

STRATEGIES FOR MASTERING EFFICACIOUS SPOKEN ENGLISH:**Dr. Anooja John,**

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ABSTRACT:

All appropriate language learning strategies are oriented towards the broad goal of Communicative Competence. Development of communicative competence requires realistic interaction among learners using meaningful and contextualised language. Formal instruction or classroom based teaching is only the desirable, but not always the essential condition. The learners will learn a language whether or not it is taught in a formal classroom setting if they have exposure and opportunities to use the target language. In fact, the essential conditions for any language learning experience are the exposure and the use of it. A serious introspection is needed with regard to the blind adoption of teaching/learning methods in the field of English language in India. The standard of English among Under-Graduates and Post-Graduates has, undoubtedly, deteriorated drastically. This has happened mainly because of two reasons. The teachers are constantly worried about two things – completing the syllabus and providing short-cut to pass the examination through that magic word ‘cramming’. A positive step in improving the situation is the recognition of the need to improve the English language abilities of the students by promoting the creative process - a process of creative construction and communication.

Keywords: Contextualised language, Communicative competence, Acquisition

Students, who have received several years of formal English teaching, frequently remain deficient in their ability to actually use the language, and to understand its use, in normal communication whether in the spoken or the written mode. The problem has come into prominence in educational opportunity, large numbers of students are entering universities and technical institutions to take up subjects which can only be satisfactorily studied if they are able to read text books in English efficiently. Efficient reading involves understating how language operates in communication and it is precisely this understanding which students appear not to acquire during their years of learning English in the secondary schools. The teaching of English in schools is in a chaotic state today. The crisis in the teaching of English has, in fact, developed into a crisis in higher education itself; for English is the medium of instruction and examination in most of the universities. With the great expansion in education, it has become extremely difficult to find trained and qualified teachers for English. In spite of the advances as well as the energy, time and money spent on the teaching of English as a second language, one finds little satisfaction among both teachers and students with the levels of proficiency acquired in the language. The

present programmes seem to operate in a vicious circle of selecting teaching materials and then assessing the proficiency of students on the basis only of that material. These programmes whether conducted through reading – based programmes or through an oral – aural system, regard the classroom as the only place of language learning. The English language, especially in India, is taught as an ‘exercise’ or as a preparation for eventual utilization goals, with no plans for immediate reinforcement outside the classroom. This makes the learner’s tasks and motivation extremely strenuous and intense. The foundational years for the teaching of English in schools are in the hands of teachers who neither know enough English nor are familiar with the latest and far – reaching developments in the pedagogy of English. In most schools, pupils are taught English for about six periods a week for six years. But it has been estimated that they hardly know 1500 words by the time they join a university. This means that they have hardly been able to learn English words at the rate of one word per period.

The All India seminar on the “Teaching of English in Secondary Schools” held at Nagpur in December 1957, was the first move, on an all India basis to revamp the teaching of English in secondary schools. An important point that the Seminar Report makes is worth remembering here. Only teachers “trained in scientific methods of teaching English should be enlisted for teaching pupils from the earliest stage ... the teacher can apply his own knowledge of the science of speech sounds to give accurate and thorough instruction in pronunciation” (qtd in Bhushan 118). This is all the more necessary since discarding the old translation and grammar method, present syllabus is based on the assumption that “language is primarily a spoken thing” and that the approach to a “foreign language should, in the first instance, be through its spoken form.” The Nagpur Seminar Report concedes that “formal grammar by the inductive method may be taught in the last three years in order to crystallize the pupil’s knowledge of the grammar of his mother tongue” (qtd in Bhushan 119).

Until recently, the role of language teacher was quite well defined and clear. The teacher used to decide for the learners what, why, how, where and when they should learn. The relationship between the teacher and learner was a traditional one. The teacher was considered to be ‘the one who knows’, in contrast to the learner who ‘doesn’t know’ or ‘doesn’t know yet’. In certain ways the approach to teaching and teacher preparation in the past was largely ‘deterministic’. The curriculum was handed down from the above by a cadre of experts who framed the courses and designed the textbooks. There was the common belief that an appropriate packaging of the subject matter in terms of vocabulary, structure, functions, etc., was the key to achieving optimal results. It was also believed that learners learn what teachers teach, and teaching if done according to the ‘rules’ would cause learning to occur. Consequently, in teacher preparation courses, teachers were trained how to operate within an explicitly laid down set of principles and follow the

procedures specified in a 'method'.

