

## Paradigm Shift in English Teaching

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**Abstract:** What separates a man from other species is his ability to form his opinions in words that are intelligible to others around him. The very ability of ours to communicate has made us the predominant species on the earth. Over the span of centuries thousands of cultures have flourished which has resulted in us having millions of languages, but over the years no language has had the over extending reach as English. The language that became almost the second language of the entire world and in some cases the first is now the very language of communication around the world. With the immense development and shrinking of the so called boundaries dominated by countries or cultures and also the economic interests of the people has forced the world to shrink. With all this globalization and the seamless transfer of information, ideas and knowledge it has become imperative that there be a language that allows us to formulate all this which is understood by all. Hence the very importance of English brings to the fore. As our elders have said no sapling can live without the proper nourishment, the very importance of the English teaching across the globe cannot be understated. It has now grown from study of literature or just phonetics to an entire set of programming that is required for the world to thrive. It is this modernization and the role of English teaching that this paper intends to bring forth.

**Keywords:** Communication, language, globalisation, information, shifts.

Language is a bridge that helps us in the world to come together and communicate with each other. The barriers of geography, race, religion, creed and colour are rendered meaningless by communication and whatever being the medium it is the language that plays the most important role. The very essence of fact that we have been able to come together and share our thoughts, feelings and ideas with each other in a coherent manner – we are entitled to be called as humankind, making us the predominant species of the planet. It's a huge world out there, with over 6 billion humans residing in it. It's no mean feat to find a common ground which would help us to conquer the very challenges that come with such diversity when it comes to communicating with each other. Call it a by product of ruthless invasion, forced conversions or the pure economic power of the countries that have adapted this language of their own – English has now become the foremost of the languages when it comes to breaking these barriers down. Over the span of centuries thousands of cultures have flourished which has resulted in us having millions of languages, but over the years no language has had the over extending reach as English. The language that became almost the second language of the entire world and in some cases the first is now the very language of communication around the world. With the immense development and shrinking of the so called boundaries dominated by countries or cultures and also the economic interests of the people has

forced the world to shrink. With all this globalization and the seamless transfer of information, ideas and knowledge, it has become imperative that there be a language that allows us to formulate all this which is understood by all. Hence the very importance of English is brought to the fore. With English being spoken so widely, David Graddol a British Linguist and author of *The Future of English* has referred to it as the “world language” or the “*lingua franca of the modern world*”.

To briefly look at the history of the English language, the language's existence came into being when the West Germanic tribes or now popularly known as Anglo – Saxons invaded Britain. The language originated from the Anglo-Frisian dialects spoken by the invaders and Alfred the great called it English in the ninth century. With colonization and globalization, English, one of the most porous languages, draws its influence heavily from German, French, Dutch and Sanskrit, started imbibing the inflections and words from the local dialects. This would lead to people for whom the language was introduced for the first time being more open to adapting it and having greater comfort with it than with the languages of other conquerors. Again to further illustrate the point with which the language easily imbibes local cultures, David Graddol points out that native speakers of English are or will soon be outnumbered by those who speak English as a second or foreign language. In an article that focuses more specifically on this issue, he states the following in his work, *The Decline of the Native Speaker*,

The decline of the native speaker in numerical terms is likely to be associated with changing ideas about the centrality of the native speaker to norms of usage. [...] Large number of people will learn English as a foreign language in the 21st century and they will need teachers, dictionaries and grammar books. But will they continue to look towards the native speaker for authoritative norms of usage?  
(67-68)

Picking up on the above mentioned quote and for a minute disregarding the moral superiority exerted by a native superior of the language – it is clear that it's not just the language that will play a major role, but also teaching it and the methods used to accomplish the same will also be of great significance. As our elders have said no sapling can live without the proper nourishment, the very importance of the English teaching across the globe cannot be understated. It has now grown from study of literature or just phonetics to an entire set of programming that is required for the world to thrive. With the changing spectrum of the world, diverse cultures joining in with interacting and more people learning the language, it is evident that the teaching if language has to be as flexible as the language itself. Also the very usage of the language which has grown from just as a means of communicating to an important tool for commerce, negotiations, expression of feelings to the very important stopping and starting of wars – the teaching has to modernize itself. Also, it has become quite evident to the society that teaching the language would not be the only solution. The English teachers now have to educate their wards with the content as well as the context of their teaching. If I may be allowed to use the common technological parlance

to illustrate my point – “It has become imperative that their students are programmed with a certain level of finesse in the language which would help them in executing the important and necessary functions that are required of them.” If we look at the English teaching that has been done traditionally, English has always been taught in a linear fashion with students being taught the discrete points of grammar and phonology first. This is all done at the expense of teaching to use English as a medium of communication. This approach could be regarded as what Wilkins in *National Syllabus* calls a “synthetic” approach in which “different parts of the language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up” ( 2). It is best illustrated by David Nunan (an Australian linguist and author of the best selling English textbook series in the world). He points out in his book *An Organic Approach to Grammar Teaching* that

