

GLIMPSES AT TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH IN THE HINTERLAND

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Abstract:

Today English in India stands at the cross-roads. English is used differently by different people in different states and so in Maharashtra. We find a paradox in the perspectives of people from Maharashtra towards English. People from urban area, especially from corporate sector are fascinated and obsessed to the use of English in their day to day life. But people from the rural area are having phobia resulting in a negative attitude towards English. They find it difficult to understand and do not like it. Even the teachers of English face many problems in the teaching learning process of a language. Therefore, the teachers should use certain techniques in a small class of learners and should find out whether these techniques are applicable and useful to develop language skills of learners.

Keywords : English at cross-roads, English in rural area, Problems of Teacher, teaching learning techniques.

A Glance at English in Maharashtra:

It is true that if we have to understand the status of English in Maharashtra, we can divide it into three categories- the rural, the urban and the cosmopolitan areas. Marathi is the mother tongue in Maharashtra. So, it is used in offices. But people from urban and cosmopolitan cities use Hindi and English. Highly qualified and people from cosmopolitan cities prefer reading English newspapers. But newspapers in Marathi are read by mass. In villages, we find that the villagers have a negative attitude towards English. So, it is obvious that in restaurants located in the rural areas, Marathi is used. Even, in urban area, Marathi and Hindi are used to receive orders. However, the situation in grand hotels is different in which English is used by waiters. We find the use of Marathi in offices such as ration shops, post offices, MSEB board, railway booking counter etc. Exceptionally, English is used at some of the railway booking counters, telephone exchange offices in big cities like Mumbai. When people meet from other states, they use Hindi and occasionally, in English when they meet people from southern states as they prefer English. In the advertisement,

English is generally used. But the use of Marathi and Hindi is also preferred due to two main reasons. The first is that government of Maharashtra forced to use Marathi as it is the mother tongue. And the second is the ignorance of people from the remote area. The same variety we find about the popularity of TV. programmes in rural to the urban areas. Hindi and Marathi channels are very popular because most of the people do not understand English. The youngsters from cities like Mumbai, Pune who can understand English, “V” channel is quite popular. The auto rickshaw drivers or shopkeepers or other common people use English rarely in their communication. They find the English language difficult to understand and to speak. But the case is different in big cities where these people from different culture, different states, different countries and different social strata. In such situation the auto rickshaw drivers, shopkeepers and even common people able to express themselves in English. Such people try to improve their speaking skills in English as it is going to help them in their daily transaction.

Nowadays, people are aware of the importance of English. They come to know that it is widely used at different places to fulfil educational purposes such as in public schools and educational institutes, at the conference, meetings, at formal functions meeting in private offices and big hotels. The result of this awareness is that the English medium schools are popular in towns and most of the people want to enrol their children in convent school to give them exposure to English. Now it is supposed that English is must in order to grab opportunities in life. People are getting aware of the functional and formal significance of English language. It is a language of Market and considering the importance of English as a global language, the Government has started English from the first standard in Marathi medium schools. As per the resolution of the Government of Maharashtra, English is taught from the 1st standard from year 2000. But Government’s allocation of a budget is not up to the mark. As a result, the preference of the parents for these schools has badly affected regional medium schools. In the words of Christina Decoursey, “the answer to this problem cannot come from educators, who can do little about government decision-making or economies.”(2013: xi)

English is not used at political meetings, social and cultural meetings. Politicians use Mother tongue in assembly. Most people speak either in Marathi or Hindi in their day to day life. Occasionally, they use English, especially, while having an interaction with an outsider. Generally, English is not used at religious places. At religious places, religious discourses are given in the respective language of the religion.

In this scenario, the life of the pupils in the coming decades is likely to bring new tensions

together with unprecedented opportunities. To enable them to benefit in the new environment will require English. The coming generation should have the ability to exchange and internalise new ideas constantly and creatively. They have to be imbued with a strong commitment to learning English. All this implies their future best.

