How to Teach Second Language?

Kavita Tyagi (Associate Professor) and Ashu Tomar (Lecturer) work with the Department of English, Bharat Institute of Technology.

Abstract

Language is a means of communicating thoughts and feelings. As Dwight Bolinger says, 'Language is species specific. It is uniquely human trait, shared by the cultures so diverse and by individuals physically and mentally so unlike one another.' It is a man's ability to use language for purposes of communication that distinguishes him from others.

Language has no independent existence, living in some sort of mystical space apart from the people who speak it. Language exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its users.

Of all the languages in the world today, English deserves to be regarded as a world language. It is world's most widely spoken language. It is the common means of communication between people of different nations. It is the language required by the world for greater understanding.

The paper attempts to study the different ways of teaching second language.
Language is the 'species-specific' and 'species-uniform' possession of man. It is God's special gift to mankind. Without language, human civilization as we now know it would have remained impossibility. Besides, being a means of communication and a storehouse of knowledge, it is an instrument of thinking as well as source of delight. According to an ancient linguist of India, Patanjali, “Language is that human expression which is uttered out by speech organs.” Language is defined as 'system of conventional, spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate.'

Most educators and trainers are not taught how to teach. Rather, they often find themselves teaching by accident. Typically, a person with a skill that is in demand, such as a particular programming language, will be asked to teach it. People assume that if the person is good in this programming language, he will be good at teaching it. But knowing the subject matter is very different than knowing how to teach it.

Language learning should be natural rather than structured. The learner should acquire the language in its natural form and in natural way for better learning. More or less what happens in our schools is that there is no atmosphere for English. Secondly, such is the case at home also. What the student lacks is the exposure of the language English both at home and school. Rutherford (1987) writes:

There is at least one characteristic that is common to every successful language-learning experience we have ever know, and that is that the learner is exposed one way or another to an adequate amount of the data of the language to be learned.

The reference to 'adequate data' suggests that a single textbook presented over a year is inadequate. The emphasis should shift from mastery learning of this limited input to regular exposure to a variety of meaningful language inputs.

The teaching profession is filled with countless opportunities to enrich the academic lives of students. The two vital factors in a second language learning situation are the students and the teacher. The language teacher must be educated, at least, to the levels of his peers. He must have the general preparation of a teacher. He must know the target language well enough to be imitated by his students. The teachers' language is the principal model for the students. We must have the competent teachers of English. A teacher who himself has difficulty in speaking the language he teaches, is not going to succeed in giving his pupils a command of spoken language.

Every English teacher in India knows that one of the problems he has to contend within the classroom arises from the pressure of the mother tongue on his students of particular language group learning. English as a second language influences their performances in English in such a way that almost all of them make the same mistakes in pronunciation, spellings, grammar and vocabulary. The inference of the students' mother tongue accounts for a number of errors and difficulties that occur at the time of learning and afterwards in the use of the language. In spite of English being so popular and common in usage, it continues to be the Achilles' heel for millions of our students in schools and colleges across the country.

Linguistics and language teaching are two different activities. There is, however, much in linguistics that can be of use in language teaching. Language teaching is a pragmatic business and no teacher should rely solely on linguistics or phonetics. There is a relation between linguistics and language teaching; this cannot be ignored. Wilkins points out, “the real contribution of linguistics is to increase one's understanding of the nature of language.” Anybody who has studied linguistics is sensitized to language and thereby to the complexity of language learning. The value of linguistics is that by increasing the
awareness of language, it makes the user more competent and, therefore, a better language teacher.

Knowledge of grammar is also important to a second language learner than to a native speaker. This is because in the process of acquiring the language the native speaker has intuitively internalized the grammar of the language, whereas the second language learner has to make a conscious effort to master those aspects of the language which account for grammatical accuracy. Grammar is essential to second language learning. The grammar is the means through which linguistics' creativity is ultimately achieved and inadequate knowledge of grammar would lead to serious limitations on the creativity for communication.

