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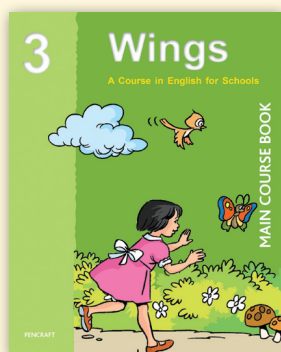
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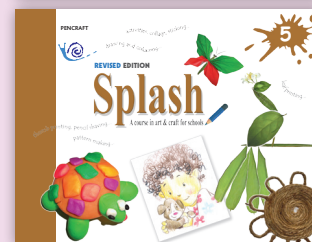
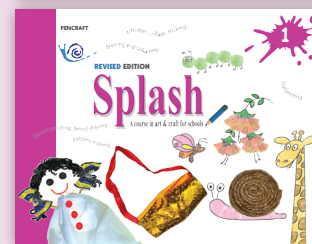
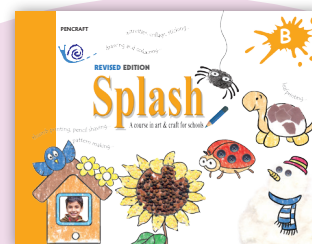
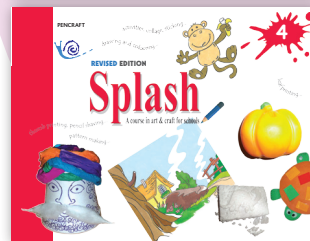
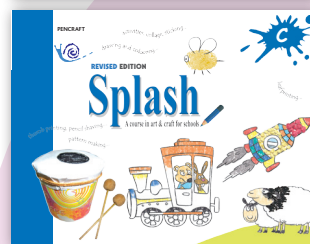
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FORTELL offers a platform for the expression of the lived classroom experience of teachers of English language and literature, which is reflected in the current issue (32nd in the series) as well. However, the greater significance of English language and literature lies beyond the classroom in its utility as a tool of communication and exchange of ideas in the outside world. In a fast changing Indian and global scenario, the questions of *how* to teach, *what* to teach and *why* to teach have acquired relevance as never before. In his interview with the editors of this issue, Professor Harish Trivedi points out the “cultural paradox” in the Indian situation, that students who need to be taught language are taught high canonical English literature in the classroom! While literature is the highest form of expression in any language, the need of the hour is “scientific language teaching”, in his words.

Professor Rama Matthew in her article on the English Language Proficiency Course (ELPC) experiment at the Institute of Life Long Learning (ILL), University of Delhi, leads the way, highlighting the need and the pedagogy for a proficiency course in English language, even at a premier centre of learning such as the University of Delhi. Professor Geetha Durairajan extends the discussion further by analyzing the use of L1 or the first language as an enabling tool in the English language and literature classroom. This pedagogy will not only help to improve all the four skills of reading, writing listening and speaking but also enhance an understanding of literary genres.

Nivedita Bedadur's essay offers the view that reading and writing should not be viewed in isolation but as activities that together promote critical thinking in the learner. Only when reading is followed by writing, independent critical thinking is generated and ideas are formulated. Ruchi Kaushik's paper focuses on a needs-based analysis for materials development for the advance level students in the college classroom. Gibreel Alaghbari formulates the criteria to select English poetry suitable for use in the EFL classroom and even suggests a number of such poems. Partha Sarthy Misra examines the theoretical considerations

behind designing a language textbook and also highlights the pedagogical principles that inform the choice of the materials. Living in an age governed by digital technology, Om Prakash attempts to explore the different ways in which new media tools can offer real life contexts to ESL learners, which, in turn, will enable them to negotiate meaning and communicate effectively.

If language is the foundation, literature is its edifice. Anindita Dutta and Monica Khanna offer approaches for the teaching of literature. Dutta's article on the contemporariness of Shakespeare once again reiterates the timelessness of his plays and their thematic and geographic adaptability in the modern world, while Khanna in her paper examines aspects of Hindu mythology to analyze the role it plays in sustaining patriarchy.

Along with these stimulating articles, we have our usual fare of book reviews, report and language games for different levels of learners. Happy reading and a wonderful new year to all our readers. We would appreciate your feedback by email at: fortell.journal@gmail.com

Tasneem and Mona



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Deconstructing the Politics of Access: The Case of the University Student*



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Introduction

As we address the issue of access to English for the large majority of young adults in the country, from the viewpoint of those who have had many years of formal instruction solely devoted to teaching English as a subject in a vernacular medium school but with not much success, there are certain aspects that seem axiomatic. Therefore, it is necessary to put them down right at the start to clarify the premise on which my paper is based.

Firstly, we must acknowledge that because of its status as an international/global language, English proficiency has become a necessity as it allows upward social mobility within the country and also opens the door to numerous opportunities all over the world. More importantly, it enables one to get access to vast amounts of work in different subject areas—both print and e-materials—crucial to higher education.

This raises the second point about equal access to English with regard to social justice. This viewpoint of the “right to English”, based on Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital” (1991) makes it imperative that we make English accessible to everyone, regardless of one’s caste, religion, socio-economic status, geographic region and so forth, thus following the principles of social justice (Rawls, 1999). The National Knowledge Commission (2006) underscores this view explicitly: “English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet, English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which makes for *highly unequal access* [emphasis added] (p. 1)”

The Context

Given this premise of unequal access to English, I would like to examine the case of adult learners at the tertiary level who are not able to use English language skills with ease or at the required level, i.e. they cannot read, write, speak or listen in “new” academic or social contexts. These students study English for nearly one thousand hours even in regional medium schools. This is a matter of grave concern since the exposure the student has to an acquisition-poor

learning environment is of a longer duration as English was introduced very early in classes from 2003, if worse in certain regions due to paucity of competent teachers or school-based constraints.

Typically, these students have had Hindi (or other regional languages) as their medium of instruction up to the school level, or have been in not-so-good private schools where, although the official language of instruction is English, for classroom purposes and day-to-day use, Hindi (or the regional language) is the lingua franca. There may be other reasons for their inability to speak English that may relate to the curriculum, textbooks, classroom pedagogy, tests/exams, teacher competence and attitude, to name a few. When such students enter a university, their poor English language proficiency, coupled with low self-esteem impedes their academic study and future life prospects in major ways. Therefore, the tough question that confronts us is, given the setback, how can we equip these young adults with the necessary (language) skills and strategies and empower them to become full-fledged participating members of the university vis-à-vis the society?

A Pedagogy of Possibility

In this section, I will discuss what might be a reconceptualization of a pedagogy that opens up possibilities for students to acquire communicative competence as well as to explore how language shapes subjectivities and is implicated in power and dominance.

Peirce (1989) argues that the teaching of English can indeed be undertaken as a pedagogy of possibility (Simon, 1987 cited in Pierce 1989)—an approach that challenges inequality in society rather than perpetuating it. This follows from the poststructuralist theory of language, where “language is not only an abstract structure, but a practice that is socially constructed, produces change, and is changed in human life” (p. 405). Peirce further examines the limitations of the theory of language first proposed by Hymes in 1979. She suggests that we need to actually go beyond these

*A version of this paper was presented at the Sixth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Kochi, India, in November 2010.

limitations by exploring a second order of questions such as the following: Why do such rules exist? Who makes them? What interests do they serve? Can these be contested? Are there other rules that can expand possibilities? If we teach students to critically examine the rules that are often constructed to support the interests of dominant groups, we will actually help them to challenge the conditions that form the basis of those rules. Moreover they will learn to examine the way they perceive themselves, their role in society and how society can be changed for the better. An uncritical integration into the society will, on the other hand, promote existing inequalities and widen the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

This kind of pedagogy, that Simon calls the pedagogy of empowerment, is not neutral but a practice of “cultural politics”, since teachers consciously or unconsciously shape students’ perceptions of themselves and the world. “To empower is to enable those who have been silenced to speak.... It is to enable those who have been marginalized economically and culturally to claim in both respects a status as full participating members of a community” (Pierce, 1989, p. 374). Peirce further argues that this will help them to be responsible for their success in life, success not only “in terms of material advancement but in terms of the learner’s greater understanding and critical appreciation of his or her own subjectivity and relationship to the wider society” (p. 409). Thus, adopting a pedagogy of possibility encourages students to explore what is desirable as opposed to limiting their growth.

This pedagogy also addresses the “access paradox” by Lodge (as cited in Joseph and Ramani, 2006) according to which, while providing access to a dominant language further entrenches its dominance and hegemony, not providing access entrenches marginalization and increases the value and status accorded to that language (see Tully, 1997 and Mathew, 1997 for a discussion of this point). A step towards making this “capital” accessible to all our learners, therefore, would be to “de-elitize” it and consciously tone down the aura that goes with it as there seems to be little concern for the devastating effect English teaching has, especially at the lower levels, on local indigenous languages, which Pennycook (1994) calls “linguistic genocide”. We will also need to encourage additive bilingualism (or additive multilingualism)—where we can learn L2 and L1 with equal competence—as the work of NMRC (National Multilingual Education Resource Consortium) demonstrates in Orissa and other states.

This line of thinking finds echoes in work done by others, most notably in the concepts of Freire’s (1970) *dialogical pedagogy* and Giroux’s (1988) *critical pedagogy*. While this pedagogy could form the basis for education at any level, I would like to argue that it is urgently needed for adult learners because of their well-developed cognitive and affective abilities and other language skills, for example, in their L1 or the regional language, which enables them to confront hidden and taken-for-granted assumptions and the nuanced nature of language.

The Case of Delhi University

In this section, I will briefly describe the effort being made to mainstream the university students who have lagged behind because of their inadequate English language skills by providing them the necessary tools to confront this impasse. A scheme, known as the “English Language Proficiency Course (ELPC)”, which is outside of the regular University academic programme has been designed for such students. This program is offered at Basic, Intermediate and Advanced levels and comprises 80 hours each. In fact, through this program, a version of the pedagogy of possibility is being tried out albeit not in all its entirety and complexity.

Student profile

The students who enrol for this programme are students of under-graduate, post-graduate or Ph.D. programmes at the University who have had at least 8-10 years of formal instruction of learning English as a subject. Their single, most important desire is to be able to speak English fluently; PG and research students also have, as one of their goals, to be able to write better, especially their assignments and dissertations. A striking feature of this large group is their high level of motivation—they are ‘willing to do anything’ to learn English.

Materials used in the course

Since the materials available in the market have been found to be unsuitable in terms of language/cognitive levels, the subject matter/content and format for this course have been specially designed for the intended learner. The use of loose-leaf, theme/task-based materials developed by teachers marks a departure from an expert-oriented model. The materials also undergo regular revisions based on the feedback received from both students and teachers, during and after the course. Thus, it is process-oriented and set within a stakeholder-approach to curriculum design and implementation. Although these are well-known notions in ELT literature, in the Indian context where a top-down syllabus and textbook approach is the norm, this is significant. More importantly they have been designed to suit the needs, aspirations, and perceived goals of young adult learners based on their feedback.

Teacher profile and classroom pedagogy

A week-long orientation to understand what teaching/learning a language (as opposed to a content-subject) involves, and to appreciate the issues faced by the disadvantaged adult learner is the first step in initiating the teacher to nuances of this complex enterprise. An ongoing dialogue/negotiation among the stakeholders is an important feature of the programme. This is achieved through emails, visits to the centre where the course is taught, and review meetings where feedback from teachers and students on different aspects of the course is examined.

Our learning so far

The actual words of students and teachers serve as evidence of the issues that are addressed in this course. Students have

invariably benefitted a good deal as is revealed through scores on end-tests that focus on all four skills of language and teacher and student feedback. As young adults, they have strong and well-formulated views on classroom methodology and teacher's attitude. They like group work, pair work, and role play activities where they can express their opinion on something, come to a consensus (or not), and are satisfied when they feel they have been heard. This feeling has been unequivocally expressed over the years by students who have consistently given feedback, "In this course we have no fear of making mistakes."

The course also revealed that the students like to engage with controversial topics such as gender, environment, generation gap, and other prevailing social issues. Sometimes, however, the teacher needs to find out what is bothering the students and inhibiting them from speaking up. For instance a student who was very shy for a long time opened up when he found that he could complain about the supercilious attitude of the girls in his class! Apart from such instances, the students find classes "democratic" where everyone gets an equal chance to participate. They find teachers 'friendly, supportive, wonderful' because she "concentrates on all students, does not demoralize the weak student". Some students may even be quite critical of the teacher: "Teacher xxx should shed her attitude, be punctual and regular."

The students are aware of the injustice meted out to them and react to it quite vehemently, since the course allows them to do so. For instance, when a task required them to complain in writing about wrongly parked cars in the parking area, their first objection was to why cars (which belonged to the rich) should be given the pride of place while bicycles and motorcycles had to make do with the remaining, cramped space. This way, inadvertently they sabotaged the task and justifiably so; the teacher allowed this, since the task involved writing a letter of complaint in a real life context.

Another challenge the programme faces is the notion of heterogeneity. Since the course makes a sincere effort to address learner needs, the task of making it relevant, meaningful and language-rich to all the students in the class is highly demanding. A diagnostic test at the beginning answers this problem to some extent, but the parameters of heterogeneity are far too many and too complex and defy simple solutions. Here, the teacher's sense of plausibility (Prabhu, 1987), of judging what works and what doesn't and acting accordingly is being experimented with.

The teachers of ELPC are mostly friendly, patient, wait for even slow learners to respond, and get them into groups and discuss things as though they are one of the learners themselves. One teacher remarked: "I immensely enjoy teaching something meaningful and useful to the students. In my routine classes the emphasis on improving the English language learning skills is missing. I realize that this is what we should have been doing as teachers of English." Similarly, students are also puzzled: "Why aren't our regular classes interesting? Why can't Sukanya Ma'am (name changed) teach like this?"

University teachers who typically do not get any formal exposure to language pedagogy, are trying to come to grips with substantive issues such as a humanistic approach to teaching, managing classroom activities, reducing teacher talk and increasing student talk, addressing heterogeneity, making sure everyone goes back satisfied, and so forth. This change seems to be significant when viewed in relation to the traditional method of teaching from a prescribed textbook with a view to completing the syllabus, regardless of how many students come to class or who comes and with what agenda.

Conclusion

The washback effect of this exercise especially for teachers seems to be positive: "we are coming together as a community, and are beginning to speak the language of pedagogy" (of possibility). Even the students might learn to break out of the "culture of silence" (Freire, 1972), to engage in a dialogue among themselves and with teachers. However, there are other questions that need to be addressed. In an effort to make the materials and the approach accessible to a larger number of students, we are trying to digitize and upload them on our web portal. Would this achieve the desired results in terms of developing in learners the ability to negotiate, critique and challenge what they are offered, to the same extent as in a face-to-face engagement? Is a consultative/collaborative mode that we are trying to explore possible?

In conclusion, I would like to propose a note of caution. In my attempt to locate Delhi University's ELPC within a critical pedagogy perspective, I hope I have not told a success story or presented a simplistic representation of the complex forces that underpin an attempt to run a seemingly simple English proficiency course for the past seven years. In my view, however, a discussion of the pedagogy of possibility does help us to reassess and reconceptualize taken-for-granted approaches to teaching and learning.

