Original Paper

Teaching English in India

—*The Use of Technologically Enhanced Realia in the Classroom*

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Abstract

In India acquisition of English language is imperative if one wants to sell oneself in the increasingly competitive job market. With a booming population the nation is filled with educated, technologically literate youth. English is not merely a foreign language in India. As India is separated by a plethora of languages knowledge of English is imperative. As the teachers in India are not native speakers of English the language they teach is not free from errors. The articulation is quite problematic as the mother tongue influence is quite pronounced. Technology helps to reduce these errors. Movies as a tool can enhance the listening and speaking skills of our students. It is quite boring to work with disembodied voices and the recorded conversations available in language labs do not sustain the learner's interest. However learners are often forced to listen to recorded conversations of people they never see, the conversation is often stilted and contemporary idiom is hardly used. However, a completely new dimension to aural practice can be added in the classroom by using movies.

Keywords

realia, productive skills, mother tongue influence, technology

1. Introduction

Teaching English in India is not easy and to teach adult students how to speak correct English is quite problematic. The students in a class room are never a homogeneous group and the teacher quite often fails to provide the correct model for speaking English. Receptive skills lead to the development of productive skills, and listening skills need to be honed before developing speaking skills. Here we are at a disadvantage because the teachers are forced to confine their teaching to the text books prescribed.

In India it has become imperative to know English in order to pursue higher education and to make oneself a saleable commodity in the job market. Though English has a long history in India the mother tongue influence is quite strong in Indian English and it is most pronounced in the spoken form. Indian

accent is difficult for non-Indian speakers to understand. According to recent surveys, approximately 4% of the Indian population use English. India has one of the largest English speaking communities outside USA and the UK. Indians have thrown the colonial yoke away but as a matter of necessity English continues to expand its empire within India. English is not a foreign language but a second language in India. In India even a student who pursues a PG programme in English Literature may not be able to speak English fluently and this is due to lack of exposure and a dearth of opportunities to speak the language. Students find themselves unable to express themselves in English. They fail to construct grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. Teaching English language in the class room is exam oriented and the most of the students clear exams but cannot use the language in real life situations. While teaching, as the emphasis is on passing the exams the students study by rote. The stereotyped and traditional pattern of exams aims at testing the knowledge of English not as a language but as a subject and most of the questions only test memory and recall. In the case of students who enroll for UG or PG programmes with English language and literature as their major, the problem deepens because they are exposed to deviant uses of language before they acquire the ability to use the language in practical life.

1.1 Literature Review

Second language learning needs careful attention as the learner is bound to impose the rules and the phonetic structure of the mother tongue onto the second language. Teachers of language have adopted and invented a variety of methods to teach English as a second or as a foreign language. Edward M. Anthony says in *Approach, method and Technique-Teaching English as a Second language*, "Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material no part of which contradicts and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. Approach is axiomatic and a method is procedural" (2). The teaching of English in India is confined to teaching from textbooks. Allwright, commenting on the inadequacies of the textbook, observes: "The whole business of the management of language learning is far too complex to be satisfactorily catered for by a pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials." (9)

The orderly presentation of language to students is influenced by several factors. The teacher has to keep in mind the age of the student, his/her mother tongue, cultural background and previous knowledge of English. The experience of the teacher and his/her level of English mastery are equally important. It was found that the earlier methods of language teaching were inadequate and the direct method of teaching was developed as a response to the Grammar-Translation method. It aims to involve the learner and it is a learner centric approach. The teaching is done in the target language, grammar is taught inductively, there is a focus on speaking and listening, and the language taught is of a practical nature.

2. Method

To solve these problems, a systematic approach should be followed. The curriculum should be devised

in such a way that teachers aim to teach different skills related to the Target language: the different skills required for Listening-Speaking-Reading-Writing. A clear distinction should be made between learning of English language and English literature. Teachers should devise ways to help pupils enjoy their language learning activities, and thereby build their confidence. The curriculum must be flexible enough to incorporate teacher generated input.