A good teacher should, therefore, be selective in his approach. He should select what is best suited for his purpose in the class room. He need not have a whole hearted commitment to traditional grammar nor should he reject out the insights of modern linguistics. He should have his own approach based on a synthesis of the insight he has acquired from his study of the different approaches. One of the fundamental principles of all effective teaching is that a teacher should plan and prepare his lesson beforehand. No teaching should be casual and careless. A casual approach on the part of the teacher results in sheer waste of time and does not make any contribution to the learning process. The teacher should not face his students without adequate planning and preparation.

Communication in English language is more likely to be more difficult to engage in under condition of stress, discomfort, fatigue, emotional distress or hostility than in a calm and positively toned situation. So it is necessary to create a comfortable and harmonious atmosphere where students are not afraid to speak and enjoy communicating with others in second language. If the atmosphere in the group or in the class is hostile and the student concerned is afraid of being ridiculed or mocked, inhibition will occur. A relaxed and friendly atmosphere is the first essential requirement. It is of great help for the students to pass on their own ideas naturally if the teacher could be friendlier, encouraging a relaxed attitude and creating a non threatening environment.

Students' talk time is very crucial for the students to master the target language and use it in their daily life. Students should be allowed to talk more and more in English. If teacher's talk dominates the class, students will consequently have little time to discuss and even some students do not get the chance to speak in the class. Students should have enough time for discussion if the aim of the task is to be attained. Teachers should plan carefully to decrease teacher talk time in a time limited classroom and turn to student centred approach.

In a student centred classroom, teacher should attach more importance to the quality of their talking since their talk time is decreased. If we want students to show real interest and enthusiasm in participation, we have to attract students with the power of knowledge, to excite students with rich content and to conquer students with the power of wisdom. Teachers need to convey a sense of self confidence in using the language. Teachers should avoid using the mother tongue of the learners and encourage students to speak up, allow them to make mistakes and corrections can be done later on. For example, if a student says “I doesn't know,” he can say a little later “I don't know” and use a variety of sentences. The English teacher must give more training to students on speaking by playing audio tapes, video tapes, films, software packages in the English language laboratory. All the students should be advised to give presentations. The teacher must be proactive, cheerful, friendly, cordial and competent in his communication and interpersonal relationships.
'Working in groups' is the another way a teacher can direct to his students. Collaborating allows students to talk with each other and listen to all points of view in the discussion. It helps students think in a less personally biased way. In group work, individual efforts are pooled and discussed to arrive at the best interpretation of the text. Students participate actively because it is less threatening than participating in front of the whole class. Moreover, working in groups makes it possible for students to help one another and in successful groups, the interaction achieves far more than individuals can work on their own. Helping one another is not only emotionally satisfying; it creates the right conditions for learning. Working together can be very motivating and a slight sense of competition between groups does no harm. It is important to have a classroom climate that encourages students to speak what they really think. Teachers must help them to see questions not as attempts to expose their ignorance but as aids to successful exploration of the particular topic.

A different kind of group work is the discussion. After some preparation and with clearly defined roles as well as interesting topics, discussions may well take up most of the lesson, with the teacher only giving short feedback at the end or even in the following lesson. Discussions can take a variety of forms. Collaborating is great in that it allows to actively participate in the learning process. Group projects and discussions are a great way to welcome this type of learning.

Another way of learning second language is by role play and other techniques of drama. The main interest of these techniques lies in the global use of language in life like situations. These techniques approximate real life language use to a remarkable degree. The use of language in a dramatic situation is likely to include the full complexity of language use: emotional overtones, posture, gesture and appropriate actions. So, the more closely the student can identify with the role or task the more it provides a natural language experience and the better understanding of the language can be achieved by him.

Moving beyond pen and paper and using a variety of representing strategies provide students opportunities to express themselves and demonstrate their understanding in alternate ways. We can involve students in dramatic exploration in a variety of ways, including choral reading, reader's theatre, dance, drama or shared reading.

Teachers must issue, on and off, relevant materials from books and newspapers for the use of every student. Each day a set of ten words, a quotation can be written on the blackboard so that the students can learn more words and their usage every day.

