ADDITIONAL

"YOUNG LEARNER AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE"

NREPESH CHANDRA DEVAR
SENIOR ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
HALDIA GOVT. COLLEGE,
HALDIA, WEST BENGAL.

NREPESH CHANDRA DEVAR
SENIOR ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
HALDIA GOVT. COLLEGE,
HALDIA, WEST BENGAL.
ADDENDUM TO THE THESIS "YOUNG LEARNER AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE"

Prepared in the light of suggestions made by the examiners.
1.2.1 **Language acquisition and language learning**

The Principal concern of the psychology of language is to provide an account of the psychological processes involved in production and understanding of utterances, that is, the investigation of language performance. Needless to say that such an investigation means the study of language acquisition. It is necessary to make a distinction between language acquisition and language learning. While the former takes place in the infant and the young child at a time when he is acquiring many other skills, the latter takes place at a much later stage when language performance has already become established and the various processes of maturation, both physical and mental are nearing completion. In recent times the intensified study of psycholinguistics has produced a considerable amount of literature in our understanding of language acquisition. But there has been very little research into the process of learning a second language. Whatever research has been conducted on language learning or language teaching this has been mostly concerned with the evaluation of different methods and materials of teaching. Some of the factors such as motivation, previous knowledge, aptitude, learning outside the classroom and, teacher performance on which learning a language depends, cannot be easily controlled. Hence the results of experiments are valid only for the learners, teachers and schools in which the experiments took place. Moreover, when we are told that learners learn well... Cont'd...
under certain conditions, our knowledge of such conditions does not tell us anything about the learning procedure. Practice or drilling facilitate learning but they may be regarded as a teaching procedure rather than as a learning procedure. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between language teaching and language learning. Until we know them clearly we cannot create the necessary conditions for optimal learning.

Many linguists opine that the study of the process of language acquisition is of little relevance to language learning because of the many differences in the conditions under which acquisition and learning take place. Acquisition takes place when the infant is maturing physically and mentally and hence there must be some connection between the two processes:

(1) "There is no evidence that intensive training procedures can produce higher stages of language development, that is, advance language in a child who is maturationally still a toddling infant"

Motivation in each case is also different. In fact all children whose mental and physical capacities lie within a normal range learn a language. This comes naturally.

The data from which an infant acquires a language is different from that from which one learns a language. An infant is not exposed to a carefully planned or logically ordered set of data, that is to say, he is not submitted to a "teaching syllabus." If there is a learning programme then it is an internal one, a product of his normal cognitive development. But second language learning for most people takes place under informal instruction.

The main argument against the two processes having anything in common is that language learning takes place after language acquisition is largely complete. The language teacher does not teach language. He simply teaches a new manifestation of language. He is teaching a new way of doing what the learner can already do.

From what has been stated above it appears that the two processes are not completely dissimilar. It is the circumstances in which learning takes place that are different. The language learner is a different sort of a person from the infant; that there has been some qualitative change in his physiology and psychology at some point in his maturation process and these changes inhibit him from using the same learning strategies that he used as an infant. Lenneberg (1967) suggests that the infants acquire language during the "Critical period" that is between the ages of two and...

...Cont’d...4...
three years. For most learners the ability to acquire a native pronunciation seems to be limited to the "Critical period". But learning a language is not just learning pronunciation.

We acquire language during a period when our brains are in a particular stage of their development. If language is not acquired then there is evidence to show that acquisition of language at a later stage becomes difficult. The two things are not fundamentally different. There are some fundamental properties which all languages have in common. When these fundamental properties have been learned through their mother tongue manifestations, the learning of a second manifestation of language, that is, the learning of a second language, relatively easier.

1.2.6. **Relevance of SLA theories to teaching of a second language.**

Learners acquire a second language either by everyday communication or by instruction. Acquisition of a second language follows certain principles. The objective of second language acquisition studies is to uncover these principles which stem from a number of factors such as the motivation of the learner, various properties of human language processing and from the manner in which the features of the language to be acquired are made available to them. Although successful language teaching is a matter of practical experience, yet teachers will be able to teach better if they have an explicit set of ideas about language learning.

...Contd...
Language policies in all countries are framed by the Education authorities but it is the teachers who actually execute them in the class rooms. Teachers generally decide what his students will learn and what order they should follow in learning what is presented to them. They think that the order they follow in presenting the features of the language will exactly be the order in which the young learner is capable of acquiring them. If the scheme of the teacher does not match that of the learner his teaching materials will hardly facilitate learning.

