The Asian EFL Journal

Professional Teaching Articles

January 2014

Volume 73

Senior Editors:

Paul Robertson and Roger Nunn

Published by the Asian EFL Journal Press

http://www.asian-efl-journal.com

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Do Boys Listen Better Than Girls?
A Brief Experiment

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Abstract

It is traditionally believed that girls have better soft skills. Interpersonal relationship is an area of soft skill where listening skill plays a major role. This study was conducted in a rural Indian school in which most of the students hail from villages around Gudiyattam, 30 kilometres from Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India. The study was conducted with 248 students distributed in three grades, 6-8, divided into six groups. All the grades had both boys and girls. Story telling activity like 'Spin a Yarn' was introduced to the class. Simple stories suitable for elementary level and pre-intermediate level were randomly chosen and read to these students slowly and clearly. A powerful battery-enabled speaker with a cordless mike was used. Students were given tests with multiple choice questions to test their listening skills and the results were documented. The results of this qualitative research suggest that in all the grades and groups, boys performed better than girls at Listening Skill tests. These results suggest that boys in particular find game-like tests and activities motivational and challenging.

1. INTRODUCTION

Boys become bored and distracted in a classroom devoid of challenges and competition. So their nature always affirms that boys will be boys as a common fact. Concentrating long and hard in a classroom does not facilitate language learning among boys. Physical games and competitions motivate them more. In the classroom, when the competition is with girl peers, the incentive to perform well is much greater. In the absence of any such activities, many boys remain passive in English language classes. This passivity should not be misconstrued as indifference toward studies.

Many schools in rural India lack basic facilities. There is no running water, electricity or teaching-learning aids. As a result, both teachers and students are under constant stress. Moreover, there are some single-teacher schools, where the same teacher teaches all the students every subject.

In the absence of appropriate resources and under constant pressure to complete the syllabus in time for the examination, many teachers resort to the lecture method. This results in monologues, and inevitably, the facilitator becomes the orator. Likewise in the classroom, listening skill plays a major role. Due to financial constraints, the students are made to sit quietly in tightly packed classrooms. Discussions among friends, and in certain cases, asking questions of the teacher, are considered wrong behaviour, and hence discouraged. Students listen passively and take down whatever the teacher writes on the blackboard. As a result of all these oppressive methods in the crucial formative years, most children from rural India never talk without inhibition - their communicative skills severely damaged. They remain silent spectators in the classes till they graduate from a university. To them, silence seems a virtue.

On the side of caution, it must be pointed out that while passive learning can be inadequate and tiresome, nonetheless it is also learning of a sort. Listening is an active form of learning. Remedios (2008, p.16) gives this warning: "Tutors must also be cautious in judging silence as non-collaborative or of speaking as demonstrating the skills of collaboration."

Sometimes, boys may exhibit an attitude of indifference in classrooms. They may seem not to be paying attention. This does not mean they are not listening. An analogy is provided by the behaviour of very young children who run around and appear not to be paying much attention when mothers regale them with stories. However, much later, the same stories are narrated in turn by these children without any change in the storyline, proving that sub-conscious learning and passive learning are powerful means of internalising information.

2. Stereotyping Boys

At parent - teacher meetings, one often hears disparaging remarks about the attentiveness and concentration level of boy students. Even newspapers portray boys in poor light after the publication of board exam results with headlines such as: 'Boys Score Poorer Marks Than Girls', 'Again Girls Outshine Boys', 'Boys do Poorly in Exams' and so on.

Contrary to popular belief, this paper suggests that boys listen as well as girls do and in fact, most of them listen better than girls.

But, popular belief is not based entirely on myth. It is based on strong evidence in the form of examination results. Here are a few examples:

Press Trust of India (PTI) (May 2012) reported:

> "Girls outshone boys once again in the Class XII CBSE exam in the Chennai region which took the top slot in the country with an overall pass percentage of 90.59. Girls recorded a pass percentage of 92.67 as against 88.87 by the boys in the exam, results of which were declared on Monday."

The same happens with the State Board and ICSE/ISC students across India. (PTI, June 2012, May 2012)

Even the Chinese experts are concerned. China Youth Daily (July 2012) reported:

> "A recent study shows that Chinese boys are being outperformed by girls in schools. According to research by the Shanghai Academy of Social Science, boys in Shanghai scored lower than girls on average in each subject, from third grade to third year in middle school... Method of education is to be blamed for the results, said Sun Yunxiao, vice-chairman of the China Youth & Children Research Association. He added that what we teach and how we evaluate are the opposite of what boys are good at. Another expert says that a lot of curriculums require students to memorize and recite, which are not an advantage for boys."

Fig.1

There has been no research attempted on why this is so. Maybe boys develop an interest in studies quite late or they mature biologically much later than girls. The moot question is this: Do boys get bad grades *because* they are boys? (Fig.1)

Very often, they seem distracted and uninterested in class. But boys from a very young age are interested in, and seem to comprehend, relatively complicated issues. For instance UFOs, Unexplained Phenomena and Events, Aliens, Bugattis, Lamborghinis, Koenigseggs, Batman, Ironman, Spiderman and so on, are obsessions of this author's seven year old son. But, inexplicably, they do not get good grades with the same ease in school. (Fig.2)
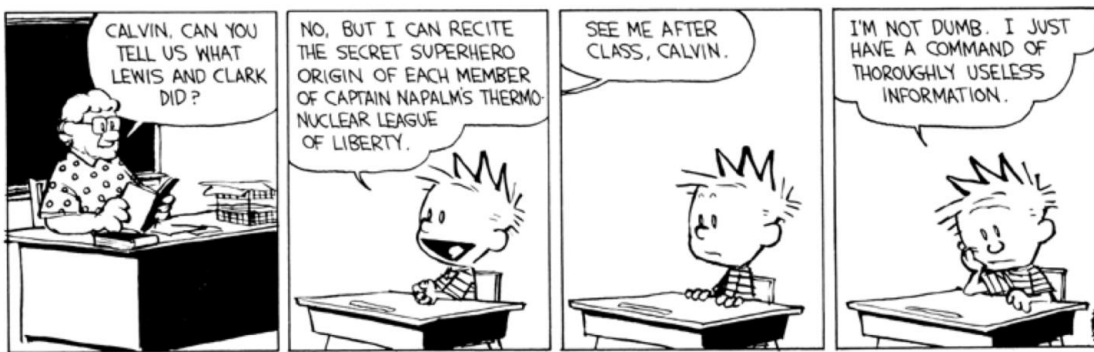
Fig.2

Can boys who fluently recite information about every player in the English Premier League or Indian Premier League be branded as dunces because they are not able to memorise a few lines from the Shakespeare canon or any other prescribed lesson? Do the lessons prove uninteresting for boys because the choice of lessons is not gender-specific? Should our course content be completely revised in order to make boy students listen better in the language classes? Maybe the time has come for us in India to re-design our course content, and ensure it is on par with the British Council's English Premier League Teaching materials (Premier Skills English, 2011) so as to make it more interesting for boys. Interestingly, boys and girls use different parts of the brain to process language. Biologically there are differences between boys and girls in the two hemispheres of the brain.

In boys, accurate performance depended -- when *reading* words -- on how hard visual areas of the brain worked. In *hearing* words, boys' performance depended on how hard auditory areas of the brain worked. Boys showed the sensory approach,

so they "might be more effectively evaluated on knowledge gained from lectures via oral tests and on knowledge gained by reading via written tests.

Many school teachers, when interviewed (Appendix 1), agree that boys listen better. They also think that girls get distracted more easily. Butmore studies have to be done on distraction levels in boys and girls. Probably, the difference in teaching methodology, the teacher's role, the curriculum and testing patterns and also the early language-acquisition methods at home, contribute greatly to levels of distraction and attention in boys and girls. It could it be that because boys are more prone to the sensory approach and girls are better at abstract thinking for biological reasons that the perceived difference in performance seems to exist. Ideally, the language teacher should find possible ways of providing both girls and boys appropriate listening tasks to improve their listening skill.

Some of the activities described in this paper were designed to check whether they help boys develop listening skill. The results of this initial study make it possible to find and confirm suitable tasks to develop the listening skill of boys. Thus these insights can also help improve the curriculum, and course developers will consider including only those lessons that facilitate the listening process in the classroom.

Some basic observations that can be used as learning insights to fostering good listening skills, is to create a conducive environment for the learner. Language learning happens first as a result of listening, then by understanding and finally by speaking. During the listening stage, the manner in which the sounds, words, phrases and sentences of the target language are exposed to the learner also decides the impact of the learning. So the comprehensible input should be clearly and interestingly presented for good language output (Stephen D. Krashen, 1981). If language acquisition has to succeed in boys and girls, then the anxiety should be at zero level. If the student has high self-esteem and low anxiety, then the learner is free from stress. (Stephen D. Krashen, 1981). He then listens to the language and acquires the input without any inhibition. The learner makes progress if he can hear and understand without any disturbance or distraction. Teachers should repeat, enunciate clearly, show associations, and explain, so the input is made clear to the learner. Realia, gestures and the media can be utilised to make the input clear and comprehensible to the leaner, and this would definitely aid the learner in developing listening skills.

Most of the immersion school programmes in Canada that allow the learners to listen to teachers who are native speakers in French, have students from English speaking communities. They follow various methods and approaches and one such method is the Total Physical Response (TPR) theory. TPR is very good for acquiring language in the beginning by just listening to instructions. Both the boys and girls listen to content which is presented in a comprehensible manner.

Bilingual education in the immersion programmes has allowed more silent listening work for the learner in a stress free environment. Young children subconsciously listen to the teachers' responses in the target language while the learner speaks in the mother tongue. Subconsciously the learners start listening to the structures of the target language. The learners learn extremely well with these methods. Young children acquire the language rules naturally without reading the rules of grammar. They do not have to learn the rules for acquiring a second language. At an early age, all the boys and girls learn to imitate and repeat the sounds they have heard. So for boys to listen and learn the language, the teacher has to create a suitable environment. The emotional levels of boys are also stabilised by providing a stress-free classroom for listening activities. In the following section the importance of developing emotional intelligence in order to develop listening and grasping skills, has been mentioned briefly.

3. Literature Review:

Dr. Jack C. Richards (2008, pp.17-19) says,

> "Listening, hardly mentioned at all in journals in the 1970s has today come into its own. Although it continues to be ignored in second language acquisition theory and research, at least in teaching it now plays a much more prominent role. University entrance exams, school leaving and other examinations have begun to include a listening component, acknowledging that listening proficiency is an important aspect of second language proficiency, and if it isn't tested, teachers won't pay attention to it."

