

A Study of English Language Teaching in India

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Abstract – In learners of English as a second language are students classified as “limited English proficient” (LEP) because they come from a home where a language other than English is spoken and score at below “Proficiency” on the LAB-R or score at the Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced level of English as measured by the NYSESLAT. Diverse student profiles exist within the overall classification of LEP. There are LEP/ELLs who may be gifted and there are many with a high level of proficiency in their native language. Others may not be able to read or write in their native language because they have had a limited or interrupted formal education in their own country. Finally, there is a population of LEP students who have been identified as having special needs and have been referred for special education services. For ELL/LEP students, it is imperative to make teaching and learning culturally relevant and to enable access to prior knowledge upon which new skills and concepts can be built. It is critical for educators to understand the ways in which students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds profoundly influence their experiences in the classroom. The visual arts enhance language development by offering non-verbal methods for communication and understanding and by providing a platform for students to create mental images. Integrating the arts into language arts and the content areas for ELLs can give students the opportunity to engage in new and varied approaches while gaining positive emotional responses to learning, understanding others and communicating their own ideas.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Language teaching in India, as we know, has a long tradition. Memorization of vocabulary and translation of sentences often formed the major part of such learning process in the past. Ancient languages such as Sanskrit and Pali were mastered in India through the process of memorization of texts and vocabulary lists. “Learning vocabulary lists indeed formed the core of language learning.” But this tradition of language teaching has been subjected to a tremendous change, especially, throughout the 20th century. In case of English language teaching in India, there are some milestones in the development of this tradition. According to D. Kanta Rao and J.M. Kanthi Thilakha: “If language teachers teach as they taught earlier, then one may not achieve the required goals of teaching English in the present global scenario.” So, there could be as many ways of learning languages as there are people learning them. The way one learnt English is not exactly the way one is teaching it. Again, the way one acquired one’s mother-tongue may be quite different from the way one learnt English. The following observation by V. Saraswathi is very important to quote in this connection. She says: “There is no best method. The history of language teaching presents a fascinating variety of methods. If there are such a variety of methods, which one are we to choose? There is no definite answer to this question,

what works with one learner may not work with another. One may be a wizard in grammar but another may just hate it. Others might enjoy memorizing sentences.” She further adds: “Different methods may be appropriate to different contexts. If we start searching for the perfect method or the ideal single solution to the problem of language learning, we bound to fail”³ Like V. Saraswathi, Diane-Larsen-Freeman’s remark on language teaching methodology sums up a major trend away from unity to diversity in the following words. They comment: “There is no single acceptable way to go about teaching language today.” The statements quoted above make it clear that no single approach or method is appropriate for all learning styles. A good lesson will, therefore, be one in which the teachers use a smorgasbord of activities taken from a variety of sources. By varying our techniques, we will give students of all styles the chance to shine some of the time. In English language teaching pedagogy the three key terms viz- Method, Approach and technique are used frequently and interchangeably. This tripartite arrangement is hierarchical in order. The term ‘Method’ is very ambiguous, and refers to the overall plan for the orderly presentations of language material, no part of which contradicts and all of which is based on selected approach and procedure.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS:

The grammar -translation method, the Direct method, Audio-lingual method, Bilingual method, Dr. Michael West's the new method, and Suggestopedia etc., are among the methods used commonly by the teachers of English in India. An attempt, therefore, has been made to review these methods as below:

The Grammar - Translation Method: This method, also known as the classical method, is one of the oldest or traditional methods of teaching English. In Europe it was used in the teaching of Latin and Greek for several centuries, and got introduced in India with the arrival of the British. This method as Tickoo said: "came to English Language Teaching in most of Asia in general and India in particular with support in the long- established tradition of teaching classical languages in the United Kingdom. The system of education in the country served as a model for schools in most of its colonies. The psychological beliefs that prevailed then were (a) that classical languages with their intricate systems of grammar were capable of training human faculties including memory, and (b) that learning these languages was part of a truly liberal education. Teaching and learning primarily aimed at the ability to read full texts rather than to communicate orally in everyday situations".

