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Need of English language communicative skills in India's socially and educationally backward regions

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ABSTRACT

In Indian education system, there has always been discussion on the issue of English language---whether to marginalize it or to abolish it---by politicians and educationists. Some say that it is the symbol of slavery and colonialism; others say that its use has created a gap in the society, while many advocate for total abolition as it is the outcome of Lord Macaulay's education system that has created Indian *babus* (clerks). The aim of the author in this paper is to present the condition English language in Indian backward society on the one hand and to suggest some measures to learn and improve this language, particularly for the learners to whom it is a second language. For, it is observed that the people, who are financially well off, prefer to send their children to the institutions where English is the medium of education and where its use shows a sense of pride.

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Introduction

Man involves in act of communication right from the day he/she is born on this earth. Though communication process begins with in non-verbal mode, the child, with the passage of time, starts communicating through the language of his/her family, and when he joins school, he starts using a formal structured language. Since English is commonly used as a formal medium of education, particularly in professional institutions and the universities of high repute, excellence in the knowledge of this language is undeniably desirable.

We are living in an age of communication which is characterized by speed, efficiency and ability to transcend the physical and geographical boundaries. Gone are the days when knowledge was confined to a particular region. Information communication technology has accessed the users know the variations being used in languages the world over. In the West, scholars like William N. Locke, A. Nida and others have already worked a lot about the usefulness and the importance of English as a second language.

Discussion

There is no disputing the fact that English is the most preferred spoken and written form of communication the world over. No doubt, there are many languages that are widely used by the people across the world, but English is quite different from them as far as its use for business and political affairs is concerned. In fact, it is a *lingua franca* i.e. a communicative medium of the masses.

In India, for more than two centuries, English has been functioning as a commonly used language, linking the people of different sections of society that is heterogeneous in nature, with respect to cultures, religions and traditions. Also, it has been connecting the Indian provinces where regional languages are much in use. It were the British who brought changes in this country by its use in the areas of business and commerce, and later during colonial period, it emerged as a very strong tool of

communication for their administrative, educational and political motives. But, it was Lord Macaulay who emphasized and formally introduced the modern education system through the medium of English language. English as medium of education on Indian soil kept on going despite being opposed by the then nationalists.

After Independence, when the British left this country, it was believed that Indian education system would be free from English language and that Indian languages would take over this language. It appeared as though the picture would change as in the 60s and 70s, there was strong opposition against English language, but in the years to follow attraction towards this language kept on growing. The reason is obvious, as those persons having good knowledge of English are preferred to those who lack of its knowledge. Knowledge of this language not only is yielding money in Indian society, but it is earning praise and respect as well. Hence a good knowledge of English language is required not only for the learners of this language, but it is equally very important for the learners of other disciplines and streams.

In India many regional languages and dialects are spoken with variation of accent and scripts. There is no uniformity so far as national language is concerned. No doubt, Hindi is the national language, yet in southern and eastern part of this country it is not only occupying a marginal position but sometimes people living there have hostile feeling for this language. In any such multilingual society, decisions have to be made about the roles of languages to be used in communication. English is being used as a medium of communication in these regions. Therefore, in political, business and cultural affairs people use this language and it is integrating the people at large. In case any regional language is forced upon any section of society to be used as a language of communication, people may have, and it is natural also, a hostile attitude and reactionary

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feelings against such language, for it may not be a medium of the natural communication.

But with English the situation is quite different. It is not a mother tongue of any section of society, at least in Indian sub-continent. But at the same time it is not a foreign language at all, at least in the sense as Chinese, German and Spanish etc are. The people have been using this language in one way or the other for two centuries and, therefore, they have some elementary knowledge of this language, based on their primary and middle level education system. Hence there appears to be no repercussion against this language.

After American dominance in both technology and politics, English has become a necessary language in the world of business and politics. It is, in the present global scenario, working as a language of the professionals as well. With advancement in technology the world has shrunk and the people of different nationalities are working together under the umbrellas of companies. Here, English is functioning as a medium of their communication. In the multi-national companies, knowledge of good English is preferred. Those who have good English communicative skills are preferred to others. This way it has become a fortune for good users. In other words, good English means good fortune.

