Teaching of English in India: Trends and Challenges

Dr Shalini Misra

(PHD - Lucknow University)

PGT (English) - Sainik School Ghorakhal, Nainital (UK)

Abstract: After sixty seven years of independence, we can say that the use of English in India is indispensable. In fact, it has spread to all parts of the world and is spoken by masses of people. It has emerged as the most useful tool to develop understanding with other nations. Every sector: public or government is dominated by the professionals who are proficient in the use of English. Now English is no more the native language of UK (which is its original home), but it has spread to other parts of the world like South Asia, America, and New Zealand etc. In most of the countries, English is taught as the second language. Though it is also a known fact that it is not the native language of many countries in the world, its dominance is unrivalled. That would not be an exaggeration to comment that without the knowledge of English, one may feel helpless. But, the sad state of affairs is that the study of English in Indian schools presents peculiar problems. The present paper aims to explore the new teaching trends and challenges to English teachers in India. It also aims to suggest the measures to improve the situation.

Keywords: Indispensable, understanding, professionals, native, knowledge.

PAPER

English claims to be the first rate international language.

It can even be called a universal language. Hence, its knowledge promotes international understanding. By extending the radius of a person's horizon, it overcomes his prejudices, intolerance and narrow-mindedness. Thus, it is very helpful in fostering true internationalism and co-operation among the nations of the world. (Jain & Sharma, p.48)

In the present scenario of LPG i e Liberalization, Privatisation and Globalization, English has emerged as the most useful tool to develop understanding with other nations for the economic growth. In a world that has turned into a global village, every sector: public or government is dominated by the professionals who are proficient in the use of English. Without the knowledge of English, people find themselves heavily handicapped when they have to compete in a professional /commercial environment. The children , who do not know English, feel helpless when they have to compete with other good students. The educational progress/ growth is incomplete without the knowledge of English. P Vijaya Kumar rightly comments in his article *"How to Better Your English and Improve Your Prospects"* in *Manorama Year Book:*

India's IT industry rode to success on the back of its young workforce's competence in English. Ordinary people still see English as a passport to success. In the globalised world lack of competence in English is seen as a bit of a handicap. The rush of people to English medium schools and to centres that offer courses in "Spoken English" or "Communicative English" is a testimony to this. (82)

We cannot comment that English is an ideal language or the only language that is required to progress in life, but it's a fact that most of the countries in the world have embraced this language to develop understanding with other nations. English has been playing a major role in our daily life. It is more widely spoken than any other language. English is the language of medicine, engineering, computer, aviation, navigation etc. English was introduced in our educational system by the British almost two centuries ago . Since then, it has been playing an important role in the field of education, commerce, law and politics. The British introduced English as they needed white collared clerks for their colonial administration. The aim of teaching English was to make the Indians realise the benefits they would enjoy after learning this language. Gradually, people realised its importance and it became not just the language of education, but the language of social progress also. The exposure to this language enriched the minds of great Indian scholars and they encouraged others also to use this language. Initially, some people opposed this idea but soon they realised that they would lag behind others without the knowledge of English. Now it has become the language of the common man in India.

Salient Features of English Language and the Problems Faced by Indian Students

A Vast Treasure of Vocabulary: It is very difficult to tell how many words actually exist in English. Now the words from other languages like Hindi and Sanskrit are also included in English dictionaries. Hence, it is almost impossible even for experts to learn and remember all the words. This is what discourages small children to learn English.

Pronunciation: There are many words in English that are not pronounced as they are written. Some examples are -Honesty, Pneumonia, Pseudonym, Psychiatrist, Doubt, Know etc. The letter 'h' is silent in honesty. Similarly 'p' is silent in pneumonia, pseudonym and psychiatrist, 'b' is silent in doubt and 'k' is silent in 'know'. For second language learners, it is a very difficult task to remember these rules as the list of such words is pretty long.

Complex Grammar Rules: Grammar rules are very complex. Tenses, Verbs, Prepositions, Conjunctions etc. cause a great deal of confusion. This is a big challenge to master all the rules as there are so many exceptions to the rules. A very simple example is the use of verb with singular and plural subjects. The rule says that in 'Present Indefinite' tense, we use 'do' with the plural subjects/nouns and we use 'does' with the singular nouns/subjects. But, the exceptions are 'I' and 'You' with which we use the verb 'do'.

