



TEACHING SPOKEN ENGLISH IN A RURAL CLASSROOM

DR. PRADIP. G. SONAWANE

Dept. of English

G. V. S. P. M. S. Late M. D. Sisode

Arts & Commerce College, Nardana,

Tal. Shindkheda. Dist. Dhule (MA) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Many people say that English is the hardest language to learn if you were not born in a primary English speaking home. English is the most common language spoken all over the globe. English is essential in writing as well as speaking. It is very challenging to teach English in rural classroom. Now a days it is Internet Communication Technology (ICT) It is spread all over the global scenario. English speaking in India comes with a different accent in each part of the country. The standardization can be got by listening to Speeches and also teaching English innovatively in classrooms. There are certain experiments carried on in a rural and tribal class through a period of academic year. The new learners should follow this kind of approach.

Key-words – Speech mechanisms, oral communication, Internet & Communication Technology (ICT) drill method etc.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching spoken English in an Indian classroom especially in a college or school located in a rural or tribal background is a challenge. The situation of heterogeneity in terms of language, that is L, L₂ and at times L₃ is a cultural and social heritage (or a restraint?) which is the replica of the Indian polity of plurality. The major hindrances in such a commotional situation of language are lack of exposure of English language to the learners, despite the fact that e-learning is in operation of booming scale. It is interesting to note that a large number of learners suffer from a disease of inhibition and as a result, they feel shy to speak out even in a L₁ situation. The chief reasons for a situation of this kind shall constitute a different body of study reasoning the socio-political, cultural and economic aspects highlighting unemployment, poverty, lack of basic amenities etc. producing a typical cultural climate in a rural language classroom situation.



Apart from the whole anarchy, what strategies could be employed in an existing situation would form a pragmatic approach to ELT and it would reward in one way or the other if efforts are taken in a positive direction. An alternative paradigm of interlingual approach has been suggested by K. Elango and it would be of some advantage in this context.¹Elango points out that even the English medium students in spite of consistent and abundant exposure to English language, the students appear to have lesser proficiency. He observes (Elango, 2002:130):

*'...but the real irony is that in spite of learners' constant exposure to English and perhaps, their commendable academic performance, their proficiency level is very low. While their lack of ability in L₁, is explainable, deficiency in L₂ is difficult to understand. Hence, the acquisition of both L₁ and L₂ seems to suffer tremendously in most cases in English medium schools.'*¹

So, the theoretical assumption that acquisition of a language is entirely dependent upon the amount of exposure to the language appears to be hypothetical; it seems that the 'acquisition of a language in a sensitive situation is possible only when there is a conducive climate in which a learner is placed.

*'Strategies such as consistent exercises in listening, mock situations for triggering conversations, say for instance, interview techniques, narrating a story, or just exchange of ideas on informative level etc., such resourcefulness in collecting material for exercises in loud reading'*²

and using them in drills enabled this teacher to produce desirable efforts; perhaps, what Elango looks forward to create conducive climate for language learning ... a sort of climate was partially created in such a desperate classroom situation. The syllabus modules spread out in two independent courses for the first year Functional English learners are taught in an academic year. The units are divided in two terms; two Mid-Term-Tests in each term and a Term-End Exam in the middle of an academic year are conducted. However, these are the college evaluative programmes but the practical, production exercises and the consistent use of English by the learners have proved to be more fruitful strategies than the formal evaluative methodology.