Then he credits Krashen's 'Input Hypothesis' for this historically significant change.

Devine (1967) says: "The importance of listening in communication has long been recognized. Although listening is seldom taught in the schools..." According to

him, researchers have been trying to re-invent the wheel. He says: "A trend in recent studies in listening has been to re-examine previously studied topics; and although some have explored new topics, all have contributed in one way or another to an evolving general theory of listening."

Learners listen by a continuous process of elimination and accurate matching of different sounds of English syllables. Field (1999) Learners will comprehend in few seconds in a step-by-step process of listening and comprehending. Sometimes learners try to process the input by bottom up process if they do not have any idea of the language. Wilson (2003)

Different research studies show that strategy instruction is believed to make learners learn better in the target language (Arnold, 2000; Field, 1998; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Goh, 1998; Harley, 2000; Mendelsohn, 1995; Morley, 2001; Park, 2000; Thompson and Rubin, 1996; Vandergrift, 1999, 2002). L2 learners definitely perform better in listening tasks after learning from the instructor different listening tasks. Many models for strategy instruction have been propounded by researchers (O'Malley and Chamot 1990, Jones et al, 1987) Language learners become effective listeners when they use a lot cognitive and metacognitive strategies while doing listening tasks (Bacon 1992a, 1992b; Murphy, 1985; Thompson and Rubin, 1996; O'Malley, Chamot and Kupper 1989; Vandergrift 1996)

Kim and Douglas (2000) are worried that university students in Korea had had very little English listening and speaking exposure throughout their lives, despite receiving six, or more, years of English language instruction. "Often times, as native English speakers, we forget and take for granted the countless hours of English language exposure we were afforded to be able to fluently communicate in English."

On the other hand, Kokas (2010) strongly argues that there is clearly no evidence to back the claims of those who say that the 'feminism of the classroom' is detrimental to the boys, as male achievement has increased over the years as much as that of girls.

Salovey and Mayer (1990) have shown that the EI developed with increasing age and experience.

Goleman (1995) found that the signs of EI appear among very young children. Goleman (1996) has also stated that emotional intelligence increases with age and it

can be learned, cultivated and increased in adulthood. Reports from a series of longitudinal studies have revealed that people change their EI competencies in a period of two to five years (Boyatzis et al, 2000). Mayer et al. (2000) also showed with a series of studies that emotional intelligence increased with age and experience, which qualifies it as ability rather than a personality trait.

In Activity Based Learning and game-like activities, learners are given room to develop their EI in order to listen and learn the language. They develop their ability to learn different cognitive and metacognitive strategies to improve their listening skills, as they develop EI with age.

Importance of Study

In the above review of literature, we studied what researchers have published about emotional intelligence and the grasping powers of both girl and boy students with regard to achievement. We also covered how important emotional intelligence and listening skills have become in schools nowadays. We still have to conduct a research to see whether there is any relationship between listening skill and academic achievement among students of both genders. If the results turn out to be positive, then, in order to prepare them to be better students in this new century, it might be advisable to include the nurturing of emotional intelligence and listening skills in school and even university curricula. It should be remembered that university students have not yet benefited from this information, though they are the ones who will soon start seeking employment.

Based on these issues, we devised a project to study and identify quick grasping power and success rate among the boys and girls students in a school. The results presented in this paper are part of an ongoing study.

4. The School and the Sample

This study was conducted in a rural matriculation school in Gudiyattam which is a small town near Vellore, Tamil Nadu, South India. A matriculation school in Tamil Nadu is an English medium school, where all subjects are taught in English from the kindergarten onwards. Children as young as three years of age are sent to these schools. One can see hundreds of parents forming long queues to get their children admitted to such schools. They do so though they cannot afford expensive private school education. This is because they believe that knowledge of English

language will get better jobs and thus better standard of living for their children in the future. As a result of this, thousands of such Matriculation schools have mushroomed all over the state of Tamil Nadu. Unfortunately, many of these schools lack even basic amenities. The quality of teaching is quite poor as most of these teachers are recent graduates without any formal teacher training, and few of them can speak English with grammatical accuracy. They are underpaid, therefore lack motivation. Moreover, these schools have inadequate infrastructure. All these factors have a telling cumulative effect on the efficiency of the teaching-learning process in these schools.

The school chosen for this study is based in an agrarian society. Most of the students of this school come from some 40 villages around Gudiyattam and their parents are mostly agricultural labourers or daily wage labourers in beedi (a small roll of tobacco for smoking) factories. A few of the parents are goldsmiths.

Many of these students walk long distances to come to school. By the time they reach school, they are tired, hungry and easily distracted. On the positive side, the school has good infrastructure; strong buildings, well equipped laboratories, spacious and airy classrooms with comfortable chairs and desks for the students, smart classrooms with interactive boards, hardworking teachers and a spirited Principal who readily agreed to help conduct the study..

The study was conducted with two hundred and forty eight students distributed in three grades, that is, grades six to eight. All the students were in the age group of eleven to fourteen years. There were one hundred and twenty six girls and one hundred and twenty two boys. Sixty percent of them spoke Tamil as their mother tongue, thirty five percent Telugu and the rest Malayalam, Urdu and Hindi. Their spoken English stood at A2 to B1 level of the Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR). This means that the students could make a series of sentences of limited accuracy. The students were trained in Listening Skill for 15 hours over a period of 2 months.

5. Listening Skill Activities

Students were trained during their regular English class hours. They came to a make shift English laboratory. The laboratory was temporarily built in a clean, spacious and well-ventilated room. An interactive board was made available with an LCD data projector. Speakers were set in place for audio clarity. Distracting posters,

wall calendars, pictures, charts, clocks and other items were removed from the room. The school had never done a Listening Skill activity before therefore; effort was made to make this a very memorable event. A set of seven activities were diligently chosen and the materials were scrutinised closely for child and age specific content. Gender biased materials were avoided.

5.1. Activity 1 (Days 1 and 2)

Newspaper clips from the children's section of reputed papers were photographed with the help of an iPad and screened with the help of the LCD Data Projector. Students were given enough time to read the news items for themselves. Care was taken to choose age and language specific news items. The news items did not have more than 200 words. After about 5-7 minutes, the news item was read to them slowly and clearly. Students could follow the reading, as the item was displayed on the screen. This whole process was repeated for three different news items in each class. All the students participated in the activity.

5.2. Activity 2 (Days 3 - 4)

Activity 1 was repeated but with a small change. This time around, the students were not given any time to read the newspaper items. It was displayed and immediately read to them. Four different items were chosen for each English class. Care was taken not to repeat the same item for any two groups of students. At the end of each reading, the display was stopped, and the students were asked a few questions to see how well they could follow the reading.

5.3. Activity 3 (Days 5-6)

Activity 2 was repeated but without displaying the newspaper scans on the screen. As already mentioned, for each activity, different items were scanned. Students were made to listen to what was read. This made them a bit uneasy at the beginning. Then they seemed to lose interest. But they were reassured that the items were easy to understand and that they were interesting. This motivated them to some extent. Spin-a-Yarn activity was introduced to induce interest. A set of questions to test their ability to follow was asked. This quiz also helped the researcher to rethink the content and linguistic level. The next activity items were designed based on these results.

5.4. Activity 4 (Days 7-8)

Child, age and language specific YouTube clips were shown online. Care was taken to show different clips each time. Though children enjoyed the whole experience, they did not seem to comprehend much. The quick quizzes after the screening showed that they had problem in listening to background narrators. They were more comfortable listening to people speaking on the screen. Therefore, in the following sessions, clips showing interviews with locally popular celebrities were shown. Students showed much interest and could understand better.

5.5. Activity 5 (Days 9-12)

This was the best activity. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed this and therefore, this activity was extended to four days. 3-5 minute movie clips were screened. Clips from popular children's movies 'Ice Age 1- 4', 'Pink Panther 1 and 2', 'Johnny English 1 and 2', 'Home Alone 1 and 2', 'Baby's Day Out', 'Spider Man', and 'Mr. Bean's Holiday' were carefully chosen to avoid gender bias. Care was taken to make sure that there was less action and more dialogue. Students could relate to the activity easily and showed much improvement in their listening ability.

5.6. Activity 6 (Day 13)

Short stories in English from Aesop's Fables and the Panchatantra (Indian fables) were read out to the students. Popular and well known stories were avoided. Effort was made to choose stories that the students were not familiar with. Students listened with rapt attention and enjoyed the activity. A quick assessment quiz showed that they had understood the passages, and that their attitude toward unseen passages had improved.

5.7. Activity 7 (Day 14-15)

A number of short stories were carefully chosen from the websites: EnglishForEveryone.Org and ReadTheory.Org. These websites are goldmines for ELT professionals. Stories are very well categorised. They are also divided into various language levels. Most of these pdf files are easy to access for the teacher. These stories were chosen and read to the students. Once again, care was taken to make sure that no two groups were given the same activity.

6. Test – Content and Pattern

At the end of 15 days covering a period of two months, one hour per class, an assessment test was conducted. Simple stories from English for Everyone.Org and Read Theory which are suitable for elementary level and pre-intermediate level were randomly chosen and read to these students slowly and clearly. Those stories that were not part of the activity sessions were chosen. A powerful battery-enabled speaker with a cordless microphone was used to ensure that everyone could hear clearly.

Students were given tests with a set of ten multiple choice questions for each story, immediately after the story was read to them, to test their listening ability. Each test lasted seven minutes. The first five minutes were used to read out the stories and in the next two minutes, students completed the MCQ paper. Question papers were given to the students *before* the passage was read to them. This was done to enable even students, who might not have remembered many details, do the test without fear. A series of five tests was given to each class.

7. Data Analysis

The answer scripts were marked and a line chart was prepared (Fig.3). The chart shows the score averages of boys and girls. The x-axis represents the five tests conducted, while the y-axis denotes the marks scored by both boys and girls in each of these tests. The line with diamond blocks represents the average marks scored by girls whereas the line with square blocks represents the average marks scored by boys.

The table shows that there were major differences between the average marks scored by boys and that scored by girls throughout the series of five tests conducted.

Specifically, in Test 2 the difference was the greatest at 45%. In contrast to that in Test 5 the difference had decreased, albeit still quite high at 30% marks with girls averaging 50% as against boys averaging 80%. Of the five tests conducted, this trend was seen only in Test 5. The averages of Tests 1 and 4 were identical in both cases with girls and boys scores at 40% and 80% respectively. The table also shows that there was a considerable difference between the averages scored by boys and girls. Boys scored consistently higher marks than the girls in all five tests.

