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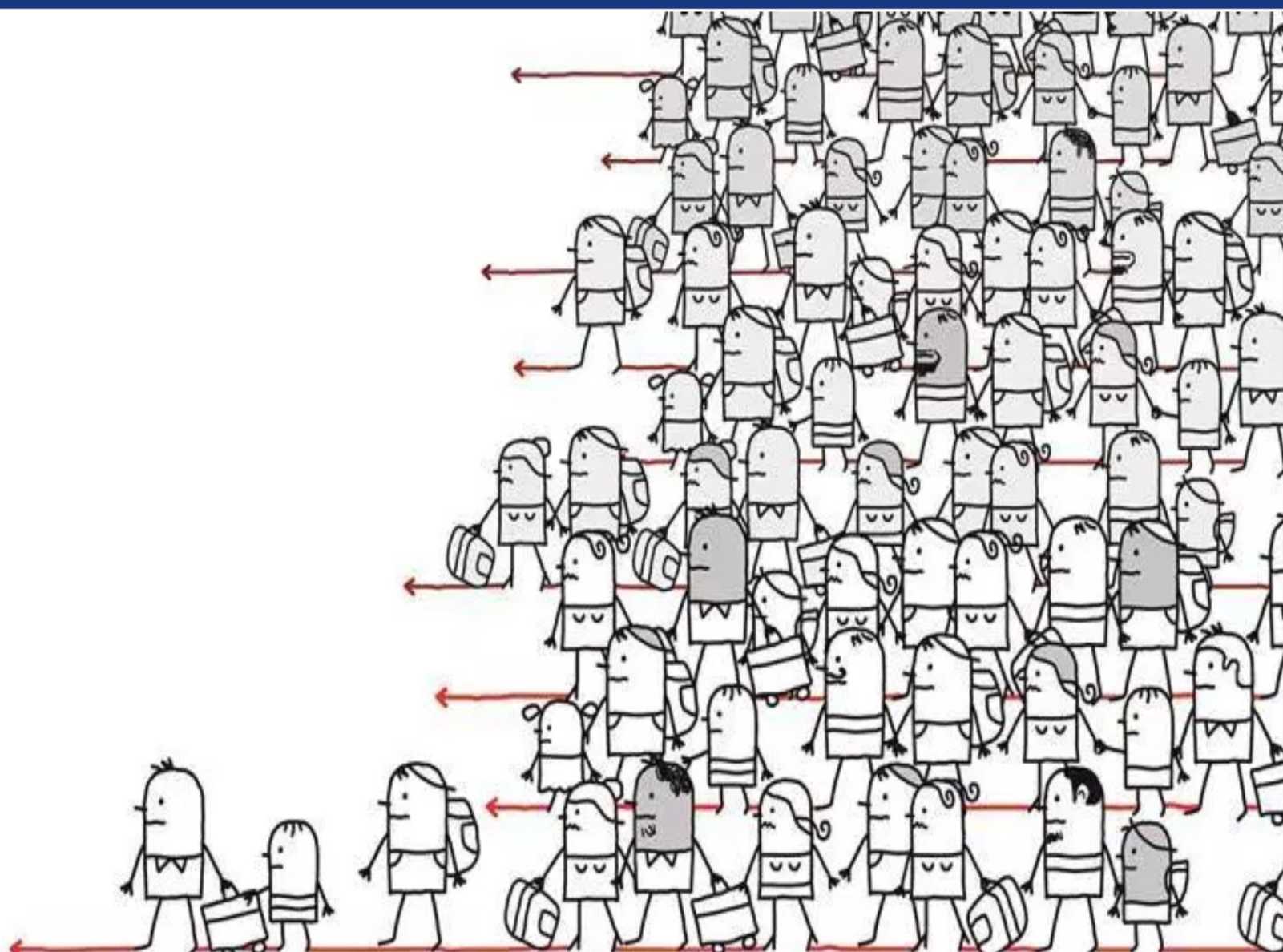
Language and Language Teaching

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(About the covers: *Migration, marriages and media constitute some of the major sites for informal language learning*)

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Contents

Editorial

R. Amritavalli

Articles

Journeys in Language Learning as Adults: A Kannadiga Learning Tamil and a Tamilian Learning Kannada

Brinda U. Rao

Adult Language Learning: Some Personal Musings

S Mohanraj

Acquiring Standard Spoken English through Extensive Reading: A Case Study

Thomas Cook

Learning German to Actively Participate in Scientific Research Work in the German Speaking Parts of the World: A Deeply Enriching Experience

Venkatesa Iyengar Vasanta Ram

Learning to Read Hindi through WhatsApp: From Deciphering to Cross-Languaging

Geetha Durairajan

Selective Acquisition of Malayalam

Paroma Sanyal

Would a "Rational Approach" Improve Academic Outcomes in English Language University Classes in Vietnam?

Philip Scott

Why Don't EFL Students

Read More? Because "We are tested on what we read in class."

Kyung-Sook Cho Busan

Stephen Krashen

50

Interview

1 Interview with Chiranjiv Singh

R. Amritavalli

56

6 Landmark

Psychology of Learning for Teachers: Preparing for Classroom Inquiry

Mythili Ramchand

64

10 Book Review

Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching: New Research Agendas

R. Amritavalli

71

16 Report

Whole Language Approach and Multilingual Pedagogy in Schools

P. K. Jayaraj

77

21

30

36

Editorial

R. Amritavalli

India is a land of over a hundred or a thousand languages, depending on how you choose to name and count a speech variety as a language. Speakers of these languages have, over millennia, interacted with one another to form a *Sprachbund*, a "linguistic area" where genetically unrelated languages develop shared traits. Our Indo-Aryan languages, genetically related to Indo-European, are said to have become "Indianized" through extensive bilingualism with the Dravidian languages (Emeneau, 1956; Masica, 1976; Krishnamurti, 2003).

Coming to our own time, coexisting language communities are the lived experience of our people. Today, in the life of an Indian, various languages may occur within the concentric circles of family, profession, and society. As these circles of identity widen and expand, they drive self-initiated language learning in the adult, well after infancy and childhood. This is the theme of this issue.

We present in this issue narratives of adult language acquisition. These are of interest in themselves, of course, but of interest also with regard to the teaching of language(s) in schools. Language teaching in school is often bogged down by the weight of scholarly tradition, literary history, and linguistic pride. It suffers, above all, from co-option into a system of syllabus, teaching, and examination, geared to competitive mark-gathering. Our learners' narratives remind us that language learning can be an empowering, exploratory and joyous experience if the learner chooses to be an active participant in it, and is allowed to be one.

The Interview in this issue is with Chiranjiv Singh, an adult language learner *par excellence*, who speaks and reads over a dozen languages. Following the convention of this journal, the interview is placed after the individual articles. However, it thematically prefigures most of the points these articles make. Adult language learners, we find, view films and listen to songs in the language they wish to learn; they teach themselves to read, and choose to read what interests them; and they actively seek guidance from speakers of the language they are trying to learn. They are eclectic, mixing a formal, grammatical approach with an informal, communication-focused approach. And they set their own limits on how many languages they want to learn, and how well they want to learn them: they are driven by their own needs and purposes.

These select narratives (however) severely under-represent the community of self-taught language-learners in this country. "In India it is happening all the time," says Chiranjiv Singh; for where "the mother tongue is different from . . . the bazaar or the outside language," people—from shop assistants to sanitation workers—"need to learn the local language, and they do it." The voices of these individuals, and of entire migrant communities, await a place in this journal. First, this is a journal published in

English; and second, these are people who speak more easily than they write. The situation calls for narratives "as told to" interested and informed researchers. Surely an opportunity for our young students of languages and linguistics! For example, I have had conversations with a person from the north-east of India, who is now a fluent Kannada-speaker and works in a branded retail shop in Bengaluru; a tailor-family, that typifies the Marwari community in Karnataka in its use of "home" and "bazaar" languages; and a Tamil-Malayalam-Kannada speaking driver who turned out to actually be a Telugu speaker. There is a Sikh community in Coimbatore, and a Thanjavur Marathi diaspora. Currently, a humorous Malayalam ditty about Bengali workers in Kerala is doing the rounds on social media.

A second adult language-learning community that needs better representation is that of wives who marry into a home with a different language. (Sometimes it could be "just" a different speech variety, or dialect.) We have only one such narrative, by a Bangla speaker: "Selective Acquisition of Malayalam." Given that marriage is the most common reason for migration in India, according to the 2011 Census (Krishnan, 2019), there must be a treasure-trove of adult language-learning stories here. The data say that 46 per cent of total migrants moved because of marriage; 97 per cent of these were women. (Employment or business accounted for 10 per cent, and education for 1.2 per cent, of migrants in India.)

Our narratives are not limited to India or her languages, for self-initiated language learning is not contained within political boundaries. An Indian scientist speaks about his experience of learning German. An American teacher of English in the U.S.A. chronicles how a Russian immigrant read popular fiction and acquired conversational English; another, in Vietnam, describes how he introduced self-selected reading to university students in that country.

This last chronicle, inconclusive and tentative as it may seem, anticipates the central theme of a brief piece by Cho and Krashen, suggesting that conventional approaches to classroom reading interfere with the development of a reading habit. In this connection, two earlier insights come to mind. Newmark (1966) suggests that the real "interference" in language learning lies in our ways of teaching (and not, as was then believed, in the mother tongue). Prabhu (1987, pp. 58 and 66, n. 14) says the comprehensibility of a text to a learner is mediated by a "criterion of adequacy," a judgment about the level of comprehension required for a given purpose: "Teaching is, therefore, primarily a matter of regulating the level of comprehension needed." The idea that comprehension levels are set by learners themselves emerges again out of my own work on learner autonomy in deprived circumstances (Amritavalli, 2007).

These narratives of language pedagogy lead the reader to the book review, which deals with facets of autonomy in learning and teaching a language; a report on whole language; and a Landmark article on the psychology of learning for teachers.

Acknowledgements

The editor thanks the reviewers for this issue, and Dr. V. Vasantasree for facilitating the interview.

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Articles

Journeys in Language Learning as Adults: A Kannadiga Learning Tamil and a TAMILIAN Learning Kannada

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Key Words: Language learning in non-tutored settings, Adult language learning, Learning local languages

Abstract

This is a narrative about two people who each learnt an unfamiliar language as adults. Both felt that they had to learn the language because the situations they were in demanded it, and both got ample support in acquiring the languages. In this article, I have discussed how, in addition to the felt necessity and the support they received, it is their personal motivation and voluntary effort that led to the learning of the new language.

Introduction

I am presenting here the journeys of two adults who each learnt a new language in very different circumstances. Both were proficient in their respective home languages and English. They had little to no prior exposure to the language that they learnt as adults. Both learners learnt the new language in the State of the Indian Union where it was spoken by the majority of the people. They were happy to narrate their experiences, and have permitted me to use their names. I am grateful to Sridharan S. and Akila R. for sharing their experiences and making this article possible.

A Mysorean Engineer Learns Tamil

Sridharan S. lived in Mysore (now Mysuru), Karnataka. He studied in a Kannada medium school where he consistently scored good marks, got into an English medium high school, and eventually got admission in a prestigious engineering college. He graduated at the age of 22, following which he was selected for a job in a public sector company called National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) in 1986. Up to this point in his life, he had lived in Mysore in a completely Kannada environment. His first posting was at Neyveli, Tamil Nadu. Sridharan went there all excited and happy.

"After the first couple of days, I felt totally lost in this little town," says Sridharan. He could not get himself from home to work because all the bus signboards were in Tamil. His attempts to ask people for help, using English, were met sometimes with a smile, sometimes with a frown, and

sometimes, people simply pointed towards the signboards. He imagined that the local people thought he was illiterate; this was a blow to Sridharan's pride. He felt he had no choice but to learn Tamil, and to learn it quickly. He bought a book with the title *Learn Tamil in 30 Days*. The first thing he did was to memorize the letters of the Tamil alphabet so that he could read the names of the places on the bus signboards.

Being an entry level engineer, he was expected to work on-site, where he had to interact with construction labourers and contractors, who were all Tamil-speaking monolinguals. This he considers as a blessing in disguise. At the field office, his colleagues helped him to speak in Tamil by teaching him new words that he needed to use and sometimes by correcting him as he spoke.

Neyveli, being a small town, had very few options for entertainment other than Tamil movies in theatres. Sridharan watched many Tamil movies. He watched some movies more than once. According to him, Tamil movies refined his language. He understood the right ways of putting across feelings and ideas through these movies. He says there were times when he offended his colleagues with malapropisms; for instance, using the word *mattai* (coir fibre that covers the coconut) for *mottai* (bald head). He was not able to distinguish the subtle differences among many such words when native speakers uttered them, but he was able to distinguish the same words and understand them in the context of movies. He was able to connect this learning with his conversations with people.

By his estimate, it took him at least six months to learn the language, and two years to attain mastery over it. He now says he possesses native-like competency in listening and speaking. He can read well and understands most of what he reads, even though his reading is

limited to newspapers and magazines, which could be termed as "light" reading. He can write reasonably well, but is not very confident of his writing skills. When asked specifically if all out-of-state employees at NTPC-Neyveli had knowledge of Tamil, Sridharan said there were a few north Indians who managed to work there without learning the language.

Sridharan now lives in Kadiri, a small town in Andhra Pradesh. He does not understand Telugu as well as he understands Tamil. He says he is able to manage without knowing the local language. He regrets that even after almost two years in Andhra Pradesh, he is unable to read or write Telugu. He barely manages to understand and speak the language. When asked the reason for his not being able to read the Telugu script, which is very close to the Kannada script, his response was that he thinks he has not learnt it precisely because they are so similar. He is able to read by guessing at the words, and hence has not put in the effort to understand the differences between the two scripts and gain competency in the Telugu script. He says that he has not been able to invest the time to learn Telugu.

A Tamilian Teacher Educator Learns Kannada

Akila R. lived in Chennai in a monolingual Tamil environment, except for the exposure to English that her school provided. When she was 17, a new family moved into the house next to hers. The neighbour had a cute one-year-old infant. The child had not started speaking yet, and he understood only Kannada. Akila became friends with the family and tried to learn Kannada in order to be able to communicate with the infant. Her attempts to speak Kannada were supported wholeheartedly by the family.

Along with the language Akila was also introduced to the culture and cuisine of Karnataka. In fact, the family went to great lengths to teach her Kannada. For example, the grandmother in the family, while sharing a recipe, showed her the ingredients as well as the "*paavu*" (a unit of measure for volume), to help her understand the words. While Akila learnt many words through these interactions, she was still not able to make sentences on her own. Her journey in learning Kannada had begun. But she did not gain any proficiency in Kannada and could at best manage to communicate with her neighbour's family.

Five years later, Akila got married and moved to Bangalore (now Bengaluru). In Bangalore, she stayed in an area that had a large Tamil-speaking population. During her stay in Bangalore, she taught at a junior college. She was the only person in the staff room who did not speak Kannada. She got to listen to a lot of Kannada that was being spoken around her, but she herself always spoke in English. Gradually, her Kannada vocabulary expanded, and she was able to understand Kannada for the most part. She even took part in a Kannada play put up by the lecturers for the students. For her role in the play, Akila memorized the dialogues. However, in spite of all this exposure, her spoken Kannada did not improve much.

Despite the language barrier, Akila had no trouble for most transactions except when she had to catch the bus to commute from home to work. She was unable to read the bus signboards. According to her, in the year 1999, the bus route numbers and the destination names were displayed only in the Kannada script. So, she bought a book and learnt to read the numbers in the Kannada script. She knew the bus numbers for her route and managed her commute by reading the bus numbers in Kannada. At that time, she didn't go farther than that; she did not learn the letters of the Kannada alphabet

because she did not feel the need to learn them. Akila remembers that her interactions with vegetable vendors, the landlady and others were in Tamil. Their Tamil was somewhat broken and far from proficient, but since they were able to communicate with each other, she made very little progress in learning Kannada.

Akila and her husband moved out of Bangalore for four years and then moved back in 2003 with their one-year-old daughter. This time they moved into a locality where there were plenty of Kannada speakers. Their daughter wanted to play with the children in the neighbourhood who spoke only Kannada. Akila, who was now a stay-at-home mom, had no choice but to come out with her child and make friends. Since most of the people she interacted with—neighbours, mechanics, helpers, vegetable vendors—were predominantly Kannada-speaking, Akila had to get out of her comfort zone and start speaking in Kannada.

A year later, Akila started working with R.V. Educational Consortium (RVEC). Among other things, RVEC worked with government school teachers, many of whom were Kannada monolinguals. As part of her job, Akila had to interact with the Kannada-speaking teachers. Some of these teachers were from different parts of Karnataka and spoke Kannada in different accents. It became impossible for Akila to carry on her work without her colleagues helping her out. So, she decided to step up her efforts to become more fluent in Kannada. In order to improve her language skills, she started speaking only in Kannada with her colleagues. She feels there was a very positive environment which helped her become fluent in Kannada. Within a year she became a confident speaker. This happened in 2005 when Akila was 28 years old.

Akila continued to work with RVEC for a few more years and was even exposed to

Kannada literature during the poetry and story reading sessions. During these sessions, Akila estimates that she was able to understand most of the subject matter, but still needed clarifications for about 20 per cent of the content. She still does not read or write Kannada. She says that she plans to start practicing reading and writing in Kannada.

Finally, Akila added that her husband has lived in Bangalore for 20 years and still does not speak Kannada. At his work place he needs to speak only in English, and his social interactions at home are either in Tamil or in English. When he has to do transactions such as buying vegetables, he either goes to supermarkets where he can pick his own vegetables, or chooses to interact with people who can speak Tamil or English. Akila feels that since her husband is able to manage at work as well as at home without having to speak Kannada, he has not put in the effort to learn the language. This is why even though he has lived for a long period of time in a Kannada-speaking area, he has not learnt Kannada.

Some Observations about the Two Language Learning Journeys

There are a lot of similarities in the language learning journeys of Sridharan and Akila. The two learners made real progress in the language they were learning when they felt an absolute need to learn it and were willing to put in the effort. Akila had an opportunity to learn Kannada in Chennai when she was 17 years old, and again five years later when she first moved to Bangalore. However, she became a fluent speaker of Kannada only the second time the family moved to Bangalore, when she chose to put in all the required effort. The motivation for her

was that she felt it was absolutely essential to learn Kannada as a teacher educator. The reason she suggests for her husband's lack of Kannada skills also corroborates this. According to Akila, he does not feel the need to put in the required effort.

This is also similar to Sridharan's experience with Telugu. Sridharan has now lived in a small town in Andhra Pradesh where he is surrounded by Telugu-speaking people. Although he has been living there for two years, and despite the many similarities between the Kannada and the Telugu languages, he has not learnt Telugu the way he earlier learnt Tamil. It is pertinent to note that according to Sridharan his Hindi-speaking colleagues in Neyveli did not learn Tamil. They managed to live and work there

without learning Tamil, while Sridharan felt compelled to learn the language.

It can be seen that when these two learners, Akila and Sridharan, wanted to acquire the language that they were surrounded by, they made use of the opportunities that were available to them. Both of them felt they had to shed their inhibitions and so they made an effort to do so. Further, both received plenty of help and encouragement from friends and co-workers. Akila and Sridharan felt they absolutely needed this intensive learning environment for about six months to one year to become confident speakers. The opportunities presented to them, coupled with their motivation and effort, helped them to find success in their language learning journeys.

Adult Language Learning: Some Personal Musings

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Mohanraj has worked as a teacher educator in different parts of the country for over 40 years. His longest stint was at The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, where he served as the Dean of the School of English Language Education. He received the Professional Teaching Award from TESOL in 2010. He is now retired.

Key Words: First language, Aptitude, Senior Under-Officer, Devanagari, Wodeyars, Language variety, Mandyam Tamil

Abstract

In this paper, I have tried to recount my experience of learning three different languages, all of which I learnt after I grew out of my teens, in very distinct contexts. I have attempted to show how needs and circumstances come together to provide the necessary motivation to learn a language. Besides the need, other essential factors include proper exposure and the right type of encouragement from speakers of the language concerned. However, there can be exceptions to this and language learning may remain a distant dream for many an aspirant.