India consists of states where varieties of languages are used in both written and spoken form. The eastern region of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other such states are considered to be the most backward area of this country both socially and educationally. These areas are devoid of modern technologies as well as resources which are available in developed states and metro towns of the country. Also, these areas are deprived of the facilities that are required for excellence and growth of educational standard. Here the people's knowledge of English language is extremely poor. They feel ashamed of themselves when they have to communicate in English language. The students studying here are also denied of good opportunities because of low and inferior communicative skills.

Methods

In the present competitive market, it is, therefore, desirable that a good and sustainable atmosphere of English language be provided to the learners. The auditory approach to language learning-be it native or a second language- is effective, for it provides a practical approach to learn a language. Yet, one should never forget that learning through this method is not as easy as it apparently appears. It is observed that an average learner faces the problem of how to begin with learning a language. In fact, he has no idea of the concept of language, particularly, a second language, for every thing floods upon his mind in such a way that he fails to form any idea of what he has listened to. He fails to make any sense of the jumbled sounds he hears. In fact, the learner has no idea what the sound means for him, and even if he has some of it, he doesn't know what he is learning. All hearing, we all know is not listening. Only a purposeful hearing is listening. There is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is a physiological process in which the sound waves coming from various objects go into contact with the eardrums. We hear many things but do not necessarily perceive sounds emanating from them. If we are asked to interpret the meaning of the sounds we have heard, it is possible that we are unable to do so. But in the case of listening we make our hearing purposeful, and we deliberately attempt at finding some meaning by repeatedly hearing what the sounds may mean.

However, learning by listening is a slow process and, therefore, the listeners prefer the use of text book approach and give up their ear training. Another very important reason why the listeners shun the auditory approach is due to their prejudice, largely built up on this notion that "eye gate" is more effective than "ear gate". Of course, visuals are very helpful means. But, it should not be forgotten that language is essentially "a motor auditory-phenomenon and our auditory sensitiveness and assimilative capacity must be developed."¹

We all know that the ability to listen well is quite as important as the ability to speak. It is generally argued that it is the art and power of speaking which alone can give effective and sustained impact on the heart and mind of the audience. Here, it appears that the importance of a speaker is greater than a listener. Nevertheless, it should not be disregarded that the speech becomes meaningful only because of good listeners' ability of appreciating it. In other words, the listener's level of receptivity matters much. A teacher, in a class-room, may prove to be very effective not merely because he is very good, but also because he is fortunate enough to have good students to listen to him. Sometimes even a good speaker feels bored when he notices the listeners are dull and listless. Communication can not take place if there is no involvement of two parties--speaker and listener.

In olden days when man had not discovered the written form of a language, he solely depended upon its verbal nature, and listening then used to play a vital role. Knowledge was transmitted from one generation to another only by its listening form of communication. In the past and even today also, under *Guru-Shishya* (pupil-teacher) tradition of escalating knowledge, listening plays an instrumental role. Today also, the illiterate and uneducated people in our villages perform their rituals step-wise as they have heard and listened to the same from their elderly people. Psychologists have also felt that good and effective human relations are based on good listening skills. Responsive listeners establish long and fruitful rapports with other human beings. There are many ways through which the listener can improve and develop the listening ability. The strong desire to listen, avoidance of distractions, focus on the message or subject, giving adequate time to a speaker to say and making notes etc. help one improve the listening skill. Concentration, mental alertness, comprehension, appreciation of the subject, evaluation, right posture, eye contact and asking pertinent questions etc. are the tips that make listening easy to develop.

One may put question as how one should learn a language. Really it is a difficult task to make rules about specific features of learning a language. Languages differ widely in their structures and individual learner does not necessarily show interest in learning all the aspects of language. However, there are certain features that might be of great interest for a learner. Sound, words and grammar constitute the backbone of a language.

The phonetic part is an essential component of a language because it includes modulation of voice, pronunciation, pattern of sound and accent which play major role in adding beauty to the language. The sound part of language is so important that the presentation part of the language becomes dead in its absence. One of the major criticisms that the speakers face is about their monotone voice. Such speakers become dull and boring for listeners.

