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Teaching English at UG in India: The Textbook and Beyond

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Abstract:

English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks at undergraduate (UG) classes in India are crucial for the learners and the teachers of English. The producers of ELT textbooks consider conventional and emerging disciplines within broader faculties such as Arts and Humanities, Commerce and Management, Science and Technology, among others and the attention is paid to the specialized requirements of these domains while preparing these textbooks. They also take into account both spoken and written communication in formal and informal contexts, and the generalized use of English along with its specialized use.

Text remains at central in ELT teaching-learning process and interaction between teacher and learner anchors around the textbook. The suitable quality material in ELT textbook, teacher's competence and learner's motivation cumulatively result in learner's linguistic as well as overall achievement. Language learning for students and language teaching for teachers become rewarding experience at the end. The present paper discusses the issues regarding the textbook, the learner and the teacher especially at tertiary level in Indian context.

Keywords: *ELT Textbook, English Vocabulary, Usage, Communicative Language Teaching, CALL, CALT, Teaching Material, Teacher, Learners, Second Language Teaching, ESL, EFL*

Introduction:

Learning a new language is learning about different culture, different community, different world view, and the different knowledge system represented in the language shared by its speakers. Human is differentiated from other animals on the basis of his

systematic and complex communication system known as language. Though non-verbal communication is significant, it can be used to express certain kind of messages and in generalized sense only. For example, one can signal for drinking or eating, but s/he cannot convey details such as

hot water or cold drink, or sandwich or spaghetti. Language provides a whole range of adjectives which are normally used to specify. For instance, someone being sick may need lukewarm water which is simply impossible to convey through non-verbal strategies. So, the role of language in human communication is indispensable.

Contrastive analysis of L1 and L2:

Contrastive Analysis of Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL) is essential in second language learning/ teaching. Because the “second and other language learning involves the ‘transfer of habits’ of the native language” and the “interference or the impact of the habits of the native language with those of the target language could, on the one hand result in total loss or distortion in the intended meaning and at certain other times, the degree of communicability may get reduced” (Rao 2000: 30). He concludes his ideas on contrastive analysis as, “the

findings of contrastive analysis of the SL and TL forms the basis of working out a suitable syllabus, developing instructional material and planning the techniques and strategies for second/ other language instruction (Rao 2000: 30)”.

The mapping of mother tongue and the target language gives some insights in teaching methodology. The contrastive analysis helps us to note similarities and differences between L1 and L2. In the case of English and Marathi word order, teachers focus the point that English has relatively fixed word order SVO while Marathi; an Indo-Aryan language has relatively free word order SVO (refer The World Atlas of Language Structures: <https://wals.info/>). They also underline the fact that though the category of P is common, English has prepositions while Marathi has postpositions (see Jadhav 2014 for detailed discussion of ad positions). Such similarities and differences improve learning speed and assist learners to store even a

miner deviation. They can utter the sound /f/ correctly only if their trainer provides him the difference between /f/ in Marathi as bilabial while /f/ in English as labio-dental sound. The indefinite and definite articles are essential in English, but these are completely absent in Marathi. Such nuances of L1 and L2, from pronunciation of speech sounds to extra-linguistic pragmatic factors, assist them to clarify the concepts in the target language (see Jones 2006 for English pronunciation). Any textbook on ELT cannot provide all such niceties. Thus, English teacher plays an important role to help learners to understand the language better.

Problem of proficiency level:

English is received cliché as a global language as it is used widely and for different purposes. It is a language of science and technology and most of the research is being published in English. English has developed its evaluation process to test learners' proficiency in language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing in different

contexts. In India, the certain skills are assumed to be acquired till school examination, intermediate level, and tertiary level. The proficiency in either their mother tongue or in English has never been tested systematically. No standardized tests are available for Indian languages. No standardized tests are used for English though these are available (see Kaplan 2002: 481-484 for various computer web-based proficiency tests). Internationally standardized tests are not affordable to the students is one of the reasons.

The similar is case with the teachers and trainers. The teachers' proficiency has also not been tested on the basis of international standards. The Master's degree in English, mostly in English literature, is basic qualification. In addition to that National Level Eligibility Test (NET) or Ph.D. is required to teach English at undergraduate level. NET prominently tests candidate's literary knowledge, though there are few questions on knowledge of language. Most of the Ph.D.

candidates complete their doctoral theses in English literature. To sum up, no systematic proficiency is tested either of learners or teachers. So, the excellence or quality in English learning/ teaching wonders in the clouds of assumptions. How can we know the facts? How can we know how many teachers are excellent and how many of the teachers are good or poor? Once, we know the proficiency level, we can take further measures like teachers training or remedial classes for students. Kaplan (2002: 398-399) underlines, in addition to several other issues, the need of contrastive [comparative] analysis and evaluation of proficiency in language policy and planning.