Learning by teaching is a widespread method in Germany, developed by Jean-Pol Martin. The students take the teacher's role and teach their peers. This method is very effective when done correctly. By participating in such type of practice students are able to build their self confidence, self efficacy and strengthen their speaking and communication skills. Students will not only learn their given topics, but they will gain experience that could be valuable for life.

The availability of the right type of teaching materials and audio-visual aids can make the teaching of English in India quite effective. Audio-visual aids are an integral part of the learning situation and are as important as the blackboard and chalk. Visual-aids help the students see and comprehend what they are taught, whereas audio aids help them learn from what they hear. Audio-visual aids combine in themselves the technology of teaching through hearing and seeing. It is an established fact that audio visual materials are a great help in stimulating and facilitating the learning of an English language. Audio video materials have positive contributions to language learning as long as they are used at the right time, in the right...
place. In language learning and teaching process, learner use his eyes as well as his ears; but his eyes are basic in learning. It contributes to the understanding of another culture by providing vicarious contact with speakers of the language, through both audio and visual means.

In modern era, the use of video in English classes has grown exponentially as a result of the increasing emphasis on communicative techniques. Being a rich and valuable resource, video is equally liked by both students and teachers. Students like it because video presentations are interesting, challenging and stimulating to watch. Video shows them how people behave in the culture whose language they are learning by bringing into the classroom a wide range of communicative situations. Video makes meaning clearer by illustrating relationships in a way that is not possible with words, which proves a well known saying that a picture is worth thousand words. Two minutes of video can provide an hour of classroom work.

Visual materials economize time and effort and create an impact on the mind of students. Different types of teaching aids can be used by teacher in the classroom like flash cards, scrap book, realia, OHP transparencies, charts, puzzles etc. However, teaching aids ought to be used judiciously. They are designed to supplement teaching in the classroom. They cannot replace good teaching methods. Proper planning is necessary for selection and presentation of the teaching aids. If the presentation fails, everything fails.

21st century is dominated by technology. The teachers will need technologies relevant to the teaching learning situation. The teacher plays an important role in using the different audio-visual aids for language teaching. They have the prime responsibility for creating a successful language learning environment. The teacher should learn the power of audio-video media, electronic media, internet etc. Audio-video should never be considered as a medium which overshadows the teacher, but it is a useful aid for them. It cannot replace the teacher because it can only teach things which are recorded on, and this makes language learning interesting. It is clear that teacher is the only person who enables the learners to comprehend what they watch and hear by using some of the communicative techniques. The teacher can be a controller, an assessor, an organiser, a prompter and a participant as well.

Students respond to different information differently. Thus, it is often to our advantage as teachers use many different formats and modes to teach the subject matter of a lesson. This is why teachers normally use some combination of lecture, text and hands-on laboratory for conveying information. With the advent of the Internet and the multiple formats that can be communicated over the World Wide Web, we now have several new and exciting ways to present information. The Web allows the incorporation of animation, moving pictures, and sound into lessons, which extends our abilities to present materials that encourage student interaction with the subject matter. Pictures and animations help bring to life scientific principles, and multimedia allows students to take a more active role in learning: they can watch experiments in action, see microorganisms up close, and use a mouse or keyboard to navigate images, simulations and interactive material. One of the advantages of using multimedia is to convey information quickly and effectively to all students and keep them interested in learning.

Multimedia combines five basic types of media into the learning environment: text, video, sound, graphics and animation, thus providing a powerful tool for education. Sitting within the four walls of the classroom the teacher can take students out of the classroom to learn things in a better way with the help of multimedia. Multimedia creates curiosity among the learners. Over the past few years, together with magnificent technological advances, computer network technology is now exerting its influence on
various aspects of life including government, business, economics and undoubtedly, education as well. Under such a circumstance, there has been a significant increase of interest in using computer and its applications not only in IT classrooms but also in the field of language teaching and learning. The role of computer in language instruction has become an important issue involving language teachers all over the world.