Why is it necessary for language teachers to be familiar with the latest SLA theories? Do they not follow a theory of language learning? "All teachers have a theory of language learning. That is they act in accordance with a set of principles about the way language learners behave." (Rod Ellis). When a teacher decides what particular features of a language should take precedence over others he certainly does so with his covert beliefs that this order of presentation of the materials will accelerate learning. But teachers who have no explicit ideas about language learning will be uncritical and will follow blindly the latest fashion in language teaching. Rod Ellis is perfectly justified when the opines" A conscious understanding of SLA is a basis for modifying and improving teaching".
2.3.1 Social and Psychological background of the informants.

Second language learning of any kind takes place in a social context. The social contexts of both the family or home and the community are relevant. The social context includes components, such as the sociolinguistic situation, the general exposure of learners to the target language in the outside community and in home and general perception of values of the target language. At the home level parents may encourage or discourage language learning.

A favorable social background influences the learner's attitude towards the community speaking the target language. Moreover, the learners' expectations and perceptions of the learning task and its possible outcomes also influence learning the second language to a great extent.

The second influence of the social context is in the provision of opportunities for language learning; these opportunities may be formal and informal. Formal opportunities are those provided by a society for language learning. Such institutionalized opportunities are available in the urban areas particularly in the highly developed cities. Institutions for spoken English, audio-visual opportunities for language learning which are available in Calcutta...
are certainly not available in the remote villages. Even when the students of urban areas receive formal instruction in a school their learning is influenced largely by the goals and priorities of the school as well as by the education, the socio-economic status of the parents of the learners. It is again the social context that provides informal learning opportunities for language use and language learning. In cosmopolitan cities like Calcutta they often come across people with whom they have to communicate in English. The interplay between language learner and learning opportunity thus determines the learner's success in achieving linguistic and communicative competence.

From the above theoretical discussion on the importance of the social context in language learning and language use the researcher proceeds to examine the social context of the learners selected from R&M, UBM and EM Schools.

The main purpose of the researcher as indicated in the Introduction is to ascertain the degree of proficiency in English achieved at the end of the Madhyamik or Equivalent Examinations. The data collected from different schools over a long period of time was voluminous as both the examiners agree. It was, therefore, not possible to interview each individual to elicit detailed information about the socio-economic background of the learners. In fact the research scholar selected the schools belonging to

...Contd...
different categories with the social and psychological background of the learners in his mind. The RBM schools from which data have been collected are situated in Panchayet areas far away from urban areas. Both the schools in RBM category are situated about 60 Kms away from Calcutta and they are connected by bus routes. Rajballavpur High School is situated on Habra- Basirhat bus route and Gaighata High School is situated on Habra- Bongaon Bus Route. Though our investigation was limited to class room work, we sought to elicit information about the socio-economic condition of the learners with the help of the questionnaire. Most of the students belonging to the above students belonging to the above two schools come of lower middle class families. Most of them are marginal farmers or petty businessmen. The students of these two areas have hardly any exposure to different cultural and social activities. The students of the urban schools, both English and Bengali medium, are economically strong and they come of comparatively affluent families. People belonging to lower middle class can hardly afford to send their children to English Medium schools. Moreover, their learning is not limited to classroom teaching alone. Their parents being affluent and educated play an important part in their education. Facilities for good coaching are also available in urban areas. Moreover, their interaction with people who speak English is much greater. This is clearly reflected in the performance of this category of students.

...Contd...9...
2.4.1. A theoretical discussion of the different grammatical items included in the questionnaire.

**SPELLING**

Spelling is always regarded as a major problem for both native Speakers and foreign learners of English. English does not use a phonemic alphabet as is found in the case of Bengali, and other Indian languages whose alphabets are derived from Devnagri. In English the letter-to-phoneme correspondence is not consistent. Sometimes the same letter may stand for different phonemes in the same word. Hence the spelling of English has to be discussed in terms of rules and exceptions.

**ARTICLES**

In English there are two Articles - 'a' (or an) and 'the'. 'A' or 'an' is called the Indefinite Article, because it leaves indefinite the person or thing spoken of. 'The' is called the Definite Article, as it points out some particular person or thing. It may be noted that the choice of the indefinite article 'a' or 'an' is determined by sound. In the chapter dealing with Articles knowledge of young Bengalee learners regarding rule restrictions is tested.