The skill-wise proficiency will clarify the learner's individual competencies. Further, the analysis of the learners' performance in listening, reading, speaking, and writing will provide teachers the opportunity to plan accordingly and improve the weak areas.

No Uniformity:

There is no common policy about measurable learning outcomes, teaching material, methodologies, etc. Some universities provide textbooks for students, while others provide some reference books and ask students to prepare themselves. Though curriculum and syllabus are prepared collaboratively, the formal assessment system is not in place to evaluate it. India, being multilingual and multicultural country, presents all challenges of mother tongue education and these challenges multiply in the case of foreign language education. At tertiary level, with learners' ample educational background, universities can present uniform curriculum for English and expect similar level of learning outcomes and language proficiency. The uniformity attempt in India can change the common fate of English in India at UG level.

Technological aid:

The problem of overcrowded classes has been a common problem in India. The student-teacher ratio is very

poor. Many of the posts are vacant in universities and colleges in India. Temporary or ad-hoc teachers are teaching in number of colleges. Qualified teachers' recruitment and improvement of teacher-student ratio should be rectified on urgent basis. This is common situation in India in all domains and in all educational institutions. English is no exception to it. This problem can be tackled little by introducing more online courses and providing content through different media. Government of India has taken such steps to create and provide quality content through digital media such as SWAYAM, NPTEL, and others. These platforms provide diverse kind of courses to the large number of students. Still, language learning requires communication between the learners and the teachers, the constant supervision about their spoken and written performances at different tasks is also required, and timely interventions are necessary to make corrections and to improve their understanding.

Thus, the teacher's role cannot be neglected even in technologically enhanced content delivery. These can be supplemented but cannot be substituted completely considering the diversity of learner's background, their diverse learning capacity, their speed of learning, etc.

In English language teaching/ learning, we found several attempts such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Computer Assisted Language Teaching (CALT) Computer Applications in Second Language Acquisition (CASLA) in several developed countries. To implement such programs India, we need more teachers, more computers with advanced software, and more training to teachers and students. Chapelle (2001) takes review of CALSA and discusses the implications of CALL and CALT. These fields face the similar challenges of teaching learning. Moreover, these filed also have challenges of human-machine interaction, sophisticated software, better interfaces, computer

programming languages, language and computer experts, among others (Chapelle 2001: 161-175). He envisions the better implementation of these technology-based English teaching learning in 21st Century (Chapelle 2001: 175).

Teaching material:

Teaching English within contexts enables students to comprehend better. The items such as excerpts, speeches of eminent personalities, biographical or autobiographical items, short stories, poems, among others are necessary to be included in the ELT textbooks. These items present the different vocabulary, different structures, and different styles. For instance, poetic diction differs from the vocabulary used in the prose. Further, the characteristics of the spoken and colloquial language are found in speeches and ceremonial addresses while language of short stories and poems create different imaginative canvas in the minds of the audience.

Teaching English includes vocabulary, grammar,

prose, poetry, communicative aspects such as letter and or email writing, personality enhancement tasks such as group discussion and interview techniques, and several other things. Teaching English does require learner's confidence building in language skills as well as their social behavior. The role of English teacher then goes beyond the textbook and deals with the problems of learners about the language and about their non-linguistic needs, about verbal and non-verbal communication.

The selection and gradation of the material are also significant steps in ELT syllabus designing and inclusion of the suitable and quality material in ELT textbook. Conventionally, scientific material such as a poem on environmental issue is selected for science students. Such practice, though logical, should be avoided as students of science get much exposure to scientific material through their science subjects. The non-scientific material should be selected for them to fulfill their literary needs. These changes

will affect their overall personality of the students and they can enjoy their ELT textbook without monotony. This is applicable to other disciplines, too.

English Vocabulary:

Language is comprised of different sentence constructions and each sentence is comprised of different words. Hence, learning and mastering vocabulary is essential to learn and master the target language. Any mother tongue is sequentially acquired from the skill of listening and progresses to speaking, and then leads to reading. The much complex skill of writing is being mastered at the end of these skills. Most of the skills are acquired by children in early age. In the case of L2, it ideally assumes the similar sequence, but most of these skills are learned concurrently. Mother tongue is acquired naturally and mostly in homes, while second language is learned in formal settings such as schools. L1 acquisition is natural while L2 learning is deliberate. Though these are the basic differences in learning L1

and L2, the generalizations are made about the languages and the language learning process.