"It is one which treats all languages as if they were dead, as if each consisted essentially of a collection of ancient documents to be deciphered and analyzed... It is the one which categorically ignores all considerations of phonetics, pronunciations and acoustic image, and boldly places language on a foundation of alphabets, spellings and writing systems... It is the one which assumes translation to be the main or only procedure for the learning of vocabulary... It is the one which assumes that word and sentence structure is to be attained mainly or solely through the memorizing of the so-called rules of grammar."

In spite of the weaknesses catalogued by Palmer, the method could best be put in use by discarding the overemphasis on the grammatical rules and by making a room for imparting training in the spoken aspects of English. The grammar-translation method in its modified form continues to be widely used in some parts of the world even today. In the mid-and late 19th century opposition to it gradually developed, and as a result of this it lost its hold in the domain of teaching of English.

APPROACHES TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING:

This approach as Kripa K. Gautam states "is based on the belief that language consists of 'structures' and that the mastery of these structures is more important than the acquisition of vocabulary. Since structure is what is important and unique about a language, early practice should focus on mastery of phonological and

grammatical structures rather than on mastery of vocabulary". This approach, according to Kulkarni 'emphasizes the teaching and learning of the basic items or materials that constitute the framework of a language'.

The cause of the emergence of this approach was the extensive research conducted on English language teaching as a foreign language at the University of London Institute of Education. This approach as, Dr. Bhat asserts 'is definitely an improvement upon the Direct Method, though the techniques and principles are not widely different'.⁸⁰ The exponents of this approach consider that language consists of 'structures' and structures are more important than the vocabulary. These structures are carefully graded in terms of both meaning and form. The term 'structural' according to Kripa K. Gautam "is referred to the following characteristics:

- a) Elements in a language are linearly produced in a rule governed way.
- b) Language samples can be exhaustively described at any structural level of description (phonemic, morphological and syntactic).
- c) Linguistic levels are thought of as a system within systems. These sub-systems are pyramid ally structured-phonemic systems leading to morphemic systems, and those in turn lead to be higher level systems of phrases, clauses and sentences".

The two essential features of this approach are careful grading of structures, and vocabulary control. J.B. Bruton in a working paper presented at the Nagpur Seminar in 1958 summarizes the basic assumptions regarding the nature of language and the methods best suited for the presentation of linguistic items. He says: "a) language is primarily a spoken thing and... therefore, our approach to a foreign language should in a first instance be through its spoken forms, b) ...mastery over the signaling system of a language is more important than detailed knowledge of the forms of the language; c) ...this mastery is best acquired by repetition of the various components of the system in varied forms; d) ... since language arises from situation, the teacher's task is to create meaningful situations from which language will arise easily and naturally; e)... mastery over a given range of structures and confidence in their use are best imparted by concentrating on the teaching of one item at a time; f)...each item must be firmly established orally before pupils encounter it in their textbooks". Yardi defines the term 'structures' as an "internal ordering of linguistic items", and further adds that structures may be defined as "devices that we use to make signals, to convey meanings, and indicate relationship."⁸³ Yardi further points out that although the terms 'structure' and 'pattern' are generally used interchangeably by some teachers, they are not

identical, as the former has a linguistic orientation, while the latter has a pedagogic orientation.

