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THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING SKILLS OF LANGUAGE

ASHOK KUMAR DAS

Lecturer in English,
Bhadrak (Auto.) College, Bhadrak.



ABSTRACT

The Present study deals with the importance of learning skills of language as a second language in India which cannot be minimised. Globalisation has increased the usage of English Language in our day to day life. Every country in the world promotes the use of English for both Intra-national and international Communication. English is spoken by more than 1.5 billion people across the world. It is the official Language in one third of the Countries of the World, including the USA and the commonwealth Nations. Cross-borders business and diplomatic communication are conducted mostly in English. It has occupied the centre-stage as a dominant language in internet and social media, the world of information and entertainment, language and literature, science and technology, research and development at the international level. This can be achieved through careful selection of learning skills of a language.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of learning skills of Language as a second language in India Cannot be minimised. It is a source language as well as a link language. It has enriched our own languages; it enables us to have easy access to Modern knowledge and helps us maintain contact and exchange ideas among ourselves within the country and with others in the outside world.

We, Indians are not native speakers of English to us is a second language. So, learning it is not as natural to us as it is to the native speaker. The native speaker of English has imbibed the language with his mother's milk. He has become familiar with the component of English in the natural process of growing up. This can't be so with us. For us learning skill of English language is essentially a deliberate effort at developing a command and control of the different components of the language: its

phonology, its morphology and its syntax. The question is: how can we, Indians master those components of English when we learn it as a second language?

As we know very well that there are basically four skills of a language. They are listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW). The first two skills are intimately related to each other, though one is a recognition skill and the other is a production skill. Also, both skills depend almost entirely on the learner's knowledge of the pronunciation of words and the articulation of sounds in the language.

FOUR SKILLS OF A LANGUAGE:

Learning a second language is in effect learning the four skills, viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Familiarity with the English sound system and an ability to articulate English

sounds prepare the students for listening to English utterances with understanding.

LISTENING:

Listening ability can be cultivated through listening practice, both extensive and intensive. Extensive listening implies exposure to a wide variety of structures and sounds. This equips the students to listen with understanding to English later in real life situations. Intensive listening is concerned with just one or two specific points. This kind of listening practice is primarily for language items as part of the language teaching programme. At a more sophisticated level, this can be done in language laboratory. Listening is found to be most effective when it is done in preparation for speaking.

In India, our students are hampered in their ability to listen for meaning by certain weaknesses. In general, these weaknesses are:

- (a) Inadequate range of words and phrases that are understood;
- (b) Inability to maintain attention;
- (c) Inability to understand pronunciation other than the personal or regional Pronunciation;
- (d) Inability to understand fast speech;
- (e) Inability to understand against the background noise through acoustic or electrical interference.

Hence, it is practically very important for everyone in this electronic age to listen with understanding. There are many exercises which the teacher himself can devise for doing remedial work.

SPEAKING

We have seen that practice in listening should precede in speaking. At the phonological level, this is particularly helpful; the students should be able to recognise a sound before they attain an ability to produce it. While giving practice in speaking, the teacher may start with dialogues. Dialogues on simple, contextualized situations may be tried between pairs of students. The teacher should control and guide the students without curbing their freedom of expression. As we know very well that this will give the students enough opportunities to practise certain phonological,

grammatical and lexical items. However, particular attention should be paid to the following drawbacks generally noticed in our students:

- (a) misplaced stress on syllables and words or absence of stress at all;
- (b) confusion between sounds with meaningful contrasts;
- (c) failure to discriminate between long and short vowels or diphthongs;
- (d) failure to aspirate initial / p/, /t/ and /k/;
- (e) misapplication of lexis and idiom.

The teacher who gives practice in oral English will find it useful if he has sufficient skill in phonetic transcription to write down at once a mispronunciation that he hears. What is important is that a student who learns English as a second, language should be able to feel that he has basic; machinery to say what he wants. It is not an easy thing to instil this confidence in the student; it calls for considerable preparation and creative thought on the part of the teacher.

