

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 9 : 10 October 2009

ISSN 1930-2940

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Human Language: Species Specific

Language is a valuable means of communication. In effect, human beings are the only species capable of producing decipherable, meaningful and discreet sounds. Language thus means only human communication. It has other features too: it is a system and is symbolic. This is so because we can think and assimilate our thoughts into words and other linguistic units - sounds, syllables, words, connected speech, etc. No other living organism can think and speak as we do.

Learning Another Language

No language, barring one's native language, comes to one naturally and spontaneously. It has to be laboriously and consistently learnt and taught. Of course, as far as one's mother tongue is concerned, it is acquired almost without any deliberate effort. One does not have to really work hard in order to pick up one's first language. First language could be simply the language of early childhood experience, not necessarily the language of the parents. Also simultaneous of more than one language is possible when this happens in early childhood. But, in the case of other tongues including English for most of us in India, one needs to put in a lot of systematic and long-term effort.

Learning a Language is Not Simply Learning the Structural Code

Only learning/teaching in our setup in India does not serve the purpose. What is required is: some ingredients of human values should be incorporated in this process so that it becomes unique and great. It may, at the first instance, sound unrealistic and unachievable, but it is possible and ought to be adopted. Of course, readily, five basic human values: truth, right conduct, love, peace and nonviolence can be incorporated in the present education system to make it value-based.

The Goal of This Article: Impart Values with Language Learning

The saying 'End of education is character' speaks volumes on how much emphasis is put on character building which includes human values as well. Since character is a broad and all-encompassing concept, the present paper confines itself only to the values in teaching/learning and to be more specific, values in English Language Teaching (ELT).

The Imperative Need

It would not be out of context at this juncture to provide what value-based education exactly means: 'it is the study of moral and ethical values that makes one a perfect man'. It has, of late, gained much significance. The manner the world bodies such as the UNO and the UNESCO have taken it up stands testimony to this fact. The main reason for the sudden thrust is the critical phase the world is passing through at present. There are conflicts and clashes, bloodshed and massacre, battles and wars- all in the name of caste, class, creed, race, region and religion. Human vices like greed, ego, jealousy, lust and hatred have taken the front seat. It is therefore imperative that human values propounded by Gandhi and other saints are instilled in the taught.

But instilling human values is a seemingly very difficult proposition as in our day-to-day life values have become more conspicuous by their absence. We, however, need to make them a part of our life and, in fact, way of living. This can be done by incorporating human values in our education system right from the KG level to the PG level. There exists certain education system where values are harmoniously blended with learning.

The five basic human values are ingrained in the whole education programme. All of us must therefore both at the individual level and collectively adhere to these principles. Then only, after some years down the line, our world will be a better place to live in.

Gandhi and Value-Imbued Education

It is relevant here to cite what Gandhi felt. He cited seven major structural and collective sins of modern times all of which ought to be dispensed with such that the quality of our lives improves:

Politics without principles: There is hardly any field in our life at present which is untouched by lack of principles politics being the most prominent. Principles are dumped as it were into a corner as far as present day politics is concerned which is why politics is considered the last resort of the scoundrels. It is time certain principles, for example civil disobedience, swaraj, fasts etc adopted during freedom struggle were adhered to in politics.

Wealth without work: Everybody these days wants to amass wealth by hook or by crook. Nobody has the time or scope to judge the fair or foul means adopted to accumulate money. This kind of earning without any labor as such makes people idle and immoral. It is therefore desirable that we earn from work so that we will appreciate the value of labor as well as money.

Pleasure without conscience: We have today been living in such an atmosphere where each one of us desires to seek all sorts of pleasures, especially material ones without conscience. We are free to enjoy our life but there has to be some sort of morality and value in it. Otherwise there is no difference between us and the animals which can't discriminate. We need to have conscience in our pursuit for enjoyment.

Knowledge without character: The knowledge we talk of in the modern day world has a very different connotation. It only means gathering and memorizing only bits of information. Knowledge without the ingredients of character is dangerous. It is therefore necessary that we gain character-based knowledge which is complete knowledge.

Commerce without morality: Morality in every sphere of our life has gone down to its lowest ebb. Commerce and business is no exception to this. In effect, morality is a rare concept in today's business world. People somehow want to succeed in their business ventures by fair or foul means. The need of the hour is to add some moral values to commerce.

Worship without sacrifice: All of us in our own way worship something or the other. But what is missing is the component of sacrifice. We never come forward to accommodate or compromise in our religious pursuit. It is therefore necessary that we sacrifice some of our wishes and other things while worshipping.

Science and technology without humanity: Man has achieved Himalayan heights in the field of science and technology. It however is sans humanity. The result is the ruinous consequences. The elements of humanity therefore have to be put in science and technology also so that the scientific temper has some human aspect tagged to it.

Education, Reading and Ethics

Education thus can be complete only when it is accompanied by moral values or components. Only reading some classics mainly for the purpose of examination and degrees is no education at all. A person will be called liberally educated only if he/she has acquired the qualities listed below by William Cronor:

The educated people listen and hear; can read and write and can also talk to anyone; solve puzzles, rigor and seek truth; tolerate and strive to make the world better; and nurture and empower.

