

ELT AND SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN A MULTI-LINGUAL CLASSROOM

SARANI GHOSAL (MONDAL)

Assistant Professor, Department of English, NIT Goa, India

ABSTRACT

Objectives

- The Necessity of Learning English Language
- Soft Skills and its importance in the present Context
- Different Techniques of Teaching English to students hailing from heterogeneous cultural background

English Language as we know is a global lingua-franca and the growing importance of it is undeniable. Almost every technical and management institute has made it a mandatory course for all. Along with this, the Soft Skills or People Skills also play a very vital role as the MNCs, while coming to the campus for placement, look for accomplished boys and girls, who combine in themselves the effective communication skill, the Hard Skills and the corporate etiquette. In fact the people skills envelop all the facets of our personality.

For this present paper, I will incorporate Inductive Methodology. By inductive methodology, I mean to say Empirical Knowledge/ experience, which I induce from multilingual as well as multicultural classroom. The result is varied as well as unique too. I mentor Students from different cultural backgrounds and therefore, a General module cannot be implemented for all. Modules are to be need-based to cater to the interest of all. A Chinese girl and a South-African girl do not respond to me the way a Telugu boy responds to my query.

A facilitator in a multi-lingual classroom has to be extremely innovative to teach language and develop soft skills.

KEYWORDS: Soft Skills, Hard Skills, Personality, Empathy, Multilingual, Multicultural and Ethnocentrism

INTRODUCTION

The Necessity of Learning English Language

The importance of English language is undeniable. It made its own place in India during the Colonial period. This used to be the language of the clerks and the rulers in the mid-19th century India, when **The English Education Act (1835)** was implemented by T.B. Macaulay. Also, the English language replaced the Persian and became the language of administration and education. Even before that the first newspaper in English, "**Hicky's Bengal Gazette**" had come out in **1780** and had run for two years. Many Indians since then believe that this is the language of Power, the language of Money and the language of Status. It is true indeed. The colonial hangover is still very much with us. All the official works in India are done in English in spite of having Hindi as National Language. Knowledge of English always carries greater weight than the knowledge of Hindi. This is the mass reaction. And to quote Amitabh's famous dialogue in the film *Namak Halal*, when he goes to meet his prospective employer, "I can walk English, I can talk English, I can laugh English because English is a very funny language", (Movie Clip).

Here we see the superior position of the English language and how it is being spoken in the melody of the local language with an amount of stress on the expression “funny”. The candidate (Amitabh) is taking pride in the fact that he is the only man in his village, who knows the language of the Colonial Masters. The film came out two decades back in 1983. Even today, the scenario hasn’t changed. Rather the importance of English in the job market has increased.

It is sad to see that the politicians of India play a game of politics with the English language. Politicians believe that the knowledge of English will broaden the horizon of the mass and that will inevitably shrink the vote bank. According to them, “English Language Education is a perpetuation of Colonial rule”. ¹ Therefore, it is being introduced at the 6th standard at many government funded schools, whereas the sons of the rich politicians study in English medium schools and speak the language better than their fathers.

Time and again, the politicians like Rajnath Singh, give examples of Japan, Germany and Russia that they do business in their respective languages. Not knowing English is not a hurdle for them. Rajnath Singh also says: “English language is responsible for the decline of Indian languages and, by extension, Indian culture”.² But C.P. Viswanath in his article in **Times of India dated July 23, 2013**, refutes Rajnath Singh and says, “English is inevitable. From Europe to China, non- English speaking people are racing to gain competency in English”. ³ Also, our politicians do not realize that India is a multi-lingual country and we donot have a single lingua-franca. This is the reason, for which English has made a strong foot hold in our country. At the same time, I wish to put a question with reference to Rajnath Singh’s comment: are we genuinely concerned about the loss of Indian languages and culture? We should examine our social attitudes and how little we are doing to foster our languages. As the language is an evolving phenomenon and it is inclusive in nature, English words easily creep into the different Indian vernaculars. If we notice clearly, “Thank you”, “Sorry”, “Good Morning”, “Good Night”, “Chair”, “Table”, “Cup”, “Papa”, “Mummy” and “Daddy” are part and parcel of the Indian vernaculars. Even we express our love in English: the three-word sentence. So is our dress code.

The contemporary parents always send their kids to the English medium schools. The vernacular medium schools are not being opted for by the post- modern parents because they wish their off springs not to lag behind in the rat-race of job market. And this language of the imperialists will continue to dominate for another century in India. It is the corporate language ...the language of trade and commerce across the globe. The intellectual property of artists too is expressed in English...be it a book or a painting or a piece of performing art. The caption of a painting is always written in English to capture the global market. The rendition of an artist is also summarized in English for the cosmopolitan audience.

