

Post- modern English Language Teaching: A Review of Objectives and Approaches

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Abstract

Language is a dynamic phenomenon and so is its teaching and learning. With the changing needs of the society, the objectives of teaching should be reviewed and determined. India started its modernisation process including education after independence. In terms of English language teaching, there were not significant changes in teaching objectives and approaches; but after 1990, when the Indian economy was opened for national and multinational companies, a great demand and opportunities were created for English language learners. This Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) process impacted not only the economic sector but also social, cultural and educational fabric of India. The changes, particularly in the field of Information Communication Technology have been gradually leading the Indian society in a post- modern era. This influence could be seen in whole process of English language teaching not only in India but in the whole world. Hence, in terms of these changes, it is imperative to reassess the role of English, its teaching objectives and approaches. The present paper attempts to review the objectives and approaches of English language teaching in India in the Post-modern context.

Keywords: Post- modern English language teaching, ELT objectives, ELT approaches

Introduction

English is considered to be a language of linking individuals, societies, cultures and nations. So, it has received a status of international language; but what is the common perception about English language in the developing countries where English is learnt as a foreign or second language? In India, the state of English is understood as a 'status language' in the social, cultural and educational context. The primary reason is the middle-class progressive mentality of the people which is directly related to the enrichment of financial status and this is connected with the employment opportunities generated through English. On the one hand people try to encash the opportunities created by the knowledge of English and on the other hand they fail to grab these opportunities due to poor basic linguistic skills. The aspiration to learn English is very natural but why people fail to learn English? The most commonly cited reason is its difficultness. It's an irony that people wish to learn a language which they have its phobia in their mind. Until there is a fear in the minds of the learners, it is difficult to remove an irrational fear of English. The learners should feel the motivation that they have the potential to learn the English language.

In order to have an effective English language teaching- learning process, three components: learning objectives, assessment methods and instructional strategies should be aligned together. Learning objectives help teachers to explore the possible outcomes of the course. Once the outcomes are finalised, instructional strategies are designed to conduct the activities in and out of the class for the reinforcement of learning objectives and preparing students for assessment. Finally, the assessment tasks reveal the achievement level of the learners in completing the learning objectives. (Carnegie Mellon University) There is no teaching without learning. If the effective learning doesn't occur, then the whole teaching- learning process could be questioned. Every step in this process, from planning learning

objectives to the assessment criteria should be revised and modified, so that an effective learning could take place.

The beginning of modern education started in India with its acquisition by the Britishers. Initially, they neglected the education sector, but with the expansion of the British empire, Britishers needed to establish a bureaucratic system “with a class of English knowing English urban ‘baboo’- who would be loyal to their masters”. (N. and Lalitha) Macaulay’s Minutes in 1835 paved the way of modern English education by introducing English as the medium of instruction with the primary objectives of creating English learned Indians for administrative purposes and propagating English culture and language among Indians. (R.N. and R.K.) The methods of teaching English were aligned with the objectives of teaching. As the objectives were limited to “... to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions who govern- a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” (N. and Lalitha 31- 32), the teaching methods and the assessment were also aligned with learning objectives.

The status of English in post- independent India was changed from the language of rulers to the language of upper class. For commoners, it was still a foreign language. Constitutionally, it was given a status of Associate Official Language, as per the act of Parliament in 1963 even after the resistance of Hindi- speaking states. The resistance gradually collapsed as the common Indians understood the importance of English in obtaining social status and employment. The significance of English never decreased even after the independence because of “two important legacies of the British rule... the full- blown bureaucratic network and the educational institutions within the well- established framework of the Macaulayan system of education, English continued to be the dominant language even after 1947.” (N. and Lalitha 139)

In the modern era the focus was on teaching so the objectives and methods of teaching English were teacher Centric. The objectives adopted by western policy makers for their educational conditions were replicated in developing countries like India. The objectives of teaching English in modern era were standardized. It didn't consider the social, financial political, cultural and other factors. The economy of India was a mixed economy mostly controlled by the government so there were not enough employment opportunities directly related with the knowledge of English but in post- modern era, the economy was liberalized, privatised and globalised and it provided scope for private sector to grow and flourish. So in the post- modern period, there is an open economy and English plays a role of a link language in global context.