In terms of advantages, first of all, computer network technology tools such as internet, e-mail, chat rooms and the World Wide Web can be used to provide students with a strong motivation for learning the language. Encouraging the students to use internet in their learning is a motivational push to students who are bored with the traditional classroom teaching methods in which they have information spoon-fed to them. Technology offers new ways of communication such as chat lines where people from all over the world can communicate in the virtual world. E-mail and internet chat rooms are interactive and allow students to communicate quickly and easily with their classmates, their teachers and even with native speakers of the target language through collaborative projects. Besides, with an abundance of interactive activities on internet and the World Wide Web, our students can play games and learn the language at the same time.

Similarly, blogging offers new ways of expressing ideas. Blogs offer a collective way of learning where all the students share their different ways of learning. This aspect enhances their overall ability of learning. Blog can be an effective tool for the development of communication skills among the students. Learners can either express ideas on blogs of their own or express views on those of others. They can participate in the discussions that are collectively maintained by the people in blogs. Here they can go beyond the restrictions imposed by the textbooks and teachers. There is a simultaneous development of both the ability to communicate effectively through virtual means of communication and the learning of English language.

However, the role of a teacher as a facilitator is indispensable. He has to monitor and supervise the blogs in such a way that they function in the right spirit. One can give some project-based or task-based work that can encourage students to use blog as a communication tool. Such activities on the blog will help them learn the different tactics of writing.

Here an instructor can form few groups in the class and give them tasks in which they have to create posts on various blogs or discuss within the group or outside the group. Such activities can activate a kind of insatiable interest in learning communication skills. It also provides a new exposure of English language to the students where they can communicate using English language. Moreover, it affirms a sense of individuality among the students as through blogging they can become more opinionated, which could result into self confidence.

Blogs provide learner with news or comments, extra reading practice, homework, summary of a lecture, study tips etc. They are very useful as they provide real world tool to practice written English.

Mobile phones are also useful for learning English language. One 'thought for the day' group is made where students have to share good thoughts through sms with the help of www.way2sms.com. The students should not forward the typical 'forwarded' messages only. They have to find them out from the books in their syllabus, if possible. One can send hundred messages to any mobile number in India for free of cost every day.
One more nice activity is there that I have recently come across. There is one website named www.englishmandir.com. This site provides five new English words daily with their meanings through sms. Students must be encouraged to get them registered with this site.

English teachers play a pivotal role by encouraging the students to communicate in English and by responding to the reactions of the students in a proactive way. They must use simple words and examples. They should allow the students to get on the stage and introduce themselves. A teacher must bring diversity in teaching in the classroom. He must carry out different ways of teaching like questioning, explaining, demonstrating in the class. The uses of storytelling and examples have become standard practice in the realm of teaching.

The most important cause for acquiring a second language lies in the attitude of students. A lot of them study English not as a skill but as a subject. Most of the students take English forgranted. Students need to spend more time in developing LSRW skills and English can be learnt even outside the classroom context. English can be learnt by watching English films, listening to English news and reading English newspapers. It is exposure, more and more of exposure, which alone will make our students speak and write better.

The whole teaching of the English language can be put into action even with reading skill. It introduces the learners to the utterance of words, voice culture i.e. articulation, accent, correct spelling and above all it makes them learn the reading habits. Online reading advertisements, brochures, journals, job requirements etc. enriches reading ability as well as provides information. Reading e-mails, newsletters and reports makes a student more comprehensive in English language. To develop the reading skill, student can be given a role play of a newsreader. It should be recorded and later on it should be shown to the class and judged by the teacher as well as the students that what mistakes were made by the particular student while reading the news. Another most interesting task is to read e-books and one can hone the reading skills. Online reading is becoming more and more popular as people tend to read material from web sources. It provides multiple sources with unlimited access.

Thus language learning is a continuous process and encouragement will make students successful. We have to develop an interest, a sort of love for language and an inclination for learning language. Once such an atmosphere is created, learning English can really be a pleasure for everyone in the classroom.

References