2.1 Course Material

According to this view, the course book is not enough, since the language skills that ought to be mastered by the learner by the end of a course cannot be acquired exclusively through the content that pre packaged course books offer. Clearly, in order to achieve a balanced syllabus the teacher must supplement material according to the needs of particular groups of learners. The teacher must "investigate the range of content types that may suit our students and our educational goals" (Cook 229), and then ensure that this knowledge is imparted in the classroom. Language teaching should not be monotonous. The teacher can and must be able to bring variety and diversity to sustain the interest of the learner and at the same time make sure that the teaching material has relevance and meets the needs of the learners.

Block cites three reasons for using teacher generated materials in the classroom .They are: contextualization, timeliness, and the personal touch. Teaching material, if carefully prepared and presented, can fulfill all these conditions. The material is contextualized and what is presented to the students is relevant to real life. In text books the concept of timeliness is most often by-passed and what is learnt is frozen language. But if the teacher is allowed to use relevant material then language learning will be fruitful. This is more likely to achieve the objective of stimulating learners' curiosity as a prerequisite to motivating them to engage productively with the topic matter of each lesson.

2.2 Technology

In India technological intervention is necessary to hone listening skills among students. It is imperative to provide the right model to the learner. As far as adult learners are concerned technology dependant teaching methods are imperative because the linguistic habits are deeply entrenched and re- learning is an arduous process. "Realia" in EFL terms refers to any real objects we use in the classroom to bring the class to life. The main advantage of using real objects in the classroom is that it makes the learning experience more memorable for the learners. Technological aids are effective "realia" and they succeed in bringing the world into the class room.

 Language acquisition is a skill and sufficient practice has to be provided. The amount of practice needed depends upon the complexity of the skills involved. A skill has only been learned properly when it can be adapted successfully to unfamiliar situations. Task based learning is found to be quite effective in teaching listening skills, and this mode ensures the development of the corresponding productive skill, namely, speaking.

2.3 Creating a Task

THE COMPONENTS OF A TASK:

1) Objectives

2) Input

3) Activities designed

4) Setting

5) Teacher's role

6) Provide opportunities for the learner to use the TL

Before designing the task the goals and objectives should be clearly detailed. The next step is selecting or creating input for the students to work with. The use of well chosen input is a central aspect of a task that is designed to facilitate communication. Movies succeed in infusing entertainment into the learning process. Movies or video recordings of TV programmes can be classified and filed under topics or themes and these provide a ready-made resource to be drawn on when designing tasks. Movies have a universal appeal and it succeeds in uniting people from many walks of life and forming a creative cultural space. This becomes quite important for students of TOEFL and IELTS who wish to go abroad. Movies will give them an exposure to different cultures. Close attention must be paid to the choice of movies. In India as we tend to follow the British model of English, the teacher should clarify the model of pronunciation followed in the movie or it will lead to more confusion.

2.4 Using Movies

Movies can be used in a class room to

- Sharpen listening skills and speaking ability.

- Increase knowledge of English vocabulary idioms, slang and their usage.

- Improve reading comprehension skills.

- Improve grammar

- Developing writing skills

3. Results

English is a stressed-timed language, so certain syllables in a sentence have prominence and some other syllables are articulated quickly. Therefore connected speech has a particular beat, making it difficult for non native students to understand. The candidates who wish to appear for IELTS and TOEFL examinations are adult learners who have already learnt English and they are learning English with a specific purpose. They have a listening component as part of their exam module and they are provided with course material for the same. But the course material needs to be supplemented by the teacher and movies are an effective supplement. Indian students sometimes fail to recognize even words that they know when it is articulated by native speakers because they may never have had an opportunity to listen to the word pronounced in the correct way. It is necessary to direct their attention to specific words when dealing with features of pronunciation.

