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Material Production in English for University Students and its Relevance in the Context of Globalization

Abstract

In the present Indian context, the lack of proficiency in Spoken English among youngsters is the biggest lacuna in their personalities. Despite the realization of the government and the academicians across the country of the growing need of communication skills in the present era, there are numerous stumbling blocks which are responsible for the lackadaisical approach towards English. Even after having learnt English for twelve years in high school, students do not seem to have acquired the ability to use the language appropriate in different contexts. They are not able to listen and comprehend lectures delivered in college classrooms and they are also not able to communicate effectively with others in English. They are not able to write or speak in flawless English. The moot questions are where lies the problem and who are to be blamed - teachers, students, curriculum, teaching methodology or evaluation patterns.

KEYWORDS: Communicative Competence, Globalization, Lecturing, Linguistic Competence, Skill,

1. INTRODUCTION

The present college classroom is a cross-section of a heterogeneous community of students. The general standard of English of a student of rural area where the medium of instruction is mother tongue will generally be low, whereas a student from the English medium school in the town will be good at

English. The low proficiency of the rural school children is a vulnerable point which often sparks a debate. But the general English classes are now more often adorned by students educated in public schools and central schools. The result is that the teacher of English in the college classroom is confronted with a wide spectrum of abilities.

Unimaginably large classes with a wide range of abilities, comprising samples of different culture and different strata of society, with varying degrees of exposure to English, pose problems to the teacher. The main occupation of the teacher appears to be to cover the syllabus within the allotted time and the concern of the student is to learn by – rote the answer to reproduce them in the answer papers. The indication is that in such a situation there is not much chance for the student to learn the language or for the teacher to teach the language.

A series of factors, like the selection of text books, the examination method, lack of clear objectives, the poor quality of teachers and the inability to develop a new approach suited to the changed times, provide multiple jolts to the teaching programme. Students who are not able to understand the basic structure of a sentence or write a paragraph without glaring mistakes, are expected to learn passages of great lyrical beauty from Shakespeare, Shelly, Frost and Whitman. It has to be admitted that things are not exactly falling

The lecture continues to be the main mode of instruction in college courses – whether it is literature class or a language class – as it used to be a generation or so ago when things were different. The majority of students today come to college from regional language medium schools and their command of English is far too meagre to follow lectures given in English. Very soon they give up the attempt to other sources for success in the examination. That is how there is a flourishing trade in ‘guide’ books. It is not that the college lecturers are unaware of these changed conditions. Many of them will admit that their students cannot follow lectures given in English, and yet they must go on doing it as they must ‘cover the portions’.

College teachers say that their students find language work and texts introduced primarily for language work, dull, whereas they find English literature much more interesting. Any language work involves a great deal of correction work, which is unpalatable to teachers. College classes are usually large and for several years to come they will continue to be large; the amount of correction work to be done, indeed, is so large that it is physically impossible for any teacher to do it effectively. Both the students and the teachers know that this work is bound to be somewhat haphazard and it is a ritual to be gone through to fulfil some requirement. For these, college teachers prefer to teach literature. But while teaching literature the students must have the *experience* of it, they must go to the texts themselves, get dipped into the actual words written by the author and appreciate the beauty and felicity of the choice of the language of the writer. This is possible only when they have some adequate sense of the language. Reproduction of dictated answers or reproduction of memorized passages from guide books is no indication of the literary sensibility or the language ability of the students of the college classes. The thing to do is to teach them the language first, and give everything else afterwards. It is no use cursing the secondary school teacher for not doing his duty. The college teacher today has to devote a great deal of attention to the problem of his student's language. This requires careful planning, and calls for other modes of instruction than the lecture. For, a language cannot be taught by lecturing *about* it.

