

**Strategic and Socio-Linguistic Need of India: Second
Language Acquisition of English through Text, Television &
Cinema**

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Today, the entire world has become a global village. Hence interaction between people belonging to different communities, cultures and countries has become inevitable. This communication takes place generally through English which now enjoys the status of international language. With the rising economies like India and China, and changing attitude of youth towards the queen's language English has undergone a complete structural change especially in India. As I have stated earlier, in a paper in the journal *ELT-VOICES INDIA*, India does not speak Indian Variety of English anymore. Rather a combination of 'Hinglish, SMS grammatology, computer jargonism, email shorthand has given birth to what I would term as 'General Variety of English'. The linguistic performance and linguistic competence of this language varies from individual to individual. 'BTW', the email shorthand of *by the way* is accepted language in business correspondence among multinational companies. But *btw* is interpreted as *between* among college going students when they communicate through mobiles. For a teacher like me it is not different from hieroglyphics. But there is no doubt that nativisation and globalization or rather localisation of English language has led to the emergence of a variety of English albeit non-native, lexically, morphologically, syntactically and stylistically different from the standard British form. This is the linguistic fact not only in India but everywhere. Thus gone are the days when we used to talk to people, now we dialogue with people over a cup of coffee or participate in a heated debate on the commoditization of services. Today we

pen down our thoughts in diary instead of simply writing or just table our views in front of friends. Thus today in our normal discourse, we keep up with the tradition of cut-copy-paste. Journalism also has seen this adaptive capability of a literary language like English and we often come across statements like - It is a good read in the best article reviews. But speaking locally or communicating in general variety of English can be the linguistic behaviour of children or even youth, but the same youth, when chairs a business session or conducts a diplomatic deal, behaves within certain 'propriety rules' of language or communication. Moreover with India marching onwards in leaps and bounds towards becoming a superpower, the communication of Indians with other nationals at the highest level has increased manifold. The ground reality is that till date countries like U.S.A., U.K. and other European nations command the world in economic, social and political matters. To be at par with them and to convince, argue or state to them we need to have full command over English as we cannot afford to have any semantic or communication gap with people who are native speakers of English. Thus the four dimensions of linguistic competence as given by Canale and Swain, i.e. 'grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence' need to be mastered by our children so that in coming times we really emerge as the world leader in social, economic and political affairs of the world. The skilful knitting of all the four dimensions of linguistic competence shall be possible only if we transcend the boundaries of second language learning and second language acquisition. Our command over English as it is in its present form globally should be as if we have two mother tongues.

There has been considerable debate among linguists of the world about second language acquisition. But every debate starts from Chomsky's theory of linguistic performance and linguistic competence, and in the given context we cannot ignore it. When we have to interact in a serious affair then we cannot afford to have grammatical incompetence. A peace resolution between two warring nations will have multiple connotations for the coming generations if there is a slight structural deviation or a minor grammatical error in its draft. Thus what Dell Hymes defined as communicative competence becomes the need of the hour. Thus accuracy, fluency and appropriate usage have to be ascertained in our linguistic behaviour. Our socio-

linguistic and discourse competence needs to be very profound. If we are unable to understand or speak in the right social context of role relationships we shall not only be a laughing stock but also create a communicative confusion. Similarly our command over language would arm us with the proper coping strategies in a communication as to how we have to initiate, or terminate a discussion or maintain and redirect any dialogue. As stated above, these four dimensions of grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competence in English language shall make us command the world in political, social and economic matters. Therefore the sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics have to converge to make us masters of second language of English.

But what are the facts about second language acquisition need to be understood before proceeding further. The neurolinguist Wilder Penfield says “the brain of the child is plastic. The brain of the adult, however effective it may be in other directions, is usually inferior to that of the child as far as language is concerned.” (Penfield & Roberts, 240) Lenneberg in his famous work ‘Biological Foundations of Language’ asserts that the development of cerebral dominance is firmly established around puberty and that language function is lateralized to the left hemisphere of the brain, and that “automatic acquisition [of a second language] from mere exposure ... seems to disappear after this age.” (Yalden, 8) But Krashen through his ‘Monitor Theory’ of adult second language acquisition refutes the earlier claims. He is of the view that adults possess two independent systems for developing ability in second language which are subconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning. The debate for acquisition and learning amongst children and adults is a prolonged affair between linguists of the world.

