

Imparting Language Skills Through Literature

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“I want a story to be entertaining, enjoyable, and illuminating in some way.”

--- R. K. Narayan

Abstract

In the present scenario, most of the engineering colleges do prefer Communicative Approach rather than literature in the curriculum of B.Tech program, to develop the four skills (LSRW). Does Communicative Approach alone serves the purpose? Can the approach enable the professional students to grab the opportunities? If so, why do MNCs give a statement that Engineering graduates are not industry ready in terms of communication skills? Thus, the situation demands flow of language and not the chunks of situational dialogues. At this juncture, a second language learner ought to feel comfortable in speaking the language. The required expressions in a language cannot be taught in isolation, to bridge the gap, there should be a blend of both Communicative approach and Literature. In a nutshell, Literature allows, one to understand the language in a better way. In fact, language and literature go hand in hand where literature comprises variety of situations, more particularly encompassing all the expressions, vocabulary, and correct sentences. While allowing the learner to practice, Communicative Approach Techniques can be applied. The present paper deals with stating the importance of Literature and Communicative Approach in imparting language skills to professional students.

Key words: Literature, Language teaching, teaching techniques, Learning Objectives.

Introduction

Eventually, English is gaining popularity as not only a major linking language, but also as a means of globalizing information and technology to make it available to all who can access it. In order not to be left out in familiarizing to professional students, English has been introduced as a subject of study in engineering colleges so that it can help the students to have adequate exposure to the communicative aspect of English to get through the cut throat competition. A point which cannot be ignored is that the learners of this era are digital natives. They do read a lot of stuff available on the internet. Indeed, they are already familiar with the language and the texts pertaining to different fields. Thus, when a learner comes to the language class, a learner must feel that he/she is learning something new and constructive. The class room is the right place for a learner to familiarize something interesting that is English literature.

Emerging of English in India

As a result of British rule, Indians are acquainted with British English. It has become official language in India as Britishers native language is English and continued even in independent India. In the present scenario it is widely used language to speak and to write. Due to diverged linguistic regions in India, there was a language vacuum to understand and make others understand and this vacuum was sufficiently and efficiently filled with English

language. Once which was a foreign language became as equal as the official language, Hindi. However, in order to train Indians, English language has been introduced in India as one of the subjects till Graduation level. As technical education and Sciences are universally common, the information provided in these domains is in English language, technical and science graduates are somehow proficient in English.

Importance of English in present scenario in the perspective of Indian Industry

In a developing country like India with mutual understanding depends on other countries for its sustainability in variety of fields. Especially, in the context of globalization, the intellectual minds have to collaborate with the other country's intellectual minds or industries either for the research innovations or for the employability. In both the cases, the effective communication skills are needed. Thus, English serves as a link language nationally and globally. Modern technology unconditionally assists scientific and technical purposes universally. It is evident that for global communication there is a dire need to learn English.

Significance of Grammar in learning English language

It is well said that "practice makes man perfect". One can observe the result of practice in learning a language. If considered mother tongue, it is acquired naturally. Though grammar is not taught, a toddler continuously listens similar words from different persons who ever are regularly in touch with it and by age 3 grasps around 200 words. It is said by the psychologists that human beings have an innate mechanism to learn language. The reason is that mother tongue is learnt without the grammatical rules being taught to a child but does the same theory applies for second language learning? Mother tongue is learnt by a child through repeated observations with the help of people in and around. It can be implied that people in and around the child create an environment of learning mother tongue but the same is not with the case of second language or foreign language. Second language learners hardly find the environment. Thus, the importance of grammar cannot be underestimated. It is innate of language. However, Ergo, Grammar plays an influential role to learn languages other than mother tongue. To express one's thoughts and ideas grammatical structures are needed in flow of communication.

In India where several languages are in practice do follow different grammatical structures. A major challenge Indians face in learning English language is that it is understood and spoken with the help of mother tongue grammar. This results in a poor English speaking skills. At this juncture, it becomes necessity to learn English grammatical rules. In the article, "The role of grammar in learning English language" Isakhanova Zarina Saidvaliyevna rightly suggests that, "Grammar is the backbone of language and without it, the produced text, whether it is spoken or written, can be classified with many labels: broken, uneducated, incomprehensible or simply not belonging to the English language" (web).

Undoubtedly, in acquiring a language, learning Grammar plays a vital role. It enables one to know the sentence structures in expressing one's thought without difficulty. It further improves the fluency. It might become rather challenging in learning English language. However, the easier method believed by the language learners that it can be learnt with the help of mother tongue. This assumption resulted in influencing English language leaving mediocre command over English language. British English has a unique grammar which has to be learnt exclusively. One cannot acquire the standard and educated British English with the help of chunks of language elements. It needs a constant practice right from basic sentence structures.

Moving on to Indian English, during Britishers ruling and after they leaving India, English language has become basic language to exchange communication but it was rather difficult to learn good educated English as it was considered as a language of privileged. Eventually, the enthusiastic learners developed interest and started learning in comparison with the help of mother tongue. Later, this approach is popularly known as "translation method". All the grammatical rules of British English were being learnt with the grammatical rules of mother tongue. Thus, translating English into mother tongue in learning English became a common approach in India.

