

## A Critical Assessment of the Transfer of Prominence in ELT in India since Independence

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There is a proverb "*If you wish to talk well, you must murder the language first.*" This, of course, implies that when a person tries to use a (foreign) language effectively in speech, fear of committing errors should not hold him back. Errors teach a man how to avoid them. The truth that it is very challenging for an individual to acquire a comprehensive and complete knowledge of a foreign language and develop competence in the use of it is indisputable. The process of learning a foreign language involves a gradual and growing control of the different components of the language. While a child is acquiring his native language unconsciously, he discovers that there is a grammatical system at work in the stream of sounds to which he is constantly exposed. But in the acquisition of a foreign language, where constant consciousness on the part of the child of the mastery of the language is needed, language learning becomes an exercise requiring a good deal of hard work. A very strong motivation is a necessity in order to acquire a firm mastery over the language. This motivation may be intrinsic, springing from an inner urge to learn a new language.

In the case of English in India, when we analyse the growth of the English language in the Indian soil from the arrival of the East India Company in India up to the modern times, we can say with absolute confidence that there has never been a lack of motivation on the part of Indians to acquire the English language. The motivation might have been the alluring encouragement that went with learning of the language, or it might have been a means to destroy the thirst for acquisition of knowledge outside the Indian scene, or it might have been the simple pleasure the language offered the learner. We can say that English has been caught in the endless instability of Indian life.

In India, where the multilingual situation has been posing a problem of communication, English has necessarily played the role, of a link language. For nearly two centuries English has been functioning as the common language in India. Even before Independence, the rulers of this country had to make certain decisions about the use of English in the place of or in addition to Indian languages. Historians by and large agree that there were three main phases in the introduction of the English language into India.

The arrival of the Christian missionaries marked the first phase, roughly covering the 17th and 18th centuries. The first period of this phase ranges from the late 17th century to the early 18th century when the missionaries brought English into India along with them. Later, when the East India Company took firm root in the Indian soil, the missionary activity was naturally supplemented by commerce and trade. During the early 19th century, there was an increased emphasis on the use of English as a link language. The second phase of English language in India is the result of the demand of the Indians for

English language studies. This led to Raja Ram Mohan Roy's famous request to Lord Amherst in 1823 for Western scientific education in part replacement of traditional Sanskrit and Arabic studies. The third phase saw the implementation, by the British under Lord Bentinck, of educational instruction in English, shaped by Lord Macaulay's *Minutes of Indian Education*. He demanded for the class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and intellect.

After 1947, the first important step taken by the government was the appointment of the Official Language Committee by the President of India on 7th June, 1955 under the Chairmanship of B.C. Kher. This Committee recommended the continuance of English as the official language till Hindi took over.

The examination system consisted mainly of essay questions and a few annotations or short answer questions which needed only the minimal exertion on the part of the student to memories the expected answers. In such circumstances it became impossible to teach the language in the true sense of the word. Most students completed their school and college education successfully without acquiring the ability to use the English language faultlessly.

The status of English as a medium of international communication is universally recognised. In a multilingual country like India, English, the legacy of the British rule played and still is playing a vital role. It acts as a connecting factor, merging the different regions using different languages into a single united entity. English is assigned the role of a second language as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges, and it acquires the privileged position of an official language. Thus, in every aspect of Indian life, English plays a major role and has become a vital part of Indian social life.

Many methods have been evolved and enabled at different points of time to teach English to the Indian students. The shift of emphasis from time to time, in relation to methods of teaching English has been marked. The present study is an attempt to analyse the nature of the changes in ELT in India and their effect on the teachers and the taught.

### English Language Teaching: The First Phase (Grammar-Translation Method and Direct Method)

Of the several methods of teaching English advocated in India in the past, the Grammar-Translation Method was, and still remains one of the most popular. The inherent weakness of this method is that it was originally inherited from the teaching of Latin, a language not ordinarily taught for active use in any language community. Because of this weakness, the learning-teaching of Latin through the Grammar-Translation Method

ignored spoken communication and the attendant social variation of language, and concentrated on the written language of classical literature.