But there can be no denying that the child in his innocence can easily pick up habits including language and can internalise it easily. Focus has to be on this aspect of English Language Teaching especially in India wherein now English should be taught not as a second Language but as first language or like the mother tongue. English has to be acquired and not learnt since toddler stage through imitation, mimicry, association, trial and error and later on methods like grammar translation, CLT, audio lingual method etc can be introduced. Hence for acquiring English, movies and televised adaptations of books as modern form of literature can be used as a teaching

aid as literature in visual form shall not only initiate interest and inspire the students but also help in acquiring proper intonation, word stress and pronunciation, apart from giving cultural inputs to the students which shall help them in the future when they would need to exercise their discourse and strategic competence.

This experiment of making children masters of English since toddler age is being practiced regularly in big cities like Bangalore. The cultural reason has also had a role to provide impetus to existing scenario. Bangalore being the software hub has also become the centre of cultural matrix with people from all states having settled there. Moreover, the norm of going to the 'Play school' from the age of 2 ½ years leaves the children with no other option than to learn English from the tender age as herein English bridges the interaction gap between gujaratis, bengalis, marathis, tamilians, kannadigas, assamese, biharis etc. Fearing that their child shall remain aloof from the rest of the students, the parents also encourage children to speak in English even at home. Hence though my neighbour in Bangalore is from rural Karnataka, she speaks to her parents & in-laws in kannada but English is the language of communication between herself and her child, though child speaks to the grandparents in kannada. Thus the child of 4 years is mastering equally, English as well as Kannada.

Hence the truth of Bangalore can become the reality at other places in India. There is no doubt that everywhere parents may not be well proficient in English, but we cannot deny that children can acquire English through other means. Census says that more than 80% households have their own houses. At least 50% of these families watch television, if not in rural areas but at least in the urban areas. Most of them have cable network but they prefer to watch cartoon network, pogo etc in hindi. We have to change this psychology of the children and motivate them to watch children's serials in English. Hindi newspapers cost more than The Times of India. English Newspaper reading has to be inculcated like a daily habit and pooling of learning resources has to be encouraged amongst children, so that children become enthusiastic to buy, read and exchange English books, journals and newspapers. Games like word building, solving puzzles, enacting role plays have to replace old games of antakshri, or chor sipahi. The story books can act as motivating force to learn the foreign language especially bedtime stories of snow white and Cinderella. Hence reading tintin or watching Tom & Jerry or Doroemon or even Chota Bheem in English shall help the

children in India to acquire English faster from a tender age and thereby become grammatically and socio-linguistically proficient by the time they step outside to meet the world.

Thus literature in the form of picture books with English subtitles and English cartoons can act as inspiring tools to initiate children in learning, rather acquiring English just like the mother tongue. Later on after entering schools the morphology, phonology, syntax etc can be mastered by the children. Ultimately language is learnt for social purpose and its importance lies in its meaning. As Kress says “ Only recently has language acquisition come to be seen as the mastery of linguistic functions, and it is this perspective that is needed...learning language is learning the uses of language and the meaning potential associated with them; the structures, the words and the sounds are the realization of this meaning potential. Learning language is learning to mean.” (Kress, 08) Hence we cannot underestimate the importance of literature even in higher classes. Students have to be encouraged to be ardent readers to become psychologically and socially strong. Watching English movies also shall equip them with the knowledge of the contemporary global world apart from teaching nuances of spoken English. The students cannot remain isolated only as Indians in the global world or remain masters of regional dialects. Future is not for mute spectators but for the initiators. When English has become the major language of interaction, China also cannot underestimate its strategic role in the world, we also cannot just be satisfied with our present socio-linguistic competence. Indian Literature can negotiate with cultural ponderings and not be willing to follow standard English, Amitav Ghosh can write ‘adda’ in *The Shadow Lines* or Rushdie can play with words, rather every writer in the post-colonial world can experiment with English language in literature. In fact today we have reached a point where regional and national dialects of various countries have infiltrated into English and we have Indian Variety of English, Afghan Variety of English, African Variety of English, and the list goes on. The readers of *The Shadow Lines*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *Things Fall Apart* can negotiate with regional morphemes in these books leisurely but the bureaucrats, diplomats, economists, scientists, environmentalists of the world have to be very specific in calling a spade a spade. There cannot be any allowance for semantic or communicative gap in strategic discourse. Hence to be the World Leader in future, our

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next generation in India has to acquire English with the mother tongue to be well equipped with not only grammatical competence but also socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

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