So the study reveals that the performance of boys in listening tests was much better when compared to that of girls.
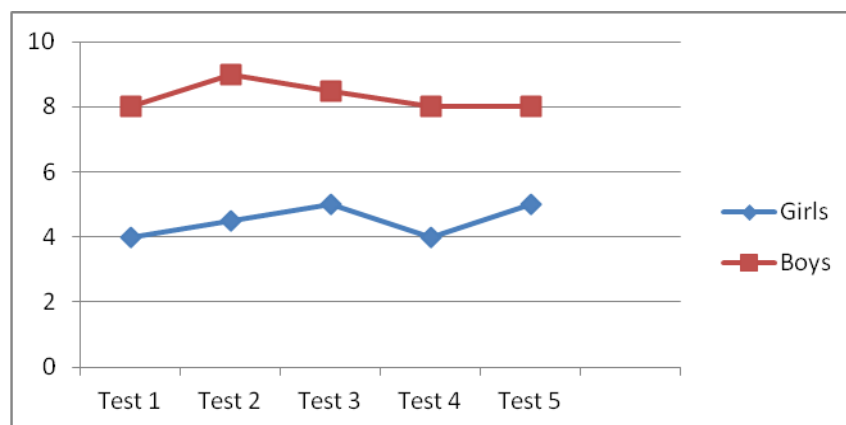
Fig. 3

8. Results and Discussions

The results of this qualitative research strongly suggest that in all the grades and groups, boys performed much better than girls in the Listening Skill tests. There is a considerable gap between the scores of boys and girls. To minimise any sampling error, five tests were given. But all the results were consistently similar. Boys repeatedly scored more than girls.

These results suggest that this can be true because boys find game-like tests and activities motivational and challenging.f While doing listening tasks, boys used the noticing strategy realistically in the game-like tests. Moreover, the content of some of the passages, like the one on the Premier League, fell within the interest range and background knowledge that the boys had. The girls in this study perhaps had areas of interest other than sports.

Boys seem to thrive in a highly competitive environment. They showed great enthusiasm when they were given a challenging task in a competitive atmosphere. According to their subject teachers, their success in these tests enabled these boys to be motivated in other classes as well.

On the whole, their emotional intelligence and stress levels were minimised so that they could concentrate better on the listening task and acquire the language. They also learnt how to concentrate in spite of external noise outside the classroom. They looked for contextual cues and inference from personal experiences. Most of the effective listeners tried to use inference, monitoring, clarification, and elaboration. Learners, especially boys, gained more motivation and awareness, which helped them when listening to teachers teaching other subjects.

Girls were encouraged to watch and listen to video and audio clips on different topics ranging from sports to science to gain background knowledge, so that they can do better in their listening tasks.

9. Scope for Further Research

Since listening skill forms the backbone of soft skills, boys can fare better in soft skills too. There is a scope for further research to address this issue. The sample population in this study is limited to one geographical area and the sample size is also small. But Flyvbjerg (2006, 2011) argues that though qualitative methods and case study research have a small sample population restricted to a single geographical area, they can be used to generalise a hypothesis. The same experiment on learner strategy use in both the genders can be carried out in different schools in order to study the benefits. This knowledge can be shared with different school teachers. More awareness for teachers on cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio affective strategies for strategy instruction can be another area of further study. Patterns can be observed to find out the different strategy use required for boys and girls to develop their listening skills. This can be an important study to foster language acquisition and soft skills

Nevertheless, this study is limited to a small rural population with its own limitations caused by socio-economic constrains. Further investigation in other schools with various ethno-linguistic student populations is necessary to authenticate the reasons for different levels of listening capabilities among girls and boys, and by course level too.

10. Pedagogical Implications

The focus of education has shifted from teacher-centric to student-centric. Language educators should innovatively engage their students. Learning should become free of gender bias. There must be more research in methodology to innovate a teaching-learning process that appeals to both boys and girls equally if we persist with co-education schools. The valuable opinions of the language teachers, practitioners, student counsellors, psychologists, parents and student representatives could be researched, documented and analysed. Teachers will know how to teach different listening and learner strategy use for a more effective teaching-learning process. This will result in both boys and girls performing better in the Board examinations.

11. Recommendations and Suggestions:

* Firstly, our methodology should change. Activity Based Learning (ABL) seems to motivate boys who otherwise play truant. They listen better, read better and therefore, speak and write better in an ABL class environment.

"As you read this, a little girl in an elementary school could be doing a mono act in class to study animals; a bunch of boys could be collecting seeds on their school premises to study numbers." (The Hindu, Sept 5, 2013).

Educators from Jammu and Kashmir in the north, Arunachal Pradesh in the north-west, to Mysore in the south (The Hindu, October 22, 2008, Sept 26, 2008, March 13, 2009) and even from China (The Hindu, Nov 16, 2009) are impressed with the ABL approach and come to Tamil Nadu to study and learn from this system.

"They want material support for starting ABL and some training. The Chinese delegation was impressed with the way our students of government schools were enthusiastic in classrooms because of the interactive learning and teaching style."

ABL has been introduced only up to the elementary level in government schools in Tamil Nadu. This approach should be extended to the high school students to improve the proficiency levels of the students.

* Secondly, course contents should be revised to bring in more activity-worthy content. This will enable the teachers in the field to easily design their own activities based on the ground reality and availability of resources. Contents should be revised keeping in mind the activities that can be customised at the local level based on the availability of resources and resource person's ability.

* Thirdly, resource persons should be sensitised about the importance of strategy instruction and listening skills. Unless a learner listens to good English, he cannot speak good English. Therefore, educators should urgently consider listening skill activities indispensable at all levels.

* Finally, test patterns should be revised. More weightage should be given to the invisible listening skill. The present trend of apportioning twenty percent for listening skill should be done authentically considering the benefits to the learners. All four skills – LSRW, should in fact be given equal weightage. At present, writing skill is predominant, whilst the other three skills are being taught and tested in an

integrated manner through the writing skill. It is not only tedious but also highly demanding of both teachers and students. All professional placement and proficiency exams like TOEFL, Trinity ESOL and IELTS give equal importance to all the four language skills. Perhaps ideas from these exams can be taken to modify the pattern of the school Board exam. Materials and syllabus designers, teachers and education policy makers should introduce the concept of effective listening strategy instruction in teaching and employ sound principles in test patterns. Listening is the most important skill that is required to process information and respond. Ultimately research evidence has proved that learning how and when to use strategies increases awareness about the listening process. Oxford et al (1989). This also closely reflects on an increase in their performance levels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Let's Teach English

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Abstract

Language is a free bird but grammar tries to put it in a cage without much success. Language is like the eternal feminine and grammar tries to impose its masculine authority on it. Both language and grammar are illogical like all human beings.. There is a constant tension between language and grammar but grammar is a necessary evil. In language teaching, the present-day context must be taken into consideration and only the language must be taught and not its grammar. Teachers must know the grammar of the language but the learners must be taught the language.

Key words: freedom, control, illogical, literary way communicative way, grammar way, interpretive way combo recipe

Wonder of Wonders

There are some wonders like the seven wonders of the Ancient World, the New Wonders of the later periods like The Great Wall of China and The TajMahal. There are also some natural wonders like Mt. Everest, the Grand Canyon, the Victoria Falls in Zambia, the natural light displays in the Polar Regions called the Auroras, the natural wonders of the Underwater World, the wonders of the Solar System like the Rings of Saturn, of the Industrial world like the Hoover Dam, etc. One may say that water, air, sun light are also natural wonders but they are all outside human beings.

The greatest of all natural wonders, the wonder of wonders is the human language. The human language is unique, species specific and innate. It is there in all human beings with a well formed brain. We do not realize it is a wonder because it is in all humans Language is so tightly woven with human experience that it is impossible to imagine life without language. Either for contemplation or for communication all human beings use language. That was why even centuries ago Descartes said: Thanks to language Man became Man. We can add: humans became Humans, thanks to language. It is language that makes us humane.

Such a common phenomenon, language is a mystery, a mind-teaser. From Panini and Plato to Chomsky- no one has been able to unravel the mystery and say anything definite about the origin and development, how we learn language, and how such a small brain manages a complex phenomenon like language. Even neuroscientists like Dr. Penfield (1959), who used neural stimulation for studying language functions in the brain or Dr. Ramachandran (2011) can only speculate about our language competence. What happens when the one hundred billion neuro-cells interact in the tiny space of the human brain and how the drama is enacted – no one knows and there is no way of testing it. Scientists have discovered the Higgs Boson (the God Particle) but no one has found out the 'language particle'. Yet, like the proverbial six blind men 'we prate about an Elephant which not one has seen'. Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution explains to some extent the evolution of the human brain but we do not know how it is used in the development of language. Is it a byproduct? Chomsky (1972) and Steven Pinker (1994) speculates about language instinct, perhaps like sneezing and yawning but more specialized but again there is no way of testing such speculations. Neurolinguistics also keeps trying to get some explanation about how language is learnt. All these attempts have succeeded only in locating some broad areas in the brain related to language function. But language remains a mystery because it is psychological and not neurological or logical. Language follows the logic of the psyche and not the logic of logicians. The mind-brain controversy is also applicable to language because language is mind-related and brain is matter (What is mind? Doesn't matter! What is matter? Never mind!).

All human beings are 'illogical'

There is no way of explaining the 'illogicalities' in natural languages except saying it is the logic of the human psyche and since language is a human phenomenon, it is as illogical as human beings are. Look at English: a 'running nose' does not run; 'nightmares' can happen anytime of the day, even during broad daylight; 'morning sickness' is not necessarily during morning; 'hot dogs' can be cold; a 'pine apple' had neither pine nor apple; an 'eggplant has no egg and no plant; 'bullshit' is not the shit of a bull; 'holy shit' is certainly not holy; when your grandfather kicked the bucket, there was no bucket nearby! Can we say that speakers of English are insane and pack them off to a mental asylum!

Every language shows such traits of insanity because human beings are like that! People are crazy, aren't they? The vagaries of English spelling and pronunciation are well known. If 'cut' is /kut/, why not 'but' be /but/? If the plural of 'ox' is 'oxen', why not the pluaral of 'box' be 'boxen'? In Hindi, the most marked feature of a man 'dhadi' (i.e. beard) is feminine in gender!