If a learner is asked to read out a passage or a few lines from the text, it is not necessary that he will say correct and proper tone of the words. Even if he is asked to pronounce the

same through phonetic signs and symbols; again he may not do the same. But if the same he listens through a medium, he can very easily grasp them. In English, to pronounce a two syllable word, there is a rule that the stress falls on the first syllable if the word is a noun, but if it is a verb the stress is on the second syllable. For example, the word **progress** can be used both as a noun and as a verb. In former case, the stress falls on the first syllable **pro**, but in latter case as a verb, the stress falls on the second syllable **gress**. Likewise, there is also a rule that the main stress is on the root syllable, "regardless of the affixes that the word formation may add"². For example, in the words **|kind**, **|kindness** and **un|kindness**, the main stress is on the root syllable, represented by vertical strokes. Many types of such other words can be pronounced correctly by putting horizontal or vertical strokes. Similarly, in intonation, the learner is much concerned with tone, its falling and rising aspects. There are several rules for falling and rising tone. For example, we expect a fall in question beginning with a "wh-word"³. We, on the other hand, expect the rise in conditional sentences or in non-final utterances. In all such cases, the learner can better understand when he actually listens to them through audio cassette or by an expert of the language. The lyrical rise and fall of the voice and other features of sound can be easily grasped by giving due attention to our ears.

So far as giving time to learn sounds is concerned, no hard and fast rules can be made, but it will certainly require many hours. To learn a foreign language, one should concentrate on its phonetic features without wasting much of his time. In those institutions where language laboratories have been set up with a view to improving communication skills, the learners have the advantage of excelling their skill with the help of learning materials and other related programmes. In good institutions like universities and technical institutes and even in good schools also, the students are provided with all such facilities. The modern language laboratories are designed with new audio-visual technological devices for listening and speaking practices. In a digital language laboratory, the learner has multiple facilities like, seeing, writing, listening, speaking and judging and correcting himself or herself through practice. Even those learners who have no such facilities can also improve and develop this skill by listening to radio, seeing and hearing of knowledge based T.V, serials or recordings of leaning materials through any private system.

Another important or rather inseparable part of language is vocabulary. The basic problem for users of a second language is about the selection and use of words at appropriate time and place. Many people say, and this appears to be true also, that by memorizing list of words, vocabulary can be increased. For this purpose, reading and listening are required. In the course of reading, one not only becomes familiar with the words by reading repeatedly, but one also becomes used to knowing the meaning of the words through reading with thinking. One thinks during the course of listening also, but the speed of thinking is

faster than listening. The time gap that one has between these two can be provided for examining other such creative mental exercises. Thinking in listening in these ways certainly will help one memorize the words. Some times by listening over and over to the words and phrases of a language we are able to build our own vocabulary.

But writing part of a language is more important than reading and listening, though it emerged quite late as a medium of communication. Its use has certainly given the languages their meaningful shape and make; it has also provided the languages with a form that still is going on. By writing words, groups of words, sentences and paragraphs, one comes to know deeper meanings and newer values and the aspects of writing. We were taught in our schools that writing one time is greater than reading hundred times. However, writing never attains perfection in the absence of reading, listening and thinking.

Lastly, the correct language i.e. grammar is, undoubtedly, the most important part of a language. In fact, this gives the shape and make of the language. One does not always consult a grammar book to know and use correct words and sentences. And even in practical life also, one has little time to turn its pages. In most cases, one listens to the speech and conversation of people and tries to use them in practice. If the sentences of a speaker one listens to are correct, one's language also becomes correct. Therefore, it is often suggested that a learner, in order to improve communicative skills, should prefer to join the company of those people who speak correctly.

Conclusion

If a non-native language learner applies the procedures discussed above to learn English as a second language, there is no reason why he/she will not effortlessly succeed in acquiring the knowledge of this language with command. English is being widely used by the elites, scientists, technologists, bureaucrats, politicians, businessmen and actors in film industries. In urban India, and the developed provinces, English is not in marginal state; rather it has become the most favorable medium of communication as many people feel proud of themselves when they speak English words and sentences. Not only this, but it is also observed that they become uneasy when they are asked to communicate in their mother tongue. All this happens because of their frequent use of English language. But the problems lie with the learners of rural and backward regions of this country where they are denied of opportunities, facilities and amiable ambience.

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