Hence it has achieved the status of a “must-learn” language. Almost all the Indian universities and the technical and management institutes offer English as a mandatory learning course. The MNCs and the PSUs look for students with adequate knowledge of English. In aptitude tests also, a portion comprises of Language Comprehension and vocabulary. Here I wish to refer to a newspaper report, which came out in Times of India on 5/01/2014. The report was entitled, **“English speakers earn 34% more than others”**. The report stresses on the fact that proficiency in English is a major boost for employability and earning potential. This has become even truer in a globally integrated economy. According to Dr. Abusaleh Shariff of the Centre for Research and Debates in Development Policy, New Delhi, **“Politicians who don’t like English are captains of a sinking ship**. Higher Education in English helps us get better integrated into the globalized organized sector and labour market...”.⁴ (Newspaper clip)

Therefore, even if we are Indians, our environment is multi-lingual and multi-cultural like a melting pot and we cannot fit ourselves properly in the existing environment without the knowledge of English.

Soft Skills and its Importance

Not only the knowledge of the English language will help one to get through the stages of interview and life, but also the inculcation of **Soft Skills or People Skills** plays an equally important role. It is a set of skills for the development of one's personality. In other words, we can say that it is a set of attributes, which develops an individual's power of articulation, job performances and career aspects. It includes certain traits like common sense, communication, flexibility, teamwork, empathy, sociability, power of negotiation, dressing sense, non-verbal aspects of communication and good manners. These are all immeasurable qualities, whereas **hard skills** are measurable and teachable, for instances: one's typing skill, mathematical ability, software proficiency, writing skill and so on. One's subject knowledge is part of hard skills. Soft Skills cannot be taught through the lecture method. One has to inculcate these skills through practice. **Soft Skills** are often equated with our **EQ or EI** and **hard skills** are part of our **IQ**. **Our personality is a combination of EQ and IQ**. But the area of EQ is vast. It is often compared with the Iceberg principle of Freud and Vivekananda, who believe that 9/10th of our personality remains hidden from the public gaze and 1/10th is visible to public. **5** Sri Aurobindo calls it "subconscious", by which he means to say the "secret inner existence" or "the submerged part our being". **6**

Iceberg Principle



Figure 1

In fact, Professor Albert Mehrabian says that 93% of our communication is non-verbal and paralinguistic. Only 7% lies with verbal aspect of communication. **7** His model of communication is often called "**3Vs**". It goes like this that the significance of Verbal content is 7%+ Vocal is of 38%+ 55% is Visual. Let us see a diagram:

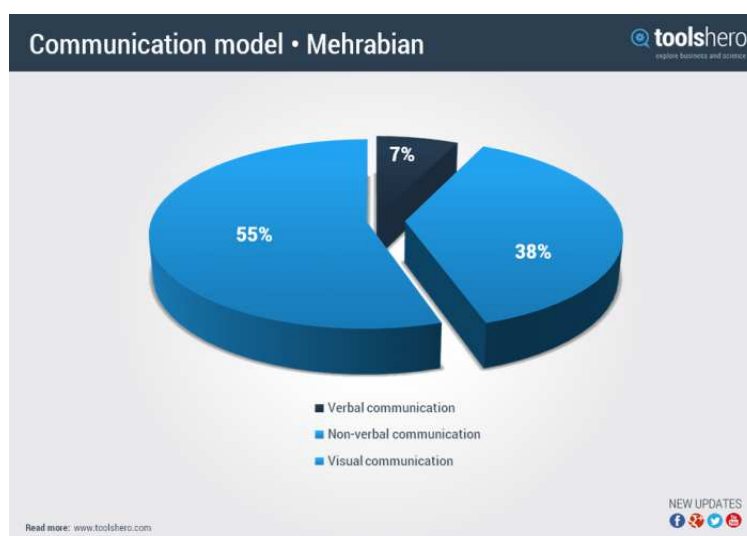


Figure 2

Yes, it is true, because when we see somebody, first we observe the exterior of the person: the facial contours, the dress, accessories, body language and the eyes of the person. And then immediately we start evaluating the person and that occurs at the back of our mind involuntarily. We are extremely judgmental. For instance:

A: “I don’t have problem with **B**”. (Verbal Aspect of Communication)

But **A** avoids eye contact with **B** and has a closed body language. (Non-Verbal aspect of Communication, which means a lot)

It sometimes happens at the workplace or at the time of job interview also. The interviewers instead of maintaining eye contact with the candidate, start scrutinizing the exterior of the candidate right from the beginning. Along with that the interviewers also observe the behavioral pattern of the candidate, for ie: the sense of etiquette, the manners, the attitude and the gracefulness. After that comes the domain knowledge. The first impression of a person creates a lasting impression on us.

