

MOTHER TONGUE (L1) Vis-A-Vis OTHER TONGUE (L2)?

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ABSTRACT

Learning a language is always a difficult thing and more so when it comes to learning a second language (L2) for it reflects the complexity of learning a language which is the other tongue rather than the mother tongue of a person. The present paper proposes to focus on the prospects and benefits of the skill-based learning of the L2. All learners, as such pick up a language by two means: a) acquisition of one's own language/mother tongue, and b) learning another language. Acquisition is a subconscious and intuitive process, similar to that used by a child to pick up the first language (L1); and the second is conscious learning, in which a learner is aware of his/her own learning process.

INTRODUCTION

With the distances between countries becoming smaller, the world now has become a global village. The usage of English (among a few other international languages such as French, German, Spanish and Chinese) is rampant. It is in this backdrop that we have to learn and teach English as a second language L2. It will help us cope up with the existing system as it is beneficial for a learner, based on her/his own needs.

Globalization necessitates the learning of and adherence to a universally accepted and internationally comprehensible language. Undoubtedly, English has become a world language rather than the language of only the English speaking countries such as the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada etc. because the number of the people who use English as a means of communication far more exceeds the number of the people who speak it as their mother tongue or the first language.

So far as English in India is concerned, India has been greatly influenced by the language for over two and a half centuries in almost all the spheres of life such as Education, Medicine,

Technology, Media, Tourism etc. Text materials relating to the subjects of Science, Engineering and Technology, Medicine, etc. are available only in English. Moreover, there is no single language that is acceptable to the whole country. Since several languages are spoken in India, we need to have a common language- a lingua franca.

A number of factors affect the teaching-learning process in India. The students in India can be categorized into two: the one is having the regional language as medium of instruction from the primary level and the other is having English for the same. Hence, the problem of teaching English as a second language to the Indian students starts from the pre-schooling stage. Further environment and family background play a vital role in success of learning process.

In India, at least two factors affect education: a) the poor family background, and b) lack of infrastructure. Many parents are not able to fund good education to their children. In contrast, they are willing to engage the children in different jobs in order to earn money. This is the prime hurdle affecting teaching-learning process. Secondly, the infrastructure or the lack of it. Many schools in India do not have proper school buildings, class rooms, laboratories, libraries etc. Moreover, it is also not adequate to facilitate the conducive ambiance for the same.

LSRW: THE SKILLS

Employing all four linguistic skills, viz. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing while working through a lesson will help us recycle language during the lesson. Learning rules are important, but practicing the language is even more important. Bringing all these aspects into a lesson will add variety to it - and help the learner pragmatically practice the language. Learners can knock off a grammar sheet without mistakes. But, when asked sensitive questions, for example, "Could you describe your father?" they have problems in answering. This is generally due to the emphasis given in many school systems to learning grammar.

LISTENING

Listening Is the Primary Skill. Listening is rarely taught in schools because the educators assume that it can be achieved automatically. But effective listening is a skill. Like any other skill, competence in listening is achieved through learning and practice. A good listener is not just a

silent receptacle, passively receiving the thoughts and feelings of others. To be an effective listener, we must respond with verbal and nonverbal cues which let the speaker know that we are listening and understanding. Listening is a precious gift. It enables even a new born baby to speak L1 without even learning the alphabet.

One can Listen effectively if she/he:-

- a) Maintains the eye contact;
- b) Is attentive;
- c) Is open;
- d) Listens carefully and try to visualize;
- e) Doesn't interrupt;
- f) Ask questions;
- g) Pays attention to nonverbal cues.

SPEAKING

The burgeoning importance placed on Oral Communication skills by employers has been echoed internationally for a decade or more and across disciplines. Knowledge and technical know-how are clearly important, but these must be presented with an excellent standard of communication skills, particularly oral. Furthermore, oral communication and presentation skills are considered the best skills for someone to get a job or enhance one's career. Speaking skill includes effective interpretation, composition and presentation of information, ideas and values to a specific audience. Individual and business relations can be maintained with the help of this skill.

It is however regrettable that in our country, particularly in certain states, speaking skill is given least importance. Though we know the importance and benefits of spoken communication, yet we are unable to justify and prove its importance. For instance, during our schooling we get very less opportunity and suitable platform for speaking. Because the classes are totally teacher-centered, where teachers are only teaching and the students are playing the role of mute spectators. As a consequence, when we go for higher studies to colleges and universities, the fear factor still prevails while speaking which becomes an obstacle in career progress. Consequently, this fear factor snatches away the opportunity of enhancing the skill. This is one of the prime reasons for poor placement in technical colleges. Furthermore, the mother tongue influence

(MTI) in learning and speaking the second language, causes less intelligibility of L2.

Speaking skills can be improved by if one follows the few steps suggested below:

- a) Practices wherever and whenever she/he can;
- b) Builds her/his confidence;
- c) Tries to experiment with the English she/he knows;
- d) Tries to respond to what people say to her/him;
- e) Doesn't speak too fast;
- f) Tries to relax when she/he speaks.

READING

Reading skills enable readers to turn orthographic writing into meaning and achieve the goals of independent comprehension and fluency. These are specific skills which enable a reader to read the written form as meaningful language and to mentally interact with the message. Reading aloud helps twist the tongue properly which leads to proper articulation of different words. In the modern age of information, reading truly is a fundamental survival skill.

One can improve one's reading skill if she/he:

- a) Knows why she/he is reading;
- b) She/he doesn't need to read all;
- c) Selects the chapters and articles that are important;
- d) Scans before she/he reads;
- e) Optimizes her/his reading environment;
- f) Once she/he starts, she/he doesn't stop;
- g) Be Consistent.

WRITING

Writing is considered the toughest skill. We need to do a lot of homework to fine-tune our writing skill. Good writing skills are essential for a career in Public Relations. A solid foundation in writing basics is good, but to succeed as a professional, it takes practice and commitment. If one is giving one's writing to anyone else to look at, accurate grammar will show that they are professional and competent, as well as making the writing look clean, neat, and generally easy to follow. Constructive criticism may be the best way to highlight flaws in the work. Because your audience is exposed to an increasing number of writings each day, the standard of writing must

be livelier, easier to read, more concise, and more interesting than ever before. To compete for attention, writing must be purposeful, audience-centered, and concise. The goal of effective writing is to express the ideas rather than to impress the audience.

Writing skill can be improved if the learner follows these steps:

- a) Plans ahead;
- b) Identifies her/his audience;
- c) Spells properly;
- d) Uses proper grammar;
- e) Reviews her/his writing;
- f) Polishes her/his writing.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, deliberate and concerted attempt is required to learn L2. It would be a really tough task to achieve proficiency and competence in second language. It is true that we are frequently exposed to L1 at every stage and at all levels. In effect, we are less exposed to L2. The need therefore is to give our learners as much exposure to L2 as possible thereby making them use L2 with felicity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Arun Behera is an Assistant Professor of English in Sri Sathya Sai University, Bangalore. He has over 22 years of experience in various capacities such as HoD, Principal, Senate member, Board of Studies member, IGNOU coordinator, NSS Program Officer etc. Dr Behera has published five books, edited Expression, reviewed A Little Book of Language and published 50 articles. He is in the review panel of IJEE and IJEL and editorial board of IJSSE and IJEE. He has been conferred Bharat Excellence Award and his bio-note has appeared in Asia Pacific Who's Who, Asia's Who's Who and Famous India's Who's Who.