Hurdles in Teaching and Learning Process:

In all the corners of schools, everybody keeps his eye on effective teaching of English. But it is a fact that all of us have to accept that students are weak particularly in the rural area in the use of English despite spending more time in learning English. Even the teachers of English face many problems in the teaching learning process of a language. It is necessary to focus on some of the prominent causes for students lagging behind in the effective use of English language and problems encountered by teachers.

Students in the rural area do not attend the schools regularly. The reason is that most of the stream coming to the schools is from farmers' families and they have to help their parents in getting work done on the fields. Lessons and poems, included in a textbook are beyond the capacity of understanding because pupils are not well acquainted with the setting, theme and events.

English subject is compulsory in schools and colleges but because of compulsion the strength of the class becomes very big which creates difficulty in practising four basic skills of language e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing. The strength of the class is uncountable it is near about 250 or more than that. So, the teaching and learning process becomes more theoretical instead of being practical. In public schools, there is a focus on teaching prescriptive grammar. That's why students find language learning difficult and tiresome. So, the condition of public schools is very bad. But in convent schools, the focus is on the functional use of English which helps to improve the language learning process. So such schools are becoming popular among people.

Colleges cannot provide every student with a textbook, or they are not in a mood to purchase it. To speak truth it is an adventure to teach English in compulsory English classes where students stare at the teachers without books. In fact, it is a challenge to educationist. They buy readymade notes or guides to get through examination. This creates the problem of lack of creativity among students.

Students in the rural area study English in the classes where sky over their heads is cloudless of competitions. Hence their aim is of passing only and not scoring good marks. That puts the teacher of English in miserable condition. To make it more miserable, 'some of the teachers hang on to their favourite techniques, because of success stories (99% pass etc.), but remember that in the

long run, they are not helping their learners to become independent and autonomous if they focus entirely on examinations'. (Eapen: 2007: 14) The faulty examination system is also responsible for this in which results play the significant role than the acquisition of language skills. Accordingly, teachers teach only those aspects which are important for the examination. Most of the questions are having a theoretical base. As a result, students simply have to memorise the answers to such questions.

Students in rural area study English in classes but find it difficult to converse fluently. Their study of English is confined to the vocabulary and grammar. They can write answers of questions correctly but they do not speak well. Learning vocabulary and grammar alone will not make them speak good English. For that they will have to acquire proper listening and speaking skills and it can only be possible through practice in the language laboratory.

Emphasis is laid on writing in the schools of the rural area at expense of listening and speaking. The students are used to sit in the rows of butterflies, listen what the teacher speaks and take down what he dictates. The result is that the pupils who can write correct English are fumbling for words when they talk to someone in English. They tend to use inappropriate expressions.

Example- What is time? Instead of 'What is the time'?

Worse still, we usually find pupils, unable to find suitable expressions twisting their neighbour's arm and looking at his watch. If they have not properly heard what a teacher was saying, how will they ask him to repeat it? E.g. 'what'? It is a rude and impolite expression. The way of asking would be:

I am sorry I didn't hear that properly. Or

Could you say that again, please?

The problem of 'Time' is another important barrier faced by teachers. They are in lack of time for conducting activities in class such as role-playing, group discussion, and dramatisation. They have to cover portion before the examination. This problem is also an outcome of overcrowded class. The ratio of students in relation to teachers is not proportional. Because of that, it becomes difficult to pay attention to the individual student.

In spite of all these odds the meritorious candidates are from rural area and that is the silver line in this atmosphere of darkness. On the part of teachers, if they develop a more positive attitude towards problems, it is possible to overcome some of the difficulties.

Techniques for Teaching and Learning of English:

To be sure of techniques, the teachers should use them in a small class of learners and should

find out whether these techniques are applicable and useful to develop language skills of learners. The problem related to large class as stated by K.K. Mcleoud e.g. management problems, evaluation problems, problem of speaking loudly and so on can be solved with the help of some approaches to the management of the large class e.g. plenary approaches (teacher- fronted), interactive approaches, and compromise approaches (inspirational lecturing, written- oral interaction etc.). (Coleman, Report no.11) A huge size of the class must be reduced to the minimum number near about 40 students. It will make the teacher of English to pay proper attention to each student and to realise the objective of teaching the English language. Short but interesting stories, one-act plays, poems if, are included in the textbooks with spoken exercises students will be tempted to listen to the teachers and speak English with their friends.