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Language Teaching in Multilingual Contexts: Using the First/More Enabled Language as a Positive Resource in the English Classroom



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Language use in India

India is a country both societally and individually multilingual at the grassroots level. Many languages are spoken in the country, but they are not all used in the same manner. Some are minority languages while others are used as mediums of instruction. English, in this context, occupies a unique space. It is not a foreign language but a second language and also the associate official language. Till two decades ago, English was regarded as a library language, but today, in the twenty-first century, it has become the language of economic and social mobility. This does not mean, however, that it will ever become the only language used in our country. Language policies of countries where individuals may be bilingual but are officially monolingual can afford to be assimilationist in nature. In countries that are multilingual at the grassroots level, however, all language functions will never be fulfilled through one language. According to Mohanty (1994), in India, bilingual persons or communities need to be accepted as those who can effectively meet the communicative demands of the self and the society in their normal functioning and in their interaction with speakers of any or all of these languages.

Languages and Relationships

Some languages in India and even in other multilingual countries are unfortunately more equal than others. For instance, Hindi, and English 'wield' more power than the other languages used in India. In terms of policy, planning,

pedagogy and practice, languages can either negate, recognize, tolerate, respect or nurture each other, or go beyond that and share mutual space (Durairajan, 2003). Currently, English classrooms in India do not even recognize languages other than English that are a part of the repertoire of students. It is assumed that English is an added-on language and that it will not affect or be influenced by the other languages. If there is any 'influence' it is perceived as an 'interference' that needs to be eradicated. However, teaching or learning an L2 is not just about teaching a student how to add a few rooms to a house by building an extension at the back; it is like the rebuilding of internal walls. It implies that in some ways the construction of the house itself will change. Trying to put languages in separate compartments in the mind is doomed to failure since the compartments are connected in many ways (Cook, 2001).

Nature of Language Proficiency in Multilingual Countries

In the late seventies and early eighties, Jim Cummins posited the idea of cognitive linguistic interdependence. Ever since then, the notions of semilingualism and separate underlying proficiency have been negated. The model of language capability within a bilingual mind is universally accepted as Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) and not as Separate Underlying Proficiency (SUP). This implies that students who know two or more languages have a common base of capability and draw from it when they use another language for communication. It also implies that if students have more capability in one language, and use that language

within or outside classroom contexts, that capability can be tapped to enable proficiency in another language. According to Cummins, CUP is like a central operating system, with capabilities such as inferring, organizing, planning being available to all languages; the surface features of the respective languages alone will be separate. This is referred to as the dual iceberg analogy (as cited in Stern, 1983).

Language proficiency was construed by Cummins (1979), as comprising two aspects—BICS and CALP (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Thirty years later, based on a whole body of research evidence, Cummins reconceptualized these two aspects as CLP and ALP (Conversational Language Proficiency and Academic Language Proficiency) (2000). Based on his original construal (BICS and CALP), he also posited the related dual continuums of texts that could be cognitively demanding or undemanding and either context embedded or context-reduced (Cummins, 1980). This massive body of research evidence, however, has not affected or influenced the language pedagogy and practice of most multilingual countries in general and plurilingual India in particular.

Language/Educational Policy and Practices in Twenty-First Century India

From the 1960s, India has had a three-language formula, but it is an accepted fact that it has not been successful. Also, it needs to be perceived more as a framework/formula that was put together to try and ensure varied language use in the country and not as a big policy document. That apart, the associate official language, English, is much more than only an associate language. At one level, English is the language of economic and social mobility. It is also the language of opportunity and access to knowledge. At another level, this “language of learning” as it is sometimes called, overshadows and takes over the spaces that other languages occupy. All of us are much more comfortable and less judgmental when we hear or use English words while speaking our own languages; conversely, we are less tolerant when we hear words and phrases from our languages used in English speech.

In the twenty-first century, the Right to Education has made education mandatory in India. Coupled with the strong reservation policy advocated by the post Mandal Commission report, the pyramid of education must and will be opened up. This implies that there will be many more students who are first generation learners and who are entering and coping with tertiary level education. English may not be their language of academics, or their language of thinking, but they need to engage with it. Indian students in India need to be proficient in English, because they need the language to empower themselves. Our government is pushing for entrepreneurship in a big way. This too cannot happen without proficiency in English. From an academic perspective, the National Curriculum Framework and the Knowledge Commission report both advocate the development of critical and higher-order thinking skills.

Learners are therefore required not only to comprehend and understand new concepts, but also to apply them to new situations. They need to analyse these concepts, evaluate them and then use these ideas to become co-creators of this knowledge. For many of our learners, English is not their language of thinking. However, this does not mean that they do not possess higher order cognitive skills. They do possess these skills but in their first or more enabled languages. To enable our learners to make connections and draw on their thinking capabilities, we need them to be able to exploit their abilities in other languages in English classrooms. But this kind of cognitive recognition of capabilities is not a reality in the Indian educational context. The first or more enabled language is used in English classrooms, but rarely as a positive resource by the English teacher.

Existing and Posited use of L1 in English Classrooms

The first or more enabled language is used in English classrooms for administrative or classroom communication purposes. If used academically, assuming that students cannot understand what is being stated in English, it may be used to either translate the text or explain it. Such a use of the first or more enabled language is equivalent to speaking a white lie: we speak it but do not own up to it and also apologize for it. Current L1 use in the English classroom is best summed up as—cannot be advocated nor avoided. Teachers deliberately do not use it as a positive resource in the classroom. It is never used to tap the cognitive capability of the students and enable better proficiency in English.

The first or more enabled language should not be used by the teacher to merely translate the text or provide explanations. This will only “dumb” our students and make them more and more teacher-dependent. It should also not be used for classroom transactional purposes. All such transactions are, after all, context-embedded. Learners, with a little bit of effort, will always understand what is required of them. Moreover, for these purposes, the more abled peers will be able to help as well. The first or more enabled language can be used both in the language and the literature class for a variety of purposes; but primarily, it needs to be used as a scaffold or a prop so that higher order skills can be enabled.

Use of the First or More Enabled Language in English Classrooms

In language classrooms, the first or more enabled language can be used to enable all four literacy skills.

To Enable Writing Capability

Our students, when asked to write essays, often turn in stereotyped book essays which can usually be traced to a guide book. This is because we expect them to think, plan and write in English and such capability is often beyond the ken of the student. Brainstorming, planning and organizing can be done in homogeneous L1 classrooms with the class as a whole in the more enabled language. Students can be encouraged to search for and find equivalent words in English once the ideational planning is done and then asked

to compose their essays in English. If needed, feedback may also be given in the first language (Kumar, 2011). If the class is heterogeneous and has many first languages, the students can be divided into language groups and the planning and organization can happen at the group level and not at the whole class level. If it is possible to work in tandem with another language teacher, it should also be possible to get similar essays written across languages. Feedback can be common across the languages and comparisons can also be made regarding their capability across languages.

To Enhance Reading Capability

The receptive capability of our students is always much higher than their productive capability. As such, students can be given texts to read in English. However if they are not able to answer in English, they may be encouraged to respond in their first or more enabled language.

To Improve Speaking Capability

As with writing, students can be encouraged to compose their ideas in their first language and if needed, also be asked to speak on the same topic in that language. Once this is accomplished, they can be asked to jot down their ideas for their “talk” in English and then encouraged to speak. In such an experiment, the talk in the first or more enabled language can function as a parallel task that will initially provide confidence and enable transfer of ideas, and later strategies, and eventually capabilities.

To Augment Listening Capability

Our students have to listen to many lectures and take down notes in their classes. More often than not, their “taking down speed” in English is not very fast and because of this, they fail to take down what the teacher says. This, more than any other reason, forces them to resort to bazaar guides and notes. We could use expository texts in our English classes and encourage our students to take down notes and also answer questions. To increase this ability and also to teach our students what they should be looking out for, we could give our students a mind map (with just the structure of the talk) in their more enabled language and ask them to write down only the main ideas and supporting detail, as indicated by us, in English. This L1 mind map will then serve as a scaffold and also teach them to read and comprehend texts better.

Use of the First or More Enabled Language in Literature Classrooms

In Literature classrooms, the awareness of literary genres and other literary techniques that are known in the first language can be used as a base to help students develop the same capability in English (Ghosh, 2010). As with the language classroom, if students are able to read literature in English but find it difficult to respond in that language, they can be encouraged to respond in their first or more enabled language. Once we have established that literary capability exists and is well developed in the students’ first language, transferring of that capability to English will happen with

ease.

Advantages of Using the First or More Enabled Language as a Scaffold in the English Classroom

When teachers use the first or more enabled language as a positive resource in the English language and literature classroom, the advantages include enabling the student in both cognitive and affective domains. A cognitive scaffolding will help teachers to teach and enhance higher order thinking skills of the students and this in turn will lead to student empowerment.

Students will begin thinking about what they are capable of doing across languages; this will enable them to reflect on their own capabilities and thereby go meta on their own language lives. Once students are able to articulate for themselves what they can and cannot do across languages, they will be able to draw on their capabilities in their L1 language and use it as a strategy to develop proficiency in English.

Such enabling across languages indicates to students that their first languages are equally important and that their language and their capability in that language are valued by the educational system. This in turn will lead to affective empowerment.

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Selecting Poems for EFL Students: Criteria and Bank of Titles



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Introduction

Poetry is not written according to a graded list of words and structures and does not represent a reality that learners can unproblematically identify with. Instead, it represents a world of experience that is ‘designed’ to disrupt, or at least problematize, our perception of it, and this experience is couched in a language that is also “designed” to break away from ordinary language. As a result, poetry is disruptive of both language and world experiences. The issue of poetic text selection has always engaged the attention of poetry teachers in EFL contexts. This concern has been well expressed by Khan (2005), who argues that teachers “cannot just choose any poem from anywhere and then critically discuss it and finish our job without considering its accessibility and appropriateness for the level of students in question” (p. 90). Khan is concerned with the accessibility and appropriateness of texts for the level of students, indeed very important criteria for text selection. In fact, there have been several lists, comprehensive but not exhaustive, detailing the criteria of selection of texts to be used in the classroom.

Moody (1971) argues that when selecting texts, teachers should consider factors such as the students’ language ability, enthusiasm, interests, and aversions. Widdowson (1975, p. 81) underlines the importance of considering “the learner’s capacity to understand the language which is used”. To this list, Brumfit and Carter (1986), add previous literary experience and cultural inaccessibility. They point out that “we can help students to avoid disliking a book simply because they misunderstand the conventions being used, or because the language is too difficult, or because the cultural references are inaccessible” (p. 23). Besides language level and interests, Collie and Slater (1987) underscore the relevance of the students’ reading proficiency and their maturity levels. They recommend “non-serious” poems and poems with a fairly simple narrative structure at the early stages of poetry learning (p. 226).

However, is it possible to think of a literature course that contains no “classics” at all? Widdowson’s answer is “yes”. The criteria of text selection, he argues, should be “pedagogic rather than aesthetic or historical” (Widdowson

1975, p. 85). In practice, however, there is a heavy bias towards the classics of English literature. All courses on twentieth century poetry, for example, would include Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and Yeats’ “The Second Coming”, the justification being that they cannot possibly be excluded. The assumption is that “if the students were continually exposed to the best uses of the English language, it would in some sense ‘rub off’ on their own performance in the language” (Short and Candlin, 1989, p. 180). Short and Candlin, however, find a problem with this assumption. “Much, after all, of what is best in English literature derives from ages linguistically very different from modern English.” Besides, “a worthy desire to read what is ‘worthwhile’ can result in an almost worthless reading process.” (Vincent, 1986, p. 210)

In the EFL context, there have been several outcries among educators against the selection of texts solely on the basis of their place in the canon. Thiong’o (1986), regrets that students in Kenya are made to recite poems in praise of the “retiring unreachable haughtily coy mistress”, poems which are “an English writer’s nostalgic response to his landscape”, poems which celebrate “the beauty of England” and its “changing seasons”, and poems on “roses and daffodils and may-poles and yellow fogs, not to mention songs of London burning and Baa Baa Black Sheep!” (pp. 224-225). These students, Thiong’o continues with his outcry, are taught “the history of English literature and language from the unknown author of Beowulf to T.S. Eliot so much that our children are made to look, analyse and evaluate the world as made and seen by Europeans”. Fifteen years later, Bisong (1995) reiterates Thiong’o’s concerns, “Literature teaching in secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria...is still very much an uncertain business. Now and again concerns are voiced about what literature to teach at school and how to teach it” (p. 290).

In the Arab world, the debate is no less heated. Marwan Obeidat (1997) addresses the issue of whether or not teachers should introduce the “threatening” and “culturally superior” English literature. Obeidat’s answer is affirmative, provided that instructors try to “avoid” the religious, moral, and cultural barriers. Layla Al Maleh (2005), however, takes the opposite stand. Though teachers of English literature

may find it “more challenging to bring their students to an appreciation of English literature, which offers social, moral, and cultural values different from their own”, these teachers, in order to avoid alienating students, can always teach English literature “amorally and encourage free interpretation” (p. 269). Al Maleh argues her defence strongly, “The choice, then, for Arab teachers of English literature is not to ‘eclipse’ texts from the eyes of their students as much as to encourage them to adopt an amoral stance towards them, and to search for that universal paradigm which is found at the heart of all great literature.”

It may be concluded that there is no formulae that teachers can take off the peg into their classrooms. There is “no special magic attached to ‘big names’ or established reputations” either (Moody, 1971, p. 29). The choice of a text is therefore eventually a matter of local decision. The classroom teacher knows the students’ abilities and interests better than any theorist or critic, and so only the teacher decides which text to include or exclude regardless of its aesthetic value or established place in the canon.

Suggested Criteria for Text Selection

I would now like to suggest three criteria for text selection, ranked hierarchically in order of their importance: 1) suitability of content, 2) accessibility of language, and 3) adaptability of text. These criteria relate to schematic knowledge of the world, of the language and of the genre of poetry respectively.

The first criterion is suitability of content. In order for a text to be selected it has to represent experiences that learners can *identify with* and *accept*. Before students can respond to a text and make individual readings into it, they should first of all be willing to accept it. Acceptance comes even before identification, but it is a stage very often glossed over. Arab scholars who have considered the issue of text selection for Arab undergraduate students however have different views of suitability. While some such as Obeidat (1997) recommend that instructors try to avoid religious, moral and cultural barriers, others such as Al Maleh (2005) choose not to eclipse “controversial” texts from the eyes of the students but to encourage an amoral stance towards them. Al Maleh is skeptical about teaching “only what has immediate relevance and bears reference to Arab and Moslem experiences” and is eager not to “cut students’ minds from the reservoir of Western, particularly English literature and culture in the name of compatibility of values” (p. 272). Al Maleh would therefore select for use in her classes texts such as *To his Coy Mistress*, which she describes as making a “licentious” invitation to the pleasures of love. What she suggests is that students be encouraged to read such texts “amorally” in order to perceive merit in the text without having to agree with its moral codes. What she fails to accept, however, is that students do not “accept” texts that present “alien” moral values, and this rules out any meaningful encounter with them in the classroom.

The second criterion is accessibility of language. Suitability

of content is a necessary but not sufficient condition. A text that appeals to the students but which is linguistically “too difficult” can hardly be enjoyed or appreciated. Linguistic difficulty, however, is not a unidimensional problem. It has at least four dimensions to it, namely, density of unfamiliar or culturally loaded vocabulary, complexity of syntactic structures, organization of discourse structure, and length of the text. This should not imply that in order for a text to be selected it has to be linguistically “easy”. A text should present some challenge to the students and should also offer them some learning. In other words, the selected text should be at the right level of difficulty for the students. It should be one that the students can manage to “log into” and make “some” sense of on their own; it should be linguistically accessible.

