TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

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Abstract:
Teaching English or for that matter of fact any foreign language cannot be based on any fixed or set methodological theory.Each learner comes from a different background,varying in his cultural,social and economic background.The present paper attempts to analyse the hindrances in the way of teaching and learning English in countries which have English as a foreign language.
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Going through the history of language teaching we find that trends in methodological thought spring from the combining of two different sources. The first of these is our changing concept of the nature of the mind. Theoretical directions in psychology and linguistics are oriented by this concept. Quite naturally it also determines learning theory. The second source comprises the practical requirements of language learning, which may be quite distinct from the theory. These requirements may again vary from one learning situation to another according to cultural, social, political and economic conditions, which determine the motives and purposes for language study at any given place and time.

Motivation in Foreign-Language Learning and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, is based on the above postulates. No worthwhile suggestion about the planning and improvement of the teaching of English in a foreign country can possibly be made without being first aware of the sociolinguistic aspect of the learning of English in that country. The next step from this would logically be methodological consideration and development of language-teaching techniques which are most suitable to the conditions of a foreign country .

Motivation in Learning a Foreign Language:
A Sociolinguistic Explanation:
The teaching of a foreign language, unlike that of content subjects, can be, and frequently is, extremely frustrating and wasteful. The most immediate, disconcerting example of this is the English-language programme for the students of non-specialist English at a foreign university. Students join the University after having done about six years of English at the secondary level. Yet a large number of them are not in a position to produce a simple sentence in English. What is even more disappointing is that there is almost no improvement in the competence in English of a sizable

number of these students even after four or five years of being taught English at the University.

It is customary to blame, for this state of affairs, the teachers, the courses, and the methods used for teaching English as a foreign language. The teachers, in their own turn, rationalize their failure and frustration by alluding to the physical inadequacies of their teaching situation, e.g., inordinately large classes, unsuitable rooms and furniture, insufficient hours of teaching provided in the timetable, and ineffective administrative control over students' class-attendance.

These factors are undoubtedly a serious hindrance to the foreign-language teacher. To me, however, these difficulties do not appear insurmountable. Even if an ideal physical teaching situation is not available, a really good teacher can do much to achieve his goal by adapting his teaching strategies to the deficient conditions and by establishing the proper rapport with his students. He will accept the physical inadequacies of his teaching situation as a challenge and try to meet it in the best possible way with his own personal resources, such as enthusiasm, intelligence and love for students. But in certain teaching situations, even all these qualities of the teacher produce but a negligible result. This is popularly attributed to the lack of motivation in the learners. But motivation

with regard to failure in learning, is usually understood in a restricted sense and on a superficial level-as merely 'situational motivation', that is, motivation in the context of the actual teaching situation. Teachers are advised to adopt various techniques, tricks, and devices to create the required interest in learners and to take maximum care to check it from waning or deteriorating into boredom and fatigue through prolonged repletion and attention. It is my submission that motivation in the learning of a foreign language has a deeper implication as well, which is socio-linguistic. Such a point of view may not immediately reduce the difficulties of teaching English in a foreign country, but it will certainly enable us to make a realistic appraisal of the situation.

Although the available psychological theories are a long way from understanding the complexities of language behavior (see J.B. Carroll, "Psychology", North East Conference

Papers, 1966), we know that both language and learning are in some sense social phenomena. Ways and features of learning vary considerably from culture to culture. In the words of Ronald Wardhaugh ("Some Reflections on the State of the Art", English Teaching Forum, Special Issue: The Art of TESOL, 1-13, 1975). 'In certain parts of the world, second, third, and even fifth or sixth languages "come easily" to everyone; in other societies a second language is "difficult" for anyone to acquire.' This necessitates awareness, on the part of the planners and teachers of English as a second or 'foreign language of the psychological obstructions students may experience in learning English because of the particular environment in which they live and are taught. The environment consists chiefly of cultural, social, political and economic factors. Any one of these factors, and a number of others can defeat the teaching of a foreign language that would otherwise be successful.