**PREPOSITIONS**

Prepositions in English as in other languages are generally used to indicate spatial and temporal relation in particular. Many... Contd...10...
words in English are followed by particular prepositions and it is a serious mistake to use the wrong preposition since the meaning of a sentence is likely to be misconstrued if the appropriate preposition is not used. Hence under the mother tongue influence or due Bengalee learners may commit errors. The chapter dealing with prepositions tests the young learner's awareness of the same and the analysis indicates to what extent they have learned the use of appropriate prepositions.

**Nouns**

"A noun is a part of speech or word class typically used in a variety of sentence functions such as subject, object, generally in combination with the definite or indefinite article and modifiers and traditionally regarded as naming or identifying persons or things". However, children become familiar with this part of speech as they grow up. But what really causes difficulties to Bengalee learners of English is that many sets of nouns in English seem to be synonymous to them though they have only a loose sense of synonymy. Hence the chapter dealing with nouns is meant to be a test of their knowledge of the subtle sense of distinction between words of such seemingly synonymous sets of nouns.

**Adjectives**

An adjective is a part of speech or word class chiefly used to premodify nouns and as a complement to copular verbs such as be... Contd... I...
and seem (John is happy; Jeremy seems healthy). Young Bengalee learners do not find it difficult to acquire them as they are familiar with this item in their mother tongue. But in English there are many sets of adjectives which cause a lot of confusion to Bengalee learners. With limited exposure to written and spoken English they often use such sets of adjectives synonymously and commit errors. Hence the chapter dealing with adjectives is meant to test how far they have acquired knowledge of this subtle sense of distinction.

PRONOUNS

It is a traditional part of speech that is typically used as a substitute for a noun or noun phrase. In contemporary grammatical theory pronouns are sometimes viewed as a subclass of nouns. There are several subclasses of pronouns: personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, relative pronouns etc. Some of the sets of pronouns have distinctions in person, number, gender or case. The chapter on pronouns is meant to test how far young Bengalee learners have acquired this item at the ends of their school leaving examination.

TENSES

Tense is the grammatical category, expressed in forms of the verb, that locates a situation in time. English like Bengali
has three tenses, viz. present, past and future. Each of them is further sub-divided into simple, progressive, perfect and perfect progressive. Although this idea of distinction exists in Bengali there may not be any change in the form of the verb to denote differences in sequence of tenses. The chapter dealing with tenses is meant to test their awareness of this.

**PHRASAL VERBS**

It is a type of verb in English that operates more like a phrase than a word such as 'go up', 'put off', 'take down'. Grammarians have adopted two main positions with regard to the nature and use of phrasal verbs:

1) That the literal use of a form like *go up* is not a phrasal verb as such, but a verb operating with a particle: The balloon went up into the air. The term phrasal verb should properly be reserved for idiomatic uses: *The balloon went up* (The crisis finally happened). Such verbs exist in Bengali also. The problem with such verbs is that their meaning cannot be predicted from their form. Conscious efforts and regular practice are necessary to familiarise the young learners with this kind of verb in English.

**V B RB S**

It is a class of words that serve to indicate the occurrence or performance of an action, or the existence of a State or Condition.

...Contd...13...
There are two main types: full verb, auxiliary verb. Tenses of verbs have been discussed in an earlier section. Here a few sets of common English verbs with a loose sense of synonymy have been selected to ascertain how far young Bengalee learners have been able to make a distinction between two nearly synonymous verbs.

**AUXILIARY VERB**

Auxiliary verbs are helping verbs. In English such verbs are customarily divided into (1) The primary auxiliaries be, have, do. (2) The modal auxiliaries or modal verbs can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must. Such verbs are necessary to make negative or interrogative sentences. A young Bengalee learner of English often makes negative or interrogative sentences by merely changing the position of the verb under the influence of their mother tongue. In the chapter dealing with Auxiliary verbs an attempt is made to ascertain the degree of their proficiency in this item.

**ADVERBS**

An adverb is a part of speech or word class chiefly used to modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs. Most adverbs are formed from adjectives by the addition of the ending-ly as in suddenly, playfully etc. Some are formed from nouns in combination with other suffixes: -wise, as in clockwise and ward(s) as in northwards, skyward. Then again a set of common adverbs have no... Contd...14...
have no suffixes (here, there, now, just, well). A set of common adverbs, also known as adverbial particles, are used along with verbs: in, out, on, off, up, down etc. In English normally an adverb comes after a verb while in Bengali the position is reversed. This however, does not constitute a great problem for a Bengali learner of English. In English there are a set of adverbs which appear synonymous to a Bengali student. Hence they confuse one adverb with another and commit errors. This item is included in the questionnaire to test their knowledge of the distinction that lies between two adverbs of apparently similar nature.