Last, but not the least, is adaptability of text. In order for a text to qualify for selection, it should be “adaptable” to the teaching objectives of the instructor. A text that is adaptable is not one that exemplifies those linguistic patterns that instructors want their students to learn, although the likelihood of such a coincidence is not ruled out, but one where learning facilitates encounter with other poetic texts. A text that is adaptable, in other words, is one that can be used or exploited to design tasks that serve to facilitate the learning of some skill of interpretation.

A Bank of Titles

The following is a bank of titles selected in line with the arguments made in this paper. This list is not sacrosanct; it may be modified, enriched or rejected. The author welcomes feedback from teachers and researchers on the list.

Title of the Poem	Poet	Country
Indian Women	Shiv K. Kumar (1921)	India
Song	Adrienne Rich (1929)	America
I am not That Woman	Kishwar Naheed (1940)	Pakistan
Women	Louise Bogan (1897-1970)	America
Death of a Whale	John Blight (1913-1995)	Australia
World War II	Langston Hughes (1902-1967)	America
Inscription for a War	A. D. Hope (1907-2000)	Australia
What I Will	Suheir Hammad (1973)	Arab-American (Palestinian)
One Question From a Bullet	John Agard (1949)	Guyana

Title of the Poem	Poet	Country
The Collar	George Herbert (1593-1633)	England
Up-Hill	Christina Rossetti (1830-1886)	England
An Elegy on the Death of a mad dog	Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774)	Ireland
Telephone Conversation	Wole Soyinka (1934)	Nigeria
I am the Only Being	Emily Brontë (1818-1848)	England
Nothing's Changed	Tatakhulu Afrika (1920-2002)	South Africa
I sit and Look out	Walt Whitman (1819-1892)	America
No More Boomerang	Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal (1920-1993)	Australia
The Road not Taken	Robert Frost (1874-1963)	America
I, too, Sing America	Langston Hughes (1902-1967)	America
An old Woman	Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004)	India
Not Waving but Drowning	Stevie Smith (1903-1971)	England
Parable of the old men and the Young	Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)	England
Keeping Things Whole	Mark Strand (1934)	America
Wants	Philip Larkin (1925-1985)	England
Ozymandias	P. B. Shelley (1792-1822)	England
Someone Else's Song	Kamala Das (1934)	India
Death the Leveller	James Shirley (1596-1666)	England
The Tyger	William Blake (1757-1827)	England

Title of the Poem	Poet	Country
The Eagle	A. L. Tennyson (1809-1892)	England
Night of the Scorpion	Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004)	India
Break, Break, Break	A. L. Tennyson (1809-1892)	England
Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind	William Shakespeare (1564-1616)	England
Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's day?	William Shakespeare (1564-1616)	England
When in Disgrace With Fortune and Men's Eyes	William Shakespeare (1564-1616)	England
Back Again	Louisa Lawson (1848-1920)	Australia
Lucy Poems	William Wordsworth (1770-1850)	England
It is not Growing Like a Tree	Ben Jonson (1572-1637)	England
I Felt a Funeral, in my Brain	Emily Dickinson (1830-1894)	America
Footsteps of Angels	H. W. Longfellow (1807-1882)	America
Because she Would ask me why I Loved her	Christopher Brennan (1870-1932)	Australia
Life	W. T. Goodge (1862-1909)	Australia
Trees	Joyce Kilmer. (1886–1918)	America
Borrowed Tongue	Khaled Mattawa (1964)	Arab-American (Libyan)

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Rethinking Teaching and Learning of "English Studies": Exploring the Perceptions of Students for Developing Need-Based Materials



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Should "English Studies" in India focus primarily on English literature or English language teaching or both? Do "teaching" and "learning" of English connote the same meaning? How similar or different are the aspirations of the English (Hons.) students from those of other disciplines who study English? As teachers of English, most of us have engaged with the above-stated questions and have tried to address them whenever given a chance. However, the one pertinent issue that has not yet been significantly addressed is that our students, irrespective of their subject specialization, have specific English language needs which can only be met if those needs are identified using thorough needs-analyses, and curricula are framed in accordance with their findings. The answer to the question "What are my students' English language requirements?" is bound to be relative and therefore attempts to integrate a needs-based approach

to syllabus design will be challenging given the mixed proficiency levels of our students as well as the top-down decision-making process regarding curriculum designing in our universities. Nevertheless, I will endeavour to explore the issue of needs-analysis through a self-reflective narrative in the hope of raising awareness among teachers about its importance.

According to Iwai et al. (as cited in Songhori, 2007, p.2) needs-analysis refers to the varied activities involved in collecting information about a particular set of students with a view to developing a curriculum that will meet their needs. Thus, a thorough, multi-faceted needs analysis can help ensure that practitioners/course coordinators have the necessary information to develop courses that are more attuned to the actual requirements of students and lecturers

(Jackson, 2005, p.304). Michael Long (2005), highlights how the one-size-fits-all approach does not work in second language acquisition when he writes, “just as no medical intervention would be prescribed before a thorough diagnosis of what ails the patient, so no language teaching program should be designed without a thorough needs analysis” (p.1).

Over the years, different terms have been introduced to define needs analysis such as Present Situation Analysis; Target Needs; Deficiency Analysis; Discourse Analysis; Genre Analysis, etc. Any approach to needs-analysis that attempts to explore the students’ needs and wants, has to take into consideration not merely their actual and expected proficiency in the language, but also their views about English language and their perceived expectations from the English courses they pursue.

I started teaching English at Shri Ram College of Commerce (Delhi’s premier institution offering specialized undergraduate courses in Commerce and Economics) in the year 2000. Prior to this assignment, I had taught English literature for three years at Hansraj College in the same university. Even before I could adjust to the transition in the course structure, the syllabus and the evaluation pattern between the two courses namely English (Hons.) and B.Com (Hons.), I had to grapple with two entirely different sets of approaches to the prescribed English courses. Whereas a majority of my erstwhile English (Hons.) students exuded a certain passion for reading literature and showed commitment and sincerity in attending classes and doing assignments, my B.Com (Hons.) students expressed ennui and displayed no other interest in the course except to simply pass in it. I think more than an academic exercise it became a question of situational necessity for me to explore my learners’ context. Year after year, I interacted with my students to find out if they thought they should have an English paper; what they expected out of their English course; how they would like the course to be taught, etc., with very little realization that I had already taken the first step towards analysing their needs.

Last year, as a pilot study, I decided to conduct a needs-analysis survey of my students in order to find out their perceptions about English, as well as their expectations from an English course. The hypothesis underlying this project was that many students have serious reservations about their English course and these problems ought to be investigated in detail. Also, if the results of this study were found to be relevant then they could be used later to probe similar issues in a larger study thus enabling teachers and course designers to modify/restructure the existing syllabi and teaching methodology in order to make both more relevant to the requirements of the students.

The study was conducted on a random sample of 39 commerce students comprising 25 girls and 14 boys aged 19-20 years. There were 13 students each from three different sections of B.Com (Hons.) third year who were studying the English Business Communication paper. Each section was taught by different teachers. Nearly 50 per

cent of these students were not from Delhi and 60 per cent belonged to upper middle class families and had studied at English-medium schools. I decided to use a questionnaire as my research tool since they are “designed for efficiency; can be objectively scored, and the data can be analysed quantitatively” (Wagner, 2010, p.26). My questionnaire consisted of three sections:

- Section I comprised multiple-choice as well as open-ended questions on the students’ common perceptions about English language and its requirement and importance in the contemporary scenario. The questions were designed to gauge if the students believed English to be the link language of the world and were able to formulate some reasons for its wide usage and popularity within India.
- Section II included yes/no questions pertaining to their current English paper. Should English be a compulsory subject for students of commerce? How many English papers ought to be there in a six semester course such as theirs? Does proficiency in English language at the undergraduate level have a direct bearing on their job placements?
- Section III had two parts—a and b. In part a, I asked the students to evaluate the merits of the prescribed course on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicated poor and 5 indicated excellent. In part b, the students had to respond to an open-ended question asking them to list some salient features of an English course they would have designed for themselves had they been given the liberty to do so.

The findings of the pilot were as follows:

Section I

Students were asked to indicate what percentage of Delhi University students, in their opinion, desired to be proficient in English. The response was as follows: 14 students said that more than 90 per cent of the Delhi University students desired to be proficient in English, 11 students said between 75-90 per cent, 9 indicated between 50-75 per cent and 5 students said less than 50 per cent. Students who indicated a higher percentage validated their opinion by writing that since English is the language of interaction in the present multicultural corporate world are keen to be fluent in it. On the other hand, students who indicated a lower percentage, especially below 50 per cent, suggested that this lack of interest arises due to several factors such as considering English as a non-specialized subject that one only needs to pass in and the English course not being interesting enough to motivate students. All students however agreed that English serves as the common language of communication across the world. In support of their opinion, they listed factors such as increase in the number of English-medium schools across the globe, maximum international conferences and seminars held in English and an increasing number of countries including China found to have people conducting

basic conversation in English. Students also felt that English is widely used within India for example, information in the public domain is provided in both English and Hindi. Moreover, there is a rising popularity of English movies, internet browsing sites, mobile apps, music, etc., in English among the Indian youth.

Section II

In response to the first question in this section—Should there be a compulsory English course/paper for students of commerce?—27 students replied in the affirmative and 6 said “no”, 1 student suggested a diagnostic test and 5 students said a conditional “yes”. Those students who favoured the inclusion of English as a compulsory paper stressed on language proficiency to ensure a better future for them and emphasized that English provided a much required relief to them from other burdensome commerce-centred subjects. On the other hand, students who answered negatively and did not favour the inclusion of English were of the opinion that studying a course under compulsion does not guarantee success and moreover, students pursuing higher studies should be allowed to decide for themselves whether they need to study English or not. One student suggested that there should be an entrance exam in English for college students to judge their proficiency. The students who wrote a conditional “yes” recommended that an English paper ought to be compulsory only if it is rich in both content and skills and incorporates literary pieces, current articles in English, and activities and exercises that are particularly relevant to commerce students. In response to the question, “Should there be a compulsory English paper every semester?”, 23 students wrote “no” while 16 students wrote “yes” provided that each paper focused on a different aspect of English studies. These included developing proficiency in different skills, exploring human behaviour and social themes through literature, learning business English, reading literary pieces to understand business-related themes such as risk-taking, leadership, ethics, etc. All the students agreed that proficiency in English would help them to get better job placements while answering the concluding question in this section.

Section III

- a) In response to the question asking students to evaluate the merits of the business communication course, 5 students wrote that they were satisfied (ticked 4= good); 7 students rated the course as average (ticked 3= average) and 27 students expressed their dissatisfaction (having ticked 1= poor or 2= below average) stating reasons such as the business communication paper was boring/difficult; offered little value-addition; was theory-centred and did not aid in developing their communicative skills.
- b) The open-ended question eliciting responses from students on the salient features of an English course they would have designed for themselves included the following: the English paper must develop the students’ soft skills, particularly the communicative

competence of students; should include interesting texts so as to stimulate in students a passion for reading literature available in English; should focus on contemporary issues; have interactive teaching methods such as discussions, simulations and presentations; should focus on developing all the language skills, particularly oral skills; classroom interactions must move beyond examination-centred practices and lastly assessment techniques should involve peer-feedback.

Post this pilot study, I have tried to address my students’ needs in several ways (though I still have to adhere to the syllabus prescribed by the Delhi University). I have moved beyond the recommended books and prepared my own PPTs and classroom and supplementary worksheets; and designed interactive assignments and activities keeping in mind the “salient features” of an “ideal English course” recommended by my students. Although it is not possible to share all of it here, yet I wish to substantiate my endeavour to develop needs-based materials and methodology by giving an example. The Business Communication paper has a section on making effective oral presentations. For several years, I had taught this section using the theoretical inputs available in the recommended books on the qualities of an effective oral presentation. However, my students emphasized that they needed practice on how to make effective business presentations, more specifically impactful introductions and conclusions. Since classrooms in my college have an overhead projector, screen and wi-fi connectivity, I decided to develop materials specifically to address my students’ needs. Therefore, following this study, I changed my approach to transact the section on “Making effective presentations” in the following manner:

- First of all, I play a short video of an ineffective business presentation (several videos are available online) and ask student-groups to spot the mistakes related to openings and conclusions and write tips on good presentations.
- Students work in groups and compare their lists and add what they have missed.
- I elicit a typical structure of Introduction (Hook – Objective – Agenda) and Conclusion (Summary – Call for action – Close) and typical phrases used in each part.
- I project an example of the evaluation rubrics designed by me on the screen so that students have an idea of what is considered good practice. I ask them to develop similar rubrics focusing only on the openings and endings of their presentations.
- Each group is then asked to prepare the introduction and conclusion (not the body) of a presentation on the launch of a new product (they are given a choice of several products, or they can come up with their own ideas for a product).
- Each group makes a short presentation and the class votes for the best presentation using the previously designed rubrics for evaluation.

The findings of this pilot study and my subsequent modifications in classroom interactions are tentative as they are based on a very small sample size of commerce students from one constituent college of Delhi University. Yet if a similar needs-based study, albeit more rigorous were to be conducted with a wider sample focusing on perceived and target needs of students, it would definitely yield rewarding results regarding the English language requirements of undergraduate students and the crucial role it can play in developing needs-based syllabi and materials. However, until that happens, at least we as teachers can all do our little bit in making an effort to find out about our students' requirements from the English courses they study and make small, meaningful interventions wherever possible.

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Reinterpretation and Subversion of Mythical Stereotypes in Indian Literature



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In this paper, I will attempt to explore the relationship between myth and gender, and examine how mythology is used and misused by patriarchy to enforce a subordinate status on women. By providing women with idealized role models and creating their own definition of morality, patriarchy uses myth as an instrument to impose their ideology on women. In this paper, I will attempt to analyze literary texts that have tried to reinterpret mythology from a feminist perspective, and in so doing, have subverted mythical stereotyped images of women.

The popular definition of the term “myth” refers to stories passed down from generation to generation. Myths, however, have an additional function, which, according to Alan Swingewood (1977), is “to eliminate the historical basis of institutions and processes, and create within popular consciousness an acceptance of the inevitable facts of class inequality and power” (p. 119). This brings us to the relationship between myth and ideology which appear to be inextricably linked. Terry Eagleton (1976) defines ideology as “that complex structure of social perception which ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is seen by most members of the society as ‘natural’ or not seen at all” (p. 6).

Myth, which plays an important role in shaping the cultural heritage of a nation, thus functions as a significant tool for

patriarchy (the dominant group) for imposing its ideology on women (the subordinate group). It does so by providing women with a series of role models who are glorified, revered and rewarded precisely because they uphold the morals of patriarchy. Myths also provide contrasting images of evil women who transgress from the roles assigned to them and are punished for their deviant behaviour. The “good” woman like Sita in *Ramayana* is passive, submissive, docile and self-sacrificing, and devoted to her husband, while the “evil” woman, like Surpanakha, is sexually aggressive and assertive. Patriarchy is therefore very clear in its stipulation of the qualities that a woman should and should not possess.

However, if myth has been used as a tool by patriarchy to impose its ideology on women, it has also been used as an area of negotiation, conflict and contestation by the subordinate group. The control of myth therefore is very significant for the achievement of some kind of cultural hegemony. As is seen historically, for a subordinate culture to establish its status, it needs to gain control of a myth by undermining and demythifying the “original” or popular myth.

In the rest of this paper, I will examine literary texts that have challenged, and tried to question and subvert popular myths by portraying mythical characters from a

feminist perspective. I will also analyze the subversion of the characters of Sita, Gandhari, Draupadi and Ahalya by feminist writers.