A foreign language is learnt for any one of a number reasons- for financial gain, for the love of learning a language, for national needs, for professional promotion, or for the establishment of close ties between the culture of the learners and that of the foreign-language speakers. These factors are observable and can be realized consciously. But the sociological factor, which is the most potent determiner, normally escapes the attention and consideration of ELT experts. This factor operates at the both conscious and unconscious levels and its effect on foreign-language learning, though not apparent, is far reaching.

In a bilingual (with one native and one foreign language) situation one of the languages is always the language of 'power', carrying greater social-prestige value than the other. The linguistic tendency in such a situation is one of completion in learning the language which carries more prestige. A similar situation obtains even in a monolingual context where there are 'high' and 'low' forms of the language. The tendency here is for the users of the 'low' form to strive to attain the standard of the 'high' form and for those of the 'high' form to try to go 'higher' to keep some kind of 'low' form in existence and use.

If a foreign language has social-prestige value in a community, the learners of the language will be both consciously and unconsciously motivated to learn it and the teacher's effort to produce motivation in the classroom situation will further augment this almost involuntary self-motivation. If the use of a foreign language adds to the learner's social prestige and is an accepted component of his status, there will be no lack of interest in him to learn that language. Contrary to this, if the use of a foreign language, however conducive to the financial welfare of the learner, is disfavoured for cultural or patriotic or what-ever reasons, the 'involuntary' sociological motivation, the strongest determining factor of foreign-language learning, will be absent.

Let us now consider the sociolinguistic aspect of learning English in a foreign country in order to see some of the reasons which hamper the creation of proper motivation for the satisfactory learning of the English language. In any foreign country, English has little relevance as a means of communication or social intercourse among the members of the speech community at any level of interpersonal relation, or of business and official transaction. The use of English for communication among the members of the community at social, commercial, or official level is hardly desirable and gives no social distinction whatsoever to the user of the language. Hence, its importance and use are limited. Students in such a situation have hardly any incentive to communicate in English with the members of their own speech community. If a few of them sometimes try to do so they might perhaps be considered snobbish and disrespectful to the sociocultural norm. This very snobbery and wish to be distinguished from others in a different social milieu may be a plus point for the learner's prestige and status. The most revealing example of this kind of situation is provided by India. The social prestige attached to the English language in that country is mainly, though not wholly, due to the long and powerful impact of the English language and culture.

In the absence of 'involuntary' motivation, which is primarily an outcome of the value a society places on a foreign language, the task of the English-language teacher in any foreign country becomes arduous and often unrewarding. Both the educational policy-makers and teachers of English should be fully aware of the part played by the sociolinguistic factory in foreign-language learning. This will, it is hoped, enable them to devise proper strategies in keeping with the difficult nature of the task in hand. My own suggestions regarding these are given in the second part of the paper.

May I be allowed to make only one point here with reference to the teaching of English. The latest research has shown that students have better motivation to learn a foreign language if they are mentally involved in it and get a sense of fulfillment from it. Acquisition of a new tool and of the ability to use it in real communication are helpful to the learner's motivation. Students are very quickly bored with repletion that involves almost no element of real communication. Much of the motivation to study a foreign language is lost if the students are not encouraged and allowed to try to express their real thoughts in the language they are learning. When a student is not able, even after a reasonably sufficient time of learning English, to register any response in the target language expected by the commonest stimulus, he is disheartened and loses interest in making any further effort to learn the language. This is because whatever motivation he had at the beginning has now been suppressed. Motivation produces interest and interest induces effort. Fulfillment keeps motivation alive and strong, and this goads the learner to put in more effort.

Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language:

The vast and constantly increasing literature on teaching English as a second or foreign language is rather baffling to the curious English- language teacher who wishes to choose a method for himself as well as to keep on improving his teaching equipment and competence. The teaching of English is today perhaps the most frequently and widely disputed pedagogical subject, in relation to such issues as failure, low standard, teaching strategies, and teaching materials. While linguistic researches have on the one hand revolutionized English-language

teaching, they have on the other hand immensely increased the demands made on the English-language teacher. He now finds himself confronted with a bewildering array of alternatives in approaches, methods and techniques.

This paper proposes to examine against this background of confusion some of the above alternatives and demonstrate that the formulation of an eclectic 'approach', drawing freely on various sources instead of being exclusive, would not only make the English-language teacher a less baffled person but reduce his frustration by producing better results.

Professor Clifford H. Prator of the University of California, who has been instrumental in the development of the Philippine Centre for Language Study in Manila and the Language Section of the Curriculum Development and Research Centre in Nairobi, has expressed, in his article on "In Search of a Method" (English Teaching Forum, 14-1, January 1976), 'a sobering and yet encouraging' view of the problem which the English-language teacher looking for a new and superior method faces today:

It appears to us that the wisest course of action under present circumstances is to concern ourselves less with theory and more with finding out what techniques succeed best with our students. Instead of accepting one particular linguistic or psychological doctrines as dogma, we prefer to try to understand all potentially relevant theories and make the best possible use of such insights as each of them may have to offer. There are, of course, words to describe such a point of view : pragmatism and eclecticism. But it seems misleading to speak of a 'pragmatic method' or an 'eclectic approach'. What we have in mind is nothing so formal as a method or so well developed as an approach. It might be more accurate to think of it simply as an attitude toward language teaching.

The usual error of a foreign-language teacher is his misguided belief that an approach or method confidently advocated, and often supported by cogently argued psychological and linguistic principles by reputed experts, is the approach or method to be adopted for any teaching situation. Believing this, he tends to ignore some significant factors like the national setting and requirement. What he should never allow himself to forget is that no method of language teaching can be effective unless it produces, at the initial as well as more advanced stages, an immediate and continuing sense of fulfilment in the learner of a foreign language. Such fulfillment

can result only from the students' effort to express their real thoughts in the language they are learning.

No exercise in determining a suitable foreign-language-teaching method in a given context can be meaningful if it does not pay due attention to: (i) the teaching situation, which includes sociolinguistic implications, national needs, and economic factors; and (ii) the students: their age, background, and the nature of their need of the foreign language they are learning. Keeping these factors in view, let us now consider some of the accepted methods of teaching English as a foreign language and their relevance to adult learners of English in

We may begin with the direct and aural-oral methods. They are regarded as the natural methods, akin to the unconscious process by which a child learns its mother tongue. A child learns its mother tongue through using it in a situation in which it lives with the language almost all the time. Besides being mimetic by instinct, the child is motivated to learn its mother tongue by the absolute compulsion of expressing itself and getting what it desires through the mother tongue. The child is constantly trained and corrected by its social environment as well as by its own growing experience of the right linguistic stimulus producing the right response- linguistic or extra-linguistic. In such a process of language learning, vocabulary items and structures are

almost spontaneously picked up, graded, and assimilated in keeping with the range of experience and situation of the child.

I fully endorse the view that the learning of a foreign language should ideally take place in the natural way; it should be learnt just as one learns one's mother tongue. But I wish to submit that the conditions of the natural process of learning the mother tongue, however, painstakingly re-created by the direct method or the aural-oral method, are not realizable and are therefore ineffective in a foreign-language classroom. Excessive dependence on mechanical repetition and drill and learning through the ear, which characterizes the methods we are considering, further accentuates their ineffectiveness. Students- children as well as adults-soon lose interest in a repetitive exercise that is usually wholly artificial and allows no scope for the expression of their own thoughts and feelings. For adults, at least, language is a use of the natural talent for relating spoken or written expression to meaning rather than an arbitrary system of vocal signs. It is doubtful whether even children learn a language by exact imitation. It is now widely recognized that the human mind-certainly in the case of adults-is capable of conceiving ideas and formulating a grammatical system for the expression of these ideas. It is also a common experience that students, especially adult students, have greater difficulty in learning through the ear alone. Their experience and education so orient their minds that they fail to assimilate and retain a foreign-language item

