

# **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN LEARNING ENGLISH: THE INDIAN PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper looks into an important problem regarding English pedagogy in Indian context. That is, the incongruities relating to the stated goals of English teaching, the teaching and testing practices and the end result. The study also highlights the fact that the existing strategies of English Language Teaching have not been able to ensure better acquisition of English on the part of a majority of the learners in India. The paper tries to examine whether introducing an Indigenised variety of English as the norm in Indian Pedagogy and more use of local sample texts can be a viable option in ensuring better success in learning English. Moreover, the paper advocates that using an Indian variety of English as the norm in Indian pedagogy can be the solution to the problem relating to English pedagogy in Indian context.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Indian English, English Language Teaching, Norm

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the context of India's heterogeneous and complex cultural reality, the English language's presence in the country's social, cultural, and economic life is undeniable and is growing rapidly. Every year, more and more people, especially from the younger age groups, acquire proficiency in the language, which guarantees them better opportunities in a job market that is steadily becoming more demanding and competitive. Like the English game of cricket, the English language has found a ready home in India. By 1978, there were about 3,000 English newspapers in India, second in number only to Hindi newspapers, in a country with at least five indigenous languages with over 50 million speakers for each of the five languages (McCrum et al., 1992). English is an "associate" official language in India spoken by about 4% i.e. 37 million of the Indian population (Crystal, 1999). However, a survey conducted by the

Indian magazine *India Today* in 1997 put forward the fact that although almost one third of Indians understood English, only 20% of them could speak it with confidence (Graddol, 1999). Therefore, English is also giving rise to an economic and cultural chasm by acting as a divider between those proficient in the language and those who struggle to communicate in English. It is an accepted norm that English in India exists mainly for communicative purposes. Therefore those who can communicate better in English have a better chance of getting opportunities career wise. As is evident from the figure stated earlier, only 20% of the people who know English can verbally communicate in English with a certain amount of confidence. For the rest, career opportunities are few in this era of globalization and market oriented economy. Although English is a compulsory subject in almost all the undergraduate colleges in India, most of the graduates passing out from these colleges every year lack proficiency in English. This dismal scenario has necessitated the scrutiny of the present English teaching norms and methods of the Indian pedagogy. Even the National Knowledge Commission, 2006-2009 has focused on the need to reform the pedagogy of English language teaching and the use of all available media to supplement traditional teaching methods.

### **CURRENT MODEL OF UNDERGRADUATE GENERAL ENGLISH COURSES IN INDIA**

The *Report of the Education Commission of India* gives us an idea of the general thinking on the issue of *English in Education* (1966:15): For a successful completion of the first degree course, a student should possess an adequate command of English, be able to express himself with reasonable ease and felicity, understand lectures in it, and avail himself of its literature. Therefore adequate emphasis will have to be laid on its study as a language right from the school stage. English should be the most useful 'library language' in higher education and our most significant window on the world.

The objectives, therefore, are aimed at all the graduates and it is assumed that the undergraduate courses will enable them:

- 1) To possess a reasonable competence in comprehension and expression of English;
- 2) To develop sharp listening skills;
- 3) To use the literature available in English to acquire knowledge of the world.

Although English in India exists mainly for communicative purposes, English is taught through the literature and thought of England, introduced by Thomas Babington Macaulay, Member, Supreme Council of India, instead of a home-grown model. When the British administration decided to spread education in India, the British Parliament passed Macaulay's Minute in 1835. As announced by the then Governor General Lord William Bentick, the great object of the British Government was the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India and all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education was best employed on English education alone (Sharp 1920: Document 30).

It is an accepted fact that the study of any literature assumes proficiency in the given language. But we teach the target language through traditional literary texts, generally British, giving students a dated foreign model in the belief that it will result in the acquisition of communicative English for current times (Kaushik,2011). In the name of norm setting, the British R.P. is still treated as the standard although the teachers are non-native speakers of English. As stated by the British Council, around 375 million speakers speak English as the first language, another 375 million speakers speak it as their second language and a staggering 750 million speakers speak English as a foreign language. Such a huge number of second and foreign language users could only be taught by indigenous non-native English speaking teachers. India belongs to the group of nations where English is used as the second language. Norm orientation in countries like India regarding the use of English in formal contexts is vital. In teaching English in India, norm has to be set regarding which linguistic form can be regarded as acceptable or should be the target in education and speech production. The notion of 'Standard English' is commonly taken to refer to such a norm, usually understood to designate a non-regional vocabulary core and the grammar of the written language (Schneider, 2007). In pronunciation, although no international norm has been set, the standard British variety (RP) acts as the norm since British English in particular still serves as a reference point and is generally more prestigious than the nativised variety (Bamgbose, 1995). Whether RP is what the majority of a population really speak, is not taken into consideration here. In Indian pedagogy, although the standard we try to achieve is British English, in practice, British English is neither taught nor learnt. In the name of British English, we are only using a variety of Indian English.

