

Software and The Foreignness of ELTL: To Be Or Not To Be?

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Abstract: As we inhabit the time and space of twenty first century blessed with the acme of success in the field of science and technology, we can proudly say that the pedagogy of ELTL programme has come of age now. Technology in general and computer and the cyber world, i.e. internet in particular have effected charismatic change in the life style of the people at large, taking language learning concerns, especially for English, in its stride as well. What earlier, with the advent of printing press was experienced by the people, is now being relished today with added flavour due to the bliss of ever evolving techno-world intended to enrich our teaching- learning experience. It has led to the macrocosmic change in the human world emphasizing a highly structured pattern of paradigm shift in language learning atmosphere. Highly sophisticated software and gadgets are able to effect radical attitudinal change in people for learning English with greater spirit and enthusiasm. From the methodical, stereotypical style of teaching a non-native language like English to the pedagogy based on developed software of computers with latest tools for test and evaluation of language efficiency, the entire trajectory of ELTL pedagogy has been a relishing experience for one and all. It has, of course, certain shortcomings as well which I have intentionally cared not to accommodate here as they lie beyond the purview of this paper. As for the 'promise and threat', I have endeavoured to explore only the promises fulfilled by the computer technology. English Language Teaching Learning programme has been certified as more of a promise of acquisition fulfilled than of the threat of learning it as a foreign language continuing, thanks to the incredible performances of the software.

Keywords: Computer, ELTL, Pedagogy, Softwares, Technology .

English language teaching and learning programme or what we call it now as ELTL is still as relevant a concern as it used to be a few decades ago when the main thrust of discussion was on English as a foreign or second language in non-native countries including India. Earlier, in order to facilitate the smooth learning conditions for L2 learners, many a training technique and innovative pedagogical tool was developed, which proved tremendously successful in ensuring desirable results in terms of teachers' proficiency in the language and the learners' effective response to it. Various training programmes, short term courses, regular practices in the classrooms, seminars and conferences etc. played immense role in not only disseminating the awareness of the importance of English in various fields of emerging trades and technologies and other academic and non-academic areas across the world but also generated radical tools and apparatus to make learning an easy and enjoyable experience. The variety of study materials and new and novel techniques of introducing them before the learners was, indeed, stupendous in the post twentieth century all over the world where English is not a native language. But, as

we inhabit the time and space of twenty first century blessed with the acme of success in the field of science and technology, we can proudly say that the pedagogy of ELTL programme has come of age now. Technology in general and computer and the cyber world, i.e. internet in particular have effected charismatic change in the life style of the people at large, taking language learning concerns, especially for English, in its stride as well. What earlier, with the advent of printing press was experienced by the people, is now being relished today with added flavour due to the bliss of ever evolving techno-world intended to enrich our teaching- learning experience. It has led to the macrocosmic change in the human world emphasizing a highly structured pattern of paradigm shift in language learning atmosphere. Highly sophisticated softwares and gadgets are able to effect radical attitudinal change in people for learning English with greater spirit and enthusiasm.

Before the paper highlights certain specific softwares available today for the development of essential linguistic competences, it attempts to share the problems of **L-1** and **L-2**. **L-1** stands for **Language-1** which means the first language or the mother tongue of the learner. Generally, the mother tongue is the first language of the child irrespective of his place. **L2** stands for Language2 which means the second language of the child which s/he learns in his/her school. The recognition of English as a second language or as a foreign language has always been debated particularly in India being a multilingual country. So far as **L-1** is concerned, the notion of acquisition of language prevails for language by definition is a social behaviour. And, as a social behaviour, language too, as we acquire any other behaviour, is worthy of acquisition, and not of learning in the strict sense of linguistic terminology. We acquire our mother tongue in the natural process of assimilation of other behaviours and habits as we grow up. **L-2**, as it has been identified as a second language or a foreign language in many cases, calls for learning, and not for acquiring. It is associated with the traditional approach to the study of language as a conscious skill involving intellectual effort and deductive reasoning. It gets prominently emphasized in relation to any non-native language, let alone English. So, the task of learning a second or a foreign language is more of a formal and structured affair than that of a native language where acquisition is helped by ease and spontaneity. The prime concern of the paper under discussion is to probe into the problematics of language recognition in general and English in particular for both the teacher/trainer and the taught/trainee. The paper also endeavours to highlight how the technological aids/softwares have been instrumental in stabilizing the conflict of linguistic binaries by being user/learner friendly in their models. So, what prevailed earlier as **BALL**¹ (Book Assisted Language Learning) is now being dominated by what we call **CALL**² (Computer Assisted Language Learning.). With the help of select linguistic softwares, we can easily identify the boon of technology in development of pedagogy and the shifts of paradigm in ELTL programme across the non-native nations of the world with India in prominence.

