

## A STEERING OF HEXAGON FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO ESL LEARNERS

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**Abstract:** Learning a Second Language is a necessity. Teaching the Second Language is an art. Observation and experience suggest that optimum achievement in Second Language learning is somehow related to motivation intensity of the students and the attitude students have towards the acquisition of the Second Language. Now this proposition needs to be addressed on the basis of a way out to the problem of the acquisition of English as the Second Language on the part of ESL learners in specific. In a multi-lingual, multi-cultural nation like India, the role or significance of English as a Second or foreign Language has been a matter of academic discourse for many years. Its status has utterly changed in the postmodern era of globalization. Thus English plays a pivotal role in its sociological, political, economical and academic contexts.

Students in India need a working knowledge of English and it is essential to evolve courses totally refreshed or improvised to the need which will meet their needs and enable them to use English for their specific purposes. Since language learning involves the learning of four skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The learning of English is not complete, if the learning any of these skills is incomplete. The utility of self-assessment on the part of a learner for the acquisition of the Second Language is inescapable considering the large number of situations in which Indian students are required to put English into good use. At this point, the question of the standard to be expected of the students is very pertinent. As we know, English is a compulsory subject at the under graduate level in India. The learning and the teaching suffers from the certain constraints across the national level. While attempts have been made to increase the element of communicative competence, the traditional pattern of examination vitiated the advantages that might have accrued. In fact, this move was explained as an attempt to meet the growing needs of the undergraduate students for reading, writing and communication skills. Many recommendations of the Commissions and Statutory Bodies of Higher Education towards enabling the student acquire English for their specific needs and purposes remained largely confined to paper in India. All the same, despite few changes, of course, the pattern of evaluation remained unchanged. The questions are largely content based and required little *if any* original thinking on the part of the students. Guide books contributed and continue to contribute even today in due measure to the examination success of many students. This has necessarily led to dissatisfaction among the students who see the course as irrelevant to their needs and interests. It is tacitly acknowledged that students bunk English classes more than the other classes because they see English as a *soft option* where the purchase of a guide book a month or so before the examination and its

ingestion is all the effort that is required to pass the examination. It may be appropriate at this point to consider why students find the subject of English at their level of achievement so inadequate. They are urgently in need of a discernible shift from the study of English as a literary humanistic discipline to that of English as a language of communication. As early as 1902, the Indian Universities Commission lamented the fact that (to make it clear of the need for English as a language of communication and to come to grips with the language) many students pass through the entire University Course without acquiring anything approaching a command of the English language, and proceed to a degree without even learning to write a letter in English correctly and idiomatically. (Para jape: 1938) All the reforms big or small have come to nothing in the face of an unchanging system of evaluation, one that fails to test the learners' language competence in terms of communicatory use. Even today the examination papers of many universities (with some notable exceptions) still reveal a bias towards *memorisation*. A good memory can still ensure a *pass* for a student who may have minimal or even no communicative competence in the language. It is to this wastage of student potential at the higher end of the scale that this article addresses itself. It is to be realised that to be international intelligible, it is not necessary to be an *Received Pronunciation* speaker, if we can evolve a standard that retains the basic phonological system of English. There is an accepted standard of English as used in India in terms of grammar and lexis mainly because it is largely the same as in standard native English. In teaching a standard, attention will have to be paid not only to segmental but also to supra-segmental features like word accent, sentence stress, rhythm and intonation. The importance of this is not adequately realised by teachers and learners of English in India. Creating a Hexagon Opportunities for ESL Teaching - Learning  
Administering Self-Assessment of Language Learning in Formal Scenario: A lot of secondary school and

university students are passive learners; and may become demotivated if they cannot see any clear progress. Their prime concern is to pass or get a good mark which will ultimately contribute towards their opportunities for further study or employment. Even within this context, self-assessment can help to make learners more active, to realize that they have the ultimate responsibility for learning. Self-assessment can help learners to locate their own strengths and weaknesses and then get them to think about what they need to do, in order to get better marks. 'By encouraging such individual reflection', Harris opines,

"Self-assessment can begin to make students see their learning in personal terms". (Michael Harris: 1977).

