

Teaching English as Third Language to Tribal Students : Evolving Teaching Techniques and Reading Testing Material

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Abstract

The UGC, under its IX and X plans, has been liberally sanctioning Special Remedial English Coaching Grants for the SC/ST students enrolled in colleges affiliated to and conducted by different universities all over the country. The State of Maharashtra has accepted the **National Education Policy**, and therefore it has implemented the '**Three Language Formula**' in the primary, secondary and higher secondary schools as well as in colleges. The 'Three Language Formula' expects the student to learn his/her mother tongue **Marathi** as **L1**, **Hindi** as well as **English** as **L2**. Though the State has faithfully implemented the 'Three Language Formula', it seems that the same policy does not work properly in the case of tribal students. The tribal students speak their mother tongue '**Bhillori**' and it is **L1** for them. The regional language of Maharashtra i.e. '**Marathi**' is L2 to the tribal students and English is L3. The school as well as college syllabus of English has been framed by accepting the 'Three Language Formula' and English as L2 for all the students of Maharashtra. The syllabus of English has been framed by accepting the fact that English is L2. However, for tribal students, English is L3 and therefore, the syllabus of English for them needs several modifications or perhaps a new English syllabus should be designed for English as L3.

After conducting surveys (one for the tribal students and second for their English teachers) the Paper has enough data to substantiate the difficulties that the tribal students have been facing while learning English as L2 and reading English texts prepared for students for whom English is L2. The paper has suggested that the English texts for the school and college tribal students should be reprepared by accepting the fact that for them English is L3 and not L2. It is now evident that along with the new texts the teaching and testing material should also be redesigned.

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We have been using English in India for the last two hundred and fifty years (approx) as the medium of instruction in colleges and universities. The Indian Constitution has given Hindi the status of official language. However, it further States that English would continue as the associate official language in the country. Paradoxical though it is, it is a fact that English, a foreign language, has remained the cementing force for different parts of India. By now, several of our universities have switched over to regional languages as the medium of instruction. Still, English is one of the compulsory subjects at the college and university level. When a large group of population of any country uses any national or foreign language for more than a century, that foreign language no more remains a foreign tongue for that group of population. This means that since we have been using English for more than 250 years, English is now one of the Indian languages. Prof. V. K. Gokak in his book *The Future of English in India* (Orient Longmans, 1952) says that the way we have been using English in India has now attained the status of one of the modern Indian languages. When we use a language, we make use of it in four ways... we hear a language, we speak a language, we read a language, and we write a language. Prof. R. K. Bansal's book *The Intelligibility of Indian English* (Orient Longmans, 1965) has clarified that with all the limitations of the Indian languages interfering in English, a

common spoken Indian English model has come into existence. The written Indian English has also got wide recognition all over the world. Indian English literature – novel, short story, poetry, drama, essay – is today a well accepted literature like the British English literature, the American English literature, the Canadian English literature, the Australian English literature, and so on.

Our schools and colleges have been teaching English as one of the compulsory subjects, though we have accepted the three language formula - the regional language, the national language and English-in Maharashtra. English is being taught from the First Standard in our schools and the College Syllabus makes English a compulsory subject in every faculty from the first year of the collegiate education.

Maharashtra has been an acknowledged centre for higher learning from time immemorial. History has recorded that several erudite scholars from our state had worked in ancient universities like Nalanda and Taxashila. Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya invited the Maharashtrian Sanskrit Scholars, when he established the famous Banaras Hindu University, to observe the rituals of the foundation of the same University and later on some of them were requested to work as faculty at the University. With such a tradition, higher education in this part of the country has been enjoying a unique position in the national

system over centuries. In 1857, based on the report of a committee, three universities including the University of Bombay came into existence. The famous dispatch of Sir Charles Wood to the Board of Directors of the East India Company in 1854 laid the foundation for English education in India. After the famous Declaration of Queen Victoria in 1858, Lord Macaulay presented the Indian Education Bill in the British Parliament. The Minutes of Macaulay, in fact, have been responsible for the introduction of English as the medium of instruction in the Indian education system. The motive was to prepare a band of clerks to serve the *British Raj* in India. When the Bombay University was established, there were only three colleges in the state and some 27 in the entire country. A decade after Independence, three more universities came into existence and at present, we have nine traditional, one technical, one veterinary, one Sanskrit, four agricultural and one open university. In addition to these, we have ten deemed universities and six nationally recognised advanced institutes imparting postgraduate instructions and guiding research. This scenario of higher education in Maharashtra is highly encouraging, extremely advanced and quite satisfactory. But it certainly has some glaring limitations in the fields of assessment and examination, applied and pure research, syllabus framing and effective teaching.