Irregular Forms of Verb: The different forms of Verbs viz. Present (Ist form), Past (2nd form) and Past Participle (3rd form) often create a problem for students as there is no standard rule for them. The following table shows different Verb forms:

Present (1st form),	Past (2nd form)	Past Participle (3rd form)
Arise	Arose	Arisen
Become	Became	Become
Cling	Clung	Clung
Cut	Cut	Cut
Drink	Drank	Drunk
Fight	Fought	Fought
Read	Read	Read
Sit	Sat	Sat

It is clear that no standard rule is followed here. The word 'cut' remains the same in other forms. The word 'read' is also not changed, but it is pronounced as 'red' in other forms.

Spelling: The spelling of some words differ in British and American English. The table shows difference in British and American spellings:

British	American
Colour	Color
Defence	Defense
Labour	Labor
Traveller	Traveler
Honour	Honor
Counsellor	Counselor
Organise	Organize
Realise	Realize

This creates confusion as the students are not familiar with the American spellings, but they often find American spellings of many words in their textbook.

Subject-Verb Agreement: It is important that in a sentence the Subject and the Verb must be used in agreement. There are so many rules regarding this and it is very difficult to memorise them. Some common rules are explained below:

As a general rule, Verb must be used in agreement with the subject. If there are two subjects expressing a single idea, the Verb will be Singular. The examples are:

"Bread and butter is a wholesome food." and "Slow and steady wins the race."

If two Nouns or Pronouns are connected by "either-or" or "neither-nor", they will take a Singular Verb, e.g.: " Either Mihir or Aditi is mistaken."

But, if each part or the latter part of the Subject is Plural, the verb will be Plural, e.g.: "Neither Nimish nor his friends have come."

If any Collective Noun refers to a single unit, it will take a singular verb, e.g.: "A special committee has been set up."

But, if it refers individually to the members of the group, it will take a Plural Verb, e.g.:" The whole committee are very grateful to you."

Degrees of Comparison (Adjectives): The Adjectives have three Degrees of Comparison: Positive, Comparative and Superlative. Some common methods of changing Degrees of Comparison are shown in the table below:

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Tall	Taller	Tallest
Fine	Finer	Finest
Heavy	Heavier	Heaviest
Beautiful	More Beautiful	Most Beautiful
Difficult	More Difficult	Most difficult
Bad	Worse	Worst
Good	Better	Best
Little	Less	Least

The examples presented here do not follow a standard rule. Some examples follow the method of adding 'er' to the Positive to make Comparative form and adding 'est' to the Positive to make the Superlative. Some examples follow the method of adding 'r' to make Comparative and adding 'st' to make Superlative . In some cases, 'y' is replaced with 'ier' to make Comparative. To make Superlative, 'y' is replaced with 'iest'. In some cases, 'more' is added to the Positive to make Comparative and 'most' is added to the positive to make Superlative. In some other cases, the word is entirely changed. There are many rules, so it becomes increasingly difficult to understand and learn them.

Homophones and Homonyms:

Homonyms are words that are spelled the same and sound the same but have different meanings. For example, the word 'fair', which means 'reasonable and morally right', has a different meaning also-'a form of public entertainment held in a large open area'.

Homophones are words that sound the same but have different meanings and different spellings. For example, 'sun' and 'son'. These words often create confusion.

Idioms and Phrasal Verbs:

There are many idioms and phrases that appear frequently in the speech of native speakers that are very difficult to comprehend by others. Some examples are given below:

cats and dogs : If someone says that it is raining cats and dogs, he means that it is raining heavily. There is no connection of cats and dogs with the rain.

straight from the horse's mouth: If someone says that he got it straight from the horse's mouth, he means that he came to know it directly from the person who really knew it. It is also a problem for students to comprehend this.

Some examples of Phrasal Verbs are:

hack around: to waste time doing unimportant or silly things.

hack into sth: to get into someone else's computer system without permission in order to look at information or do something illegal.

hack off: to annoy someone.

Understanding these Phrasal Verbs is often problematic as their meanings are quite confusing.

COMMON ERRORS IN EXPRESSION

India is culturally, linguistically, stylistically and ethnically the most diverse nation. People here speak different languages, celebrate different festivals, wear different kinds of clothes and enjoy different varieties of foods. It is said that after every 50 kilometres , we'll find people speaking a different language. The more is the variety of speakers, the greater is the possibility of errors in speech. Some common errors are listed below:

Tautology (Unnecessary repetition of something): For example, "He returned back home around midnight.", "He goes for morning walk in the morning."etc. This is a very common practice to use such expressions because the students don't know that the word "return" means "go/come back."