To say, in settings where there is a statutory end-of-course examination to be passed, initial self-corrected tests can be useful. Tests can be administered which are similar to the end-of-course exams, e.g. by using past papers. Students can then be given keys to work out their own scores. Through self-assessment learners can realize that studying languages is different from other kinds of learning at their school or university, that the prime objective is performance in the language rather than knowledge about the language. When self-assessment has been done initially, and students have a *progress* record of their own performance, they are ready to periodically review their own progress. Godwin warns that self-assessment should not be restricted to the field of self-directed learning. In the conventional school and university classroom it is a practical tool, if implemented systematically and integrated into everyday classroom activities. Self-assessment can not only make students more active, it can assist them with the daunting task of learning how to communicate in another language. Above all, they can be helped to perceive their own progress and encouraged to see the value of what they are learning as William Godwin pointed out

"the best motive to learn is a perception of the value of the thing learned." (Godwin: 1797).

Conducting Storytelling Sessions to Develop Interpretive Processes: This is a procedure based on research into listening and reading comprehension that involves students in analysing and defending their interpretation of oral and written stories. This procedure extends students' range of interpretive strategies, developing their sensitivity to the differences between oral and written output, and their ability to balance top-down and bottom-up processing of both. More specifically, it enhances their ability to assess the demands of a text, exploit background schemata, combine factual and inferential interpretation and revise interpretation when desirable. Using group work, it helps students

to interact productively and harmoniously, exploiting both agreement and disagreement listening to stories in English. It is appropriate for both ESL and EFL and for students of all ages and all proficiencies above absolute beginner. It is readily adaptable to student interest and teacher proficiency and requires minimal equipment. A linguist Barbara Strod-Lopez defines the procedure with a step-up formula: "Introduce the story Read, tell or play the story, Ask students to summarize the story to themselves, Distribute ten statements about the story (True/False), Focused Listening (Ask students to formulate the problems they faced in assessing the statements and to predict where in the story the solutions appeared), Group work 1 (Encourage students to challenge and disagree with each other), Compare and explain responses (Focus on inferential statements, exploring the full range of opinions and arguments. Finally weigh arguments on each and select no best response), Distribute the story in written form, Group work 2 (Form groups to know which parts of the story seemed especially important when listening and which when reading?), Explaining the differences (Ask how listening is better than reading and vice versa) 11. Optional activity (Ask students to find sequel to the story)." (Barbara Strod-Lopez: 1996). Using stories in the way described develops critical thinking, self-monitoring, strategic flexibility and fruitful peer interaction. They can develop some skills: Using a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic background knowledge in making inferences and supporting them, Analysing the causes of differences in interpretation, Challenging and disagreeing harmoniously in English. Finally, and perhaps, most crucially they enjoy the stories and learn the language in a naturalistic ambience.

Using Figurative Language to Expand Students' Word Power: Figurative language is an area often neglected in the teaching of vocabulary. Research shows that understanding figurative language requires an act of *completion* from the reader, in which a linkage is established between the two disparate elements being compared and a series of linguistic inferences are made. It could be argued that, for the language learner, this process of decoding is applicable not only to poetic or literary language, but to many other instances of figurative language as well. For instance, My love is a rose. Violence is cancer. John's ego is very fragile and she is easily crushed, so you have to handle her with care. Lazar comments that "in order to understand figurative language the learner needs to unravel the covert connections in the utterance through a process of inference. Teachers explicitly encourage learners to work out." (Gillian Lazar: 1996). Hawkes says that it is also useful for their vocabulary-building skills, if students are encouraged to group

vocabulary around metaphorical sets. Idioms are a rich repository of figurative meanings. Hakes says, "In many classrooms it is likely that most idioms are taught formulaically as chunks of language to be digested whole. But perhaps alerting the student to the figurative meaning implicit in the idiom is a helpful way of making idioms more meaningful and more memorable." (Hawkes: 1996).

Vocabulary Instruction – Looking Behind the Word: For vocabulary instructions, it is suggested that lexis, grammar and discourse should no longer be thought of as separate strands in the language syllabus. Diana and Julia constitute that

"An integrative approach would allow the teacher to shift attention from one to the other and back again, in a matter that is natural and unforced." (Diana Ooi and Julia Lee Kim-Seoh: 1996).