Yet the advocates of the Grammar-Translation Method argue that translation can best interpret English words and phrases and sentences. They assume that a child comprehends a foreign language best when it is taught through the mother tongue and that the structure of English, which is quite difficult, can be best understood by the child when contrasted with that of the mother tongue. So, they maintain that the Grammar-Translation Method can be used effectively by the students also for their written exercises in English.

The Grammar-Translation Method was popular for a number of years. The teachers found the method easy to follow since they themselves were taught English through it. This method was comparatively easy to follow in large classes since it laid emphasis on written rather than on oral work. Since it is natural for the student to go back to his mother tongue to find an equivalent expression for an unfamiliar foreign word translation would occur anyway, no matter what technique the teacher adopts. So the student naturally feels at ease when the teacher himself uses translation in the classroom. The teacher, when confronting a large classroom, finds it easy to communicate with the students through liberal use of their mother tongue. As Mackey says in 'Language Teaching Analysis',

***“Translation Method can best be used to teach to classes of any size by teachers with imperfect knowledge of the language and special teaching techniques. It is easy and cheap to teach and administer and the number of class periods may be as few or as many as administratively feasible.”***  
(31)

However, when the students failed to attain the expected standard and proficiency in the language, experts began to reconsider the efficacy of the method and concluded that translation as a method was unacceptable in English language teaching. Gatenby, who opposed any form of mother tongue usage in the English class in his 'Translation in the Classroom', asserted that,

***“All failure in language learning is a result of the unnatural process of acquiring speech. Every normal child learns to speak the language of his environment and to understand what is said in it.”***

The emphasis that the Translation Method lays on the written form rather than on the spoken form goes against nature because any human being learns to speak before going on to learn writing. Moreover, since the minimum unit of reading in this method is either a letter or a word, the child, in spite of attaining some mastery over vocabulary, finds connected speech difficult. So, he breaks up sentences into units of words and does not absorb the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

Another major drawback in this method is that it does not provide for sufficient practice. Language is a set of habits, learnt through constant practice and usage and the Translation Method neglects this very vital part. There is no direct contact between experience and expression. Though the child may learn the meaning of the word, it fails to learn the correct usage of the word in sentences. Since the mother tongue plays a major role in the learning of English, the pupil is inclined to

think in his mother tongue first and then translate the thoughts into English. As a result, he never develops the habit of thinking in English and subsequently never assimilates correct English usage.

Further, it should be accepted that it is not always possible to find complete and correct translation for all nuances of thought. The thoughts, emotions, feelings, culture and habits of the English people are vastly different from those of Indians and hence a literal and apt translation is not always possible. English has certain untranslatable items in vocabulary, expression, idiom, phrase, structure and grammar. Certain English words and expressions do not have any equivalent in Gujarati. For example, the English terms 'scales' and 'key' in music, 'drawing room' and 'pudding' have no literal equivalents in Tamil. The literal translation into Gujarati of the English idiomatic expression "it rained cats and dogs" would produce a ridiculously absurd jumble of words. The structural difference between English and the mother tongue also makes exact translation impossible. For instance, the teacher cannot explain the use of the article in English to the Gujarati student.

### **English Language Teaching: The Second Phase** (Structural Approach and Situational Approach)

The Structural Approach is not a method of teaching. It is an approach to language teaching. The modern trend of having a systematic and scientific attitude towards language teaching has evolved the Structural Approach to language teaching. This approach can be used with any method. It is an approach which aims at teaching the pupils the essential tools of the language in the early stages of language learning.

In India, this approach has been described as the syllabus of graded structure and controlled vocabulary taught through the oral approach and, in the seventies, this was believed to be the most effective method of teaching English. Basically any language has the two elements, vocabulary and the arrangement of words in particular order. Though words have individual meanings of their own, the order or manner of the arrangement of words determines the sense conveyed. After teaching the learners the alphabets of English language, words with their meanings are taught. Then, the classification of words, parts of speech is introduced in which the distinction between noun, pronoun, verb etc., is taught.

Then the sentence is introduced. The parts of a sentence (subject, predicate, object, adjunct etc.) are distinctly separated and taught. Next the types of sentences (assertive, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory) are taught and subsequently transformation of sentences (from negative to positive, from interrogative to assertive, from exclamatory to assertive etc.) is taught. Tenses and their different patterns are practised repeatedly. Once they are mastered, active voice and passive voice are introduced. Thereafter the learners are taught the degrees of comparison. Direct and indirect speech is taught next with the varieties of sentences. After these seemingly unrelated sequences of language learning, clauses, phrases and full sentences are taught as components of simple, compound and complex sentences.

