



FORM AND FUNCTION OF ENGLISH IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The axiom ‘Many a little, makes a mickle’ holds good in the case of English Language also when we speak of British colonial hegemony. It has spread its spell across the length and breadth of the globe. The diehard lovers of their language of the people of Japan and the China have also fallen prey to the fascination of English. The advent of the English in India too, has widened the avenues in the field of national and international levels not only in literature but also in the corporate world. Who can be oblivious of the capacious contributions of the European scholars and lexicographers like Charles Philip Brown, Rev. Ferdinand Kittel and Johann Philip Fabricius, to name a few; they have enriched Indian linguistic treasures so much so that their literary works are the lighthouse. In a nutshell, English is a Lingua Franca of the world. By now, it is an indispensable medium of communication. Its educative value cannot be denied.

In 1835, the public proclamation of the Macaulay’s Minutes making English mandatory was the first milestone passed by the then people of India. Macaulay’s dream of making India an anglicized nation did not come true. However, the foundation of English education was laid during the colonial period. All national and international transactions are done through the medium of English. Its journey from its inception to the present era—from a foreign language to

the stature of the Associate Official Language of Administration has been a noteworthy achievement. The aim of this paper is to pinpoint the problems that are confronted by Indian students residing at different geographies. It analytically studies the present form and function of English discovered in India, in general.

Keywords: axiom, hegemony, spell, diehard, corporate world, lexicographers, indispensable, educative

Needless to say that multilingualism in India is a commendable quality but one is unable to accept the role of English among Indians. It serves the purpose of mediation. Post-colonial India brought out novel changes in the academically pedagogic system with the introduction of English as a compulsory language.

Growth of English medium schools was observed like frogs in the rainy season and at the same time the number of students enrolled was astounding.

Coming to the form and function of English in India, it has been analytically observed that there is an enormous gap between the comprehension level of students depending on the rural and urban geographical division. A student-centered study shows that the learning outcome at the rural areas has low percentage while it is very high at the schools situated in urban areas. The academic or non-academic state of English learning at villages is far from contentment.

There are many reasons for this clear-cut variation. Being a non-phonetic language, it becomes very difficult of students to learn English in the classroom where the ambience is that of a Mother Tongue or of a regional language. The Ministry of Education and Youth Services in India had appointed two commissions, headed by Prof. V.K. Gokak, one in 1965 and another in 1969, to study the learning levels of the students at both scholastic and collegiate positions and the findings were as follows:

The findings of the first study group revealed that the standards of English in India have deteriorated very fast in our schools and colleges where students can't write or speak a single correct sentence in English. The findings of educations commission (1966) and the study group (1970) are also the same. (1)

After delving deep into the topic of form and function of the English language in India, it can be feasibly inferred that the seven core reasons that follow are suffice to prove the poor performance of the students:

1. MT as a Barrier
2. Bilingual Pedagogic Approach
3. English as a Phonetic Language
4. Ambience on/off Campus
5. Cramming for Examinations
6. Intervention of 3-language Curriculum
7. Non-standard Colloquial Usage

MT as a Barrier

While learning a foreign language like English, Indians encounter plenty of problems. In all linguistic areas, they make use of the same sentence patterns that are fond in their mother tongue. This MT interference affects the learning of the second or foreign language and it is a tough nut to crack when the nature of a language is not the same as one's native tongue.

It has been scientifically approved that Direct Method of learning a language is conducive to learning with confidence. In other words, LSRW is the linguistic ladder of four rungs in learning any language under the sun. But in India, very few schools abide by this ascent because of the fact that students employ the tenets of their MT while speaking or writing English. Robert Lado has aptly and succinctly expressed the fact: The inference of the students 'mother tongue accounts for a number of errors and difficulties that occurs at the time of learning and afterwards in the use of second language. (2)

Indian students usually speak English by aping the accent of their First Language One can easily understand the nativity of the speaker whose English has all the salient features of his MT. Thus a person's parent language becomes a barrier in the acquisition of a target language like English and frustration is the definite result. This contrasting contour condemns and corrupts the quality of the TL (i.e., Target Language).