Language is a skill which requires practice to acquire it and that the practice has to be done by the learners themselves. The teachers should realize that the aim in any skill subject is to give the maximum actual practice to the learner, which means that the teacher is obliged to talk less ; the more he talks, the less time the students get for practising language skills. The teacher should demonstrate the multi-skill situational approach to the teaching of language. Briefly this means:

- (a) giving up both the lecture mode of instruction and the dictation of notes;
- (b) securing the active participation of students in the learning process;

- (c) employing all the language skills in a class - listening, speaking, reading and writing – which are to be mutually reinforced;
- (d) presenting and establishing language items in a context meaningful and interesting to the learners;
- (e) ensuring adequate, spaced repetition of the item to be established;
- (f) using a limited vocabulary well within the reach of the students.

Part of the trouble of teaching in college classes is, no doubt, due to the nature of text books prescribed. For compulsory English, an anthology of essays is usually prescribed. In some universities, a book of poetry selections is also prescribed. But very often the selections show no evidence of the compiler being conscious of the linguistic equipment of the students. The selections are overloaded on the side of allusions, local reference, technical or foreign words and expressions. Students have to wade through such material with very little motivation and interest in the subject matter. What they study in these writings has little relevance to the day - to - day life of the learner.

But the teacher is not in a position to refuse to teach an unsuitable text. If an essay runs to twenty four pages and has all manner of allusions, uses philosophical jargon, and outmoded vocabulary and structures and if the teacher is allotted three periods of forty-five minutes each to teach this essay, nothing much can be expected of him. This, indeed, is a great problem. The best thing for a teacher is selection and simplification surely; it is not worth teaching and establishing outmoded vocabulary and structures. What the teacher should do is to select those items which are well worth establishing and spend some time on them. He should give up spending a great deal of time dealing with allusions which are decidedly beyond the reach of his students. Of course, the teacher can make a brief and passing reference to them. The teacher should also ignore a great deal of the passage which has little relevance to the student from the linguistic, cultural or even examination point of view. He can narrate the main ideas of the essay, selecting some key sentences and elaborating on them. He should narrate the main ideas in a controlled vocabulary, asking questions on them, put a neat outline or even a good summary, drill a few structures and vocabulary items and feel satisfied that he

has made a good job of it. Philosophical ideas and cultural elements of a civilization buried in the deep past are not likely to be of any interest to an average university student.

Ezra Pound says, “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree” (qtd in Gautam 52)[1]. Roman Jakobson declared that “a linguist deaf to the poetic functions of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unacquainted with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms” (qtd in Gautam 55)[1]. But a ‘language – literature’ myth of opposition has been created and the study of language has been excluded from the study of literature. This separation is false; the natural sense of language includes literature even as literature includes the study of the language of literary works. But at the university level, usually the department of English is conveniently divided into two – one faction for language and the other for literature.

A subject is regarded within the academy as a clearly demarcated body of knowledge, controlled by its own distinctive protocols and sanctioned by recognised authorities in the field. When it is ‘English’ that is viewed as a subject – particularly in the Indian context - the term refers both to English, on the one hand, as the designation for a body of literature belonging to Britain and written in the English language i.e., as a ‘knowledge’, and on the other as the name of a language that stands in relation to the mother tongue as a ‘second’ language, proficiency in which therefore requires language ‘skills’: ‘skills’ being the subordinated means towards the end of knowledge acquisition.

‘English Literature’ or the study of English literary texts, is usually collapsed within the same enterprise of ‘English’. Even where, as in the more prestigious Honours or Major programmes in English literature, the overt aim of the course is to impart ‘knowledge’ of a national literature, the pedagogies of literature teaching tend not to be sharply differentiated from the language mode. Neither the development of critical abilities nor the requirements of scholarship is privileged in such a course of study. It is by and large

explication of the text rather than interpretation that takes place in the classroom, and it is comprehension ability that is tested in the student, exactly as in language classes. If there is an Indian specificity - or rather, peculiarity – to the teaching of English literature, it lies in this explication – followed by testing comprehension.

Literature is a skill subject to some extent. Unless one masters the following skills, the resultant interpretation of literature is bound to be unsatisfactory:

1. Analysis of the vocabulary and syntax of a given poem or prose passage. This is essential for understanding a given text accurately and for determining the kind of style into which a given use of language will develop.
2. Scansion of the metre of a given poem or of the rhythm or movement of a given prose passage.
3. Analysis of the style of a given passage and its organic connection with the theme.
4. The ability to express oneself freely on literary topics with a sense of style.