unless they see it in written form. Learning through the ear and habit formation by imitative repletion are relatively more successful with children. But adult student's reasoning and critical response to a situation produced by the direct and aural-oral methods unconsciously hinder successful cultivation of the habits of the target language. The mimetic instinct, which these methods aim at bringing into full play, functions better in less critical minds. Even for children, however, these methods can be really fruitful only if the process of re-creating the conditions of natural learning of a language is carried to the impossible extent of confining the young learners to a camp where they are completely segregated from their native-language environment and compelled to be immersed in the target language all the time.

The more radical proponents of the direct and aural-oral methods have been opposed to using the learners' mother tongue in the teaching of a foreign language. Their common argument in support of this is that one language is completely different from all others; only a few words in the English language would have exact equivalents in a foreign tongue. This becomes strikingly prominent in the case of structural words which are syntactically so significant in English. The same difficulty arises in the case of structures. The use of translation, therefore, produces only confusion and encourages the learner to think in his mother tongue. The direct and aural-oral methods, it is claimed, condition him to a state in which he makes mechanical responses to external stimuli or thinks in the target language. Such a claim, I wish to assert, is but wishful thinking. The learner, whether a child or an adult, in fact, responds to external stimuli and thinks, at least until such a time when his linguistic equipment in the target language is adequate to cater-with reasonable efficiency- to the needs of his experiential range, in the mother tongue. This is a psychological reality which has got to be faced. The language-teaching methods which ignore this fact are bound to be unsatisfactory.

Unlike the direct method, the grammar-translation method is not rigidly exclusive. The work done by the historical grammarians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has further helped, by introducing a historical perspective, to develop an attitude towards the study and teaching of English, even in those teachers who use traditional grammar, that is far more objective and logical than the emotional and dogmatic attitude of the traditionalists. Based on the concept of language as knowledge rather than skill, however, it encourages rote memorization. The main disadvantage of this method is that it ignored, until quite recently, the

very important distinction between what we may call the 'living' and the 'classical' languages. It tended to concern itself almost wholly with the written language. By 'living' language! mean a language which serves as a means of normal communication and inter-personal relationships in a community. For want of a more suitable term I have used

'classical' for those languages which have survived only as languages of literatures and have ceased to be used as tools of day-to-day social interaction: Sanskrit and ancient Greek are such languages. The grammar-translation method, describing English on the basis of languages like Latin and Greek, is useful for teaching a 'classical' language. But for teaching a 'living' language like English-how exactly English grammatical structures operate in actual usage-the use of this method has been found unsuitable. One of the chief reasons for this is that a 'living' language like English-how exactly English grammatical structures operate in actual usage-the use of this method has been found unsuitable. One of the chief reasons for this is that a 'living' language is spoken in the native user's sociocultural context and is an integral part of his developing racial and psychological make-up. The translation method requires the learner of a foreign language to communicate his sociocultural thinking through words and structures of the foreign language. Separated from its dynamic native situation and context, to which it is integral, the target language loses vitality and natural expressiveness. When English is used by a foreign learner in this way, the very edifice of communication is likely to fall through because the frame and the content do not hold together organically. The learner in this case uses a means of communication which is opposed to his psychic, social and racial background. Ideally, the learner of English as a foreign language should be trained to 'think' in English. But as I have already stated, this is usually a psychological impossibility. The psychosocial and racial elements operating in the native speaker's thinking can possibly not be transferred to the foreign learner, especially when he is learning the foreign language in his country. The facts, situations, and contexts which go with these elements can only be 'learnt', and they should be learnt consciously and so thoroughly that the facility attained and homogeneity between sounds and situations may give an 'illusion' of 'naturalness' or full 'mastery'. This is essential to the learning of a 'living' foreign language.