Freedom vs. Control

Language is a free bird; it follows the flights of fancy and can fly anywhere with our imagination. Many have questioned the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic determinism that language controls thought; it is not that easy to control language. Even the oft quoted Chomskyan example 'Colorless green ideas sleep furiously' as a deviant construction is made possible in some context. Ian Robinson demonstrates that a paraphrase 'Insipid ideas lie dormant in the mind of a revolutionary' is a perfect possibility. In Dylan Thomas 'Man broke the sun, pulled the wind down'. Yeats 'made his song a coat'. A poet says 'Leave a kiss but in a cup'. In Shelly 'The mountain kisses the sky, the wave kisses the shore, and cloud kiss the peak'. Almost anything is possible in speech as well as writing. Language can fly anywhere; she is so romantic that she can flirt with any language. Look at English- a global flirt. It dates with all languages in the world – Greek, Latin, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian (Glasnost), Japanese (tsunami), Chinese (tea), Arabic (coffee), Hindi, Tamil (juggernaut), etc.; the latest one is from Punjabi 'jugad' (meaning 'improvise' or 'innovate') which even Harvard Business Review uses.

Such intercourses have given birth to pidgins, creoles, and even languages like the Hawaiian pidgins and creoles, the pidgins used in the West Indies, and in other parts of the world. The interaction between Persian and Hindustani resulted in Urdu, a poetic language.

Language is a living phenomenon; it is dynamic and keeps changing. It is always in a state of 'flux'. Look at the new words and expressions that English keeps on adding according to the technological, economic, and socio-political requirements. Computer technology has given birth to many new expressions: email, SMS, blog, download, mouse (the plural of which is not 'mice'), geek, cloud computing, data mining, data warehouse, etc. Words like 'texting', 'mind space', 'bandwidth', stress buster' have become part of everyday usage. Women's empowerment has brought in

'genderlect', 'gendercide', etc. Many of the words from the masculine gender have been pushed to the common gender area: governor, actor, manager, author, etc. Many other expressions about the environment like 'global warming', 'climate change', 'greenhouse effect', 'El Nino' are widely used in current English. Informal expressions like 'brownie points' (meaning (credit for having done something good), 'buzz kill' (meaning 'something or someone that spoils an otherwise enjoyable event or feeling) are widely used.

It is because English keeps changing and borrowing, it has become a global language. With globalization and technology, it is absorbing more and more words even from different cultures.

Though language is a free bird, grammarians try to put it in a cage but language refuses to be caged. That is where the clash occurs between freedom and control- language and grammar. The species called grammarians are also known by several names: word-watchers, mavaens (a Hebrew word that means 'expert' in not a very positive sense), moralizers, language police, the legislators of language, etc. Their main job is language policing. The framers of the rules are the grammarians, popular columnists, copy-editors, style manual and handbook writers, and pundits. They create rules that are generally flouted and ignored by the users of the language except the teachers of English who try to follow the rules in the grammar class. All the best writers in English, including Shakespeare and Milton and most of the mavens themselves have been among the flagrant flouters. Someone somewhere must be making decisions about 'correct English'. That was just the purpose of Academia Françoise that amused its users who gaily ignored it. Fortunately, there is no English academy (though some attempts were made in the nineteenth century) and as a result English has become a global language. Greek and Latin were considered the language of enlightenment during the eighteenth century and they became the ideal of precision and logic to which English should aspire. So, English grammar was written in the Greek-Latin mould and, at that time, such manuals made the English grammar books useful as a way for learning Latin and Greek.

A case in point is Fowler's Modern English Usage (1926), revised by Sir Ernest Gowers (1965). Fowler's book is a classic example of the prescriptive attitude. Fowler gives a large number of examples of contemporary usage and points out 'mistakes' in them to say that they are not acceptable usage. If English and 'correct

usage' is not found in its users and the writings of its eminent writers, where then is English? Who's English is English? Unfortunately for Fowler, one smart guy noticed that Fowler and his brother, Frank, wrote the introduction to the Concise Oxford Dictionary; he carefully 'audited' the introduction and examined it with a microscope. He found all the 'unacceptable' usage that Fowler lists in Modern English Usage in the introduction and published the list captioned 'Howlers of Fowler'.

Fowler has been criticized – notably by his famous contemporary Jespersen- for being 'old fashioned'. Fowler was a 'prescriptive' grammarian and prescriptive grammar is not used outside the classroom. Jespersen, 'the grammatical historian' is in favour of recording the facts of language like a naturalist observing the facts of nature and recording it. Fowler, on the other hand, 'the instinctive moralizer' (as Jespersen calls him) held the proper purpose of grammarian was to 'to tell people not what they do and how they came to do it, but what they ought to do for the future'. Fowler has been criticized for relying too much on Latin grammar. He admitted the charge but justified it: Whether or not it is regrettable, that we English have for centuries been taught what little grammar we know on Latin traditions, have we not now recognize that the iron has entered into our souls, that our grammatical conscience has by this time a Latin element inextricably compounded in it, if not predominant'. He was aware of the tension and he knew and said, 'usage evolves itself little disturbed by their (i.e. grammarians) likes and dislikes'. Randolph Quirk wrote: You cannot depend on the Fowler of Modern English usage giving you either an objective account of what modern English usage is or a representative summary of what the Latin-dominated traditionalists would have it be. Modern English Usage is personal; it is Fowler.

Forcing modern users of English to follow the old rules of English grammar because it is not done in Latin makes as much sense as forcing the modern generation to not use-whoop, e-mail for sending messages but pigeons! People are ready to change when it comes to the modern modes of transport, the state-of –the-art technology in computers, mobile phones, I-pods, etc., and even fashions, but not willing to change their mind-set when it comes to grammar.

No grammarian, however descriptive he tries to be, has or ever can describe the totality of a language, including the figures of speech, idioms and phrases, proverbs, slang expressions, the said -and -the unsaid, the poetic creations, and new

additions. No grammar can capture all aspects of a language; language is a happening site and always in a state of 'flux'.

That is why grammarians have always got a different treatment. Browning wrote 'The Grammarian's Funeral' and Ian Robinson 'The New Grammarian's funeral'. No one has written about a grammarian's birthday or on his wedding! Why is it so? Are they so dull and boring? Are they not interested in life? A Sanskrit saying goes: A grammarian takes more delight in saving one 'mora' than in the birth of his son. That shows the reason why they are treated differently.

The Gender Clash

Interestingly, it is worth noting that language is feminine- the eternal feminine- mysterious, puzzling, deep, unfathomable, subtle, and colourful. No wonder that most languages in the world are considered 'she', mostly mother or sister. If language is feminine, grammar is masculine- more assertive, wanting to exercise control over the uncontrollable in the patriarchal tradition. That is why, perhaps, there has been no top ranking woman grammarian in any language of the stature of Panini or Jespersen. The age-old gender conflict is found in the tension between language and its users on the one hand and the grammarians and the language police, on the other; it is the same tension between freedom and control.

Not so Logical

Though grammarians claim that theirs is a logical discipline, there are many unsolved problems and illogicalities in grammar.

Take for example, the two commonest and frequent words in English: 'yes' and 'no'. No one has classified the part of English speech to which they belong. Sometimes they are called adverbs; but the 'yes' and 'no' that are used in discourses like "Are you a grammarian? No, I'm not", obviously are not adverbs because they do not modify a verb or an adjective or another adverb. They not only modify the whole sentence that follows but also connect the two- the previous and the following. Some dictionaries classify them as interjections (Collins New Gem Dictionary) but they do not normally exhibit any emotion as interjections are supposed to do... Are they abridged sentences? Similarly, how to classify 'please' in 'Please, will you help me?' The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English says 'please' is an interjection! Is 'Thank you" also an interjection? Grammarians are silent about such tricky issues.

There are more important puzzles like the '-ing' trap. Kruisinga (1931-2) states: To what absurdities the traditional 'logical' distinction leads may be seen from the following pairs of sentences, in all of which the first is declared to be a 'gerund' and the second a 'present participle':

He went on *walking*. (gerund)

He went *walking*. (Present participle)

He continued *looking*. (gerund)

He stood *looking* at the game. (Present participle)

They also point out that the 'verbal –ing' in the second sentence is variously interpreted by Henry Sweet as a present participle or as a half gerund (New English Grammar, 1891-98. sec.2328). Nesfield talks of the 'gerundive use of the present participle' in examples like 'I rely on the wall being built immediately'. Quirk and others in their voluminous Comprehensive Grammar of Contemporary English avoid the use of the word 'gerund' and say that we need to recognize a complex gradience through what is traditionally called 'gerund'.

One can point out many such fallacies in all grammars written so far. The most obvious one is what is called 'case' in English. Grammars that follow the Latin tradition list at least five cases: the Nominative, the Accusative, the Genitive, the Dative, and the Vocative. Some add the Instrumental and the Comitative, and other cases. English is not an 'inflected' language like Latin or Sanskrit; it is an 'isolating' language. It makes use of prepositions in some cases like the Dative. For the Nominative and the Accusative only the word order shows the meaning: "John met Mary' and 'Mary met John'. The Genitive is expressed by an apostrophe and the Vocative by intonation. The pronouns have different forms for the Nominative, the Accusative, and the Genitive. There are no case inflections in English. In the five case system, there is no distinction between 'He cut it with a knife' and 'He cut it with his wife'...

When it comes to doubtful areas of usage, grammar books offer   very little help. For example, what is the past tense of 'shit'? is it 'shit, shit, shit' or 'shit, shat, shat' or 'shit, shitted, shitted'? Is it 'pocket- picking' (like rag- picking) or ' pick pocketing'? One, who does it, is he 'a pocket picker' (like 'rag picker') or a

'pickpocket' or "pick-pocketer"? Grammar books offer no clue to such issues; grammarians will say these are matters of usage.

Language all the time taunts grammarians. No grammarian will ever touch the expletives and the four-letter words that are often used by the young 'rule-breakers' and the novelists.

That is why there are very many jokes about grammarians. Here are some: A grammarian went to a pet shop and bought a talking parrot. After a week, he went back to the shop and complained, 'The parrot you sold me uses inappropriate language. I don't want it.' The owner of the shop was surprised and exclaimed, 'I never taught her to use abusive language or to swear or curse.' The grammarian replied, 'I'm not talking about that. She splits infinitives and says "It's me".

Another one: God was sitting in Heaven and there was a knock on the door. 'Who's that?' asked God. 'It is I,' came the reply.

'That must be a grammarian or a teacher of English. Send him to hell,' ordered God.

A Necessary Evil

Does it mean that all grammarians must be ex-communicated, banished from the society, or hanged? Certainly not. Some rules, some control, some order, some discipline is a must; otherwise, there will be chaos. Like on the roads, if there are no traffic signals or traffic police, there will be utter confusion, traffic jam, road rage, and no one will be able to reach the desired destination. Similarly, if there is no order or discipline among the users of a language, there will be no communication. Extreme individuality will break down the basic fabric of a language and the language speaking community.