Any variation from the pattern the pupil has learnt is explained to him as and when it occurs in the lessons and further practice takes place until he masters the new pattern. Thus, in about four or five years he becomes familiar with the basic structures of the target language. The more he learns, the

more familiar he becomes with the heterogeneous structural pattern of the target language. Over a period of time, he himself should be able to shape his thought in the form of those structural patterns he has mastered earlier and to express himself well without mistakes in the written form. The main difference of this approach from the traditional grammar approach is that the grammatical jargon is omitted and structures are introduced without grammatical labels. It does not require the pupil to know or learn the definitions of the parts of speech or of clause and sentence but the structures cover the whole of grammar and repeated practice of these structures leads to the formation of habits which will enable the learners to arrange words meaningfully and convey ideas.

French, in 'International Language', calls the three basic principles which are used in sentence construction in English the "Bones of English." The three are: (a) word order, (b) use of structural words, and (c) inflections. (30)

According to A. W. Frisby's Teaching 'English: Notes and Comments on Teaching English Overseas', the word-order points to sentence construction. The distinction between the main patterns of sentences such as statements and questions depends on the order of words. The change in the position of the words changes the pattern itself as shown below:

She will write.  
Will she write? (59)

There is no uniformity in the structural summary prescribed in various States in India. In Maharashtra and Gujarat, the structural syllabus exists side by side with the traditional Grammar-Translation Method. Since under the Structural Approach the essential points of grammar should be woven into the texture of the reading lessons in such a way that the pupil may arrive at his own generalisation about the language, it does not require the students to know the definitions. Moreover word-order is far more important than inflected forms of words under the Structural Approach. Hence uniformity in structural syllabus could have been easily achieved throughout the country. M. L. Tickoo, in his article 'The Structural Fallacy', says, "***The Structural Approach in India is the child of necessity. Teachers of English in India face a uniquely difficult task. The range of the functions of English is ever increasing, whereas the opportunities for learning it have been gradually reduced. Methods and materials successful in the past have been inadequate. Necessity has often mothered invention but at times it has also led to futile dodges. The Structural Approach in India is a dodge.***" (177).

Teaching English in India is a complex task. It is riddled with numerous problems at every stage. Some of these are Linguistic and many are educational. The Structural Approach can never solve them all, nor even prescribe answers valid for every classroom. A model sentence is provided by the teacher and the students first learn the pattern and then substitute each unit of the sentence with another word from the same grammatical unit. Through repeated practice, the pattern is learnt. Though this method ensures correct usage, it has its limitations. As the pupils learn isolated sentences, sequence is absent.

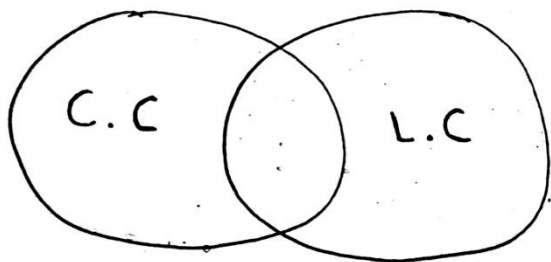
### **ELT: The Third Phase** (Communicative Approach)

Communicative approach has tended to concentrate on teaching the use of the language in social situations rather than teaching the grammatical rules that we need to produce correct sentences. As a result, there have been a number of interesting practical developments. From a finite experience of speech acts and their interdependence with socio-cultural features, the learners develop a general theory of speech to conduct and interpret social life. Therefore, this Communicative Approach implies the following preparatory activities as suggested by Brumfit in 'Language and Literature Teaching: From Practice to Principle':

