



Teaching English as a Second Language: Theory and Praxis

Mujumdar, Aarati (2017). *Teaching English as a Second Language: Theory and Praxis*. New Delhi: Sage. (Rs 350/-)

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Reviewed by Kalyanee Rajan

The discourse surrounding English Language Teaching has been evolving by leaps and bounds in the last several decades—from English as a foreign language, English as a second language, English as Lingua Franca to teaching English for various specific purposes including academia, corporate training, soft skills, general communication, and so on. It is with a critical eye therefore, that one approaches a new addition to the corpus titled “Teaching English as a Second Language: Theory and Praxis”. For such an endeavour to succeed, the challenge will be to strike a balance between existing scholarship and fresh insights into the evolving ramifications of the aspects being examined. With over thirty years of teaching experience behind her, Aarati Mujumdar takes the challenge head on and strives to share her personal experience of teaching English to students spread across India and Muscat, where she is currently based.

Speaking about her motivation for writing this book, Mujumdar writes in the Preface how she was perplexed by the contrasting responses she received from different students in the same class in Nasik, Maharashtra. Comprehension dawned some time later, when as an MPhil student at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, she learnt “why language behaviour was differential among students though input remained the same”. This prompted her foray into analysing what she calls “numerous socio-economic and intellectual factors”, and the “different way of processing information” that is unique to every student. Mujumdar spreads the fare lavishly; the book is divided into five broad sections and fourteen chapters therein.

The first section titled “Theoretical Underpinnings” includes three foundational chapters which survey English in the world and India, methods and approaches employed, and the basics of language learning. Mujumdar offers an exhaustive discussion on various critical views regarding L1 and L2 acquisition, including the Behaviourist view, the Mentalist theory of SLA and the social and Interactionist theories of SLA. The second section titled “Elements of Language” presents the features of language such as Phonology and Morphology, with liberal use of apt

examples. The third section titled “Instructional Practices” should interest teachers greatly, as it delves in detail into classroom practices, and focuses on developing the four pillars of language acquisition LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) as well as Grammar, Vocabulary and Study skills. It is in this third section that Mujumdar traverses familiar territory, and by means of some very useful, practical examples drawn from her own teaching experience, Mujumdar provides ready reckoners and solutions to tackle the tricky terrains of developing LSRW-GVS skills. It is remarkable that Mujumdar also covers the burning issue of plagiarism in the chapter on study skills, thereby mapping the discourse in its entirety.

The last two sections titled “Evaluation” and “Classroom Resources” are somewhat shorter than expected, given the large amount of space accorded to the third section, and also given that the field of evaluation and assessment is being held to sustained development and rethinking in the current pedagogical discourse. Overall, though some of the research and insights employed in the first and second sections may sound somewhat dated, teachers of English can benefit from the application-based examples and questions provided within each chapter. The first two units would benefit mainly researchers working in the field of ELT. The book is amply supplemented by an exhaustive bibliography and a useful index at the end. The book would have benefitted from better typesetting and a more user-friendly layout; the dark monochrome pictures take away the dynamism of many prescribed activities. The unimaginative book cover also does not compliment the significant area under study. With the volume hitting a whopping 350 plus pages, one is left wishing for a more interactive (perhaps accompanied by audio-visual material) and attractive edition which would do better justice to the author’s erudition and enriching insights.

Kalyanee Rajan is an Assistant Professor of English, Shaheed Bhagat Singh (Evening) College, University of Delhi. Her research areas include Shakespeare Studies, English Language Teaching, Translation Studies, Classical Indian Poetics and Dalit Literature.

kkrajan15@gmail.com