Students' classroom learning mainly depends on the Form-and-Function Method; here form refers to the grammatical category of a word and function deals with the usage of the term in a sentence in the environment of a tense. This traditional approach to learning English

enlightens the learner on the truth that one is doubtlessly unable to acquire the language skills only by studying Form and Function.

This method is based on the idea that the more difference between the learners' mother-tongue and the target language, the more difficulty the learner will face in acquiring these structures or items. (3)

There is an oceanic gap between the learning levels of rural and urban students. Rustic students do not have access to English at or out of their schools or colleges. It is close of impossible to bridge the vast chasm between these two geographical separations. According to Lado's *Linguistics across Cultures* (1957) those items of a target language that are similar to the learners' first language will be easy for her/him to learn. And, those items of a target language that are different than the learners first language will be difficult for the learner to acquire. This is what the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis suggests. (4)

Bilingual Pedagogic Approach

May the students belong to either metropolis or the countryside, bilingual method of teaching a foreign language does not fetch favorable fruit to the learners/speakers. The Bilingual Method is otherwise called 'Three P's Method': Presentation, Practice, and Production. These three stages of learning go one after the other:

First, you present material. Then you all practice together and students are expected to produce something with their new knowledge. Principles of the Bilingual Method: Understanding of words and sentences in foreign languages can be made easier by the use of mother tongue.

There is no need to create artificial situations for explaining the meaning of words and sentences of the target language.

Bilingual method is the combination of the direct method and the Grammar translation method.

The loopholes of this method are like a deer caught in the headlights. Students understand the target language but production is their Achilles heel/vulnerability. The learner is lost in the labyrinth of the MT and the TL (i.e., Target Language). Ambiguity ails him/her and lets him/her roam on the roads of hesitation and uncertainty. Lacking is the functional aspect of English because mind is in the queer quest of translation and interpretation of the thought in the L2 (i.e. Second Language) and with the result, the user of the English language becomes helplessly unable to structure even a sentence.

English as a Phonetic Language

A gigantic contrary feature between the MT and English is that after French, English is a notorious example for a Non-phonetic Language. In other words, the written form and the pronunciation do not agree with each other. To be short, spelling is not the same as a word is pronounced. The standard pronunciation of the word ‘Tortoise’ is /'tɔ: (r)təs/ but people and even some teachers at school do not know that it is not /tortois/ ; the pronunciation is written in IPA i.e., International Phonetic Alphabet. Indian academically accepted standard is the British Dialect which uses forty-four speech sounds. The study of English phonetics is an entirely neglected area at schools and colleges. So our students, may they be at rural areas or at urban cities, are unaware of the phonetic aspect of English. Thus the form and function of the English language in India have remained aloof. There is no room for compatibility between them.

International Phonetic Symbols seem to be a nightmare when students happen to come across phonetic tenets. It can be concluded that the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet produce forty-four speech sounds.

Ambience on/off Campus

Any language can be learnt easily when there is favourable atmosphere. On the list of language skills, listening is the first skill to be honed followed by Speaking. Therefore, the best way to learn any language is to start speaking without thinking about the shortage of vocabulary and grammatical mistakes. The main purpose of a language is to communicate.

School authorities have to prescribe English as the Campus language. When students start speaking regularly, they develop English language habits. Schools run by missionaries strictly abide by the rule of maintaining their own standard of English and every student has to speak only in English whether he knows grammar or not. There is nobody to evaluate their speech and correctness of pronunciation and sentence patterns.

Either in the classroom, with the teachers and classmates, or in the playground, English should be their medium of expression. Students must use English off the campus too. Such constant and deliberate efforts pay well after a couple of months.

At rural schools, students use MT or the RL (i.e., Regional Language) for communication instead of English. They do not seriously take the topic of ‘Communicative Skills in English. Usually, students do not speak in English on the pretext that they do not have sufficient vocabulary and the knowledge of basic sentence structures. It is like a bad workman blames his tools.

