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Teaching Communication Skills in English through Translation: An Effective Methodology for the Beginners (Engineering Students) from Rural Background

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Abstract:

“Translation seen as conversation- for conversation assumes equality among the speakers- is clearly the language of languages, the language that all languages should speak”.

- Ngugi Wa Thiong-o (director, International Center for Writing and Translation, University of California)

There is no denying the fact that teacher trainers in English have been using multiple teaching methods to help the learners in acquiring, developing and strengthening their knowledge and communication skills in English. In the existing ELT situation in India, translation is more or less abandoned or replaced with CLT which proved to be rather harmful, useless , ineffective and arduous experience for the learners of non English medium colleges/institutes or from the rural settings. This paper aims at reviewing and discussing the uses and effectiveness of the use of translation/ interpretation in fostering communicative competence in English in these above mentioned learners. This paper also covers the author’s own experiences as a teacher trainer as to how on the initial level the translation/ interpretation can be exploited to motivate, develop and enhance communication skills in English in these learners.

Keywords: translation, problems or challenges in language learning, four communication skills and translation method as teaching learning tool.

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Introduction

India is amazing and unique for its unity in diversity. No other country in this world embraces the extraordinary mixture of ethnic groups, profusion of mutually incomprehensible languages, diversity of religion and cultural practices than India does. This diversity is also reflected in the

education system of India. On one hand, we have learners from the best institutes in the country like IITs, IIMs, and ISB.etc and on the other hand we have learners who are in margins. The mode of instruction in higher education is English. English has become lingua franca of the international business, technology, aviation, diplomacy, banking computing medicines engineering and tourism. That is why in education for every year we find that more and more courses are being offered in English. Therefore, it has become one of the most important and effective languages having communicative and educative value. Speaking effectively, articulating and expressing candidly and clearly in English is considered to be the vital competencies in today's global scenario. David Crystal in one of his lectures said,

“there are more people speaking English in India probably in the rest of the mother tongue English speaking world combined.....the consensus was perhaps third of the population speak some sort of English. The figure must be three hundred to four hundred million which is more than the combined populations of Britain, Ireland, Australia, U.S., Canada, and South Africa.”¹

Importance of English for Engineering Students

B.Tech (Bachelor in Engineering &Technology) is one of the biggest fields of study in the world now a day. Here English plays a very vital role because these engineering students are required

1. to understand their lectures in English,
2. to have good communication competence in English,
3. to deal with the countless, tutorials, labs, project reports and papers in English,
4. to have access of knowledge through one of the most convenient sources of information i.e. Internet which provides most of the information in English,
5. to be proficient in English during the job hunting processes like interviews, group discussions, personality development,
6. to co-operate and communicate with different people from different parts of the world in English after getting a job because English is spoken and used worldwide. Therefore, communication skills in English play an important role in the academic life and career of engineering students.

Engineering students from Rural Areas and their Problems with English:

But still English is considered to be a foreign language in the rural and semi-urban areas or to those who are socially, culturally and economically marginalized students as they find it quite difficult to learn or speak English. They are

- Students who are from minority groups.

- Whose either parents are either literate or semi- literate.
- Who often resides in low-income or seasonal income family
- Whose residences are either in rural or in semi-urban localities.
- Whose primary languages is other than Hindi/English
- Who did not have exposure in terms of mainstream cultures or , have no previous exposure of English
- Those who are not exposed to learning environment.

In nutshell, I can say they are from the socially, economically, culturally disadvantaged group constituting agricultural, casual or industrial laborers resulting into poverty, low level of education and poor access to health services.

Therefore, it is a challenge for the teachers, educators or trainers to make English language accessible to them. They have been using multiple techniques or methods to make them proficient in English. These methods are: grammar teaching forms, the direct method also called as Natural method or Reformed Method, Dr. West's new method, Bilingual Method, Structural approach, Oral approach and Communicative language teaching etc. In a nutshell, these methods have been doing more harm than good to the first year learners because these methods can help them to pass the examination but will not enable them to communicate effectively and adequately in real life situations. A methodology which can effectively blend both accuracy and fluency is needed at the most. Widdowson has rightly pointed out that,

“Fluency and accuracy are complementary and interdependent phenomena: the problem is to know how the competency works in natural language use and how it can best be developed in the process of language learning.”