Since Independence, Indian higher education has expanded pheno-

menally. Ours is perhaps the second largest higher education system in the world. The phenomenal increase in the field of higher education has resulted in unplanned proliferation and inadequate infrastructure facilities at many centres. The growing mismatch between supply and demand for graduates, increasing complexities of universities, coupled with pressure to expand, and limited resources pose a serious challenge to educational planners in India. In addition to all these predicaments, we have to confront the position of English in our higher education system all over the country.

Even after Independence the language problem remained more or less the same all over the country. The Government of India evolved a policy of universal education for all. This recommended the use of regional language as a medium of instruction at the primary and secondary level. At the university level, English was the medium of instruction. After Independence, 'Universal Education' opened the door of education for all the citizens, but this created many problems too. Unmanageable over crowded classrooms and the non-availability of trained teachers affected the quality of education. Colleges had to face the problem of mixed ability groups in English. This resulted in a wide gap in language efficiency level between English medium and vernacular medium learners. Universities like Nagpur, Pune and

Kolhapur allowed Marathi as the medium of instruction along with English in the colleges under their jurisdiction. Today, almost all universities have adopted this policy of medium for instruction.

For the purpose of education, the Government of India Central Advisory Board of Education devised a three language formula in 1962. The Education Commission revised this formula in 1964-66. It suggested that the mother tongue or the regional language should be the medium of instruction from classes I to X. They made the study of English compulsory as a second or third language from class V to VII respectively.

Recently, the Government of Maharashtra has introduced the teaching of English from class I and has devised a scheme of teaching English at the primary level i.e. from class I to IV.

For lower secondary stage (classes VIII to X), the arrangement of language teaching is as follows-

1. Mother tongue - Marathi
2. Hindi at higher or lower level
3. English at higher or lower level

This has given English the status of L2 and L3. Though Marathi is the mother tongue of the majority of school and college going students, English still has equal importance in the school and college syllabus, and in the university instructional system. English is considered essential in the areas of administration, commerce, banking, education etc. It is true that the state

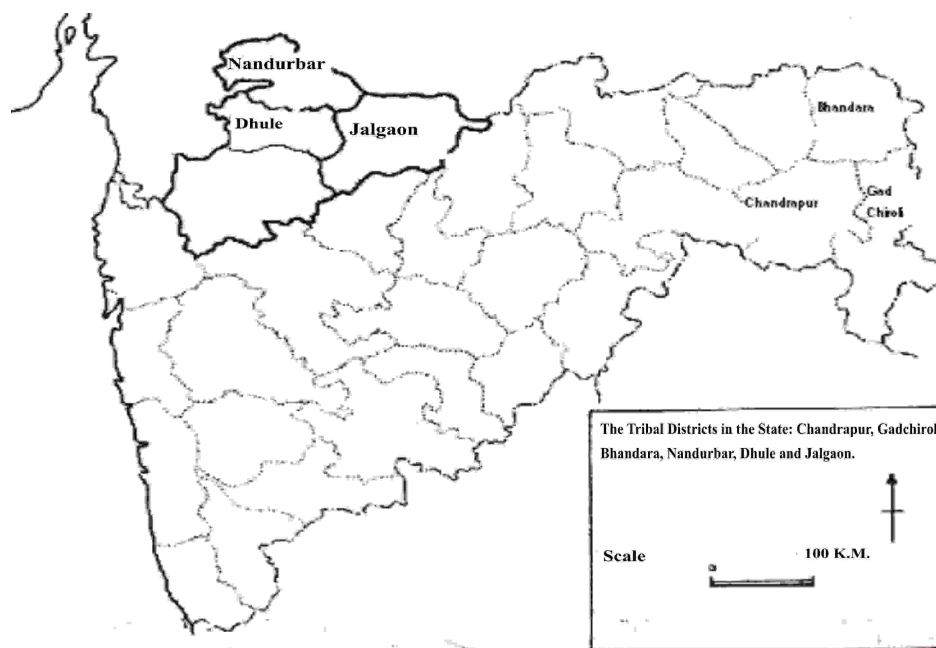
government policy of education at the school, college and university level has been changing from time to time, but English has remained of focal importance and has always remained one of the compulsory subjects. By about 1950's, the state government made English a compulsory subject from class VIII and allowed Marathi alongwith English in schools. In the late 1960's, English was made a compulsory subject from class V and of late, English is taught from class I. This fluctuating policy for English has yielded several negative as well as positive results. Today, we teach English as one of the subjects from class I at the primary level, one of the compulsory subjects at the secondary and higher secondary level, as a compulsory subject at the first, second and third year of the degree course in the arts faculty, and as a compulsory subject for the first year of the degree course in science and commerce faculties. Each university in the state has its own curriculum for different faculties but still English is taught as one of the compulsory subjects either in the first year or the second year of the degree course. Each university offers a special course in English both at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. This is how English is taught either as a language or as a literary course at the collegiate and university level.