Values in Learning a Foreign Language

The same thing holds true for language learning as well. In effect, learning a foreign language, according to Alan C Frantz, offers more value for a number of reasons as stated below:

Learning a foreign language offers a sense of cultural and linguistic past. When one learns a language other than his/her own, he/she is exposed to the culture of the target language. In this sense, it enriches the learner not only with the history of the target language but also its culture. It also helps expand one's view of the world and also of opportunities.

When one learns a foreign language, one's point of view widens. The opportunities and scope also expand. Learning a foreign language is, therefore, valuable for the learner. Foreign language learning strikes a balance between content and skill. One cannot learn fully only the content with the exclusion of skill, primarily because language learning is basically a skill and these two things are interdependent.

Learning a foreign language also contributes to the creation of a student's personality and intellect. Learning a foreign language enhances one's intellect and shapes his/her personality. Knowledge of an additional language gives an extra edge to the learner and hence valuable.

Learning a foreign language encourages critical reflection of language and culture and fosters one's country's image. The learner develops a critical approach to the target language and culture against his/her own. As an important component of culture, it enhances his/her nation's image which has immense value.

Foreign language learning contributes to cultural literacy as also respect for other peoples. When one learns a foreign language, it makes him/her literate culturally. Moreover; it also creates in him/her a sense of respect for other peoples, especially the speakers of the target language. Many Indians have achieved cultural literacy and also have developed respect for the British.

It contributes to achievement of national goals. This is true as far as English in India is concerned. During freedom movement, for example English worked as a common language to bring all nationalists together. It thus contributed to achieving the national goal of integration and independence, and it continues to do so now.

Foreign language learning improves one's knowledge of the native language and modes of thought. One tends to improve his native language as also the modes of thought.

Development of thought is a positive sign. It enables transfer of training. Language learning makes it convenient for the learner to transfer all that he has learnt to others. A person trained in English can easily transfer his knowledge to his fellow countrymen which is surely of high value.

Language learning thus is a profoundly value-laden activity. And, in India especially, it has been going through noticeable transformation in methodology in recent years. It is a relatively new concept and is still in its youthful stage. Yet the value education exists there although we don't acknowledge it.

Four Major Skills and Values

English Language Teaching imparts four major basic skills to each of which value can be added: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Unlike hearing, listening is only receiving the auditory information. It means processing the information intelligibly and so it is also preparing one to respond and react. It inculcates in the learner the ability to decipher and sift auditory information and accept only what is required. It requires strong

auditory discrimination and concentrated focus. This power to discriminate is an example of value. Similarly, having concentrated focus is another instance both of which can be easily put in the process of teaching the listening skill and learning other subjects.

Secondly, speaking is the most frequent form of utterance but it is also the most misunderstood skill. It makes the sincerity and spontaneity of the speaker more demanding. A contrived utterance can never be long disguised. So truthful conscience on the part of the speaker is what is expected. We can, for example, highlight this particular value while teaching the speaking skill to the learners so that they apply truthful conscience in their speech. Lexical choice and sentential, semantic and discourse structures for truthful expression are handled through this.

Reading is basically of two types: silent reading and reading aloud. The former promotes self understanding and stimulates exploration of both inner as well as surface meaning. It also aims at subsequent interpretation, prediction and analysis, all of which inculcate in the learner the sub-value of discrimination and quest for truth.

Reading aloud, on the other hand, mostly focuses on the listener's comprehension. It is therefore desirable that it is done with correct sense grouping, stress and intonation so that the text becomes meaningful and free from ambiguity. The reader should be sensitive to the limitations of his listener: noise, distractions, non-availability of text etc. He should live up to the trust reposed on him by the audience. Both the sensitivity and the zeal to win the trust are values.

Fourthly, writing is the most rigid of the modes of language use and skills. It is this rigidity that necessitates simplicity, non-ambiguity and directness. It fulfills itself using strategies: narration, description, classification, argumentation, definition, cause and effect, process analysis and compare and contrast, etc. These strategies give distortion-free angles of vision, improve perception and causal relation of all activity, and sharpen the judgment, clarity, reasoning and sensitive intuitive understanding, all of which are values.

It is pertinent to note here what Bill Johnston says: "it is only by confronting the moral complexity and ambiguity of our teaching that we can hope to identify the good and the right things to do in any given set of circumstances." In other words, learning a language with values is not only possible but highly desirable as well.

Dependence on Moral Decisions

It, however, largely depends on the moral decisions that the English language teachers must take while interacting with the students, the curriculum and the role of the English teacher as an agent of their school. The decisions include issues such as classroom rules, teacher's expectations of the students, cross-cultural issues, values in text books, choice of the variety of the English to be taught, the teacher's role as a representative of the school, etc.

Johnston observes that teachers can not make sweeping statements or take blanket decisions on the issues raised above. The decisions have to be based on his or her values along with how these values interact with each individual context or situation.

To conclude, the essence of language teaching, like that of all teaching, lies in values which is moral in nature. The morality of teaching is highly complex, paradoxical and saturated with important and difficult dilemmas. Since moral dimension of teaching is rarely talked about and teachers are hardly aware of it, there is a great need to uncover and examine values that inform teaching.

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