My Observations

Adult language learning has been an interesting field of study, for it exhibits variety in terms of learners and their situations, and sometimes defies established theories. In my life, I have come across a very senior person (a seventy-odd year-old Tamil speaking lady) who has lived in a foreign language environment (in Gujarat) for several years, refusing to pick up a word of it. Yet she could go around the markets and do her shopping and also bargain with the vendors about the prices of vegetables and other commodities. She was very successful.

I have also come across several people who have picked up languages just like that; my mother with almost no schooling to her credit, picked up several languages largely because she lived in different parts of the country. She, my mother, could fluently use Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu, and Hindi, and had a smattering of Tamil and English. Both these women had similar backgrounds, but their adult language learning abilities were different. Perhaps the reason is that one was motivated and had an aptitude to learn language, while the other did not. That is perhaps too general a point, however. Let me now come to how I myself learnt some languages.

A Bit about Myself

I can operate in six different languages with varying degrees of fluency—Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, Tamil and Gujarati, besides English. I learnt Kannada and Telugu in my childhood, and both can be considered as my first languages. Tamil being a popular language in Mysore, where I lived, and with quite a few friends of mine being Tamil speakers, I was able to pick up a smattering of this language. Later in life, I

chose a Tamilian for my life partner, and so my ability to use this language improved considerably. As a teenager and a little later (closer to my middle age), I picked up Hindi and Gujarati. I shall now share some of my learning experiences with these three languages (Hindi, Gujarati and Tamil) in this brief write-up.

Learning Hindi

Hindi being an official language of India along with English, as a school going boy in the 60s of the last century, I had to learn some Hindi formally. This was part of the curriculum – a compulsory course of study, but this did not give me any knowledge of Hindi. Since Sanskrit was my second language, I was familiar with the Devanagari script; therefore, I could read and write Hindi as part of my studies just enough to pass the examination. But I could neither speak nor understand the language.

After matriculating from school, I joined college to continue my education. This was a period immediately after the wars we had with China (1962) and Pakistan (1965). The spirit of patriotism was strong, and so we enrolled ourselves as cadets in the National Cadet Corps Rifles (NCCR). I also became part of the troupe, reluctantly to begin with; but I participated much more enthusiastically later, to rise to the position of a Senior Under-Officer—the highest rank a cadet could achieve in the NCCR.

I was with the NCCR for a full four years. During these years, I had to attend parades twice a week, annual camps of 10 days duration every year, and twice in these four years, special camps of 30 days each. In all these events the medium of instruction was Hindi (with occasional talks by officers in English). My interaction with the trainers and with cadets from different institutions and places during the camps helped me gain knowledge of Hindi.

Gradually my speaking ability became better, which stimulated me to read a few weekly magazines in Hindi. (This was largely during my visits to the barber once a month.) I used to enjoy small jokes, snippets, short news items and some short stories which were published in *Dharmayug*. This helped me refine my use of the language. This was when I could appreciate dialogues in Hindi movies and also got bold enough to croon Hindi songs with an understanding of their meaning.

With my college education coming to a close, I joined postgraduate studies, and my use of Hindi took a back seat. Luckily, I had a few classmates who were from the Hindi belt, and I made it a point to converse with them in Hindi. They helped me develop good conversational skills, and then there was no looking back. My life as a participant at the CIEFL, Hyderabad (the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, now The English and Foreign Languages University), and later as a teacher educator in certain parts of north India, gave me the confidence to use Hindi in public. It took me close to six years to learn this language and to stake a claim to knowing it.

Learning Gujarati

I learnt Gujarati in very different circumstances. On completing my research at the CIEFL, Hyderabad, I got a job at the H M Patel Institute of English Training and Research in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat. I did not know a word of Gujarati, nor was I familiar with Gujarati culture. I accepted the job, and went to Vallabh Vidyanagar taking a train from Hyderabad. It was a long journey of over 24 hours. I had to reach Bombay (Mumbai of today), change trains and then reach Anand in Gujarat to go to Vallabh Vidyanagar. Luckily for me, the train that took me to Anand from Bombay was a day train which stopped at almost every station on the way. I could look at every station and make a note of the names of

places as the train passed each station. At the railway stations, the Indian Railways have a convention of indicating the name of the place in a specific order—the regional language on the top, and the official languages Hindi and English in the bottom left corner and bottom right corner respectively.



[Untitled image of a destination board]. Retrieved from <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/aW0eygbnc3o/hqdefault.jpg> November 22, 2019

This was very helpful to me, for I could read the names of places in Hindi and English and try and relate them to the name of the place as written in the Gujarati script. I was alone, and there was plenty of time (a nine-hour journey), and I started copying the names of the places as written in Gujarati in a notebook. This helped me identify some of the similarities and differences between the Gujarati and Hindi scripts. This was very rudimentary, and I was still to get a hang of writing the Gujarati letters of the alphabet systematically. (Though they had a close resemblance to the Devanagari letters, it was not an easy task to grasp their strokes.)

I arrived in Vallabh Vidyanagar late in the evening. I was given some temporary accommodation for a couple of days before I could find a house to stay in. During the following days, as I walked through the streets I paid careful attention to the sign boards and started reading them. This helped me become a reasonably good reader of the script. It was much later that I learnt that the

phonology of Gujarati was very different from that of Hindi, and being familiar with the script was not a sign of any success in learning the language.

As I continued to work in Vallabh Vidyanagar, I soon picked up the spoken form of the language (slowly but steadily), and with the help of a colleague I also learnt to write Gujarati. This was an achievement, for now I could read, write and speak Gujarati. Though not very fluent, I was accepted in their society with all my nuances, and errors.

The encouragement received from friends and the people at large, gave me the confidence to read some books in Gujarati. As a teacher educator, I had to go with my students to various schools to supervise teaching practice. This provided me with ample opportunities to speak in Gujarati with school children and also the teachers teaching in schools. In about two years or a little less, I was a reasonably good user of Gujarati. I owe this to the good exposure I got to the language and the opportunities to use it, both of which helped me pick up the language fairly quickly and well.

Learning Tamil

The initial years of my life were spent in Mysore. I had the major part of my education and a few years of my life as a teacher in this town. Mysore was a princely state with very benevolent rulers—the Wodeyars. In the late nineteenth century, some of the Wodeyar kings got people from the erstwhile Madras state to work as ministers (*diwans*) in their kingdom. Most of these people were Brahmins and belonged to either Iyengar or Iyer families. Generations of their descendants have settled in Mysore and have become part of its culture. However, they have retained their language—Tamil, though it has emerged as a distinct variety with some Kannada words integrated into its vocabulary. The

phonology and syntax of Mysore Tamil is also distinct. This variety is also known as the Mandyam variety of Tamil.

As a school-going boy as well as a college student, I had some friends who belonged to the Iyengar community. When I visited my friends' houses, I often got to listen to their language and without being conscious of it, I picked up a few of its bits and pieces. I never had an opportunity, nor a need, to use this language as long as I lived in Mysore.

After working for a few years in Mysore as lecturer in one of the colleges, I moved to Hyderabad for further studies. It was here that I met my prospective wife, who was a Tamilian. (She is a polyglot, who is fluent in more than eight Indian languages as well as English. She is also a translator recognized by the national Sahitya Akademi.) It was my marriage to her that gave me plenty of opportunities to use the little Tamil I knew and improve it. Today, I can comfortably interact with speakers of Tamil, though I have not been able to become familiar with its script. Reading and writing Tamil have remained a distant dream for me.

Conclusion

Learning a language depends on a variety of factors. In the first place, one should have a friendly attitude towards other languages. Secondly, one should possess the necessary aptitude to learn a new language when one has an opportunity. It is equally important to understand that no language is superior or inferior. All languages are alike in that they are organic and dynamic. We should be sensitive to their dynamism and accept their nuances. With the right attitude and aptitude, one can learn a new language when there is a need supported by the luxury of proper exposure. In this respect, I was lucky with all the three languages I learnt. I could otherwise have never learnt them.

Acquiring Standard Spoken English through Extensive Reading: A Case Study

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Key Words: EFL, Extensive reading, Sustained silent reading, Standard spoken English

Abstract

An immigrant, who worked in an American machine shop, acquired polite standard spoken English by reading romance novels in an 18-week adult extensive-reading ESL class. Full-time employment in the machine shop and once-a-week class discussions provided the only places where the student was routinely exposed to spoken English.

Introduction

This paper reports a case supporting the claim that reading popular literature in a second language strongly influences a learner's acquisition of the spoken target language. The powerful effect of reading on first and second-language acquisition has been well-documented in many multi-participant research studies (Krashen, 2004). In addition, an overwhelming number of individual case studies, which support the larger more rigorous studies, continue to pile up (Krashen, 2007). The greater number of participants involved in larger studies ostensibly makes them more generalizable, but individual case studies, because they are experience-near, are often closer to the less abstract subjective truth we know as individuals. In the long run, the sum of the many one-off generalizations about the experience of individuals, outlined in the growing corpus of case studies about second language reading, provides robust evidence supporting the benefit of this language learning practice.

A Case Study

Sergei¹, a recent thirty-something blue-collar Russian immigrant, enrolled in an 18-week adult ESL class taught at a junior college in a large American city. He had lived in the U.S. for a little less than two years. By day, he worked as a machinist in a machine shop where he was the only non-native-born worker. The shop employed an all-male, racially diverse group of native-born working-class employees. Until taking the class described in this paper, the machine shop was the only place where Sergei had routinely heard or practiced English. He lived in a Russian-speaking neighborhood, socialized with Russian speakers, and

rarely watched English language television. He was married to a Russian and spoke Russian at home with his wife and family.

Sergei was a highly motivated student who said he wanted to improve his English so he could understand everything his co-workers said. At the beginning of the semester, he reported that he had no trouble communicating and understanding anything related to his job. He had been working in the machine shop for almost two years and said he understood almost all of the work-related conversations. But when the conversations among his fellow machinists left the nuts-and-bolts topics of the shop, understanding the English around him became more difficult, and he often could not follow what his co-workers were talking about. He also mentioned he had trouble understanding his co-workers' jokes and humor. He thought his English had stopped improving. This is why he enrolled in the ESL class and what motivated him to improve his English.

The ESL class was for adults and based on an extensive-reading curriculum. It met for three hours a night, one night a week, for eighteen weeks. The class read nine Danielle Steel novels over the course of the semester—three weeks for the first novel and two weeks for each novel after that, except the last week, when students were asked to read an entire novel in one week. There was also an optional finals week bonus assignment for which the students were encouraged to try to read an entire book of their choice in one day, or over the weekend.

Over the course of the semester, students were asked to read at least one hour a day at home and, if this was not enough time to finish the book, to catch up on the

weekends. At the beginning of the semester, students were taught how to read a book for pleasure. The rules for pleasure reading were simple: 1) Focus on the story and read for meaning; 2) Read quickly and silently; 3) Do not use a dictionary; 4) Do not translate; 5) If you do not know a word, guess its meaning and go on; 6) If you cannot guess the meaning of the unknown word, skip it and go on; 7) Give it a chance².

Students who objected to not using a dictionary were encouraged to at least try this method for the first book, just to see if it worked. They were reminded that this was probably how they read for pleasure in their native language. The students were also told that the first fifty pages, or even first half of the first book, might be hard going. But they were promised the reading would get much easier after breaking this barrier and that after that, they would soon take off in English and fly through the reading.

The in-class work consisted of conversations about the books. The topics under discussion were generally initiated by the students, but guided by the teacher when structure was necessary. At the beginning of each class, students were routinely divided up into small groups of four or five for group discussions. After this, "grand conversations"³ including the entire class ensued. A relaxed student-centered classroom atmosphere encouraged many of the English learners to successfully participate in front of the large group of classmates during these grand conversations, something many had never done before (Graves & Fitzgerald, 2003). The focus was on meaning and students discussed their opinions about the books. Many lively topics about the narratives were discussed. Students generated many high-interest questions concerning characters in the novels, such

as "Should Adrian divorce her husband?" The novels spurred many lively conversations and debates among the students, which they often tied to their own lives.

There were no tests, no grammar instruction, nor any systematic attempt to explicitly teach the English language. However, on occasion, when students asked specific questions about English usage, structure, grammar, or pronunciation related to the reading, the teacher addressed them and then went back to the focus on meaning.

Sergei had never read an entire book in English, or even tried to start one. But he became an enthusiastic learner after reading *Heart Beat* (Steel, 1992), the first assigned novel, which became his "home run book"⁴. He reported that he read for an hour a day, as instructed, and several hours beyond that over the weekends. He finished all of the books that were assigned. As the weeks went by, his face often lit up in class, and he was animated in his small group conversations. He routinely raised his hand in the large group discussions to give his opinions to the class. He became an avid learner. He always looked happy and would sometimes stay to talk after class.

Then during the fifteenth week, just before our class started, and seven books (close to two-and-a-half million words) later, Sergei entered the classroom and sat down to talk with his discussion group. But he did not act like his usual self and looked depressed. This was not like him. Other members of his group noticed it, too. An unhappy hangdog look clung to his face. His luster was gone.

I was concerned and approached his table. As I did, one of the group members spoke up and told me that Sergei had had a bad experience.

So, I said, "Sergei, what's the matter?" He raised his head and, in a sullen voice, replied, "The guys at work made fun of my English."

"What did they say?" I asked.

"They said, 'Hey, Sergei. How come you started talking like a guy on a soap opera?'" As he spoke, a wounded feeling crossed his face and slouched his body.

He went on to complain that, the previous day, the guys at work had started talking about the way he was speaking. He looked convinced that the ESL class was not working. He had wanted to improve his English in order to fit in better with his fellow machinists, but now the guys were ribbing him about the way he spoke. This had never happened to him before.

I laughed and said, "Congratulations. That means your English has really improved a lot. You're even starting to speak better English than the guys around you at the shop, and they were born here."

Then I explained to him about different dialects, linguistic registers, and how the speech of males in an all-male group is often much rougher and less standard than their speech at home with their wives, or at school, or church, or in polite company. I also explained that American humour, especially among males, can be quite rough, but that they were just having fun and really giving him a compliment. I said it was probably that way in Russia, too, at least with the rougher speech, but that he may not have thought about it. I told him that the novels' dialogues were written using the polite speech of standard educated English. As a result of reading the books, he was using this kind of language. The guys at work had noticed he had started speaking more properly, so this proved he was making excellent progress. He felt better after this

explanation, and the hangdog look started to slip away.

I further explained that the language of romance novels was like the language used in soap operas on television. I reiterated this because his co-workers had noticed that he had started talking like the people on soap operas. This was proof he was talking like the characters he was reading about in the books. So, he should take what his fellow machinists said as their way of saying how much he had improved his spoken English.

He began to look mollified.

I said that if he read spy or detective novels, he could read dialogue that was more like the machine shop's. But that he did not need to do this, because his co-workers were just kidding him. He should take their soap-opera comments as an acknowledgement of his progress and a genuine curiosity about how he started to talk that way. In addition, the good-natured kidding around showed he had been accepted as one of the guys. If they really thought his English was bad, they would not bring it up at all. Furthermore, they were kidding him for speaking good proper English, not for speaking it poorly!

I also asked Sergei if he would share this experience with the class. This turned into a discussion about the powerful effects of extensive reading. A number of other students testified that people had also noticed and complimented them on an improvement in their speaking. Many said they had found themselves being able to perform better and speak English more fluently. Others discovered themselves uttering vocabulary words they had read, but never heard before in conversation. Sometimes, words they had neither heard nor explicitly studied, just rolled off their tongues and out of their mouths, without

conscious awareness that they even knew them, until they discovered they had used them. After listening to the others, Sergei also volunteered that he had experienced

Discussion

The most interesting aspect of this case is that Sergei picked up many elements of standard educated white-collar spoken English almost solely through reading. This register is sometimes referred to as “proper English” and is what most teachers and middle-class mothers want to instill in their students and children. Because of Sergei’s relative isolation from this polite spoken register of standard American English, this case provides an excellent example of how powerfully extensive reading promotes language acquisition without focusing on explicit instruction. Limited weekly exposure to the teacher’s speech, combined with the imperfect versions of English spoken by his classmates, who were also reading the same romance novels with the same polite educated “soap-opera” language, certainly helped. But, except for the teacher, none of the students fluently spoke polite educated standard American English. In addition, the two-and-a-half million words Sergei read, before his co-workers made the soap-opera comments, dwarfed the amount of English he had heard in the classroom.

The effect, although not quantifiable, was large enough and significant enough to

become a topic of discussion at Sergei’s workplace among his fellow machinists. This was no mean feat, considering that none of them were ESL teachers or linguists. Most surprising is the fact they identified Sergei’s new-found language ability as belonging to the romance genre by labeling it as “talking like a guy on a soap opera”. As far as I know, up till now, no linguist has ever described the linguistic qualities of the genre of romance novels nor the spoken register of soap operas. Machinists may have a greater interest in, and be more sensitive to, this kind of language than linguists, perhaps because they do not want to be identified as someone who talks that way—at least at work. The influence reading had on Sergei’s growing acquisition of proper spoken Standard American English is clear, and most of this change was a result of reading romance novels.

Notes

1. Sergei is a pseudonym.
2. Dupuy et al. (1996) encouraged their students to follow this simple set of rules for EFL pleasure reading.
3. Peterson & Eeds (2007) use the term “grand conversations” to distinguish student-centered discussions in which learners explore their thoughts and feelings, as opposed to traditional teacher-led classroom discussions.
4. Trelease (2001) introduced the concept of a ‘home run book,’ a reading experience that readers claim stimulated their initial interest in reading.

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Learning German to Actively Participate in Scientific Research Work in the German Speaking Parts of the World: A Deeply Enriching Experience

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V. Vasanta Ram has been on the faculty of Ruhr University at Bochum, Germany, since 1970. Earlier, he worked in Kanpur at the Indian Institute of Technology and the Gas Turbine Research Centre. He took the German language course of Goethe Institut, Arolsen, Germany, between July-October 1961, and submitted his dissertation for a Doctorate in Engineering (Dr.-Ing.) in 1966.

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Key Words: Learning German, DAAD scholarship, Research work in fluid dynamics

Abstract

This paper is based on the experience of its author who went to Germany to conduct research work in the area of fluid dynamics, a branch of science/engineering that deals with fluid motion, e.g. of air (wind, smoke), water (in rivers, oceans), oil, blood, or glacier. The research work in Germany was funded through a scholarship awarded to the author by the organization DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst - German Academic Exchange Service). The scholarship included a four-month German language course at the Goethe Institut. This paper summarizes the author's experiences at learning and using German, both at the Goethe Institute and thereafter.

Introduction and Initiation into the German Language

In the late fifties of the last century, when the author was on the verge of completing his first degree in engineering (B. E.), he was, as many of his fellow-students were, and students in that stage possibly are even today, in a frame of mind to chart out a course for himself that he wished to pursue in his profession. Viewing them primarily from this angle, the author was on the lookout for engineering disciplines that held a promise of meeting his expectations from several perspectives. One of these was a close coupling between the profession as practiced and one or more of the subjects the author had gained familiarity with through the curriculum prescribed for the basic engineering degree. At this point, a visitor's lecture in the broad area of aeroplane flight, organized by the local Mechanical Engineering Student Chapter, captured his imagination. The lecture was mainly instrumental in kindling within him a keen interest in engineering subjects related to aeroplanes.

The author soon discovered that the curriculum of the basic engineering degree was not an adequate preparation for practice of a profession belonging to this field, making it more or less mandatory for an aspirant to pursue further studies in subjects more closely related to aeroplane flight. The author then sought admission to the Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru, India, which was offering Post-Graduate Diplomas (D.I.I.Sc). He found admission to a department dealing with aero-engines, an area he was fascinated with. The Indian Institute of Science, at that time, required aspirants of D.I.I.Sc. to pass a test in Modern European Languages; French and German were the languages in which

courses were offered. The author opted for German, and this was his initiation into the world of this language.