Some districts such as Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Nandurbar, Dhule and Jalgaon have a

majority of tribals population. The percentage of tribals is 68-79 percent.

The basis of the present study is the methodology of teaching a foreign language to students whose mother tongue is Ahirani or Bhilori and who have completed their primary, secondary and higher secondary

a starting point. Such a point of reference between two languages can be found in the theory of descriptive linguistics. In order to characterise the notion 'linguistic description of natural language', we need to distinguish two aspects of such descriptions: that part which concerns



education in the regional language like Marathi. Such a study is based on the general theory of linguistics, i.e., the study of abstract structural relations underlying all human languages. A prerequisite of any attempt to compare the grammars of two languages is of course a common point of reference, without which we shall have neither a justification for bringing two languages together nor

features of the language which makes it different from other languages and that part which concerns features common to all languages. That is, one must distinguish those features of a language that it has by virtue of being a natural language. The features specified in order to characterise it as a natural language are the universals of language (Katz and Postal, 1964: 160).

A general theory of linguistics is a study of abstract structural relations underlying all human languages. It is a study of linguistic universals and not just a study of diversities or idiosyncratic properties of languages. Structural features common to all languages are called language universals. The fundamental assumption underlying general linguistics is that all natural human languages have certain semantic features and abstract formal properties in common; that they are all culturally determined variations on a finite set of universals. The aim of general linguistics is to bring out this rich uniformity underlying surface diversities. The aims of a general theory, says Lyons (1971: 49-50), are-

- i) to arrive at a statement of the rules that formed the basis of a person's ability to speak and comprehend a particular language;
- ii) to provide a framework within which the grammar of any natural language can be described; and
- iii) to arrive at a statement of the rules of universal grammar, by studying a variety of human languages or also the human organisms.

The claim that human languages are very much alike is often met with skepticism. After all, when we compare linguistic systems in learning a foreign language, for example, we are struck by the differences between them. No one will deny that languages differ from one another in a multitude

of details. On the other hand, we must realise that surface peculiarities are much more likely to attract our attention than underlying structural principles, while it is in the latter that we would expect to find language universals. It is evident that surface linguistic diversity often conceals underlying uniformity.

Langacker (1967: 241-242), while clarifying the point, states, "All languages exemplify the same basic organisational scheme. More specifically, every human language comprises an infinite set of sentences, each of which manifests, in phonetic form, a conceptual structure. A complex series of syntactic rules serves to connect conceptual structures with surface structures, which are linear strings of lexical items grouped hierarchically. . . . There are simply no exceptions to this organisational scheme. No one has ever found a human language lacking syntactic rules, phonological rules or discrete lexical items. No one has found a language in which lexical items were not composed of linear sequences of sound segments. . . . Linguistic systems differ somewhat in structure, but they vary only within the confines of this common framework."

This is how the general theory of linguistics today has accepted that there are certain phonological, syntactic and semantic units that are universal; their occurrence in any particular language can be treated and identified as instances of a universal set.

