

TEACHER COGNITION

G. Bhuvaneshwari*

Abstract: *“Teacher cognition research is concerned with understanding what teachers think, know and believe. Its primary concern, therefore, lies with the unobservable dimension of teaching – teachers’ mental lives” - Professor Simon Borg. This definition indicates that there are three questions before you. What do teachers think? What do teachers know and what do teachers believe? These must be the million dollar questions for every student and it is also crucial for every teacher to know the answers for these questions about themselves. Answers to all the three questions need not be the same. But the answers play a vital role in the development of every student the teacher interacts with. While the young learners believe everything their teachers believe. What a teacher says something to a kindergarten student is like Bible words because the teacher is like a god to him/her. He/She does not bother what the teacher actually thinks or knows. It is not the same case with adult learners. They want to know what their teacher really knows and thinks and believes. The belief system of the teacher may either persuade or dissuade a student. It needs utmost sincerity and responsibility when it comes to teaching. Thus this paper will focus on what should a language teacher think, know and believe while teaching the adult learners in the present scenario.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English language in a multilingual country like India is a highly challenging and interesting task as it provides a platform to the language teacher to learn while teaching. This paper aims at discussing set of beliefs that the English teachers in India have and also to understand clearly the root cause of the belief system.

II. IT IS DIFFICULT TO TEACH A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO STUDENTS IN INDIA WITHOUT ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

There is belief that any foreign language in India can be taught only through English. This complicates the process because the student and the teacher should be first good at English grammar before learning any other foreign language. According to linguistic theories, a language can be taught well only when it is taught in the same language rather than using other language as a medium. Influence of English is so much in India that people are made to believe that English is the only source of medium through which foreign languages can be taught.

* Asst. Professor, Division of Languages and Social Sciences, VIT University, Chennai, India

III. IT IS IMPORTANT TO SPEAK ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITH EXCELLENT ACCENT

Teachers today do believe that a language especially English should be spoken in native accent. They do think that is one form of being standard. It is important to be understood while you communicate. Accents can be followed only when a person masters the language. While few would agree for the statement, there are others who would say accent is not really important. There occurs confusion because there is a mild difference between accent and pronunciation.

Pronunciation is one's ability to pronounce words in a way that makes them intelligible to other speakers of the language whereas accent is intonation and rhythm of speech. It is anything that makes one sound foreign. Thus pronouncing the words clearly would help one to communicate well rather than focussing on accent, which is a mere imitation of the other language.

IV. IT IS NECESSARY TO KNOW THE TARGET LANGUAGE-SPEAKING CULTURE(S) IN ORDER TO SPEAK A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

To address this challenge again, we have two sets of arguments. To speak English, one must behave like English. It also involves saying "I do not speak Tamil well" or "I am from a convent, so I do not speak regional languages well". It is important to know the culture of a language when you move into a new country but one need not adopt the culture to be well versed in that language.

V. LEARNING ENGLISH IS MOSTLY A MATTER OF LEARNING MANY NEW VOCABULARY WORDS

Vocabulary can be defined as the words of a language, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words which convey a particular meaning, the way individual words do. Vocabulary is central to English language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Wilkins (1972) wrote that "... while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". Vocabulary is important to communication but knowing many words can make one a better speaker as the choice of words are high. At the same time, choice of words for the right context will make one a better communicator.

VI. LEARNING ENGLISH IS MOSTLY A MATTER OF LEARNING MANY OF GRAMMAR RULES

There is a difference between learning a language and acquiring a language. One acquires our mother tongue, which is an unconscious process and does not require serious/formal grammar study. On the other hand learning a language is something different. We learn a language after we pass that age of unconsciousness (childhood). Then we cannot say acquiring language, rather we must say learning language, and it

requires serious/formal grammar study of the language we are learning. Thus when one tries to learn a language, learning of rules and grammar automatically happens which leads to the acquisition of language in the process.

VII. CONCLUSION

A language teacher does not only teach a language but through teaching a language he transfers his culture, the belief system that he has. A teacher's strong and positive personality, communication ability and leadership can also be as important as the knowledge and skills of a foreign language that the teacher imparts and it helps in developing good relationships with students which is a key to good teaching.