The translation method though popularly used in India it has its own drawbacks. This method is enabling the learners to be a second-rate learner. As the learner starts thinking in mother tongue first and then decodes it in English, the entire process takes much time to think, speak and write. This time taking process leaves the learner embarrassing and prevents to learn. To overcome this drawback, a new approach is required, Indian English Literature.

Learning English through Indian English Literature (IEL)

The significance of Indian English Literature has its own essence in itself. One can witness all the phases of Indian life in the writings of IEL. Every Indian writing is a blend of situations, values, human emotions and attitudes in a nutshell, Indianess. Indian writers do speak the life of the reader with the reader itself. One visualizes one's life, an Indian life in these writings. This is the reason why the Indian readers enjoy reading Indian writings. IEL has gained its ground in sphere of world literatures.

Why Literature?

Literature is mainly whimsical writing. Vivek Malhotra rightly signifies in his article Teaching/Learning Language through Literature that, "literature not only delights us but it transports us. Literature is the reflection of the society. It reciprocates to the society whatever it takes from it. Literature broadens our outlook. Studies become insipid in the absence of literature. In short, literature makes a human being man in the real sense". It is through the profundity of literature that man becomes well mannered (2). Ergo, it consists of situations, feelings, ideas, pains expressed by the characters, closely knitted in the form of a story. Indeed, literature is an authentic source to experience different cultures and language features. A learner can discover the way the characters in literary works see the world outside. It is said that literature is an instant hedonism that enables involvement and the

learner needs to be motivated, relaxed, positive, engaged (Arnold 2). However, once the learner reads a literary text, he/she begins to inhabit and draw into the text. Understanding the meanings of lexical terms or phrases becomes less significant than pursuing the development of the story. The learner becomes enthusiastic to find out what happens as events unfold at culmination. She/he feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. This can have an instrumental effect upon the whole language learning process. According to Obediat, “literature helps students acquire a native like competence in English, express their ideas in good English, learn the features of modern English, learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely and concisely” (32). Familiarizing IEL to the Indian students on the one hand is appreciable and on the other hand, grammatical elements can also be taught contextually.

Literature and the Four Basic Language Skills

The four skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing are equally important for language acquisition. A learner needs to master these skills simultaneously. Literature is an expedient to teach these skills. In fact, literature bolsters teaching language skills effectively. However, while using literature in the language classroom, Skills ought to be taught in an integrated way.

Teaching Grammar through Literature

It is incontrovertible fact that the grammar is the most unglamorous thing in the world. However, an essential part of teaching of any language is the teaching of its grammar. In conventional teaching of grammar the rules are taught in isolation, for instance,

Simple Present Tense

Subject + Verb1 + Object

E.g.: The Earth revolves around the Sun.

Simple Past Tense

Subject + Verb2 + Object

E.g.: She completed Intermediate in 2018.

Remembering plethora of mathematical expressions for learning grammatical rules is a convoluted task for a learner, while speaking. Hence, it results in tedium while learning grammar. If the same rule is taught contextually, chances get fairly improved for learners to comprehend the situations, understand the rules and apply them situationally. Every native speaker of a language, literate or illiterate speaks the language fluently. This is possible through repeated observations and practice. If the same language is to be acquired by the non-natives, grammar rules play an influential role. At the same time if these rules are taught in isolation may not be effective. Therefore, it is easier for a learner to learn grammatical principles through contextualized passages.

Choice of literary text: Short Story, An Astrologer’s Day by R. K. Narayan.

The first paragraph of the story has been taken for the discussion. Learners preferably need to work in pairs to complete the task given below.

Punctually at midday he opened his bag¹ and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook and a bundle of Palmyra writing. His forehead was resplendent² with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam³ which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted. The power of his eyes was considerably **enhanced**⁴ by their position placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks: even a half-wit's eyes would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect⁵ he wound⁶ a saffron-colored turban around his head. This color scheme⁷ never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks⁸.

After reading the story, Think critically and interpret the below given.

1. "He opened his bag". What does the sentence suggest?
2. Guess the meanings of the phrase abnormal gleam, resplendent, enhanced and wound contextually.
3. How does the astrologer's appearance help him attract customers? In your opinion does it suit his profession?
4. Analyze the phrase "To crown the effect" in terms of Astrologer's attire.
5. Were you surprised listening to what an astrologer does? If so, state your view on astrologer's predictions in the perspective of technology.
6. Do you agree to the comparison between People's attraction and bees' attraction? Justify your reason referring the statement "color scheme never failed".

Short story is a genre of twentieth century. It offers expression to the frenetic pace of life. As the character norm in short story is between three and six characters, each one being crucial to the story a learner can observe many situations and the behavior of the characters. Moreover, being laconic, short story enables a learner to read it completely in one sitting. Consequently, a learner tends to focus on vocabulary, sentence structures and other language features for better understanding the text. According to Langer "literature can open horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect and explore" (607). In a nutshell, the use of a short story seems to be a very helpful tool in language through literature classroom. As it is short, it makes the students' reading task and the facilitating easier.

Conclusion

A story is always an interesting path to involve the learners in language acquisition. However, there are some problems encountered while teaching English through literature.

This hindrance may be overcome with the suitable selection of a short story. It is not only a tool to uptick the four skills of the learners in the target language but also introduces to the culture of the target language, building up a cultural competence.

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