Charles Fillmore (1967: 1-2), Chomsky (1965: 27-30), Bach(1965), Halliday (1966) and Greenberg (1963) have elaborately discussed the language universally and have stated their own views on the occurrences of such language universality in several natural human languages.

Descriptive linguistics is often regarded as the major part of general linguistics. A linguistic description of some language is called a grammar of that language. A grammar is a set of statements saying how a language works. It includes a description of the principles for combining words to form grammatical sentences. The linguistic description of languages is often undertaken with no ultimate practical goal in mind. "Descriptive linguistics, in other words, is akin to pure science. A physicist is likely to investigate some aspects of the physical world that interests him with no intention whatsoever of turning the results of his research to practical application; he investigates it because it intrigues him, because he wishes to contribute to human knowledge. Similarly, linguists are interested in one particular aspect of psychological reality, namely the psychological phenomenon we call language. The desire to know more about this phenomenon is ample justification for investigating it." (Langacker, - 1967:6).

Descriptive linguistics involves the description of a language at one point in time. It is concerned with the description and analysis of the ways in

which a language operates and is used by a given set of speakers at a given time. This time may be the present (in the case of languages as yet unwritten or only recently given written form, it will inevitably be the present as there is no other way of knowing any other stages of them, though there are methods by which certain facts about such earlier stages may be inferred); the time may equally well be the past where adequate written records are available, as in the case of the so called dead languages like Ancient Greek and Latin, and in the case of earlier stages of languages still spoken such as Old French and Old English. "What is more important is that the descriptive study of a language and of any part of a language, present or past, is concerned exclusively with that language at the period involved and not as a descriptive study, with what may have preceded it or may follow it. Nor is the descriptive study of a particular language concerned with the description of other languages at the same time." (Robins,1960: 4-5).

The present ELT situation in Maharashtra particularly, and in India generally is very complex. English can hardly be described today in India as a second language. "It is now in the process of acquiring the status of a compulsory 'third' language" (Yardi, 1977: 2). The methodology of second language teaching can hardly be useful for the teaching of the third language. To quote Yardi (1977: 4), "Pedagogically considered, such a

distinction between L2 and L3 seems warranted. An active command of a third language is rare. Michael West is of the view that a bilingual person knowing two or more languages is a myth flourishing only in England. The point in the Indian context is whether we can continue to practice second language teaching methodology in a situation where English has acquired the status of a third language. Second language teaching methodology with almost equal emphasis on all the four skills seems unsuited to the emerging situation. The emphasis may have to shift to the acquisition of passive/receptive skills.”

Even in the changing situation, synchronic comparative studies are necessary for the production of graded teaching, testing and reading materials. What we need today is suitable graded teaching material, especially reading material. The insight obtained through a study of this kind, it is hoped, can be helpful in the preparation of adequate reading materials, pedagogical contrastive grammars, remedial grammars, translation algorithms, etc.

As Prof. Yardi has pointed out, “English is now in the process of acquiring the status of a compulsory ‘third’ language..... Second language teaching methodology with almost equal emphasis on all the four skills seems unsuited to the emerging situation. The emphasis may have to shift to the acquisition of passive / receptive skills.” (Yardi, 1977: 2 to 4).

The surveys conducted have revealed the difficulties of the SC/ST students in learning English. The experience of the researcher as a teacher of English, teaching English to SC/ST students, so far has been that SC/ST students have difficulties at all the three levels - phonological, grammatical and syntactic. The experiences of the other practicing teachers of English collected through the surveys have added to the knowledge of the researcher. The difficulties encountered by the SC/ST students while learning English have been analysed and the analysis suggests how further steps to improve the methods of teaching, the methods of preparing teaching material, graded reading material could be taken.

The prerecorded cassettes (prepared by the CIEFL, Hyderabad, by the ACEN Laboratory, Pune) can be used in the language laboratory to improve the pronunciation and hearing ability of the students, especially the SC/ST students. The audio-visual aids in teaching the foreign language as L2 or L3 have always given good dividends. Bridge courses, remedial courses, spoken English courses could be designed after collecting the survey material and they would be offered to the SC/ST students in due course of time. The present study would help the practicing teachers of English to revise the pedagogy.



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