After passing out of the Indian Institute of Science with a D.I.I.Sc., which had been by then converted into a degree of Master of Engineering, M.E., the author, who was keen on pursuing research, sought a position advertised by the then newly founded Gas-Turbine Research Centre, GTRC, which, to him, held the promise of his being engaged in research in the field of aero-engines. He was selected as a Junior Scientific Officer. He accepted the post, and was a member of a small team entrusted with the task of performing engineering calculations and preparing engineering drawings, both being steps necessary in the design process of a jet engine.

In the course of his work at GTRC the author came to appreciate the importance of scientifically well-founded knowledge in the fundamentals of fluid motion in order to perform tasks necessary for satisfactory engineering design of a jet-engine. Acquiring this knowledge was not straightforward. It needed undertaking more advanced studies involving research, which called for the author to consider going abroad for such studies. The author was confronted with the dual problem of getting admission into an educational institution engaged in research in an area relevant to aeroplanes and/or aero-engines, combined with finding sources of financial support for such studies. The two, put together, appeared an insurmountable hurdle at that time, when a senior and much-experienced colleague showed a possible way out.

This colleague, who had become a kind of a mentor for the author and had combined advanced study in the U.S.A. with research in a German-speaking country, encouraged the author to explore possibilities for advanced study and

research in countries outside the English-speaking world. In light of the author's experience until then, with many vain searches for financially supported openings for advanced study/research, the author decided to intensify his efforts to include countries outside the English-speaking world. He was much encouraged by the words of his mentor, who expressed his own experience by saying "it (doing research work in a German speaking part of the world) was an enriching experience." An important point the mentor made in his advice was that there were far-reaching contributions coming from researchers working in the German speaking parts of world, many of which have indeed been recognized to be of pivotal scientific significance even today. The mentor said, "It speaks for a good researcher not to overlook these contributions."

The Language Course at a School of the Goethe Institut

During the second year of his employment at GTRC, when the author was putting in intensified efforts to find funding sources for advanced studies with research abroad, there appeared in the newspapers an advertisement offering scholarships to be granted by the German Academic Exchange Service, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, DAAD, for advanced studies and research in various disciplines in the then Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). The author applied for this scholarship and, after an interview, was selected for one. The DAAD-scholarship included a boat passage from India to Europe, and a four-month language course of the Goethe Institut.

Both the DAAD and the Goethe Institut are supported by the Federal Republic of Germany, and their objectives and scope are defined through their statutes. Since these are known and widely publicized on their websites, it suffices here to recall that the Goethe Institut runs language schools for learning German in many parts of Germany and also in other parts of the world. The batch of DAAD-Scholarship-holders from India, including the author, set sail by boat to Europe in the second week of June 1961. The entire batch of scholarship-holders disembarked in Marseilles, from where, after an overnight stay, they proceeded to Germany by train. En route, in Frankfurt am Main, the scholarship group was divided into two sub-groups, with one sub-group proceeding to the German-Language school run by the Goethe Institut in Iserlohn, and the other to the school run in Arolsen. The author was in the sub-group sent to Arolsen. When it arrived in Arolsen, they were met at the railway station by the Director of the Goethe Institut German Language School in Arolsen, who had made lodging arrangements for the scholarship holders for the duration of the language course.

As was customary in Germany those days, the students were lodged in individual rooms in apartments in which families lived, and rented out rooms for students of the local Goethe Institut German Language School. The German language course started a few days after the group's arrival. Before it formally started, the students were given a short test to assess their proficiency level in the German language; some of the students had after all undergone a course in German before they came to Germany. With the background of the course in German language that the author had taken for his M.E. at IISc, he was assigned to the *Grundstufe* (Basic course). Students in the group, numbering around fifteen, came from many countries, of which relatively few were from the

English-speaking world. Many were from countries where the languages spoken were Spanish, Italian, French or Japanese. Most of the students were assigned to the *Grundstufe*.

German was introduced and used in the classes for communication between the teachers and the students from the very first day onwards. A book, obviously specially designed for the use of adults learning German, was used for this purpose. Classes were held six hours a day (0900 - 1200 hrs and 1400 - 1700 hrs) from Monday through Friday, and 0900 - 1200 hrs on Saturdays. As would be expected, the German language used in the starting stages of the course was of a relatively simple structure. It then proceeded step by step into stages of increasing complexity. Emphasis was placed on grammatically correct usage, even in the beginning stages.

Already during the course, the author gained the impression that the teaching staff at the Goethe Institut Language School had a good appreciation of the peculiar difficulties typically experienced by an adult wanting to learn German. An adult, being generally used to employing his or her own language of choice - whether as a mother-tongue from childhood or through schooling - to express his or her own thoughts in that language, say in English, French or Spanish, when learning German, is often observed to face several difficulties that may be characterized as typical. To give an example, one of these pertains to the proper declension of the article which, in German, is governed by all the three, case, gender and preposition. Some further examples observed to be associated with characteristic difficulties, pertain to pronunciation and formation of the past-tense of a verb. The German language course at the Goethe Institut, through their method of teaching, struck a balance between all the three, viz. grammar, syntax and pronunciation, without which

communication, whether by a written text or oral, is susceptible to errors or misunderstandings or both.

Besides helping the students out of the difficulties mentioned, the teaching staff at the Goethe Institut Language School, Arolsen encouraged their students to put into use what they had been introduced to in the class in their daily life, outside the classroom; a procedure that, in the author's experience, struck deep roots. Furthermore, as part of the course, the students were required to write a short essay (running into a page or two) in German, on a topic of their choice. In any event, to the author these were of much help to gain confidence in using the German language as such.

In short, the course at the Goethe Institut Language School had laid a sound language foundation for the author to engage himself during his stay at the Technische Hochschule (now Technical University) Braunschweig in research work in the subject of his primary interest, which was Fluid Dynamics.

Learning to Use the Language in Research Work

As just stated, the four-month course at the Goethe Institut Language School in Arolsen had laid a sound foundation for the author in German, but this by itself was not sufficient for him to actively participate in research at the Institut für Strömungsmechanik of the Technische Hochschule Braunschweig. The main shortcomings that the author had to make up for concerned vocabulary and writing, both with strong orientation towards the subject of Fluid Dynamics. For learning to use the language to this end, the author found it necessary to take some steps on his own initiative. Some of the steps he has listed below:

- Read the research literature, when the work had been done and reported in German, in the original language itself, which was of course German.
- Write periodical reports of his research work in German.
- Give the seminar lectures on the ongoing scientific work, which is customary in universities in Germany, in German. It was very helpful to prepare the lectures by writing them out first, paying attention to proper grammatical usage, but not delivering the lecture by reading the written text. Writing out the entire text first helped speaking with ease in German in front of an audience!
- Participate in discussions following a lecture in German, particularly if the speaker has given the lecture in German.

By the time his stay at the Technische Hochschule Braunschweig came to an end, the author had acquired a proficiency in German that met the standards set for a Dissertation (Dr.- Ing.).

Concluding Observations and Acknowledgement

Since this is an article the author has written based only upon his own experience in learning German, he finds it more appropriate to give this section the title as above, instead of just "Conclusions". In summary, the author can identify himself with his Mentor's words that "it (doing research work in a German speaking part of the world) will be an enriching experience", and he does so unreservedly. Although more than six decades have passed since the author was initiated into the German speaking world, its influence on the author is still breathing full of life, for which he wishes to put on record herewith his

indebtedness both to his Mentor, whom he wishes to refer to in this paper through his (Mentor's) initials AP, and to DAAD. He also thanks the Editor of this volume for asking him to write an article on "Learning German".

L'Hospital's Rule

This is a rule in Calculus, about which Vasanta Ram has a story to tell.

During the initial stages of his research, in a discussion with his German advisor, the author suggested that a certain problem was not amenable to the solutions then extant. The advisor asked if he had tried "Lo-pitaal's" rule.

Vasanta Ram, who had never heard of this rule, returned a confused negative. The advisor thereupon, somewhat dismissively, called in his secretary and instructed her to take the scholar to the library and point him to the relevant books.

Only then did Vasanta Ram realize that he knew this (quite commonly known) rule as "El Hospital's" rule! That was how it was pronounced during his course of study, and perhaps still is.

Interestingly, an internet search for the rule now shows a spelling closer to the pronunciation: L'Hopital's Rule, along with the conventional spelling: L'Hospital's Rule.

Wikipedia tells us that the rule is named after the 17th-century French mathematician Guillaume de l'Hôpital (French: [lopital]).

-Editor

Learning to Read Hindi through WhatsApp: From Deciphering to Cross-Languaging

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Key Words: Reading Devanagari script, Deciphering letters, Text difficulty, Scaffolding, Comprehension

Abstract

This paper is auto-ethnographic in its approach. In it, I have reflected on my experiences of learning to read Hindi in the past two years, using texts sent to me on social media (WhatsApp). In the paper, I will attempt to answer two research questions regarding the actual letters in the Devanagari script that I found difficult or easy and the types of text that I found difficult to comprehend. I will end the paper with a few implications for adult learning.

Introduction

I am a 62-year-old, working at the English and Foreign Languages University. I grew up in Madras, studied in a convent school with Tamizh as my second language, and no exposure to Hindi, since Tamil Nadu follows the two and not the three language formula¹. In the late 70s, after completing my Masters in English Literature, my elder sister and I were inspired to sign up for a correspondence course, *Learn Hindi Through English*, offered by the Central Hindi Directorate. It followed a structural approach: we were taught the letters, and then had to read aloud and write: “*yeh kitaab hai, yeh kalam hai, yeh kursi hai*”, and so on. Neither of us got very far with our foray into learning Hindi, and we came to the conclusion that we were not good language learners. Reproducing strings of words, with little or no cerebation demanded as learner effort (Prabhu, 1991, 2019) was not helpful. We never went beyond the first few lessons.

Years later, in Hyderabad at CIEFL (now known as the EFL University), I taught myself to speak Hindi by listening to the language spoken around me, watching Hindi movies and television serials occasionally, and attempting to use the language whenever the opportunity presented itself. I also attempted to teach myself to read in Hindi, by looking at Hindi posters when I stopped at traffic signals, but I did not get very far. Many years later, as a 60-year-old, and armed with a smart phone, I stopped myself from getting irritated with Hindi messages sent to me on *WhatsApp* (a social media site that allows one to send messages or make free calls on cell phones), either as an individual or as a group member, telling myself: “Why don't I try to read these short messages and see if I can teach myself to read Hindi?” I began in April 2017. I am still learning.

This paper is a self-reflective narrative of my travails and successes over the past two years (2017-2019). I received and tried to make sense of 40 text messages during this period. I actually received more than 50 texts, but with the learner-centred power that I vested in myself (Amritavalli, 2007) I deleted texts that were too long, or in the form of poetry. I stayed with the texts that were within my proximal development zone (Vygotsky, 1978). Texts, in this context, were not mere strings of words but carried new knowledge. As such, I initially struggled to decipher the code only because I wanted to comprehend what was being said. This struggle to comprehend (Prabhu, 2018), I suspect, is what enabled me to become a somewhat successful reader of Hindi. This self-motivated learning, however, is not purely self-instructional. My former doctoral student, Deepesh Chandrasekharan, was and still is a very patient teacher/informal tutor to me. I would forward the messages to him, along with a text explaining what I had or had not understood. This was accompanied by queries which he patiently answered, thus enabling me to read Hindi.

Nature of the Paper

This paper is purely ethnographic in its approach. I have attempted to critically examine some of the 40 Hindi texts and the discussions around them to glean the language learning processes. I have also attempted to answer the following two research questions:

1. Which letters were easy/difficult to decipher and why?
2. Which texts were easy/difficult to read and understand and why?

Data Analysis and Interpretation

There are two kinds of data that will be examined and interpreted in this paper.

The actual texts in Hindi (transliterated, along with their translations) are the first. These are referred to as text 1, text 2, etc. The second kind of data has been collated from the discussions that I (GD) had with Deepesh (DC) either in the form of questions and answers, or comments.²

Hindi Letters that Were Easy/Difficult

In the first few months, my most frequent question to Deepesh was: "What is this word? I don't know." For instance, in text 1, "*nibha*" and "*sambhaal*" were difficult to read and decipher. Similarly, in text 2, I found "*gaanthon*", and "*sudhre*", problematic. In text 3, "*bhenṭh*", and "*chadhaaun*" were difficult to decipher.

Text 1:

he(y) bhagwaan sabke mobile sambhaal-kar rakhnaa, isii-se sab rishte nibhaa rahe hen.

Oh God! Take care of everyone's mobile phone. All relationships are maintained through them.

Text 2:

*adrak kii gaanthon-saa rahaa bachpan apnaa,
bas utnaa hii sudhre, jitnaa kooṭe gaye.*

Our childhood was like a knob of ginger
We only improved to the extent we were thrashed.

Text 3:

*jai shrii baalaajii kii
he(y) baalaajii aap to(h)
saare(y) jagat-ko dene waale
mein kyaa tujh-ko bhenṭh chadhaaun
jiske naam-se aaye khushbu
mein kyaa usko phool chadhaaun
suprabhaat
aapka din mangalmai rahe*

Hail to thee, lord Balaji!
O Balaji, you who give the world everything,
What gift can I offer you?
You whose name spreads fragrance,
How can I offer you flowers?
Good morning.
Have a blessed day.

My discussion with Deepesh after I sent him text 1, captures the problem:

GD: "I did not get 2 words: *sambhaal* I got only half right. You know, thanks to *Swachh Bharat* I learnt the letter for *bh*, so *nibha* and *sambhaal*".

Deepesh was able to catch what I was saying; with true learner-centredness, he used shared knowledge of linguistics. This is what he said:

DC: "Oh, ok. Tamizh does not have aspirated plosives. So must be really tough for you."

I too had realized this, and reiterated:

GD: "Yup, aspirated letters are tough to remember for me, 'cos can't hear the difference."³

Deepesh's reply to my statement sums it all up:

DC: "... I can understand. Training the ear and then seeing the difference. Phew!" (He went on to liken me to) "the nursery school student with no exposure to English, getting used to an English medium classroom."

But non-recognition of aspirated letters was not the only problem I had with deciphering the Devanagari script. In my own words: "Some letters look alike." I found it difficult to tell the difference not only between the aspirated and unaspirated letters such as *p* and *ph* (प and फ), but also between totally unrelated letters such as *ch*, *gh*, and *dh* (छ, घ and ढ), *sh* and *kh* (श and ख), and *bh* and *th* (भ and थ). All these letter clusters looked very similar to each other, with minor variations.

Text 4:

*yuddh nahiin, prem karoo
aur agar donon karnaa he
to(h) shaadii kar lo*

Make love, not war
And if you want to do both
then get married.

This short and simple text, that advised people to make love not war and if they wanted to do both, to get married (text 4) was difficult to decipher initially because of the gemination but, although there was no English scaffolding (Bruner, 1985) available, world knowledge made it enjoyable to read. In this text, I also had a problem with "the squiggles below the word". It took me a while to read the word *yudhdh* (युद्ध). If by some chance, it was a different half letter below the full letter, I was completely lost.

The second "squiggle" that caused major problems belonged to the various forms of "r"⁴. First, I had to work out to which letter the "r" was attached, when it was marked as a "matra" above the word; and then, in some cases, the "r" would be indicated below the word with a "squiggle". For example, in Image 2 below, in the word सिर्फ 'sirf' "r" is indicated as a matra above the 'f'. In text 10 below, in the word कृष्णा *Krishna*, the 'r' is a curved squiggle below the letter 'k'; while in the word पराक्रम *paraakram*, it is a line below the same letter 'k'.

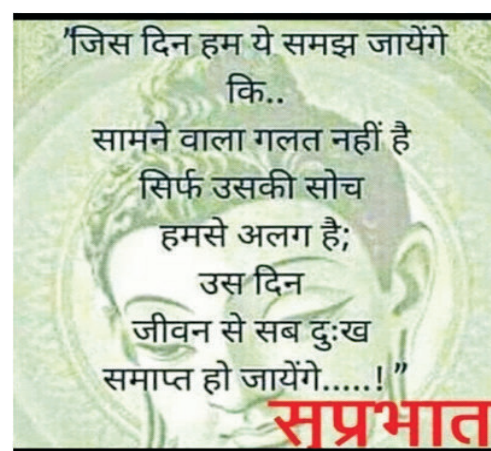
Last but not the least; an overarching decipherability problem was caused by the medium and type of text. WhatsApp texts, by their very nature, are authentic and are intended to be read by the language user. They tend to have stylish fonts and often have images that have been copied and uploaded. For a sample of a problematic stylish font, see image 1 and for a sample of a problem in

deciphering caused by the background image, see image 2.

Image 1



Image 2



Easy versus Difficult Texts

I read different types of texts each with its own level of difficulty. The easiest yet the most boring text (text 5) was the one from my bank asking me not to reveal my card no., PIN, CVV, etc., to anyone.

Text 5:

Card nambar, CVV pin, O T P kisii ko na bataayen. Bank kabhii nahiin puchtaa.

Card number, CVV pin, OTP. Never tell this to anyone. Bank will never ask for this.

Being able to decipher and read this text was not a challenge for me. Known knowledge in a new code did not make me want to crack the code, because the demand to solve a problem and learn to read (Prabhu, 2018) was missing.

The texts that gave me my first

"satisfaction of having cracked the code" were two humorous ones, accompanied by a visual (picture/video), and where the required background knowledge was available. The first text had a picture of a woman with a phone in her hand and her baby in a huge coat pocket (text 6). This text spoke about what the world had come to, for what should be in the hand was in the pocket, and vice versa.

Text 6:
(accompanied by picture of a woman with a phone in her hand and a baby in her coat pocket)

*kaisaa zamaanaa aayaa he.
jo haath me honaa chaahiye vo jeb men he, aur jo jeb men honaa chaahiye vo haath men he.*

What has the world come to?
What should be in her hands is in the pocket and what should be in the pocket is in her hand.

The second text was about what a husband ought to do when his wife cried: the short video showed him taking a selfie, at which point she just stopped crying and started smiling (text 7).

Text 7:
(accompanied by a picture of a man taking a selfie of himself and his wife)
jab aap kii biiwii aapke saamne roye to turant ye karen

Whenever your wife starts crying when you are around, just do this.

There was a second set of texts which I found easy to decipher as they included a few English words. The first text in this set (text 8) was laced with a bit of humour and took a quiet dig at women. My world knowledge and the few English words used, written in English script, made it easy for me to not only decipher and read but also enjoy what was written. The text was about a child asking her father, while filling out an application form for a school,

what to write for mother tongue. With his tongue in cheek, the father replies: "*likh, beta, long and out of control.*"

Text 8:
(Baccha school kaa admission form bharte hue...)
Baccha: Papa mother tongue me kyaa likhuun?
Papa: likh betaa, very long and out of control.

(Child, while filling the admission form for a school)

Child: Father, what shall I write in the mother tongue column?

Father: You can write, very long and out of control.

I did not know that the word "*bharte*" meant "(while) fill(ing) in", but I was able to guess the meaning from the context. The same world knowledge helped me understand a text that most of us would have received at some point or the other, with a link asking us to open and vote whether we would like a Ram mandir or a mosque to be built in Ayodhya (text 9).

Text 9:
*ayodhyaa men kyaa banaanaa chaahiye.
Raam mandir v/s Baabri masjid.*
Open fast and vote (link given).
Sharing is caring.
Aap apnaa amulya vote zaroor karen; is message ko zyaadaa share karen.

What should be built in Ayodhya, a temple for Ram or Babri masjid? Please cast your vote and share this with all.

The third set of texts that was easy to comprehend were short ones which had small philosophical statements, normally signalled as the "*vichaar*" for the day. If such a text had some support in the form of a mythological reference (text 10), it was that much easier to comprehend.

Text 10:
chhofii unglii par puraa govardhan parvat

*uṭhaanewale Shri Krishna
baansuri dono haathoon se pakaḍṭe he.
bas itnaa hii antar hai paraakram aur
prem men.
Isliye rishton me paraakram nahiin prem
dikhaayiye*

Shri Krishna, who lifted up the whole Govardhan mountain on his little finger, holds his flute in both hands. Just such is the difference between valour and love. So show love in your relationships, not valour or strength.