Adjective and Adverb: The students often get confused in the use of Adjective and Adverb.

 For example, a student is taught the use of 'hard' and 'hardly' and the teacher asks him, "Do you work hard?" He replies, "Yes, I work hardly." Instead of using "hard", the student has used "hardly" which is conveying a wrong meaning. Similar examples are listed below:

1.   Teacher: Do you run fast?
Student: I run fastly.
The correct word to be used here is "fast".
2.   Teacher: I think he is honest. What do you say?
Student: I think different.
Though 'differently' is technically correct here.
The examples presented here reflect a defective speech pattern used by the student. The students tend to commit such mistakes because they simply fail to understand that "Adjective" is a word which qualifies a Noun or Pronoun (or adds something to its meaning) and "Adverb" is a word which modifies the meaning of a Verb, an Adjective or another Adverb.

Formal/Informal Use of Language: There are some expressions used formally. For example: 'How do you do?' The teacher says to the student, "How do you do?" and the student replies, "I do it myself." This happens because the student does not know that the expression 'How do you do?' is used as a formal / polite greeting when we meet someone for the first time . These are the common problems faced by a teacher in the classroom especially in a Hindi - medium school.
Apart from this, it is observed that there is usually a gap between written English and spoken English. In verbal communication, we accept certain things, like incomplete sentences and phrases etc., but while writing we need to be very careful about grammar and expression.

Word -Order in a Sentence:

The natural order or arrangement of words in a sentence is Subject-Verb - Object. However, in long sentences, we could have different arrangements.

Reena Gupta quotes a line from Gray's immortal Elegy in *How to Write and Speak Correct English:*
Homeward the ploughman plods his weary way.
The ploughman plods his weary way homeward.
Plods homeward the ploughman his weary way.
His weary way the ploughman homeward plods.
Homeward his weary way plods the ploughman.
Plods the ploughman his weary way homeward. (50)

She comments, "This line can be paraphrased to read 18 different ways. His arrangement was made to comply with the rhythm and rhyme of the verse. Most of the variations depend upon the emphasis we wish to place upon the different words."(50-51)

This is quite complex to comprehend how to arrange the words in a sentence. This is just one example. There is a never ending list of such sentences.

Hindi-medium students generally commit mistakes related to word-order in a sentence as their mother-tongue interferes with the second language. For example, the sentence : "I eat food" is correct in English, but most of them translate it like, "I food eat." A child learns his mother-tongue at home in a natural way. Whenever he wants to express something, he uses the appropriate forms in a proper context without any conscious thought. When the same child begins to learn a foreign language , he tries to follow the rules of his mother-tongue because he has become so much habitual of using his mother-tongue that he can't resist. This is one of the major problems faced by the second language learners.

SMS Language:

Social media is no doubt a very effective and powerful tool in our hands. It has really revolutionised the world of communication. But, it has brought paradigm shifts in the use of English as a language. For example, the word 'Good', is written as gd, gud etc. 'Friend' as frand, frnd, frn, frd etc. 'Smiles' as smyls. 'Joys' as jys, joyz etc. Some use symbols also for 'Joy', 'Smile', 'Heart' etc. This has become a fashion or style. The abbreviations used here do not conform to the standard norms. This is leading to the death of 'Standard English'.

Methods of Teaching English:

There are different methods of teaching English. The oldest method is Translation-cum- Grammar Method. This method is based on the assumption that a foreign language can be easily learnt through translation

.Miles Turnbull and Jennifer Dailey-O'Cain also remark in *First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning, "*Research findings indicate that the first language may contribute to student target-language comprehension, use and learning" (5).

But, there are some demerits of this method. No perfect translation is possible in many cases. Word for word translation destroys the meaning of sentence and fluency of speech. For example, "Light was burning the whole night. " (Batti sari raat jal rahi thi) , "Meet me in my empty period. " (Mere khali period me mujhse milo) ,"Give me broken money." (Mujhe tute paise do).

