We also come across difficulties in respect of pronouncing or uttering vowel sounds and consonant sounds of the target language, particularly when we find that certain vowel and consonant sounds do not exist in the vowel and consonant system of the home language.

For example, a learner from North India has to face a lot of difficulty in mastering the vowel and consonant sounds of English, that is, Second language. When a person comes across consonant sound /z/ in English, he is taken aback because the consonant sound /z/ does not exist in Hindi, that is, the home language of the learner. Again consonant sound /f/ exists in English but it does not exist in Hindi. A Hindi speaker will pronounce the word zoo /zu:/ as /**dʒu:**/ which is the wrong pronunciation of the word. Again a Hindi speaker will pronounce the initial sound of the word flower or fruit as /fh /which is a wrong pronunciation of the word. It is the responsibility of the teacher to help the student in making correct pronunciation of the target language. It is generally seen that the teachers do not pay heed to the correct pronunciation of the words of target language which makes the learners a laughing stock in society. It is also imperative that the teachers themselves should be well trained in the written, spoken and communicative aspects of the target language; only then they will be able to do the justice to the learners.

People living in urban areas and metropolitan cities are economically well off, and they can afford costly education by sending their children to well established, well equipped, reputed schools, colleges and universities, but people living in rural areas in India are generally poor; the economic status of these rural people is far-far below the status of the urban people. Barring a few rich landlords and peasants who can afford to send their sons and daughters to the reputed colleges and universities in urban areas, the village folk, in general, have to depend on schools and colleges being run in rural areas.

Generally speaking the schools and colleges situated in rural areas are deficient in proper infrastructure, adequate premises, library facilities and audio-visual apparatus for Second language learners. Moreover, teachers prefer to teach in schools, colleges and universities situated in cities and metropolitan centers. Generally, on one pretext or the other, they try to avoid posting in rural area schools and colleges. And those who are posted in rural areas perform

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their job reluctantly. By hook or by crook, they manage their retransfer in cities, as early as possible. Sometimes, through their connections they get their posting orders cancelled, on one pretext or the other. Thus, this situation is highly detrimental to the progress and development of the rural students – that is, first, lack of infrastructure facilities cum modern teaching aids for Second language teaching, second, unwillingness on the part of teachers to be posted in rural area schools and colleges.

An Imperative Condition

It is imperative that highly efficient and competent and experienced teachers, well-versed in linguistics and phonetics, and well acquainted with methods and approaches of teaching and able to establish rapport with the rural students, are posted in rural areas. We should not and cannot forget and ignore the harsh fact that we are living in an age of globalization, technological and scientific advancement and bitter competition; therefore, in the light of these circumstances, it is must that the rural students are brought at par with the urban students so that the Indian society as a whole, without disparities, registers progress in all fields of life including the field of Second language teaching and learning.

It will be far better if the teachers with rural background are assigned the task of imparting knowledge of English language to the rural students in the rural area colleges. Naturally, these teachers and rural students will be able to communicate with each other in a more friendly and natural way.

These teachers will be able to understand and appreciate the problems and difficulties of the rural learners in a far more sympathetic manner than the teachers with urban background. However, this opinion does not mean that urban teachers should be debarred from posting in rural colleges. Those who are really interested in teaching the rural students must be encouraged to work in rural areas – special incentives in the form of special pay etc. should also be provided to the teachers who volunteer to work in rural areas and show good results in making the rural students proficient in English language.

In short, as far as English language teaching in India is concerned, competence in language system and proficiency in communication is the need of the hour.

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