Computer Assisted Instruction generated a huge space for all kinds of

learning including language making them interesting, profound and enjoyable. So far as language area is concerned, CALL i.e. Computer Assisted Language Learning has worked wonder in the last few years. Here computer as medium is used to teach a particular subject involving the features like animations, music, voice variants and other effects to make learning efficacious and retentive. So whether for experienced or inexperienced teachers and dull or bright students, the availability of diverse choices lying with online resources has really made CALL a grand success world wide. Adding even a more radical dimension to the ELTL i.e. English Language Teaching Learning programme, multi-media computers have worked wonder with their features of different instructional options, learners' choices and high degree of interactivity. The foreignness of English as a non-native language is just overcome by the possibility of using different media in one single interface. These computers can be used interactively as pointed out by Paul Brett³ with a provision of a number of learners' choices in terms of contents, mode activity type of tasks, difficulty, and level of support, sequence, time and place of learning, guidance etc. For example, a learner has the choice of video or audio mode or both in the use of multimedia content. S/he is also facilitated to exercise the choice of sequence guiding him/her for the next activity. Thus, a classroom of language integrated effectively with such computers provides ample scope of interactive learning central to CALL. The whole pedagogy of learning today has undergone a tremendous change due to paradigm shift effected by CALL, let alone language learning or acquisition. The centrality of the textbook resources earlier has now been superseded by the authentic updated materials on almost all subjects supported by hyperlinks and hypermedia. The easy access to graphics and illustrations along with the text and the availability of dictionary and encyclopedia at the fingertips certainly provide an edge over the days of BALL, i.e. Book Assisted Language Learning. So, the paradigm shift in language learning is just observable in two ways. The first is that the mere dependence on books is no longer the helplessness of the learner using Internet. Secondly, Internet too being user friendly empowers the learners facilitating access to self-learning.

Carla Meskill, while referring to John Higgins, one of the pioneers in Computer Assisted Language Learning Programme for his ways of understanding computer in language education talks about the metaphors like magister and pedagogue as used by him. She explains how these metaphors specify the varied roles of computer affecting the nature of language education saying: "On one hand as machine a magister (the director and controller of instruction) and on the other the machine is as pedagogue (the slave whose sole function is to respond to and serve the learner)"⁴. The distinction clearly shows that while computer as magister manipulates what happens in the language process, computer as pedagogue in its more user-friendly features encourages learners to explore and discover language on their own. Unlike the arduous process of learning a non-native language like English, the user-friendly technique of the machine is what makes the latter approach as more cohesive stating language as worthy of acquisition. One of the recent

achievements of computer technology is the development of the software, JAWS or Job Access With Speech⁵. Though this software was developed to assist the visually impaired children in their language learning endeavour, it has equally benefitted the common non-native learners, teachers and the taught. This is a screen reading software called JAWS designed in America. JAWS has features which assist learners for all the intricacies of a non-native language like English. For example, the poor performance of Indians being non-native learners for peculiar English pronunciation can well be attended by the use of this software. The frequently mispronounced words like heart, breakfast, memento, extempore etc. can be easily corrected if one uses JAWS. The phonetic accuracy is the prime advantage of this software for both students as well as the teachers..

Paralinguistic features play an equally significant role in communication particularly observable in speaking being one of the important linguistic skills. Accent, pitch, rhythm and intonation are the grave concerns of a good speaker. Any lapse in these features not only results in loss of communication but also in ludicrous and at times precarious effects. That is why a sincere speaker takes care of all the subtleties to ensure efficacious communication. For instance, a person attending a funeral ceremony of one of his/her close neighbors, utters the word of solace and grief but unfortunately does not care for the tone and pitch requisite for the seriousness of the occasion may land him in trouble creating an embarrassing situation for already aggrieved family. These features once maintained while speaking not only sound fascinating from linguistic perspective but also add to the efficacy and precision of communication intended. JAWS here is of great help as it is also designed to ensure the correctness of accent and intonation for the learners in general. Today we can see that American English is rapidly competing with British English in its accent. This presents yet another problem for all non-native learners to be proficient in both variants of English. JAWS is designed accordingly to produce both varieties of English overcoming the problems duality of phonetic features of learners at large. The plural use of JAWS can be realized with the fact that it is designed to read and pronounce not only English and its variants but also other languages like French, Italian, Spanish, German and their multiple variants. So, a person fond of languages can better exploit this software designed and developed for the purpose, which should, however, be called MLTL, i.e., Multi/Many Language Teachers Learning rather than ELTL, i.e. English Language Teaching Learning programme alone. Moreover, JAWS is also able to read out books available on Internet in E-text format. Thus, the software is a panacea for the intricacies and complications of all areas of a particular language. However, all the books are not available on for free access but some of them still can be purchased at much reduced cost. There is just one impediment amidst multifaceted features of this screen reader software. And, that is its cost. It is too high to be affordable for a common individual student. However, it can be purchased by the institutes to accommodate the larger community of students and teachers.