There are many other necessary evils in life like the State, the police, the judiciary, social conventions, and even marriage! Without the institution called marriage, there will be no family, and without family there will be all kinds of problems; it doesn't mean that family is a perfect institution; there are problems but it is a necessary evil. It all depends on what one makes of one's marriage; some make their married lives miserable and some tolerable. Too much control either from the husband or the wife will kill the relationship; too much freedom too will have its own

problems. We must know how to strike a balance and make marriage a happy one, as far as possible.

Similarly, grammar and grammarians are necessary evils. They have a role to play; we need them. At the same time, we must remember that too much control will strangle the language, as it happened in the case of Sanskrit and Latin; or people will say, 'Any fool can make a rule and every fool will mind it', as it happened in France after the establishment of the Academy. Too much freedom will result in pidginization and creolization. There must be a balance, a middle path. No Fowler, no Nesfield, no Wren and Martin can stop MacDonald from using "I'm loving it' to sell their french-fries and burgers, however that sentence maybe ungrammatical. Language mavens will frown, but french-fries sell! People are interested in french-fries and not grammar rules.

Grammar is like a dictionary; we use a dictionary for reference and not for learning a language; it is there for reference when needed. Similarly, let grammarians write historical, prescriptive, descriptive, and philosophical grammars; it is their job and they enjoy it. Grammar is like any other discipline- philosophy, economics, etc. Let them practice their trade. When needed the users and teachers can use it for reference purposes. Grammar books are necessary but with a warning "Handle with Care".

Ought We to Teach Grammar?

With due apologies to Shakespeare, we can say: The fault, dear teachers, is not in grammar, but in ourselves, that we are underlings, taking orders from the planners and the Boards of Studies without thinking and expressing our views and behaving like foot-soldiers. So, the question is not about grammar and its usefulness but its usefulness in teaching, say English. Science and technology can be used or misused; similarly grammar too can be used or misused.

As in religion, where there are believers, non-believers, the agnostic and the confused, the idolaters of grammar with blind faith and unyielding faith in the value of grammar as the basis of all good writing and speech, advocate the teaching of grammar as a subject in the curriculum; some condemn it saying that 'there is probably no subject on the school time-table on which more time is expanded unprofitably than English grammar'(West1952); quite a few are not sure and have no

clear idea regarding the nature, use and outcome of grammar instruction. As a result, grammar is taught out of necessity because it is included in the syllabus and questions are asked in the examination. Teachers are interested in 'covering the portion' rather than developing the language competence of learners.

Peace makers like Pit Corder, a noted applied linguist has a non-committal statement: The answer to the question 'Ought we to teach grammar is, therefore, psychologically 'yes' and linguistically 'perhaps''' (Pit Corder1973). Michel West, the author of New Method Readers (1935 *onwards*) and the General Service List of English Words (1953) and who taught in India for some years, lists some of the reasons for the popularity of grammar among teachers:

It is possible for a teacher to teach the grammar of a language although he has no real command over the language.

Grammar is popular with examiners. It is difficult to test fluent speaking or writing ability. Grammar questions are easy to set and correct.

Many examiners are elderly; they learnt their English under a grammatical system.

(West 1952)

In a 1986 movie called '36 Chowringe Lane', the head of the institution conducts a staff meeting for work allotment. She asks the youngest one to teach romantic poetry and oldest, who is about to retire from service soon, to teach grammar. One can clearly see the thinking behind the selection. On teaching grammar, someone remarked: 'For all your rhetoricians rules teach nothing but to name his tools' or the saying 'Any fool can make a rule and every fool will mind it'.

A learner once wrote an elegy about his grammar class:

When I die bury me deep;

Bury my grammar book at my feet.

Tell the teacher I've gone to rest

And won't be back for the grammar test.

What is the reason for this aversion? Why this 'kolaveri di'?

What is wrong with the good old Nesfield (1898) or Wren and Martin (1936), another very popular school grammar, a book that broadly follows the Nesfieldian pattern but was written and published using British names with Indian examples? Wren and Martin has gone into several reprints and revised editions; it is, according to claims, passed on from father to son and grandsons, from generation to generation. Why are such books not relevant today?

There are some reasons for not using books published about 75 or even 50 years ago.

The English language has undergone a sea change in the last 30 or 25 years.

Many new theories like modern linguistics have brought in new insights in grammar and about language, language learning and teaching.

Our attitudes towards grammar and usage have changed.

The learning styles of the present generation of learners are different.

The market demands are different.

The English language has undergone a sea change in the last 30 or 25 years.

Many new words have entered the language and used in everyday use. For example, many technology related, gender related, environment related words and expressions have become part of common usage. One cannot find a computer mouse and its plural, e-mail, or SMS in Nesfield or Wren and Martin. Nesfield, while listing the masculine and feminine in the section 'Nouns: gender' gives 'governor – governess'; this is absurd because they have different meanings. When some woman becomes a governor of a State, she cannot be addressed 'Your Excellency, the Governess'! Many of the gender related words have moved into the common gender as a result of the women's movement: actor, author, dance-master, headmaster, inspector, instructor, mayor, manager, porter, postmaster, etc. Even words like 'master' and 'mistress' have different meanings; 'Madam' is different from 'madam'; 'dog' and 'bitch' have different meanings in different contexts. 'Wizard' and 'witch' are not to be used in all contexts as masculine and feminine; 'He is a computer wizard' is fine but 'she is a computer witch' is not acceptable!

Many new theories in modern linguistics, structuralism and post-structuralism, generative grammars, functional grammars, speech- act theory and psychology

have brought in new insights about language, grammatical notions, language learning and teaching.

A lot of research has brought in many useful findings about the nature and structure of English; they cannot be ignored. Many examples can be given to illustrate this. Both Nesfield and Wren and Martin use the verb 'love' for conjugation. In wren and Martin the authors say that 'the complete conjugation of the verb 'love' is given with a view to helping the pupil to systematize the knowledge already acquired by him'(1970 edition, p.159).

   I am loving.   We are loving.

They are loving.   You are loving.

I have been loving.   We have been loving.

Obviously, the verb 'love' is not used in the continuous tense, except in advertisements like the Macdonald's, just to attract attention. Moreover, the verb 'love' is semantically transitive; no one can love intransitively! At least, you must love yourself.

In Wren and Martin, a sentence like 'The window is broken' is given as an example of the passive voice (p.97). Modern grammars consider such sentences 'stative' since they show the state: 'The window is in a broken state' or 'It is a broken window'; it is like 'It is strong'. At least, 'The window was broken' can be transformed into an active but not 'The window is broken'. Again, Wren and Martin gives "He is gone' (= He has gone); but there is a difference in meaning. In a more obvious example like 'The carpet is faded' shows the condition but 'The carpet has faded' shows the process that started some time ago and resulting in the present state. Historical grammars say, 'The Lord has come' has become 'The Lord is come' as a result of the weak form 'has becoming 'is'; it is the result of speech on writing.

Such insights are not given in the old school grammars. As a result, question paper setters set questions like 'The table is made of wood' (Change the voice.). How on earth one is supposed to change it into the active? "Made' is an adjective followed by a prepositional phrase 'of wood'; 'made' is not a verb at all. Look at similar sentences: 'Clouds are made of water particles.'; 'They are made for each other.' 'Made' is also used as an adjective in sentences like 'He is a made man' (= a man certain of success, because of luck or help).

There are so many sentences that have transitive verbs with their 'objects' but they are not used in the passive:

We shake hands.   We nod our heads.

Some appear to be in the active voice:

She is outspoken.

I am depressed.

I was born in an inappropriate time.

The limit of absurdity can be illustrated by the following anecdote: A girl went to a party and everyone complimented her on her beauty. While the party was on she came running to her friend and said, 'They all told me I was beautiful.' She was worried about the sequences of tenses and not about her beauty!

Our attitude towards grammar has changed.

We no longer think in terms of 'correct/incorrect' and 'grammatical/ungrammatical' but 'appropriate/ inappropriate'. For instance, you cannot go to your boss and say 'you are a fool' or your wife and say 'You are ugly' and claim that you have produced perfectly correct sentences. They are unacceptable because they are inappropriate. What is inappropriate is also ungrammatical in a given context and languages are used in contexts.

Many of the so called ungrammatical or incorrect sentences are acceptable. Look at the following sentences:

I saw everyone before my friend noticed *them.*

Everyone returned to their seats.

Earlier the language mavens condemned such sentences. Many more can be cited.

Who is the message from?

I don't know who to suggest.

Even the Oxford English Dictionary says 'Whom is no longer current in natural colloquial English'. In a construction like "Ferdinand whom they supposed is drowned…' most grammarians will consider 'whom' wrong. Fowler says, 'No

grammarian would have a word to say for it'. But Jespersen says, 'It is the only place where 'whom' is still naturally used'. The whole matter of 'whom' vs. 'who' has become a matter of style like the problem of ending a sentence with a preposition.

Even a sentence like 'Mohan killed a snake' attracts the attention of the animal rights activists! Examples like 'I went to my village to sell the land along with my wife' as an instance of ambiguity raises the eyebrows of girls who ask "Why not we say 'I went to my village to sell the land along with my husband'?" A perfect possibility except for the fact that there may be no takers for the husband!

English is no longer the property of the English. It is used all over the world and bent according to the 'context of situation'. With the growth of democracy and all kinds of variations in pronunciation, spelling, syntax, and cultural associations, it is impossible to legislate and fix norms.

Even the standard newspapers in India use expressions like the following:

The criminal is absconding. (Instead of 'has absconded')

The concerned minister will look into the matter. (Instead of 'the minister concerned')

You must be knowing that person. (Instead of 'perhaps, you know the person')

Sometimes what is considered 'Indianism" is accepted as standard usage like 'biodata' and 'preponed'.

With attitudes changing like fashions, with so many varieties of English in the world like American, Australian, Nigerian, Indian, etc. and people exposed to all varieties through the media- both print and electronic- and literature, it is difficult to teach 'correct English'. We cannot say that Americans speak incorrect English or the English used in Indian Writing in English is incorrect.

The learning styles of the current generation of learners are different.

The SMS-generation is not in a mood to learn all the rules and do all the exercises in isolated sentences and wait patiently for their application in composition writing. In Wren and Martin paragraph writing starts only from page 516 and that too a paragraph on 'The Cat'! A funny distinction is made in the earlier sections between grammar and composition. The one given below is an exercise in grammar:

In the following sentences which are Adjective Phrases and which are Adverb Phrases:

Put your shoulder to the wheel.

