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Emerging Approaches & Methods in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

English Language Teaching has become a dual faced challenge in modern India post-independence. As a particular urban section of modern India marches towards the accomplishment of language skills, the majority of the rural class remains untouched. The former group exists in a milieu where acquiring this happens as a natural process whereas for the latter it is an uphill task like climbing Mt Everest with bare foot and no food. This results in continuous widening of the social gap between them. The need of new approaches and methods arise to assist the second group. To make things more vivid, let's categorize the learners.

- *Firstly, the ones who have communicative issues.*
- *Secondly, the ones who are new to English as a language.*
- *Thirdly the ones who are beginners for literacy itself.*

The present situation is that it is necessary for every individual to acquire this language as it is linked to his socio-economic growth. So the first category should work on 'direct method' by developing an environment of English which would assist them in getting familiar with the usages of English. The second category, I am sure, would find solace in using mother tongue as a prop. So it can depend on 'bilingual method' where the support of a regional language would be comfortable. A combination of both methods with the involvement of the government can be of significant help for the third category.

English Language Teaching has become a dual faced challenge in modern India post-independence. As a particular urban section of modern India marches towards the accomplishment of language skills, the majority of the rural class remains untouched. This results in the continuous widening of the social gap between them as it is linked to his socio-economic growth.

The urban India has been in touch with this language since independence though in a small way, but as its population grew, it went on increasing or maintaining its tangibility of the language. Due to its consistency in being in touch with the language, it is not at all a problem at any point of time to progressively keep on accomplishing it and hence, learning English becomes a natural process.

But the problem was and is with their less-fortunate counterparts in semi-urban and rural areas. For them English is always like the horizon. The more they try to familiarize it, the more it gets further. It is an uphill task like climbing Mt Everest with bare foot and no food. The tools required for any individual to learn this language is not available for them on one hand and on the other the process of learning itself needs lot of time, effort and money which they are not in a position to afford.

This issue can be looked into through another angle. Any individual for instance is an expert in his mother tongue. Why is that he or she is an expert in his mother tongue? Since his birth he has only heard this mother tongue for more than a year. Then people have spoken to him all the time only in mother tongue. He has answered back whether in correct or wrong form only in mother tongue. He was not conscious that people around him would laugh at him if he commits some mistake. And finally, there was no alternative language available. In this background, the individual would have spent more than five years in the 'environment' of his mother tongue. Hence, he or she would definitely become an expert.

If similar thing happens with any individual with respect to English, then automatically they would become an expert in English. We have so many NRI kids who speak better English than most or many of the PhD's in English. This is not to vouch for the content of their chaste English which in most cases would be foul and sickening. This happens because any language by default carries its culture. And this is totally an irrelevant topic at least here.

So the message is clear that an English environment should be created to accelerate the process of getting better control over this language. Unless it is done, English would remain a horizon or a Mt Everest in front of our semi urban and rural kids.

If we have to look into remedies, first of all we need to categorize the learners. Depending upon the exposure to the language English, the learners could be broadly classified into three categories.

- Firstly, the ones who have communicative issues.
- Secondly, the ones who are new to English as a language.
- Thirdly the ones who are beginners for literacy itself.

The third group who are the first generation learners of their clan need not worry much about the language English as they basically earn their livelihood by working physically. In all probabilities English may not play a critical role and needless to say that this does not reduce the importance of English language learning. Behind every adult there would be another bright and promising generation

who would want to aim at the sky. So in this background, it is the responsibility of the adult to get exposed to the language and push their ward to the second or if possible to the first category mentioned above. This itself would be a herculean task for an individual of third category.

Coming to the next category of individuals who are new to English as a language, it is yet another task. The concept of learning here is like cycling. For the ones who have gained the balance, it is just a child play but for the others it is nothing but 'jadoo' or magic. It is the responsibility of the teachers, friends, relatives and all people around to lend a helping hand by creating a suitable atmosphere. They may need the support of their mother tongue at every step. Bilingual Method where two languages are mutually used to the benefit of the learner is the best possible method at this stage. With the help of bilingual method, an individual can be successfully pushed to the first category.

The first category as mentioned earlier are the ones who have communicative issues. This is most prospective and promising on one hand and most critical and crucial on the other. This is the group of people who don't have another option or unlimited time. Their success, career and life revolves around this language. It is very critical for them to accomplish in a short span of time.

Now what should these guys do?

Once again the answer is simple and only the answer is simple but the solution is a task. Let us try to understand the mindset of the learners whom we as teachers encounter. A boy or a girl who has come from semi urban or rural background, he knows the usages of English, well aware of the diction but has some or lot of problems with communication. He would struggle hard to frame one single meaningful sentence but let alone with his friends who are sailing in the same boat, he would talk loads and loads of sentences in his mother tongue. And he acts like *Parama Shiva* who just swallowed the great *visha* when he has to speak in English. He hesitates to speak out in English as he is conscious of people who may be watching him and eventually laugh if he commits some mistakes. Probably the greatest problem with this kind of people is that they have an easy and readily available substitute for English which is their mother tongue. They themselves will not be aware that when they switch on to their mother tongue.

Now let us work on a possible remedy for them.

Even when Sachin Tendulkar, the God of cricket, is playing and if balls are not favorable to him, the commentators keep on saying that he should stick to basics. Sticking to basics is so important. Let us take a look at the basics of language learning and how they can help this category of learners.

First of all these guys should be made clearly understand that English is just a language like their mother tongue and in fact much much easier than it. The mentor should do the work of *Jaambuvanta* in making our *Hanumans* realize their potentials.

Secondly, with due respects to their mother tongue, they need to forget it for two years. That particular language should not exist for them.

Thirdly, they need to watch lot of TV shows in English. News channels or sports channels or anyone but in English followed by lot of reading and writing in English.

If we keep on adding sugar to water and if we don't mix it up with a spoon, it would be of less help. Similarly while following these three steps, if we don't do the next, it would be useless. As and when we meet new words, we need to pause, check their meanings and use them in at least three different contexts in the next six to eight hours. Only then those new words would become known to us. It is exactly the way a stranger even today in rural India. If a stranger is roaming around in a village, all people will be looking at him with a question mark on their faces, "who is he...?" Everybody feels that it is their birthright to know who he is. And when someone ventures into questioning and manages to get the answer, only then there would be a sigh of relief in them. Every new word is a stranger to us till it becomes known. Like the villagers who do not rest till they convert the stranger into a known person, we should not allow a single new word to pass without making it a known word. It is possible only when we find out the meaning and use it 3 to 4 times immediately.

By listening to, reading and writing the language for a considerable amount of time, anyone would meet more number of new words. And new words are deemed to become known words due to the practice of checking the meanings at all times.

After having done all these things, still it is only through practice that a person can get perfect. Now our young friends with language issues are expected to talk which they would choose not to do even at gunpoint.

Now how to make them talk or practice is the question. It is quite natural that they are shy to talk in front of others for obvious reasons. It is almost impossible to make them talk. Talking happens not only at physical level but also at mental level. The talking at mental level is called as 'thinking' which never ever stops. So we can make use of this nonstop mental talking for practicing the language. If we are able to convince and motivate them to do this, probably our job is over. The individual should keep on working on pushing himself to the next category till he reaches his goal. If this is continued for two years continuously with lot of awareness and consistency, there is no doubt that they will be able to converse like any other orator.

Language learning is like learning cycle as I mentioned earlier. Once the individual gets the balance of it, sky is the limit.