

## DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

**Dr. B. Kathiresan**

*Associate Professor & Head i/c, Dept. of English, Thiruvalluvar University, Vellore*

**Dr. P. Vasuki**

*Associate Professor & Head, Dept. of English, GTM College, Gudiyattam*

### **Abstract**

*The teaching of English is a huge world-wide industry employing many people and bringing large revenues to English speaking countries. It bridges the large gap between cultures paving way for a multicultural society. When there are innumerable methods of teaching English and humpty number of agencies like the TEFL striving to promote learning strategies to facilitate language learning, there are variations in English. Even the need for the language has different contexts, features and aims. English being a foreign language, the teaching of English has been experimented through many approaches. Needs have become varied and as English for many students is indeed their second or third language, it varies within the educated class and also is used among business and common man. These variations of English serve different purposes. Variation in a wide sense includes for example the ways in which a user's accent and dialect varies from individual to individual across time and place, the ways in which it differs between old and young, male and female. The role of this variation is pervasive and influencing extensively on the students than is realized.*

**Keywords:** *TEFL, foreign language, second language, third language, Spoken medium, linguistic variations, Idioms*

English in the early twentieth century had a utilitarian function which was to communicate knowledge. Later in the century due to colonial and post-colonial influences society became multilingual and English turned to be a medium for social communication. Applied linguistic approach followed by the audio-lingual method, structural approach, the bilingual method and transformational generative model gave room for communicative competence. The shift is from linguistic competence to communicative competence. Language acquisition in adolescence aims at building up the learner's communicative competence. Language teaching is pupil centered. Grammar and usage are both emphasized for accomplishing communicative purpose. Stress, tone and pitch play a vital role in transforming a command sentence into a request.

English as a communicative language aims at conveying meaning primarily. The function of English globally is communicative. Pronunciation is given due credit presently as meaning demands the ability to comprehend. Language learning varies according to the age, need and interest of the learner. For the acquisition of language, translation method can be used judiciously. Spoken medium can be closely followed by giving reading and writing exercises. As spoken form of the language gains predominance linguistic variations play a vital role in the selection of materials. Teachers today have to facilitate the learners to speak the language. Language learning has become a process of trial and error. Group and peer group activities

enable language learning. Such language acquisition demands intrinsic motivation which leads to better language use. Meaning is understood on negotiation between the listener and the speaker than on accuracy. Accuracy is context based and not based on grammar.

Such language learning demands activity oriented syllabus than the regular mode of syllabus framed by experts. The teacher would have the liberty and right to each material from daily use, magazines, newspapers, TV and radio. The communicative aspect of language turns into a vehicle for interpersonal relationship in a multicultural modern set up. Students need to impart and seek information, express and find out attitudes (emotional, intellectual, moral etc.) and get things done.

The exercises so framed for language learners differ with age. Although adolescent under graduate students have a focused syllabus the practical college class room is challenging. Either the classes are very big with nearly hundred students who take up English as second or third language. In such a heterogeneous set up language acquisition differs from one student to another. Students memorize dialogues and prefer to speak than write. So testing becomes difficult. Such a syllabus demands the learners to take up learning outside the class room as in watching TV, emailing, social conversations etc. Language is taught through work (exercises) than through literature. Idioms, clichés and collocations are not used. So testing becomes difficult. Teachers have to be more dedicated to motivate the students. Peer group activities have to be carefully monitored else the student with language skill would try to dominate the group. Certain students fail to respond, either they are too shy or adamant. Reading and writing skills are not given much importance. Similarly grammar becomes secondary as communication gains importance. Students intend to use more of regional variations of the language than the standard Indian variety. The limited time allotted for language learning and with the limitations in learning makes language acquisition aim at interactive skills than any other. The hurdle of such language acquisition is that students aiming to take up exams like TOEFL find it difficult as spoken is one of its components. Language labs have become a necessary component for language acquisition. Colleges prefer to establish language labs as electronic media judiciously substitutes social meetings of people. Phone interviews are given practice within the campus. Technically language learning is associated with the acquisition of soft skills in order to get better employment opportunities. The responsibility of the language teachers have become more than subject teachers.

Suggestions to overcome such problems though have practical difficulties could be experimented with. Students can be streamlined into two categories based on testing their entry level. The higher scorers can be allotted language through literature syllabus. This would enable them to use Standard English and also be exposed to the intricacies of language. The weaker scorers can be given communicative language syllabus. This would even solve problems faced by teachers in giving peer group activity. All the students would get equal chance to talk during group discussions. As communicative language teaching aims more at the first two skills, listening and speaking; the next two skills, reading and writing can be given as home

assignments for students. Colleges which cannot afford to have language labs can use their computer multimedia kit to an extent and students can be asked to watch TV programmes in English channels and report them in class.

To overcome the use of the regional variations of the language, students can be asked to write down minimal pairs like tie, tat, top, tall, tot, tin and multiple contrasts like short-fought, thought-taught, fill-fail. Dialogue writing, role playing, mock interviews, group discussions and listening activities can be given. At the later stage debates can be used to practice both listening and speaking skills. Extempore, for-and-against a topic can help the students to develop the art of speaking, to create one's own style and also to succeed in this competitive global market.

Such teaching methodology is student centered. In this approach the text and the author's view become secondary while language becomes predominant. Student's emotional response is encouraged. Students can reflect their past experience and a great deal more about current approaches. The speaking aloud approach foregrounds the effect of sound of words. The didactic nature of acquiring communicative competence is a characteristic feature of language learning.

This approach encourages students giving them the ability to recognize and appreciate the nuances of language. It offers help and advice where needed entering into discussion with the students. As its optimistic students would be able to feel that they have achieved something as a class.

Teachers can also consider themselves as progressive. In certain situations the teachers may not be able to gain confidence in the students. This implies that the attitude of students has changed drastically. They want to be 'on their side' and 'friends.'

Along with these approaches teachers may adopt a wide range of techniques in order to bring the desired response in the students. They are (i) understanding the students, (ii) encouraging the students, (iii) using discussion in the class, (iv) helping students to apply the ideas discussed by giving them written work. The teacher can oversee going around the class. The pedagogy of the class is discussion and application of what has been learnt, followed by sharing of what has been written i.e. second discussion and summing up the lesson. There are other methods of engaging the student's attention, like playing tape recorders, reading aloud and group discussion. These approaches show different types of activities and opportunities for discussion and reinforcement.

As language is fundamental to all learning some ask for English as a language for communication. Some others view English as a language for requirement focusing on meaning. Some consider language as a medium for self expression. But all imply that the English language is important.

**References**

1. Axelrod, Rise B and Charles R. Cooper. *The St. Martin's Guide Top Writing*. New York: ST. Martin's Press, 1994.
2. Bridges, Charles W. and Ronald F. Lunsford. *Writing: Discovering Form and Meaning*. California: Wardsworth Publishing Company, 1994.
3. McGuire, Peter and Sara M. Putzell. *Technical Writing*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.
4. *Prentice Hall Writing and Grammar*. New Jersey, 2004.