You have put a spoke in my wheel.

His star is in the ascendant.

******************** (Wren and Martin: Ex 79, p.181)

(Twenty isolated sentences are given.)

The one below is an exercise in composition:

Substitute suitable Adverb Phrases for Adverbs in the following sentences:

He writes carefully.

Soon the sun will set.

****

(Eighteen unconnected sentences are given for composition.)

Here is one parting shot. Stannard Allan's Living English Structure: Practice Book for Foreign Students (1974) treats learners like morons. Exercise1 asks the learners to put the following in the plural:

A husband is a man.

A garden has a tree.

Present-day learners will totally agree with Wilhelm Victor, a German scholar in his monograph 'Language Teaching Must Start Afresh' shouted in 1986: Death to rules and isolated sentences! The basis of language teaching must be the connected text (quoted in Howatt1984). Gunther, another German scholar, in 1881 cried: Teaching isolated words and word-forms is a grievous offence against psychology and pedagogy (in Howatt 1884).

Unless grammar is integrated with composition- oral as well as written, it is totally useless and a waste of time. Anyone who advocates the sentence –grammar must be sentenced to death! The present-day learners are the fast-food generation; they have no patience to plod through the dry-as-dust exercises. The Google-

generation wants instant results because of the competition, rush, and the value of time in modern life. Moreover, even the connected texts must have human interest and current relevance. Many theme based texts are coming into the market like **Empowerment English** (a book for teaching English through gender issues) and Eco-English (a book for teaching English through environment related issues). More and more context-based materials that are even technology enabled for teaching communication skills are also available. To ignore all such materials and go in the same old path will only marginalize the institutions and teachers. Learners will find alternate ways and sources and ignore the old ones.

The market demands are also different.

The market expects graduates with communication skills in English with pleasant personality, and social skills. To teach them Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd (16th century) or Milton's paradise Lost will be a crime. Just because some teachers like such texts, it does not mean that those texts are to be thrust on the unwilling present-day learners. The learners are to go out as employable graduates and they have a life to live.

At present, the top-down policy of our universities and colleges has proved to be ineffective. Some old-timers sit on the Boards of Studies and decide what is good for the learners without considering the market demands. The learners have no say in what they want to learn, how they want to learn it, and how they wish to be tested; even the prospective employers have no say in curriculum planning. The old-timers, who are not even familiar with the technology-enabled materials or materials that have current relevance sit and decide the fate of a whole generation; that has proved to be disastrous. This has also resulted in the marginalization of our universities and colleges and the students losing respect for the teaching community.

Several ways of teaching English

Let's start thinking differently on something useful and relevant. Now, the right question is 'How to Teach English'. There are many routes to Mt. Everest; there are many ways of teaching English interestingly and effectively. Here are some suggestions.

        a) The Literary Way

        b) The Communicative Way.

c) The Interpretive Way.

d) The Integrative Way.

e) The Combo Recipe.

a) The Literary Way:

Teaching English through literary texts has been the traditional way since the introduction of English in India. The standard fare in the curriculum was poetical selections from Goldsmith, Pope, Shelly, Keats, Wordsworth, Shakespeare and others, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, some plays of Shakespeare, essays by Bacon, Addison, Johnson, Lamb and others or at the most, Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* or Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* and such other pieces. With minor modifications here and there, even today the same type of curriculum (an anthology, consisting of about a dozen essays, usually by the acknowledged masters of English prose and some poems) is used in most colleges and universities. The educational system has become a huge machine for manufacturing degree holders fit to be the clerical staff or 'cyber coolies'in multinational companies. No one reads the original texts and no competence in English is acquired. Learners are not encouraged to learn the language, react to what they read, to think creatively or to do any original writing. After some years, students will think that the bazaar notes -writers are Shakespeare, Milton and Shelly! India is the only country where the madness of teaching Shakespeare and Milton takes place on such a massive scale to students who do not even understand or write English properly! In many other countries literature is studied as a subject by only those interested and have the competence in the study of literature and not for the purpose of communication. For the vast majority in India, English learning is for communication and not for literary studies. No one seems to be bothered- neither the UGC nor the universities; the farce goes on.

But, the changing or changed role of English has necessitated a rethink. In the present context, **a) a lot depends on what is meant by 'literature' and b) how a literary text can be viewed**. There is much literature outside the canonical grid: children's literature, folk literature, popular literature, Dalit literature, women's writing, science fiction, comics, audio books, etc. Apart from Western literature, there is a lot in world literature that can be considered literature in English. Secondly, even canonical literature can be studied from a contemporary point of view in relation to

our own times. For example, Shakespeare's *Tempest* can be studied from a post-colonial point of view or *The Merchant of Venice* from a Jewish point of view, or *Macbeth* from the angle of State violence and Human Rights or even a comparison between Lady Macbeth, who is directly involved in the murder, and Kaikeyi in the Ramayan, who inadvertently caused the death of the king, Dasarat. This will make the study of the old texts more relevant, encourage critical and creative thinking, and sustain students' interest. For example, the passionate reply of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice in*III.i when Salerio asks Shylock what good a pound of Antonio's flesh can be used to motivate learners to talk about the feelings of the marginalized in our society:

To bait fish withal! If it will feed nothing elase, it will feed my revenge. He hath *disgraced me and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated my enemies- and what is his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that> If a Jew wrong a Christian< what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance by by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.*

In the contemporary context it could be a black or Dalit or any one of the marginalized, downtrodden sections speaking to others in the society.

At the higher level too, many interesting literary pieces like WoleSoyinke's 'Telephone Conversation', or 'Spoken English and Broken English' by G.B. Shaw, or 'The Sporting Spirit' by George Orwell and such other interesting pieces can be taught.

But, it must be emphasized that this is not the only way for learning and teaching English.

b) The Communicative Way:

We can teach English in terms of certain communicative functions like the following:

    a) Social formulas

    b) Inviting someone

    c) Saying goodbye

    d) Congratulating

    e) Introducing yourself

    f) Introducing someone

    g) Answering an introduction

    h) Greeting someone

    i) Thanking

Such other items can be added.

c)   The Interpretive Way

Some short texts that have current relevance and that raise social issues like gender discrimination, corruption, etc.;mini stories, and interesting episodes can be used to teach English.

An example is given below:

Jesus vs Satan

Some people were arguing for long about the computer skills of Jesus and Satan. Tired of all the bickering, God said, "Enough is enough. I'm going to set up a test that will run for two hours, and from the results I'll judge who does a better job." So, Satan and Jesus sat down at the keyboards. They moused. They googled. They faxed. They e-mailed. They downloaded. They did spreadsheets. They did some genealogy reports. Jesus worked with heavenly efficiency and Satan was faster than hell! Then, ten minutes before their time was up, lightning flashed across the sky, thunder rolled, rain poured, and, as expected, power went off! Satan stared at his blank screen and screamed curses. Jesus just sighed. Finally, electricity was restored,

and each of them restarted their computers. Satan started searching frantically, screaming: It's all GONE! I lost everything when the power went off!"

Jesus quietly started downloading and printing all his files from the past two hours of work. Satan saw this and became irate: That's not fair! He cheated1 How come he has all his work, and I don't have any?"

God just shrugged and said, "JESUS SAVES."

Students can be asked to read the passage aloud so that they get practice in proper speech habits like stress, pause, and intonation. Isolated words selected from the passages and sentences can be used for speech practice. Related words for the words used in the texts should also be brought in to encourage vocabulary enrichment. Another useful technique is to give dictation, using the words selected from the passages wherever necessary. Comprehension (both factual as well as inferential), points of usage and interactive composition can be built around the selected texts.

The following aspects are suggested to exploit the texts to the fullest extent:

Loud reading to improve speaking skills and reading.

Vocabulary enrichment.

Comprehension- both factual and inferential.

 Points of usage.

Interactive composition – i.e. responses to the given text.

Spelling and punctuation.

The Integrative Way or the Grammar-Composition Way

The term 'pedagogical grammar' is a broad cover term that includes both a teacher's grammar and a learner's grammar. A teacher is not a grammarian but he/she ought to know enough grammar to teach the language in question in a way that is effective and to take informed decisions; a teacher must be in a position to decide how much grammar, to whom, for what purpose(s) and how it has to be taught. If teachers are sure about their knowledge of grammar, then and then alone, grammar can be integrated both with oral and written composition. This requires that teachers must know some essential grammar. It does not mean that teachers go to the class and download their knowledge of grammar. The learners' requirements are different.

Moreover, there is no point in repeating the same grammar that the learners are supposed to have learnt at the school level. Often, the same categories like the tenses, the active and the passive voice, the reported speech, the use of articles and prepositions, and the conditional clause are repeated, using isolated sentences and transformation exercises, resulting in boredom and aversion. This must be avoided.

The use of the tenses can be taught even with the help of even a railway time-table. For instance, take the Rajdhani Express from Bangalore

To Nizamuddin. We can ask several questions:

What time does it start from Bangalore city station?

When does it reach Secunderabad? How long does it stop there?

Does it stop at Bhopal? How many stops are there between Bhopal and Nizamuddin? What is the total running time?

Many more questions can be asked. This way we can teach one of the uses of the Simple Present. When the train stops at a station, we look at the platform and many things are happening there. The porters are waiting; some people are running; some others talking to their relatives and friends. The use of the Present Continuous can be easily taught.

Thus a given grammatical category is repeatedly made use of in a given situation that too in a controlled way. Many interesting situations can be brought in, depending on the level of the class

For example, the use of the Passive Voice which is generally used to describe processes can be taught in an interesting way without using grammatical terms.

Here is one describing how coffee is made at home in a very typical South Indian way.

How coffee is made/ prepared/ brewed/ fixed.

Teacher: The beans/ seeds of the right quality *are selected* and they *are tested* with great care. Then what *is to be done*?

The raw beans *are fried/ baked/ roasted/ cooked* slowly over charcoal fire. (Which one is the correct word?) They are *not fried or baked*. What are the differences?

The beans *are roasted* till they become … (Invite suggestions regarding colour words – black, brown, coffee brown).

Then *what is to be done*?

The roasted beans *are…* (Invite suggestions: *powdered, ground* into fine grains). They *are not powdered*.

Are they grains or granules? What is the difference?

Then *what is to be done*?

The fine grains *are put/ placed* at the bottom of the upper part of a coffee-filter.

What is a filter? There are two cylindrical shaped cups that sit one over the other; there are small holes at the bottom of the upper cup so that water can drip into the bottom one.

Is it filter coffee as shown in the advertisements or filtered coffee? It is filtered coffee.

Then *what is to be done*?