However, the developments that have taken place in ELT theory and practice, particularly the research on second language acquisition-learning processes and the growth and development of communicative language teaching approaches, have led to a re-consideration and re-assessment which as pointed out earlier, were perceived in highly prescriptive and restrictive terms. From a focus on form, lexis and structure there has been a shift to a focus in "language as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relation and for the performance of social transaction between individuals" (Richard and Rodgers 56). There has been a radical departure from the notion of language learning as a phenomenon attributable to habit formation and conditioning to a view of learning as an active process assisted by interaction that is 'natural' and 'meaningful'. Learners are now recognized to be the prime movers in their own learning process and the focus has shifted to the individuality of learners, their particular learning styles and strategies. A glance at recent professional literature on language teaching, reveals so frequent a use of words or phrases such as 'learner-centered', 'learning-centered', 'individualized/personalized learning', 'learner training' that it seems as if the language teacher is somehow 'out of focus'. However it would be inaccurate to conclude from this that language teaching and language teacher are no longer viewed as essential components of the process of language learning. The teacher is still considered an irreplaceable element in language instruction and the centrality of the teacher's role in the learning process though questioned, remains unchallenged. The changes that have taken place in the perception of the teacher's role should have implications for the teacher preparation programmes that are conducted.

The teacher must do his best to provide circumstances that will arouse in his students a genuine interest in learning. Circumstances here relate to two things, namely, (a) an English-speaking environment in which students can hear and practise freely, and (b) a pleasant atmosphere which makes students more willing to learn on their own volition. A circumstance that can be made use of is the readings in a text book, an interesting story in which the student can understand words and phrases more thoroughly and penetratingly than in an isolated sentence. Learning a word from a word-list is not so useful as learning it in a sentence and the most efficient way to learn a word is in the complete context of a smoothly written story. It is a pity that the prevalent way of teaching English has, for a long time, been to use as teaching material a book full of isolated sentences, to call such a book a grammar and to assume that this 'grammar' is a cure-all for whatever is lacking in the student's knowledge of English. It should be noted that the purpose of teaching English is to pave the way for the students to understand what they are taught: after they gain such understanding they should further their study in other ways. The teaching of grammar should initially be confined to language structures only, the building of vocabulary should be left to extensive reading, for, if the two are confused together, the students are likely to be bewildered and make

mistakes due to their lack of knowledge of the language in its totality.

The emphasis of teaching has also shifted away from the ‘correct’ way of selecting, sequencing, grading and presenting the language as content and away from prescribed teaching methods and techniques towards providing activities and processes which lead to natural communicative interaction in the classroom. The teacher is no longer seen as a person who possesses and transmits language as content but as a person who assists the learner in developing an innate capacity to communicate in another language. “The teacher is now seen as a facilitator, an advisor and a counsellor who is more concerned with providing an environment that will make available for learner appropriate opportunities for language learning” (Edelhoff 128). In fact the multifaceted nature of the language teaching methodology which is currently being advocated requires the teacher to play a far more complex and wide range of roles than was needed in the past. To use Peter Strevens’ (95) metaphor, the teacher is required to operate like a ‘chameleon’ who in order to survive in the classroom must continually observe the surroundings and activities forming part of the approach to language teaching that is being currently advocated - the communicative approach. “The communicativeness of a lesson depends not merely on the materials being used, but also very much on the teachers’ use of these materials in the classroom, the sensitivity with which he directs student activities” (Andrews 129). For, however rigorous the advance planning about what is to take place in the classroom, in the final analysis it is the teacher who must directly shape what happens in the classroom. Designers of syllabus and materials do decide on the shape of the teaching – learning activities but then the effectiveness of any method in a particular situation is a function of the actual performance of the individual teacher.