The words are not stand-alone properties: these are triggers to the larger encyclopedic network of knowledge. The understanding vocabulary develops the general ability of the brain along with language comprehension and hence the attention has always been paid to learning/ teaching of the vocabulary in ELT textbooks. There are different approaches to English vocabulary: understanding vocabulary, learning vocabulary, teaching vocabulary, and researching vocabulary. The recent publication provides current state-of-art of English vocabulary (see Webb 2020 for instance). The teachers can benefit from the same.

Teaching English Usage:

The learners of English as a second language likely to make many mistakes while using the language in different contexts. These problems are ranging from vocabulary, grammar, formal/ informal

usage, standard English/ dialectic use, American/ British variety, etc. Knowing general meaning of the words, concepts, or terms will not help its appropriate use in speech or writing. Students at tertiary level should make aware of correct usage of English and the references such as Michael Swan's (2007) *Practical English Usage* will help them to clarify these points. It explains 634 such points where non-native speakers are likely to make mistakes. Any ELT textbook cannot include these points in the restricted page limits. These resources can be mentioned in the further reading section or reference section. For instance, Shivaji University has been producing ELT textbooks for more than three decades for UG courses such as B.A., B. Com., and B.Sc., but it has not been providing such complementary material in it (see for example the recent published book by Shivaji University in 2020 for B.Sc. III *English for Communication*). These textbooks with limited pages and restricted ideas may

not allow its curious practitioners to explore beyond the material given.

Communicative Approach to English Teaching:

There are different approaches to teaching English at UG level. As Leech and Svartvik (2005) begins their introduction to refute the claim that grammar is not necessary in communicative approach. They put it as, "It is sometimes argued that grammar is not important in a communicative approach to language. However, we take the view that communicative competence rests on a set of composite skills, one of which is grammatical" (Leech and Svartvik 2005: 3)". We can't imagine language learning without grammar. Grammar is nothing but generalized rules of the language. The learners of any language should follow certain rules to share the language and to avoid the miscommunication.

Richards (2006) mentions the features or assumptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as; language is learnt by using it

instead of studying about it, grammar is no longer important in language teaching, errors are inevitable and to be ignored at the beginning, more focus in CLT is on speech, among others (Richards 2006: 2). He distinguishes these approaches into three phases: traditional approaches to language teaching (up to 1960s), classical communicative approach to English teaching (1970-1990), and the current communicative language teaching (1990 onwards). His core assumptions of the current CLT can be summarized as below (Richards 2006: 22-23):

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises improve learner's abilities.
3. Communication, being holistic process, improves several language skills and modalities.
4. Students' involvement in language enables them to analyze it and reflect on it.
5. Learning language is gradual process which involves its creative use, trial and error. The accuracy and fluency are to be maintained reducing errors as students progress further.
6. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator.
7. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

Richards concludes with the statements that the focus of CLT at the beginning was to develop syllabus and teaching approach that shifted to identification of learner's communicative needs. Currently, CLT operates considering the above assumptions and it focuses on either input of the language learning, or some aspects of it, or the whole learning language process. According to him, the current CLT has developed its course books and other ELT material accordingly and these are still evolving further (Richards 2006: 45). By maintaining Communicative

Approach to English Teaching, Indian ELT experts need to improve the ELT textbooks and classroom practices in line with the current CLT.

Conclusion:

ELT textbook is essential tool to teach English in India. It may restrict the curious and more competent learners and teachers at certain degree and does not allow to the limitless opportunities that language provides beyond the textbook. At the same time, the textbook is well structured tool that controls learners and teachers from directionless and aimless wonderings. Thus, the ELT textbook is undoubtedly required and should be supplemented by other materials such as audio-visual materials or more resources. Additionally, the teacher as a facilitator is vital in making the language learning more comfortable and enjoyable activity. The role of learner is equally important as the role of teacher and the well written textbook.

The present paper takes review of different issues in cursory manner only. It takes

into account the specialized needs of different domains and basic modes of language in different contexts. It discusses the language learning policy, planning, and implementation. It also discusses the different components to be included into ELT textbook. It touches some of the issues in the textbook and beyond the textbook that really affect English language teaching-learning in India. While supporting CLT approach, it also expects the modification in current ELT textbook practices in India.

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