A lot of learning of English can take place if students make honest efforts by making use of the opportunities they get on or off campus. Students lack determination and far-sightedness relating to the need and usefulness of the English language both in personal life and in profession after the completion of their education. The success of the entire corporate world rests on communication skills in English. Those students who ignore or do not heed the honing of English speaking and writing skills regret in future. They neglect by making hasty decisions and repent at leisure.

Cramming for Examinations

Cramming is to learn something in a short time for the purpose of taking examinations. Students aim at learning the important answers with the view to faring well in the examinations. Rote learning is their blind method which may collapse during examinations. The number of such students is very large. Guides of their textbooks sell like hot cakes. They even try to tread on abusive ways of malpractice.

They do not learn English but try hard to discover ways to learn by heart sans comprehension of the content. They are unable to understand the consequences that go a long way. Pressure to perform well by getting good grades is there be-all and end-all.

Intervention of 3-language Curriculum

Off and on, there are changes in the educational policies that also affect the honing of the English Language Skills. At times, two-language policy at certain grades and three-language policy, some other time. At lower classes, from I to V, for instance, regional language is prescribed—i.e., one-language; from VI to Vii two-languages policy in which Hindi or English is optional, other than the regional language. From VIII to X, a study of three languages has been introduced and the third language is a foreign language, i.e., English.

On one hand, English has not been given much room and the intervention of two languages makes the milieu corrupt as far as campus language is concerned and on the other, students are not exposed to Functional English. Their mind is divided on the study of different languages sans having English as the Campus language. A nightmarish situation is that after the completion of graduation, Functional English is the need of the hour and English communication skills are prioritized.

When English language skills have the significance in the modern technological era, why does the department of education not focus on the amelioration LSRW skills from the basic grades at school?is a question that arises automatically. Not to mince matter, according to

the recommended formula, it is clear as crystal that from I to V, English ought not to be taught and priority is given to the MT and RL. Practically speaking, the students start learning English, who have been fundamentally influenced by both their MT and RL. So Mother Tongue Habits are distinctly found not only on the form but also on the function of their English. The impact of MT and RL definitely distorts the visage of English.

Non-standard Colloquial Usage

To a great extent, English either at school/college or in everyday speech, is heard in the corrupt form; it has the imitation of MT and RL and the vocabulary is also not up to the mark. Students conjoin words which are borrowed from their MT or RL. Countless instances can be quoted:

I am sustified.	For tired
You are gabrified.	For frightened
My uncul has come.	For uncle
Cominga nota?	ForComing or not?

When a scholar surveys every city in India, he discovers varieties of English by virtue of the impact of the regional language and mother tongue of the user. Multilingualism in India has brought bounteous problems in the teaching-learning process of English. It is owing to the fact that English is a non-phonetic language like French and Indian languages are phonetic. This is the first and foremost barrier in the English in India can be classified into the students who belong to the rural areas and those who stay in incredibly sprawling metropolitan cities. Our syllabi have to be redefined on the basis of this oceanic geographical distinction.

For the above relevant reason, innumerable English Coaching Centres and English Institutes have been mushrooming in every nook and cranny of streets.

Remedial Measures

After having journeyed briefly through the ebb and flow of the form and function of English, it can be logically inferred that students are in need of what is rightly called 'Functional English' which comprises Form and Function of English language. No matter what grade English is prescribed from but what matters is to prescribe what is useful to students in improving their English language skills. This is the urgent and inevitable need.

It is pathetic to say that the Phonetic aspect has been totally ignored and the authorities concerned have turned a blind eye to the teaching of English pronunciation. Coming to vocabulary, a proper plan has to be tailored to enrich students' Word Power.

Form refers to Grammatical Structure of English and Function to the colloquially earmarked nuances. A meticulously designed special Functional English Course has to be graded and it is the pressing urgency. Some of the salient features of Functional English are:

Functional English equips students with the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to use and apply English in everyday life. Gaining these skills will ensure your students can get the most out of their future work and education. Functional English is a separate stand-alone qualification that can be taken whenever your students are ready. Students need to pass Reading, Writing and Speaking, Listening and Communication to gain the qualification. (5)

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