Indian English (IE) is a cover term for that variety of English used by a large number of educated Indians as an additional language in communication at the intra-national level in day-to-day dealings. It has absorbed the predominant local culture as well as the subcultures in the approximately 300 years of its existence. In a study conducted by Kaushik among students of BAIII English (Compulsory) under Punjab University, it was found that the model used for teaching English in the year 2004 did not include the skill of speaking both in the teaching materials and the tests as if it were not a part of linguistic expression mentioned as an objective in the Education Commission of India (1966). The listening and speaking skills of students are never tested and anything that is not tested is never paid much attention by both the teachers and the students. The prescribed texts are full of alien contexts and unusual usages and together they cover 50 per cent marks of the final examination paper. For students grappling with elementary English, the model of the language the books offer has little relevance. Of the remaining 50 percent marks, essay and précis writing are allotted 25 percent but here too, the topics are quite predictable resulting in crammed answers. Although around 15 percent of the total marks are earmarked for modelling of samples of modern usages, the settings are decontextualized and hence cannot inspire much learning. The paradigms of grammatical structures carried by the grammar books along with the idioms prescribed do not relate to real life contexts (Kaushik, 2011). These findings hold true for almost all the undergraduate colleges in our country. The prime objective of most of the students is to somehow score the 'pass marks' in English. Therefore, the real purpose of developing the communication skills is never achieved in the case of a majority of the learners. This lends credibility to the argument favouring a more effective model of English Language Teaching in India.

## **INDIAN ENGLISH AS A PEDAGOGIC MODEL**

A pedagogic model of a language nowadays does not cater to only the orthography, lexis, morphology and syntax of the language. There is the necessity of providing the teachers and learners with ideal or near ideal speaking and writing formats covering various genres and styles, represented through relevant contents. Adoption of an Indian variety of English as the model will definitely serve the purpose and will enable the teachers and the learners to relate better to a language carrying an indigenous flavour in content along with familiar contexts and

language usage in the prescribed texts. Hence, the English used in the pedagogy will serve local needs and the learners will find themselves in familiar footings since the contents will be steeped in the sociolinguistic, socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic environment of the learners.

In spite of the consensus on the viability of Indian English as a Pedagogic model, there are issues that still remain unsettled. These include, as stated by Ayo Bamgbose (1998), the adequacy of pedagogical models, the overriding need for codification and also the constant pull between native and non-native English norms. The basic fact that we have to keep in mind here is, English is taught and learnt by users for whom English is the second language. They are not the traditional natives unaffected by the language contact situation in the country. Therefore in the name of setting a norm for the pedagogy, we are trying to achieve a target which is neither achievable nor is desirable. Even the most educated and elite class in India use only a type of Indian English which has been termed the acrolect variety (Silke, 2002).

## **CONCLUSION**

Linguists in recent times have come up with comprehensive and authentic documents on the basic differences between Indian English and British/American English. The identity of Indian English through its differences in Phonetics & Phonology, Morphosyntax, Lexis and Discourse from British English has been clearly shown by Pingali (2009). Kachru and Nelson have also clearly marked out the differences between Indian and British English in respect to Phonology, Stress and Rhythm, Sounds and Grammar (Kachru & Nelson, 2006). In his analysis of Indian English, Schneider, applying the Dynamic Model of nativization, shows how Indian English over the years has evolved and grown to reach the fourth and penultimate phase of nativization (Schneider, 2007). Moreover, people closely associated with English teaching/learning/writing will favour the move of formulating a contemporary indigenous model for pedagogic purposes (Kaushik, 2011). Therefore, using an Indian English variety as the norm in Indian context and pedagogy is definitely a viable idea that needs to be looked into in order to ensure a successful English language learning scenario in India.

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