

## USING SHORT STORIES AND INTERESTING LITERARY TEXTS TO MAKE LEARNING OF THE LANGUAGE MORE INTERESTING FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** The paper aims at stressing the use of tools and techniques that can help undergraduate students develop an interest in English language. Given the amount of importance accorded to the usage & knowledge of this language in the corporate world, it becomes imperative that the fresh graduates develop a good understanding of it. The mistakes in writing and speaking committed at the workplace often mar their chances for further growth. The paper, therefore, proposes to discuss a few innovative techniques to make the learning of the language fruitful and productive.

The focus of syllabi of communication across various disciplines usually is to inform the students theoretically about what communication essentially means and how one can overcome hurdles to make it more effective. This paper, however, will throw light on how to teach students to become better articulators rather than just communicators. Proficiency in English language, the language of international affairs & business, is in great demand today. We have reached a point where the professional world rewards the best articulators. Knowledge of Grammar and vocabulary for diverse situations and ideas is, therefore, a must. The paper in question will unearth a few techniques of teaching that may have a positive impact on the minds of learners.

**Keywords:** articulate well, dialects, lingua franca, teaching techniques

**Introduction:** English proficiency carries considerable weight in today's times. The unfortunate part, however, is that given the impact of local dialects and addition of indigenous flavor to the language, it has lost its original sheen. Inclined only towards mastering their chosen trades, the students at the tertiary level completely discount the learning of a language that has, today, become the lingua franca of the world. Inability to articulate well later becomes one of the biggest hurdles in career advancement- a fact that one realizes with great pain only later in life. The reason for this waning interest in the language may well be the teaching techniques being used in the classrooms.

The study in question focused on a select group of Undergraduate students from four classes in the college. The focus of the first exercise was building of vocabulary. The words chosen in each situation were such as would not be familiar to an average Undergraduate student. Each class was divided into 5 groups comprising 5 students each. Each group of students was then given a set of approximately ten words. The task involved writing down their meanings. After spending about 10 minutes on the exercises approximately 3 students in each group said that the words were obscure and that they could not figure out the meanings. Now, the same words used in situations that had the appearance of a story were handed to them. The students were then asked to interpret the meanings of the words in context. This time they were all able to come comfortably to close definitions of the given words.

The exercise, on account of its story telling form, not only attracted the interest of the students but also

made them learn words that were initially a challenge for them.

The focus of the second exercise was to make students express themselves as well as possible by narrating a story they had read. The stories initially handed to them were those from Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury tales. Each student was asked to come prepared with at least one story of his choice from home. The feedback, this time, was that the stories were funny yet interesting. The presentation time fixed for the story telling exercise was 5 to 8 minutes. The narration of the stories in the first class was not very effective as the presenters fumbled and repeated sentences. But, after about three similar sessions, they had become more comfortable in expressing their thoughts as they now started looking for appropriate vocabulary and more suitable grammatical structures to make their presentations flawless.

The conclusion derived from this small experiment was that stories and anecdotes had a stronger appeal on the mind of the learner as compared to any other method. So, if the lessons on communication are designed in such a manner, they are likely to give better results.

**Motivation:** The intention behind conducting the two experiments was to unearth an effective way to get students to become better articulators. The two experiments were conducted keeping the following in mind:

1. How to make learning of the words interesting and easier
2. How to make students retain the words after they had read them in context.

3. How to help them learn the usage
4. How to convince them to give an oral presentations in the class
5. How to help students speak without hesitation in the class

**Literature Review:** For the purpose of conducting the study, the following books were considered:

- Sodhi, Gurmeet, *An Inquest Into Writing* (Paragon International Publishers, 2012)
- Murphy, Raymond, *Murphy's English Grammar*, (Cambridge University, 2004 Third edition)
- M'Carter, Sam, *A book on writing*, (New Age International Publishers, 2006)
- Internet : Geoffery Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* – Sparknotes.com

**Objective:** Using short stories and interesting literary texts to make the learning of the language more interesting for undergraduate students.

**Research Problem:** The focus of any communication class is to inculcate in the students a better sense of understanding of the language. The trainers, however, find it difficult to get the students completely involved in the lessons delivered in the class as the students are more inclined towards their chosen areas of specialization. This problem becomes pronounced when these learners graduate and are ready to go out into the job market in search of work matching with their qualifications and capabilities. A number of these candidates are rejected by the hiring authorities simply on account of their inadequate knowledge of the language of communication. The objective of this study was derived from these very phenomena. To find a viable solution to this problem facing the students and trainers alike, this study was conducted with some self-made exercises.

**Research Technique used:** To find a solution to the above problem, the researcher used qualitative research techniques. The following activities were undertaken as part of the research:

- a.) held face to face conversations with the students in question regarding why and what problems they faced in learning a language
- b.) asked them to express their views on the following :

Q1. What method of learning a language works best for you?

Q2. When do you feel completely involved in a language class?

**References:**

1. Murphy, Raymond, *Murphy's English Grammar*, (Cambridge University, 2004 Third edition)
2. M'Carter, Sam, *A book on writing*, (New Age International Publishers, 2006)

Q3. When are you most likely to participate in a language class?

Q4. When do you find it hard grasp a concept in a language class?

On the basis of the answers obtained to above questions, two exercises that were felt to be effective enough in drawing the interest of the students in the learning of the language were devised and administered.

**Discussion :** The techniques used by language trainers for teaching of new words have till now focused on getting the students to learn the roots, prefixes and suffixes. This however becomes a little drab as roots are derived from various languages and the students feel they are being asked to cram things. The method of teaching words through context has also been in vogue but the texts chosen are dry and obscure. This study, therefore, included the use of self-made texts that were in the form of stories with unfamiliar words embedded in them. The sources of these stories were novels and books that would in general interest a learner. The texts were, however not picked up as it is from the books. They were modified to match with the learning abilities and desired goals in mind.

Similarly, in the case of presentations, the learners were asked to narrate stories from Chaucer's *Canterbury tales*. This not only enhanced their knowledge of literature but also made them go to dictionaries and grammar books to look for appropriate expressions for their presentations.

**Findings:** At the end of the whole experiment, it was found that most of the students had started picking up reading material of their choice and were extracting words from them to add on to their existing vocabulary. All in all, the process had brought them on to the track for learning new words. The same held good for the second exercise on presentations. In the subsequent classes they voluntarily picked up small texts and paraphrased them before the class. This led to the shedding of the initial hesitation of facing a crowd and also learning better ways to express themselves.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded that a student feels motivated to learn through stories and interesting texts and they should be incorporated in the language curriculums of all disciplines.

3. Lewis, Norman, *Word Power Made Easy*
4. Internet : Geoffery Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* – Sparknotes.com.

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