Of all the characters in Hindu mythology, the most popular role model all women seek to emulate is undoubtedly Sita. The epitome of self-sacrifice, chastity and virtue, Sita is glorified because she unquestioningly follows her husband into exile, and remains devoted to him despite the hardships she has to endure. Bina Aggarwal (1988), analyses the character of Sita in her poem, "Sita Speak". The poem is a series of questions posed to Sita, who is urged to put an end to her silence and speak out her side of the story. In her poem, Aggarwal questions patriarchal authority, holding it responsible for contributing to the injustices meted out to Sita and forcing upon her a silence which appears to be uncharacteristic of her otherwise strong self. Aggarwal further criticizes and condemns each male member of the family and society who is in a way responsible for Sita's sorry fate. She begins by critiquing Sita's father for his role in moulding her into a passive human being, training her to be flexible, adjusting and obedient to her husband:

Your father married you to a prince
told you to be pliable as the bow
in your husband's hand (p. 104)

In the next stanza, she adds, "Didn't you note Ram broke the magic bow?" (p. 104). Sita thus becomes a metaphor for the bow for she too was figuratively "broken" by Ram when he asked her to prove her chastity and subsequently banished her. The ideal image of Ram is thus questioned. Sita is later referred to as "the victim twice victimized", first by her oppressor Ravan who abducted her, and then by her own husband who made her undergo "the chastity test on the scorching flames" (p. 104).

Her brother-in-law Laxman is not spared either, for although he did not directly cause her pain or suffering, he remained silent in the face of her humiliation, lacking the courage to oppose an act which was undoubtedly unfair. The sons, who Sita had nurtured with love and care, are chastised in the poem for not standing up for their mother's rights in the face of their own self-interest:

Unhesitatingly, they joined him –
future rulers of his land.
Their lineage was accepted

Yet your purity still questioned. (p. 104)

The society thus accepts the ancestry of the sons but refuses to accept the mother who bore the sons, and thus also becomes a target for attack. Finally, the persona criticizes those poets who wrote Sita's story and who claimed that women were not worthy of hearing the *Ramayana* but only fit for being beaten like a beast. The poem ends with a provocation to Sita, who, despite her inherent strength, is characterized by a passive and submissive acceptance of her

predicament. Sita's sacrifice of her love for her loved ones without a word of protest is questioned, and she is asked to explain her silence:

Sita Speak!

You who could lift the magic bow in play with one hand

Who could command the earth with a word

How did they silence you? (p. 104)

Although the most glorified of all mythical heroines, Sita certainly does not stand alone in mythology in her passive acceptance of her fate. Gandhari, the wife of Dhritarashtra, shares this quality with her. She takes a decision to blindfold herself for the rest of her life in order to share the physical disability of her visually impaired husband. Her decision is traditionally taken as a symbol of self-sacrifice and a perfect example of a wife's devotion to her husband.

Githa Hariharan (1992) subverts the image of Gandhari in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The story of Devi's mother Sita parallels that of Gandhari to a certain stage in the narrative. Sita, who loves music, broke the strings of her Veena (musical instrument) which "came apart with a discordant twang of protest" when her father-in-law accused her of neglecting her duties as a wife and daughter-in-law. She gave up her passion and became "a dutiful daughter-in-law the neighbors praised" (p. 30).

This seemingly self-sacrificing act was more an expression of her anger and protest, just as, according to Hariharan's interpretation, Gandhari's would have been. Moreover, Sita, who appears to her husband to be the ideal woman "who did not complain, a woman who knew how to make sacrifices without fanfare" (p. 103), is actually a strong and dominating woman who takes decisions on behalf of both her husband and daughter without shattering the ideal image they have of her.

She tries to make her daughter Devi conform to the role of a woman which society expects of her, and is consequently displeased upon hearing of Devi's elopement. The Gandhari myth is subverted when Devi hesitantly approaches Sita's door after her affair comes to an end and hears the strains of the Veena wafting through. Sita takes up the Veena again, thus discarding the Gandhari-like role of the ideal wife, mother and daughter-in-law that she has been playing, and opens her eyes to those parts of her personality which she had tried to deny and suppress.

While the mythical Sita and Gandhari are perceived as ideal women, Draupadi, a complex and multi-faceted character is a bold and outspoken woman who does not hesitate to express her opinion; nor does she make an effort to control her anger and rage in response to the humiliation inflicted upon her. It is significant that although she is praised for her devotion to her husbands, she has not been taken up as a role model in popular media.

Mahashweta Devi (1990), in her short story, "Draupadi" presents us with an interesting subversion of the Draupadi

myth. The protagonist of the story, Dopdi Mehjen, a Naxalite, is captured by military officials. Like her namesake, Dopdi, who asserts herself by refusing to answer the questions of the authorities, becomes a victim of male lust. While the mythical Draupadi escapes humiliation when she appeals to divine authority for help, for Mahashweta's Dopdi, there is no miracle. Her multiple rapes ordered by Senanayak leave her physically wounded and bruised, but do nothing to her determination and morale. While the mythical Draupadi cannot be stripped because of divine intervention, Mahashweta's Dopdi refuses to accept the piece of cloth thrown towards her before taking her to the Burra Sahib's tent. There is no trace of shame when she confronts Senanayak, who has never before felt afraid to stand before an unarmed target. "You can strip me," she tells the Senanayak defiantly, "but how can you clothe me again?" (p. 104). She challenges the values of a male dominated society and exposes the brutality of her oppressors, going much beyond her mythical counterpart.

While the mythical heroines discussed so far have been revered, mythology is also replete with images of the "bad" woman. One such woman is Ahalya, who allows herself to be seduced by Indra. She is punished for her curiosity by being turned into stone and can only be revived and purified by the touch of Ram.

A short story by K. B. Sreedevi (1993), "The Stone Woman" subverts the Ahalya myth. Ahalya is filled with awe at the first memory of Ram, who had brought her back to life. "One could go on listening to that voice which resonated like the peal of temple bells. The moment she saw him she knew that her long penance had not been in vain. She was drowned in the heavenly pleasure evoked by his gentleness" (p. 48). She compares him to her "detached and saintly husband" (p. 51), who, she observes, is "incapable of uttering such (gentle) words" because he has "mastered the art of the all-destructive curse" (p. 48), and wonders who is the more compassionate of the two.

Her illusion of Ram as the ideal man, the epitome of compassion and greatness, however, is shattered when she hears that he has forsaken his pregnant wife, Sita. "The fire has abandoned its own flame," she mourns and laments that "Nature [is] deserted by its Protector" (p. 52). The irony of the situation is that Ram, the only man who has the power to bring her back to life, the "protector" of nature, questions the chastity of his virtuous wife and abandons her. He thus seems to be no different from her own husband who cursed her and turned her into stone. It is here that Sreedevi's story deviates from the myth. Rather than be indebted to a man who has been unjust to his wife, Ahalya rejects the salvation he offers her, and expressing her solidarity with Sita, turns back into stone. She thus challenges the false morals and values imposed upon women by a patriarchal system where a woman must constantly prove her purity and chastity to the world.

These literary texts have therefore attempted to question and

subvert the stereotyped images of women in mythology. This new subverted image no longer upholds patriarchal ideals, but creates its own morality. Thus, by the process of social change, there is a "remythification" which includes the idea of "demythification" of the original myth—that is to say, a reconstruction of the "original" myth, and the creation, in its place, of a new myth which subverts, demystifies and deconstructs the original myth.

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Exploring the Reading-Writing Relationship for Critical Thinking



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The Context

As an educator and language faculty, my work involves observing classes, talking to teachers, interviewing candidates and facilitating capacity-building sessions. In order to understand beliefs underlying class room practices I often observe teacher strategies and reflect upon them and examine them carefully. These beliefs are based upon traditional practices of taking reading and writing as discrete skills, to be developed separately with drill and practice. The cognitive aspects of reading and writing as meaning making are often ignored. Here are two examples of teachers I observed:

Ritu is a dedicated teacher. She divides her language classes into writing classes and reading classes, with more classes dedicated to writing than to reading. In the reading classes, children read aloud to understand the sound-letter relationships and to improve diction. In the writing classes, children do copy writing, free writing and creative writing.

Selva Raj time-manages his classes, he keeps ten minutes for reading and twenty minutes for writing in each class. First, he reads the lesson and then makes the children read it. This is followed by a discussion on what the author is trying to say. The last ten minutes are used for writing down in their own words what they have discussed. The children recollect the discussion and write it down, either in the form of questions and answers or in the form of an essay. Sometimes, Selva Raj asks them to write their opinions on the ideas expressed in the text. When asked why he uses this strategy, he replied that children need dedicated time to practice each skill separately. Moreover, writing is harder than reading as it requires thinking, creating and expressing.

These two examples reveal some common myths that prevail among teachers regarding the relationship between reading and writing. Firstly, most teachers see reading and writing as discrete skills. The second myth is that reading is a receptive skill and writing is a productive skill. So learning to read is easier because we receive information and store it in our brain, while writing requires retrieval of information and organizing it to produce words, sentences and discourses.

When we think about reading and writing as a product, we tend to think of them as distinct skills. We need to understand that reading and writing are processes which are so intertwined and interrelated that they cannot be separated.

According to Paulo Friere, reading is a process of writing in the mind. "Reading always involves critical perception, interpretation, and *rewriting* of what is read" (Friere, 1987, p. 24).

Introduction

Both reading and writing are processes of creation. When we read and write, we do not simply encode or decode words, we also create meaning. Words on a page are mere marks, lifeless and empty, unless we breathe meaning into them.

Recently, our understanding of reading has undergone a paradigm shift as we no longer think of reading as the process of abstracting the author's meaning from the text. Two sets of theories have contributed to this understanding. The schema theory of reading and the socio-cultural and socio-critical understanding of reading and writing as processes of understanding, representing and critiquing the world.

Lev Vygotsky posits in *Thought and Language*, "meaning-making follows two simultaneous processes which work in opposite directions" (Vygotsky, 1986, pp. 218-219). They include the process of decoding, which builds from sounds and letters to meaningful wholes; and the process of meaning-making which begins with the contextual, cultural, and previous discourse knowledge that offers choices to match the textual matter. Reading and writing are therefore ways of thinking. They are social processes facilitated by the presence of people with whom we participate in activities.

The Conceptual Basis of Reading and Writing as Ways of Thinking

One of the most influential developments in language research has been the view that readers and writers are engaged in creating or composing a textual world in the process of meaning-making (Kucer, 1987, pp. 10-27). Kucer debunks the myth that reading is a process of linear progression of sound, word and meaning-making, while writing is a process of meaning construction. He affirms that both processes—reading and writing draw from the same pool of cognitive and linguistic resources. Researchers argue that fluent reading involves several processes that are characteristics of good writing (Flood & Lapps, 1987, pp. 9-26). What could these processes be?

Processes Underlying Reading and Writing

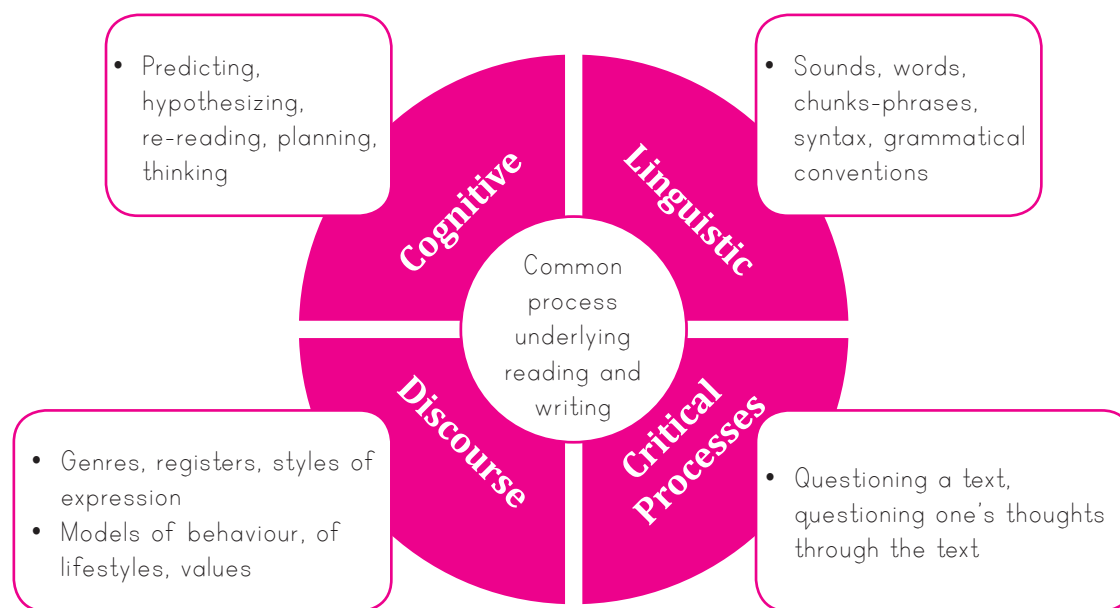


Figure 1. Cognitive processes underlying reading and writing.

When we read, we choose what we want to read and we try to predict the content from the title and contents. When we read a story, we try to predict the plot, the characters or the next action, the next argument, its logic, the conclusion, etc. At the level of words, we replace almost all words with our own versions except for the key words. When we write, we plan and choose what we want to write; in a story, we create the content and the title. As we continue to write, we predict (articulate) the plot, the characters, the action, the argument and its logic and conclusion. We are constantly refining, ideas, words, sentences, syntax.

Linguistic Processes Underlying Reading and Writing

At the most rudimentary level, when kids read whole words or small sentences even at a very early age, two things happen—they develop phonemic awareness and sound-letter relationships, they select words, phrases and sentences to recreate their experience. If this is done only through reading, it becomes a drill but when they write down their own words and thoughts, even with invented spelling it is a much more incidental, less laborious, and more natural process. Moreover, this process is achieved in the service of another functional task, that of trying to communicate something with someone. Learner-created texts have the advantage of engaging learners with their own writing as well as developing the meta-linguistic strategies common to reading and writing.

Readers and writers therefore share procedural knowledge, which includes sounds, words, morphology, syntax, and discourse strategies of cohesion and coherence.

Discourse Knowledge

The term discourse can be described as a formal way

of thinking that can be expressed through language, and includes the social boundaries that define what can be said about a particular topic. A discourse community can be defined as people who share similar thoughts and ideas. Discourse may also be understood as a unit of language organized around a particular subject-matter and meaning. The idea of discourse signifies an awareness of social influence on language. Strictly speaking, it is only discourse that is directly accessible to us, since we only learn about the story via discourse. Elements of the discourse thus determine our perception of the writing. For instance, while reading a story we may ask ourselves questions such as: What is the narrative situation? Whose point of view is being presented? Which narrative modes have been employed? How are the thoughts of the characters transmitted? How has the chronology of events been dealt with? How has style been used? All of these elements are always used to create a certain effect. For instance, how is it that the reader tends to identify with one character and not with another? An analysis of the elements of the discourse reveals how the reader is “manipulated” into forming certain views about the story.

While writing a text, the writer takes these very elements into consideration and asks the very same questions to herself.

Does Writing Help in Reading?

Writers make use of reading in a number of different ways. They develop drafts, re-read them, review notes and compare styles with other authors. Writing techniques are used as pre-reading and post-reading activities in most class rooms. Most academic writing is done in response to reading. Writing as well as reading is a form of thinking. In academic writing,

students have to articulate a clear thesis, and identify, evaluate and use evidence to support or challenge the thesis-sustaining arguments and synthesizing ideas.