Therefore, a literature syllabus has to be so framed to promote the following abilities in students:

- 1) Acquisition of some minimum quantum of knowledge regarding literary terminology, literary forms, literary movements, characteristics and trends of literary movements and periods, principles of literary criticism, and the classical and other backgrounds of literature. There is a certain minimum knowledge in these matters which a student of literature should possess. This knowledge can be acquired by anyone who has average intelligence and a good memory.

2. The study of literature also results in what may be called problem – solving activities. The study of literature is bound to lead the student to biographical, aesthetic, psychological, sociological, historical, philosophic, textual and other considerations. This requires a good deal of thinking and study on the part of the learner. More than memory, what the learner requires is keen intelligence and insight in order to master this aspect of literary study.

If English language teaching in the university cannot make a total commitment to the protocols of skills pedagogy, the English literature teaching can not be entirely fitted within the alternative ‘authentic’ mode of knowledge pedagogy. The generative aspect of knowledge, which allows for leap from what the learner actually studies - in this case the English literature syllabus – to other analogous objects of study, is inhibited when ‘mastery’ over the prescribed text becomes the sole end of the pedagogic process. This is a feature that the subject English shares with a number of other subjects taught in the university. The outcry that follows when examination questions are found to be ‘outside the course’ is an illustration of this narrowly defined focus of study. In the Under-Graduate English examinations, examiners frequently discover that the ‘background’ question, which requires a certain broad general reading as well as the ability to draw connections among the texts studied, is invariably badly answered or altogether neglected by students. More and more, it is testing that determines the contours of study. Tutorial and coaching classes and guide books spring up outside the academy in order to respond to this reality. By simply anticipating questions and drilling candidates, these ‘teaching aids’ prepare students for examinations without imparting ‘knowledge’ as such. Or rather a division of labour between the university and its outside is clearly laid out.

What distinguishes the examination or ‘limited knowledge’ pedagogy from the skills mode is that where skills pedagogy clearly integrates means and ends, the university examination becomes an end in itself. If what is taught in the university is too solipsistic to be counted as ‘knowledge’, it is at the same

time not purposive enough to serve as a skill. To sum up, English language and English literature teaching in Indian universities display the following contradictions:

1. There is increasing functionalism in ELT, an overt acknowledgement of the necessity for developing the skills mode, but a lack of clarity about the learner's 'desires'.
2. The formal structure of this pedagogy, such as lectures, three – year programmes, traditional testing methods, continues to be determined by the university's 'knowledge dissemination' mode.
3. English literary study in India is unable to refuse a commitment to explication, haunted as it is by the notion of the English language as an obstacle. The critical, scholarly, philological purposes of literary studies are, therefore, not undertaken in this kind of study.
4. By drawing the limits of knowledge, English literature – in this respect like other disciplinary studies in the university – fails as a subject of knowledge.

Most of the university departments of English have virtually been departments of English literature. The literary bias of English syllabuses has led to the lamentable neglect of the teaching and use of functional English. It would not be far from truth if it is said that no learning of language takes place in all the three years that the students are at college. "Students who cannot understand simplified English text books have to read Lamb, Hazlitt, Wordsworth and Shelly and to listen to lectures about them" (qtd in Johnson 96)[2]. "The super structure" to quote Halliday [3], "is more weighty than the foundations can support" (184).

When in an atmosphere charged with literary bias, an attempt is made to introduce courses in English language with emphasis on communicative skills, there arises resentment from many quarters. Some of the older teachers

are not convinced about the need for ELT training. When they went to college, the number of students was very small. They had been to schools where teachers were very thorough and only the best students went in for higher education. But the ground reality has changed completely. Now every one comes to college, even those with minimal knowledge of English and the number of students has swollen beyond all proportions. On the other hand, most of those who take to the teaching of English come with a public school background and an elitist M.A. in English literature, but they are ill-equipped for the other half of the task, the major portion of their work - teaching language to large classes.