How to Develop a Positive Personality

First let us know the meaning of personality and unless we know it, we cannot develop a positive personality. According to Sri Aurobindo, man is a multiple being **8** and man is not always aware of the different aspects of his being. As **communication is situation-bound**, Different situations and different environments necessitate different types of communication and different attitudes and in each situation we wear a different personality.

If we go back to the root of the word, “Personality”, we find that the word has derived from the *Latin* word *persona* meaning “theatrical mask”. Personality is a mask-device. Every day, we wear a personality before stepping out of our home. That is to say, we assume a social role every day. Nobody knows our real or personal self. Also, before going out, we stand before the mirror and we keep checking our reflection till we are satisfied with our image.

Let us have a look at the chart given below:

Table 1

Our Real Self	Our Inculcated Personality
Impulsive	Measured
Passionate	Composed
Nervous	Confident
Happy-go-lucky	Calculating
Impractical	Balanced
Sympathetic/ Apathetic	Empathetic

We have to keep our real self under control in public to build up a positive image, which helps us to win in every situation. Along with that we need to introspect on ourselves. Introspection helps us to be withdrawn, which helps one to evaluate one’s strengths and weaknesses. In other words, it can be called a **SWOT Analysis**. It helps us to control our wrong movements and we can build up a positive image.

Here I wish to add an example of Self-Knowledge: At the time of introduction, the custom is to exchange Business Cards. But, does a visiting card reveal the person? No. It reveals a person partially...only the accomplishments in working life in a few square centimetre. It does not reveal the job function and the person’s contribution in reality. Therefore, Business card is not really an extension of self as it is popularly believed.

Some Positive Features of Personality

- A smiling face is a signal of positivity. Smile also indicates a person's energy. We do not like a dull and boring face.
- "Shrug" is a complete no-no in any professional situation. It symbolizes casual attitude of a person.
- A firm handshake is a cue of a person's confidence. At the time of handshake, the arm should not break at the elbow point. Often I have experienced people just submitting their palms to the opponent. It is actually nervousness. At the same time, it should not be bone-crushing...just a firm grip is required.
- Eye-Contact is mandatory in every aspect of either professional or general communication.
- Often, I have heard people introducing themselves with "Myself"...why to start with reflexive pronoun? We should always start with "I am" as to give stress to our subjective self. Stress pattern matters a lot in effective communication.
- Verbal tics are to be avoided in any form of professional communication.
- Use of Space is also important in soft skills development, for instance, proper space has to be maintained at every situation like intimate, personal, social and public zones.
- Chronemics and Chromatics are also important to indicate the positive personality of a person. (One should not turn up late for a meeting and should wear attires of soft shades)
- The colour of the belt, shoes and socks should be of the same colour, preferably black. A pair of White Socks contrasted with black shoes is a complete no, no.

Teaching English in a Multi-Lingual and Multi-Cultural Classroom

Here I would like to share my experiences with you. I value my experiences as learning points as they help me to evolve every day in the light of progressive awareness. In a class of 90 students from different cultural backgrounds, I cannot use the same techniques for all. Also, it is not quite beneficial. Therefore, at the beginning, it is advisable to take an **Entry Level Test** to find out the existing standard of the students. That test will comprise of vocabulary, précis of a passage and some soul-searching questions. Précis is a way of testing one's comprehending and expressive skills. I personally find it very useful. Soul Searching questions project the attitudes of the learners. Vocabulary test makes me aware of their standard.

After the entry-level test, the class should be divided into groups as per their potential. Hence every group will blend some good and some average learners. And the facilitator will give them different exercises. Every group will have a team leader, who will lead the entire team for a particular task. The position of the team leader will be in rotation.

The exercises can be: power-point presentation on different interesting topics

- Sales Promotion of an innovative Product
- Poster Presentation

- Preparation of User's Guide of different daily use products like Refrigerator, Washing Machine, AC, Microwave, Television and Software installation
- Survey on topics like "Drug test on animals", "Shopping Mall or Retailers", "Beauty Pageant" and "Fairness Products for Males".
- Interview on soul searching questions (each team will interview the other team)

These activities are all related to expression, imagination and speaking skill of the learners. I think that instead of teaching grammar and words, I should adopt the **direct method**. The learners will learn by speaking and the team members are there to help themselves.