When one writes, one conjoins all the experiences that have taken place during reading into a whole, as a process of connecting the dots. This process involves scanning and sieving, selecting and rejecting. Writing therefore actually rewrites all our experiences of reading the word and the world!

Gage (1986) as quoted in (McGinley & Tierney, 1988, p. 7) describes how writing contributes to knowing in his chapter, "Why Write" in the *NSSE Yearbook*:

Writing is thinking made tangible, thinking that can be examined because it is on the page and not in the head invisibly floating around. Writing is thinking that can be stopped and tinkered with. It is a way of holding thought still enough to examine its structure, its flaws. The road to clearer understanding of one's thoughts is travelled on paper. It is through an attempt to find words for ourselves in which to express related ideas that we discover what we think.

Reading and Writing as a Mode of Learning and Critical Thinking

Why do we want children to read and write? Do we want them to acquire decoding skills simply to be able to follow instructions, or do we want them to read and write for knowledge creation and to be able to participate in the democratic processes of the nation, in the economic processes for their well-being as well as to develop and to express their ideas to the world in the process of being and becoming.

The objective of higher level reading and writing processes is to: use the title to indicate contents, predict the intention of the author, understand conventions of different genres and create meaning of vocabulary from the context and recreate the context, question the ideas with reference to the context, have an independent perspective, and to situate the reading in your social context; and more importantly, to critically question the ideas of the writer for knowledge creation.

If we want our students to become critical thinkers, they need to write in conjunction with reading. Critical thinkers must recognize the value of initiating an engagement (with reading and writing) at an appropriate time. They must have an understanding of the unique purpose of reading and writing as well as its power in order to comprehend, critically examine and rewrite the world and the word.

Conclusion

For educators, the term literacy is particularly useful as it brings together the two concepts of reading and writing which, up to the 1980s were treated quite separately in curriculum, pedagogy and research. In fact, one of the major contributions to language education is the merging of reading

and writing. Today, there is a need to understand reading and writing as forms of understanding the word and the world and also as ways of acting upon social reality for change and transformation.

Reading and writing are part of the basic educational process; they are the cornerstone of a child's success in school, and indeed throughout life. Without the ability to read and write critically and with conviction, the opportunity for personal fulfillment and participating in the economic life of the nation and the democratic processes will not be possible.

Finally, what could Ritu and Selva Raj do differently in their classrooms? Teachers like Ritu and Selva need to look at reading and writing in an integrated manner. They could ask children to collect writings on a theme related to the text, from sources such as newspapers, magazines, books, and even pamphlets, brochures or advertisements. These could be read and analysed before turning back to the text in question. Instead of simply accepting the ideas in the text, children could question them, and perhaps even debate on ideas from other sources. Writing down these questions would lead to fresh ideas and approaches. Author visits could be arranged for understanding the relationship between the processes of reading and writing. However, all these changes will reflect in the class room only when the teacher begins to read critically and participates in knowledge creation.

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How Contemporary is Shakespeare?



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Introduction

Is Shakespeare relevant today? Such a question often crosses our minds as we read the plays written by the great playwright. However we know very well that Shakespeare's plays continue to be performed even today not just in English-speaking countries, but in others too in very many languages across the world. There are innumerable situations in Shakespeare's plays that can never change from century to century, from country to country, despite differences in knowledge, cultures, customs and societies. In Shakespeare's works, we experience practically every human emotion and condition. Shakespeare's characters fall in and out of love, betray each other, misunderstand each other, argue, deceive, fight and kill each other; they are at times angry, grieved, ecstatic, envious, untrustworthy, deceptive, magnanimous and forgiving. They possess character traits common to human situations in every age. Even the social issues of Shakespeare's time which feature in his plays—class division, racism, sexuality, intolerance, position of women, crime, war, death and disease—are still some of the burning issues in today's world.

Shakespeare's plays therefore embody human emotions that haven't changed or have changed very little with time. Do we not find a striking similarity between "King Lear" and all those plays and novels written today about sons and daughters trying to get rid of their fathers by putting them into old age homes? Can we not find a depiction of racist intolerance in "The Merchant of Venice" that continues to pain us even today? Human beings actually do not seem to change much with time, nor does their nature. The problems remain the same for every age, but in different forms. Through my paper, I will explore whether Shakespeare can still be considered contemporary.

Brecht on Shakespeare

Shakespeare has become contemporary in our changing times and these times have changed our perception of Shakespeare. Brecht, in "Kleines Organon für das Theatre" (A Short Organum for the Theatre) (1949), wrote thus: "The theatre should always be mindful of the needs of its time....Time! The time to be contemporary, the time to start the dialogue, the understanding, the time of Shakespeare and the time of reading Shakespeare, our time, your time, Shakespeare's time!" Brecht further points out that it is war time and Fortinbras is about to wage war against Poland. It

is for the first time in Shakespeare that Poland is mentioned and we hardly bother to talk about Poland when discussing "Hamlet". However, for Brecht in 1949, Poland deserves special mention connected with the time of Hamlet and his writings on Hamlet. Brecht wrote: "Overcome by the warrior-like example of Fortinbras, Hamlet turns back and with a piece of barbaric butchery, slaughters his uncle, his mother and himself, leaving Denmark to the Norwegians." "Leaving Denmark to the Norwegians"—that was Brecht's interpretation of "Hamlet" after the Second World War—leaving territory open to occupation and to a different king.

Martin Esslin, a theatre critic and author analysed Brecht, pointing out how Brecht did not want the audience to believe that the conditions shown in "Pericles" and "Hamlet" are being repeated today. Brecht in fact wanted to show that Othello does not embody innate male jealousy when he strangles Desdemona, but that he represents the seventeenth-century idea that women are the properties of their husbands.

Shakespeare Presented Today

An example of how Shakespeare transcends the boundaries of time and space, is Ariane Mnouchkine's Japanese production of Shakespeare's plays which include big Japanese dolls and Samurais. Between 1981 and 1984, Mnouchkine translated and directed a series of Shakespeare's plays: "Richard II", "Twelfth Night" and "Henry IV Part 1." Mnouchkine was a French stage director who strongly believed in the collaborative process of theatre. She with her company *Théâtre du Soleil* developed ideas out of improvisational exercises incorporating multiple styles of theatre in their work.

This however is vastly different from Kurosawa's films on Shakespeare. Kurosawa's "Ran", released in 1985, is a retelling of Shakespeare's "King Lear". Kurosawa's version is a violently lustful domestic drama centered on a conflict for power between a father and his sons. Presented through an ominous lens of betrayal, murder and deceit, the film is brilliantly presented; ferociously chaotic but never sacrificing its narrative lucidity. Shakespeare for Kurosawa is terror, the terror in "King Lear"; Lear for Kurosawa is timeless yet contemporary.

I remember reading an article on Shakespeare's play Hamlet being enacted in a festival on a beautiful beach resort in the Mediterranean. In this particular theatre production of

Hamlet, Claudius's court was dressed in modern costumes resembling those of the people on the beach. This was an attempt to find a contemporary connection with the audience so that the substance of the play could be brought home to the audience, as also the point that Shakespeare's plays transcend epochs, cultures or regions.

To claim that Shakespeare is contemporary can at times however be dangerous. A shocking example of this was given by a Shakespearean critic who described the manner in which the Nazis used "The Merchant of Venice" to stir up hatred against the Jews. Shylock was presented as a man isolated from society, and insulted, injured, and loathed by all. Shakespeare also endowed the character of Shylock with a psychological depth that no other character in the play had. In fact, "The Merchant of Venice" has played a very unwelcome role in the sentiments against Jewish people. In the play, the trial has been portrayed as a merciless and shameless parody of justice by a fake lawyer.

From the point of view of homosexuality, Shakespeare may once again be regarded as being contemporary. Hans Meyer, the German literary critic, describes in his writings how in "The Merchant of Venice", Antonio is homo-erotically tied to Bassanio.

Understanding Themes of Femininity and Marriage

Let us now take a look at the Elizabethan marriage customs and Shakespeare's treatment of women that constitute a major barrier to the contemporary understanding of his work. "The Taming of the Shrew" has been presented as a good guide to marriage and delights the male chauvinist. Similarly, there are many dialogues in Shakespeare's plays in which the submission of women in marriage is praised along with qualities such as obedience, gentle voice and a reluctance to protest. In "King Lear", "Her voice was ever soft," Lear says over the dead body of his daughter Cordelia. He continues, "Gentle and low—an excellent thing in woman." However, Cordelia is someone who answers back and so does the character of Beatrice in "Much Ado about Nothing".

The question therefore remains, to what extent can a contemporary woman find herself in Shakespeare's plays? In order to understand this, not only do we need to understand Shakespeare's plays, but we also need to see how the ideas of the play connect with life outside the theatre. Can the women of today relate to Shakespeare's plays and see their lives in the midst of the situations he presents in them? Men seem to be superior to woman in Shakespeare's plays. The female characters are generally portrayed as powerless to influence the outcome of events; they are presented more as types than characters. Shakespeare's heroines are like kaleidoscopes—they are all different from one another and have their own characteristic qualities, skills, flaws and failures. Shakespeare gives his heroines a leading part only when they dress up as men, as in the case of Portia, Viola and Rosalind. He wanted to prove that only when

women dress as men can they behave in a rational and intelligent manner (such as Portia in "The Merchant of Venice"). Shakespeare was probably the first to perceive a characteristic masculine trait in every woman and in this respect he was close to Freud and three hundred years or so ahead of his time. In "Hamlet", Gertrude has to marry another king, Claudius, who is the stronger man. Again Bianca, as soon as she gets the ring on her finger in "The Taming of the Shrew" says to Lucentio, "More fool you for betting on me!" Therefore in Shakespeare's plays, men bet on women and we find a cynical society which, while protecting women actually batters them to pieces. Has the position of women actually improved in our society from Shakespeare's time?

Shakespeare and Modern English

Many words and phrases from Shakespeare's plays and sonnets have become iconic catch phrases, clichés, proverbs, and idioms that we use in contemporary speech today. So, if we hear someone as being "in a pickle", or waiting "with bated breath", or going on "a wild goose chase", we must not forget that we owe all of these to Shakespeare's "The Tempest", "The Merchant of Venice" and "Romeo and Juliet" respectively. Expressions such as "It's Greek to me", "more sinned against than sinning", "a fool's paradise" or "vanished into thin air", all have their origin in Shakespeare. Moreover, when we refer to jealousy as "the green-eyed monster", we are actually quoting Othello's arch villain, Iago. "The be-all and end-all" is uttered by Macbeth as he murderously contemplates King Duncan, and "fair play" falls from Miranda's lips in "The Tempest". With his invention of commonly used expressions and phrases, and his creation of new words, Shakespeare was able to impact the modern English language in a way that no other writer ever has.

Multiple View-Points

There is one very strong point that needs to be stressed upon in our reading of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays provide a multi-focal view point—one can look at the plays as they were written, or one can treat them as a historical pieces or expressions of continuing human emotions. In whichever way Shakespeare is produced, then or now, the plays touch a chord in the hearts of the audience, irrespective of time or age. The audience can always find their own experiences in the context of the work that the great artist has provided to them. All they need to do is to recognize that their experiences are not entirely personal to themselves but are shared by a broad section of humanity through the ages.

Conclusion

Shakespeare may not be our contemporary in the sense of being topical, but he certainly is contemporary to our inner behavioural patterns. Through his writings, he has shown to us how society evolves, how we betray our allies out of fear and weaknesses, how conspiracy (as in "Julius Caesar") takes its course partly through slander and partly through correct

statements. Shakespeare's knowledge and understanding of the world is different from ours. His world view is related to a moral order which comes through his plays. If we consider his moral order to be essentially different from our own, we might be limiting the meaning of his plays by only looking for topical connections. Conversely, if we want to actualize Shakespeare as if he is living now, we would lose the historical perspective contained in his plays. If our approach is too historical, we would end up with a very rhetorical Shakespearean theatre based on beautiful, ornamental words. The best option is therefore to find a style and maintain a fair balance between the original "historic" Shakespeare and our interpretation of what we call "contemporary" Shakespeare. We must not forget that Shakespeare's plays continue to entertain people, sometimes as authentic historical performances, at other times as modern interpretations on stage, or in countless films and TV adaptations all over the world.

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Learning beyond the Confines of a Classroom: Communicative Language Teaching, New Media and English



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Introduction

The technological advancements and media tools for communication that have come up post web 2.0 have turned out to be a social phenomenon that have impacted every walk of our life. The language classroom is very much located in this new media space. This virtual transformation of physical space provides a more democratic, flexible, and natural setting for language use. This paper will attempt to demonstrate that new media tools can provide learners with a real socio-cultural learning environment, where they actually negotiate meaning in a real life context. The fundamental premise of Communicative Language Teaching method (CLT) can be captured in an integrated new media technology-enabled learning environment when teaching English as second language. CLT essentially assumes the learner's engagement with language for a variety of purposes in all phases of learning. The essence of this assumption can be captured in the virtual space of new media technologies, which provides a more democratic, flexible, and natural setting for language use. In this paper, new media is understood as a collective term which refers

to the technological advancement and media tools for communication post web 2.0, such as internet, YouTube, Skype, Twitter, Blog, Facebook, mobile phones, etc. The advancements in digital media technologies have turned out to be a social phenomenon, making geographical boundaries porous and blurred. This is reflected in the linguistic boundaries as well. Traditional media and new media are together defusing linguistic boundaries between standard and vernacular varieties of language. Digital audio-video exchanges and their abundant online availability for mass consumption are responsible for fuelling this phenomenon. In an ambitious remark, Crystal (2003) describes a possibility of:

...a world in which intelligibility and identity happily coexist. This situation is the familiar one of bilingualism—but a bilingualism where one of the languages within a speaker is the global language, providing access to the world community, and the other is the regional language, providing access to the local community. (p. 22)

This statement essentially assumes English to be the global

language and any language other than English as a regional language. This may be a hypothetical situation, however it has a basis in the fact that even with a very conservative assessment, we cannot deny the fact that English has turned out to be the language of this digital technology revolution that is facilitating outreach to the masses and creating a new social order in which people interact with each other within this hyper electronic network.

This technology-driven social change in the backdrop of the exponential growth in communication technology is very comprehensively documented by Manuel Castells (1997), in his three monumental volumes known as *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*. He defines the network society as:

...a society whose social structure is made of networks, powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technology. By social structure, I understand the organizational arrangements of humans in relations of production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power expressed in meaningful communication coded by culture. (p. 3)

These arguments lead us to draw two inferences very clearly. The first is that new media technologies have acquired a pervasive effect, and the second is that English has gained even more importance as the means to take this medium to the masses. The virtuality of the network society is a new reality and the language teaching classrooms are located well within it. Therefore, any change within the environment will be reflected in its engagement with language in the classroom. The following section briefly describes the basic assumptions of the CLT method when identifying the role of new media technologies in delivering effective learning outcomes.

Principles of Communicative Language Teaching Method

Language teaching methods have changed considerably from Grammar Translation method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, Total Physical Response and The Natural Approach. Today, CLT is a widely accepted method for teaching a language.