The key modules in the syllabus prepared by the Board of Studies (BoS), University of Pune (UoP) with a timely feedback from CIEFL is as follows: Introducing definitions of language, speech mechanisms, vowels and consonants followed by remedial grammar inclusive of processes of word formation training the learners to be able to form words and understand their structures, word accent, accent in connected speech, weak forms and in Oral Communication, simple mock situations in speaking such as, introducing oneself, others etc.

and simple events, and narrating stories, telephone conversations, making a short speech, reading aloud a piece from a drama or a passage etc. Besides, apart from the modules, the learners were encouraged to listen to news-reading sessions on the radio and TV programmes such as debates and interviews. The internet access was provided to the learners in the language lab and the library to accelerate such exercises and the learners were motivated for the same. However, more care was taken that maximum time of the learners was devoted to practical-sessions; four periods consisting of fifty minutes in a week was devoted to the listening exercises. The output was on an average during the first term but the scale of interest among the learners gradually increased. The most remarkable output was that the learners grew interested, their curiosity-level increased and subsequently, they were motivated to continue the practical-sessions on their own. This was the principal achievement of the consistent classroom efforts that we undertook. The class consisted of 27 students and out of 27, 12 students showed rapid progress and the rest were on the average footage on the predictability scale of expected results.

MI. Tickoo (2003 : 143-162) suggests a few strategies of teaching speaking; he favours the drill method and consistent practice of four language skills which work together providing support and sustenance to each other. It is true that listening and speaking always precede reading and writing; it implies that learning a language is learning how to understand and speak it. Good listening skills not only lay the foundations of good speech but they also grow best through effective communication. A good speaker is a good listener in the same way as a good listener often makes a good speaker.

On the basis these principles, the CIEFL audio material based on 'Makers and Finders' and 'Story Times' proved very interesting to the learners. They provided good material for exercises in listening for the learners. The results were productive and effective enough; they reached to a scale that the learners grew so much enthusiastic that a group of them presented a performance in English; a court scene from Shakespeare's *As You Like*, based on the text from 'Makers and Finders' was wonderfully done. The accent, intonation, pronunciation etc. were up to the mark. This was a considerable achievement of a group of learners who were from a rural and tribal background.

The pre-planned language drills were of greater use. The exercises in production of English sounds, for example, the labio-dental/ f /, / s/ and / z /, contrast between / v / and / w/ and so on were attempted consciously; such types of exercises were also attempted for vowel production such as shorter vowels and longer vowels e.g. / i : / and / I / etc. Look at the following examples: (**Ex. in Spoken Eng. Part 3: CIEFL, 1977: 37**).

e	e	e	e
Debt	date	letter	later
Gat	gate	test	taste

Sell	sale	west	waste
Tell	tale	wet	wait
s	z	s	z
False	falls	piece	peas
Pace	pays	ice	eyes etc.

Look at the following examples as practice material for consonant sounds:

(Ex. in Spoken Eng. Part2: CIEFL, 1977:12)

	f	v	f	v
1	fail	veil	6. Ferry	very
2	fan	van	7. Leaf	leave
3	fast	vast	8. Proof	prove
4	fine	vine	9. Safe	save
5	few	view	10. Be'lief	be'lieve

Practicing an element of language through such exercises can definitely enhance learners to learn a fragment and gradually lead to accumulate larger units. It is argued somewhere in applied linguistics that people do not speak in real life situations as it is done so in a drill-method. People speak rarely using repeated sentences, made-up words, fixed words or memorized sentences. However, such kind of exercises give a good start at a phonological or at a word level and could slowly move to a sentential level; asking something implies using a question form or replying a question in a form of a short response or a short sentence. Besides, such drills help learners to focus attention on an element of language; they help learners to connect sentence patterns with appropriate contexts of use (e.g. formal and informal commands, invitation and suggestions). The drills moreover help to build accuracy; it ensures attention to correctness of form, good grammar and intelligible pronunciations. Peter Stevens (1985: 84-85) also argues "most learners learn to produce most sound features of a foreign language with reasonable accuracy by mimicry alone. He suggests three main teaching techniques which can be invoked to assist learners in learning pronunciation viz. exhortation, speech training, and practical phonetics."³ Teaching spoken English in India has various barriers, Stevens' techniques seem to be practical at least in a rural classroom situation. Indian learners in a rural and tribal classroom often feel embarrassed and ill at ease in an English conversational situation. They tend to speak English as they write,⁴ they hardly make any distinction between written English and conversational English; observe the following piece (Yardi, 1970:12): a. How do you do? b. I am all right. / I am doing well. Or, a. Hallo, I'm pleased to meet you! b. Hallo, I am also pleased to meet you.



