

ACTIVITIES BASED CONTENT FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL: AN INDIAN CLASSROOM PERSPECTIVE.

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This review examines research on teaching English language at the collegiate contexts with a particular focus on the merging of language learning activity and regular set of activities based on a particular relevant field. The overarching question framing this review is: What is the base for the activity of language learning and how are they instantiated as curricula and instruction at the college level? To respond to this question content for teaching language in India is analyzed and addressed as evidenced in published research. The review concludes by suggesting overarching contexts and approaches for the promotion of language learning activity and directions for future research.

Keywords: acquisition, contexts, curriculum, language teaching, proficiency, Tasks

Introduction

In the past decade, in the field of language teaching special initiatives have been taken to develop oral proficiency in the target language for which content, context and culture have become critical issues. It may be also because of the growing interest to speak fluently in English among the young people graduating from Indian technical universities and colleges, as a good number of young students are being recruited to work in the United States. Responding to demand for Indian technical workers, the United States Senate increased the quota of visas for skilled workers from 115,000 to 195,000 in 2000 (Alarcon, 1999; Saxenian, 2000). Though in the recent times, obtaining visa has become difficult, the statistics show that Indians still receive nearly 45 percent of visas each year. On the other hand, there is a growing demand for Indian students at the universities in the United States (Creehan, 2001). Accordingly, at the college level in India, teaching faculty is expected to rise up with activities and curricula, in order to communicate and operate effectively with the necessary vocabulary in target language.

The number of English medium schools is increasing in India and yet the practice in speaking in English and the knowledge in communication are not satisfactory at the college level. In order to connect intellectually to the rest of the world, the need for collegiate language training programs becomes vital for

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continued existence. Yet an important barrier to this mission is the bifurcation in many FL (Foreign Language) programs. At the higher level it becomes difficult for a language trainer to decide his level of operation and the target to achieve. In other words, more often than not, students for the colleges are not from one background and do not have the common impudence as they come from different social and educational background. This bifurcation is characterized by fixed lines of demarcation between lower-level language courses on one end and advanced literature and culture courses on the other hand. (Paesani. K & Allen .W. Heather, 2012: 54).

In the context of India, the difference between lower level and advanced level in the field of language teaching is not demarcated clearly. The difference is evident only when the students are prepared for interviews and oral proficiency. As mentioned above, at the college level, a facilitator or language trainer is squeezed in between the continued influence of lower-level language courses and the expectancy of advanced literature and culture courses. As Maxim (2009) points out, there is a need for systematic research on what advanced language capacities look like, how students reach them, and which pedagogies facilitate their development.

Language teaching in India is mostly carried out with the facilitation of non-native speakers. It is also not easy to identify efficient teachers or trainers of language like that of measuring other skills as a “highly qualified” teacher can only be identified with the certificates and college degree. This is not only a problem faced with in the frontiers of India but it’s a problem of the world in language teaching. For any foreign language teaching for that matter, it is not easy to find the right material and usually recruitment is done with a general outlook. As Sullivan remarks, “all can agree that the French teacher who cannot speak French will not be a successful teacher of French language” (2011, p. 241). There are studies that compare and contrast educational practices in India to those in the United States with respect to the goals that teachers have for student learning, the way teachers approach the curriculum and the textbook, the way knowledge is communicated to students, and the way teachers interact verbally with their students (Clark, 2001; Alexander, 2000). However, in learning English though there are influential approaches in Indian classrooms like the west, both the teacher and the students do not have regular opportunity to socialize with their target language. Thus, considering the necessity of satisfying the needs of the advanced level students in India and the resource available for them, this study analyses the key concepts and the possibility of merging of language learning activity with regular activities like sports and games which can generate regular opportunity to socialize. It also brings out the possibility of maneuvering contexts interesting fields or contexts from fields in which students are interested to make the activity of learning language subjective and productive.

Language Learning Activity

During the last few decades, so many methods and approaches considered to be suitable for effective second language teaching have been coming up. At the same time, there is a growing urge towards discovering the best method and the best content to achieve effective foreign language learning is evident. Experts at different occasions have come with different views about language teaching or towards the betterment of language teaching. Though there are methods and suggestions, this review brings out some of the key concepts in the development of language proficiency.

According to Gattegno, a major cause of mistakes in day-to-day living is lack of the appropriate inner criteria (1976. p.27). It implies the fact that in order to undertake an activity of teaching language and to manage it successfully, there is a requirement of criteria. In another work, he states his views about a teacher in which good teachers, according to him, whether of language or of anything else, are the ones who 'force awareness and thus generate criteria' (1985. p. 66).