No creative writer writes a work of literature for the purpose of teaching a language. He is more interested in the problems of life and death, the conflict in the mind of a character or the fabric of society than in the position of a preposition or an adverb in a sentence. He is more concerned with justifying the ways of God to men than justifying the ways of a grammarian to the young learner. Elucidating the liberty taken by creative artists Jespersen has given numerous examples from the English classics to show that even the most reputed writers in English literature “split their infinitives, dangle their participles, double their negatives or use prepositions to end sentence with” (qtd in Andrews 93)[4]. The language used in literature is adapted for a literary and imaginative purpose and is very often remote from real life situations. This signifies that every great work of literature exemplifies a unique use of that language with a clear stamp of individuality which, incidentally does not coincide with the objectives of language learning.

The teaching of practical ability in a language is a task quite different from that of teaching the understanding of literature written in that language. Not only are the two different in kind, but also practical ability must always come before the understanding of literature. The attempt to introduce foreign literature to a learner before he has a sufficient command of the language in which it is written may have had bad effects on him. Teaching English as a language is entirely different from teaching English literature. One does not look for the same teaching-learning exercises in a language lesson as in that of

literature. The demands made by the two are very different. In a literature lesson, one is concerned with the biographical sketch of the writer, the characteristics of his age, the plot, character, philosophy of life, the meaning of the text and the meaning of that meaning. In a language lesson, on the other hand, one is preoccupied with vocabulary, usage, grammar, pronunciation and communicative skills. When a work of literature is used to teach language, the language class often turns into literature class and sometimes a general knowledge class, leaving language to take care of itself. A student of English who is not conversant with the basic verb patterns and sentence structure is asked to mark the platonism, the metaphysical conceit, the pathetic fallacy, the classical restraint, the romantic thrill, in one stanza or the other.

Literature is one among the many uses of language and its pursuit can best be taken up within the purview of ESP as has also been recommended by Strevens[5], “You could now-a-days regard literature as being yet another way in which English for special purposes is being supplied” (4). It may be in the fitness of things to re-define the term literature in the context of ESL so as to include into its gamut even non-imaginative writings. The nature and extent of literary component in English curriculum are to be determined by the context of learning English, which will include, among others, the place and purpose of learning English and various socio – linguistic details concerning the learner and the teacher. As things stand today in India, one does not notice any difference between the method and strategy of teaching English as a second language and of teaching indigenous first language. Besides, not much thought is given to the fact that the norms of communicative competence of users of English as second language are not identical with those of the native speakers of English. Without denying the immense value of literature, first things should always come first. “To read Shakespeare”, says Pattison[6], “is a very good reason for learning English, but he is not a model for learning contemporary English” (57). Furthermore a plan to teach both language and literature in the same course has often proved as exercise in futility. It is difficult to think of an English teaching programme with equal emphasis on language and literature. “In fact even to try to give equal emphasis on language and literature within the same course often results in neither one being taught” (Marckdardt 78)[7]. It is

high time it should be realized that literature is not language.

The fact of the matter is that English literature teaching in India, due to the instructional and examination procedures, has become purposeless. It is taken for granted that the only objective of teaching English, particularly at the higher level, is to expose students to the study of literature for its own sake, as if this could be the only aim of a course in the literature of a non-native language. The solution to this problem, as Halliday suggests, “is not to exclude literary studies, but to ensure that no student is pushed into literary work until he has sufficient linguistic ability to understand, enjoy and appreciate the literary texts that he will be studying and above all no student who wishes to extend his practical ability to *use* English should be forced into accepting a kind of ‘conditional sale’ in which he can only continue in English if his studies are of a literary nature” (45). There are a large number of jobs and professions which require not simply correct English but advanced skills in the English language. The country has no option but to depend upon the departments of English in colleges and universities for producing men and women trained in these advanced skills in the use of English. Since Indian students learn English in order to be able to use it, to carry out the functions it has in India, it is only right that the content of learning should be what those uses require. It is not that all students specialising in English do look for profound literary culture. Skill in the use of English is very popular in the job market and for students, this is one of the main attractions for the higher course in English. Therefore, one of the primary concerns of higher course (eg. M.A) in English should be to train students to an advanced level in the actual use of the English language and for this, English teaching syllabus has got to be realistic, need based and language oriented.