The texts that were the most difficult to understand were the ones which had a superficial as well as a metaphorical meaning, or had a sarcastic tone. Text 2 is a good example of such metaphoric use. I “got the ginger statement all right, but not metaphorically.” I did not realize that the text had a deeper meaning—it was all about how “...our childhood was as uneven as the “joints” of ginger; that we improved only as much as we were crushed” (DC). First of all, I did not know the literal meaning of the word “*gaanṭh*”, that it means knots, let alone that it referred to “the joints, like pieces in ginger” (DC). The meanings of “*sudhre*” (improve), and “*kootna*” (to pound) were also not known to me. As such, even “*kooṭe gaye*”, meaning “got pounded” (DC) was beyond my level of comprehension. As a result, in the words of my tutor: “yeah, the ginger one was too metaphorical for you to get it” (DC).

A text (text 11) I got in September 2018, more than a year after I began trying to read, was about the similarities and differences between different kinds of clothing—pajamas, palazzos, shorts and bermudas.

Text 11:

*pajamaa aur palaazzo
asl men sage bharii hain
fark sirf yeh he ki pajamaa
sarkaarii skool men padhaa huaa
jabki palaazzo convent educated he*

*barmudaa [sic] bhii apne kaccheey ka
bhaai he
jise videsh padhne bhejaa thaa.
nalaayak ne wahaan jaakar
naam badal liyaa.*

There was a range of problems with this text. Initially, all that I understood was: “Something about 2 girls, government school and convent; bermuda, shorts, or country (not sure), name changed maybe”. Deepesh had to explain this text in detail to me.

Pajama and palazzo are actually “own brothers” [sic]. The difference is merely in the fact that the former went to a government school and the latter is convent educated. The Bermuda is also the brother of our *kaccha* (underwear), who was sent abroad for studies. The fellow changed his name there (to Bermuda). Essentially saying that palazzo is pajama and Bermuda is underwear shorts; using the metaphor of convent educated and studies abroad as a metaphor for westernization [sic].

My comments to Deepesh on this text summarize many of the problems I encountered with it. First, “I actually thought it was about genuine sisters and a Bermuda brother. Never thought of it as clothes.” Secondly, I realized that when English words are written in Devanagari script, it takes a lot of language capability to read it and yet perceive it as transliteration. Deepesh actually thought I did not know these four terms of clothing and therefore glossed them for me before explaining the metaphor.

“Palazzo is the name given to women's pants that flare at the bottom. Bermuda is what people call shorts that come up to the knee”. I told him that I was very sure that “with English or Tamizh I would have caught it at once. So, when reading the script itself is difficult, [the] mind does

not look at metaphor?" I was convinced that "even if someone had set a question, in Hindi, I think I would have got it."

This makes one wonder whether higher order comprehension in a new language needs a "trigger" or maybe scaffolding. I never understood the humour or the metaphor implied in this text. But I was equally sure that "if the question and answers had been in English and I only had to read and understand, I would have got it without any extra effort!"

My attempts to read Hindi also made me realize that with knowledge of the world and the word in other languages, even with limited proficiency, it is possible to not only read and interpret a text but even ponder over paradigmatic choices for a word and end with a pragmatic translation. The Cumminsean threshold hypothesis (1980) was at work here. A text I read in December 2018 (text 12), spoke about how we as people need to understand that other people are not wrong, but just different from us; the day we do this, our worries will disappear.

Text 12:

*jis din hum ye samajh jayenge ki
saamane waalaa galat nahiin he
sirf uskii soch
ham se alag he;
us din
jeevan se sab dukh
samaapt ho jaayenge.....!
suprabhaat*

The day we understand that others are not wrong; just that their thinking is different from ours: that day we will be rid of all our worries. Good Morning!

As I asked Deepesh, in the text it says that "the day we are able to see or state, or accept that others are not wrong but different, all misery will disappear from our lives." I had gone on to tell him: "In my mind, I had thought of "perceive" as the verb to be used, because I thought of

perspective, but dropped it as way too off. As for the word "samajh", I actually had 4 or 5 verbs in mind—state, accept, perceive, understand—which I did not want to use". Interestingly, I knew that "even in Tamizh I would not have so many options".

Interpretation of Findings and Conclusions

This very brief foray into an analysis of the difficulties and successes I faced as an adult learning to read Hindi through WhatsApp has thrown up a range of issues for adult language learning and teaching. First of all, there is the issue of learner interest, which is an absolute prerequisite. Secondly, learners have to be given the freedom to choose their own texts. Thirdly, these texts have to be easily decipherable as far as fonts and print size are concerned. Texts with images have to be very carefully chosen, with beginner decipherability in mind.

With reference to the selection of texts, the length of the text also needs to be taken into account. In the initial stages, longer texts will be a deterrent to learning. As far as themes are concerned, a range of themes ought to be available. Texts with dual meaning ought to be introduced only after a certain level of proficiency has been attained. Most importantly, if adults have to learn a language or even just become literate, one should think of these texts only as a collection or a resource book which they can dip into. This should be the case even if adults have to take an examination and receive a certificate. There is no need to restrict one's teaching to specified pre-determined content when the aim of the course is proficiency development.

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Notes

1. The three language formula was introduced by the Government of India in 1957 and modified in 1964. The formula provided space for education either through the regional language or English, with the proviso that other than the medium of instruction, two other languages would be studied in middle and high school. If English was the medium of instruction, Hindi and the regional language would be studied. If the regional language was the medium of instruction, then Hindi and English would be studied. Tamil Nadu protested against what was perceived as the imposition of Hindi, and therefore the state was permitted to follow a two language formula, with an exemption being granted to studying Hindi.
2. The transliterations of Hindi texts are in italic font. Many of these texts were in the form of verse. While I have attempted to retain the format of the

text in the transliterations, the translations are in prose and not in verse.

3. Voicing is predictable in Tamil (intervocalic, or preceded by a nasal sound). So, where Hindi has *p*, *ph*, *b*, *bh*, and so on, Tamil, whose alphabet is scientific enough to reflect its phonology, has only the letter *p*, which can be understood (and read) as *b* intervocalically, and in post nasal contexts. (Recall that aspiration is absent in Tamil).
[Compare the comment about intervocalic voicing versus germination in Malayalam, in Paroma Sanyal's article – Ed.]
4. Ed.'s note: The symbol for 'r' in words like ऋषि /rishi/, कृष्णा /Krishna/, अमृत /amrit/ etc. in modern Hindi represents the sound sequence 'ri'; in Sanskrit, this was a vocalic sound. When 'r' occurs in a cluster with another consonant, if 'r' is the second sound in the consonant cluster, it is written as a diacritic on the first consonant, as in क्रम /kram/, श्रम /shram/, ट्रक /truck/, etc. If 'r' is the first sound in a consonant cluster, it is written on the 'head' of the second consonant, as in कर्म /karm/ and शर्म /sharm/.

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Selective Acquisition of Malayalam

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Key Words: Familial space, Morpho-syntax, Phonology, Dative subject, Questions, Retroflex, Geminate, Kitchen, Literacy, Literary engagement

Abstract

In this paper, I will present a curated account of my linguistic reflections on my journey into the Malayalam language community of my husband. My reflections can be classified roughly into three parts—morpho-syntax, phonology, and literary engagement with the second language.

Introduction

Living within a language community to become a part of it is quite different from learning a language for a specific purpose. In that sense, the particular case of second language acquisition of Malayalam discussed here is comparable to contexts of first language acquisition. Both are without any particular objective or communicative goal. However, from every other perspective it is the typical case of a second language learner, fraught with misinterpretations. The reflections conclude with the observation that being a linguist, and being consciously aware of the descriptive generalizations, has hardly helped in the actual acquisition of Malayalam.

One of the professional hazards of being a linguist is disappointing hundreds of people who enthusiastically ask you, "How many languages do you speak?" Rarely do linguists speak any more languages than they would if they had been doctors or engineers instead of linguists. Our job entails thinking about various aspects of language, analysing data from hundreds of languages to observe recurrent patterns, making generalizations, and theorizing about it all. Most of us are quite incapable of generating a cogent sentence in any of those languages, let alone thinking in them. However, faced with a natural context that demands adult language acquisition, do we as linguists, with all the baggage of theoretical knowledge, approach the task differently? That is the central question that I will be reflecting on in this paper within the anecdotal bounds of my personal journey with Malayalam.

Malayalam is the language spoken by the people of Kerala, which includes the family that I have been married into for the last fifteen years. For most of my husband's relatives, I was the first non-Malayali that they had to accommodate within the intimate familial space, and the lack of language was both convenient and an impediment. The lack of comprehensible language between me and most people, and my foreign sounding name with the usual Bangla vowel harmony being a mouthful, contributed to me being re-named as well as being infantilized. In Kerala, I was a word-less child, with a name that nobody outside Kerala called me by. I was no longer an adult, a wife, or an eloquent academic.

Morpho-syntax

Every new person we encountered back home [*naat-il-e*] asked the same question "*Malayalam ari-o?*" ["Do you/does she understand Malayalam?"]. Initially I was not sure if the question was directed at me, the non-comprehending non-Malayali, or my spouse, my interpreter. As a linguist, I knew that Malayalam has no agreement, and like all South Asian Languages, it is a pro-drop language; so the question was ambiguous between second and third person. As I stood pondering on this, my spouse would assume my silence to signal non-comprehension, and reply that I did not understand the language, and people would stop talking to me.

It is true that I did not understand clearly; but I still wanted *ammachi-maar* [grandmothers], *cheechi-maar* [elder sisters], *paappan* [uncles], and everyone

to speak to me. So I started saying "*aria, paray-illa*", which amounts to something like [I understand, but cannot speak]. This was a good compromise since it was followed by long monologues from my interlocutors that served as excellent language input. It is not as if I could not get Malayalam inputs from the overheard conversations between other people, but it was exponentially more difficult to follow those, particularly because most people speak very fast and sloppily, and often while chewing tobacco or arecanut. Speech specifically directed at me was mostly slower, repetitive and exaggerated, so it helped a lot.

I started using the dative case marking in Malayalam very early, telling amma "*enikkiməḍḍi*" ["it is enough for/to me"] at dinner time, as she tried serving another ladleful of rice into my plate (around the same time, I started using "*ḍa*", a sort of interjection; in a matter of weeks, I was ordering the dog, "*ku:tti:po-ḍa*" ["go to your kennel"]). This could be partly because I was primed to notice the dative case marking due to my knowledge of its existence as a linguist, or because it was extremely common. It would indeed be interesting to see if Malayalam children start using dative case marking in the two-word stage like I did. Acquisition evidence from Tamil, a closely related language, in fact indicates that children make an early distinction between subject and non-subject dative (Lakshmi Bai, 2004). That could be a factor in adult acquisition as well, since I cannot recall any regular uses of dative case that were not cases of non-nominative subjects.

Pragmatically speaking, one would expect that adults would learn to frame

questions as a priority. After all we spend an inordinate amount of time in the Indian subcontinent teaching the syntax of question-formation to second language learners of English. In my personal experience with Malayalam, this is one of the more rare constructions that I have had to use, if we ignore the question particle "*-o*" in the usual Malayalam salutation "*suk^h-əṁ aṅ_o-o?*" ["Is everything well?"]; albeit the lack of performance data is not real evidence that I did not develop the competence or ability to frame real *wh*-questions in Malayalam. Perhaps this is so because we are culturally more apt to utter a sentence with a polar question intonation than ask a real *wh*-question. For example, if I am not able to find amma in the house, I am much more likely to utter "*amma town-ilpoy-o*" ["Has amma gone to town?"], with a rising intonation, than ask "*amma evade*" ["Where is amma?"]. Also, the question particle "*aṅ_o-o*" when used by itself translates to ["Is that so?"], and is therefore an independent entity that punctuates and perpetuates all gossip and is an essential tool in the arsenal of any adult. Coupled with "*aḍipol_{ḷi}*" ["awesome"], it forms the bedrock of casual conversations among cousins.

Phonetics and Phonology

Unlike syntax, where being a linguist has perhaps aided language acquisition, my linguistic knowledge has had nearly no impact on my phonetic and phonological acquisition. For the longest time, I struggled with the insecurity that I would utter "*ku_ḷiçh-o?*" with the retroflex lateral, in my attempt at saying "*kə_ḷiçh-o?*" with

the retroflex rhotic. The former literally meant "Have you taken a bath?", while the latter would mean "Have you eaten?", and serves as a regular conversation starter among Malayalis. It is the cultural equivalent of the comments on weather among the British. The source of my apprehension was obviously that the Bangla speaking tongue was not made to be curled in retroflexion; and accidentally asking people about their cleansing routine is not a great idea and perhaps even impolite. There is also the intermediate "*kuḍich-o*", with the retroflex flap, which means, "have you drunk?", and has a very specific connotation so that brides in the family typically do not ask about their specific drinking habits from other family members. So, I needed to steer clear of that as well. The same case of insufficient retroflexion served as a source of endless mirth to the children in the household when I said things like *pəḷli:ppoy-o*, intending "Did he/they go to church?" Instead, it would sound like "Did he/they go to lizard [*pəḷli*]?", due to insufficient retroflexion of the lateral.

Years before I tried becoming a Malayalam speaker, when I was doing my M.A. in linguistics, we had done a perception experiment on stops using Malayalam speakers, as part of a Phonology course. Basically, we had recorded some singleton and geminate stops uttered by Bangla speakers and asked a set of Malayalam speakers to tell them apart. When they could not do it accurately, we recorded Malayalam speakers producing the same sounds and tried comparing their acoustics. The hypothesis was that Bangla and Malayalam speakers use different acoustic cues to comprehend geminate

and singleton stop consonants. Armed with such very specific knowledge, fifteen years after becoming a part of a Malayalam speaking community, my brain is nonetheless incapable of registering the distinction between "*pani*" ["fever"] and "*panni*" ["pig"].

In the summer of 2019, as we drove through the north Malabar landscape and I sat rolling my tongue and pronouncing the unpronounceable place names that littered the landscape, the linguist within me finally figured something out. The name of the place we were passing by was Chakitapara; it was a familiar name as a relative lived close by. The mud-spatter on the signage forced me to pay attention to the sign in Malayalam lettering instead of the convenient English, and I made a casual comment on spelling norms. At this point both amma and her son clarified that the /k/, /t/ and /p/ in Chakitapara were indeed geminates for them ('Chakkittappara'), and there was no error in the Malayalam spelling. For native speakers, there is voicing neutralization in medial position unless the consonant sound is a geminate¹. So all medial voiceless stops are both written and perceived as geminates, irrespective of actual phonetic factors such as VOT or stop duration. For example, the word ["ten"], "*pəḷḷə*", is written with a geminate "*ḷ*", but ["thirteen"], "*pəḷḷimuune*", is written with a singleton "*ḷ*" (which is voiced when pronounced). In sound contrast, where my Bangla processing brain perceives a voicing distinction, the Malayalam speaking people perceive a distinction between a singleton and a geminate consonant. In short, very few adults who are trying to acquire Malayalam may know as much about Malayalam phonology as I do, but this has not helped me in the acquisition of Malayalam phonology. My

inability to tell geminates apart is paralleled only by my inability to utter retroflex consonants with any degree of consistency.

At this point it is clear that on account of being a linguist, I was not unfamiliar with Malayalam as a language when I travelled to Kerala and started acquiring it. But that is true only if I consider syntactic and phonological acquisition to be language acquisition. Were I to include lexical words as the beginning point, then my real introduction to Malayalam was definitely mediated by the spices, utensils and ingredients in my kitchen. The kitchen was a magical personal space where neither of us wanted to bring in the mediating languages—Hindi or English—that otherwise interceded between the Bangla and the Malayalam universe. Between “*posto*” [poppy seeds], and “*kappa*” [tapioca], we discovered a natural context for lexical acquisition. Consequently, by the time I set foot in our village in North Malabar, I had a veritable arsenal of culinary vocabulary—*maṅṅeḷ* [turmeric], *uppə* [salt], *pəncəsaarə* [sugar], *ṭeṅga* [coconut], *ṭəyirə* [curd], *poṭṭə* [beef], *koṛi* [chicken], *mi:n* [fish], *cemmi:n* [prawns], *uḷḷi* [onion], *payerə* [string beans], *veḷḷərikka* [gourd], *veḷḷuṭuḷi* [garlic], *inji* [ginger], *kəriapille* [curry leaves], *kəṛuga* [mustard seeds], *pəcəkəri*, *eriṣeri*, *puljṣeri* (types of curries), *catti*, *pappəḍəmkutti* (types of utensils)—and many more such words at my disposal.

Literary Engagement with the Language

With regard to reading, I would like to draw a distinction between whether one

can read in a language, and whether one actually reads it. Being an avid reader, one third of my day involves reading and a fair amount of it is literature. But, I have never read books in Malayalam. It is for the same reason that I have not read books in Bangla. Just as I have never had any formal education in Malayalam, I have never studied Bangla in school, perhaps on account of it not being the State language where I grew up. Although our parents ensured that all of us siblings can read and write Bangla, none of us ever put in the effort to read books or newspapers in Bangla. My literacy with regard to Malayalam has not been very different. Just as the home I grew up in was full of Bangla literature, our home in Delhi abounds in my spouse's ever-growing collection of Malayalam literature. In both cases, I read the labels, dust the covers and arrange the books on the bookshelf. This points to the lack of “*bildung*”—a word coined by the Germans to refer to the development of the self and potential through intellectual nurture. Languages acquired in informal circumstances, whether first or second, have the potential to realize the communicative goals of second language acquisition, but fall short of being the language in which one thinks, and develops and expresses intellectual thoughts. In my personal journey with the five languages that I can speak, read and write—Bangla, Hindi, Odiya, English and Malayalam—I use only one to think in and express my thoughts. That language is English. While English is a second language for me, it is the only language in which I received formal education. For my parents, that language is Bangla, and for my spouse it is primarily Malayalam and then English.

For me, the act of writing this paper itself has been a negotiation between the two worlds of Malayalam that I inhabit. The first is a teleological journey from the outside to the inside through interaction with people and places. The second is an academic quest to theorize the first through reflexivity. The complement would be if my partner, a non-linguist, were to reflect on his acquisition of

Bangla in the non-formal familial spaces of my Bangla-speaking universe of North Bengal.

Notes

1. Compare Geetha Durairajan's observation (this issue) about intervocalic voicing of *p* in Tamil—Ed.

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Would a “Rational Approach” Improve Academic Outcomes in English Language University Classes in Vietnam?

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Key Words: Free-reading, Autonomy, ELT textbooks, Self-directed learning, Input-based approach, Rational learning, International teaching

“One is never taught a language. One can only learn it.” A. Gethin

Abstract

This study examines the impact of the rational approach (Gethin & Gunnemark, 1996) on academic outcomes, as an alternative to mass-marketed ELT textbooks with communicative language teaching (CLT) speaking tasks. A group of eight second year university students was taught how to select authentic texts, read at their own pace, and collect new vocabulary independently. Students applied this method for ten weeks, two classes a week. The number of vocabulary items collected, number of questions asked, and results of a pre- and post- TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) reading comprehension test were recorded. Correlations between behaviours and TOEIC scores were calculated, and students' capacity to adopt the method in the cultural and educational setting of Vietnam was examined. While the pre- and post- tests yielded negligible results, this approach appeared to motivate the students in a way that seems unusual in this setting.

Introduction

This study examines the “rational approach” (Gethin & Gunnemark, 1996) that uses students' self-directed exploration of language. For the past fifteen years, I have taught English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Vietnam. This experience has led me to question the effectiveness of the mass-marketed curriculum materials often used for teaching English. From the time I arrived in Vietnam, there was a steady schedule of English classes, full of eager students. I taught in various settings, from language institutes with part-time evening classes for teens and adults a few days a week, to full-time day school for middle and high school, and private instruction at companies one or two days a week. I worked at a college that had a full-time intensive English language certificate program, with three-hour classes five days a week for twelve weeks, over four course levels. Our college increased class time from fifteen to twenty hours a week by adding two classes in the afternoons, in an effort to boost student success rates. When class times were increased with no changes except for putting students through more of the same kind of lessons, I began to question this intense program of lessons and reliance on the textbook, and its methods.

