

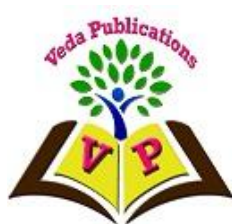
MY CREATIVE EXPERIMENTS WITH IMPARTING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AT THE UNDER GRADUATE CLASSROOMS

Chitra V

(Assistant Professor, Department of English, National College Jayanagar, Bangalore 560 070)

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ABSTRACT



This paper is an attempt in delineating the techniques used mostly successfully, to impart English as a second language at the Under Graduate level (UG), by the author. A working knowledge of English along with basic computer skills still fetch a very decent living in India and therefore is the dream of many students to acquire the same. However the word “English” itself comes across as a bitter pill to many due to their socio-economic factors. Coupled with these crippling factors the gender of the students unfortunately also plays a greater role in the acquiring of the language. Although very eager, and having “cleared” the qualifying examinations, these students find it extremely hard to cope with the standards at the UG level, which not only tests them only on one or two aspects of the English language but adapts a holistic approach on all the four aspects of language learning encompassing Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening skills. This paper is on the tried and tested techniques to teach the moderately scoring students (classified as Level One).

Keywords: *Second Language Acquisition, Holistic Learning, Creative Techniques, Level One Students.*

Gradation of the students based on their acquired skills in using English in their everyday lives play the primary, most important pivotal role even before any training can actually start in the classrooms. This is very essential for the teacher to have gauged her / his students well before hand and not to judge them as inferior and assists the teacher in making the class more interactive and a fruitful session. It has been observed over the years by the author that the rural students who enter the UG level courses be it the Humanities / Sciences streams have successfully cleared the qualifying examinations and are intelligent and also mostly well informed in their chosen course. However for most of these students the stumbling point is the English language which somehow seems to have eluded them over the years. Most of these students also happen to be first generation learners from their families. The students have had a fear of using the language over the years due to the elite status associated with it. The socio economic factor also is one of the contributing factors and most often female students have much disadvantage over their male counterparts, the reason being they have had very limited resources to interact during or after class hours. Therefore, it is pivotal and very essential to grade the students; this can be achieved with very simple practices.

Each student is made to speak in a very casual, non-threatening atmosphere. The student is assured that this is not a "test" to be passed and thus he / she eases out of self-drawn discomfort zone. The moderator (the teacher) asks very simple questions that have to be answered only in English as do the other students of the class. Gauging automatically happens as the teacher very carefully and mindfully records the ability of the students to converse in English. As the conversation proceeds the teacher hands over very simple paragraphs to be read. These comprise not very challenging words but on the contrary are well spaced out with no typographical errors. The student is now asked to read the chosen paragraph loud and clear. The speaking and the reading skills have already been subtly tested and the listening test is an on-going process as the teacher again gauges if the student is actively, effectively listening and answering appropriately to the

questions posed. The last step would be to actually make the student write. This is sometimes tricky as most of the students do become very conscious to write on the White / Black board and it is intimidating when the class is watching. If the student is not willing to write on the board, he is gently nudged to write on a piece of paper. Here again, it can be a very creative session with the other students of the class / the moderator asking for very interesting questions that may involve the students' interest ranging from Movies, travels, food preferences, relationships to even his fashion sense. The trained teacher has already graded the student based on the above exercise and holistically comprising all the aspects of language learning: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing – the students can now invariably be grouped under the categories of Poor (Level 0), Average (Level 1), Good (Level 2) and Very Good leaning on to the levels of Excellent (Level 3) users of the language.

An interesting find of course and not very surprisingly is that none of the students who have been tested so far by the author fall under the Level 0 category; the reason is plain and simple. The language of English is not at all "foreign" to them anymore. May be teaching of an entirely foreign language like Mandarin, German or Spanish would be an uphill task. However, these students do use English words and phrases in their everyday vernacular even with their rural folks with much ease. Many of the words of English have easily and comfortably replaced their vernacular counterpart. Their ears have been tuned to the language most often by even popular music and Hollywood movies. Therefore, they are not entirely "new" to the language thanks to their formal years at school. They have, after all, cleared their qualifying examinations that included English as a second language to enter the UG level. This paper deals with the teaching techniques used to impart the English language to the Level 1 (L1) students. This first step achieved without much intimidation to the student and in the most conducive way paves way for further pedagogical methods that can be employed by the teacher in the classroom.

