

## **THE SOCIO LINGUISTIC APPROACH; A RELIABLE ELT PRACTICE IN RURAL SETTING**

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### **Abstract**

In contemporary Indian society, speaking English is a class act, a social privilege and a sophisticated medium to exhibit intellectual glamour. It is in fact a fantastical dream of almost all Indian students. Leaving alone the period of British rule in the sub continent, in the seven decade multi lingual history of Independent India the wish to be English speakers stays far and distant, analogous to a mirage that ever tantalize but never come true. Especially for students in rural setting it remains a day dream, a desire stamped 'not possible' all across its face. Hither to innumerable new, innovative recommendations, countless pedagogical experiments are being tried ceaselessly to actualize the ELL ritual in India. Generally speaking, language acquisition in normal conditions is effortless and spontaneous. It requires no mental labour, most involuntary that one is really not conscious of one's learning. But this phenomenon goes the other way in the case of Indian way of English Language Learning. As an exception, students in cosmopolitan or larger cities have proved to be successful second language users having provided with congenial family school and social environment as safe launching pad. This cannot be found in rural setting. Yet the possibility to skip English is seldom possible. The journey of higher education without English would not become complete. Therefore proficiency in English is mandatory and rural students have no other ways out. How to teach these people is a question only partially answered. In this context the present paper makes an effort to analyze two aspects. (1) What specific challenges do rural students encounter in acquiring English? (2) How can they be brought closer to target language by exploiting the conditions in the community where they are active members? In continuation the paper also examines how best one can utilize the linguistic knowledge already acquired through mother tongue, various socio-linguistic factors, native conditions, social necessities contribute as natural triggers to generate and promote a new language acquisition.

**Keywords:** Linguistics, Socio, ELT, Approach, Rural area etc

### **Introduction:**

Language is an involuntary reaction to a valid stimulus. In fact it is the single most prominent way of individual to express him. The necessities behind his act of expression could be innumerable. He would invariably share the contents of his will when it is primary

and emergent. The urge to fulfil needs forms the very basis of socialisation. Depending upon the intensity of need to express, the individual adopts body language or sign language. Sometimes it may range from frantic incoherent grunt like noise to well organised systematic speech. Hence language acquisition in natural conditions is easy and involuntary. However in the case of secondary or mental needs it is individual's choice to speak or not. In the absence of emergent needs or congenial conditions what means would elicit or inspire an individual to use language? Teaching English in India particularly in rural India requires a reasonable answer to the challenge hither to discussed. The analysis of factors that amount for the decades long unsuccessful journey of teaching English in rural India would figure out several difficulties. Today's world of technology may conveniently attribute the pathetic situation to the shortage or absence of e-gadgets, language laboratories, digital class rooms etc., procurement of which is economic and not readily available. Learner's indifference to target language and teacher's limited ability to train are other important realities.

Looking at the matter in lighter vein one of the author's friends who got failed in his tenth class needless to mention his negative attitude towards education, had emerged a successful trilingual speaker in two years time. Becoming fluent in two other languages without any pedagogical aid should be curious to language teachers. All the while, the factors that cooperated him to learn are he happened to work at a busy ice-cream parlour and had to stay in a room for little over a year where all others speak Tamil only. Secondly his learning of Malayalam took only nine months.

Then he had to monitor a road contract work in a village near Kochi. He had to spend most of his time with native wage workers who were complete monolinguals. His need to deal with native folks for various purposes got him close to the native language. So his need to speak in Malayalam was obligatory. More over his love for movies and sports had made him even to learn the native script for regional news paper reading. This happened twenty years ago when the use of e-gadgets was seldom. For this language journey society was the teacher and socialization was the target. In his 'Second Language Learning Vs Second Language Acquisition' Stephen Krashen presents the curious case of a Bombay fruit merchant who was a polyglot. Here one can observe the absence of teacher, teaching and taught who in fact the main pillars of the organised learning system are. Further no one worries about motivation, methodology, materials, encouraging environment and high serious pedagogical principles. Social needs and relations acted as natural L2 triggers. The positive aspects that supported SL acquisition in the above sited example are not likely to prevail in rural India. The realistic assessment of the actual status of ELT in rural setting will help to adopt more suitable teaching techniques.

#### **State Of ELT in Rural India:**

- Learning English is not an urgent social necessity, it is only an academic burden. Hence the learner has neither instrumental nor integrative motivation.