In this article, I will outline a study I undertook as part of a twelve-week course that used learners' self-directed reading, in the presence of a teacher to answer any questions, as its mainstay. In the first part of this article, I will briefly explain the instructional and the ELT context in which the study was undertaken. In the second part, I will describe the methodology, and attempt to evaluate the experience of this study from the point of view of the students and the teachers.¹

Part 1

The Vietnamese Language Education Context

Traditionally, the Vietnamese education system is teacher-centred, with large classes in which the transmission-of-knowledge model is followed. Tran Thi Tuyet (2013) contends that though administrators, lecturers and outsiders criticize Vietnamese students as being passive, “it is the rigidity of the system that causes such meek behaviour.” In observational studies of students in Hanoi, Thompson (cited in Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013a) found that if the teacher takes on the role of authority and transmitter of knowledge, students adopt a passive learning style, but if the teacher is engaging and interactive, students become active and engage in class activities and contribute to the discussion.

Vietnamese students, however, emphasize on accuracy of recall, as do students from other Asian countries. Frequently criticized in the West as a rote approach, in the East “memorization with understanding” is used as a strategy for a deep approach to learning (Chalmers & Volet, 1997, p. 89). In this approach, students go through a series of steps, in which they first simply memorize the information, but later apply it in a deeper way. Biggs (1998) found that many Asian students believed information should first be learned thoroughly in order to allow them to apply it. Thus, for learning a language, they expect to first be explicitly taught its grammar or rules, as they want to learn everything they need to know before speaking.

The Vietnamese Context of ELT

Foreign teaching methods have been steadily becoming the mainstay of Vietnamese ELT since the Ministry of Education made it a part of its new directives starting in the 1990s. This usually results in the same syllabus, taken from the ELT textbook's contents page, being implemented, the same materials taught, and the same methodologies applied to a wide variety of courses. These courses may be for government officials to learn international communication, for engineers to learn to read texts in their respective fields, for high school and university students preparing to live and study abroad, and for elementary students in after-school institutes (Brogan & Ha, 1999). Once I applied to a large university, the most prestigious foreign-based university in the country. To prepare for the interview, I was sent a page from the textbook they would use. It was from the same textbook I had used for 4th graders at evening classes in a language institute.

I was surprised at how much every aspect of students' learning and class time was determined by an ELT course book and accompanying material (hereafter textbooks), one of the same half-a-dozen or so brands, all based on the same method. For EFL in Vietnam, the textbook and the teaching method it brings are synonymous with "curriculum," and unquestioningly accepted (Dang Tieu Yen, 2005). Teachers are required to teach every lesson and every point in the textbook, regardless of the type of course or the students (Breach, 2005). In the many kinds of settings and varied ages I worked with, typically the only difference was the length of time spent in the classroom, since each used the same kind of textbooks, with the same approach and teaching methods. Once I tried to vary the curriculum: I helped a language school

import several boxes of used books on a variety of topics from a city library used-book sale in the United States, to supplement reading instruction. Unfortunately, the books were treated as precious, students were not allowed to take them to read at their leisure.

For Vietnamese students, access to books and libraries could be described as very limited and inadequate (Tien Phuong, 2010; Tin Tan Dang, 2010). In a survey, most Vietnamese University students said textbooks with basic knowledge are their main materials (Nguyen Hien, 2012). A survey by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) found that 20 percent of colleges and universities do not have a library. Other schools have "libraries with no soul", i.e. "no books" (Nguyen Hien, 2012a). Of the 172 libraries in colleges and universities, only 38.9 percent were able to meet standards; 39.7 percent of schools, or 77 schools, reportedly have e-libraries.

Problems with the CLT Approach

The CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) approach of the textbooks does not have its own techniques for teaching vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, as against the traditional grammar-translation or audio-lingual methods it replaced (Tan, 2005). The assumption is that if students are put into activities or tasks, they will naturally learn the language through use. Students are to use their own words, but it can seem as if they have no words at their disposal for the interactive language task.

At several English language schools, students are not allowed to use dictionaries. This leaves them without a resource to understand the text. The ban also extends to materials with translations into the native language and use of the native language in class.

Teachers have to expend a great deal of direct instructional time in front of the whiteboard to somehow explain the vocabulary in the text being read. This instructional time replaces time for students' own search for meaning from the context, or efforts to read independently.

I do not have the space here to enlarge specifically on my experiences with CLT in Vietnam. I shall only say that similar difficulties were reported by teachers in a survey. Four specific problems surfaced: (i) lack of motivation for communicative competence (Tran Thu Thu Trang, 2007); (ii) resistance to class participation (Le Pham Hoai Huong, 2004; Pham Hoa Hiep, 2007); (iii) using Vietnamese during group work; and (iv) low English proficiency (Bock, 2000, p. 25). “These new methods simply do not work given our students' learning style, our culture, and our context” (Pham Hoa Hiep, 2007, p.3). Often when working in speaking lessons, the students were evasive, and actively tried to undermine the language objective of the lesson, or digressed in creative ways. They were exhibiting the kind of resistance described by Holliday (2006) as “social autonomy”—a group resistance to being taught by methods that do not cohere with their worldview. Such local strategies for solving the task-based group and pair work language activities of CLT classrooms is appropriate linguistic and socio-cultural behaviour (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996), and an indication of the curriculum's irrelevance to local contexts (Truong Bach Le, 2004).

From what I could observe, in several cases students emerged from the twelve-week course with less accurate English and a no larger vocabulary than when they started. Very weak students usually did not improve noticeably. Many students participated and followed instructions but were not able to use English independent of the tasks and dialogues of the textbook; they were not able to use English to

express ideas in talk that they had initiated. Students were “following the agenda” of the lesson but not “appropriating that same agenda for their own purposes” (Kinging, 2002, p. 255). On the other hand, the smartest, most able students nearly always started with a high speaking and reading ability because they had either gained proficiency at high school, or on their own. Typically, a successful student had a private tutor or was already able to use English well enough to participate in the activities given in the textbook. These bright students found the classes too long and tedious.

A Successful Non-Conformist

There were some teachers who did not comply with the prescribed curriculum and came up with their own ways of teaching. One college teacher I shared a class with did not follow the curriculum or prepare any lessons at all. The only paper he took into class was the lineless, 8 inch by 11 inch photocopy paper, which he used for all exercises, from surveys to drawing plans to brainstorming. Sometimes, he brought in board games and speaking activities from the recourse pack of extra material, or a movie or a music CD. Being a co-teacher in a class with him was difficult because he would routinely disregard the textbook chapters, leaving the co-teacher to try and catch up. When I looked in his classroom, I saw a variety of activities, where students were all doing different things. Some were speaking to him, others were working on their laptops, still others were reading a book or reciting lines from a play or a movie, and some students were not doing anything. The class seemed to be completely chaotic; the students seemed to have taken charge of the space. They were involved with making movies or projects for much more time than our curriculum permitted. Yet, despite the apparent chaos, the class

and the teacher got along very well, working as a unit. His students developed strong speaking voices in English, and by the end of the course they seemed to be able to express themselves with confidence in fairly accurate English. Also, they seemed to have more outgoing and positive personalities. This raised the question: given a curriculum that cost so much and required so much time and concentration from the students, was it not significant that not using it at all seemed to be just as effective (if not more)?

The Rational Approach

In Gethin's approach, students are taught how to observe and notice language in a rational way while reading or listening. Students make meaning of the target language through cognitive processes that they initiate and guide. I became interested in Gethin's approach after reading an online essay about what Gethin described as an unchecked proliferation of expensive language schools, along with an ELT industry that perpetuates an orthodoxy of lessons which adhere to mass-marketed materials and methods which are unquestioningly accepted but do not work: "what actually happens is that students pay these enormous sums to be *prevented* (italicized in original) from doing what they want to do: learn the language efficiently. . . It is only when they escape from school that they can truly begin learning—if they know how to do it the right way" (Gethin, 2002). This seemed to be a fairly accurate description of the situations I experienced while teaching at language programs in Vietnam.

Prior to this study, I corresponded by email with Gethin. He gave some suggestions: have learners keep a book to log their progress, writing down any new words or grammar points that interest

them. He also said he would not know what to do with students in such a time-intensive class, and suggested I teach for 1/10th of the time and let them learn for the rest of the time. The same pace and degree of learner choice in reading materials has been suggested by Amritavalli (2007) and Lomb (2008), and in Krashen's (2004) comprehension hypothesis and advocacy of free reading.

The preference for whole class learning is a feature of the Vietnamese context that the "rational approach" accommodates. Indeed, Gethin calls for a kind of teacher-fronted instruction that invites and expects spontaneous discussion, and is geared toward individual responses in the large group setting:

If languages are going to continue being taught in classes, the old fashioned method of the teacher talking to the students ("chalk and talk") is still the best. . . . There should be nothing old fashioned about the manner in which the teacher talks. The talk has to be completely informal and flexible. (Gethin & Gunnemark, 1996)

In this approach, the teacher's role is to introduce students to ways of learning, and be a source of correct information. The teacher should be a strong authoritative presence in the class, yet be engaging and flexible with students' needs and questions, independent of lesson parameters; and support students as observant learners responsible for their own learning. In the beginning, teachers need to show students how to observe and what sort of things to observe, but then they must step out of the way and allow them to learn, and check on their progress periodically. When a teacher tries to present information for you to learn by reading to you, choosing books for you, setting lessons, or selecting words for you to notice, it often becomes a kind of interference that actually slows

down or prevents comprehension and acquisition (Gethin, 2002). Others in the ELT field have described similar effects (Marcel, 1875; Krashen, 2004; Amritavalli, 2007; Lomb, 2008). Gethin's (1997) “rational approach” to language learning is a type of self-directed learning (SDL) in ELT that relates to the concept of Learner Autonomy.

Part 2

Overview of the Study

This was a study of self-selected individual student reading of authentic texts at the students' own pace. The course ran two days a week for ten weeks for one and a half hours each day. In the first week, there was a tutorial in the methods of the approach. Then the students worked in class with the teacher present to assist them and answer any questions. There was a pre-and a post-test, using Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC, a standard test often used in tertiary courses in Vietnam), and two other triangulated data points: a checklist record of the number and type of each students' questions, and student-created learning logs. The data were analyzed for correlation between the size of vocabulary collected and gains on TOEIC test. During the study, students had at least three one-on-one talks with the teacher, who made notes of their progress and comments on the method.

Participants

Participants were students at a foreign language and technology university in Vietnam in the second year. They were at the pre-intermediate level of EFL at a university where most students were language and communication majors. The

study group had a total of eight students. This small size may have been due to the school's decision to not award any grade or points for the course. At the presentation of the course, twenty-five students registered and signed research subject agreements. Thereafter, the ELT director of the university asked that the research be conducted as part of a speaking and conversation class. When the researcher explained that the focus of research was on language input through reading, the ELT director wanted to know which text or reading material the teacher would select for students to read. When told that the language material would be student-selected and self-paced, the director decided that no credits could be given for this course because there “was no curriculum”. After that, only eight of the twenty-five students who had registered actually attended the course.

Procedure

The proposal was to replace CLT textbook methods with authentic reading sources selected by the students themselves. These included magazines, storybooks, textbooks or books from the university library. Students were to read at their own pace. During the first week, the teacher explained the basic principles of self-teaching and learning techniques and strategies. A text sample selected by the teacher was used to demonstrate techniques of guiding one's own reading comprehension, including using a dictionary, “guessing” the meaning from the context, and discerning items that needed to be looked up in the dictionary from those that could be guessed at. Students would be responsible for their own grammar knowledge, but had the option of receiving explicit explanations if they so requested. Students were instructed to keep a daily log of their observations, vocabulary and reflections

on things to remember, and their mistakes.

The teacher showed students slides of different types of authentic texts for comparison. The class had to identify the difficulty level of each text, the different purposes they fulfilled, and text resource types (e.g.: periodical, journal, ESL learning book, business English magazine, novel, children's novel). Strategies were explained for understanding unknown words using context clues such as adjacent words, and grammatical aspects of parts of speech and sentence structure. Basic sentence grammar concepts (subject, verb, pronoun, preposition, tense, and aspect) were reviewed. These kinds of exercises are known as focus-on-form (Long, 1991), or consciousness-raising (Sharwood-Smith, 1981). Students also worked on texts with missing words (Cloze exercises). The whole class went through the process of predicting missing words, with the teacher presenting and discussing strategies to do so.

Using a Dictionary and Collecting Vocabulary

Students were shown slides of pages from different kinds of dictionaries and engaged in discussion considering the usefulness of each. They received and went over a text of the most basic phrases, to make sure they knew them all. They were given a basic vocabulary list of four hundred words to make sure they knew the minimum number of words required to read independently (Gethin & Gunnemark, 1996). They were asked to record in their log books new or unknown words that came up in their reading, discriminating between important new words and ones they did not need to remember.

Making a Working Grammar Chart

Students made a personal comprehensive working grammar chart on a sheet of 16 inch by 20 inch paper to review all the basic grammar they could remember, to make sure they were not missing any basic forms, and to understand the concept of a conscious working grammar.

Self-selecting Reading Material

Students were offered a variety of authentic reading material to select from in every class, and also to access the university library. This material included novels, children's novels, graded easy ELT readers, adult ELT essay readers, magazines, reading journals, instruction manuals, ELT textbooks and grammar books. Students were asked to read anything they wanted. This is essentially the idea of extensive reading (Bamford & Day, 1998; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983), free voluntary reading (Krashen, 2006; Mason, 2011), or learner-chosen texts (Amritavalli, 2007; Kumaradas, 1993). The concept of allowing learners free choice of the pace and content of reading is supported by these and other scholars (Krashen, 2004; Lomb, 2008).

Evaluation of the Learning Experience

I will present the evaluation of the rational approach in two parts. In the first part, I describe an attempt to empirically measure the gains. In the second part, I present an experiential account of the activity of self-selected reading.

Primary Research Question and Empirical Data

The results of the TOEIC pre-test and post-test were inconclusive. Nearly all score changes were within limits for standard error of measurement (SEM), and standard error of difference (SEDiff), as stated by the designers of TOEIC (Prolingua, 2016). The graphs in figures 1 and 2 present the students' pre- and post-test scores, together with the amount of self-collected vocabulary, arranged according to descending order of self-collected vocabulary. The numbers assigned to students however reflect the order in which their reading choices have been individually discussed. Again, there appears to be no correlation between vocabulary and TOEIC score.

This confirms the insight in a comment by Krashen, that one would not obtain strong results in a twelve-week classroom study using student-selected reading (Krashen, 2010, personal email communication). Research in self-directed reading and free voluntary reading is usually done over a longer time period (6 months to a year, or even two years). In addition, the TOEIC is not considered to be an effective tool for measuring individual progress, especially in the short term (Andrade, 2014; Childs, 1995).

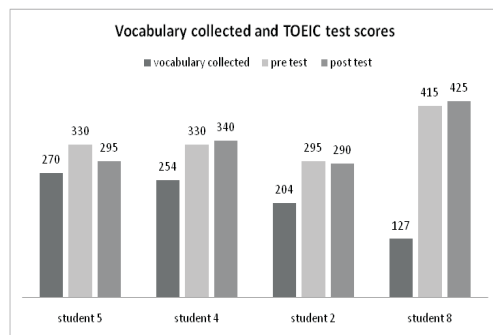


Figure 1. Vocabulary collected and TOEIC test scores for students 5, 4, 2, and 8.

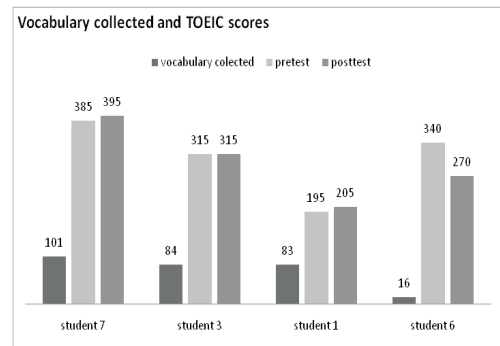


Figure 2. Vocabulary collected and TOEIC test scores for students 7, 3, 1, and 6.

The data on student-initiated questions and amount of vocabulary gathered also yielded no significant findings. Overall, the number of questions recorded was rather low (less than one question per student per class), suggesting that students either did not know when to ask for help, or were confident of their own abilities to learn. Students tended to ask about very distinct and memorable language usage problems. One student asked me to explain the subjunctive verb case in an article in National Geographic. Another student asked about sentences that lacked a subject and appeared to be a fragment that did not make logical sense; this required explaining ellipses and implication as well as the recursive function of some English sentences. One student asked about a sentence with mixed tenses that did not appear to make sense. This was because there was a hidden narrator and characters with different perspectives. They asked about unusual nouns specific to the topic and words not found in a dictionary.

Evaluating the Students' Reaction to the Self-Directed Learning Method

My observation of students and interviews with them indicate that the students

adapted well to the self-directed learning method. After initial hesitation, students were able to take on the learning techniques of self-directed learning and decide what they wanted to read. When asked about their reading choices, they all gave thoughtful and clear reasons. When the students made presentations about words or phrases they had learned, the class was attentive and asked questions. They responded to the method by applying themselves to the course right until the end. It appears that they easily took to their role of "rational" self-directed learners and even enjoyed it. This finding supports the claims of Vietnamese researchers (Thompson, 2009; Tran Thi Tuyet, 2013a; Le Van Cahn, 2004) that students would like the chance to have more autonomy to make decisions about their learning if conditions are set for them.

"A Book Buffet"

To compensate for the inadequate access to reading materials, I brought in a variety of books and magazines from the United States and the United Kingdom to each class in two suitcases and backpack, and placed them out on tables in the front of the room. Students called this the "book buffet", and they appeared very interested and pleased with this arrangement. This positive reaction of the students was significant, because it was an indication of a level of acceptance and comfort in a culture where group meals are the primary focus of social life.

Findings from Interviews with Students about Their Choices and Progress

The student-selected texts seemed to accord with their personal preferences.

This was indicative of a "more real" process in their interacting with the new language, which brought out their own ways of working with language, grammar and topics. Each student seemed to have their own unique adaptation of the learning approach.

Student #1 read entire elementary level books for young readers (totalling over 150 pages). Her language level and pre-test scores were the lowest (in the upper elementary range), and it was difficult to have spoken communication with her in the beginning. She selected an easy reader *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Disney's Junior novelization), and kept at it steadily every day. During the vocabulary presentation, she shared interesting examples of the parts of a large sailing ship. She asked for books on constellations, and read the one I gave her. She also read other children's books. By the end of the course, her speaking was noticeably better.

Student #2 was interested in reading IELTSs and grammar (she did exercises on relative and adjective clauses, and gerunds versus infinitive verb phrases), but she also read short articles from *Reader's Digest* (about 5 pages), and tried to read a few chapters of several elementary level books (about 150 pages). She switched from one book to another and from one story to another without completing them. She was the only student who did not appear to take to the conditions of the method. She kept asking for instructions on what to do next, and was not able to explain the contents of what she had read. I carefully went over a passage with her in Forster's dystopian science fiction short story, *The Machine Stops* (Forster, 1928), to explain the story she had read. However, I found that she did understand, even the subtle points. Despite that, she did not think it was useful for her to read slowly enough to comprehend completely. She said her goal was to increase her IELTS score, and

often questioned the purpose of the method we were following, since she said it did not teach the test-taking skills she needed for scoring on the IELTS.

Student #3 started by reading some stories and textbook articles, but then decided to focus on grammar exercises in a bilingual textbook. She followed a systematic approach and wrote the answers to the exercises in her notes. The book featured different kinds of sentence patterns, with substitution exercises and fill-in-the-blanks. She did not take part in extended reading, but her way of learning was in line with the method of the approach, which suggests doing grammar exercises if one is so inclined and enjoys it. She reported that she found this kind of study satisfying and interesting as it was like solving a puzzle. She felt the course was time well spent in being able to review and consolidate her knowledge of language forms and patterns, and that her confidence and ability at English had improved.