For example, immediately after explaining what a particular word means semantically, the teacher might want to talk about its discourse or pragmatic value (the concept of marked and unmarked terms), teach or revise word formation processes in relation to that particular item, or show how syntactic configurations change depending on which form a *root word* is used. This can be achieved without too much strain by reorienting the more established approach, and thinking in terms of 'activities' rather than clearly demarcated 'lessons'. This would mean no longer having the 'vocabulary lesson' as such, but instead of teaching vocabulary through reading, and selecting passages for the reading skills lesson with a view to incorporating vocabulary and grammar activities. The avoidance of predetermined word lists of disparate items based on frequency counts, concepts of learn-ability, coverage etc., is also recommended. Pedagogic word lists can be derived from a corpus of written texts, and learners should be strongly urged to contribute to this data bank according to their own interests and aims. There are certain advantages to this approach. Breen states that "Vocabulary taught through reading would give the learner more opportunities to process language use at a deeper level and to develop semantic networks and other kinds of associative links that will ultimately enhance learning." (Breen, M.P.: 1984).

This approach has advantages, in particular the fact that learners can be involved in the process of deciding what should be taught, and when. This should enhance motivation and engagement. It has also been argued that teaching content should address specific learner needs. This would mean that, for intermediate and advanced learners, traditional selection criteria might be given a lower priority than items that lend themselves to particular kinds of treatment, such as comparison and contrast, derivational processes and collocability.

Spoken Grammar: The teaching of grammar is regularly based on written examples and on a proscriptive approach to 'correct' English. Teachers of spoken English consider that learners need to be given choices between written and spoken grammars, that the interpersonal implications of spoken grammars are important, and that methodologically inductive learning may be more appropriate than the 3Ps (Presentation-Practice-Production) approaches adopted in traditional grammar books. But then, McCarthy and Carter prove that "the 3Ps may need to be supplemented or extended to include procedures which involve students in greater language awareness of the nature of spoken and written distinctions, and thus or a range of grammatical choices across and between these modes." (Michael McCarthy and Ronald Carter: 1994). As such, a 3Is methodology may be appropriate standing for – Illustration – Interaction – Induction. 'Illustration' here means wherever possible examining real data which is presented in terms of choices of forms relative to context and use. 'Interaction' means that learners are introduced to discourse-sensitive activities which focus on interpersonal uses or language and the negotiation of meanings, and which are designed to raise conscious awareness of these interactive properties through observation and class discussion. 'Induction' takes the consciousness-raising a stage further by encouraging learners to draw conclusions about the interpersonal functions of different lexico grammatical options, and to develop a capacity for noticing such features as they move through the different stages and cycles of language learning. If such procedures are developed in tandem with a syllabus in which the language presented is not wholly constructed on sentence-based, decontextualised abstractions, then teaching about the spoken language using a '3Is' methodology has considerable potential for a more rapid acquisition by learners of fluent, accurate and naturalistic conversational and communicative skills.

Universals of Politeness: A certain '*politeness*' phenomenon is an ever present and an all pervading factor in our communication skill. It's not easy to understand the etiquette of cultures different from your own. Things that may be rude in your own language can be perfectly polite in English, and some things that you may consider polite are rude to an English speaker. Learning about English etiquette is the best way to avoid social gaffes. As such, it is essential on the part of the teacher to offer a wide variety of language functions present in English and their practice by the taught in practical sessions in the classroom. Language functions include many things: Making requests, agreeing and refusing requests, asking for information, making suggestions,

asking for permission, saying sorry, expressing possibility and so forth. The etiquette in the discipline of writing skill is yet another art to be owned with care and caution. As communicative competence has achieved ascendancy in the goals of foreign and second language pedagogy, attention to functional aspects of language identified as speech and writing activities has also increased. Autonomy in language learning is a desirable goal for philosophical, pedagogical and practical reasons. However, although, many language programmes claim to be learner-centred and supportive of learner initiative, much classroom practice appears to

subvert this goal. It is addressing towards embryonic status of the English Language teaching-learning process, certain opportunities are created in this paper for use with the teachers of English to deliver outstanding results for benefitting the ESL students making them learn English with a considerable ease, speed and joy much to the high water mark of satisfaction on the part both the teacher and the taught.

*"The eyes and ears of a well-prepared teacher continue to be among the best instruments of appraisal."*  
(Hunter, 1970)

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