

Learning English as a Foreign / Second Language: A Critique

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A knowledge of the English Language has become an object of importance in relation to its application in various walks of life. A complete command over the language could be possible where the varied meanings of usage of words, idioms and phrases according to the changing circumstances and situations are comprehensively elucidated to learners. In the twentieth century there is the phenomenon of the native speakers of English being outnumbered by the non-native speakers considerably. There are as many as 1500 millions users of English as a second language. Of these, an estimated 18 million users are in India. The Indian users of English are spread all over India. Though the users of English are spread all over India. English in India has a pan-Indian character. Though the users of English in India make use of the charastic role of English, yet there is no complete homogeneity. The variation in the use of English is partly due to the vast linguistic diversity in the country. It is estimated that there are as many as fifteen major languages and 1652 languages and dialects spoken in India. The ethnic variety of proficiency tend to contribute to the lack of homogeneity in Indians' use of English. Against this back ground, Indian users of English language, lack intelligibility in communicating English language as it ought to be communicated like native speakers of English. This kind of situations often noticed by the native speakers who claim that they use only **Standard English**. Standard English is defined by H.C.Wyld as a certain vareity of English "spoken within certain social boundaries, with an extraordinary degree of uniformity, all over the country". It is neither a regional nor social dialect, but its use confers a social change on the speakers. Every educated Englishmen speak it as it is the widely accepted dialect. It is the English spoken in southern England and it remains to be the language of the cultured and educated people living in south of the River Thames. It is the speech heard among men who have been educated in public schools of

England and the same variety is also heard over the B.B.C. At best, we may call it “good English” which is universally recognized for its clarity and comprehensibility. The Indian scenario is altogether different in respect of using “good English”. The basic reason is English has become a **Linguafranca** for the English users of India. India’s social and cultural background must be taken into account when we are called as ‘unintelligible’ speakers of English language. The discrepancy between the urban and rural learners is vary vast. The rural folk makes use of mother tongue (MT) when they try to learn foreign language as second language. The reason is being, English is taught to Indian students mostly by non-native speakers in a non–native environment besides various other socio-cultural reasons, there are quite a few problems in their use of English, both in its spoken and written forms.

In order to capture the spirit of “good English”, the strategy required to replace the difficulty in the use of styles and tones appropriate to a situation need to be imparted. Indian English has become a product of cultural, linguistic and other factors exerting pressure on the English language in India. In recent years the mass media including radio, film, television, etc have native variety of English nearer home and provided more exposure to the language to thousands of Indians. The impact of such exposure should be bound to be whole some covering rural mass in general and learners in particular. This is a healthy trend towards the development of an acceptable, even respectable, variety of English which will be dubbed intelligible as “good English” spoken throughout India. But with advent of the Britishers in India, English was introduced as an official language. The resultant factor has been that the vernacular languages of India have been influenced and the impact over them has been visible.

With the dawn of globalization English has gained more prominence and became an indispensable tool for communication in the fields of Education and Employment. Obviously the knowledge and fluency in English has become desirable output for the securing employment is in the wage sector in general self-employment in particular. As is believed India lies in villages and the rural students with a sound and comfortable knowledge of their core subjects lag behind and suffer from the art of communicative skills for the simple and sole reason that English is not their first language. With the IT revolution and most of the software and the operating systems being in English, English language has emerged as one of the outstanding languages. English to the Indian psyche symbolizes better component of

education, culture, higher intellect leading to wider exposure to outer world abound in vast panorama of knowledge and wisdom.

As many as 40% of Indian students hail from the rural setup. Teaching English language and learning in the rural Indian context has always been an intimidating and challenging task at the college level. Language teaching to rural students is not only an exigent mission but also challenging chore. There are problems being encountered by teachers and students. The foremost problem faced by rural student is that he is influenced by of socio-cultural background deeply rooted in their psyche. The teacher as a provider of knowledge with inherited wisdom keeping in mind the level of the student as a learner and he/she should try to teach English not only as a subject but also as a skill. The other grievous problem is that the rural students try to learn English through mother tongue. Hence the teachers have no option other than teaching English through bilingual or translation method. The teacher is rather compelled to translate whole content into the learners' mother tongue. This process makes teacher to introduce Indian English which is replete with a whole lot of loan words from Indian languages which the media make popular. Under this category we have words like **bandh**, **gherao**, **goonda**, **lathi**, **naxalite** etc. These words appear in newspapers every day.