Student #4 was interested in reading short novels, and stories from collections. She read a story for two weeks and then abandoned it because she did not like it. She then chose stories from an (out of use) high school textbook, following which she read five stories from a fiction book *Love Stories*. During the course, she brought several books to donate to the class book collection. She was very enthusiastic about the course and had the best speaking ability, but was absent a lot of time. She reported having learned a lot and felt more confident about using English for communication.

Student #5 read an out of print English as a second language (ESL) literacy textbook (low-intermediate level, with single page readings and comprehension questions). She then tried to read all the National Geographic articles, and essays in an upper-intermediate level literacy textbook. She had a very deliberate and

careful approach, reading and taking systematic notes. The amount of vocabulary collected by her was the highest, and her notes and questions were very specific and thoughtful. This student reported a lot of improvement in terms of her comprehension; she seemed to focus on vocabulary more than anyone else in the course.

Student #6 tried many kinds of books and texts, and finally gravitated toward lower intermediate level reading. He also finished reading a technical manual for driving. He only read one or two pages of three National Geographic articles. He finally settled on a 5th grade science textbook whose topics included "Weather", "Where does wind come from?", "Inside a Cave", and "Icicles in stone". He was interested in minerals, cameras, space and caves, and asked for clarification for a sentence explaining the formation of stalactites and stalagmites. At first, I did not think he was able to comprehend enough English to self-direct his reading, because he did not say much when I asked him about what he was doing. However, as the course continued, he was able to talk more confidently about his progress. He believed he had improved a lot. He became very specific about the questions he asked. I was surprised at the amount of reading he had covered because he was so quiet in the beginning (entire book comprising 126 pages of 3rd grade level; 2 chapters of an adult level book; and 2 other readers (Upper Intermediate level).

Student #7 started by reading *Reader's Digest*, but did not enjoy it because the writers appeared to be complaining and dissatisfied with their lives in a way he could not relate to. He took up American history and authentic American texts. He decided to move on from these as well after encountering many archaic words. He felt Thoreau to be boring and difficult to relate to. He did not want to read National Geographic because it appeared

to focus on war or conflict. Instead he read an anthropological book about the history of human kind, which he found to be satisfactory (he read 3 chapters, 66 pages). He said that the first texts did not "come to life" for him, and it always seemed like he was reading a foreign language slowly, by translating every word. By the end of the course he was reading the anthropology book. He said that he could get much more out of it, and that the words made an impression on him. He thought the course really helped him by allowing him to exercise his mind and learn language differently.

Student #8 was interested in reading either thriller novels or ghost stories. She read one article: "Creatures from hell"; two chapters of a novel, and one entire novel of 416 pages. This student read more than any student, and read at home every day as well. She reported being very involved in the storyline of the novel, and also that it was a rewarding experience to learn English by reading this way. She did not ask many questions, except about unusual meanings not found in a dictionary. She asked about sentences in which the subject was omitted or which contained references outside the sentence, such as ellipses. She described being able to sense and feel and experience the book much the same as a movie or a story, and was surprised that she could read a foreign language book so smoothly. She asked the least number of questions.

Summary and Conclusion

The students' selections of reading materials are reflective of their variety of interests and approaches to reading. Their choices reflect individual themes and preferences for their learning directions. Further, the student-chosen texts appear to be centred around their level of

difficulty, which suggests that students are able to adjust their selection process to their level, and adjust their focus to gap areas in their own knowledge.

One of the most rewarding things about this approach was seeing a new appreciation among the students for extensive independent reading as a part of language learning. In discussions, all students reported an improvement in their understanding and comfort with speaking in English after spending so much time reading English texts. Reading what they wanted at their own pace with a teacher as guide, appeared to transform students into confident speakers, especially when talking about the stories or ideas that they had come across in their reading.

Vietnam has its own education system, and it would be a big assumption to think that a different system could be incorporated into it even in the smallest way. In Vietnam the concept of a student browsing and selecting their own material to read independently as part of their education is not commonly accepted. Where curriculum is delivered by the institution and teachers only deliver the items in the curriculum, it is not realistic to recommend a learning method, where the basic conditions and activities are not generally accepted, understood, or permitted.

Yet the "rational approach" (Gethin & Gunnemark, 1996) includes a practical set of learning techniques. In the present case, this approach gave the students a chance to become confident speakers simply by allowing them to select the topics and vocabulary based on their interests and efforts. While it was very different from what they were used to, it seemed to be an improvement over rigidly following textbook tasks.

This study fell short of finding evidence of the positive effect of this method. However, given the observed and reported

positive effect on learning, it would be a good idea to try a more involved classroom study with a larger group, or a more sensitive form of evaluation than the TOEIC, which has been described as a "rough measure of overall ability" (Andrade, 2014, p. 19). It may also be a good idea to look at the impact of increased access to authentic reading material on speaking proficiency or confidence, and at student and teachers' attitudes to

availability of books in Vietnamese schools.

Notes

1. This study was undertaken as part of my M.A. project submitted to Hamline University. I would like to thank Dr. Dwight Watson, Dr. Andreas Schramm, and Trieu Pham for their guidance and assistance with this project.

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Why Don't EFL Students Read More? Because *“We are tested on what we read in class.”*

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Key Words: Pleasure reading, Acquisition of English, Testing

Abstract

Only 11% of university students enrolled in university classes in English education in Korea considered themselves to be pleasure readers in English. Nearly all agreed that a reason for this is that they are tested on what they read. We argue that comprehension testing on reading results in less reading, less comprehension and less acquisition of English.

Introduction

It has been firmly established that self-selected pleasure reading has a very positive impact on language development (e.g. Krashen, 2011; Smith, 2006; Lee, 2007; Mason and Krashen, 2017; McQuillan, 2019). The question of how and why some young people become readers and remain readers is therefore central (Cho and Krashen, 2016).

Method and Results

We review here data on attitudes toward reading in English among university students training to be elementary school teachers enrolled in classes in English language education in a Korean university. Five groups participated in the study, from five university classes taught in different years at the same university.

All subjects were in their third year in the university. All were majoring in elementary education and minoring in English education. They had studied English in school as a foreign language for 12 years.

Students in all five groups filled out a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester. We present each question followed by students' responses.

Question 1: *Do you consider yourself to be a pleasure reader in English?*

Table 1. Non-readers and readers among students

Group	N	Non-reader	Reader
1	26	25	1(4%)
2	27	24	3(11%)
3	29	27	2(7%)
4	24	20	4(17%)
5	21	17	4(19%)
Total	127	113	14(11%)

Overall, only 11% (14/127) considered themselves to be pleasure readers in English. There was no significant difference between the groups with the highest percentage and lowest percentage of non-readers (groups 1 and 5), $p = .16$, Fisher's Exact test).

Subjects were also asked: *If you don't read in English, why?*

They were given a choice of responses:

1. *Reading in English is difficult.*
2. *Reading in English is no fun.*
3. *Lack of access to interesting books*
4. *We are tested on what we read in class.*

Table 2 presents the number of students who selected each option. Students were allowed to choose more than one option.

Table 2. Reasons: Why not reading

Group	1	2	3	4	5	Total (127)
N	26	27	29	24	21	
Difficult	12(46%)	13(48%)	13(45%)	15(63%)	13(62%)	52%
No Fun	4(15%)	7(26%)	7(24%)	6(25%)	7(33%)	24%
Access	7(13%)	8(30%)	14(48%)	4(17%)	7(33%)	31%
Tested	17(65%)	21(78%)	24(83%)	24(100%)	20(95%)	84%

Note: Group 1 from Cho (2017); numerical errors corrected. Group 2 from Cho (2018)

Responses to the first three questions (reading is difficult, no fun and lack of access to interesting books) produced similar results with one-fourth to one-half of respondents agreeing that they were factors that influenced their English reading habit. All three, it can be argued, are the result of assigned reading of demanding texts that are only comprehensible with a great deal of effort, an approach inconsistent with what is known about language acquisition, that reading material should be comprehensible and interesting. This approach is also inconsistent with Cho and Krashen's (2016) conclusions: They

reviewed factors that successful long-term pleasure readers in English as a foreign or second language had in common: In four out of six cases, readers disclosed that they clearly had sufficient access to books, and all six engaged in self-selected reading.

"We are tested on what we read in class."

This item was by far the most frequently chosen reason for not reading more in English, selected by 84 percent of the students. In two classes, all or nearly all the students selected this option.

There have been no studies documenting the frequency of post-reading comprehension testing, but it appears to us to be very common. The assumption seems to be that testing for content is the only way we can determine that students are really reading and that they understand what they read. We suggest here that testing prevents comprehension, and with it, enjoyment and the desire to read.

If we test comprehension, the result is less comprehension

Comprehension testing forces readers to try to remember what they read while they are reading. We hypothesize that this reduces involvement with the story or ideas in the text, which not only results in less enjoyment but also, ironically, less remembering of what is read.

The traditional view is that we remember things better when we retrieve them more

frequently from memory. Frank Smith has pointed out, however, that this applies only to facts and concepts that are irrelevant to us. Studies supporting the "laws of learning" are based on subjects' trying to remember nonsense words (Smith, 1988). Rather, we remember what is relevant and interesting. This is supported by a series of studies showing that "incidental learning" can be more powerful than "intentional learning" (studies reviewed in Krashen, 2003; 2016).

Thus, being tested on reading is the opposite of what is needed for remembering. Ironically, the books we remember most are those we found highly interesting, not those we were tested on.

We also suspect that anticipation of a test on what we read kills the pleasure of reading. If we were tested on everything we read, many of us would never read voluntarily at all.

It seems that testing can have a devastating effect on attitude, and thus on language acquisition, because it results in less voluntary reading. Other forms of comprehension checking may have a similar effect (Krashen and Mason, 2019).

Testing was mentioned in four of the six cases in Cho and Krashen's study of long-term pleasure readers in English as a second or foreign language. Three had not experienced testing, and one young reader refused to take reading and vocabulary tests that came with the books his mother ordered for him. He reported that he "hated them" (Cho and Krashen, 2002).

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Call for Papers for LLT 18 (July 2020)

Language and Language Teaching (LLT) is a peer-reviewed periodical. It focuses on the theory and practice of language learning and teaching, particularly in multilingual situations. Papers are invited for the forthcoming issues of *LLT* (LLT18 onwards). The references must be complete in ALL respects, and must follow the APA style sheet. All papers must include an abstract (100-150 words) and a set of key words (maximum 6 keywords). Papers MUST be written in a style that is easily accessible to school teachers, who are the primary target audience of this periodical. The articles may focus on the learner, teacher, materials, teacher training, learning environment, evaluation, or policy issues. Activities focusing on different languages are also invited. The article must be original and should not have been submitted for publication anywhere else. **A statement to this effect must be sent along with the article.**

The upper word limit (including the abstract, key words, references and a short bio-note) for each contribution in different sections of LLT is:

Article: 2000-2200 (it could be extended to 3000 words if it has some theoretical significance);

Interview: 2500-3000; Landmark: 2500-3000

Book Review: 1000-1500; Classroom Activity: 750; Report: 1000

The bio-note should not exceed 30 words.

Papers must be submitted as a word document in MS Office 7. Please send the fonts along with the paper if any special fonts are used. For images, please send jpeg files.

Last date for the submission of articles:

January Issue: August 15; July Issue: February 15

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Interview

R. Amritavalli (RA) talks to Chiranjiv Singh (CS)

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Amritavalli is a theoretical linguist with an interest in first and second language acquisition. She has retired from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, and lives in Bengaluru.

Chiranjiv Singh has been called a “Renaissance man”. A former Ambassador of India to UNESCO in Paris, Singh is an administrator with a keen interest in art, literature, music and languages. He retired in 2005 as additional chief secretary to the Government of Karnataka, which honoured him with a “Rajyotsava” award. He has been President of the Alliance Française, Bangalore, receiving the French knighthood, Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite; and served on the governing bodies of the Indian Institute of Science and the Institute of Social and Economic Change (both in Bengaluru).

Impelled by a love of literature, Chiranjiv Singh has acquired and learnt to read a dozen languages in addition to his native Panjabi, namely Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi/Urdu, Kannada, Marathi, and Tamil, apart from Arabic, English, French, and German. When he looked at the theme statement for this issue of *LLT*, his immediate response was that the municipal workers and shop assistants around his home in Bengaluru spoke at least three or four languages that they had learnt on their own. A Tamilian, for example, would speak Kannada, and Hindi and English, as would a person from the north-east of India:

CS: Yes, in India it is happening all the time. Because in many cases, the mother tongue is different from, you can say, the bazaar or the outside language. Even in what we consider the Hindi heartland, for example, the mother tongue could be Bhojpuri or Maithili, which is different from the standard *sarkari* (official) type of Hindi, that is, the Rajabhasha. So, most Indians would be in that sense bilingual in any case.

Some of those who are known for going out, like Panjabis, Malayalis, Gujaratis, they tend to pick up the local language and it's normally through informal settings. They intermingle with the people and often it's a process of linguistic osmosis. In many cases, for work purposes, for business, they need to learn the local language, and they do it. It happens all the time in India.

In my case, when I came to Karnataka—I came to Karnataka at the age of 25—the official work was done in English. There was no pressure to learn Kannada as such. In fact, many of the previous generation[s] of IAS officers from other states never learnt Kannada. I was interested in languages myself from the beginning, so that's a different matter; but otherwise, we had no arrangements for teaching Kannada. When I was in the Administrative Training Institute [ATI], I

got the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore to prepare Kannada lessons for outsiders, IAS, IPS, IFS, which they did. Now, anyone coming from outside is given a thorough grounding in Kannada at the ATI, but in our days, this was not the case.

So, when I learnt Kannada, I first started listening to Kannada songs and then seeing Kannada films: starting with mythologicals, because there you know the story. If it is *Lava-Kusha* or *Sita Kalyaanam*, you know what is happening; and fortunately, I am still very fond of mythologicals and folktales, because in our childhood, we were permitted to see only mythologicals and folklore films. So, these I started seeing in my first posting, and I saw all those films, *Katthari Veera*, *Jagadeka Veerana Kathe*, etc., any folklore or mythological film. Then I learnt the alphabet, and after that I stopped getting English newspapers and started taking only the Kannada newspapers and reading them. Basically I learnt Kannada from films and songs. The songs - you see, you remember the tune, and P. B. Srinivas became a great favourite of mine; so if a song was playing, "*be[adingal]ina nore-haalu koḍadali tumbi tando[le]*" ["The foaming milk of moonlight she has brought filled into a pitcher"], I would ask what is *koḍa*, they would say [pitcher]. *Malligeya hambu* is the (jasmine) creeper—so like that you build up the vocabulary; but I never had any lessons in Kannada as such. No formal learning.

RA: But now you read Kannada literature.

CS: I do, that is because as I said I was interested in languages from the beginning. It was something I can't explain, because even as a child, in my 6th or 7th class during summer vacation, my hobby was to create new scripts. So, the interest in languages was there, but my learning in Kannada was informal.

Whereas, German I learnt formally; but

French again I learnt informally when I was posted in France. Before that, in 1960, my father had got Hugo's French language course, you know, Hugo's courses, so those books were at home; and I had done matriculation. In between matriculation and college, you have three months' time, so I started reading those French books. It was informal self-teaching, but later on I was posted to Paris. For three and a half years I was there, but again it was informal learning. I never attended classes as such.

Other languages also, when I was posted to Belgaum, I learnt Marathi. As Marathi script is the same as Hindi, that was not a problem. Again, listening to Marathi friends' speech, and taking Marathi papers, and Marathi magazines, and I started reading Marathi literature; and I am still getting a Marathi newspaper – Similarly Gujarati, I picked up on my own because again –

RA: Were you posted in Gujarat?

CS: No, I just picked it up. I mean I was in Ahmedabad for three months once, and my host was getting Gujarati newspapers, so one fine morning, I just picked up the papers and a couple of times I would ask them, what is this or what is the meaning of this. Otherwise, I was on my own, and now (gestures at his bookshelves) there you can see Gujarati books there – K. M. Munshi's –. So, I mean most of the language learning in my case has been through informal means – Urdu again, of course at home, my parents taught me the Urdu script.

RA: Was Panjabi at one point written in Urdu script?

CS: Here on this side it is Gurmukhi, in Pakistan, it is what they call Shahmukhi which is modified Persian script. So, I started reading Urdu and wherever I needed to ask something, I would ask my

father or mother.

RA: Your home had (as you mentioned elsewhere) Persian, Urdu books ...

CS: Yes, I was fortunate in that sense because both my parents knew three-four languages, and they were both fond of reading. I grew up in a house with books around me. When I was to be put into school, the best school in that area was just across the road – like these shops opposite. So, I was put in that school, and that was the Anglo-Sanskrit High School – Hindi medium, with Sanskrit compulsory!

RA: It was called the Anglo-Sanskrit High School? Which city?

CS: Its name is Anglo-Sanskrit High School. Khanna, in Punjab. A.S. High School, it is quite a famous school.

RA: It was Hindi medium, but called Anglo-Sanskrit!

CS: Because Sanskrit was compulsory.

RA: English and Sanskrit were compulsory.

CS: Yes. It was Anglo-Sanskrit High School, A.S. High School. The mother tongue was Panjabi, the first language in school became Hindi, and I was taught English at home, so it was quite a linguistic mix. Most of the language learning in my case has been informal. Like in many cases in India, people learn informally.

RA: Except for German, you said.

CS: German, yes, German I learnt formally, because I had gone to Germany to do Ph.D., but then I got selected in the IAS, so I came back.

RA: What were you going to do a Ph.D. in?

CS: Linguistics.

RA: Linguistics! Oh, our loss! Where in Germany?

CS: Heidelberg.

RA: Heidelberg, oh my goodness.
(laughter)

CS: So, I came back, and during the period that I had to write the exam and wait for the results and interview, etc., those five-six months, I taught German in the Panjab University, because the German teacher had gone back to Germany, and she recommended my name, so I was appointed straightaway as German teacher.

RA: So, you took courses?

CS: I took courses in German.

RA: How [Where] did you study German? In Heidelberg?

CS: No, no, in Goethe Institut. Actually, when we were in Libya—my father was posted in Libya—I joined Goethe Institut's classes; and there I [also] picked up Arabic because we were in Libya and Egypt.

RA: So, is that script different, the Arabic, from the Urdu script?

CS: No, Urdu is a modified Arabic-Persian script, because of additional sounds which Arabic does not have; for that they have additional symbols.

RA: So how many languages do you know? About twelve, I was told; or more than twelve?

CS: Actually – twelve, thirteen, or so.

RA: "Twelve, thirteen, or so" – you have lost count! And we have trouble teaching three in school!

CS: At this age, if somebody asks me how many do you know, I say I am in the process of forgetting many!

RA: Because you wanted to read literature, so – you picked up the script also.

CS: Basically, yes. Marathi because I wanted to read Marathi literature; Gujarati, Kannada, Hindi, Panjabi; Sanskrit was there, Bangla. Yes, Bangla I learnt on my own because I wanted to read Tagore in Bengali. No translation does justice to Tagore. So I learnt Bengali. Actually, I had gone to Bengal for a camp for one month. During that period, I learnt the alphabet there, and then continued.

RA: Continued by reading the literature? Or newspapers?

CS: I ordered this book, *Teach Yourself Bengali*. Having learnt the alphabet, [I learnt a] bit of grammar from *Teach Yourself Bengali*, and then I was on.

RA: So, you went straight into Tagore?

CS: Straight.

RA: So, for you, the language is visual as well as auditory.

CS: Yes, yes.

RA: You seem to have mostly picked it up, by looking at it as well as listening to it—after your twenties and even later. You know there is this popular belief that

children should be put into English medium schools as early as possible, English is very hard to learn later...