1. The needs of the learners are analysed to find out what types of language use are most necessary for them.
2. The syllabus is specified not only in terms of the language items learners are likely to need, but also in terms of meanings that they may want to express and the things they may want to do with their language.
3. Materials are developed which take into account the different ways in which people use language—they may be organised around topics, or functions of language—and they are so organised that students are forced to try to express themselves through the language, often without much help from the teacher.
4. Teachers are trained to use group work and simultaneous pair work in class so that students have as many opportunities as possible to work intensively on their own.
5. Materials and techniques are devised to individualise work so that all students in a class do not have to work in the same way, at the same pace, at the same time.
6. Language teaching is seen as an effort to involve the whole person and it is not treated as a purely technical exercise but as related to the genuine feelings, interests and needs of students.
7. It is assumed that students will necessarily make mistakes as they learn a new language and that they need the opportunity to experiment with language, even if that means making mistakes while they do so. (4)

Like any other methods, the Communicative Approach also has its own merits and demerits. The greatest advantage of this method is that there is a strong likelihood of mastery over the four aspects of the language such as grammar, socio-linguistics, discourse and strategy competence.

This approach is relevant to the pupil because it does not stop with the use of an alien language in a limited situation and atmosphere, mainly the classroom, but ensures the use of the language outside the classroom too because the student is being trained in the use of the language for a very vital and basic purpose of any human being—to communicate with others. Since the student is able to learn communicative competence through this method, which enables him to have a meaningful social interaction, he naturally finds this method more interesting and motivating and hence learns the language with greater eagerness. This approach has another great advantage in the sense that the language is learnt and is interpreted through conclusion rather than through formation of hypothesis. Linguistic competence and communicative competence are interlinked as shown below:



C.C – Communicative Competence  
L.C – Linguistic Competence

**The Syllabus**

Very often a syllabus is equated with the prescribed textbooks, ignoring other vital and important aspects of learning and teaching associated with the syllabus, such as the method of teaching, the co-curricular and extra-curricular. Our educational system often sounds like suggestions coming from the ivory tower. Sometimes the suggestions appear so fascinating that their relevance to the need of the hour is pushed back. As a result, there is lack of expected response from the students, and there is frustration on the part of the teachers. So, the syllabus planners have to take these things into account before planning a syllabus.

In India, a majority of parents want their children to speak English. It is amazing to note that more than the children their parents are keen that their children should learn English. While academicians say that the need for teaching English for academic purposes or as a library language, the demand of the society places emphasis on the skill of speaking the language. Academicians also have started realising that Spoken English is important for the students to follow lectures and for successful classroom interaction.

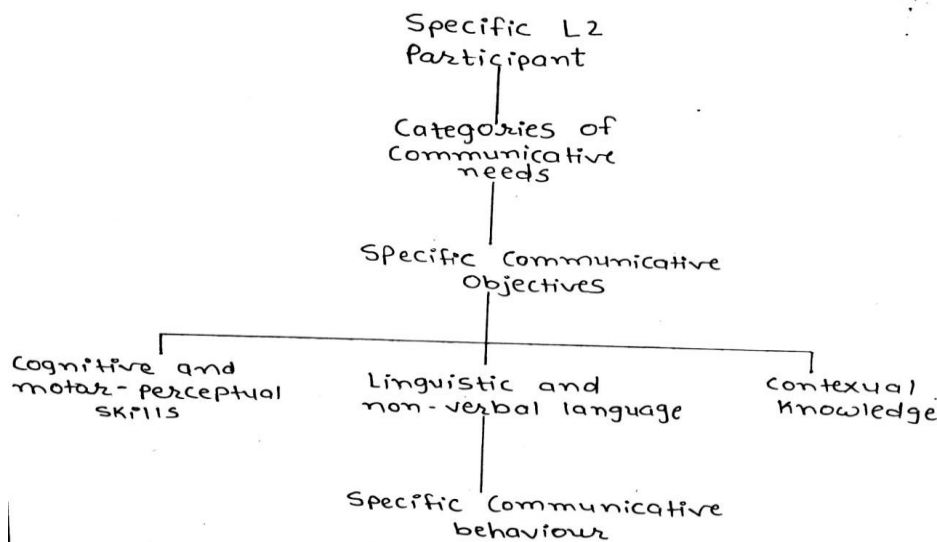
The textbook for Standard XI and XII has a different structure. There is an extract from an authentic text to serve as an introduction to the reading material to begin with, followed by a lengthy reading material. There are exercises and tasks meant for improving the students' pronunciation and writing skill. Interestingly, there is a project work in each lesson, to be carried out individually and independently by each student.