A resourceful teacher should tap the dynamism of the textbook instead of becoming a slave to and fully depending on it. The textbook is only a starting point in a functional class; it functions as the graphic presentation of the broad outline of work the teacher is expected to do in class. The successful manner in which the textbook is exploited depends fully on the resources of the teacher: (1) The teacher will draw plenty of material from the unit for listening–speaking work and ground every unit properly in its aural–oral basis (2) Since *training* in speech is the chief aim in this context, a teacher uses functional approach to language teaching (3) Any functional approach places emphasis on the communication skill of speaking, with a result that the teacher has to draw material from outside the textbook. The textbook, therefore, can only be the starting point and the broad outline in which the teacher finds his own material to provide the children with ample learning experience in speech. The language of the textbook is seldom fit for the purposes of teaching the speech-skills in the classroom. The teacher draws situations from the various ranges and circles of the pupils’ experience which enables him to pick up those aspects of the L2 which are most useful, proximate, concrete, particular,

capable of provoking interest, and catering to the creative requirements of the pupil.

In order to improve students' hearing and speaking abilities as well as to improve their interest in learning, the teacher should avail himself of every chance to speak in English instead of the native tongue. The teacher's use of English in classroom is sure to require special care and skills. The speed with which he speaks should be suited to the student's proficiency in English, so that they can easily understand him and enjoy his teaching. Also, the vocabulary he uses should be chosen carefully with the intent that most of the students can understand, or at least catch the main idea of what the teacher says. To use this method, the teacher himself has to have rather good proficiency in oral English, or else carefully prepare himself for situations that may occur, in order to avoid appearing awkward in front of his students.

The 'models' of language learning / teaching processes which are now being proposed call for tremendous changes in attitudes both towards what is to be taught and how is to be taught. The research that has been carried out to investigate the process of second language development, as well as its product, in communicative interaction, points to the need for new classroom strategies and suggests that classroom procedures should be oriented towards natural language use and away from the conscious and analytic study of forms and structures. This, in turn, obviously requires a new definition of the role of the teacher, who must be concerned with creating an environment which provides appropriate and 'comprehensible input' – an environment in which the learner can engage in 'real' communicative interaction. The teacher is also required to provide positive effective feedback to the learners and to avoid being threatening and alienating. Only then, proper language development via strategies which the learner finds most beneficial can take place. A resourceful teacher can, thus, facilitate 'Second Language Acquisition' fruitfully through the adoption of the following procedures:

1. Create exposure to language so that learners have more opportunities for communication.
2. Create an informal atmosphere as against the formality of an L2 classroom.
3. Encourage learners to focus on the meaning or message, not on form.
4. Adopt a tolerant attitude to errors; if the teacher strongly feels some correction is needed, do it incidentally.
5. Provide an atmosphere where learners are free from tension.
6. Respect the learner's freedom to be silent until he is ready to communicate.
7. Build up pressure for genuine real – life communication

Learning to speak a language is decidedly more complex than learning to listen or understand. Speaking is a productive skill that requires the learner

to retrieve almost instantaneously the precise sounds, grammatical forms, word order arrangements and content vocabulary that will express what he wants to say in an unanticipated situation. The complexity of the speaking skill lies in the fact that it involves thinking of what is to be spoken while speaking what has been thought. This skill requires a great deal of practice, for it includes (a) pronunciation, and (b) expression. In the former the entire phonetic system comes into play, and the grammatical, lexical and semantic systems are simultaneously used in the latter.

It is often said that there is no such thing as language teaching: 'language cannot be taught; it must be learned'. Even if that is true there are still certain things that the teacher can do to help the students learn English. Many theorists believe that the more nearly the teacher can make the conditions of the classroom approach those of the home, the more likely the pupils are to acquire a correct knowledge of a foreign language in a comparatively short time. But the fact is that a classroom, with one teacher and 40 or more pupils studying together a few hours a week, the latter and probably the teacher too, already actively thinking in a language they know, can never reproduce the atmosphere of a home where one or two children in contact with several 'teachers' and with minds not yet filled with any modes of expression, are learning a language. What concerns the teacher in a school is that he cannot reproduce more than a fraction of the conditions under which a child learns its own language or bi – lingual child learns two.