CS: I don't know – you see, I was sent to school at the age of six, because my grandparents thought I was too weak physically to go to school. I was with my grandparents. But at home, they started teaching me the English alphabet, and the result was, we attended a wedding, this is before I joined the school, and you had those lights, you know, the moving lights. "Welcome" was written in those moving kind of lights and I was wondering, I asked somebody, "Welcome? 'Well' is *baavi* (Kannada for 'a well'), the *kuan* (Hindi for 'a well'), why are they saying, "Come into the well?" Everybody started – laughing! So, we spoke Panjabi at home, I was taught English and Urdu script at home. By the time I joined the school, at school it was Devanagari – but I don't think you have to put children into English medium schools, I am not in favour of it. English from the 6th standard or 5th standard is good enough.

RA: That was indeed the recommendation, officially, by all the English teaching bodies – and the basic subjects should be taught in the mother tongue up to the 10th standard?

CS: Absolutely. India is signatory to the UNESCO convention on mother tongues, so I don't know why this is not being taken up more seriously, that medium of education should be the mother tongue.

RA: But can I play Devil's advocate here, and tell you that even the mother tongue is not taught in such a way that it is properly learnt?

CS: Because, you see, enough attention is not being paid to teaching in the mother tongue.

RA: So what should be the thing we do?

CS: You need to have schools in Indian languages which are comparable to English medium schools. When I had to put my children in school in Mysore, I was then posted at Mysore, I asked the District Education Officer, I want a good Kannada medium school, because I wanted the children to go to a good Kannada medium school. But after going around, he came to me and he said, "Sir, there is no good Kannada medium school", so I put them in St. Joseph's which is English medium. I said all right, they have gone to this but at least let the first language be Kannada.

Now, here the question is you don't have anywhere in Karnataka good Kannada medium schools which are comparable to good English medium schools. This is one problem, and this is not only in Karnataka, it's all over. Except, perhaps, in Maharashtra. I have a friend in Pune. He came back from America after many years, and we were talking, he had to put his daughter in school, and this is one of the reasons why he returned. So I said, "Sushrut, put her in [a] Marathi medium school, and she would in any case, learn English. Otherwise, she would not learn Marathi". So he put her in a Marathi medium school. Everybody thought he was spoiling the child's future and all that, but he is so happy now. He said she has learnt English in any case, she is very good in Marathi and as a bonus, she has learnt Hindi because the script is the same...Which means Pune has at least one good Marathi medium school, which somebody coming back from abroad can put the child into.

RA: So when we say "good", what do we mean?

CS: Good, I mean in both academic terms as well as physical infrastructure.

RA: Academically? Some sense of a

modern approach to what learning means, or involves, which is missing?

CS: Yes, also text books, which is another weak point in Indian languages.

RA: So you do need to modernize?

CS: Definitely, both the subject and the content. You see, the other problem in our textbooks is, instead of making children learn the language and make the content interesting for the children, we want to make the books didactic. You have to sensitize them to this, you have to sensitize them to that – at a later stage it is okay, you can say from 5th standard onwards, you can talk of gender equality, environment, etc., but until the 5th class, why do you have to bother about that? In fact, whenever I was learning a new language, fortunately, *Chandamama* was published in all these Indian languages, I would subscribe to *Chandamama* in that language.

RA: Which is a child's magazine, or mythological ...

CS: Yes, I think there has been no publication like *Chandamama*.

RA: It has stopped now?

CS: It has stopped, unfortunately stopped many years ago.

RA: This is an important thing, because to give it a professional label, it is called age-appropriate material. And nowadays, there are so many misconceptions about how children should be taught language. One misconception is that books should not have pictures. I have actually come across this.

CS: Should not have pictures? What on earth for?

RA: Because, they said, it distracts them from the text.

CS: No, the book should be as beautifully produced as possible. It should be attractive to hold, attractive to see. *Panchatantra* is our great example, *Hitopadesha*, *Panchatantra*. Because these naughty or silly princes would not learn anything, Vishnu Sharma was asked to give lessons, and those stories are still great, absolutely. With that example in India, we still have this kind of thinking, I can't understand. Such lovely folktales, such great fairytales in India, such a wealth of traditional narratives, and in the 3rd standard, we have to talk about teaching children this or that! First let them learn the language.

RA: You know, we talked about the success of our people in learning languages informally—we were talking about the *paurakarmikas* and the shop assistants. But somehow, when it comes to school and learning languages, all these natural learning language abilities are thrown away, switched off.

CS: Yes, the teachers need to be re-trained, the language teachers need to be re-trained, and the textbooks need to be re-oriented. As I said, at least up to the 4th or 5th standard, don't try to be didactic. Just make it interesting.

If you want to teach about cleanliness, there are any number of stories even in our folktales about cleanliness. Pick one of those. You don't have to, at the end of the story, say "Moral!" which I have seen earlier in some textbooks, there would be a story and at the end, "Moral."

Language books, especially for children, should not be didactic. They should be interesting. You can have in Social Studies all your ideas about environment, that can come in there, but why in language teaching? I remember in my

children's 3rd or 4th standard Kannada book, there was a lesson on Lal Bahadur Shastri in which it was mentioned—in a 3rd standard book!—that he did not take dowry. You are talking to a 7- or 8-year-old child, and you're saying [this]. First, why have a story on Lal Bahadur Shastri? And then, why have this, that he did not take dowry! This is the problem with our textbooks for children.

RA: Written by adults for adults, it does not take the child's perspective.

CS: When we have *Hitopadesh*, we have *Panchatantra*, we have such a wealth of folktales, and you have to say so-and-so did not take dowry in the 3rd standard text book!

RA: Is it some anxiety to make the child a small adult? I think there are two views of the child, one that the child is a kind of Wordsworthian Father to the Man, a Rousseau kind of idea; and the other, which seems to prevail now, that the child should be moulded as soon as possible into a miniature adult. Do you think that might be one of the problems?

CS: You see, the span of childhood is shrinking. You have children who at the age of 2 are almost addicted to smart phones because the parents use smart phones for keeping them occupied, and this loss of childhood, to my mind, is one of the tragedies of the modern age. Let children be children. That is why in the Scandinavian countries and countries like Switzerland, the minimum age for school children is 6. Unfortunately, I think because of the hold of the English language, we don't know what is happening in Finland, because we have no connection with Finnish or Swedish, or what is happening in Switzerland.

In the entire world, educationally Finland is supposed to be number 1, followed by other Scandinavian countries, and school

admission is at the age of 6. Before that, it is just nursery, playschool, etc. Now, in Europe—I have seen because during my postings in Europe my children went to school there—the pressure goes on increasing as you go up, and the maximum pressure I have seen is at the Ph.D. level. In India, the maximum pressure is at the +2 stage! Which is—something is totally wrong with our educational system, which has its impact on language teaching also. Language should be learnt naturally.

RA: But what about children who may not have the home advantage?

CS: I am a founder trustee of an NGO called Sampark. It's a 27-year-old NGO. Now, we are working with children of migrant workers. And these are mostly construction workers and they come from Odisha, they come from Tamil Nadu, they come from Andhra. Also, now increasingly from North Karnataka. And we see that the children—for example the mother tongue would be Oriya, but here the child is exposed to Kannada also, and given the opportunity, the children learn. Except that it should not be forced. Force feeding should not be there.

We are not bothered about English at this stage, because most of the teachers here who work with these children are Kannada speaking teachers. So obviously, the teaching begins in Kannada. Some of them know Hindi, so those who come from Jharkhand, and all those children, it's a mix of Hindi and Kannada, etc., and the children learn. The children learn because this is an informal setting, and not a school with a teacher with a stick. Children learn, and we are happy with the progress of the children.

Landmark

Psychology of Learning for Teachers: Preparing for Classroom Inquiry

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Key Words: Understanding learners, Practitioner research, Initial teacher preparation

Abstract

This paper is a plea to enable prospective teachers to use the conceptual frameworks, tools and approaches that the discipline of psychology has to offer, so as to understand how children learn. In the course of reviewing Michael Howe's classic book *A Teacher's Guide to the Psychology of Learning* (1999/1984), I will make a distinction between gaining knowledge of theories of learning as mere information, and a deeper "understanding" that allows teachers to research learning in the context of their own classrooms. I will argue that initial teacher education programmes should shift focus from teaching theories of learning as a product to be assimilated, to understanding the processes used to generate these theories.

Prelude

Educational psychology has long been recognized as an important domain of study for initial teacher preparation, and has been one of the "foundation" courses in pre-service teacher education programmes in most countries (Poulou, 2005). In his classic book *A Teacher's Guide to the Psychology of Learning* (1999/1984), Michael Howe reiterates that "all teachers should be experts in human learning". In the course of reviewing the book, I will argue that such expertise is gained not by mere knowledge "of the mechanisms and causes of learning", as Howe suggests in his preface to the book, but by providing teachers with opportunities to learn the methods and tools that the discipline of modern cognitive psychology has opened up. It becomes especially important for prospective teachers to understand how children learn in out-of-school contexts as well. I will use the current curriculum reform efforts in teacher education and a survey conducted in Karnataka as illustrative cases to frame my argument.

The Book

In his preface to the second edition of the book, Howe (1999) provides an overview of "the contributions of modern cognitive psychology to our understanding of those kinds of learning that are needed for making progress in the school classroom". The first two chapters provide a very brief introduction to learning during infancy and preparation for learning at school. The crux of the book lies in chapters 3 to 5, where Howe describes studies that provide evidence for "three related and interdependent ways of aiding learning", namely encouraging mental activities, providing adequate practice and building on existing knowledge (p. 42). He combines a brief description of relevant

research studies and their findings with practical guidance for teachers to consciously trigger children's cognitive processes. It is the former that will be of most interest to teachers, for reasons I will elaborate in the last section.

In Chapter 3, titled "Mental Activities and Human Learning", Howe presents a series of three experiments by Brabsford, Nitsch & Franks (1977); Bower & Karlin (1974) and Craik & Tulving (1975) (as cited in Howe, 1999), to make the point that instructions which require participants to mentally process the pictures or words they are looking at, lead to significantly greater retention of these pictures and words. He goes on to elaborate that "memory for meaningfully perceived items is related to the extensiveness of mental processing," along with a description of an additional experiment with "more precise experimental control" (p. 30). To rule out the possibility that "extensiveness of mental processing" merely mean the time taken to do the processing, Howe gives the example of another study by Rogers, Kuiper & Kirker (1977). In this experiment, "carefully designed questions about aspects of the words other than their meanings" ensured that participants took just as long to answer non-meaning focussed questions as questions that focussed on meaning (p. 31). Nevertheless, recall of words whose meanings needed to be attended to was much higher than recall of words introduced by other tasks, such as the identification of a particular consonant-vowel pattern.

Thereafter, the same experiment of recalling words was conducted with an added condition of "self-reference", where participants were asked to identify if the words displayed (all adjectives) described themselves. They found that "participants' recognition of these items were twice as accurate as for words that followed a conventional question about the word's meaning" (p. 31). Meaning that is personally relevant to participants is what

accounts for better recall of words. In the next section, Howe quotes Craik & Tulving (1975, as cited in Howe, 1999) again, to indicate that a conscious intention to learn was not an important factor in determining what was in fact learnt; with the caveat, "(t)hat is not to say incentives and intentions have no effect in everyday learning. However, the present results do indicate that their effects are indirect ones" (p. 33). These sets of experiments broadly suggest that engaging in mental processing of meaning, in particular, meaning that is personally relevant to a learner, leads to better retention.

It would have helped if Howe had described the context of these experiments better. Also, knowledge of the age group of the participants would have helped analyse issues such as what it would mean for a teacher who is attempting to teach a new word to older children, or when a young child picked up new vocabulary. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how studies build on one another in an attempt to increasing the explanatory power of these findings. They also offer teachers ideas and tools to help them observe the learning processes of their students, and avoid essentialising labels such as "slow learner" or "uneducable". Howe devotes the rest of the chapter to elaborate upon ways of supporting learning by structuring information (for example using a narrative strategy) and creating mental images.

In Chapter 4, Howe rues that the importance of repetition and practice in learning is not adequately recognized. He reports a number of studies to build his argument that "gaining of capabilities and competence is largely a result of steady progress that takes place as a consequence of frequent and regular learning activities, among which repetition, rehearsal and practice play prominent roles" (p. 53). The next chapter provides some strategies that can help

students become successful learners, by building on what they already know, and these are elaborated further in Chapters 8 and 9 on training for comprehension and extending writing skills. For example, drawing on research conducted by Ausubel (1968, as cited in Howe, 1999) and Bransford et al (1981, as cited in Howe, 1999), Howe suggests that to enhance learning, a teacher can help her students forge new knowledge to existing knowledge through advanced organizers, or by means of directing them "towards those parts of their prior knowledge that can illuminate the links that exist between new facts that are apparently unrelated to each other" (p. 72).

In Chapter 6 on "Intelligence and Human Abilities", Howe reviews a substantial amount of literature to break a myth held by many teachers and parents that intelligence is largely unchangeable, or that it is innate. He also debunks the ability of intelligence tests to predict success in later life by quoting a study on Chinese immigrants, whose average IQ was lower than that of white Americans when they first arrived in America soon after World War II. However, they were far more successful, for example in terms of professional job status, three decades later (Flynn, 1991). While acknowledging "inherited differences", Howe quotes research on infants (Shaffer & Emerson, 1964; Korner, 1971; White, 1971; Escalona, 1973) to show that "(t)he ways in which genetic influence have their effects on broad traits are rarely simple" (p. 106).

In the course of discussing the role of training in actively promoting effective learning techniques (in the last two chapters), Howe mentions that these skills are not easily transferred into new settings, but does not reflect on why this is so. The situated nature of learning is now well established (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as is the social context of learning (Vygotsky et al., 1978; Bruner, 1986).

Current Curriculum Reforms in Initial Teacher Education

It was only a decade ago that policy makers in India recognized that it is important to introduce prospective teachers to socio-cultural aspects of learning (NCTE, 2009) along with "psychology of education" that had hitherto drawn on a behaviourist paradigm (Batra, 2005). All student teachers now study what are considered seminal theories of learners and learning (NCTE, 2014).

The current national curriculum framework for initial teacher education stipulates that "(s)tudent-teachers will understand theories of learning as conceptualized currently within psychology and cognitive science" (NCTE 2014, p.10). The document lists Mukunda (2009), Piaget (1997) and Vygotsky (1997), presumably as suggested readings to shape such an understanding. In fact, these readings provide excellent opportunities to understand theories of learning. For example, Kamala Mukunda's books *What did you ask at School today* Books 1 & 2 (2009 & 2019) give an accessible account of current discourses on learners and learning, along with illustrations. But they need to be "read" beyond an understanding of their theoretical formulations, if indeed these theories are to give teachers insights into how children learn in different contexts. As Duckworth (2006) argues, teachers need to think "like" Piaget instead of "about" him (p. 83). This is neither trivial nor self-evident, as the following survey shows.

The Survey

In 2012, a survey was undertaken in the state of Karnataka to study the status of initial teacher education in the

elementary sector. The survey included a purposive sample of 108 teacher education institutes (representing 10.8 per cent of the total number of institutes that were functional in Karnataka at that time). As part of the study, 10,279 student teachers enrolled in these institutes and 606 faculty of education were asked to rate the courses according to their relevance to teaching practice, on a three-point scale (with 2 being highly relevant and 0, irrelevant). In the study, psychology of education was consistently rated as highly relevant, and received higher ratings than pedagogy courses, both from the student teachers and their faculty (Karnataka Knowledge Commission, 2012). In an earlier small scale study, 25 newly appointed teachers, who had completed their pre-service programme within the previous two years, were given the same task and this cohort also reported that psychology of education was most relevant to them as teachers (Ramchand, 2009). However, when they were asked to describe what aspects of the course they found most relevant, or even recall what they had learnt in the course, they were unable to remember anything significant (other than a few of them mumbling "something to do with chimpanzees and a salivating dog"). Student teachers who were undergoing the course could also do no better than recalling Piaget's name and stage theory.

Subsequently the elementary teacher education curriculum in Karnataka was revised to ensure tighter linkages between theory and practicum courses (DSERT, 2016).

The Need for Practitioner Research on Learning

Children are learning all the time, both within the formal school setting and

outside. To engender meaningful academic learning, teachers need to understand how children learn. To formulate this understanding, teachers themselves need to be supported more robustly than what is envisaged in the current curriculum reforms. As practitioners, they need to be supported to undertake research on students' learning in the context of their classrooms. Foreman-Peck & Winch (2010) argue that practitioner research is essential for teaching effectively, and developing deep knowledge and professional values among educators. Further, there is evidence that an inquiry-driven teacher preparation programme supports robust learning among students (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012).

Student teachers and their faculty require physical and cognitive accessibility to research on learning. Books such as Howe's could be one such source. While dated, the book is useful in terms of giving practitioners accessible accounts of research. Mukunda (2009; 2019) gives a more updated account of what we understand about children's learning in simple and lucid language. Her books are

more in the nature of a summary of current knowledge on learning, which while crucial for practitioners, must also enable them to discern available evidence to make sense of what is useful for their classrooms. The Faculty of Education must help student teachers unpack the methods, and conceptual and analytical tools that researchers use to arrive at these understandings. This will enable student teachers to engage in "critical explorations" if they are to generate knowledge about how learning happens within their own contexts once they are employed as teachers (Duckworth, 2006). This assumes significance in the dynamic context of classrooms, given that teaching and learning are complex processes.

If the current curriculum reforms initiated in teacher education are to take root so that teachers are able to meet the diverse learning needs of children for a fast changing, complex future, prospective teachers need to be equipped not only with the knowledge that research on learning throws up, but also with robust inquiry skills to be able to function as autonomous agents of change.

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Book Review

Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching: New Research Agendas

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Autonomy in Language Learning and Teaching: New Research Agendas

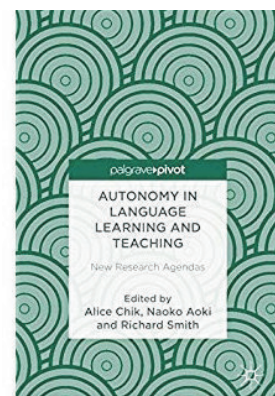
London: Palgrave Pivot (Springer Nature, Macmillan Publishers). (116 pages).

Chik, Alice, Aoki, Naoko & Smith, Richard (Eds.) (2018).

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Reviewed by: R. Amritavalli



If the title of this edited volume of 6 Chapters (Chapter 1 the Introduction) suggests proximity of its concerns to the theme of this issue of *LLT* – informal language learning by adults, its subtitle “New Research Agendas” is perhaps portentous of its departures from that theme. Exploring the “who, what, when, where and why” of learner autonomy (Introduction, p. 2), the book takes us into “contextual constraints” (Chapter 3), “group processes” (Chapter 4), “digital practices” (Chapter 5), and “human geography and mediated discourse analysis” (Chapter 6). Chapters 3 and 4

deal with formal learning contexts. Nevertheless, there are connections between its explorations and the concerns in this *LLT*.

Autonomy has been defined as “the capacity to take control of one’s learning” (Benson, 2001/2011); individual authors in the book all mention Benson. Part of this phraseology is now made familiar by Brexit sloganeering. The definition’s invocation of “capacity” entails presuppositions of incapacities for autonomy: cultural, economic and individual. However, the book begins by convincingly rebutting these

presuppositions, in Chapter 2. This chapter by Smith, Kuchah and Lamb, entitled "Learner Autonomy in Developing Countries", is licenced for open access under the Creative Commons Attribution. Smith et al. argue that given the "difficult circumstances" of teaching in developing countries (West, 1960), "successful language learners ... are autonomous learners who can exploit out-of-school resources" (Abstract, p. 7). Provincial learners in Indonesia "(e)ven at the age of 12-14 ... were able to distance themselves from their school English classes" (and teachers!) (p. 10); mobile phones provided internet access, which brought within their reach dictionaries, language learning websites, and Facebook friendships with foreigners as well as fellow-Indonesians. Referencing Sugata Mitra's well-known "hole-in-the-wall" experiments, these authors set, as a first research priority, studies of out-of-class learning through mobile phones and the internet (see, in this context, the newspaper report in *The Times of India*, Bengaluru, October 11, 2019: https://m.timesofindia.com/india/stuck-on-a-maths-problem-these-social-media-apps-could-help-you/amp_articleshow/71536748.cms).