152

Connected speech throws up more challenges. The intonation pattern of the first language is imposed on English and distortion occurs causing barriers in communication. If sub titles are provided for the movies, in the initial stages the learner will recognize the words that are already known and will also be exposed to the correct intonation pattern followed for different types of utterances. The script dependency will reduce slowly and the learner will be able to follow the story line without reading the sub titles. Movies provide a reliable source of authentic listening material for the practice of pronunciation.

Movies as a listening tool can enhance the listening experience for our students. It is quite boring to work with disembodied voices and the recorded conversations available in language labs do not sustain the learner's interest. However learners are often forced to listen to recorded conversations of people they never see, the conversation is often stilted and contemporary idiom is hardly used. However, a completely new dimension to aural practice can be added in the classroom by using movies. The setting, action, emotions and gestures that our students can observe in a film clip, provide an important visual stimulus for language production and practice. It has been noticed that adult learners learn a new language quickly if they are made to watch movies with sub titles.

Watching movies can also lead to improving grammar and developing writing skills. This can be done at a stage when the learners are not dependant on the subtitles for comprehension. Students are asked to watch a particular scene a few times and then are asked to write the main words and short phrases that a particular character says. Each group is given a character and is asked to listen and exchange information. This is more effective if there are two characters in the scene. Working with someone from a different group, the learners then write the script for the scene, incorporating both characters. As they will not have written down the whole script from the listening exercises they will have to use their imagination and fill in the gaps. This gives them an excellent opportunity to work on grammar.

Designing a task to facilitate learning English through viewing movies. It is important to divide the task into different activities for different stages: pre-viewing, while-viewing, and post-viewing.

It should be kept in mind that this task involves individual as well as group activities.

• Hold a class discussion prior to the film viewing. Have a goal clearly in mind and make sure that your "lead in" focuses on the specific goal.

• Develop a check list that will help students focus on specific areas. They know that they have to listen for specific information and therefore they will listen actively. Experts refer to this practice as "while-viewing." It helps students develop their critical thinking skills also. This part of the task is an individual activity.

• It is a good idea to have breaks in between so that the students can clarify doubts. Allow students ask questions about what they have seen to increase both their listening and speaking skills. The teacher should also have prepared questions related to the movie.

The questions have to be graded. Begin with yes/no questions and increase the complexity as the session progresses."What", "Where", "When", and "Who" questions should be followed by "Why",

153

"How", and "Imagine" questions. Using why, how, and imagine if you were… questions, together with questions that ask students to judge, evaluate, and critically analyze, will develop the critical thinking abilities of the students. This is completely different from questions that demand recall.

- Conduct a thorough review after the film is over. This is commonly referred to as "post-viewing". Improve the summarizing skills of the students by having them give an overview of what they have seen and talk about why it might be relevant to them.

Learning Outcome:

The students would have acquired the ability to listen for information, they should be able to use the target language in real life, they should also be able to write with clarity.

To check the effectiveness of the sessions certain tasks must be designed. Some of them are:

1) Role play activity. Students can be asked to enact a scene they have seen in the movie.

2) A short film is played for the students, but they will not be shown the visuals they can only hear it. They have to reconstruct the clip in their own words. After they write it down they can be shown the film to check whether their deductions were right.

3) At a later stage students can be asked to watch movies and write film reviews.

In Indian classrooms, especially at the college level, learners are not of the same level. In mixed ability level teaching, the teacher has to devise different strategies so as to motivate all the learners. Teaching becomes highly challenging as it involves planning lessons which include a rich diversity of tasks corresponding to a variety of learning styles and abilities. The teacher has at first to identify and find out the effective strategies and to implement an active, interesting and interactive process of learning for the learners with different levels of ability. It must be kept in mind that language is ever changing and while teaching English the teacher must use material that is updated and relevant or language acquisition will remain an impossibility. The concept of language teaching has to be restructured in India and the use of technology and realia in the classroom have to be encouraged.

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