- Language happens through imitation. Rural Indian students find no desirable English models to imitate both in and out the classroom. But the picture presented in the example above the learner had several native speakers all around him.
- The status of English in rural India is unique. It is neither mother tongue to fulfil primary language needs nor a foreign tongue used only for official purposes nor a second language which is taught by native speakers as it is with the Spanish speakers learning English in U.S.A.
- Rural students' exposure to English is minimum. English class is the only resource. The use of English here also purely formal and non-communicative as opposed to the case presented above. All care taker talk, peer talk and parent talk are missing.
- Teachers treat English as a content, memory based subject. The idea of language for communication is totally confined to the objectives page in the textbook and the entire curriculum is filled with the pursuit of exams. So the play of pressure is always present and the learner is not free.
- The singular teaching method that has been in wide use is the GTM though it is labelled as grammar translation; the actual practice is content translation only. As a result the student is neither good at grammar nor vocabulary.
- Psycho linguistic and socio linguistic features of language acquisition or not being recognised. This leads to the non awareness of more important phase of silent period.  
Here and now principle in activity designing is paid no attention.

The facts figured out indeed present a grim picture. In this context the appropriacy of Socio Linguistic Approach as a potent, more reliable way of ELT to initiate L2 acquisition is not over emphasized. Though full pledged L2 speakers are not produced, the SLA's ability to prepare a strong and steady platform to make friends with the target language is certain.

Socio linguistic approach considers of exploiting the social conditions of the community where the individual is a member to encounter the challenges in approaching the target language i.e., English. The main pedagogical principle of the approach is to examine the positive influence of significant social factors such as the age of the individual, his mother language, gender, social class, ethnicity etc., in the process of language learning. Social milieu vary individual to individual. So as the methodology of teaching too. ELL tasks are designed as a continuation to the social repertoire already formed in the mind of learner. Hence second language acquisition is not a sudden start; it is a deliberate but smooth shift of direction. Most times learning material is derived from the actual and authentic

situations that happen in and around his immediate social environment. This helps to operate from the learners' individual conceptual world. Introduction of ESL into his well known world considerably efface the learning anxieties as well as psychological distance. No long time is being taken by the learner to establish solidarity with the content extracted from his own world.

The concept of globalization sustains the students self esteem. The sanctity of his beliefs or the importance attached to the social practices is not being threatened any way, while learning L2. For instance gender is a social construct that mean not the very same to the members living in different social communities. Any two girls from distinctly separate social groups may not agree on the sameness of social roles or functions that must be performed by a woman in general. In the same manner the learning styles or learning preferences of individuals of two groups may not be similar. Age plays a significant influence in determining a student's attitude.

An attitudinal change decides how a participant identifies or connects his person or his world to the characters or the setting presented through the material he consumes. To draw an example, a high school boys reading of Prem Chand's well known story Sadgathi (English) would evoke a great sorrow at the worse predicament of the protagonist. He weeps with the victim. He may not see as distinctly as an elderly student in the higher grade understands the ruthless reality of caste discrimination. For the boy the clash is mostly between good and evil or to some extent weak and strong. In contrary, the student in the advanced age group perceives them as strong representatives of their respective castes. The social reality presented would elicit wrath or rebellion and not mere sorrow out of him. Language wise the story provides a great opportunity to learn English words and expressions used to describe the remote rural phenomena that are not frequently found across popular English stories. The elaborate description of the series of morning rituals performed in an orthodox Brahmin family, the daily gruel some domestic chores happen at a slum house of an oppressed class, the life like dialogue between characters that carry the whole range of emotions contain a fairly good amount of communicative potential than a text oriented, thoughtfully drafted language exercises prescribed in a formal setting.

One of the chief characteristics of SLA is it respects the bilingual speaker. The approach does not recommend native like fluency in target language. Yet is humanistically understands the psychological and linguistic limitations or possibilities of the learner. As it were, the approach was of high use for rural students. It views mother language a valuable resource, a reservoir of thoughts. Therefore, the first and second languages are not looked as separate entities. They are a continuum, an integrated whole. The approach explores the scaffolding potential of L1. Moreover it practically acknowledges the fact that it is not possible to create a linguistic vacuum to accommodate L2 in L1's place. The approach tens to view rural Indian students as beneficiaries of common underlying proficiency (CUP)

hypothesis. SLA majorly focuses on transfer and transition as opposed to the cardinal doctrine of the GTM i.e., translation. Code switching and Code mixing are counted as promising L2 initiators. The speaker feels it easy to speak having an option of falling back to his mother language whenever he thinks it hard to find a suitable expression or structure in ESL. Eventually SLA offers a useful principle of transition through code switching or mixing to the group of methods that view mother tongue as an effective instructional tool.