The term “communicative competence”, which is the central theme in the CLT method, was introduced in second language learning in the early 1970s (Habermas, 1970; Hymes, 1971, 1972; Jakobovits, 1970; Savignon, 1971). Hymes’ (1972) notion of competence was a response to Chomsky’s idea of linguistic competence. Both Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1972) used the notion of competence, but their theoretical positions were distinct. Chomsky’s notion of linguistic competence refers to the tacit knowledge of language (that subsumes formal linguistic subsystems such as phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic). Hymes’ position extends beyond the tacit knowledge of language to include sociolinguistic competence and the actual knowledge and abilities of the language user that

govern successful communication. According to Savignon (2002), “Competence is defined in terms of the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning and looks to both psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives in second language acquisition (SLA)” (p. 1). Berns (1990) provides a useful summary of eight principles of CLT (as quoted in Savignon, 2002), which assumes certain fundamental notions. These include: the learner’s communication need is central; the pedagogy is flexible and accommodates socio-cultural factors; and above all the pedagogy requires learners to be engaged with language in a variety of ways during all phases of learning. The following section describes the role of new media technologies in capturing these fundamental principles of CLT method during the teaching-learning process of English as a second language.

English Language Teaching in New Media Enabled Learning Environment

In the preface to his work, *Language and the Internet*, David Crystal (2004) notes:

An emphasis, which formerly was on technology, has shifted to be on people and purposes. And as the Internet comes increasingly to be viewed from a social perspective, so the role of language becomes central. Indeed, notwithstanding the remarkable technological achievements and the visual panache of screen presentation, what is immediately obvious when engaging in any of the Internet’s functions is its linguistic character. If the Internet is a revolution, therefore, it is likely to be a linguistic revolution. (p. viii)

The process of digitization has facilitated the masses to have access to worldwide network in a truly emancipated networked society. The members of this network society are connected to this network of information through internet and mobile technology. During the last two decades, there have been a number of studies centred on the use of technology, specifically on the use of computer and digital technology in second language learning. There are apprehensions and reservations regarding the overwhelming use and impact of technology on the learning outcome of the learners. Bax (2003), proposes to achieve a state of technology normalization, in which:

CALL (computer aided language learning) finally becomes invisible, serving the needs of learners and integrated into every teacher’s everyday practice....It will require change in attitudes, in approach and practice amongst teachers and learners; it will require fuller integration into administrative procedures and syllabuses. (p. 27)

From the beginning of the year 2000, the focus of studies shifted from CALL to the web 2.0 based internet and related media tools available in cyberspace. These include studies conducted by Campbell (2003), Bax (2000, 2003), Eastman (2005), Godwin (2003) and Johnson (2004), etc. Campbell (2003) elaborated on the impact on productivity of using Weblogs for exchanging views and ideas in ESL

classes, and promoting collaborative tasks in language use for ESL learners. Jackson et al. (2006), brought out some interesting findings such as “the students who used the internet more, got higher scores and grades.” Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006), demonstrated that discussion forums on the internet substantially enhance a learner’s argumentative skills. Hismanoglu (2011) observed that the “potential of ICT in ELT has been recognized and technology and materials are available, but what is missing is the efficient integration of them into the currently used course books and the ongoing teacher training”. There were a number of studies with almost similar interpretation, which unanimously acknowledge the potential of information and communication technology in SLA and English language teaching. Ahmad (2012) statistically explored EFL learners’ response towards new media technology in general and its impact in improving accentual patterns of individual English words in particular. Therefore, there is a sizeable body of literature recommending effective use of media tools in ELT.

Berns’ summarization of the eight principles of CLT essentially keeps the learner at the centre of the entire process of teaching and learning. The teacher is required to simply be a facilitator in creating opportunities to use language for a variety of purposes. The new media tools create a free and non-threatening environment for learning. The availability of new online media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogger, YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest, etc., to name a few, are virtual realities of our life through which we socialize and express ourselves. These can be used and capitalized upon in the context of English language teaching to create a natural habitat for language use, extending beyond the confines of a physical classroom. These media platforms can be used in a variety of ways such as group chats, blog postings, group discussion forums, posting opinions and comment trails on an issue, video sharing and registering responses on discussion forums, etc. These readily available internet tools can be instrumental for learners in receiving and spreading information, expressing their feelings and emotions, and sharing ideas and experiences in the target language. The learners’ connectivity with the network and the ease with which these platforms can be used make it very convenient and feasible. Face-to-face communication is hence replaced by an asynchronous computer-mediated communication, which prompts learners to experiment with ideational and textual functions in constructing meaning. Proximity between learners becomes redundant and they are no longer required to be present physically in a class for getting opportunities to use a language. The new media platforms create these opportunities to use and practice English in their independent time and space and give learners the freedom to engage and experiment with the language. Interestingly, learners are not at all out of reach, and the teacher, being a member of the network, has accessibility to the format and content of language use by the learners.

The teacher can facilitate collaborative learning by creating smaller groups for group chats; initiating a class blog for posting comments; starting an online discussion forum to make everyone participate in the discussion, voicing their opinions on issues, and reflecting on ideas; and initiating an online platform for sharing audio and video depending on the local assessment of the creative needs of the learners. The virtual character of these media tools and platforms provide the learners with a non-threatening, democratic, flexible and open environment for using language beyond the physical space in a variety of ways such as sharing information, posting comments, giving an opinion, responding to prompts, expressing feelings, narrating experiences, etc. It also empowers teachers to help the learners in achieving their learning goals without any constraints on time and space. The teacher does not need to struggle to keep track of the developmental phases of learning of the individuals as the data texts (stored and saved in the archives of the digital platform) are always available on the network at his or her disposal.

Conclusion

Finally, we can conclude that the integration of new media technologies in English language teaching and learning process has visible effective outcomes. The basic idea of keeping the learner and learner-centric needs at the centre of pedagogy, which is fundamentally required in CLT, can be captured easily in the new media enabled virtual learning environment. This is complementary to the physical classroom, and in no way proposes to replace the physical classroom. The idea is to extend and integrate these two spaces (virtual and physical). This integration requires the language teacher to be well-versed in new technology and have an uninterrupted link with this network.

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Designing a Language Textbook: The Theory and Practice



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Introduction

Designing a language textbook is a multi-dimensional task that requires a nuanced understanding of the objectives of the language curriculum, a sound knowledge of the theories of language learning and their pedagogical implications, an understanding of the requirement of the examination boards and the language policies of the Government. In order to make a language textbook result-oriented, the author has to understand and appreciate the correlation between the theory and practice of curricular material development in language. A language textbook is not merely a collection of texts drawn from different genres; it reflects a particular

pedagogic point of view arrived at by the textbook designers after taking into account the broad educational objectives that inform the curriculum followed in a particular context. In this paper, therefore, I will discuss the theory and practice of designing a language textbook in English in general and critically analyse the process of designing an English textbook for class IX in particular. I will record the theoretical considerations that prompt textbook designers to form a specific perspective of English language teaching. I will also highlight the pedagogical principles that inform the choice of the material in consonance with the theories and practice of teaching English as a second language in a

multilingual non-native context in which the learners have little exposure to real English outside the English classroom.

Discourses on Textbooks

The notion of a textbook evokes mixed reactions among its stakeholders. The role of a textbook and the politics of textbooks are debatable topics across the globe. Koutselini (2012) observes that textbooks play a protagonist's role in the classroom, downgrade students' autonomous learning and annihilate teachers' political sensitivities. *The Position Paper on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks* prepared and published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training points out how "teaching the textbook" becomes the whole of education in India. Lamenting the misuse of textbooks in the Indian classrooms, the said position paper observes,

The present day classroom practices are, in almost all schools of the country, totally dominated by textbooks. All premises of flexibility of the curriculum and syllabus and freedom of the teacher are completely forgotten by the time an educational plan reaches the classroom. The teacher is seen as either incompetent or unwilling or both, the school is seen as devoid of all learning material, and the environment is seen as of no use in the child's learning. (NCERT, 2006, p. 37)

Is the textbook therefore the best medium for delivering language learning materials? How much language learning materials does a textbook need? Who are the most suitable persons for writing a language textbook? Does a hidden agenda vitiate the content of a language textbook? The hostile discourse on language textbooks which started in the eighties of the last century prompts us to believe that textbooks for language teaching are more sinned against than sinning. Despite the views of experts who criticize the use of textbooks for teaching language, language teachers across the globe continue to use them (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 158) and private publishers as well as the ministries of education of various countries continue to propagate the use of learner-centred and teacher-friendly language textbooks. According to Tomlinson (2003), "Textbooks for teaching languages are nothing but language teaching materials which can be instructional, experiential, elicitive or exploratory" (p. 2).

The Background

The involvement of Indian States in the production of school textbooks goes back to 1969. In its first meeting held on 5 April 1969, the National Board of School Textbooks established under the Chairmanship of the Union Minister of Education recommended that school textbooks up to class X should be produced under the control and supervision of the State Governments. Consequently, State Textbook Corporations were set up in almost all the States of the country and they started publishing textbooks prepared by their respective State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs). In order to improve the quality

of textbooks and to make them responsive to the changed educational perspectives and pedagogic practices, the SCERTs of the country undertake periodic exercises to revise their textbooks and it is against the backdrop of this ongoing academic practice, that SCERT, Chhattisgarh initiated the process of preparing new textbooks for class IX in 2014. The decision to design a new textbook in English for class IX was based on the feedback received from the students and the teachers of Chhattisgarh, who expected a comprehensive change in the approach of the English textbooks used at the high school level. Consequently, a team was constituted by SCERT, Chhattisgarh either to revise the existing textbook or to design a new one.

In order to revise the English textbook for class IX, SCERT, Chhattisgarh formed a group of textbook writers who had a rich experience of writing English textbooks for the State of Chhattisgarh. Besides these distinguished members drawn from the field of ELT and teacher education of the State, special assistance groups from Azim Premji Foundation, Bangalore and Vidya Bhawan Society, Udaipur were also involved in conceptualizing, designing and creating materials for the textbook. On a request from the SCERT, Chhattisgarh, two Delhi based linguists and ELT specialists extended their guidance and academic support to the writers' group, right from the initiation of the project till its successful completion.

The Preparatory Stage

The exercise started with a brainstorming workshop in the month of September 2014. It was decided in the workshop that the proposed English textbook would encompass a range of genres and themes suitable for the target group and the activities presented in the textbook would be designed in such a way that they triggered the learners' interest in using English for communicative purposes. It was also decided that the textbook would be context specific in terms of language and culture and the materials used in the textbook would be drawn from authentic sources. The question of the criteria to be used for the selection of authentic materials was debated upon by the members from the diverse perspectives of language, language pedagogy and the objectives of education in the Indian context. It is pertinent to mention that the National Council of Educational Research and Training has specific recommendations regarding the content to be used in language textbooks and one of the recommendations states that the "selection of content in language books must be such as to inculcate desirable attitudes and values and a general appreciation of the life and culture of the people concerned" (NCERT, 1975, p. 24). The task of designing activities suitable for the learners of the regional medium schools of Chhattisgarh was therefore a bone of contention. How could the activities be designed to be suitable linguistically, cognitively and pedagogically? How could the learners be involved with different types of activities, experiential as well as developmental? After a detailed discussion, it was decided that the activities "should

match with learner needs and wants and with principles of language learning, and that they should be developed in ways which provide flexibility of use to learners and teachers as well as coherence of connection (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 126).

An Analysis of the old Textbook

Prior to the actual production of the textbook, an analysis of the existing English textbook for class IX was undertaken by the members of the group. It became evident that the themes covered in the existing textbook fell under six groups: (1) family, (2) lives of great men, (3) life and society, (4) inspiration, (5) love and (6) patriotism. These were restricted to four genres: (1) biography, (2) descriptive, (3) narrative and (4) poetry. The language of the materials presented in the textbook was not too difficult and was appropriate for the target group. But, the activities presented in the textbook were not at all activity-based; they followed a structural approach and were not suitable for integrating all the skills of language learning. The tasks given at the end of each lesson were not application-oriented; they were mechanical without any objective. It was surprising to note that though all the textual materials were child centric, the activities did not give the child any scope to use a language creatively. It was clear from the analysis that the existing textbook was a mixture of disparate materials collected and compiled without adhering to the principles of material production. Moreover, the activities presented in the book followed a structural approach which encouraged rote learning. The pedagogic orientation of the textbook was elusive and it was rather an apology for a language textbook!

Salient Features of the New English Textbook

The new English textbook follows a communicative functional approach which aims at enabling a learner to acquire a communicative as well as a functional competence in the target language. The selection of the materials and the presentation of the activities in the new textbook were based on the principles of the functional communicative approach which regards language as a tool, a means for communication and language functions in particular social contexts.

The book consists of eight themes: environment, sports, health, adolescence, travel and tourism, culture, inspiration and science and technology. Each theme, in turn comprises three sections—a literary text as Reading A, a poem as Reading B and a non-literary text as Reading C. The selected materials are exploited by exploring meaning in context, comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, writings, study skills and projects. Listening and writing activities are not presented as discrete activities, but are presented to reinforce comprehension. The integration of skills is a distinctive feature of all the units and the learners get adequate exposure to the creative use of the target language. The eight themes cover the following genres: story, poem, biography, article, reminiscence, brochure,

conversation, telephonic interview, science fiction and speech.

An analysis of the materials presented in the new textbook indicates that the principles of material design identified by David Nunan (1988, pp. 1-14) were very meticulously followed by the authors of the textbook. These criteria are: (a) the materials should promote the objectives of the curriculum prescribed by the authority, (b) authenticity of the materials should be ensured, (c) the materials should stimulate interaction, (d) the materials should prompt the learners to pay attention to the formal aspects of language, (e) the materials should encourage learners to develop learning skills, and (f) the materials should encourage learners to apply their developing skills to the world beyond the classroom. Thus, the new English textbook is undoubtedly “a set of materials for the efficient and effective teaching and learning of a known student body by a known teaching body at a given level to a prescribed standard” (Lyons, 2003, p. 500).

Conclusion

The designing of an English language textbook for Chhattisgarh was a laudable attempt to provide the learners with an opportunity to understand and use English with ease by exposing them to interesting and challenging authentic materials drawn from different genres. Now the responsibility of exploring the textbook for pedagogic purposes rests with the English teachers of Chhattisgarh. Are the English teachers ready for this challenging task?

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In Conversation with Professor Harish Trivedi

Reflections on English in India

Professor Harish Trivedi, formerly Professor and Head of the Department of English, University of Delhi, is an eminent international scholar of post-colonialism and translation studies. He has authored *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (1993/1995), co-edited *The Nation across the World: Postcolonial Literary Representations* (2007, 2008), *Literature and Nation: Britain and India 1800-1990* (2000), *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (1999), and *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* (1996; rpt. 2000, 2006), etc. He has also translated Premchand's biography by Amrit Rai (*Premchand: His Life and Times*, 1982, rpt. 1991) and has authored many essays and articles which have appeared in various books and journals.

Here, he is in conversation with Mona Sinha and Tasneem Shahnaaz.

MS and TS: Welcome to *Fortell*, Sir. We are honoured to have you sharing your thoughts with us for the journal. You have had a long association with the Department of English, University of Delhi as Professor and Head and you are known for your strong views on the teaching of English and native languages in India. It was during your tenure as Head that a revolutionary syllabus, incorporating large doses of Indian literatures in translation, was introduced for undergraduate students of English literature. To begin with, we would like our readers to know your views on the current status of English in India and how it is taught in our classrooms.

HT: I'm very pleased to be speaking to *Fortell*, of whose existence I've known for a very long time, although I've not been its regular reader. I'm very pleased that we are talking about these issues in a forum which is very well known in the field and which circulates as widely as it does.

