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Language Education

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Abstract

Understanding fairly well the language in which instruction is imparted is essential for the educational process. However legions of pupils and students all over India at different levels, engaged in different branches of study, are unable to follow lectures in English and the literature available in their subject. Why are they in such situation? What is the reason? These are puzzling questions. India is a country with more than 15 major languages and about 1600 other languages. In spite of such diversity of languages, communication between citizens should be possible for the national life to continue and to become stronger. Generally speaking language is a tool to communicate with others and also to acquire knowledge on various subjects. English is not a knowledge-subject, but skill-subject. It is more like singing or physical education than other subjects like Physics or History.

Acquisition of mother tongue by children is a universal success, it is of utmost interest to analyze how such acquisition takes place in order to devise methods of teaching language. Various methods have been adopted by educationist. The communicative approach is one of the exciting developments in language teaching in recent years. In communicative language teaching, almost everything is done with a communicative intent; students use the language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role plays and problem solving tasks. It is a boon to Language education, for it gives much emphasis to skill development.

Language Skills:

Language is usually perceived globally. It does not represent the same thing for all its users. It is something for illiterates, something more for literates; linguists, grammarians, writers and poets find in it what others fail to perceive. Generally speaking language is a tool to communicate with others and also to acquire knowledge on various subjects. It is not a knowledge-subject, but skill-subject. It is more like singing or physical education than other subjects like Physics or History Full learning of any language means the acquisition of the following distinct skills: understanding spoken language, speaking, understanding written language and writing. The first and third are understanding skills, the second and fourth are expression skills.

(1) Understanding spoken Language:

This skill requires good knowledge of the words as they are pronounced; ears have to be trained to that effect, words and sentences have to be gathered in their normal sequence.

(2) Speaking:

This skill is very important in the employment market. In all professions where speaking is an asset, success depends on the standard reached in that skill. Acquisition of this skill implies a good knowledge of its sound system, intonation, stress and rhythm.

(3) Understanding written language:

This skill implies first the ability of reading. Not all persons who speak a language are able to read. One has to learn painfully how to read. In fact this is the first school activity. Even when one is

able to read with ease, he will understand only to the extent of his knowledge of the language and of the subject.

(4)Writing:

Not many persons write even in the mother tongue. Paradoxically in examinations this is the mostly or solely required skill. In a sense the skill of writing is much easier than that of speaking. Time is available for reflection, for the correction of sentence pattern and of the words in respect of their property and spelling. One cannot be said to have acquired the skill in writing when he still thinks first in his native language and translates into the target language. Thought should emerge directly in second language.

Language Acquisition

"Language learning is complex. It ranges from the acquisition of simple automatic skills to an understanding of abstract, conceptual and aesthetic meanings, all occurring in the same sentences. and his learning must be achieved to an unbelievable degree of facility involving hundreds of articulator changes and grammatical and lexical selections per minute. For this reason, one is no longer justified in expecting any single development to solve all problems of language learning"- Robert Lado

The largest of those involved in the process of acquisition of language consists of children. It is common knowledge that no child fails in learning naturally his mother tongue. Since acquisition of mother tongue by children is a universal success, it is of utmost interest to analyze how such acquisition takes place in order to devise methods of teaching other languages in the class room. Various methods and approaches have been adopted by educationist to teach English, some of the common ones are:

Grammar Translation Method

- Direct Method
- Structural approach
- Situational approach
- Bilingual approach
- Audio-lingual approach
- Substitution Method
- Communicative Approach

Communicative Approach

The communicative approach is one of the exciting developments in language teaching in recent years. William Littlewood (1981), "writes, the communicative approach makes us more strongly aware that it is not enough to teach learners how to manipulate the structures of foreign language. They must also develop strategies for relating these structures to their communicative functions in real situations and real time".

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

In communicative language teaching, almost everything that is done with a communicative intent, students use the language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role plays and problem solving tasks.

Principles of Communicative Methodology: Communicative methodology involves five main principles:

- (i) Know what you're doing-the focus of every lesson should be performing of some operations: learning how to do something. ...every lesson should end with the learner being able to see clearly that he can do something which he could not do at the beginning.
- (ii)The whole is more than the sum of the parts-the ability to handle formal elements of language in isolation is no indication of the ability to communicate. What is needed is the ability to deal with these elements as a whole in a real context.
- (iii)The processes are important as the forms-A method which aims to develop the ability of students to communicate in a foreign language will aim to replicate as far as possible the processes of communication, so that practice of the forms of the target language can take place within a communicative framework. Three such processes which can be isolated and which can be incorporated either individually or together in teaching procedures are information gap, choice and feedback.
- (iv)To learn it, do it-learning theory states that one learns to do by doing "Only practicing communicative activities can we learn to communicate"
- (v)Mistakes are not always mistake-trivial mistakes of grammar or pronunciation does not matter as long as the student gets his message across.

CLT Principles

- Communicative Language Teaching method follows certain principles.
- Whenever possible authentic language as it is used in real context should be introduced.
- The target language is a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study.
- One function can have many different linguistic forms. Since the focus of the course is on real language use, a variety of linguistic forms are presented together'
- Students work with language at the discourse level. They must learn about cohesion and coherence, those properties of language which bind the sentences together'
- Games are important because they have certain features in common.
- Errors are tolerated and seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills.
- One of the teacher's responsibility is to establish situations likely to promote communication'
- The social context of the communicative event is essential in giving meaning to the utterances.

Procedural phases of the CLT instructions

Finnocchiaero and Brumfit (1983) illustrate how the procedural phase of instruction are handled.

- Presentation of a brief dialogue or several mini-dialogues'
- Oral practice of each utterance in the dialogue.
- Questions and answers based on the topic and situation in the dialogue.
- Questions and answers related to the student's personal experience but centered on the theme of the dialogue.

- Study of the basic communicative expression used in the dialogue or one of the structures that
- Exemplify the function.
- Learner discovery of generation or rules underlying the functional expression of structures.
- Oral recognition, interpretative procedures and
- Oral production activities proceeding from guided to free communication.

Conclusion

A fundamental defect in the classroom teaching is that it does not allow time for maturation, so essential in the process of language acquisition. The fact that there is a big gap between understanding and expression, and that a good span of time should be allowed between them is completely lost sight of. Students are compelled to speak and write prematurely which has got a disastrous and paralyzing effect' such a practice is the result of assimilating teaching of language to teaching of other subjects, where questions of previous day lesson are a common feature. Language teaching should diverge from the way of teaching other subjects; it must be more of skill oriented. This communicative approach is a boon to Language education, for it gives much emphasize to skill development.

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