In the changing scenario of Globalisation and mass communication intellectual contributions towards the framing of syllabus should not only be of high standards but also fulfil the requirements of students of today. In the context of globalization, the material producers have to bear it in mind and frame the syllabus identifying students ‘needs’. It is also one of the important activities to be carried out towards realizing the very objective of the

curriculum.

The employees of the BPO's that have newly emerged through globalization contact people worldwide. Besides being acquainted with a wide range of vocabulary, the employees have to be exposed to the account of many foreign nationals. The existing syllabus and the material do not have any provision to offer even minimum teaching in these areas. They need to be trained in this kind of soft skills so as to be viable professionals in this field and be able to compete with others.

It can be stated beyond doubt that the students are aware that English is a language that can be considered indispensable for flourishing in the different types of careers that students go in for. They are very keen on improving their communication skills in English and they want to do it during their college years. The students and their English teachers strongly feel that the English syllabus followed in colleges is not at all helping the students adequately. Hence, syllabus designers should recognize the students' English language needs and provide ample scope for developing the required skills. The syllabus should cater to the professional needs of the learners because no successful learning process could occur without a well formulated syllabus. It should be a student centered one as students are the real audience.

To overcome the drawbacks:

1. The syllabus designers, while framing it, have to identify the needs of the students and set the syllabus accordingly. They also have to foresee the workplace of the students today. Teaching literature will help them only to some extent whereas imparting the language abilities will certainly be beneficial to them. Materials should focus more on the development of the language skills.
2. In service training, refresher course and orientation programs have to be offered to the teachers. The training manual should exhaustively cover the entire methodology to be adopted in the class.

3. The teachers have to correlate the lessons with real and contrived situations so as to facilitate the teaching and learning process.
4. The coverage of the syllabus, has to be evenly maintained, that is to say, the pace should be neither fast nor slow.
5. The academicians who frame the syllabus and prepare the course material should have a balanced thinking. This is mainly lacking in them because they follow the traditional method of teaching and they are not that much familiar with the transition that is taking place today.
6. The material prepared should have proper orientation to develop the language abilities and also to face a challenging world.
7. There are very few exercises to train the students of today in debate, discussions and role-play. It is generally thought that these are all time consuming exercises. But these help them a lot to find out solutions for most of the problems, that they would face in their professional career.
8. A minimum of three reviews on the framed syllabus and prepared course materials have to be done before implementation. Necessary additions and deletions have to be made as suggested by the reviewers. These reviews would pave the way for assessing the fulfilment of requirements well in advance. There can also be a comparative analysis on the material already used with the latest devised one.

No doubt, learning anything in the English language will be quite useful to the students. What will be most useful to them is to be considered by the academicians. To be more specific, they have to prepare the material relevant to the context foreseeing the future needs of the student community. The material should include enough exercises to improve the speech skills of the students because it forms the basis for the development of the rest of the skills. It is also equally important to see that the materials produced are presented effectively in the classroom.

2. CONCLUSION

When the students come out with university degrees, they would have learned English for about ten years – five years in the schools and five years in the colleges. But the fact is that they are not able to communicate in English – speak English, write English, read and listen to English – with the desired effectiveness. It is possible to improve the present ELT situation in India by changing one's attitude, contexts and methodology in classroom teaching. Spoken English is a much sought after course these days. One hears, outside the schools and colleges, of promises of 'Learn English in 30 days' and offers to 'Improve your English'. Such private coaching centers, which are mushrooming and are minting money, use concrete and interesting materials and teaching methodology. Enthusiastic students enroll on such courses for developing communicative skills and are ready to pay Rs.13000/- to Rs.55000/- for GRE, TOEFL coaching. Students will feel happy and get benefited if the same kind of coaching is given in the college itself.

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