About the status of English and as to how it is taught in the classroom, yes, you are right, I've thought about it for a very long time. I feel concerned about it and sometimes I'm even anguished about it. If I were asked to name half a dozen major problems in this country, or even maybe just two or three, I would say this is one of them. English is not just a language in India; it is a dream that we sell to any number of people in this country. If you learn English, you will get all this, if you don't you will not get any of this. The haves and have-nots will be divided strictly on the basis of whether they know English or not—or this is what we project so as to bluff the people.

TS: Why do you call it a dream or a bluff?

HT: After so many years of teaching English in India, how many people actually know the kind of English that will take them places? Very, very few. Everybody who goes to school begins to learn English in India.

but 80-90 per cent of the people fall by the wayside, unless they have advantages already of the social and economic kind.

There are two or three kinds of English that people acquire in India. One is this top class English that gets you places, that gets you jobs, that makes you succeed in interviews and so on. The second kind of English is fairly correct, competent English but without the accent, without the social bearing to go with it. And that doesn't get you to the top of the tree. And then there is another kind of English which you've learnt for 10-12 years in a Hindi-medium school but you are still perhaps as incompetent in it as when you started. You might have even got degrees in it. And as I said, this proportion is 80-90 per cent of English learners. There are differing statistics about how many people in India know English. Of course, the first thing to do is to define what "know" is. I would say that figure is not above 5 per cent in any meaningful sense.

But what I'm anguished about is the fact that so many poor people all over India, who can barely earn subsistence level wages, make great sacrifices to send their children to English-medium schools chasing this impossible dream!

There are two kinds of successes even now possible in India. There are lots of people who did not know much English but have acquired a little along the way as they succeeded. This is the kind represented, for example, by Dhirubhai

Ambani. He hardly knew any English when he started, and then his children went to top management schools in the US. The other kind of success is not only Modi; remember also Kamraj, Deve Gowda, Chandra Shekhar, who became top political leaders. The best thing I have heard on this is: *Paanch saal raaj karte hain angrezi mein, aur phir aake vote maangte hain Hindi mein!* (They rule over us for five years in



English, and then they come and plead for votes in Hindi!) Hindi here means all our regional languages. So there's a huge paradox at the heart of our democratic nation.

From time to time, there are slogans raised, if not movements launched, to remove English from India. I've been watching it with active interest for the last 50 years. It came to a head when the Queen of England visited India in 1961. Some of our top socialists and other anti-Congress leaders launched this campaign for removing English from India as a token of assertion and affirmation that we are no longer ruled by the British. One of them was Ram Manohar Lohia who was very attractive to me as a political leader, and quite as charismatic for the young as Nehru.

Here I'd like to mention a couple of short stories in Hindi which bring up the issue of Hindi and English, with English shown as being connected with slavery and snobbery, with people pretending to know English when they don't because otherwise they would be thought to be scum. I sought out two such stories and translated them for an anthology published in London. One of them is titled "George Pancham ki Naak" (The Nose of King George V) by Kamleshwar which is as strong a political satire as any. The other one is by Sharad Joshi, called, "Virginia Woolf se Sab Darte Hain"—(Who's Not Afraid of Virginia Woolf?).

So, this is the social situation outside the classroom; a dream of economic and social advancement, as if language alone could do it. I keep arguing against it, but I am also one of the beneficiaries, so I'm a bit compromised!

Let me offer another related argument here. The world's twenty biggest economies are grouped as G-20. Of these, only four or five are English-speaking, because English is their first language. All the other countries have got rich in their own language, from China to France, from Japan to Germany. Only we believe that only English will get us there, and this has set India back. So there is a serious national problem here.

MS: Can you really wish English away? How do you suggest we get over this hegemonic hold of English over our society?

HT: You're right, and we've perhaps missed the historical opportunities we've had. In 1950, it was said we'll continue with English only for 15 years. We also said that the SC/SC quota system would be in force for just 15 years. That's how we began. People forget that the quota was not given in perpetuity. It has now become a vested interest in the same way as English has.

Also, we could have had a national language. That would have given us the same situation as Germany and Japan, the same way to grow. But as 1965 approached, the anti-Hindi campaign began in Tamil Nadu and some other states too. They did not want Hindi to be imposed in 1965 and said they wanted more time. Nehru was very concerned about this and assured them that nothing would be imposed upon them against their wishes.

In 2003, I wrote an article in which I said that in our part of the world we can apparently have either a national language or a nation; we can't have both. I mean, just look at Bangladesh, breaking away from Pakistan and the Sinhala-Tamil civil war in Sri Lanka. And I'm very pleased that in India we still have a nation.

So it's a very difficult situation and there is no easy remedy for this. What can be done is to try and see whether English is equally necessary for everyone in the same proportion. There never will be corporate boardroom jobs, English-speaking jobs, for everybody in the country. Lots of people will have to earn their livelihood in other ways, in their own languages. Why do they need to learn English and have it thrust down their throats in the same way as others? I am not saying that we should segregate them from the beginning. There should always be opportunities and also the option to switch streams and move forward. Together with English, Hindi has also spread because it has become the language of migration of lower class labour within the country, of economic mobility and advancement at another level.

MS: It is now also the language of the mass media.

HT: When the 24-hour news channels started, *Aaj Tak* had the highest revenue. Earlier everybody looked down upon Hindi. Now they recognize that Hindi is a force in itself. It's capitalism at work; profits driven by a large consumer base!

MS: Yes, the top TRP garnering TV channels in the country are in Hindi. English is nowhere close!

HT: And another interesting fact: *The Times of India* calls itself the highest selling English daily in the world. They may be right. But they never tell you that they are *not* the largest selling newspaper in India. The ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation) tells you that of the ten largest selling newspapers in India, seven are in Hindi—*Dainik Bhaskar*, *Dainik Jagran*, *Panjab Kesri*, *Amar Ujala* and so on. The basic point here is that there is a hidden strength of the local languages which those of us who operate in English never see.

You asked if there is a way around this. I think it's a bit too late, especially after globalization. But what can be done by us who operate in English is to recognize that there is another India out there. Only when we accord other languages space and dignity will we move towards true democratization of languages and peoples in India. In Malayalam or Kannada, Tamil or Bangla, the sense of pride in one's own language is so much greater and each one of these languages is spoken by 7 per cent or 8 per cent of the population or even less. Hindi is spoken by more than 40 per cent as their first language. And if you add up the number of people who understand Hindi in some form or the other, it brings the figure up to about 70 per cent. That's very large. You can't get by beyond the big cities by just speaking English; you need to know some kind of functional Hindi or other local language.

So let's recognize this situation and let us allocate resources

proportionately in the areas of education and development.

MS: I wanted to ask you about this other view that English is an Indian language. Very recently, Uday Prakash said this very categorically in an interview to *The Times of India*. Would you agree with this?

HT: For a very long time I did not think so, but now I am changing my mind. Because of Chetan Bhagat and Amish Tripathi! Just look at their sales figures running into millions. If English was not an Indian language, would they have been selling so many copies? Of the 22 Indian languages recognized by the Constitution and the 24 by the Sahitya Akademi, English is no longer at the lowest spot in circulation. A new class of readers has emerged. Earlier English was a badge of elitism. It is now democratic in the sense that large numbers are buying these books. In which other language does any book sell so many copies? This also means that English has a foothold on the ground in India which we need to recognize, especially among our affluent middle class.

We need not debate whether English is an Indian language in some deep cultural or esoteric sense. I am simply going by the market for novels, and that is a new phenomenon. R. K. Narayan never had it; Raja Rao, Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy didn't have it. Despite their winning the Booker or other such awards, their sales in India were invisible compared with these sales.

I wrote an article on that recently, published in *Muse India*, in which I say that if English becomes an Indian language, it will be by stooping low to conquer, by losing its elitism. It has become so vulgar; look, for example, at the use of a certain kind of demotic English by the characters in both Bhagat and Amish, who use four-letter words freely. "Vulgar" also means "common" in the old etymological sense. And in that sense we have to acknowledge that English has become an Indian language.

MS: What do you think of the teaching of English language in our classrooms at the college level?

HT: I commend *Fortell* for its focus on the teaching



of English language. There was a golden moment in Englishlanguage teaching in India which got nipped in the bud. This was the CIEFL-effect in the 1970s-80s, when even our brightest teachers wanted to train in ELT. But now, while English teachers in our colleges still teach a huge component of English language, they only acknowledge the literature books they teach. We are living a lie by teaching literature when the demand is for language.

So, right, English is an Indian language, and let's teach it but let's not mix it up with high canonical English literature. It is true that literature and philosophy are the repositories of the highest form of expression in any language. But not everybody needs that. We need crash courses in scientific and systematic language teaching. And I am quite clear in my mind that language need not be taught through literature and hoary literary classics.

I believe in functional English, I believe in ELT, I believe in gradedvocabulary texts; that is the way forward. Also, let's accept that our English is Indian English. Let's accept that most people in the West will not readily understand us when we go there.

TS: When you say Indian English, what exactly do you have in mind?

HT: It is what is common between those Indians who are reasonably well educated and reasonably competent in English without any pretensions to being international. The trouble with Indian English is that then it stops being an international language. You can have it only one way, not both ways. It can be either Indian or global.

TS: That's okay...

HT: But some people say they want to learn English to go abroad, to go to America. That's another ball game. Look at our call centers. Everybody there, all of whom were smart English-medium boys and girls, had to be re-trained intensively in their accent and vocabulary for the first three weeks before the Americans could understand them. Let's not be too proud of our English. Indian English is what most educated Indians use and understand, and just that.

TS: But that English has also come to us through the British who ruled over us.

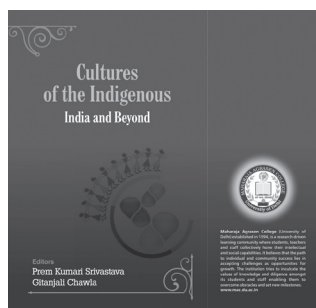
HT: Right, it is an evolution of what came to us long back, its transformation taking place over 150-200 years of local conditions. Try reading West Indian English, for example Braithwaite's poems, or the dialogues in Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* or in the novels by Achebe or Ngugi. You may feel it is "wrong" English and comical. In so many ways our English seems similarly "wrong" and funny to the British or the Americans who use it as their first language. If English is an Indian language, what shall we tell them is their language? And if we operate in a second language, can we escape being second-rate in all kinds of ways?

TS: Thank you so much for your time, Sir. This has been a most enlightening and meaningful session.

Cultures of the indigenous: India and beyond

Srivastava, Prem Kumari & Chawla, Gitanjali (Eds.) (2014). *Cultures of the indigenous: India and beyond*. New Delhi: Authors Press. (257 pages)

ISBN 978-81-7273-923-2 (Hard Cover)



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The greatest challenge of projects such as *Cultures of the Indigenous: India and Beyond* is to disentangle the submerged indigenous from the dominant non-indigenous, and the local from the “glocal”, without losing sight of the particularities of the cultural/spatial registers in question. Such particularities are consequent upon the diverse ways in which cultural artefacts interact with market, milieu and politics. The fourteen essays included in this volume edited by Prem Kumari Srivastava and Gitanjali Chawla succinctly represent the possibilities and challenges of such ventures. These essays explore the binary between, on the one hand, presumably pristine folk cultures, and, on the other hand, non-indigenous dominant cultures which get hybridized on account of their anxiety to absorb the indigenous. Samuel Dani’s essay on Dombaja—the folk music of the Doms from Western Odisha—illustrates how the upper caste residents of Bhalapada appropriate the untouchable quarters of Dompada by extending a ritualized patronage to Dombaja. Entitled “Dombaja: De-territorializing Dalit folk music in multiple contexts”, the essay suggests that Dombaja’s capacity to be the inspired tune of protest against the stifling caste discriminations gets neutralized as the folk performance unfolds within the superstructure of feudalism and the logic of the caste-ridden society. Sutapa Dutta’s essay from this collection explores the ways in which commerce of the exotic in the globalized world has turned the divine madness of the Baul performer and his stoic dispassion from the

world into a profitable commodity.

The task cut out for the contributors to this volume, therefore, is to suggest strategies of recuperation and attempt a few rescues and coups too, in the process. Equally important for them is to be cognizant of the fact that a narrative of recovery is not universally a narrative of rebellion against the oppressive hegemon. In certain cases, the story is one of cross-pollination. The American anthropologist Robert Redfield in *Peasant Society and Culture* (1956) proposes a continuum between the folk and the secular, rather than an essential schism between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. Nearly a fourth of the essays included in this volume explore, in different cultural contexts, the possibilities of this continuum and problematize the exclusivity of the indigenous from the modern. Anjali Gera Roy’s essay on the modern “mutations” of Bhangra explains the way in which this art form has benefitted from “techno-determinism.” Most importantly, technology-aided performance and reproduction through the internet has accorded a degree of visibility to the indigenous which it was hitherto deprived of. Nina Sabnani’s essay discusses the ways in which it has now become possible to represent non-verbal texts and ethnographies using animations.

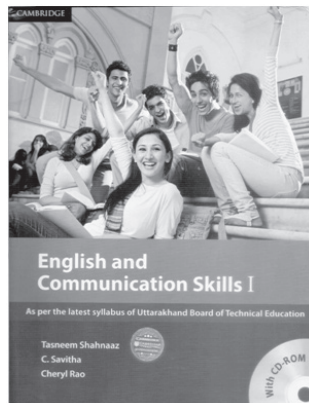
This neo avant-garde enterprise, as Shrivastava and Chawla argue in the introduction to the volume, demands that conventional rules for engagement with the subaltern should be expanded. For Jawaharlal Handoo, as he points out in his conceptual essay on the marginalization of folklore, this amounts to inclusion of those elements of the indigenous which are elided in traditional ethnographies—the magical and the unreal. This volume is significant in that it not only opens up several theoretical and methodological interventions in the studies of the indigenous, but it also demonstrates ways in which alternative historiographies could deploy these mediations. A good illustration of the latter is Ruchi Kumar’s essay entitled “The Bhils of Rajasthan: Knowing the Intangible through the Tangible.” Ramesha Jayaneththi makes a similar attempt at constructing an alternative historiography of the *Rodiyas* of Sri Lanka.

Must we construe realist narratives out of the supernatural/legendary accounts, is a question that needs to be asked. In the 1962 classic Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, James Stewart plays a senator whose exploits, although falsely attributed to him, gave hope to the residents of a small town in the Wild West. Years later, when he confesses the truth of his legendary feat to a journalist, the journalist refuses to publish it saying “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” Ronald Trickland’s essay in the volume speculates on the paradoxical results which such experiments can precipitate. Such reflexivity, in addition to methodological and theoretical questions raised in this volume, makes it an important read for students and scholars of folklore studies.

English and communication skills I

Shahnaaz, Tasneem, Savitha, C. & Rao, Cheryl (2015). *English and communication skills I*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

ISBN 978-1-316-50786-5
(Paperback)



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English and Communication Skills I has been commissioned to serve the needs and requirements of the Uttarakhand Technical Education Department. However, it can serve the needs of any young adult looking to improve their English language proficiency and employability in the current global scenario.

Today, most stakeholders are keenly aware of the importance of enhancing interpersonal communication, English language proficiency and workplace related world knowledge. However, they do not find an easy-to-buy and well brought out course book/study material that will help them work on these inter-related skill areas. In my view, the present volume under review fits the bill exactly on several counts. Firstly, it lends itself to both classroom use and self-study mode by motivated adults. The format, the unit break up and the simplicity and directness of the language used in the book make it accessible to the average Indian adult learner. The “Communication Skills” section is replete with activities

for the students to engage with in the classroom. The last section on “Developing Oral Communication Skills” has many examples to listen to and read through. Along with role play activities on how to greet others, introduce oneself and others, take leave from others, thank others, etc., this section gives learners adequate practice material.