READING

Reading like listening is a decoding process. But it is a very complex process involving many physical, intellectual and often emotional reactions. There are two kinds of reading skills: the skill of reading aloud and the skill of reading silently. Reading aloud is primarily an oral matter; it is closer to pronunciation than to comprehension. It is good that the students develop the skill of reading aloud. The greatest amount of reading that is done in the world is silent. The skill of silent reading, however, varies from person to person and depends on several factors including each person's requirement. Reading becomes easy to the student if he is trained to comprehend the patterns of relationship between words—"The semantic patterns of lexical items". So, good silent reading pre-supposes a knowledge of the cultural value of words and expressions and the ability to identify the thematic content of what is in the text.

The ability to read English intelligently and imaginatively, the student should decode phrases or sentence groups. It also develops correct reading habits. No doubt, it grasps meanings of word and sentences from the context. However, it acquires the ability to use a suitable dictionary. As we know

very well that it comprehends materials falling outside the prescribed text.

Writing Skills

The languages of today have come to stay for a major part of their function as written languages. So the importance of developing the skill of writing in students cannot be over emphasised. As far as practicable, it is very important in class:

- i. To learn the motor skills of good writing;
 - ii. To learn spelling, punctuation, use of capital letters etc;
 - iii. To reinforce vocabulary and structures already mastered orally;
 - iv. To keep a written record of what has been learnt; and
 - v. To practise for achievement tests.
- Therefore writing skill is needed in everyday life
- a. To conduct personal and business correspondence ;
 - b. To take notes from books, newspapers, lectures etc.
 - c. To keep records and to maintain a diary ; and
 - d. To express oneself in prose or poetry.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

Language is a skill subject like painting or dancing. Just as we learn painting or dancing through constant practice, we acquire language in the same way. In fact, a language is an over learned skill. Language learning is essentially a habit forming process and constant and intensive practice is the basis of habit formation. Knowing a language is not the same thing as knowing about it. Knowing a language means mastering its four basic skills, viz listening, speaking, reading and writing. Knowing about a language means to know the meaning of isolated words or sentences or the rules of grammar.

The aims of this study are as follows: every language has three constituents. They are sound, structure, vocabulary. The chief aim in learning the basic four skills of a language is to master its sound system, i.e. to understand the stream of speech, to hear the distinctive sound features and to approximate their production.

The second aim is to grasp the structure of the language; i.e. the arrangement of words into sentences. The third aim is to learn the vocabulary. It must be remembered that one can't learn all the words of a language. We know only those words which fall within the range of our experience. That is why the four basic language skill should receive in due attention. No skill should be neglected at the cost of others.

KNOWING A LANGUAGE

Every language has three constituents they are sound, structure and vocabulary. The chief problem in learning a foreign language is to master its sound system, i.e. to understand the system of speech and to hear the distinctive sound features. In learning a foreign language, therefore the first task before the learner is to understand and produce the sound of the language. As Fries says:

"A person has learnt a foreign language when he has thus first, within a limited vocabulary, mastered the sounds system and has second, make the structural devices matters of automatic habit".¹

Our students should know the language, that is to say they must be able to use correctly in speech and writing. They need not bother, especially at the early stages about the rules of grammar, but fight shy of speaking English. They become self conscious while speaking English. Such students don't have sufficient practice to use the language. In this connection, we may say that a student knows a language if he has mastered its basic speech and grammatical patterns and essential vocabulary through the basic skills (viz. LSRW) – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Conclusion

We need English not only for operational purposes but also for identifying ourselves with those who use the language in India and abroad. If a person has command over the spoken word, he has a sense of achievement which is an incentive for further progress. So, language becomes real and meaningful for him. The main purpose of language is communication. Keeping in mind the above, we may say that learning the basic four skills (LSRW) of a language is to enable all students to use English with ease and comfort. That is to say, they should be able to listen, speak, read and write English effectively

and develop an ability to understand the basic patterns of the culture of the English speaking peoples. So, it is rightly said by Robert Pauls –“When we learn first language, we face the universe directly and learn to clothe it with speech; when we learn a second language, we tend to filter the universe through the skills of language already known.”²

REFERENCES

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 2. Roberts, Paul ; Understanding English, Page-5
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