

Nishevita Jayendran, Anusha Ramanathan & Surbhi Nagpal (2022). *Language Education: Teaching English in India*. Routledge Series on Principles Based Adaptive Teaching. Routledge India, Pages 213, ISBN 978-0-367-48593-1 (HB), Rs 995

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The book provides a disciplinary background for language teaching in the Indian context. It suggests the use of a constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy based on multilinguality, multimodality and multimedia. The aim is to promote self-expression, critical literacy, cultural sensitivity and inclusion.

'Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but a cabbage with a college education' (Twain, 67). This is one of the many quotations with which the authors pepper their text—to create an extremely readable, well-researched and comprehensive volume on pedagogy for ELT.

Communicative competence in English is recognised as an important skill and undergraduate courses include papers with titles like 'Communication in Everyday Life,' 'Communication in Professional Life,' 'Fluency in English' and 'Language through Literature.' Such papers do not have prescribed texts (only suggested ones in some) and therefore allow the teachers a lot of flexibility in choosing their materials and methodology.

Unfortunately, teachers of the English Department lack training in ELT and therefore cannot always optimise the creative freedom allowed by the syllabus. This is because the disciplinary focus in the universities has always been on core literary subjects. Pedagogy, as a subject of study, is confined to Education departments.

Hence, for college English teachers, this book is significant as a guide to the teaching of language. It is part of a TISS series designed to meet the perceived lack of quality curricular materials for training teachers in pedagogy. Nishevita Jayendran, the first author, is, in fact, one of the series editors.

The book, which is divided into eight chapters, keeps its focus on

the Indian context while providing the interdisciplinary theoretical background of language studies. It recommends a constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy, based on multilinguality, multimodality and multimedia, with the aim of promoting critical literacy, intercultural competence and inclusiveness in the classroom. Lucidly presented in simple language in a text book format, with review paragraphs, chapter objectives, summaries of key points, explanatory diagrams, anecdotes, examples, case studies, caselets, quizzes, exercises and discussion points, it is quite literally a treasure for college teachers who need to rely on their intuition and experience in their language classrooms. This volume brings everything under one roof. It also provides a curated reading list after every chapter which would be invaluable for those inclined to combine their praxis with research.

Chapter 1, titled 'The Notion of Language—An Overview', takes the reader through the disciplinary background provided by Saussure, Chomsky, Eco, Suzanne Langer, Pierre Bourdieu, Stuart Hall, Terry Eagleton, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Malinowski, Sapir and Whorf, Vygotsky and E.D.Hirsh. This discussion of the nature of language, its structure, its symbolic and representational aspects and its rootedness in culture and politics lays the ground for the pedagogies that would be suitable for the language classroom.

Chapter 2, on 'English Studies in India,' examines the impact of colonisation, decolonisation, neo-colonialism and globalisation. The tabular presentation of key ideas of important educational policy documents clarifies the official stance on language studies and shows a growing focus on communicative competence in English.

Is language innate or learned? Does language influence our world view or is it shaped by the world? Chapter 3 on 'Language Acquisition and Language Learning' looks at these long-standing debates with respect to various thinkers like Skinner, Chomsky, Pinker, Piaget, Vygotsky, Crystal, Aitchison, Sapir and Whorf. The importance of input in language learning and the four components of communicative competence are presented and Cummins' concepts of BICS and CALP are applied in the Indian context.

Chapter 4, on 'Language and Literacy', briefly touches upon the question of conventional literacy in India—still so relevant in the light of newspaper reports of poor literacy outcomes among children and the

pandemic-induced learning deficit. However, this is set aside as they engage with the expanding definitions of literacy to include cultural, digital, multimedia and critical literacy. The theoretical underpinning is provided through a discussion of Graaf and Duffy, the 2015 UNESCO declaration, Palincsar and Ladewski, Olson and Torrance, Hoggart, Freire, Wells, Alexander and Canagarajah. They stress the attributes of the language teacher: a critical consciousness, the ability to encourage dialogism in the classroom, and the willingness to self-develop in terms of content knowledge, pedagogy and technological skills.

Chapter 5 focuses on Communicative Language Teaching as the most relevant approach to ELT in India. The theoretical base is provided by Chomskian linguistic competence and performance, Hymes' idea of socio-cultural interaction as a component of communicative competence, Savignon's focus on interpretation and negotiation of meaning, Krashen's five hypotheses, Berns' principles, Prabhu's task-based method and Littlewood's communicative continuum. Fluency is explained in terms of automaticity and appropriacy, using authentic, meaningful materials and activities to encourage integrated development of all the language skills. Kumaravadivelu's postmethod paradigm based on principled pragmatism and Douglas Brown's Cognitive, Socio-affective and Linguistic Principles of Pedagogy, seem especially relevant to conceptualise the ELT transactions in college.

Chapter 6 talks about teaching 'Language through Literature.' The rationale is a focus on cultural and critical literacy through materials which reflect the Indian experience. They suggest a discourse-based model using multimedia and multimodality, encouraging different types of reading in which grammar and vocabulary may be understood contextually.

Chapter 7 is on the 'Teaching of Literature'. As the title indicates, it provides a pedagogical perspective, detailing the generic aspects to be covered while dealing with a literary text. The aim is to promote critical literacy, life-skills and inter-cultural competencies. Activities and some forms of assessment are briefly indicated.

'Assessment and Evaluation'—the last chapter—brings in the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy model for both teaching and assessment. There is a detailed exposition of Assessment—how it differs from evaluation, its importance, what affects it and its three major types—being Assessment

of, for and as Learning (AoL, AfL and AaL). While the first is traditional and therefore familiar, the third is a relevant and timely takeaway for college ELT professionals in the light of the weightage given to Continuous Assessment in the new UGCF 22 syllabus.

A thorough reading of the book will therefore bring conceptual clarity about ELT and generate ideas for effective engagement of students.

In his foreword to *English Studies in India* (2019), Dutt mentions the need for a 'pedagogic overhaul' to encourage 'non-hierarchic, transdisciplinary dialogues that teach critical thinking and stimulate the imagination'(ix). When the language teacher understands that the aim of ELT is to promote creative self-expression and cognitive competence, as stressed by the authors of this book, we would be halfway to achieving this mandate.

References

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