Let us see how the advocates of the direct and aural-oral methods, who are so insistent on training a foreign-language learner to 'think' in the target language, purpose to achieve their goal. They say the learner should learn the target language by using it. So far it is fine. But how actually to do this? Certainly, through some 'dos and don'ts': by using the target language in improvised contexts and artificially created situations, by oral drills, by deliberately making the learner 'think' in the target language, by now allowing the teacher (nor the learner) to use the learner's mother tongue, and by postponing the teaching of the skills of reading and writing in the target language until the learner has acquired oral command of some basic patterns and 'useful' words suitable to familiar situations.

From my own experience as a teacher of the English language I am inclined to accept that the learning of a foreign language takes place more quickly through the oral method,

at least in the initial stages. But retention of what has been learnt is in this case rather disappointing. The descending graph of forgetting is as steep as the ascending graph of learning. This is so because the learner does not take home any visual symbols which he may connect with the sounds which he has listened to and in which he has been drilled in the classroom. In a social context where English is frequently and widely spoken outside the classroom, the foreign learner of the language is likely to hear repeatedly the words and patterns he has learnt in the classroom and this reinforces his learning and contributes to its establishment in his mind. Audiolinguism and its so-called natural method have some positive merits. But can we, even inadequately, create the requisite situation for this natural process with only 40 to 50 hours of teaching and learning spread over a whole year? The difficulty is further increased by the absence of proper motivation, especially of the 'involuntary' kind.

The prohibition of the use of the students' native language is objectionable not only on psychological grounds, but because it is a practical disadvantage. It may be illuminating to recall that Professor C.C. Fries's Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language (University of Michigan Press, 1945), the first and classic statement of the theoretical and practical concerns of the audiolingual ('oral') approach, nowhere prescribed that the students' mother tongue should not be used in the foreign-language classroom. Indeed, Fries even recommended giving rules and their explanations in the mother tongue. Giving such explanations and instructions in the students' native language is not only more convenient and effective but allows more time for really significant practice in the target language.

To claim that useful equivalents between the target language and the mother tongue are rare is not wholly true. At the basic levels of meaning there are numerous words and quite a few structures which may have reasonable equivalences. Words like, pen, cow, table, run, go, sleep, red, black, white, etc. are likely to have equivalents in most languages. To get equivalents of words in their extended meanings is, of course, difficult. I see no harm using the mother-tongue equivalents of basic words of English. This makes the job of the teacher easier and quicker because he does not have to struggle unnecessarily to communicate meanings of simple words. He can thus save a lot of time, which he would otherwise have spent in drawing sketches on the blackboard or in using visual aids to convey the meanings of simple words. Once the vocabulary items are explained in the mother tongue quickly, the teacher can concentrate on sentence patterns made with those simple words. Immediate communication of meaning brings to the learner a sense of fulfilment and this is an incentive to further learning.

I am aware of the criticism which my point of view may invite from staunch advocates of the direct and aural-oral methods. They would say, 'How can a sense of fulfilment leading to increased interest arise when the learner has not "learnt" any utterance which can be meaningfully used in a real situation?' Whatever the linguistic or pedagogical argument, even learning words does bring a sense of fulfilment, like that of a child who has collected a few beads without having the ability to thread them together. I am not in any way advocating 'a collection of beads.' But I do insist that the audio-lingual approach should be modified in many important ways according to the conditions prevailing in any foreign country and the needs of our students.

What I recommend, in fact, is not a return to the grammar-translation method, but a compromise-based on a selection of the most suitable features from different sources and systems-between various approaches and methods. Such eclecticism makes heavy demands on the English-language teacher. He cannot distinguish wisely between what is suitable to his particular tasks and what is not useful unless he has good knowledge of diverse systems and styles of teaching English as a foreign or second language. He must be at the same time both questioning and enthusiastic: willing to reject both old and new techniques that appear unsuitable, as well as eager to supplement and revitalize his teaching with useful adaptations of techniques both new and old.

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