This teacher made it compulsory for the learners to attempt routine transactions in English in the class, this attempt consequently worked to a certain extent among the sensitive learners but a large number of learners preferred to be mum; later the compulsion was relaxed and bilingual approach was followed and the participation level gradually increased.

Speaking is an instance of use; therefore, it is a part of reciprocal exchange in which both reception and production play a part. The skill of speaking therefore involves both receptive and productive participation. H.W. Widdowson(1985:60-61) argues in this context that *language teaching aims to acquire and 'develop an ability to handle spoken language, what learners need ultimately to acquire is an awareness of the language being learned is used for talking.'*

Tiger's Eye and Twist in the Tail, the two radio programmes produced by BBC for Indian learners of English in Mumbai in 1990's and the texts are published by OUP contain interesting material for listening exercises; Twist in the Tail is a sequel to the former. It narrates a story in an Indian context and includes environment, management, commercial matters, problem-solving transactions of Indian community etc. The accent, intonation, pronunciation used etc were intelligent enough to the young learners. However, the feedback received from the learners was not up to the mark. Perhaps, we needed to do it more conspicuously. Probably, the material being more interesting for learners from Commerce faculty must not have triggered interest for the learners from Arts faculty. Notwithstanding, efforts could be taken to use the interesting audio-material supported by the texts for listening exercises. The reasoning is that this teacher is using the same for the new batches and the desirable results are being reflected.

It is true that language learning normally takes place after language acquisition is largely complete. According to S. Pit Corder(1987: 113) the language teacher is not teaching language as such, but new manifestation of language. The language learner has already developed considerable communicative competence in his mother tongue. In this context, what the language teacher is doing is teaching a new way of doing what the learner can already do. He is attempting therefore, to a greater or lesser degree, the behavioural repertoire, set of rules or ways of thinking of the learner; and it is equally true that the learners' pronunciations, accents, intonation, articulation of English sounds, grammar are constantly changing and developing ; they could be regarded as in the process of relearning. Grant Taylor gives very interesting exercises where learners practise a certain element of grammar which enhances his ability of using a structure or a phrase confidently; the principle of repetition and drill method is exploited in these exercises. Look at the following examples (Taylor, 1967:107-108):

Exercise: 1



Didn't your friends get back last week?

last Monday

a week ago

a week ago today

a the week before last

Didn't your friends get back last Monday?

Didn't your friends get back a week ago?

Didn't your friends get back a week ago today?

Didn't your friends get back the week beforelast?

Exercise: 2

My brother met them on Tuesday

See My brother saw them at two o'clock,

telephone My brother telephoned them an hour ago.

consult My brother consulted them in the evening,

advise My brother advised them in the evening,

help My brother helped last Tuesday,

pay My brother paid them last Tuesday.

Practice of the adverbial of time and various verbs is drilled in the above examples; Taylor presents a number grammatical item systematically with a view to help learners to start speaking in English. Sasikumar and Dhamija (1997) also make an attempt to present such material which aim to improve the learners' colloquial usage and pronunciation so that they may be able to communicate fluently and intelligibly; the learners are here assumed to know the structure of English but cannot communicate effectively, especially in speaking. Besides, the CIEFL graded readers were also of some advantage to the learners.⁵

Thus, the experiments carried on in a rural and tribal class through a period of an academic year showed satisfactory and up to the mark results if not the excelling or the best one. But the point to be emphasized is that if learners grow interested and happen to sustain the interest and consistent efforts in language learning tasks, there is a possibility that the learners could be able to achieve excellence. A few learners have shown this kind of success but one has to agree that tremendous efforts in this direction must be taken if more success is to be harnessed and a very complex sort of follow up has to be maintained. However, in conclusion one can argue that in a situation where learners are from a rural and tribal background, multiple methods, bilingual approach, and consistent practice of four language skills could enable a learner to become a good speaker of English.