Virginia Collier's Conceptual Model for Acquiring a Second Language (1995), which helps explain the complex interacting factors that students experience when acquiring a second language has four major components: sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive processes. As Omaggio Hadley stated, "language proficiency is not a monolithic concept representing an amorphous ideal that learners rarely attain; rather it is comprised of a whole range of abilities that must be described in a graduated fashion to be meaningful" (2001, pp. 8–9). According to Mishra, communication can be a complicated process of giving and taking with innumerable intricacies and dimensions. Often, however, it is seen as a set of communicative competency involving the written and spoken modes. It is taught as a package involving training in writing, speaking, listening and reading. (Mishra, 2006. p. 2).

Paesani. K & Allen .W. Heather in their conceptualization of Literature and Culture have brought out a concept to meet the requirement of "considerable knowledge and practical expertise in the area of linking content and language learning in order to be able to contribute to an extended curriculum whose pedagogies would lead students toward the stated goal of [translingual and transcultural competence]" (Byrnes, 2008, p. 23). The theoretical framework adopted for this study extends from this approach to find a curriculum whose pedagogies would lead students towards translingual competence.

Content for Language Teaching In India

Wilkins states plainly that in the process of language teaching, 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 (Wilkins, 1976 p. 2). Language teaching methods are composed of prescribed tasks for understanding the syntactical and semantic patterns and the

task associated with language teaching is defined by Long as "...a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation... and helping someone across a road. In other words, by 'task' is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between" (Long, 1985 p. 89).

Thompson (2008) argued that instructors must shape course syllabi and lesson plans to explicitly merge language and content to move students from school level to proficiency level. She has also demonstrated how a syllabus might be organized according to linguistic functions appropriate to the levels of higher aims like narration and description which require knowledge in the past and future tenses. She also believed that these should be a part of class room discussions.

The main purpose of giving a course for college students in language is to make them inculcate the habit of writing and speaking in English which may be of great help for them in the future to intellectually connect to the rest of the world or to locate materials for their own technical requirements.

The questions that need to be answered here are what is the major difference between the syllabus of the beginners and that of the college level students? How are they actually taken to the students and how their proficiency level is assessed at the end of the course? The fact is that in most of the technical colleges and universities in south India, same kind of training in reading and writing, as it was done at the lower levels, is done and the rest are discussed theoretically. Above all listening and speaking part of the syllabus is attempted but the nature of the task is arbitrary and never based on a concrete platform.

In order to keep the language classroom alive and productive, Bueno (2009) and Zinn (2004) promoted film as a springboard to students' oral and written productions and they also focused on development of students' media literacy and the analysis of written/visual texts. Zyzik and Polio (2008) examined the types in incidental focus on form the way in which attention of the students can be attracted to the forms of the language when need arises and the methods of language instructor to take it to the students.

Thus, teaching English language at the collegiate contexts has been time and again researched with the focus on participation in classroom discussions and creation of interest for the students to participate. The content for language teaching has been literary content on which a meaningful discussion can be orchestrated or some innovative endeavors like the help of media for the advanced level to intensify students' participation. In the context of Indian class rooms, these are considered to be additional requirements along with the basic grammar classes that they are used to for the development of writing and reading skills. This study suggests the

possibility of following a special context or a situation that may be of the students' interest for all the four skills in such a way that a regular systematic pedagogy can be followed. In other words, instead of finding different situations based activities and examples that are incoherent to teach all the grammatical rudiments, this study suggests that it is possible to generate examples and tasks from one situation based on which most of the tasks and examples to work out can be designed.

Conceptualizing Content and Situation

Peter Skehan (2003) brings the people interested in the use of tasks for language teaching under three major groups: researchers, testers, and teachers, and each group has different concerns when working with tasks. Researchers see tasks as convenient or necessary means to explore theoretically-motivated questions. The emphasis will be on some kind of empirical study, and its level of validity, and the task that is chosen, and the way it is used will be secondary to the research questions which are being asked. Thus he carries out his experiment in a class room setup, gathers data and analyses it. A tester, according to him, also employs self-contained individual tasks but he works with the available data, arising from actual communication, which can be assessed and already standardized. Teachers can be differentiated with the pedagogical approach which is not subject to the same degree of manipulation characteristic of a research study. He adds that here the time span will be extended as teachers do not narrow down with demonstrating some sort of experimental effect, and are likely to be integrated within some extended pedagogic sequence. Peter Skehan understanding about researchers, testers, and teachers gives us the fact that a developing effective pedagogy happens gradually and after careful experimentation and evolution. For an example, a test carried out with the view of exploring the possibility of teaching language through activities based on sports and games has shown positive impact on the learners. It is because a familiar or an affable environment can certainly activate language learning than a task or activity that is not so.

