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## Subtle Ways of English Language in Teaching and Learning Process in Reference to Indian Students

*Dipika Rani*

*Associate Professor of English, Govt PG College, Hisar, Haryana, India*

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### ANNOTATION

All human knowledge is stored and transmitted in language which is so ubiquitous that we take it for granted. Despite its undeniable importance in day-to-day affairs, English is, in fact, a nightmare for Indian students. It is difficult for students to learn English and to pass their language paper despite the hard work of the full year. It is necessary to understand the nuances of English language and the causes of our failures in its teaching and learning process. A child does not need tutoring to acquire his native language, his 'mother tongue' which is Hindi for Indians. So, learning a foreign language like English generally involves greater efforts and seldom results in perfect mastery. The attention is not given to the proper understanding of grammar and phonetics of this foreign language in our schools and colleges which poses a great challenge before us. Students should try to innately understand the nature of English language and to understand phonological and grammatical rules of English clearly and comprehensively. Teachers of the English language should teach English very systematically and logically. The aim of this research paper is to create an understanding of the general nature and subtle ways of English as a language and the lacunas in the teaching and learning process of English in India.

**KEYWORDS:** English, Grammar, Phonetics, Indian, Teaching, Subtle, Student.

All human knowledge is stored and transmitted in language which is so ubiquitous that we take it for granted. Language which permeates our thoughts, mediates our relations with others and even creeps into our dreams is present everywhere. Even other living beings like animals have their own language including certain gestures to communicate. An understanding of language is also of immense intellectual significance with direct and indirect relevance to other disciplines. Thus societies without it would be impossible. Simultaneous existence of many regional languages in India, hub of knowledge and learning with a very long history of culture and civilization, changes this seemingly simple linguistic reality into complexity. The aim of this research paper is to create an understanding of the general nature and subtle ways of English as a language and the lacunas in the teaching and learning process of English in India.

We have always been in search of a common medium to communicate among people of different regions and sections speaking a wide variety of languages. In such a helpless condition, English helped different sections of Indian society to communicate against the British. Even after independence, there is no national consensus on the issue of a common language mainly because of the conflict between Hindi-speaking Northern states and Dravidian language-speaking Southern states. So English is progressively developing as a common

means of communication to share the feelings among Indians. The importance at global level as a standard means of communication has also made English an acceptable reality for Indian folk devoid of its relation with the Britishers. It is no more a colonial or western language for Indians who have developed a bitter-sweet relation with it.

In such a scenario, the number of people who speak English as second and foreign language is continuously increasing than the number of the native speakers. The linguistic centre of English has moved from England to elsewhere which has given rise to several varieties of English which Braj Kachru calls “World Englishes”. Despite its undeniable importance in day-to-day affairs, English is still a nightmare for Indian students speaking Hindi or other local languages especially in semi-urban and rural areas where the condition is worst. In this era of globalization when nothing can be imagined without English language, this is a tragedy for our students that a mere talk about English creates a fear in their minds. It is difficult for students to learn English and more than it to pass their language paper despite the hard work for the full year.

To find out the causes of our failures in making English as our own language we have to understand the challenges and limitations of teaching and learning English in the regional linguistic environment of India. When we talk about the teaching of English language, concept of ‘first language acquisition’ by a child is worth considerable. Every human child, provided he is given a chance by heredity and environment, acquires his native language during the first few years of life. The child does not need tutoring to acquire his native language as he is bound to acquire his first language, ‘mother tongue’, on his own and no one can prevent him to do so. It is a strictly biologically programmed activity. The child has the ability to create and comprehend, effortlessly and spontaneously, sentences that are completely ‘novel’ to his experience. The mother-tongue of our students is ‘Hindi’. So, learning a foreign language like English generally involves greater efforts and seldom results in the perfect mastery of the new idiom. However, language is not inborn but is acquired.

Suppose an Indian child is adopted by an English couple just after the birth, the child will learn / acquire English as his mother tongue. In the same manner, South Indians have less or no problems in learning English as it is taught to them by birth like their native languages such as Tamil, Telugu etc. Most of the North Indian students learn English as a subject in their schools and so are not quite innovative or inventive with this foreign language.

It is quite clear that English is not the first language of our students and can be learned only with efforts. Today we teach our students English from the very first class but even then students remain unsuccessful in having grasp over English. First of all, students do not create any understanding of the language but only do a cramming work or ‘ratafication’ of some chapters including in the syllabus. The attention is not given properly to the rules of grammar and phonetics of this foreign language in our schools and colleges which makes English a problematic language for students. Teachers ignore the linguistic aspects of the language while teaching. Wrong sentence structure, use of inappropriate vocabulary and spelling mistakes are very common due to the lack of speaking skills, correct grammatical knowledge and language comprehension.

