

English as a second language in India

By

Sandra Moss

Abstract

The 200 or more years of the British rule in India has left Indians in a dilemma as far as language is concerned. India is already home to several regional languages and English only adds to the number.

The people too are divided in their opinion about the language, on the one hand some think the vernacular should be encouraged and on the other some think that ignoring English will lead to lack of progress and advancement of the state. So, in this way, English attains an elevated position of being an indispensable part of a life that is looking for progress or for status. These two opinions have given rise to two sections of educational systems the Government and the Private.

In India English has been taught as a second language and is treated more as a subject than as a language that is more expressive and versatile. Moreover, the translation method gives rise to many problems in syntax, pronunciation and vocabulary. The need for English today is felt more in the professional world where the English Learners are adults who lack confidence to speak, those who are not oriented to reading and writing in English and lack the art of learning, in such a case learning English becomes a very daunting task, yet one can see that the Indians are doing well in ESL.

Key words : English learners, art of learning, educational system.

Introduction

With the coming of the mobile phones, the computer and Internet services becoming an integral part of our life, our approach to English has shifted from merely being a second language to becoming an indispensable part of the modern life. Educational institutions where English is a Medium of Instruction are now in greater demand as ESL is seen as a passport to the professional world, Moreover, English is perceived as a necessity to save one from an embarrassing situation, and as it is a Lingua Franca of the world it is the language to compete in the modern world. Hence, with the increasing demand for English, the chasm between the English speakers and the non-English Speakers will slowly close in but with a price.

Pandit Nehru realized the need for English language skill for communication when he said, “Let English serve our purpose but let our mother tongue prosper”.

The main problems that I would like to discuss are:

Why haven't we Indians mastered the art of speaking fluently in English?

Where is the main problem?

Is our teaching learning methodology faulty?

What is second Language?

The First language is the language that is picked up from birth by speaking and listening and as we grow the vocabulary of the language also grows as naturally as the life grows.

The second language, here referring to English is an acquired language which is learnt systematically with its syntax and vocabulary and pronunciation. Unfortunately, the second language learnt is seldom used in daily life and is relegated to only those few hours of classroom learning in a formal academic institution.

Although the second language English is taught step by step the learning and its use is not as rapid as the First language or the mother tongue or as fluent as the first language.

Here we enumerate the study of the **Why** and **the difficulties** of mastering the second language English.

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA

English is recognized as a link language in India and in the International arena and a library language. In India English is used in the administration, Judicature, Legislature, commerce, technology and media. It is widely used as a medium of instruction in Medicine and science and technology.

The importance of teaching English in India are:

- i. English has today become one of the major languages of the world.
- ii. It will be very difficult to neglect English language because of rich Literature and for Scientific and Technical nature we have to depend on English.
- iii. English has given access to the treasure of knowledge.
- iv. It provides opportunities to Indians to get employment throughout India.
- v. It provides a strong binding force to keep all Indians united. The statistics collected by David Crystal (1997:61) shows that nearly 670 million people use English with fluency and competency. Most of the countries in the world whose mother tongue is not English learn this as a second language.
- Vi. It helps the students going broad for further studies.

Problems with learning English as a second language.

Classroom Teaching

English in India is taught in most of the schools at different levels. The heterogeneous makeup of the group of students, compels the teachers to resort to translation method of teaching. Secondly,

as most of the students are the first-generation learners of English, they get little or no help or even exposure to learn English. The translation method and the lack of exposure of the different nuances of the language makes it difficult for the student to gain fluency in the language and most of the time it remains as an academic compulsion or just another subject to clear the examination.

English Grammar

English Grammar with its many exceptions is highly complex and not easy to master. While mastering the grammar rules may be easy putting it into practice is a herculean task. The concept of applied grammar is new but is seldom followed in schools. The native English speakers are highly aware of the Grammar and can easily notice grammatical errors. The fluent English speakers are proud of their expertise of this world language making it more difficult for the second language learners to speak.

Pronunciation

The pronunciation of words in English language are not obvious. But most of the Indian languages have phonetic spelling. Indians tendency to pronounce English words phonetically can cause a lot of embarrassment. The native English speakers know how to pronounce 'Knight' or to pronounce to 'k' as in 'chaos' or to silence the 'p' as in 'receipt'.

The second difficulty in the pronunciation arises from the differences between British and American pronunciation, the non English speakers is caught in a dilemma as to which is the correct pronunciation. Is it semi or '*semai*,' edzucation' or education, 'laboratory' or 'labraetory'.

In Britain the vowel 'o' like in dog, hot, pot is pronounced with rounded lips , Americans do not have this vowel and pronounce it with an 'ah' sound.

There is lack of correspondence between the spelling and the pronunciation. As there are many silent words such as: knife, knave, kneel, knowledge etc.

The other difficulty with the pronunciation is that one letter has multiple sounds as: 'ch' produces three sounds as 'ch' in church, 'k' in character, and 'sh' as in chaperone.

Mother tongue interference

According to (LANGAUGES OF INDIA, 1991 CENSUS)

In India alone there are

18 scheduled languages,

114 other languages,

216 mother tongues,

96 non specified languages,

Approximately 1000 languages

It is quite natural for the local or regional language to interfere with the second language in the pronunciation.