English is not an easy language to learn for a non-native speaker simply for the reason that it is not

a phonetic language. This is the first tumbling step to many of the L1 students to learn the language effectively, in the experience of the author. However this can be overcome with carefully measured steps. The students are required to keep a journal exclusively for the language and register even the smallest aspect learnt on a daily basis without procrastination. This is done with the help of their vernacular language written alongside the actual pronunciation. As a general rule, English is always in the format of Subject + Verb + Object where as in the regional vernaculars this varies to a greater extent and allows itself all kinds of combination that include O+S+V !! This basic grammatical rule of English is the first step to be inculcated in the minds of the students. Next step would be to introduce tenses. The author always has taught tenses encompassing even the past participle form along with the main tenses of past, present and future. As the student has now confidently proceeded to learn the language in the most comfortable way, sentence linkers are introduced. Most often than not, the vernacular language also is employed in helping the students to learn very rudimentary connecting linkers. The learning of the very simple "Wh" question forms comprising *What, Who, When, Why, Where and How* play a very important note in the learning of the language alongside teaching of question tags. It is inculcated in the class that English question forms ending with the symbol question mark "?" are always employed to end a question. However when a sentence is asked mistakenly as a question, it is the question-tag that ends the sentence. For example, the intended sentence "*You are Coming*" is taught to be made right with the question tag, "*You are coming, aren't you?*" and the students are most eager to learn these simple sentence forming techniques. An effective step in word building repertoire practice is the use of prefixes and suffixes. The L1 students usually grasp it much better and faster – they find that this practice has enriched their learning experience; The root words can morph into another new word by the clever use of suffixes and prefixes and this is greatly appreciated by them. The Subject Verb agreement, Active Voice, Passive Voice, Direct Speech and

Indirect Speech are taught gradually after the initial learning hiccups fade away and a new enthusiasm has now gradually crept up. Fossilized errors that have somehow crept up in everyday language are carefully pointed out and are always taught and repeated in every class. The usage of Prepositions are always invariably taught by enacting the preposition involved; on, off, below, beside, into, across, among, beside, before, above, along, inside, between, around, behind, below, beneath are a few examples. The students are encouraged to use their electronic gadgets, smart phones, recording devices to be used appropriately throughout the sessions to record and play back their findings for a better grasp.

Following are some of the time tested effective techniques employed by the author in the classroom to develop the following four components of the English language.

A. Listening Skills:

Most often, various researches through the years have revealed that one listens only to answer the questions asked! The findings are not surprising. One becomes attentive only when the spotlight is on them and "tries" hard to answer by listening. Therefore, the teacher now has to show the class the nuances of *Active, Effective* listening. This is a two-way communication. A very rudimentary game of "fixing the Elephant's tail" is played in the class. A picture of an Elephant sans its tail is drawn on the board. The class is divided into smaller groups comprising a maximum of five students in each group. A student is selected to *fix the tail of the Elephant* that has been drawn on the board. He / She is blindfolded. The student has no other option but to actively and effectively listen to the commandments of their fellow group members. The student is guided by their group members by way of instructions. The student and the helpers are now effectively listening to one another. The student is encouraged to fix the missing tail of the Elephant only through the instructions given by their group members. Although very simple game, this also meets the need of the students to become an active learner by not sitting on a bench and taking notes; on the contrary they learn to even communicate as a larger group and lose all their inhibitions. Another popular technique is

that of reading out a task from one group. This task can be any topic comprising cooking, flower arrangement, library card/passport/driving license application. The task is always read out from one group as a sequence. Usually five or six sentences complete the task. The question to the rest of the groups can range from “pick out the verbs” to “what has to be used as a seasoning on the pizza?”. This leads to an effective listening from all concerned and with a surcharged atmosphere of competition. To continue on the games that can be used to impart effective listening skills is the *Game of the Opposites*. The moderator or a student gives instructions pertaining to simple tasks like *sit / stand / left / right / big ball or small ball*. The students playing the game are required to do just the opposite. For example when the instruction given is to *sit* the student should *stand* and vice versa. This is all the more confusing if the student is also distracted by looking at the moderator who is prompting a wrong answer, if they are not actively listening.