India is rapidly developing itself on the verge of post-modern society. From 1991 onwards, it has been shifting gradually from modernism to postmodernism. With the adoption of Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG) policy in most of the sectors promoted the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) which is the core of post-modern society. (India and postmodernism) The impact of postmodernism has different dimensions on the diversified sections of Indian society, but it is certainly visible through rapid growth of ICT, increasing employment opportunities in private service sector, consumer friendly environment etc. One more pointer towards post- modern society is “the rise of popular culture is in India. The popular culture is very much evident in the mass communication discourse in the country. Its imprints are found on advertisements, TV serials and Bollywood cinema etc.” (India and postmodernism)

In post- modern period, Indian society has been witnessing some major changes and trends in the context of the employment of English language. The scope of English has been expanding among all the sectors and strata of society. It is used by more people for different purposes. According to David Graddol, there are three main drivers in India working towards the increasing use of English, namely education, employment and social mobility. (Graddol) The fourth driver influencing the whole ELT process is ICT. All these drivers are interconnected and contribute towards the greater use of English. This demand for English education is directly and indirectly related to employment opportunities in organised sector, which require basic language skills and advanced language skills to some extent. Education and employment are linked to social mobility. As the rising Indian middle class crossing the geographical boundaries for higher education and employment opportunities, English has been serving as the link language within and beyond the country. Technology is the factor which has changed the nature of other drivers and the ELT itself. The knowledge of English is crucial for the use of ICT. It has been playing an important role in education, employment and social mobility.

With the changed scenario, the role of English has not been limited to 'library language' as it used to be before in modern period. The communicative English skills are required and demanded by the post- modern society. This demand is primarily for education, employment, mobility and ICT. In the present post- modern context, India needs qualified and professionally skilled work force to cater the local and demands in different sectors, particularly in the service industry. To become a global power, it is imperative for India that more people should shift from unorganised sector to organised sector and English could contribute a major role to achieve this objective. (Graddol) Hence, English teaching objectives of modern period need to be reviewed in the post- modern period.

The teaching objectives are formulated on the basis of content to be taught. As teaching is a meaningful and purposeful activity, its objectives are to be determined carefully and consciously before the commencement of course of a course. "The teacher can identify his or her teaching objectives with the help of his subject knowledge and understanding of educational objectives" (D. N.) After determining the teaching objectives, a question arises about the suitable method or approach to deal with the objectives. Whether the established methods should be used or to innovate new methods? "From this ... historical perspectives... the concerns that have prompted modern method innovations... on how to teach foreign languages. Change in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need." (Richards and Rodgers) The traditional objective of learning a foreign language "is to learning a foreign language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development" (Richards and Rodgers 5) To fulfil this objective, grammar and translation factors used to be focussed in a method. First the learners are taught the analysis grammar rules which is followed by the textual translation and explanation in native language using grammar rules. Vocabulary is also explained and interpreted in the mother tongue of students. Reading and writing skills are majorly focussed and no proper attention is paid to listening and speaking skills. Vocabulary is taught through the prescribed reading text. The use of bilingual dictionaries, memorisation of words and translation exercises are the common practices in second or foreign language classroom. Accuracy is emphasised than fluency while using grammar and translation. (Richards and Rodgers 6) The practice of this Grammar- translation method has been still used by majority of teachers even in the post- modern period, which substantially fail to fulfil the ELT objectives.

After independence, the language experts promoted the structural approach. Its aim was to make English learning easier for learners. Some basic structures are identified by the experts are included in the syllabus in a graded manner from the easiest to the most difficult. The Madras English Language Teaching (MELT) campaign promoted this approach. From National education policy 1986, the focus from teacher centric methods shifted to learner centric methods and then to learning centred methods gradually. In post- modern period, the objective should be to design a curriculum which is learning centred, need based and socially relevant. (Saraswathi) In modern period, the teaching objectives and approached used to be standardised, but the post- modern era believes that the change is the only constant thing in this world. Hence the practice of reviewing the teaching objectives and approaches needs to be established, which should strike a balance between the local and global needs.

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