As a facilitator, I have experienced these techniques are quite useful and in my class, I stand aside, listen to them and just keep correcting the speech and the pronunciation of the learners, often I help them with tense and words. A facilitator is not a task master; he/she is just a guide, who makes the environment of the classroom conducive for learning. Freedom should be there. Also after every session, I invite the students to share their feedback among themselves. Extempore speech is also quite useful. Once I gave a topic entitled "Dream" and asked some students to speak on it. A girl from China first spoke the literal meaning of it and then shared one of her dreams and finally her dream of getting a good job. Her speech was extremely meticulous and soft. A boy from Andhra Pradesh shared his dream of becoming a software engineer working with an MNC in abroad. That is why he studies 24x7. Another Goan boy simply spoke of his day dreams.

Here we see three different responses from three different individuals reflecting their personalities and the cultural background. The Goan boy is extremely happy-go-lucky. He does not allow himself to be victimized by the pressures of studies and subsequent career. That is the general attitude of the Goan society. But the boy from Andhra Pradesh is extremely hard working as he belongs to Telengana region, which we all know, has been suffering from water crisis and it is relatively arid than the Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh and that is why the people from Telengana are very practical and hardworking.

Finally the Chinese girl called Juliana appeared to be very careful and precise unlike others. In fact, the Chinese students are usually very modest, precise, simple and meticulous. As a facilitator, here my job is to observe them and understand them as they are. A facilitator must not evaluate any learner from **ethnocentric perspectives** at the very beginning as that breaks down the learning process.

The background and the culture influence our attitudes and language a lot. In the first year of professional communication, the facilitator should make them attuned with the course and look for their cognitive development. However, ethnocentric behaviour is very common in a multi-cultural classroom and that leads to formation of groups leading to an unhealthy atmosphere. Here the facilitator's role is to judge the situation with **empathy** and he/ she must stand aside. Empathy is extremely important in professional communication. It is a way of being with others and also it leads to greater receptivity. As a facilitator, first I create avenues for the students so that they can speak out first; after that we should train them in the soft skills part, ie: the required polish of the language, the business vocabulary, the attitude, the dress code, the proper body language and the use of space.

Here is a list of Business Vocabulary:

Table 2

Business Vocabulary	Meaning
Appendix	Additional Material
Bonus	Additional Payment
Clause	A Particular Statement
Discount	Reduction in the Price
Evidence	Information presented to support a point
Null and Void	Invalid
Prospect	Opportunity
Salary	Payment
Warrant	Formal Assurance

Personality Test is also a very useful tool for inculcating positive personality among the students. Plenty of questions are there in Google and the facilitator can download any set of questions.

The facilitator can adopt interview techniques for those students, who are shy and do not want to come out of their comfort zone. I have a very shy student from Jhansi, who is a first generation learner of English Language. One day I simply asked him to prepare some slides on the culture, place and food of Jhansi and to give a presentation. Initially he was nervous, but when all the students asked him more on Jhansi at the time of presentation, he regained confidence and now he has become a very enthusiastic learner.

Also, the students can form English speaking club and the facilitator can arrange for competitions and prizes. This reward-oriented learning process is also very beneficial. At NIT, Goa, we run a club called Toastmasters International. It is a non-profit International Organization for developing soft skills and language skill. As a facilitator, I feel that the zeal for learning has to be created among them by engaging them in different activities so that they will automatically take the initiative and only then teaching English will be interesting.

CONCLUSIONS

Multi-Lingual Classroom is a challenge for the facilitator of ELT and Soft Skills. The facilitator requires to be extremely imaginative and innovative to cater to the interest of the multi-cultural as well as multi-lingual stakeholders. The modules must cover the interest of more or less all the students of the classroom and the facilitator has to be extremely cautious about the ethnocentric remarks. Also, the facilitator requires to do a survey well in advance regarding the heterogeneous racial background of the students and accordingly he/she needs a preparation like what are the nuances of a particular ethnic group or culture.

The teaching process has to be team based, where students can engage themselves in different simulation based activities to improve their speaking skills, which automatically develop the soft skills like teamwork, tolerance, group behavior, adaptability, interpersonal skills, ability to follow instructions, ability to listen and so on. The objective of the facilitator is to create the environment conducive to learning, the rest is taken care of by the learners only.

REFERENCES

1. Jug Suraiya, "Talk Business", TOI, 22/01/2014
2. indiatoday.intoday.in/story.rajnath-singh-english-remark-india/1/292262html
3. C.P. Viswanath, "Don't bark at English", TOI, 23/07/2013

4. “English speakers earn 34% more than others”, Reema Nagrajan, Sunday Times, Jan 5, 2014, Goa
5. M.M. Bhattacharya, Man-A Multiple Personality, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1985
6. Sri Aurobindo, SABCL-18(The Life Divine), Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, p. 353
7. www.businessballs.com/mehrabiancommunications.htm
8. M.M. Bhattacharya, Man-A Multiple Personality, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Society, 1985