The wisdom of Edgar Dales 'Cone of experiences' reverberates in task or activity designing of SLA. Language doesn't happen in vacuum. It requires a context. However it is difficult to internalize linguistic items presented through unfamiliar contexts. Most times the prescribed textbooks with their literature or cosmopolitan culture orientation follow this as a habit. One can sense the artificiality of dialogue in the texts prepared according to the CLT. Self introduction or saying apology is done more beautifully in an informal setting that a learner witnesses in a movie or a short film. Therefore learning in an authentic situation or life like context demands less effort. A context inherently is a rich source of content itself. As it is obvious, unlike textual role - plays a good dialogue in context is a free roll. The need to express makes up for the language deficiencies. But in an interior rural context it is not so easy to find real situations of every kind. To overcome this obstacle, the teacher should think about contriving situations that promote social interaction.

Topics chosen from recent sensational news items, local happenings, and dialogues set on glamorous movie or TV world, popular gossip, cosmetics, trendy fashions, sports, TV shows, serials and many more have creamed to engage learners' attention to initiate a free type casual interaction. Previously the CLT has designed modules with dialogues to suit various communicative purposes. But these were formal and superficial. Now the dialogues have become less serious, more socialised. No topic which has compelling communicative content is left untried. Seeing it in practice, the dialogues prepared by 'Boston English Centre', U.S.A. to initiate social communication unhesitantly explored the sensational topics under 'show bizz' column such as Angelina Jolie's ( a well known American film maker) second pregnancy or Paris Hilton's( a media personality, business women, actress) release of her naked pictures in a bath tub to manipulate free speak. So there is no topic taboo. Here the focus is not on the virtue of action. But how strong urge does it inculcate in the speaker to participate in the dialogue i.e., generating language involuntarily. By all these one can affirm that the SLA with social orientation makes the content both comprehensible and compelling.

A concrete example may serve to see the theory in practice. It is demonstrated that how a simple social event is capable of generating a whole range of learning activities.

**Event : A visit to a beach temple**

ACTIVITY	SKILL	ACTION PERFORMED
1.Map Reading	Reading	Listing out nearby picnic spots from the local maps
2.Survey or Interview	Read and Respond or Listen and Respond	Mark the place of preference or give reasons why he or she prefers a particular place.
3.Group Discussion	Speak/Share/Convince	Decide an appropriate date, mode of transport, food and refreshments.
4.Letter Writing	Writing	Seek permission from the Principal through a letter.
5.Describe your journey	Narrative and Descriptive Skills	Write a brief travelogue (individual / pair work)
6.Making a documentary	Presentation/Social/collaboration skills	Shooting a video/gather temple history from the natives/giving voice to the documentary
7.Dialogue Translation	Translation Skills	Translate any funny or interesting Telugu conversations into English.

A resourceful teacher would device any number of learning activities from a simple event. Applying the same principles to the lessons in the prescribed texts one can make the material amicable and interesting.

**Conclusion:**

It would be appropriate to close the article with a real life experience. It was 2010 and the author was working at a junior college, Venkatachalam, a cent percent rural place. Sai, a girl of 6years was living in the house next to the college. Little is the use of English in her family. In other words her exposure to English is almost nil. She was joined in a newly established Hi-fi English medium school where the teachers were not natives. So no use of Telugu in the school. Most of the students were hostlers from other states. Hence English was the only alternative. First 6 months it was a struggle to the girl. Later she started picking up English. By the turn of the year her English was fluent and spontaneous. The two examples presented in the article prove that SL acquisition can happen both informal as it is happened in the first case and formal settings. However the most essential pre-requisites to launch into a new language are the need to speak in L2, reasonably fair models

to imitate and exposure to practice the newly acquired language. The SLA with its orientation towards social communication tends to follow these principles while designing interactive language acquisition activities. Thus the approach is more reliable and friendly to teach English in rural setting.

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