If the thousands of students who come to the High School every year, only a few can speak or understand simple colloquial English and although most of them can translate literary English into their own language, very few can translate from the vernacular into English with any skills. If, after learning English for four or five years, a student of average intelligence cannot understand a few words spoken to him by an Englishman, and cannot express his ideas in English, it cannot be denied that there must be something wrong in the teaching of the language. More and more educational authorities everywhere are emphasizing the need for teachers who are thoroughly trained in their subject and for the teaching of English as a living speech and not as a dead language. In other words, if the thousands of secondary school teachers were really proficient in the English language and if they know how to teach it, there would soon be a remarkable rise in the standard of English in schools.

There can be no doubt that primary school children can and do learn English with remarkable ease, enthusiasm and naturalness. If only the early learning of English is designed and functions as part of a process, which continues unbroken in secondary schooling, the standards of spoken and written English will be impressive. One great advantage of an early start to learning English is that the young learner is put into the position of thinking in English from the very start far more readily than the older beginners. The foreign language grows with him as an active part of his thinking and talking.

English language has certain unique qualities unlike the Indian languages, it has no one to one correspondence between the symbol and the sound. It is quite different in structure, sounds, vocabulary and the mode of conveying message. If one wants to be an effective communicator, he has to master English to a reasonable degree of proficiency like mastery over sounds, grammar and the extra linguistic features. Therefore, listening to good spoken English is the starting point and this familiarizes him with the acceptable form of the code. When one listens to someone speaking, he listens to sounds and words and distinguish between different combinations of sounds in forming words, link them to meaning by association and understand what is heard. Then begins the process of production in the form of speech which involves expression of ideas, emotions, intentions and reacting to persons and situations. While doing so, fluency and catching the style of speech – whether it is intimate, caused, consultative, and formal – and responding accordingly, is important. Many students are frightened of English. It is just a matter of attitude. It is observed in the classroom that whenever a group work is organized, the extroverts try to steal the show and introverts are mostly passive. It is true that some learners are temperamentally incapable of interacting, they are shy to speak, they are afraid of being made fun of, are nervous and diffident and have ‘inferiority complex’. A genuinely motivated teacher can work wonders in such situations by motivating the ‘extroverts’, as well as the ‘introverts’ in the right measure.

The ‘oral approach’ on language teaching is based on the principle that the spoken language is the basis of writing and not the other way around. The approach implies, ‘hearing before speaking, speaking before reading, reading before writing’. Teachers who follow the oral approach say that language learning should consist, especially in the first stage, of oral practice. A method of instruction in which the oral teaching is always a step or two ahead of the written work seems to produce satisfactory results in the classroom. The pupils should be given the maximum of speaking time. Just as a child will write exactly as he speaks in his native tongue, so a pupil learning English should be able to write correctly what he has learnt by ear. Language learning is, in fact, a matter of copying. As the learner advances he becomes able to form new expressions that are acceptable to the other speakers of the language. But it is quite a problem to know how to help the student to move from straight copying to speaking freely. Undoubtedly, the best results are obtained where sounds are learnt before literary symbols. Learning to speak from what one reads is an unnatural process and should be avoided.

The Indian learners of English up to the age of twelve years should be imparted the training of speaking prior to that of reading. There is no real need at this stage to do very much for reading. It would be better to establish firm habits of correct speech than to try to teach an extensive vocabulary or to develop fluent reading – valuable as that is. In the lowest secondary school classes too, the teaching of spoken skill should be given the first priority.

Whatever the age of the learner and the method used by the teacher, the aim at the initial stage of teaching should be the production of sounds of the target language. The transition from listening stage to speaking stage would be very simple if opportunities for production are made available gradually within the normal comprehension activities.