The Communicative Approach: Dr. Sharada Bhat opines that the communicative approach to teaching of English is organized on the basis of certain communicative functions, such as apologizing, describing, inviting, promising etc. that the ESL learners need to know. She further, adds that this approach, as applied to English explains the language in terms of the functions it performs. This approach, according to Dr. Bhat, does not ignore the role of grammar in the process of language learning, but it insists that the grammatical rules are useless unless they are applied to real-life situations. Communicative approach focuses on the significance of language functions because the learner needs knowledge of both meaning and functions. It lays emphasis on functional, communicative and social interactive activities. It also lays emphasis on the semantic aspect of the language. In order to improve the ability of reading comprehension it is essential that the learner knows the semantic aspect of the language. Dr. N.S. Prabhu draws a distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence and says that there is a logical relationship between the two. Prabhu says that a language structure is best acquired when the learners' attention is on meaning, when the learner is preoccupied with understanding, working out, relating or conveying messages and copes with the language. This 'coping' or 'deployment' is central to the process of language learning. Prabhu further states that there is no syllabus in terms of structure, no pre-selection of language items for any given lesson. The basis of each lesson is a problem or a task and the conduct of the lessons consists of setting the task, demonstrating ways of tackling it and, in the process, giving some pupils a chance to attempt it, then getting all the pupils to attempt and, finally giving each pupil a rough indication of the measure of his success. The function of the task, as Prabhu opines, is to bring about a self-reliant effort by the learners. Tasks, according to him, consist of : interpreting a schedule, giving a set of directions, deciding which action is right and why. Attention to grammar is entirely incidental. Incorrect sentences are rectified by the teacher. William Little wood has distributed communicative competence into pre-communicative and communicative learning activities. In the methodology of the pre-communicative activities the teacher isolates specific elements of knowledge or skill which compose communicative activity and provides the learner with opportunities to practise them separately. The learners are thus trained in the part-skills of communication rather than practicing the total skills to be acquired. This aimed at providing command of the linguistic structures, without actualizing it for communicative purposes. Therefore, the learners' main purpose is to produce language which is acceptable and appropriate. Pre-communicative activities are categorized into structural activities and

quasicomunicative activities, the latter take account of communicative as well as structural facts about language.

A major aspect of the ethnography of this approach, according to Patrik T. Kameen, is the analysis of the events in terms of their constructive components. These are: participants (speaker, hearer, sender, and receiver), setting (i.e. a psychological or cultural setting), the actual form of a message (i.e. a linguistic description of the message), topic (i.e. what is the message about), Purpose (i.e. goal, intention), key (i.e. serious, mock), channel (e.g. oral, written), code (i.e. language or variety within a language), norms of interpretation (i.e. how different norms of interaction or violation of them interpreted), genre (i.e. casual speed, poem, prayer, form, letter). Allen Widows points out: 'utterances can take on an enormously wide range of meanings in different contexts'. He further adds that the learner must be aware of the social meanings of the language forms in different types of social contexts which he may have to face in his life. The classroom teaching should preserve the communicative character of the language and it should enable the learner to face the real-life situations.

Keith Morrow is also of the same opinion. He writes: "any use of language will take place in a context, and the language forms which are appropriate will vary in accordance with context".

Experts in the field of CLT observe that creating and interpreting everyday situations in the language class should be the important strategies of teaching English as a second language. This is evident from what Little wood has to say:

"Foreign language learners need opportunities to develop the skills; by being exposed to situations... the learners need to acquire not only repertoire of linguistic items, but repertoire of strategies for using them in concrete situations".

Little wood further writes elaborately on the significance of meaning or semantic options, as language is essentially a system of meaning potential i.e. it consists of sets of semantic options available to the language users that relate what the user can do in terms of social behaviour, what the user can say in terms of grammar. Little wood writes:

"Students must also learn to relate language to the social meaning that it carries and to use it as a vehicle for social interaction. To this end, it is necessary to increase their sense of performing in a meaningful social context, rather than simply responding to promote... with the necessary

linguistic form and the necessary links between form and meaning”.

Howatt distinguishes between a ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ version of this approach as: “There is in a sense, a ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ version of the communicative approach. The weak version which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years, stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching...The ‘strong’ version of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. If the former could be described as ‘learning to use’ English, the latter entails ‘using English to learn it’”.

Summarizing the main characteristics of the communicative approach Richards and Rodgers asserts:

- i) Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
- ii) The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.
- iii) The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
- iv) The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse”.

An important aspect of communicative approach which has attracted attention of the applied linguists is the syllabus model. Wilkins’s notional- syllabus was one of the very first syllabus models, which specified the semantic-grammatical categories and the categories of communicative function that learners need to express. But it was soon criticized by linguists as merely replacing functions. According to Richards and Rodgers “it specified products rather than communicative processes”.

CONCLUSION:

In learners of English as a second language are students classified as “limited English proficient” (LEP) because they come from a home where a language other than English is spoken and score at below “Proficiency” on the LAB-R or score at the Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced level of English as measured by the NYSESLAT. Diverse student profiles exist within the overall classification of LEP. There are LEP/ELLs who may be gifted and there are many with a high level of proficiency in their native language. Others may not be able to read or write in their native

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