B. Speaking skills

As a precursor to this session, the teacher has already taught them very basic phonetics. The difference between vowels and consonants and their pronunciation are taught. This can be done using the various *You Tube* videos or as this author has effectively taught in the class, can be done by just drawing their attention to the various parts that go into articulating the English sounds. The L1 class easily grasps this concept after just one session. The sessions are made more enthusiastic by making them *throwing their th's, rounding their o's, kissing their b's, biting their v's, curling and burying their r's, fishing their y's to not opening the upper lip for wh's*. This simple and fun way of explaining pronunciation makes the class much easier to grasp what is being taught.

After the pronunciation practice the popular technique employed by the author is to make the class engage in a small group activity. The L1 students are now further divided into very small groups comprising not more than five students in a group. Each student is asked to write a topic closer to his or her heart's reckoning in a small chit of paper, which is now collected in a bowl. The topics are written by

the students themselves. The teacher is only a moderator in the process. These topics ease out the students because they find it circles around their interest and everyday lives. The teacher is only a moderator now as in a Group discussion. Hence, it is found that the students do lose their inhibitions and try to speak very simple, grammatically unflawed sentences. Help does come from the teacher and their own class as well. The class is an interactive, group-centric session. This session is usually recorded on a gadget like a smart phone and the students are encouraged to revisit their sessions and improvise on their presentation skills. It is almost guaranteed that they automatically correct their posture and thus become very confident speakers through this practice. Group Discussions on a burning topic of the day or any topic that lends itself to debate is another effective tool. The author vouches for the fact that every student of the class actually starts taking part in these sessions with vigor and enthusiasm and speak their mind out albeit in grammatically correct simple sentences. The thought process involved in putting forth their opinions is a great motivator to improvise on their speaking skills.

C. Reading Skills

The teacher as a precursor to the learning of the English language has already brushed upon the special characteristics of the language that include stress patterns in the language and also its unique characteristic of rise and fall. This requires practice and the author uses some of the videos of British Council to impart this part of the language. The students are asked to do this as an extra-class activity and each group is assigned a task to record their sessions of reading. The punctuation symbols are almost the same in their vernacular language as well and thus this session requires them to superimpose what they already know. Intermediate pauses, tone fluctuations and the pitch of the voice are also taught for effective reading. Mirrors are used by each group to watch their facial expressions and recording devices are used to improvise their own reading skills. A Newspaper is brought in by each student. The teacher gives them a small task that might involve reading an article / interview / book or film

review. This is more effective in making the L1 students to read out aloud and without inhibitions.

D. Writing Skills

The initial learning of writing wherein a five year old student was taught this skill is reinforced much to the chagrin of the students... Although it is jeered at initially, once the objective is clear, no complains are heard any more. The direction of each alphabet along with an arrow showing the actual direction with which it is written is again repeated. English being a language written from left to right, the curves always tend to be on the right. Each group analyses their members' handwriting and anyone seen to write with a left curve is actually jokingly warned to have a negative social trait...They are made to invest in the four ruler book which was discarded by them long ago and put into judicial practice now to practice the writing of each alphabet along with its cursory form. A small game played in this session is again a game that went back to their school days – *Name Place Animal Thing*. A student is made to tell out loud all the alphabets and is stopped by the students at any point. If he stopped at "F" then each student should now start jotting down a Name, Place, Animal and Thing starting with that particular letter, accomplished within a given time frame. This practice ensures they listen well, comprehend what is being expected and write down exactly the specifics needed in English. The thoughts and actions converge within a stipulated time. This is a good brain exercise as well. Points are given to each correct bandwidth answer. The next exercise that comes in handy to make a student effectively write is the *guided story* wherein only the pointers have been handed out to the student. The author always invariably chooses very famous folklores, legends etc for this exercise for the simple reason being the student is aware of the story line. The student now proceeds to use all the skills learnt that come in handy now with this guided story writing.

This paper exclusively deals with the classroom techniques used in imparting English language as a Second Language to the L1 level students. There of course are innumerable other materials in the form of audio recordings, videos and other mobile game applications that are flooding the

market today and many of them are available at a click of a button. The students are always advised to listen to any English News channel daily to improve their repertoire and to read an English Newspaper. They are forever encouraged to converse only in English in a class room set up with their peers and with the teacher. These practices go a long way in making an L1 learner rapidly improve his English Language skills.

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