Mauer (1997), in the Presentation-Practice-Production framework has brought out the fact that the games can be either for practicing specific language items or skills or for more communicative language production. However, a very little research has been carried out on the possibility of encompassing the entire objective language learning task with in one regular game. Designing activities based on the field of outdoor games for teaching language at the college level will be suitable for young students at the college level as it has the charming features associated with it. Generally, young students are attracted towards it more than people from other ages irrespective of their sex. It is because it is a part of their everyday life. They either like it through actual participation or by regularly watching it on television.

Most importantly students at the college level tend to feel that they are closely connected to the game than the teacher because of their juvenile fancy. Here students

need not have to collect information especially on the topic as they do it every day out of interest in order to share with their friends and they are interested in it. The following paragraphs bring out a strategy with cricket to teach learners from vernacular medium to learn the basics for formal presentation and writing and the objective of making them to write comfortably in laboratory observation.

Task I

Preparation

First students were given the basic verbs related to cricket and to use it with regular pronouns in simple present. Then the structure of a sentence in simple present is explained and changes in the verb forms are identified. The general usage of simple present was analyzed and they were made to understand that it is possible to present all the procedures with the help of simple present and its passive form. In order to give practice in the same the following activity had been devised and executed.

Activity

Few of the cricketing articles like bat, ball, gloves and stumps were given to them and they were made to define them in the class in turns. First they had to speak about the thing and define it. Then they had to say a sentence about its use and finally they had to speak about its color and shape.

Example:

1. This is a cricket bat.
2. A bats man strikes the ball and scores runs.
3. It is made of wood and it has a handle.

Task II

Preparation

First students were made to take the cricketing articles like bat, ball, gloves and stumps and to take their position in such a way they are getting ready to play. They will have to exactly as an instructor directs them.

1. One student to give a set of instructions.
2. One to do as per the instruction.
3. One to give commentary.
4. One to record it.
5. Clear directives were given regarding the sequential actions.

Activity

In the setup of the class room, three things are done at a time. One gives instruction in simple present to students with cricketing tools. The third student gives commentary as it is done. The fourth one records it in passive in such a way to record the happenings.

Example:

1. A: Ram, take your position in front of the stump. (Instruction)
2. B: Ram takes his position in front of the stump. (Commentary)
3. C: The position is taken in front of the stump by ram. (Passive Form)

Contexts and Further Research

Making the learners to think of entities or situations familiar to the teacher for classroom language practice may not completely make the participants get involved because of many reasons like the individual's knowledge about the entity, understanding, and anxiety etc. so, it can be made easy by giving them facts that they deal with regularly. Making them to think and compare two things like computer and human brain may not be inviting but making them to interpret a cricket score card will be certainly appealing. This can be further taken to higher levels by making students play and give live commentary, preparing a match summary, taking the role of players and giving press report and preparing a dream team. In this way language activities at the college level can be demarcated at a higher proficiency level with that of lower levels.

Just like language for specific purpose that has gained a great importance in the recent years at the college level, a parallel and compelling regular activities can be supplemented for productive learning. As language for specific purpose is for providing language assistance for professionals of a particular field, students of varied fields can come under a common ground to learn language. As exemplified through the previous paragraphs with a popular out door game from which vocabulary, verbs, tasks and discussions can be orchestrated, activities like cooking or designing that are liked generally by the majority can also be made as the foundation for the cultivation of productive language acquisition. It can be a wide arena for language researchers and teachers in India and else ware in the world as the elements of common interest varies along with the culture.

Conclusion

This review concludes by presenting the fact that along with pedagogical and curricular approaches and initiatives to teach language for particular purposes, creation of parallel contexts from a relevant field or field of students' interest will open a new possibility in language at the collegiate contexts. As Magnan's (2003) points out the recent developments and bringing of the subfields of our departments

closer together and make their interaction potentially more fruitful than earlier times, this review suggests parallel fields that can be maneuvered to sustain continuity and convenience.

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