Water ----- (*is boiled*) separately and the boiling water --- (*is poured*) over the fine grains on the upper part of the filter. Then it *gets filtered*. What is a strainer and what is the difference between a filter and a strainer? In some houses even now a piece of cloth *is used* as a strainer. For making tea a nylon strainer *is used*.

Then what *is to be done*?

The decoction *is collected* in the lower cylinder. (Can the word decoction be used as a verb? Please consult a dictionary and give the answer.)

Milk ----- (*is boiled*) separately. Now, tell me which one *is added* to which-the decoction to the hot milk or the hot milk to the decoction? (Wait for suggestions.) The decoction *is added* to the hot milk till the milk turns coffee brown. Then what is to be done?

Sugar is added, if necessary, just to lessen the bitterness but without making the coffee too sweet.

Then the hot coffee is --------. Have you seen what *is done* in the coffee shops? Is it made elastic or lengthened or sold in yards? No. It is cooled by pouring it from one 'tumbler'*(a flat bottomed drinking cup without a handle)* to another small vessel called 'dabara' or 'davara' till the right quantity of foam *is collected* at the top; it also *gets aerated* in the process which adds to the taste. A similar process *is done* in the espresso coffee.

A couple of drops of decoction *are added* at the top just to dress the coffee. Then it *is served*. Now, smell the aroma!

The passive forms are listed on the blackboard- - the ones used in the statements, questions, and negatives in columns. Some students may say that they are the passive forms because they learnt it at the school level.

After preparing the class orally, students can be asked to write two paragraphs on 'How coffee is made'.

Similar paragraphs can be attempted on 'How tea is made', 'How ice-cream is made', etc.

Note: The coffee making narration can also be written in two other styles. It can be in the form of instruction like 'Bring raw coffee beans from a shop. Roast them till they become coffee brown…….' Or in statements with 'You' like 'You bring the raw beans from a shop. You roast them till they become coffee brown…' But in both the styles, the narration is in the Active Voice but the meaning implied is in the Passive.

At an advanced level, topics like 'How coffee is grown' How cars are assembled' can be attempted. This will involve reference skills. Students can be asked to prepare flowcharts for some processes; some may do it on the computer for topics like 'How bread is made in factories'

Thus the use of the passive in describing processes can be taught interestingly without using grammatical terms.

Repeated use of the same grammatical category in interesting contexts will make learning very effective and enjoyable. The same kind of technique can be used for any item or grammatical category listed in most syllabuses; thereby, grammar gets integrated with composition.

Many more examples can be given. The teaching of grammar can be made very interesting, useful and relevant by contextualizing any item or category that has to be taught. The context of situation and the context of imagination can bring in several areas that have been excluded from the teaching of grammar; for example , general knowledge, items from newspapers and journals, interesting pieces from the electronic media and movies, literary pieces according to the level of the learners, related areas from other disciplines… the sky is the limit. The dry-as-dust discipline called grammar, celebrated only in a funeral, can become a confluence of all streams of knowledge, abilities and skills by the wedding of grammar to composition; contextualization removes the false dichotomy between grammar and composition.

The *synergic processes* in language learning get a proper focus in the teaching of grammar if done properly. Critical thinking, the art and science of self discipline, and contemplative communication are inherent properties of *gramarye, grammar and glamour,* all related etymologically to magic and learning. Teachers must take into account the interests of the technology savvy learners of the present-day if grammar is to be retained in the curriculum.

The Combo Recipe

A combination of the four types mentioned above can also be used. Some literary texts- both old and new, some pieces for communication skills, some modern texts that raise important social issues, and some contextualized pieces for teaching important grammatical categories can be judiciously mixed to make the learning of English more interesting, effective, and challenging. This combination will also take care of different aspects and interests of learners. Let's teach English and not high-flown literature, grammar or phonetics to those who are waiting to learn English.

What has been suggested so far are not the only ways to teach and learn English. There are many other ways that can be thought of. The point is that the good –old ways are not the only ways and they are to be redefined, adopted, adapted, and sometimes even abandoned according to the changing times and demands. Let us try to make the teaching of English vocationally useful, intellectually challenging, culturally sensitive, aesthetically satisfying, and socially relevant.

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Use of Oral English: A Case Study on Students of VIT University

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Abstract

The eminence of the English language in the globalised world is indubitable. It is now the most widely learned second language in the world and is increasingly being perceived as a basic skill. Communication and language skills are non-negotiable requirements of the industry. This paper tries to assess the usage of English as a spoken language among the engineering students in VIT University. The methodology employed is to observe students at random places (like cafeteria, classroom, hostels, super market, event function of debate society etc.) over a period of three weeks. The observations were carried out by a group of 12 students who themselves were both active and passive observers. The findings revealed that the usage of English as a spoken language depends on many factors like the context and the people with whom we are conversing with. In an informal place like the cafeteria, some students do speak in English while in the classrooms the percentage of students speaking in English is higher. The students need to be motivated to converse in English language in all places. Apart from the observations made, the present study suggests measures to motivate the students to speak in English language.

Key Words: English, Engineers, Locale, Cooperative Learning, Activities

Introduction

In the present world, English is recognized as a global language. It has spread from Britain to other parts of the world and serves the multi purposes of communication ranging from desire to communicate to carrying out trade and commerce. It is also the language of international business, air traffic control, United Nations, diplomacy, world banking, science and technology, academic research, space travel and global computing. English is perhaps the most flexible of all languages because people belonging to different parts of the world speak English in many different types of accent, and produce different vowels and consonants sounds. But they do somehow manage to communicate with one another through universally accepted, common sets of symbols. It implies that English is the only language having a pan-global character. The present paper discusses the importance of oral English for engineering graduates and brings out interesting statistics on the number

of students conversing in English and other regional languages in their daily lives on the campus. The study is also an analysis on the factors that influence the students' preference to speak in English or in their mother tongue. The study concludes by suggesting a few measures which can be adopted to increase and improve the English speaking skills of the students.

English as a Global Language

English as a language is achieving new dimensions in the present world. Consider the following statistics: English is used by about 750 million people, only half of whom speak it as a mother tongue. More than half of the world's technical and scientific periodicals are in English; English is the medium for 80 per cent of the information stored in the world's computers. Three quarters of the world mail, telexes and cables are in English. (The Hindu, p.11). It is inferred from the statistics that English both written and verbal is used more widely than any other language in the world. As McCrum and McNeil observes, English has become the language of the planet, the first truly global language (The Hindu, p. 11).

English language is the widely used one in the Internet. It is the only language used in air traffic control. It is the overwhelmingly dominant language of science. (Gordon,2011) English is a major language of international business, diplomacy, and science and the professions. It is the language that an Iranian businessman and a Japanese businessman are likely to use to transact business. Important commodities such as silver, tin, and hard currency are traded in English. English is also an official language, or the official language, of many international organizations, including the United Nations and many professional organizations (Kitao, 1996). It is frequently the language of international conferences, and it is the language of international athletics. Throughout the world, many professional papers are published in English. Even papers that are published in other languages often have abstracts in English.

Importance of English for Engineers

With the advent of globalization in India, there arose an imminent need to create a globalized workforce. The multinational companies have opened and are opening their offices and shops in India. Even a lot of business outsourcing is done in India. Indian companies are also going global. Due to these developments, Business Process Outsourcing, IT majors and MNCs insist on good communication skills when

they recruit fresh engineering graduates. Sometimes these fresh recruits are sent to the overseas corporate offices wherein they are required to communicate in English with their business counterparts. According to a survey, (p. 161) 99% of employers and 95% of employees believe proficiency in English directly affects one's employment opportunities.

Engineering has always been the biggest field of study in the world. It is a well known fact that English is a tool that significantly affects engineering students in academic life. A student of engineering requires very good communicative competence in order to understand the various theories that he/she studies in engineering. In academic life, engineering students have a lot to deal with the countless English lectures, tutorials, labs, project reports and papers. The most convenient source of information i.e. Internet provides much of the information in English. During the recruitment process, proficiency in English language is a decisive factor. In any MNC an engineer is required to co-operate and communicate with different people from different parts of the world. English communication competence plays an important role in the academic life and career of engineering students.

Engineers use their knowledge to design and implement structures, devices and systems that realized a desired objective. It is inevitable that the process of design which is crucial to any engineering work requires a collaborative effort between people from different fields. For example, a civil engineer will need to communicate with the surveyor and architect to design and implement his/her construction project. In the globalized world today, these people from other fields may come from different parts of the world and do not speak the engineer's mother tongue. Hence English, being the *lingua franca*, helps to facilitate effective communication. Good English will enable engineers to get their ideas across better, and hence get the job done faster.

ISSUES IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

According to Roulston and Black (1992), there are three sources of weakness that can significantly impact on an engineer's communication skills education. They are identified as:

Students' attitudes to communication.

Insufficient course content.

Deficient or inappropriate teaching methods.

All the three factors adversely affect the learning outcome of an engineering programme. A fairly large percentage of the present day students remain passive in the class in spite of all the exposure through social networking and electronic gadgets. Another significant element included the lack of opportunity for engineering students to be able to practice communication skills, particularly the oral component.

Methodology

This study is done as part of the first year engineering students' mini project in a project based learning (PBL) class. A PBL class for them is certainly an innovation. They are divided into heterogeneous groups and given real time projects. The students are involved enthusiastically in the project for over a period of three weeks. Twelve students formed themselves into groups of four and chose five different locations to observe 500 students and their usage of English as a spoken language. The locales chosen included the class rooms, Food court, Hostel Mess (both boys and girls), Le Cafe and a Debate Society (a student chapter in VIT). The observations made are quite interesting.

Criteria for Observation

Number of students speaking in English

Number of students speaking in regional languages

Observations

In VIT University, there is student representation from almost all the states in India. Some students appear to be more comfortable speaking in their regional language. A regional language has its geographical bounds defined within the state (Spolsky, 1978). It appears quite natural for a first year student to befriend a student belonging to the same state, a prelude to converse in the same language. A case in point is the observations made in a Mathematics class. A group of six first year students introduced themselves in English and no sooner did they find that they all belonged to Northern part of India than they started speaking in their regional language i.e., Hindi.
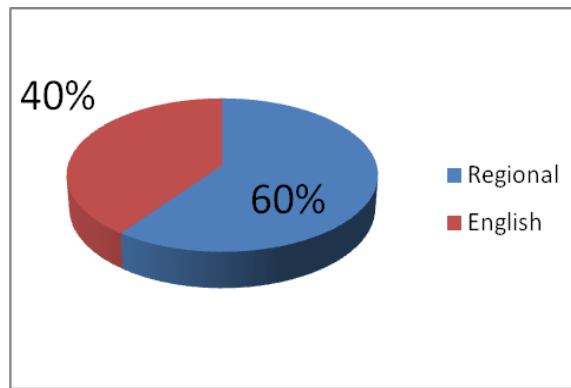
Fig 1- In a class room

English is used in both public and personal domains and its functions "extend far beyond those normally associated with an outside language, including the instrumental, the regulative, the interpersonal and the innovative, self expressive function" (Kachru, 1997). In a classroom, 60% of the students converse in English before they code switch to their regional language as Fig 1 illustrates. Another dimension to this observation is the presence of the faculty. The faculty's presence invariably makes the students to speak in English language.