Smith et al. go even further. Autonomy, they say, is "an essential characteristic of all successful learners and can be found everywhere if we know how to look" (p. 18). It may be missed by "western eyes" because it takes "varied forms" in different settings. Their second research priority is therefore "more research into and sharing of success stories of teaching in low-resource classrooms." Pointing out that "the exchange of educational ideas is ongoing and multidirectional" (p. 15), they tellingly recapitulate how, a little over 200 years ago, a "Madras System" was introduced into the bulging schools of an industrializing Britain ("England was at that time, after all, the epitome of a 'developing country'", p. 16). This system was a form of peer-teaching and collaborative learning built on

a traditional Tamil form of literacy teaching, where a master would instruct older children in how to draw letters and words in sand, and they would then help younger children to write and pronounce them, thereby enabling far more children to learn to read and write than would be otherwise possible.

Finally, and importantly, Smith et al. argue in favour of decolonization of ELT through "a participant-centred approach" to research, with and by learners (Kuchah, 2013; Pinter, Mathew and Smith, 2016), and teachers or teacher associations (a couple of projects from India find mention: AINET, the All-India Network of English Teachers, and Naidu et al. 1992).

Chapter 3 by Gao, which describes the cultural context of teaching English in East Asian countries, finds its echoes in Philip Scott's narrative (this issue) of introducing self-selected free reading in a college in Vietnam, in the face of mass-marketed materials. Gao adopts a current premise that "learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are interdependent," not least because "teachers who did not experience autonomy in learning ... are unlikely to support ... autonomous learning" (pp. 30-32). In other words, teachers tend to teach as they were taught. He identifies, from internet discussions in mainland China and Hong Kong (in an online teachers' community, and responses to a query in an article about teachers' errors on an English proficiency test whether teachers are responsible for students' falling language standards), three major constraints on teacher autonomy. These are: bureaucratic control (a tight regime of accountability that subjects teachers' professional standards to external scrutiny), an "educational consumer" culture born out of the "marketization of education", and a cultural tradition that simultaneously deifies teachers and reviles them for perceived failures.

The first and the third constraints are well-known in India, the second (to my mind) less so. British-origin communicative ELT materials here have to find their place amidst a robust public as well as private ELT publication presence. Institutions such as the NCERT and the SCERTs received their impetus in this regard from the pioneering efforts of Makhan Lal Tickoo's Department of Materials Production at the then Central Institute of English (see Tickoo, 2008). As for bureaucratic control and external standards of accountability, this might be an inevitable by-product of the push towards professionalization. Teachers are not unique in this respect. Lawyers and doctors, for example, have workload requirements, and are nevertheless expected to be competent and stay updated in their professions. (Doctors have also emerged in India as victims of the consumerist stance of the patient and their "party".)

But what sets language teachers apart from doctors and other professionals is the nature of language and its acquisition. Knowledge of a language is not the received and codified knowledge of a "subject" such as medicine, law, or physics (Chomsky, 1975). Language acquisition must invoke the "instinctive" growth and automation of mental structures in the individual learner's mind, in a supportive environment (Pinker, 1994). The language teacher's knowledge domain is the capacity to detect and promote the "occurrence of learning" (Prabhu, 1987) in the individual learner, i.e. to invoke ZPD (the Zone of Proximal Development, discussed again below). The teacher has no prescribed and pre-prepared diagnostic/remedial kit for individual learners. This is why the bureaucratic response to learning "failure" of "more of the same" curriculum or methodology is futile (see Philip Scott in this issue). The reflective teacher-practitioner sees this futility. Without autonomy, no language teaching or learning is possible. This is why language teachers gripe about bureaucratic control.

Palfreyman (Chapter 4) finds that curriculum planners and teachers now see autonomy and group/pair work as "key tenets" in language education, and sets out to "understand ... how autonomy and groups can work and develop together in practice" (p. 53). Working in a group is a highly valued "soft skill" (p. 55). Collaborative learning has its theoretical underpinnings in the Vygotskian ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development), and India's monitor method for Tamil literacy (the "Madras System" referred to in the first chapter). Contra Palfreyman, ZPD does not entail that "learning happens in interaction and is only then internalized" (p. 57); or that "interdependence is... a necessary, initial stage" (p. 59) of scaffolding for self-regulation. Nevertheless, this is a useful discussion of the possibilities and pitfalls afforded by group learning, where "collective intelligence", "community of practice" and "positive interdependence" must balance the negative effects of the "free rider".

Subtypes of positive interdependence are mentioned that appear to be particularly relevant to team sports. Education now has its own team sport, namely school quiz contests. The following example of collaborative preparation for tests may thus be relevant; it may serve also as a healthy counter to the prevailing individualistic culture of an aggressive pursuit of marks. In this example, learners revise as a group for a test they then take individually; "then the score of one of members, chosen at random, is given to all members of the group." On this somewhat startling procedure, students "not only gained higher scores than another group which had worked individually but also had more positive attitudes towards the test and the class" (p. 58). The claim that "peer assistance seems to have benefits in terms of autonomous learning for the provider of help ... peer tutors ... [feel] more responsible, more motivated, more critically aware and more confident in their own learning and use of English" (p. 60), again rings true.

In Chapter 5 Alice Chik, and in Chapter 6 Murray, return to informal language learning and ethnographic inquiry. Murray presents an account of the learning opportunities afforded by a social learning space for Japanese students of English: an "English Café", created within a large café. Chik's auto/ethnographic account of picking and learning a language from the internet rests on case studies. Her understanding of autonomy returns to just that in Chapter 2: "successful language learners learn and use their target languages both inside and outside the classroom (references omitted)," and "researchers and teachers ... need to make stronger connections as to how language learning is situated in the learners' social worlds" (pg. 75). Autonomy is central to CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning), which was initially teacher-initiated, but now stands redefined as "any process in which a learner uses a computer, and, as a result,

improves his or her language" (Beatty, 2010, p. 7): for "... daily digital use is almost a given. Language learning is almost incidental" (p. 77).

Chik details learning experiences on Duolingo, which provides structured language lessons through bilingual translation. In an interesting exercise of their autonomy, she and some other Duolingo learners reversed their roles at the end of a course (from English speakers learning Italian, to Italian speakers learning English); they found this to be "the best way to revise and consolidate the newly learned Italian" (p. 86). Autonomy here endorses a good old practice in the grammar-translation method!

Indeed, as Smith et al. observe (Chapter 2, pp.15-16), "'teaching students to learn' is not simply the latest language teaching fashion but can be related to deeper, older educational conceptions and traditions".

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Language and Language Teaching (LLT)

Objectives

Published twice a year in January and July, *Language and Language Teaching (LLT)* reaches out to language teachers, researchers and teacher educators on issues and practices relevant to language teaching. The primary focus of the publication is language pedagogy in elementary schools. *LLT* proposes to establish a dialogue between theory and practice so that practice contributes to theory as much as theory informs practice. The purpose is to make new ideas and insights from research on language and its pedagogy accessible to practitioners while at the same time inform theorists about the constraints of implementation of new ideas.

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Report

Whole Language Approach and Multilingual Pedagogy in Schools

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A few days ago, I visited the Union LPS (Lower Primary School) Thrikkanarvattom in Ernakulam Town along with two experts from NCERT, Professor Indrani Bhaduri and Dr.Vijayan. We saw that the students were fully involved and engaged in learning. After visiting the school, I thought how true the ancient Chinese proverb, "Tell me, I forget/Show me, I remember/Involve me, I understand", was. The students of Union LPS Thrikkanarvattom were really amazing. They could read Malayalam with comprehension, do basic operations in Mathematics and read and communicate in English and Hindi, and of course enjoyed singing songs in their mother tongue. Here is what Professor Indrani Bhaduri, Head of Educational Survey Division of NCERT wrote in the School Visitor's Book:

A great experience meeting and talking to the students and teachers. The students are well versed in four languages, their mother tongue, Malayalam, English and Hindi, which they can read and write. The student-teacher relationship is also worth mentioning. Teachers teach students as their own children. A very dedicated team. The school totally endorses the concept of "Joyful learning".

The Story of Union LPS Thrikkanarvattom

Except for three students, all the other children of the school are the children of immigrant workers, predominantly from Bihar, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Assam and Nepal. The medium of instruction in the school is Malayalam. As the children belong to different linguistic communities, they found it difficult to understand Malayalam, the language of instruction. In fact, the children of immigrants from the North and North East were found to be insecure when they were exposed to

Malayalam. Hence, Samagra Shiksha, Kerala and the district administration launched a project titled "Roshni". This project helps the children of immigrant workers acquire proficiency in Malayalam, English and Hindi by using the strategy of code-switching through special packages, and by taking an extra ninety minutes before the morning classes. It enlists the service of educational volunteers who are proficient in Hindi, Bengali and Oriya. As the volunteers are multilingual, they can communicate easily with the children and hence understand them better.

We met a student from Class 1, whose parents were from Pondicherry. He could speak Malayalam fluently and read and

understand simple stories. He could talk to his classmates fluently in Hindi. Nobody had taught him Hindi; he had acquired it from his friends in Class 1. We also talked to his mother, who had come to pick up her son from school. She told Professor Indrani Bhaduri that her son spoke Tamil at home. So this Class 1 student was proficient in three languages. We also talked to a student from Bihar whose mother tongue was Bhojpuri—the language chiefly spoken in western Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. This student read a Malayalam story fluently and narrated the story to Professor Indrani in Hindi. Professor Bhaduri asked the girl to sing a Bhojpuri song, which she sang rhythmically. This indicated that the students keep up with their mother tongue along with Malayalam, English and Hindi. It was clear that the multilingual pedagogy implemented for the inclusive education of migrant children was working well. The teachers and educational volunteers not only ensured that the migrant children learnt Malayalam, English and Hindi, but they also made sure that they loved their mother tongue and were proud of it.

Multilingual Pedagogy

Professor Rama Kant Agnihotri, in the Joint Review Mission (JRM) Report 2014, specified that the state of Kerala has to seriously think about implementing a pedagogy rooted in multilingualism in the schools of Kerala, for teaching the children of tribal and migrant labourers. He complimented the Malayalam-English code-switching strategy used for teaching English in the lower primary classrooms in the state. In Union LP School as well as other schools in the state where the children of migrant people study, the education system has effectively made use of multilingual pedagogy. The main pedagogic tool used in this inclusive education is code-switching. Code-

switching is generally defined as a shift from one language to another by the speaker during the speech. As part of the teaching process, Malayalam teachers used graphic reading and writing during the early stages of language acquisition. The following processes were used as part of graphic reading and writing. The teacher initiates an interaction in Malayalam using a picture or a video. The volunteer teacher uses code-switching strategy and talks in Oriya, Assamese, Bengali and Hindi. For example, in the picture interaction, the teacher asks in Malayalam: "ഈ ചിത്രത്തിൽ എന്താ കാണുന്നത്?" The volunteer teacher code-switches into Hindi: "यह चित्र देखो, चित्र में क्या दिखता है?" Sometimes, volunteer parents also participate in the team, teaching along with the class teacher. The teacher speaks Malayalam clearly and slowly, maintaining appropriate pace, tone and stress to make her/his speech audible and meaningful. Teachers also use narratives to give meaningful, interesting and comprehensible input to the learners. The narrative is presented with appropriate voice modulation, pitch, tone and body language in order to promote active listening and comprehension. The teacher presents the narratives in Malayalam and the volunteer teacher code-switches to Oriya, Assamese, Bengali and Hindi for the same narrative. In this case, the Hindi, Oriya, Bengali, Tamil and Assamese speaking children could read the elicited text graphically. They were able to identify sentences, words and letters written in Malayalam. We were really impressed by how the multilingual pedagogy came alive in the classrooms.

Phonics Versus Whole Language Approach

Many of us were taught to read and write starting with the sounds of the letters. We

repeated consonants or vowel sounds until the association between the letter and the sound was ingrained in our minds. Educators call this the phonics approach. In this approach, memorizing the shape of the letter and its sound is the first activity to take place in the learner's brain. This approach has been around for so many years that many people are convinced that it is the only way that reading can be taught. In the phonics approach, learning starts with the smallest parts of a language; the pieces are added together until the learner understands how to interpret every symbol to read or write a message. This method however often does not work very well when students are not familiar with books and printed words. For them, the symbols are too abstract and have no meaning as they have not had the opportunity to see others using the symbols to read and write.

The inclusive educational programme for the children of migrant labourers in the schools of Ernakulam is based on the philosophy of whole language and social constructivism. Whole language is not a specific method. It is a philosophy of education that describes how we view language, literacy, teaching and learning. The major assertion in this philosophy of learning is that language is "whole". This means that if we take it apart to focus on its letters, vocabulary or grammar patterns, we lose the essence of what language is. Reading should not be taught as the isolated skill of connecting symbols and sounds. Learning to read must also be connected to life experience, meaningful activities and the learner's goals through discussion, speaking, listening and writing. In the simplest terms, the whole-language approach strives to teach children to read words as whole pieces of language. Influenced by the Constructivist Theory, proponents of the whole-language methodology believe that children draw from their perspective and prior experiences to form the framework for new knowledge. This type

of instruction is taught using a holistic approach, meaning that children do not learn to break down sounds individually but to take words at face value and associate them with prior knowledge.

Multilingual and Whole Language Pedagogy

The pedagogy rooted in multilinguality in the schools of Ernakulam uses whole language strategies. In such a classroom, the teacher focusses on knowing and caring about the learners, identifying generative themes, creating learner-centred materials, integrating skills (LSRW), preparing teaching manuals and learning aids, helping learners to read and write, assessing learners' achievements and mentoring and handholding them to higher achievement and joyful learning. In the whole language approach, the learners play a central role. In fact, programmes based on the whole language philosophy claim that their methods are "learner-centred", rather than "book-centred" or "teacher-centred". Multilingual and whole language pedagogy promotes inclusive education and joyful learning. The students in Union LPS Thrikkanarvattom learn individually, discuss in groups and work collaboratively. Further, the teachers use a variety of teaching learning materials besides the textbook.

Our team also met the parents who came to pick up their children after 3:30 pm in the afternoon. A parent from Jharkhand said the school was wonderful and his daughter, who is in Class two, reads and speaks Hindi and Malayalam. A Bihari mother said to us that her daughter in Class four speaks and reads Malayalam, Hindi, English and Bhojpuri. She is also proficient in maths. The Headmistress summed up, "Our students are coming from small homes to a big home. The school is a big home for them and we love them all."



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Volume 5 Number 2 Issue 10 July 2016

Contents

Articles

Peer to Peer Deaf Literacy: Working with Young Deaf People and Peer Tutors in India
Julia Gillen, Sibaji Panda, Uta Papen and Ulrike Zeshan

1

Evaluating the Reading Capability of Visually Impaired Students: The Need to Go Beyond mere Administrative Accommodation
Geetha Durairajan

8

Learning to Teach Learners with a Visual Challenge
Shruti Sircar

13

A Note on the Performance Test in a Conversational Course Taught to Visually Impaired Students
Nozomi Tokuma

18

Strategies for Teaching Deaf Students
Andesha Mangla

23

I too Can Get an Award! Mountain Climber's Award: A Case Profile
Asha Singh

28

Disability of Language: Disabled People are not Blessed with Divine Organs
Jagdish Chander

34

Language Teaching to Children with Disabilities
Sudesh Mukhopadhyay

38

Interviews

Interview with Prof Madan Vasishtha
Andesha Mangla

43

Interview with Prof Anita Ghai
Santosh Kumar (Translated by Ramnik Mohan)

46

Landmarks

But Words can Never Hurt me: The Linguistic Construction of Disability in Text and Discourse
Tanmoy Bhattacharya

53

Book Reviews

Rethinking Disability in India
Tanmoy Bhattacharya

61

Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geek
Santosh Kumar

64

Suggested Readings

South Asia Disability Studies: Redefining Boundaries and Extending Horizons
Tanmoy Bhattacharya

68

Communication Options and Students with Deafness
Andesha Mangla

69

Classroom Activities

Activities Using Chits

Story Using the PVR Method
V-shesh

71

Find the Meaning
Sachin Singh

73

Sing Language and Written Language
Tushar Viradiya

73

Reports

Know me, Teach me: Annual Training Workshop
Andesha Mangla and Santosh Kumar

75

Report on Book Release: *Rethinking Disability in India* by Anita Ghai

Asha Singh

77

Forthcoming Events

Deepa Palaniyappan

78

Language and Language Teaching

Special Issue on Literacy

Volume 8

Number 2

Issue 16 July 2019

Contents

Editorial

Sadhna Saxena

Articles

Teaching Economics in Schools in India: Issues, Controversies and Dilemmas

Arvind Sardana

Developing Acquaintance with Mathematical Disposition via Language

Haneet Gandhi

What is or is not Common between Mathematics and Language

Hriday Kant Dewan

Literature for Literacy: Strategies for Critical Thinking in the Classroom

Nishevita Jayendran

Gender and Issues of Language in Science

Deepika Bansal

Teaching Writing: A Reflective Account

Sayan Chaudhari

The World of Hindi Medium Students

Payal Yadav

The Language Experience Approach: An Invitation to Talk, Read and Write

Sonika Kaushik

Social Science and Language in Schools: Some Preliminary Notes

Manish Jain

Interviews

Interview with Shobha Sinha

Sadhna Saxena and Neema Chaurasia 56

Landmarks

Languages of "Instruction" and Abstraction, Languages of Doing and Feeling

1 *C. N. Subramaniam* 67

Book Reviews

8 Influence of English on Indian Women Writers: Voices from Regional Languages

Neema Chaurasiya 77

13 The Double Perspective: Language, Literacy, and Social Relations

Veena Kapur 81

21 Teaching Children's Literature: It's Critical!

Prachi Kalra 85

27 Classroom Activities

Activities to Familiarize Students with Maps

33 *Jayatri Chawla* 90

Reports

38 Reflections on OELP (Organisation for Early Literacy Promotion)

Chhaya Sawhney 93

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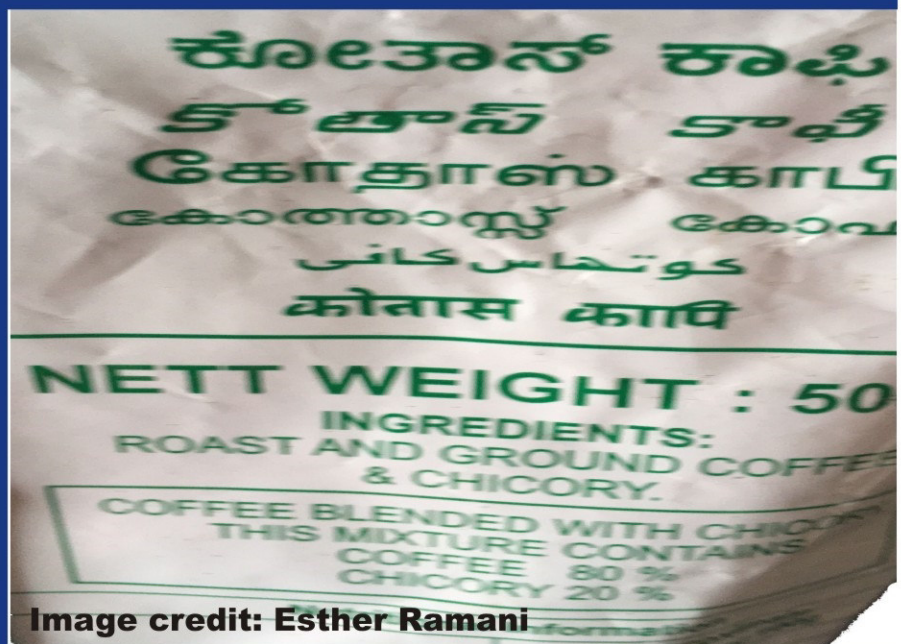
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INSIDE

- Articles
- Interview
- Landmark
- Book Reviews
- Report



'There are many aspects of human emotions and knowledge which cannot find expression in words and must therefore get spaces in 'lines and colours, sounds and movements'.
Tagore



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