Now the question arises why students do the cramming work. The factor pertinent here is that students face a lot of problems in learning and speaking English simply because its phonological rules and speech patterns are markedly different from those of Indians languages. Indian English is largely unintelligible to the native speakers of English. English is a stress-timed language whereas ours are syllable-timed languages. Due to certain characteristic niceties of English language, Indian students have to face some hindrances in teaching and learning process of English which are:

- ✓ Wrong accent
- ✓ Syllable elision
- ✓ Faulty pronunciation of English sounds
- ✓ Faulty rhythmic patterns
- ✓ Wrong location of the nucleus
- ✓ Ignorance of aspiration in speech
- ✓ Leaving important words unaccented in connected speech
- ✓ Faulty division of a long utterance into tone-groups
- ✓ Replacement of English sounds by their Indian equivalents

As there is no one-to-one relationship between spelling and sound in English, our students are unable to spell or speak so many words correctly. For example, though the spelling is identical (-se), mouse has /s/ as the final sound whereas noise has /z/. The exchange of /s/ -/z/ and /v/- /w/ creates a great confusion between words like peas-piece/peace, falls-false, fears-fierce and words like west-vest, wine-vine, while-vile respectively. Students also do not give due length to English vowels because of the analogy with their mother tongue. Long vowels are not made as long as they ought to be and short vowels are not made as short as they ought to be. For instance, they use only one /ə/ in place of all the three / ʌ, ɜ:, ə / sounds. The flexible approach of English language is also harmful for beginners as it makes difficult to understand rules e.g. the spellings of Church and Christ.

An accurate understanding of any language is worth acquiring. While we speak or write, we should be grammatically correct. G. Davidson in his book *The Right Way to Improve your English* puts very firmly, "Grammar is the basis of a language, the frame-work on which ideas are hung, and the loftiest imagery of thought can fall flat if ungrammatically expressed." Our students are weak in English not only phonologically but also grammatically. They are unable to understand basic formations like verb- patterns, sentence- patterns, syllable, word and clause and so on. From the very first level of studies, grammar including tense, voice, narration is repeated again and again but students can't understand these rules properly even till undergraduate level. Even the basic demarcation of sentences into various past, present and future tenses proves very woeful for students. Chapters of noun, pronoun, adjective, article, preposition, auxiliary etc seem difficult and nightmarish. Such ignorance of the subtle ways of using English makes Indians' experience with English rather bitter, unhappy and less comfortable.

Moreover mere study of the form and structure of a language in learning process is not sufficient. It is also significant to use it in different situations practically. S.K. Mukul rightly says, "When we learn a new language, we intend not to possess something but to do something. If we learn language with a view to possessing it, we cut a sorry figure in our actual life." We should not merely produce grammatically correct sentences but also use them correctly in practical life. It is a great failure on this level that teacher cannot make students fluent in the language even with a complete knowledge of grammar. Students cannot use it practically or speak it comfortably while talking. It is a much-known fact that, in India, emphasis is given on our local dialects and cultures which discourages our students learning a so-called foreign language. Our social set-up and background is very much responsible for this miserable condition of students. Undoubtedly even after so many decades have passed in teaching and learning English language in India, English is a

dream, a nightmare for aspirants who want to learn it. It is still a foreign language. Too many coaching centres and their English speaking courses are largely evident of the whole scenario. Students and job-seekers are trying to learn English for their bright prospects but the result is almost cipher especially in remote/rural/backward areas. Lack of confidence, less hard work and practice of students are responsible factors for such a horrid picture.

Earlier, for Indians, English was a reality not close to Indian heart and sensibility. Raja Rao, a noted Indian English writer, accepts this fact in the 'Preface' to *Kanthapura* in these words—English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make up like Sanskrit and Persian was before but not of our emotional make up. However, English has now become a language of expression of Indian culture and characteristics. It has entered into the emotional level of an average educated Indian who can think and write directly in English and not as it was earlier – think first in mother tongue and then translate it into English. No doubt, English is now a part and parcel of Indian psyche and thinking. But still in some remote and rural areas, English is not considered a language of our emotions and feelings but the time has come when we have to change this approach and unnecessary emphasis on our 'desi bhasha'. Only our positive approach and attitude will remove the barricades in learning English language.

Despite all this, the spread of English language in India in the present time is undeniable. The teaching-learning circle shows indispensability of English for students. The medium of instruction in educational institutes is progressively becoming English. The growth of school education in English even in rural areas is an indicator of Indian bent towards English. English is the language of all the knowledge on internet is. Courses on spoken English, soft skills, communicative English, business English are run to prepare students for future prospects in trade and business, various jobs in India and abroad by developing their speaking and vocational skills. A change from traditional 'grammar translation' method to 'communicative and accent based' approach in the teaching of English is seen today. All the more, good text and reference books of different subjects are available more in English. This change in the field of education is undoubtedly an epitome of the shift in communicative reality in India. Teachers of the English language should be slightly more responsible and sensitive in this issue. They should teach English very systematically and logically.

Systematic study of English language only may help us today to meet the challenges in getting academic success. Teacher should also make their students and others realize that English is no more a 'foreign' or 'white' language but a language which is serving the purpose of a 'vehicular language' bridging the gap between the two different parts of India– the north and the south and among India and other countries. We should be determined to change the ambivalent relationship with this language into the relationship of functional necessity. Sincere efforts and strong will-power of English learners are required as English has established itself as lingua franca of India and is governing Indian communicative arena along with other languages of India. The need is to innate the nature of English language and to understand phonological and grammatical rules of English clearly and comprehensively. English is a rather flexible and sophisticated language and Indian students must concentrate on the small refinements while learning English to make English a day reality rather than a nightmare for themselves only to secure a prosperous future in the modern globalized era.

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