Notes

1. In a special issue on *In Teaching English in Non-Native Contexts*, Dr. K. Elango advocates an interlingual approach to teaching and learning languages. He suggests that there should be

a merger of all language departments. I feel it would be a too ideal project and on the surface level it would appear as a practical situation but in reality it would assume several complex problems; however it has been of advantage to employ a bilingual or what Elango terms it as 'Interlingual Approach' or, I suppose it can also be understood as a 'Multilingual Approach'

2. Print material collected prominently from various sources such as *The Times Of India* (Tol), Pune Times and Times Mirror (both Tol supplements), *The Indian Express* (TIE) Pune Newline (TIE supplement), Reader's Digest, CIEFL *Exercises in Spoken English* Part 1,2, & 3 Makers and Finders and *Story Times* and many more were used.

3. (i) Exhortation: That is, instruction to imitate and mimic, to make such and such a sound, without further explanation,

(ii) Speech Training: The construction of special games and exercises which entail the use of words or sentences so as to practice particular sounds, sequences of sounds, stress-patterns, rhythm, intonation etc.

(iii) Practical Phonetics: Including especially the following:

(a) description of the organs of speech

(b) Description of the articulation of sounds

(c) Description of stress, rhythm, and intonation

(d) Ear-training (i.e. practice in actually making particular sounds, both in words and sentences, and in isolation and in 'nonsense' sequences also).

4. Indian English teachers especially at school and plus two level not only follow but swear by Nesfield and Tarkhadkar once very popular in Maharashtra who advocated tire translation method.

5. The CIEFL Graded Readers such as, *Home Again*, 1979, (originally written by James Herriot & *simplified* by S. R. Pralhad); *The Three Wishes*, 1985, (Retold by Karnna Kumar); *The Hunter and The Mermaid*, 1985, & *Hiawatha*, 1980 (Gen. Ed. M. L. Tickoo) based on a poem by H. W. Longfellow & *retold* by Vinodhini Bhupalan were issued to the learners and they played an important role in increasing the competence of the Learners 'speakingability'.



WORKS CITED:

- Bansal,- R. K. & J. B. Harrison, 2005 reprint, *Spoken English for India*, Mumbai: Orient Longman.
- Corder, Pit. S., 1973, *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, London: Penguin Books..
- Devidas, K. V.,G. Radhakrisna Pillai, L. Balgopal eds. 1984, *Makers and Finders: English by Air*, Book I, II & III, Deptof Radio, Television & Cinematography, CIEFL, Hyderabad: Oxford University Press.
- Chaudhari, S. C., 2002, *Teaching English in Non-Native Contexts: Essays Presented to V. Sarswathi*, Chennai: Orient Longman.
- O'Conner, J. D., 1997, *Better English Pronunciation*, New Delhi: Universal Book.
- Sasikumar, V. K. &P> V. Dhami/a, 1997, *Spoken English:A Self-Learning Guide to Conversational English*, New Delhi: Tata McGraw Publication. Stevens, Peter, 1985, *New Orientations in Teaching of English*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, Grant, 1967, *English Conversation Practice* New Delhi: Tafa McGraw Publication.
- Tickoo, M. L. 2004, *Teaching and Learning English: A Sourcebook for Teachers and Teacher-Trainers*, New Delhi; Orient Longman.
- Widdowson, H. G. 1985, *Teaching Language as Communication*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yardi, V. V., 2002, *English Conversation for Indian Students*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman. *Exercises in Spoken English Part 1 Accent, Rhythm and Intonation, Part 2 Consonants & Part 3 Vowels*, 1977, *Dept of Phonetics and Spoken English* CIEFL, Hyderabad: Oxford University Press.