The teacher should empower the students to acquire language skills. The teachers have to communicate with the students about day-to-day things in simple language. For instance, sometimes students displease others by using the inappropriate expression. When we meet a friend we may say: ‘Hi!’ ‘Hello!’ But we cannot use them to talk to our official superior. We greet him, by saying ‘Good morning, Sir’. It is necessary to make them learn and use the expression appropriate to each situation. It is a need to give a variety of expressions on each text while studying it. The practice of questions and answers in the form of dialogues given are meant to be spoken and not just read. In order to bring this in action join one or more than two students and stimulate them to speak.

No doubt we are, and must be proud of mother tongue ‘Marathi’, but we should be able to create English atmosphere in the class and outside. Even to control the problem of time, the teachers should not waste their time in explaining the text in the mother tongue. They should understand that English class is the only place where most of the students get exposure to listening and speak English. The environment must be created in the schools where students feel comfortable in speaking English. For that group discussion, workshops, various contests such as essay and elocution must be organised in the school during the academic year to develop communicative skills. By doing so pupils while growing will be able to make use of English effectively and naturally.

The situational English should be taught to them through different dialogues. The dialogues either between two persons or between two groups should form their topics, for making requests, expressing gratitude, obligation, making suggestions, asking for information and expressing surprise. As far as pronunciation is concerned, there is a standardised pronunciation recognised throughout the world. It is called Received Pronunciation as an ornament of English language. To serve the purpose of effective pronunciation and communication modern teaching aids like the internet, C.D.

Player, V.C.D., tape-recorders must be used in the classes it will also enable the students to join a process of interaction. In this way, the language teachers can motivate and encourage learners to express themselves.

Here we have to understand that learning is a personal construct controlled by the individual learner. So, the teaching and learning should be collaborative in nature. In the early 1900s, John Dewey and other progressive educators theorised that “children flourish if allowed to grow freely in their own way at their own rate without being forced or limited by too much teaching”. It is Dewey who laid the foundation for learner-centeredness in which he objected the spoon-feeding of knowledge by teachers. He pointed out that learner should play a fuller and more active role in learning. The question of decision- making is important in learner-centred teaching where teachers have to promote autonomy to the learner in the classroom. This autonomy introduces freedom to learner regarding what to study, how to study, and when to study. This will help students to get more exposure to use language by reading, writing, listening and speaking. There is no need to explain grammar rules. They should be encouraged to use grammar correctly in context. The teachers should introduce their students to the difference in acceptability and correctness in grammar. They should tell them that the sentences which observe the rules framed for the use of a language are called correct sentences. If they break these rules, they are called incorrect sentences. On the other hand, acceptability is based on the current usage. Acceptable sentences are spoken or written by a large number of speakers. If some rules are broken while speaking, they are recorded as part of current usage. Eg.

‘We should consider why we have gotten ourselves into this murky situation. ’

The teacher should tell students that the above sentence is acceptable because in American Standard English ‘gotten’ is used as a past participle of ‘get’ instead of ‘got’.

In brief, the teachers should cultivate multiple bits of intelligence in students. Hence we can understand that the role of the teacher should become a true facilitator of learning for the language learners.

Conclusion:

Teachers have to play a very significant role in day to day educational scenario. He is the catalytic agent for realising the desired objectives and for translating the dreams into realities. The teacher should be proficient in the language. In the Indian way of thinking, young generation is a positive asset and precious national resource which needs to be cherished, and developed with tenderness and care, coupled usages of English at different levels. The positive action of teaching

and learning English needs to be planned and executed with great sensitivity. For that teachers should have a sensible practical attitude towards problems.

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