Lack of communication

Just as the mother tongue is picked up by mere practice of both listening and speaking so also the second language can only be learnt well by speaking and listening. However, in most of the educational institutions speaking in English, which is their second language is never strictly emphasized and so the lack of confidence in speaking.

Teacher Quality

Most of the teachers teaching English do not have a complete English background i.e they have not studied throughout in English, they, the teachers too are the victims of the same problems of not getting the complete essence of the English as they come from the vernacular background.

Secondly, our system looks for marks not proficiency, the eligible candidate may have the grades to secure the job but certainly lacks the basics of the English such as the right pronunciation, the vocabulary and the right and fluent usage of the language for communication, thus cannot pass on the language in its entirety to the beneficiaries.

Remedial measures

It is to be understood by all the second language users that though English may be treated as the second language it is the language for growth, for higher education and for International trade and commerce. Hence, just a working knowledge is not enough, each learner has to enhance the language by reading and listening and speaking.

A second language English learner has to learn to coordinate all the nuances of the English Grammar while speaking and yet keep the flow, a daunting task but the only way to master the art of speaking English fluently is to read and speak.

The Direct Method

According to Webster's dictionary, the best method for teaching a foreign language is the direct method through conversation, discussion and reading in the language itself without the use of the student's language, without translation and without the study of grammar, the words are first taught (K K Bhatia)the students get an opportunity to listen to the spoken English, the student thinks in English and can strengthen his ability of self-expression.

English in India Today

Nationalists have always raised their voices against the propagation of English. Nevertheless, English language continues to be widely used in India especially in the media, air transport, national press, and the social elite and for higher education. The survey shows only 4% Indians use English i.e. 35 million people thus making it the largest community after UK and the USA. Even Gandhi who was a proponent of the native language believed that his message would be most widely understood if communicated in English. So although English is not an indigenous language it remains an associate language beside the Official language 'Hindi'.

Why we Indians lack the kind of quality required in speaking English

We Indians learn little English and then mix it with our own language and make our own phrases in English. We believe in conveying our message so the proper grammar, the right expression is diluted or rephrased for convenience for example:

Myself ,Suresh Kumar.

I am having four brothers and three sisters.

He has white hairs.

I will give exam

He is married with my friend.

These are some of the errors Indians commit but it is more widely used and understood. Correcting the wrong and learning to speak the right English is another difficult task. But as long as it is understood by all the English Speakers are happy with their construction of phrases.

Conclusion

A report suggests that People who are able to speak foreign languages have increased earning power and are popular with the opposite sex. Speaking a second language can increase an average worker's salary by 2,00,000 a year. Among higher earners the difference is even greater, a survey of 2,700 firms found nine out of 10 thought their businesses could benefit from better language skills. The sector most in need of language skills is media, sales and marketing, according to the companies surveyed.

It is rightly said that “, **English is our window to the world and**” (its use) cannot be avoided. Even countries like China and Japan are now taking to English in a big way." Not only was English the language of technology, but it was also a tool of communication,

By learning English as a second language early on, we are setting the younger generation up for a number of advantages that will help them through the rest of their lives. The 2002 U.S. Census indicates that approximately 14% (more than 7.5 million) children between the ages of 5 and 17 are fluent in more than one language, and this number is expected to increase in the coming years. There is no doubt that the benefits of learning English reach beyond economic, educational, and employment advantages. It also increases a child's linguistic abilities because bilingual children are better able to comprehend the complexities associated with a particular language's meaning and grammar. Since some words across various languages share a similar pronunciation and vocabulary, the connection is made for children early on and makes learning a new language more attainable. In addition, children who learn English as a second language are able to expand their vocabulary across both languages at a faster rate than their mono-linguistic peers.

Rajagopalachari said that English was the gift of Goddess Saraswathi to India and that in our anger and hatred we should not throw away the baby (English) with the bath water (the English people) (Ramakrishnan, 2007).

Jawaharlal Nehru opined, “If you push out English, does Hindi fully take its place? I hope it will. But I wish to avoid the danger of one unifying factor being pushed out without another unifying factor fully taking its place. In that event there will be a gap. The creation of any such gap or hiatus must be avoided at all costs. It is this that leads me to the conclusion that English is likely to have an important place in the foreseeable future” (Nayyer, 2004). Hence the learning of English as a second language or an associate language should explore opportunities for its refinement for our own betterment.

References

[1] Bhatia, K. K. (2008). *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*, Kalyani Publishers, 39-45.

Cohen, J. A. (2008). *Adolescent English Learners in the English as a Second Language*

Classroom: What are their Perspectives? (Ph. D. dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (AAT

3341320). <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1660014741&sid=1&Fmt=2&cl>

ientId=79356&RQT=309&VName=PQD

Colman, Rosalie M. (1981). English as a Second Language and the Salad Bowl Concept. *World*

Education Monograph Series, Number Four. The I.N. Thut World Education Center, Box

U-32, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06268. ED215955

Eble, K. (1988). *The Craft of Teaching*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

English as a Second Language Handbook for Adult Education Instructors (1990). In *California State Department of Education, Sacramento*. Retrieved October 13, 2011, from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED321600.pdf>