Many scholars thought that this method is difficult and leads to confusion. As a reaction to this method, came the Direct Method. This method enables the students /pupils to think in English. This method is based on the assumption that a foreign word should be associated with its meaning directly. It discourages the use of mother-tongue. In this method, instruction in the language classroom is limited exclusively to the target language.

Many eminent scholars and linguists have realised the importance of this method. Brian McMillan and Miles Turnbull quotes Frank in *First Language Use in Second and Foreign Language Learning:*
Frank believed that trying to make connections between the first language and the target language most often lead to inappropriate transfers; students should therefore try to think in the target language and develop a separate target language system. (21)

According to Frank, 'Translation' is a waste of time. While making students do so, we activate part of the brain that we want them to forget about.

There are other methods/approaches also. Dr West's New Method or Reading Method became very popular. This method suggests that 'learn to read effectively' is the simplest way to learn a foreign language. The new methods of teaching are – The Structural Approach (lays importance on the mastery of structures), The Situational Approach. ((learning by doing -use the word in meaningful situations) and The Communicative Approach (lays emphasis on the use of language-communicative competence).

Learning a foreign language involves the establishments of the links between the language structures and their meanings. Teaching English language to Indian students is not an easy task. The usual methods of teaching fail because the students fail to associate the form with the meaning. That's why they hesitate to communicate in English. Even the teaching of grammar does not help students. They find grammar rules very complex. Melinda Whong remarks in *Language Teaching Linguistic Theory in Practice* :

One common frustration for teachers is that, no matter the amount of correction, some students continue to make the same errors. Instead of being frustrated, you should first ask yourself whether it is an error or a mistake .A systematic error might be traced to some universal property of language, or it might be a property of the learner's native language... High rates of mistakes, however , may signal that the learning environment is causing undue stress to the learner such that they are not able to perform to their highest potential. (18-19)

If this is the case, a teacher should make certain change in the classroom environment. Teachers need to create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning.

NEW TRENDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT):

As a result of the vast expansion of IT sector in India, many new teaching trends have emerged. New teaching trends focus on e-learning. Now each classroom in any good school has turned into a smart classroom. Students are enjoying reading e- books and making the best use of other resources also like audio and video facilities. But, it is a very challenging job for a teacher to make those students familiar with these techniques who come from very poor background and not exposed to this world.

The new methods of teaching language include 'Project Method' and 'Action Research'. Other methods to make learning effective are: Role-Play, Debate Competition, Elocution Contest, Speech Competition, Recitation and Declamation Competition, Group Discussions etc. All such activities require highly skilled and experienced teachers. Unless we have the trained teachers, the whole exercise will be futile.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

(1) The first thing a teacher should do is to build a rapport with the students so that they feel free to communicate with him/her.
(2) Teachers should pay attention to individual differences. All children are different. They learn at

different pace. Some weak students demand more attention than others.

(3) Students must be taught in an informal way (friendly manner). If the teacher is very strict, the students will not respect him/her.

(4)Teachers should have a high degree of patience to deal with problematic children/students as such children need special attention.

(5)Teachers should never discourage the students even if they sound foolish.Their little efforts must be recognised and appreciated. This encourages them to speak in front of others without feeling embarrassed .

(6) The modern children don't like traditional methods of teaching. So, a language teacher should organise lots of activities in the class keeping in mind the age and interests of children/students.

T C Baruah has also stressed the importance of co-curricular activities in classrooms .He asserts in *The English Teacher's Handbook:*

Classroom teaching alone is not sufficient to achieve the objectives of teaching English. It is therefore essential to supplement classroom teaching with co-curricular activities specifically designed to promote pupils' learning of English. In fact, because of the strong motivational element, these activities may sometimes be found to be more effective than the curricular ones. (312)

Bearing in mind, the objectives of teaching, CBSE introduced the new evaluation system -CCE (Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation) for school children .It stressed the significance of speaking and listening skills. Good communication skills build up the confidence of students. Considering this, the CBSE had also introduced the formal assessment of speaking and listening skills in senior classes.

 This motivates the students and they take a keen interest in learning English language. CCE scheme engages the learners and help them develop their language skills in a natural context. Students take part in various co-curricular activities . They learn by playing and doing. In addition to this, a teacher should encourage the students to consult a good dictionary to look up the meanings of difficult words. The students should refer to standard grammar books to understand the correct usage of words . A teacher should motivate the students to try to learn Standard English. If they do so, they would definitely improve their "Communicative Competence".

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