The syllabus In English is grammar-based. There is an emphasis on traditional grammar with a few structural sentence patterns thrown in; writing tasks are included. There are also activities to expose the learner to text types. There is scope for teaching poetry.

The following table presents the time schedule for teaching English to students at various levels in various States of India.

State	Age of the Child	Duration: Till the end of secondary or higher secondary course	Class in which English is introduced	Approximate number of periods per week
Andhra Pradesh	12	6 years (high school)	VI	4 hours
Assam	10	7 years (higher secondary)	IV	7 hours
Delhi	10	7 years (higher secondary)	V	6 hours
Gujarat	14	8 years (high school)	III	12 hours
Kerala	11	4 years (high school)	V	7 hours
Madhya Pradesh	12	6 years (high school)	VI	6 hours
Madras	10	7 years (high school)	V	6 hours
Maharashtra	14	4 years	VII	6 hours
Mysore	11	6 years	V	6 hours
Orissa	12	6 years	VI	8 hours
Punjab	12	6 years	VI	6 hours
Rajasthan	12	8 years	VI	6-9 hours
Uttar Pradesh	12	6 years	VI	6 hours

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



Such models prove very useful while designing the syllabus. Once the syllabus has been designed the next task is materials construction. It is a practical requirement of the language learning/teaching process for the learners. All teaching materials need to possess certain characteristics:

1. **Realistic:** Capable of being used by the teacher and the learners; capable of being learned from; cheap enough to be available actually in hand, not empty entries in an official list which never reach the learners.
2. **Relevant:** To the particular point in the learner's progress, to his aims and age group.
3. **Interesting:** Should be on varied topics of interest to the learner; intellectually satisfying.
4. **Encouraging:** Possessing the quality of making the learner feel he is making progress, or at least enjoying the learning.
5. **Compatible:** With the approach being followed and with the teacher's attitude.

However good, the syllabus may be. However effective the evaluation system may be, the general effectiveness of language learning and teaching in any given country is heavily dependent on the nature and quality of the training which teachers undergo before entering their profession.

The progress of a society depends on the education the people get and the quality of the education in turn depends on the quality of the teachers. There are two traditional ideas about the preparation of a teacher. One is that he should be educated but need not be trained. The other is that he should be trained but need not be educated. That teachers should be both educated and trained is a growing concept.

In India, looking back at the ancient past, the teacher's role combined both the aspect of worldly welfare and the spiritual gain of the learner. Hence, the teacher, called the guru, was held in high esteem and teaching as a profession, was universally revered. In such circumstances, the teacher was expected to be the master of a specific branch or some branches of studies and also to have a high moral character.

In the late eighteenth century foreign missionaries started a few teacher training Institutes chiefly for primary grade

teachers. The first school worthy of mention was one set up at Serampore (Bengal) where mostly teachers for the first stage of education received teacher training in the vernacular.

For the better administration and governance of the teacher training programme and also for sure standard of quality of education, the Study Group on Education of Secondary Teachers in India, which met at Vadodara in March 1964, recommended the establishment of State Councils for Teacher Education in the States and a National Council for Teacher Education at the Centre. Apart from the regular training colleges, a number of universities have introduced correspondence course. In these courses, the theory part is expected to be covered through intensive self-study, reading of lessons and answering questions through correspondence. Since most of the trainees are teachers already in service, regular class teaching in two subject areas is thoroughly checked and supervised and suggestions for improvement are given.

For nearly two centuries English has been functioning as a common language in India. In spite of the social demand for the learning of English, the efforts taken by experts and working committees to improve the standard of English, and the various experiments tried out and the various projects undertaken to better the teaching of English to Indian students, English language teaching and learning remain unsatisfactory.

A change was taking place in the Government's language policy which necessitated drastic changes in the objectives of learning/teaching the English language. The urgency to shape Indians who would think like Englishmen was replaced by the necessity to create Indians who would learn English as a second language and later on as a library language.

No one method is perfect in itself. The Structural approach proved to be effective in teaching grammar; the Communicative approach was effective in encouraging the students in group-work and in assigning them individual tasks to be carried out severally; the Direct Method was effective in teaching vocabulary; and, judicious use of vernacular expressions helped to increase the interest of students and made them feel at home.

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