Very importantly, almost the entire content of the book is provided both in Hindi and in English. I think this is a feature that ought to be highlighted because lower level learners are often intimidated by a text which is entirely in English. Also, students who study in a regional language medium, often lack the reading acumen, skill and vocabulary necessary to efficiently understand the concepts or protocols of usage that have to be applied in performing the tasks set in the units. Having the content in both the languages allows easy access and possibly provides the necessary practice to the learners to move from one language to the other, at their own pace and will. For example, a learner who wants to practice, exercise and/or test her/his reading skills and strategies, may begin with the English text and then move on to the Hindi version to find out how accurate her/his comprehension has been. Further, recent pedagogical research in ELT shows that bilingual support ensures greater learner comfort. It is a pity that this has not been suggested in the “Introduction” of the volume that acts like a “Note to the Teacher/Student” or “How to use the book” page.

While we are on the topic of reading comprehension, I must congratulate the authors for tapping fourteen interesting expository pieces of topical interest and interest-sustaining lengths. Topics such as the Dubbawallas of Mumbai, Numaish—an annual consumer exhibition started by a batch of Osmania University students, which include pie charts and bar graphs on time spent on mobile phones and music preferences go down very well with both teachers and young students.

The “Facets of Literature” section, however, has dated texts, possibly because of university requirements and pragmatic issues such as saving copyright costs! However, it has copious bi-lingual glossaries which help the reader in comprehending these texts.

Finally, the cherry on the cake is the accompanying CD that supports the listening and speaking exercises given in the units. The audio scripts have been thoughtfully provided at the end of the book, should there be an absence of audio equipment. The use of appropriate graphics and pie charts, graphs or diagrams enlivens the text and captures the reader’s attention as well.

The Book of English: Listening and Speaking

Chakravarty, Falguni. (2014). *The book of English: Listening and speaking, (Book 9 & Book 10)*. Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India Pvt. Ltd.

ISBN 935059511-7

935059512-5 (Paperback)



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This set of two books—*The Book of English: Listening and Speaking, 9 & 10*—complete with audio CDs is purported to support the prescribed curriculum for Listening and Speaking in CBSE schools. Each book comprises 12 units—“Self”, “School”, “Neighbours”, “Entertainment”, “Sports”, “Health and Fitness”, “Environment”, “Tourism”, “Disasters”, “Socio-economic Issues”, “Science and Technology”, and “Culture”. These units are either related to the themes in the prescribed main course book or the topic areas recommended by CBSE for listening and speaking tasks for secondary school students. Each unit has three sections—“Listen and Figure out”, “Speak and Express” and “Pronunciation”. At the end of each unit, rubrics for self-assessment and peer assessment have been included.

Two tasks in the listening section aim at developing the sub-skills of listening—listening to identify or infer specific information, understand the main points and understand the gist of conversations, news reports, talks and interviews. The content in these sections caters to the needs of the students as it includes topics such as body image, stress related to examinations, exercising, behaviour of teenagers, etc. An exercise on the learners’ awareness of their listening behaviour is included in Book 10. More of such exercises would have served the dual purpose of practicing listening and indirectly providing learner training. Varied types of exercises such as fill in the blanks, answer the questions, respond to personal questions and react to the views of the speaker, etc., expose the students to the different purposes for which one listens, even though more variety in line with the recommendations of the CBSE board could have

been accommodated in the space available. Taking notes or summarizing points without any guidelines could be challenging for the students at this level.

These books provide tasks to practice speaking fluently as well as for pronunciation practice. Each unit includes two speaking tasks—one completely controlled or guided and the second, a free fluency-based task. Visual input in the form of graphs and charts or pictures followed by questions or expressions have been included to help students develop their oral skills.

Reacting to the views of others, sharing experiences, speeches, debates and conducting interviews form the second task. Within this, there is scope for adding exam-type tasks that aim to develop the different sub-skills of speaking. The tasks of sharing views or experiences in most of the units stand alone, even though they are related to the themes. Students would have benefitted from the tasks had they been linked to the contents of the listening tasks or the previous speaking tasks. It would have made the units more cohesive too. Some of the tasks, particularly in Book 10, are beyond the level of the students and/or cater to students in urban areas.

Phonetics has been dealt with extensively with sections that introduce stress, intonation, rising and falling tones and syllabication, following the model through two tasks. These tasks aim at speaking accurately and reciting with appropriate intonation, stress and rhythm. The use of an Indian accent and clarity in speech in audio clips would be a great help not only to the students but to teachers as well.

Self-assessment and peer-assessment after each unit using given rubrics is the much needed feature of these books. However, applying descriptors as used by the examiners is not possible for the students. Modifications in the rubrics to suit the tasks in the units and making them more student-friendly (e.g. listing of specific descriptors) will help students use these books properly and monitor their progress.

Overall, the books add to the available practice material to hone students’ listening and speaking skills.

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Activities for the Language Classroom



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We all know students learn best when they are actively involved in the process of learning. While we lay emphasis on communicative language teaching in the classroom, there are times when we struggle to make our language exercises truly communicative in nature. I would like to share with you some activities and tasks that worked well in my ESL classroom at the university. While you may use some activities as they are, you may have to modify others depending on the language proficiency level of your learners, their experience of working together and your aim for doing these activities in class. Please remember what works for one may not work for another and therefore it is important that you trust your impressions about your learners before trying these activities in class.

Information Gap Activities

Information gap activities are used to create speaking opportunities between groups or pairs. In order for communication to be authentic and realistic, it is important that one group/ individual has some information that the other person does not have. All students bring different kinds of experience to the class and these could be exploited to generate genuine information gap.

Tip for teachers: For successful completion of the task, it is necessary that the students know the particular language to find the missing information. Students at the basic level would need some support here so the teacher could pre-teach the language that the students will need to find the missing information. If the students are at a very basic level, the teacher could also share some “Wh-” question forms that students could use for asking questions.

Personal Experiences

All students (and teachers) bring something to the classroom. We are all the sum of our experiences, likes, dislikes, hopes and expectations. We are all thinking, feeling individuals, capable of originality of thought and expression. Often, students in an ESL class become tongue-tied and awkward, which prevents them from actively participating in class activities. One way of helping students overcome their feelings of anxiety and incompetence is to allow them the

opportunity of bringing their world into the classroom. You may also find ways for your students to contribute their own cultural experience in the classroom. This could mean asking your learners to talk about their own experiences, about how they celebrate weddings/festivals or what places they visit. When students find that their experiences are welcome and their feelings are respected, they usually start engaging in ESL activities with more enthusiasm and interest.

Newspaper Activities

Newspapers provide authentic, up-to-date information about various topics and can be used effectively in an ESL classroom. The newspaper supplement, though not a great source of language, may be used to generate interest in learners if they are keen to know about the latest trends and media. However, if you are going to use a newspaper, the task itself should be authentic wherever possible, not merely the material. One aim of reading a newspaper should be to encourage students to read outside the classroom as well. So it is best to avoid activities such as “underline all the adverbs”, etc., because we do not read the newspaper to learn grammar. When teaching young adults, it is more important to talk about their opinions and see how and to what extent newspapers influence students’ thinking and opinions. Editorials and short articles describing latest research on topics of general interest are a great way to engage the interest of young adults.

The following activities work well with young adults. They could be modified according to the proficiency level of the learners.

Activity 1: Planning a Trip

Time: 20-25 minutes

Skill focus: Speaking, Listening

Materials: A4 sheets

Methodology:

Ask the students to write on a piece of paper the name of a place they have visited. On another paper, they should write the name of the place they would like to visit. Now pair up

students according to their interests. For e.g., If student A has been to Goa (a beach destination) and student D wants to go on a beach holiday, the teacher can ask them to pair up.

Give the students 5 minutes to write down the information they want to share and the questions they want answered. For e.g., student D may ask what's the best time to visit, what's the must-do thing, etc., while student A may make a list of the highlights of visiting the place, highly recommended things to do, etc.

Now ask the students in each pair to talk with each other. They could either begin with student D asking questions or student A first describing a few things after which student D may ask questions to fill gaps in the information.

Activity 2: Memories and Experiences

Time: 25 minutes

Skill focus: Speaking

Materials required: Picture cards

Methodology:

Spread some pictures on a desk. Ask the students to pick up any picture that interests them. Ask all those who have similar pictures to pair up together, for instance all those who have a picture of a toddler to form pairs. Similarly, all those who have pictures of teenagers/school farewell will make pairs.

Ask them to talk to each other and share memories triggered by the picture and why the picture appeals to them.

This is a good exercise to conduct at the beginning of a session/course as it encourages the students to talk about themselves. This activity works well with students because there is no pressure on them to talk about things they may not know about, they simply share their own experiences. For a very basic class, the teacher may allow the students to use their first language if they are unable to find the appropriate words in English.

Activity 3: In my Opinion

Time: 60 minutes

Skill focus: Reading, Speaking/Writing

Materials required: Newspaper clippings, Handout

Methodology:

1. Cut and make multiple copies of a newspaper clipping that you know would interest your students.
2. Ask students to work in groups of 4-5 students each. Give them copies of the newspaper clippings. Ask them to read the article and decide whether they agree with the writer and to what extent. You may give them some questions to make it a focused reading exercise. If you want to challenge them, ask them for a different opinion from the one expressed in the article.

3. Some questions that the teacher could write on the board:
 - a. What is the writer's opinion about...?
 - b. Is the writer taking a clear stand on this topic?
 - c. What examples are being provided to support the writer's position?
 - d. Is there any data? Does it look convincing?
 - e. Is the writer generalizing (e.g. All men below the age of 45 are at a risk of being diabetic)? Is the generalization justified?
4. Distribute the handout on asking questions/sharing opinions, especially with students with basic proficiency in English. Once the students have read the article and thought about the questions, ask them to discuss it with the members in their group. Encourage students to share their knowledge/personal experiences to substantiate their points of view.
5. Alternatively, the teacher could ask students to write their responses to the article. If given as a home task, students could be encouraged to find more information/data/articles to support their points of view.

Handout

Giving Your Opinion

I think that...

I don't think that...

In my opinion...

I agree with the writer...

I don't agree with the point...

Asking for Support or Details

Why do you think that?

Could you elaborate?

Could you give (me) an example?

Can you illustrate that?

What evidence do you have?

Could you explain it in more detail?

Could you provide some details?

Supporting Your Opinions

Let me illustrate...

For example...

For instance...

To give you an example...

Let me give you an example...

Language Activity



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Manu Gulati is a TGT English in Sarvodya Kanya Vidyalaya, Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi. She is interested in preparing low cost activities and tasks to improve English skills of school children.

Activity name: Words within Words

Skill focus: Writing

Participation: Individual or group

Level: Primary, Middle, Secondary

Learning objective: To improve the vocabulary of the learners.

Time: 2 to 7 minutes

Methodology:

1. Choose a word or a phrase and write it in on the board in capital letters. (Example- LANGUAGE)
2. Make two to three words, using the letters of the word written on the board.
3. Ensure that no letter is used more often in the newly formed words than it is in the word on the board.
4. Each new word should have at least two letters.
5. Write the new words on the board to enable the students to understand the task better.

Here are three words made from the letters of the word "language"

- a) Gun
- b) Gang
- c) Age

6. Ask the learners to form as many words as they can from the given word.
7. Do this activity by timing it as well.
8. The child who is able to form the maximum number of words is declared the winner.
9. The children share their words with each other either by writing them on the board or by fixing their sheet on the bulletin board.
10. The new or difficult words are discussed in the class.

Call for papers

for

Fortell

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The new millennium has given rise to new genres—e-mails, blogs, podcasts, web content, e-novels replete with hyperlinks, and of course, social media. How similar or different are these to the 'traditional' media of writing? With both texts and 'texting' in our classrooms, have our teaching methodologies and materials adapted to these changes, and if so, how? The July 2016 issue of Fortell invites articles/research papers that address these concerns.

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Editors: Iqbal Judge & Gitanjali Chawla

Last date for submission: April 30, 2016

Professor Geetha Durairajan at Ram Lal Anand College



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Ram Lal Anand College, Delhi University, in collaboration with Forum for Teachers of English Language and Literature (FORTELL) hosted a talk by Professor Geetha Durairajan on 18 August 2015 in the seminar hall of the college. Professor Geetha Durairajan is a Professor at the Evaluation Department of the prestigious English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad. She spoke on the topic “Language Teaching in Multilingual Contexts: Using the First/More Enabled Language as a Positive Resource in the English Classroom”.

The talk was presided over by Professor Rama Mathew, former Head of Department of Central Institute of Education, Delhi University. The hall was packed with an eager audience of FORTELL members including the president of FORTELL Dr. Vijay Kumar Sharma, who is also the principal of Ram Lal Anand College, faculty members of the English and other departments of the college as well as several students. After the welcome remarks by the Principal of the college, Professor Rama Mathew introduced the speaker.



Professor Durairajan’s lecture, even though entitled “Language Teaching in Multilingual Contexts”, included experiences of both teachers and students hence expanding the scope of her theoretical formulations. She focused on the benefits of the use of the first or what she called the more enabled language in an English classroom. She first introduced the theory of language use, followed by an explanation of the language formula as devised by her and finally explored a couple of examples to illustrate her argument. Instead of relying on a power point presentation, Professor Durairajan distributed a handout of her illustrations, giving the presentation a real time experience and enhancing the engagement of the audience. Her theoretical premise was that the more enabled language is our closest ally when it comes to a person’s thoughts, mental calculations and engagement with the self, and therefore it should be identified as an asset rather than as a liability. She suggested that the teacher’s perspective/attitude towards a student’s language proficiency can make or break the confidence and learning ability of a student and therefore it is more beneficial to use the student’s already well-equipped grasp of one language to teach a new one, in this case English.

Professor Durairajan’s lecture was applauded by the audience for its complex suggestions made in crisp but simple language. Professor Durairajan was overwhelmed by the audience’s positive response to her arguments. Most people agreed that the cooperative instruments she had spoken about have already been informally used in the teaching-learning processes even though they may not have been acknowledged formally. The students left the lecture hall with the confidence that they could take charge of their own learning and become independent learners. The program ended with a vote of thanks.

Forthcoming Events

3rd ELT Conference

No One Left Behind: The Role of ELT In Promoting Inclusive Growth

Conference place: Amity University Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow(India)

Conference dates: March 4-6, 2016

For details, please visit: <http://www.eltonfamity.com>, elt@lko.amity.edu

MATSDA/University of Liverpool Conference on Authenticity in Materials Development for Language Learning

June 18-19, 2016; Liverpool, UK

Plenaries include Rod Ellis, Alan Maley, Brian Tomlinson

Web: <http://www.matsda.org>

MELTA 2016: The 25th MELTA International Conference 21st Century Learning in English Language Education:

Embracing Technology and Progressive Pedagogy
May 30 - June 1, 2016; Casuarina Hotel & Convention Centre, Perak, **Malaysia**
Web: <http://melta.org.my/home/>

JALT (Japan Association of Language Teachers) 2016
42nd Annual International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning & Educational Materials Exhibition
Conference place: **Aichi Industry & Labor Center – WINC Aichi, Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, Japan**
Conference dates: **25 - 28 November 2016**
Theme: To Be Announced

AILA 2017: 18th World Congress of Applied Linguistics: Innovation and Epistemological Challenges in Applied Linguistics

Location: *the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)*

Conference dates: **July 23-28, 2017**

Website : <http://www.aila2017.com.br>

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