In the art of small talk, a form of casual conversation, it is observed that majority of the students love conversing in the regional language. Very few students are observed to be speaking in the English language. The student observers had a real task in identifying English speakers along the pavement in the university campus. The students observed were either going to a class or going to their hostel room. As Fig 2 illustrates only 20 percent of the students observed spoke in English as they were walking along the footpath in the campus.
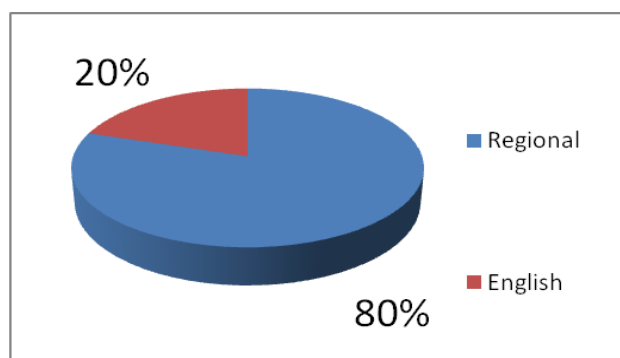

Fig 2- Along the footpath

In another informal setting like the hostel mess, majority of the students were conversing fluently in the regional language. Irrespective of the content of their

conversation, the students were chatting in their mother tongue. A point to be observed is the informal setting which makes them speak in their mother tongue. It goes without saying that their upbringing is certainly a factor to be observed in their preference for a particular tongue. The students who are conversing in English language are invariably from reputed English medium schools and for them speaking in English is quite natural. In an informal place like the hostel mess only 18 percent (Fig 3) of the students observed spoke in English language.
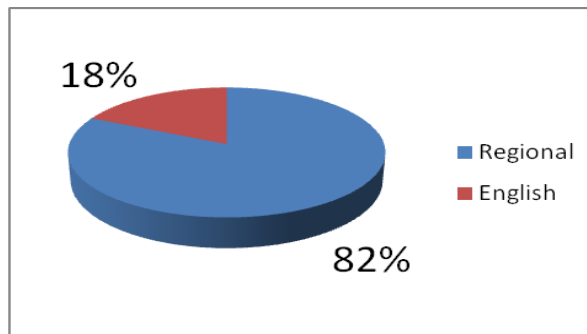

Fig 3-In the hostel mess

Le Café, a place for students in between the classes, is another informal setting where the students converge and converse. It is quite a revelation that 60% (Fig 4) of the students observed conversed in English language compared to the 40% who conversed in their regional language. It is a place where they spend very short time and the locale certainly has a bearing on the tongue that they choose in conversing with one another. The role of English as a spoken language is not replacive; it overlaps with local languages in certain domains (Kandiah citing Sridhar, 1985).
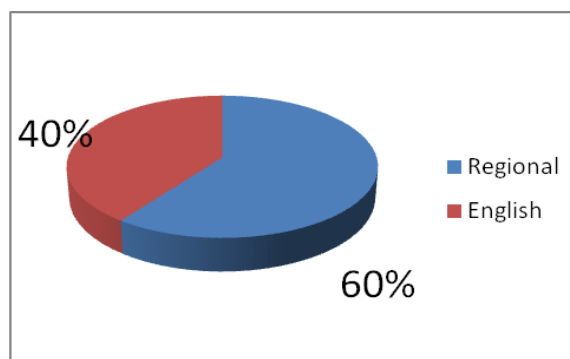

Fig 4- Le café

Through the observations made, it can be inferred that there are many factors which affect the students' choice of the preferred tongue. In a student chapter i.e. the

Debate Society, 95% of the students observed spoke in English language. In such a situation, it becomes imperative for the students to speak in English language.

Conclusions

Many conclusions can be drawn from the above observations. To a great extent, students prefer to stay in their 'comfort zone' i.e., they speak in the language in which they find it easy to convey the message. Many students converse in their mother tongue with their close friends. It is quite natural that students prefer to speak in their mother tongue as they are comfortable and make others comfortable. Many students hesitate to speak in English because they are not so fluent. Another conclusion that can be drawn is the medium of education at school that decides the student's choice of adapting to a particular language.

English is only a link language but is not a common language that unites the students. In a college campus, known for heterogeneity, the students prefer to speak in English only when the situation demands. Locale has a strong bearing on the students' choice of language. In a debate society, it is evident that only those who are fluent take part in the activities, hence the observation. In an activity based classroom, students invariably speak in English language. Having no other option, they speak in English in spite of their self-imposed inhibitions

Suggestions

It is perceived that as per the changing times and to meet the demands of the future, the students should be made competent in English language skills. There are many suggestions which can be implemented based on the above observations and conclusions. Students should be given many opportunities to speak in a classroom. This can be achieved if the present curriculum is re-designed. The teacher should not overdo speaking activities in one lesson. They should be evenly spread so that there are options available in every lesson. In that way each student will have plenty of activities to choose from.

Students' listening and speaking skills should be given importance. Students should be motivated to converse with new persons so that they overcome their inhibitions. Introduction of FFCS (Fully Flexible Credit System) will help them mingle with students belonging to other disciplines. FFCS provides greater freedom for the student to choose courses. They can be asked to take up inter-disciplinary

projects. This will indeed equip them for their future endeavors. Students should come out with weekly/monthly newsletter, debates to improve their English language skills. Students should be motivated to be part of some student chapters so that they enhance their speaking skills.

Students should be encouraged towards cooperative learning. As technology is a group activity, students would benefit a lot if they are taught the principles of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning increases a long list of social skills, including listening, taking turns, conflict resolution skills, leadership skills, and teamwork skills. Students coming from cooperative learning classrooms are more polite and considerate of others (Kagan, 1999). Allot a time limit for each and every speaking activity. Take into consideration those activities that involve either group or pair work. Keep the activity fun and simple. Clear instructions need to be given. Always reflect on what can be done to help students improve their speaking skills.

One of the main advantages with cooperative learning is that it leads to interaction with points of view different from one's own. Each student carries his or her own set of information and ways of interpreting that information. They tend to persist in their own way of thinking until they are challenged by interacting with someone with different information and/or a different way of interpreting the information. Interaction in heterogeneous teams, therefore, creates higher level thinking (Kagan, 1999). In a traditional classroom a student can dream, knowing they will not be held accountable if only they don't raise their hand to be called on. In a cooperative learning class there is no such luxury to slip through the cracks.

In cooperative learning structures, there is not the luxury to slip through the cracks, making participation more equal. For example, in Think Pair Share each student has equal time to participate in the activity. If we call on students one at a time, even if we said nothing, and transitions were done in no time, in a class of 60 it would take 60 minutes to give each student one minute to share his or her point of view. In pairs the same amount of participation can be accomplished in two minutes! Overall, therefore students in cooperative learning are engaged in a far higher percent of the time.

Role-play is an important strategy that will encourage self-awareness, while role reversal will contribute to the student's understanding of empathy, of knowing

how the other side perceives engineers. They should be made to enact a few real time situations. Indeed, this need not be confined to specifically engineering concerns. They can be given common contexts in a work place. However, such context-specific role-play will help to cement those skills within the engineering framework.

Enhancing communication skills across the curricula, again rather than in a stand-alone subject, will make the students productive and employable. This includes delivery of oral presentations in engineering studies and incorporating communication and presentation skills in the marking structure of reports so that the students treat them more seriously. It should be made mandatory so that a student gets at least one opportunity each semester to hone his communication skills in general and speaking skills in particular. This may involve a restructuring of certain components of subjects and, indeed, the curriculum.

Experiential approaches, with opportunities for debriefing and re-application, provide opportunities for the development of self-awareness. Such an experience involves the student in the actual experience of communication. Videotape playbacks of oral presentations also stimulate reflection in the student. Peer feedback can be encouraged because of the proximity and familiarity. It is true that students are reluctant to get feedback from their teachers. Constructivist approaches (Neo & Neo, 2009) build on past learning and should be utilized to build on students' positive learning experiences to enhance learning and skills development.

Language and communication skills are recognized as important elements in the education of the modern engineer, including English for specific purposes. Despite its current *lingua franca* status, there seems to be limited implementation of English courses globally. It is essential that the curriculum is designed to help engineering student involve more in a classroom situation. The need of the hour is to motivate the passive student to become not only active but also proactive. Those institutions that have already implemented multilingual and communication elements will be at the forefront of providing the demands of industry and society.

Speaking is being capable of speech, expressing or exchanging thoughts through using language. "Speaking is a productive aural/oral skill and it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning" (Nunan, 2003). As an engineer, one has to make a very good impression by his/her ability to communicate

effectively. From communicative point of view, speaking has many different aspects including two major categories – accuracy, involving the correct use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation practiced through controlled and guided activities (Hamer, 2001). It is in this context that a computer aided English language laboratory, provided with pronunciation software, assists the learners. Exposure to the Received Pronunciation will certainly help the student polish his/her accent to some extent.

Along with the exposure to pronunciation software, an engineering student should be made to converse with other students in a classroom through planned activities. It will enhance their fluency levels. Fluency, considered to be the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously, emphasizes knowledge of the language and skill in using this knowledge for an effective communication (Bygate, 1991). Repeated exposure to planned activities will improve the confidence levels of the students. Language knowledge and skill are considered two fundamental elements of an effective communication.

It needs to be noted that good vocabulary knowledge will give learners confidence in their speaking performance. Better vocabulary knowledge and having more words at one's disposal is likely to facilitate the ability to tell a story better, to demonstrate a more extensive range of language resources, and to come across more intelligibly. Better vocabulary knowledge could also contribute to boosting the speaker's confidence, which would come across when speaking and influence the overall impression created (Oya, et al, 2009).

The objective of English for engineers is to market their employability skills. Curriculum specially designed to augment their LSRW skills would unquestionably bear fruit in the long run. All that is required of an ESL/EFL teacher is a little extra effort to make his/her students extraordinary.

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