Use of translation method in the initial level in teaching communication skills in English:

In order to help these learners to acquire, develop and strength their knowledge in English, teacher trainers in English have been using various teaching methods. In the existing ELT situation in the rural areas, for the beginners, translation method can be more useful and effective in teaching the communication skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

My classroom Environment:

In most of the institutes or technical universities, these above mentioned four skills are being taught either in class rooms or in communication labs. But my classroom is a classic example for teaching communication skills. The five stage exercise on ‘describing your place’ presented below is an attempt to catalyze this process:

Step 1:

Here we have a sound system console supported by 25 student consoles facilitating the trainer teachers to play lectures and to record the audio clips of the (speaking) learners. Here audio clips of describing the place are played and the learners are asked to exercise these following practices:

The instruction is: Listen to the following sentences pausing your machine after each sentence to write down the essential details of what you have heard:

1. Edinburghof Scotland.
2. The city is often regarded as.....city,.....
3. The annual Edinburgh.....world.
4. Theof the city.....
5. The new town wascity conditions.
6. The old townonce ran freely.
7. The festival isconcurrent.....three weeks.
8. Now the largest.....by opera.
9. Today.....exotic and controversialsophisticated.
10. This most romantic of cities.....rock.

Step 2:

In this step these above mentioned sentences are being translated by the students in Hindi with the help of the teacher. Then they are asked to reread these sentences until they comprehend them.

Step 3:

In the following questions you must supply appropriate responses (can take help from translated sentences):

1. Which city is the capital city of Scotland?
Answer.....
2. What is the opinion of the speaker for the city?
Answer.....

3. Write down about the annual Edinburgh international festival.
Answer.....

4. Why the new town was designed?

Answer.....

Step 4.

Complete the dialogues given below (answer should be based on the sentences given to you for listening practice)

1. A. JAIPUR is the capital city of which state of India?
B.....

2. A. How do you find this city?

B.....

3. A. I have come to know about Jaipur literary festival. Tell me something about this fest.

B.

4. A.....

B. The city is divided into two parts: the new Jaipur and the old Jaipur. The new Jaipur was designed to improve upon the cramped and crowded city conditions.

5. A.....

B. This most romantic of cities boast of spectacular castles sat high on top of the extinct volcanic rock.

Step 5.

Imagine the content of the conversation between A and B. the students are asked to make groups (not more than five) and instructed to take part in role play where a few conditions are given to them in which they have to describe their places. They may take only the case papers during their role play together with any notes they have made.

The Purpose of the Five Stage Pedagogy:

In the above mentioned exercise the first step is least communicative. This was intended to find out whether the learners are able to listen and write down the essential details of what they have heard. Till their secondary and senior secondary level, they manage to pass in English by memorizing routine answers. It is presumed that till this level they are not exposed to listening skills in English that is why they cannot comprehend the meaning of what they listen to nor can

they interpret the listening materials. In the first step when once it is ascertained that they are able to grasp the essential words, we can take them to the second step to translate these sentences in Hindi. Here the role of a teacher is essential because s/he guides the learners to connect or compare the English culture with their own city/ home culture on the basis of their previous knowledge and new knowledge of the city mentioned in the sentences and their own city/home. At step three the communicative component is introduced more precisely. The purpose of this exercise is to check whether the learners are able to understand the sentences and respond to the questions in the given context that are communicatively and coherently related to thinking and reading skills. The fourth step is designed to make the learners connect the lifeless context given in the sentences to their own lively city/ town/ home culture by asking them to imagine themselves in the role of both as the questioner and the responder. Here in this step, they are given the opportunity to ponder over and come up with a variety of possible responses. The fifth and the last step allow the learners to plunge imaginatively into some kind of brief interactive session through role plays.

Through the process of translation in these five steps the learners not only listen to English sentences accurately and appropriately but also repeat the same in their own language, with their own literary, cultural and historical traditions and experiences. Here translation becomes a language, a conversation to communicate effectively, accurately and fluently with other learners. These steps encourage and motivate them in breaking their inhibitions towards communicating in English. In terms of communicative competence, translation activities require accuracy, clarity and flexibility.

Duff has rightly said it, “trains the reader to search (flexibility) for the most appropriate words (accuracy) to convey what is meant (clarity)”

Conclusion

In the communication classes these translation activities in groups can encourage learners to discuss the meaning and use of language at the deepest possible levels as they work through the process of understanding and then looking for equivalents in another language.

Translation was a significant part of ELT for a long time, and then a significant missing part for a long time also. With the arrival and then total dominance of communicative methodologies, translation was quickly consigned to the past, along with other ‘traditional’ tools such as dictation, reading aloud and drills. However, it and these other abandoned activities are now a feature of many communicative classrooms and successful aids to learning, although the approach to using them has changed. Therefore, this paper aims at focusing on the importance and the judicious use of translation method for the beginners of engineering institutes in rural areas. As Duff (1989) says,

“Teachers and students now use translation to learn, rather than learning translation. Modern translation activities usually move from L1 to L2, (although the opposite direction can also be

seen in lessons with more specific aims), have clear communicative aims and real cognitive depth, show high motivational levels and can produce impressive communicative results.”

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