The syntax deviations of Indian English may be traced to the patterns existing in Indian languages. Indian English also abounds in many Indianisms (or neologisms) to express the cultural milieu like a **cousin-brother**, **cooling glasses**, **delink**, **batch mate**, etc. Some English words are used in India in contexts in which the British do not use them. 'He saw the drama' for 'he saw the play', 'he lives back of my house' of British English would become 'he lives backside of my house' in Indian English some words which are appropriate to a particular register in British English are in general use in Indian English: 'bogie' which is a railway term for the British, used in a general sense in Indian speech 'outstation cheque' is another example of an expression used in different registers in India and England. We continue to find the difference in the level of perception between the rural and the urban students. Hence the style of teaching and the style of learning need to be adjusted and altered in order to suit the learning strategies adopted as per the class-room situation. The research of learning strategies will not be completed unless a reference is made to interweave factors of learning style, learning training with reference to English as a second languages as follows:

- Language learning strategies in second language acquisition.

- Learning style in relation to learning strategies.
- Learning training with reference to learning strategies.

The term **learning strategies** often coincides with the process to enhance learning. Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, enjoyable, self-directed, effective and transferable. Whatever strategies devised, Indian students never volunteer to learn English, keeping a side the influence of mother tongue. But the whole attempt should be directed towards learning “acceptable English” or “good English”. There are as many as 274 structural patterns in English language. It is estimated moderately that there are 8 lakhs words including science and technology. Apart from this the students don't have proper exposure of phonetics, grammatical rules, and regulations. To acquaint themselves with these areas, they should be taught by trained and language experts. In order to develop proficiency in English certain remedies need to be adopted such as:

- Teaching of English from Ist class to rural students instead from Vth class.
- To look at the age of the learner.
- To ascertain information about his/her cultural background.
- To estimate the level of perception of the learner.
- To maintain teacher student ratio enabling both to achieve learning objectives.
- To make learning process as enjoyable experience.

A well-trained teacher can introduce a number of language-items such as syllable division, spelling by adopting to Audio-visual methods of teaching. Knowledge of vocabulary is a must. It is heartening to note that English is taught through CALL in Engineering Colleges. The same amount of effort and facilities could be also extended to rural students enabling them to learn in a learning-friendly atmosphere. Around 40,000 words from Hindustani found the place in the words popular dictionaries like Oxford English Language Dictionary, Collins Cobuild English Dictionary besides Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary etc.

In the present scenario many English medium schools are established and catering to the needs of rural students. The major problems of rural area students are that they hesitate to speak English, giving an impression that they are diffident due to language intricacies. Because they are even today, being taught in grammar-translation method. Language drilling in multiple skills such as LSRW skills need of the hour. ‘Tenses’ play an important role in teaching English language.

After the introduction of Computer Technology the learners notice that many opportunities for the improvement of multiple skills entered into the realm of knowledge expansion, paving the way for knowledge – high way.

Skill development as a process involves students, faculties, corporate and support from the government (NASSACOM 2009). Employability skills development process has become a perfect blend of technical and generic skills. These skills help students seeking jobs of their choice. Soft skills and communicative skills enrich students and demonstrate their ability to face any challenges for all-round empowerment.

It appears that there is a close relationship between language and thought. Everyday experiences suggest that much of our thinking is facilitated by language. Is it possible to think without language? Does our language dictate the ways of thinking?

The structure of language is something most of us take completely for granted. We are so used to speaking and understanding our mother tongue (MT) with the complex linguistic architecture that underlies almost every sentence. Language acquisition seems to be very important. The formal properties of language, such as word order and sentence sequencing constitute the medium in which our connected thoughts can be presented and organized.

There seem to be a number of speaking skills to improve English language skills of rural students, namely **pair work, group work, role play, language games, JAM** sessions etc.

The use of English is often called ‘refential’, ‘propositional’, or ‘ideational’. Language scholars have identified several other features of language where the communication of ideas is marginal.

Teacher is everything and omnipotent phenomenon. He/She is free to choose his/her own skills and abilities. As Mark Van Doren said, “Freedom to use the mind is the greatest happiness”.

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