The language wall is erected one linguistic brick at a time. The easy grammatical bricks are laid at the bottom of the wall, and they provide a foundation for the more difficult ones. The task for the learner is to get the linguistic bricks in the right order: first the word bricks, and then the sentence bricks. If the bricks are not in the correct order, the wall will collapse under its own ungrammaticality.( 65) However as all of us are quite aware that teaching and learning are two very different things and such approach might well be taken as good teaching technique would fall short in making the student learn a lot. It is thus that the English teaching has now to take on a more holistic and humanistic approach where the focus has to now shift on to the student and his needs for having the language as a more comprehensive tool to meet his and the worlds requirements. I would be remiss to point out that it's not just the intense requirement of having a paradigm shift towards the student that has affected the English teaching, we just cannot forget the huge technological progress that taken place. Internet, tablets, readers have all brought a huge shift that has to bring out a virtual u-turn in the teaching techniques. Initiative like the US federal government partnering with Jeff Bezos and Amazon to use Kindle as means to bring English to the sub Saharan countries as well as the non-native speakers in America speak of a big change in the older techniques. Also with the whole communication technique that was taught earlier where English as to be used as verbal or a written language has a new rival now – computers place where the boundaries are more blurred than usual. Again we are moving away from classrooms to virtual classrooms where the student and the teacher are connected by the net, so any thoughts of using traditional techniques go for a toss. Usage of tapes, CD's, DVD's, real time classes or recorded ones has all brought in new challenges which the teachers now have to strive to address. This brings us to the challenges that need to be addressed regarding the very techniques that need to be used for teaching. As pointed out the Computer mediated communication or CMC has now formed major chunk of our communication process, bringing in lexicological and phonological changes to the language (what becoming wat, I am becoming i m, words like multitasking being added etc.) we are

now at a place where the teaching has to cater basically to Multiliteracies – a term coined by New London group. Multiliteracy is a pedagogical approach that strives to answer, reply or react to the inadequacy of educational approaches, which limit themselves to 'page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language' (61). Instead, it suggests that students should learn to negotiate a multiplicity of media and discourses. Any pedagogical approach that can meet this challenge (multiplicity of...) should include the following such elements, which are discussed in more depth by the New London Group. Among them are:

- Immersion in situated practice: Practice in authentic communicative situations is required for students to learn how to collaborate with partners, negotiate complex points, and critically evaluate information as it applies to particular meaningful contexts. At the same time, such authentic situations can give students the opportunity to develop new technological illiteracies in meaningful contexts.
- Overt instruction: The kinds of sophisticated communication skills required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will seldom develop through practice alone. Students need the opportunity to step back under the guidance of a teacher to critically analyze the content, coherence, organization, pragmatics, syntax, and lexis of communication (which is necessary, for example, in the analysis and critique of texts, and other media forms. [B-CD]).
- Critical framing: Effective cross-cultural communication and collaboration, including making effective use of information found in online networks, necessitates a high degree of critical interpretation. The instructor's overt role thus should extend beyond narrow language items to also help students learn to critically interpret information and communication in a given social context and
- Transformed practice: Transformed practice allows students to improve their communication skills by raising their practice to new levels based on prior practice, instruction, and critical framing. This involves working toward higher-quality outcomes within particular contexts and also to transfer what has been learned for application in new social and cultural contexts.

Bearing in mind all this, it is easy to figure out that this goes beyond the very scope of traditional syllabus. We have to come up with newer methods that would take into consideration all of the above. This brings us to the project based or task based ways of teaching. This would involve learning by experience or learning by doing. This goes a long way in breaking the traditional hierarchies of teaching and establishes a more open approach for the student, where he or she is forced to learn by using all the communication strategies and planning. This approach thus becomes more hands on and draws the participation of the student more than just listening on the lectures. However, if we are led to believe that this would then diminish the importance of the teacher, then we would be wrong in believing so. A lot of argument can go towards the point that instead of having a teacher, the new techniques require having more of a facilitator, but all these will be wrong. We are right in thinking that the teacher does not control the mind of the student, and thus have very little

control over the natural learning process of the student, which is unique to every person. However, what the teacher can help in creating is the right environment that is required for the students to learn. Also a degree of authority has to be exerted when it comes to learning, meaning a very return to our old *gurukul* methods is very much in the offering. Also, the teacher is responsible for making the tasks more informative and interesting which draws their students into an environment more conducive to language learning. With rapid changes brought about by globalization and the effect of technological advancements have made, it is apparent that English teaching has to take a monumental shift. To put it in a very contemporary sense, English teaching has to now become more like programming or learning a computer language. Every single object or function that is taught has to be able to execute an important and necessary task, as well as the person using has to make sure that there are no redundancies in the communication pattern used by him/her. Again, it is no longer enough to teach language in a linear pattern, with every line of code coming one after another, but has to take more of a blocks kind of approach where learning is imparted in blocks which would be necessary. Also the student has to be made aware of the strategies and planning techniques which formulating his/her own ideas, so that instead of a long garbled though grammatically correct message, the person ends up with a precise and useful piece of language.

The role of teacher in all this is pivotal, where first the paradigm has to shift from a linear approach to a more holistic one which would allow the student to use it in a better manner across all mediums of communication. Literature will always be a joy, and its place in teaching cannot be taken over by anything else or also by any other way. But when it comes to learning the language, we do have a lot to ponder about.

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