But this is an incontrovertible fact that in the classroom a child often has a book thrust into his hand on the first day of a language course and is taught to read written symbols of sounds he has never heard or is then hearing for the first time from a teacher. The majority of people learning foreign languages, not children only, get half of their knowledge from the written, not the spoken word. A small child, although he can talk and understand his own language, will soon begin to read and write it, and acquires additional knowledge of it through reading. The important point is that he *first* learns to hear and speak the essential foundations of the mother tongue. It is also true that the child's power to understanding what he hears is far in advance of his power to express his thoughts; a school course does not allow time for this gap to appear. In school, where instruction in concentrated, learning to speak and write and to recognize the meaning of sounds and written words, is a combined process. It would be ideal, and quicker in the long run, if the teachers would confine themselves to strictly oral methods until children could speak English as well as they spoke their own language at the age of six. Such concentration on spoken English pays dividends in fluency, pronunciation and the natural use of English. But this would require a large number of teachers with a thorough command of the language. At the same time, cutting out reading and writing altogether has obvious disadvantages, one being that the desire to *read* a foreign language is usually stronger than a desire to *speak* it in a country where it is not regularly spoken. Another disadvantage of leaving reading and writing to a late stage is that the systems of education, artificial as they often are, demand a literal knowledge of language, so that a learner has no chance in a public examination if he cannot read, and perhaps translate much more difficult English than he can speak. In any case, reading, and later writing, are best woven gradually into the fabric of an oral / activity methodology.

The most significant trend currently in methods of teaching English as a second language is the attempt to assign to communication its proper role in the classroom. This trend has given rise in the last year or two to the production of effective textbooks for use at various levels of instruction. The methodological novelty of these texts involves 'manipulation' and 'communication'. Manipulative language activities are those in which the sounds, words and structures to be used are supplied to the student by the teacher or textbook. Communicative activities are those in which the student himself supplies the sounds, words and structures needed to express his thought. The emphasis is on putting thoughts into words rather than decoding the thought from the words. Most teaching techniques used in the language class are mixed and involve both manipulation and communication. Indeed, manipulation and

communication can be regarded as two extremes, and classroom activities can be arranged on a scale stretching between the two extremes. Activities involving strict control of what the student is allowed to say or write are at the manipulative end of the scale. Gradually, there is a move from manipulation toward communication by relaxing the control. Thus, the teacher can plan classes in which new material is first presented through the manipulative exercises, which seem most effective in forming habits. The teacher then moves on, through activities in which the proportion of communication increases, until the language is used for the purpose for which it is intended - communication.

But many a student trained in the manipulation of structure of the language find themselves short of conversational ability, for what they have learnt are archaic and pedantic words, not every day English; and the style is the literary style, which sounds very formal and artificial. It is not enough that the child is given some knowledge in the use of structures and words in the act of communication. He needs guided practice to develop facility and fluency of speech. Conversational speech is characterized by well known expressions, tags, expletive exclamations and hackneyed phrases. Therefore, dialogue learning in the early stages is advised to teach this informal style of speech. But in over learning these, there is a danger of drilling becoming mechanical. Over learning without conscious awareness of what is repeated, leads to fixation of responses but without the quality of transference of knowledge to other situations. The teacher is also warned against allowing the learner the process of translating words and phrases or first think in the mother tongue and then frame and speak sentences in English.

The importance attached to the listening – speaking skills is not a mere linguistic jargon, but a fundamental principle in any L2 teaching programme. The communication skill of speaking requires great dynamism on the part of the learner as well as on the part of the teacher in his functional approaches in class. It calls for the creative imagination of the learner and the teacher. Since it involves creative production of the language, the learner is expected to tap his creative resources fully. A half-hearted participation in a language learning activity does not prove effective. Learning the language is a continuous endeavour even in the classroom. Among the busy schedule of the school, the time allotted to language teaching is least and under this circumstance if the attention paid to the practice in the communication skills is not intense, not much can be expected.

Conclusion:

In order to speak or write a foreign language fluently one should possess certain armours and cast away the husks. The armours are confidence and courage to speak without any hesitation. The qualities that the learner to cast away are shyness, fear and feeling of inferiority. Teachers should help the learners in making them better communicators by giving various exercises. The essence of

English language teaching is in reinforcing the four skills and providing enough opportunity to employ them. English has now become a tool to scale great heights in the job market. Possessing good Spoken English is the need of the hour. The sublimation of the job of an English teacher is when the students overcome their difficulties in communication and attain a reasonably good communicative competency in English.

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