

MOTHER TONGUE INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

Language is a method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of arbitrarily produced symbols for physiological as well as psychological survival. In a multilingual Indian Society, where English acts as a second language, our aim of teaching English is not to develop British or American accent but to help the learners to overcome regional accents, wrong pronunciation and gradually train them in proper articulation. The aim of this article is to discuss the mother tongue influence in the process of English Language learning and how a teacher can help to overcome some of the problem encountered by an Indian learner of English as well as to improve his/her communicative competence.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a growing need of hour in this age of globalization. In fact, second language is a language acquired by a person in addition to his mother tongue. The definition presented by Richards C. John Plott and H. Plott (1992).

“Foreign language is a language which is not a native language in a country. A foreign language is usually studied either for communication or for reading material in the language.”

When confronted with something new, whether it is a new food, a different kind of music or just new information, it is natural instinct to look for similarities with things that are familiar to us and to draw some comparison with what we know already. Consciously or unconsciously, we bring what we know to what we do not, making it possible to learn language without relying to some extent on our mother tongue. In fact it is humanitarian also

to accept mother interference in learning a foreign language. Studies on the interdependence between Mother tongue and foreign language indicate a linguistic interdependence (Jessner & Cen02,2000) with regard to multiple subsystems (phonological, syntactic, semantic and textual).

Due to Globalization every aspect of our world is undergoing a transformation. In the present scenario those who are well versed in English can reap its benefits, those who are not are marginalized. The changing and fast evolving times have witnessed the growing importance of English language in all spheres of life. Conscious and unconscious use of English words in our everyday conversation bears evidence to this fact. As we know very well that language learning is a great fascinating experience especially the learning of a foreign language or Second language, but the influence of mother tongue has become very important area and is usually referred to as ‘Language Interference, Transfer or Cross-lingual Influence.’ Language learning entails the successful mastery of steadily accumulating structural entities and organizing this knowledge into coherent structures which lead to effective communication in the target language (Rutherford, (1987)

Because of the rapidly increasing web of educational facilities, we are enjoying the facilities of the convents. But it has neither helped in raising the level of the students nor made them learn English as a language. In reality, Second language learners appear to accumulate structural entities of the target language but demonstrate difficulty in organizing this knowledge into appropriate coherent structures. There appears a significant gap between the accumulation and the organization of knowledge. If the structure of two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in second language learning thus indicating an interference of L₁ on L₂ (Dechert, 1983 and Ellis 1997). Ellis (1997:51) refers to Interference as ‘transfer’ which he says is ‘influence that the learner’s L₁ exerts over the acquisition of L₂.’

In the second language teaching learning context such as in India, pronunciation of the target language is generally not given adequate importance. But it plays a pivotal role in the entire process of language learning. It develops the communicative skills and helps the learners to acquire a good command of the language he learners. It is normally argued that to acquire command of a second language, a learner has to develop four basic skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. All these four skills interact with each other and they are essential for

teaching and learning of second language. Wong (1987) is of the view that even when the non native speaker's vocabulary and grammar are excellent, but their pronunciation falls below a certain threshold level, they are unable to communicate efficiently and effectively. A second language learner has a tendency to transfer his habits from his mother tongue to the second language system. This transfer of L₁ linguistic features to L₂ is called Interlingual Interference. This interference can be of two types.

1. Interference of the First language items with the second language items where both possess certain similarities.
2. Interference of L₁ items in L₂ items which do not possess similarities. At points of similarities between L₁ and L₂, the second language learner employs his L₁ learning strategies and techniques in his L₂ learning. But at places of differences he faces difficulties. So a second language teacher should be very careful in employing his teaching strategies to help learners to overcome such difficulties.

Another difficulty that the learners face in the production of English speech sounds. Many English consonant sounds are different from those in Indian languages. For instance, English (f) as in 'fine' is a voiceless labio-dental fricative sound, but in Hindi and Bengali sound system, there is a similar sound /ph/ which is a voiceless bilabial stop. So a Bengali and Hindi learner of English find it difficult to learn English (f), which is a fricative sound i.e. the active articulator (lower lip) does not touch the passive articulator (upper teeth). Similar problems may occur in the production of English /θ/ (a voiceless dental fricative).

Apart from the difficulties encountered by an Indian learner of English in the area of segmental phonology of English, problem may also occur at level of supra segmental phonology. There are major differences in the use of stress and intonation between English and an Indian language but most of the Indian languages are stress neutral languages. Research studies are still going on to identify such areas of differences. Hence, in the teaching learning context, the teacher should be careful to develop a kind of functional intelligibility. Persistent efforts on the behalf of learners can help to develop skills.

Some Suggestions:-

As we know language is a vehicle for cultural aspects. Many studies have been done to analysis whether a teacher should use bilingual approach or monolingual approach but generally monolingual approach has been criticized by many teachers as they find it practically impossible. Monolingual approach neglects the student's naïve language influence and cultural background but I strongly believe that use of mother tongue is very beneficial for beginners, as they get pace in their learning the target language, it will take the desirable lead. In fact, discovering the similarities and differences of both languages can enhance acquisition. Auerbach believes that 'when the native language is used, practioners, researches and learners consistently report positive results.'

With the passage of time bilingual is gaining support and validation. Using L₁ is not a major issue but the problem is when and how to use it. Before using L₁, a teacher must have in his mind L₁ as a mean to an end. The target language must be used where possible and L₁ when necessary. In this regard, a complete strategy however is to be proactive, this means that the teacher should actively control and influence how, when and where the mother tongue is used. If he can do this his classes are likely to be more authentic in the same that they reflect the neutral interplay of L₁ and L₂ which is inherent in Seconds language acquisition.

So, the second language teacher should present a good model of utterance. He should encourage the learners to speak in English as far as possible because for meaningful teaching learning, it is essential to develop the learner's speaking and linguistic abilities. It emerged during focus group discussion that the authoritative, embarrassing and humiliating attitude of the teacher towards students, particularly when they make mistakes, can have severe consequences on learner's cognition and their willingness to communicate in the class.

English Language Teaching in Indian context cannot follow the motto "One nation, One People, One Language," so a balanced approach should be applied and both languages can be seen as complementary than as alternatives. It is obvious when English is used as second language the influence of mother tongue occurs. The influence can be neutralized when the learners are asked to inculcate certain practice in daily lifestyle.

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