Test and evaluation has always been a potent pedagogical tool irrespective of discipline. So far as language is concerned the test becomes still more relevant since language permeates all disciplines, whether science, arts or commerce. Computer Assisted Language Learning proves to be of great help in developing the test tool for a particular language. Some of the well known softwares with specific linguistic tests as explained by Dan Douglas are Hot Potatoes, Moodle and WebCT. Hot Potatoes itself consists of six modules that enable users to create multiple choices, short answers, jumbled sentence, cross word, matching/ordering, gap-fill (cloze) exercises for delivery using the Internet. However, it is essentially most helpful in low-stakes tests like in-class quizzes. But, with its user friendly features like easy downloading and accessibility interested users cum employees at public funded, non-profit educational institutions can avail it free of charge since the software is not free ware. Similarly, Moodle, a more potent test development tool fascinates a number of linguistic items like description, essay, true/false and those available with Hot Potatoes. Much like JAWS explained earlier, Moodle also facilitates with the importing features of reading texts and audio files for reading and listening tests. These softwares of language testing can also be integrated into an online course by institutions for designing and developing online classes including assessment modules. It is still more accessible to one and all as it is a free complete online course management system to be used by individual teachers or to be adopted by entire institutions. WebCT like Moodle is also an efficacious test development tool which can engage various types of assessments such as fill-in-the-blank, jumbled sentences, paragraph writing, true/false, short answer, matching, multiple choices etc. Thus, it is similar to Moodle, but, a relatively easy programme to use for developing comparatively simple and low-stakes tests. However, the latest version of this product, Blackboard Learning System-Vista Enterprise Edition, is a commercially available integrated course management system that also allows for multiple assessments thereby helping language teaching learning programme smooth and interesting. Thus, we see that computer has established itself as a proven wonder in influencing the teaching learning programme all over the world. With its dual role of “magister” and “pedagogue”, the machine has largely been responsible for the complete paradigm shift in language education in general and English in particular. From the methodical, stereotypical style of teaching a non-native language like English to the pedagogy based on developed softwares of computers with latest tools for test and evaluation of language efficiency, the entire trajectory of ELTL pedagogy has come of age with this technology. Apart from its basic functions and features of being “infinitely patient, allowing us to spend as many hours as necessary and being extremely fast” (Douglas,56), the cyber/computer technology has also contributed to the learners by making them available new and newer models of knowledge and tools of language. It has, of course, certain shortcomings as well which I have intentionally cared not to accommodate here as they lie beyond the

purview of this paper. As for the 'promise and threat'(Douglas,57) I have endeavoured to explore only the promises fulfilled by the computer technology. English Language Teaching Learning programme has been certified as more of a promise of acquisition fulfilled than of the threat of learning it as a foreign language continuing, thanks to the incredible performances of the software.

End Notes :

1. The acronym, BALL(Book Assisted Language Learning) is, however, understood today to stand for **Blog Assisted Language Learning** as well. In the ever evolving world of technology pedagogy of linguistic acquisition comes of age when yet another acronym, **MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning)** is recognized as quite functional and fulfilling to a great extent.
2. Web excerpt from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer-assisted_language_learning/Accessed 4 May, 2013.
3. Brett, Paul. *Multimedia for Listening Comprehension: The Design of a Multimedia Based Resources for Developing Listening Skills* , System. Vol. 23, No. 1.1995.77-85
4. Meskill, Carla. "Metaphor That Shape and Guide CALL Research". *CALL Research Perspective*. Ed. Joy L.Egbert and Gina Mikel Petrie. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers,2005.Web . p 30.Accessed 5 May, 2013 .
5. Ted Henter, a motorcycle racer who lost his sight in a 1978 automobile accident, is the originator of JAWS who released it in 1989.

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- Douglas, Dan. (2010). *Understanding Language Testing*, Hodder Education, UK.