**PARTS OF SPEECH**

In English one word may be used as more than one part of speech. So also in Bengali. But in English such changes occur more frequently than in Bengali. In English we may use the same word both as a noun and as a verb. We drink a glass of water (noun) and a gardener waters (verb) a plant.

**NUMBER**

Number is a grammatical category used in describing parts of speech that show contrasts of plural, singular etc. In English, the number system is basically a two-term contrast of singular and plural, shown in nouns and some pronouns and determiners, and to some extent in verbs. In English the plural is usually formed by -s or -es forms to nouns. In Bengali, a noun does not always take the plural marker. In Bengali the rules of plural formations are too few...
while in English the rules are too many. Moreover, along with many irregular plural forms there are many exceptions in English. This item is included to test the proficiency of Bengali learners in the Grammatical category.

**Change of Speech**

In English, there are two forms of speech—Direct speech and Indirect (or Reported) speech. Unlike Bengali, English follows the distinction strictly because any violation of the rule makes the sentences not only ungrammatical but also confusing as far as meaning is concerned. When we quote the actual words of the speaker, it is called Direct speech. When we report what he said without quoting his words, this is called Indirect speech. In indirect speech in English, there are many changes in the sentence such as, inversion and reversion of subject and verb, in indirect questions, change of adverbs and pronouns etc. When the reporting verb is in the past tense, all present tenses of the Direct are changed into the corresponding past tenses. So many changes constitute a major problem in learning English as a second language. The test in this item will determine their degree of proficiency in English.

**Arrangement of Words in their proper setting.**

Modern English is comparatively uninflected. Hence the word order is more or less fixed. The normal word order in English is SVO except in the question form or except when we want to be... Contd... 16...
poetic. In Bengali the word order is not as rigid as in English, hence young Bengalee students often commit errors in arrangement of words and phrases in their proper setting. This item is included the questionnaire with a view to ascertaining the degree of their proficiency in this category.

**Analysis of Data**

The researcher has adopted the simple statistical method to analyse the voluminous data collected from different types of schools over a long period of time. Checking and evaluating the voluminous data from different angles such as sexwise, streamwise is a stupendous task as both the examiners agree. He has not merely detected the errors. He has also explained the nature of errors and the sources of difficulty have also been indicated. Hence the researcher had to adopt the simple statistical method to cope with the huge data.

**Sources of Errors**

In the Introduction the researcher has clearly stated that his main objective is to investigate what errors young Bengalee learners of English make while learning English as a second language. He has, therefore, put special emphasis on mother tongue interference as the major source of errors. On pages 5 and 6 of chapter I the researcher has clearly stated that errors in English among Young...
Bengalee learners stem from various sources such as, interference from the mother tongue, overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, the building of false system and concepts and carelessness. While dealing with different types of errors he has pointed out the sources of difficulty for Bengalee students. He has explained that apart from mother tongue interference errors in English among young Bengalee learners are due to a variety of causes. However, he has laid special stress on the interference of Bengali, as the specific situation he is dealing with is that of some GOC young Bengalee learners of English.

**MAJOR THEORIES ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITIONS**

In compliance with the suggestions made by the foreign examiner necessary corrections have been made on pages 11 and 12 of the original thesis and reference to the Acculturation Model and Accommodation Theory is provided in the updated Bibliography.

**FOREIGN EXAMINER'S COMMENTS RELATING TO PAGES 47, 52 AND 147**

In reply to the above the researcher clarifies his position by stating that like English Bengali also has two articles- Definite and Indefinite. In the sentence 'ekti balok Khale' (Aboy plays) etki is an indefinite article while in a sentence like 'balok-ti Khale' ...

...Contd...18...
(The boy play's) 

A definite article which is added to the noun bālak like a suffix. In English on the other hand we have the definite article 'the' coming before the noun boy in the sentence 'The boy plays.'

Unlike Bengali, English has two different forms of the indefinite article such as a and an. The choice of a or an is determined by sound. The point may be clarified with a few examples. 'An apple', 'An ant', 'An hour', whereas we have 'A boy', 'A pen' etc.

With regard to the statement "Under the influence of their mother tongue Bengalees often omit articles in writing English sentences and thus commit errors" on page 47, the researcher will substantiate his point with examples. In Bengali articles are often omitted in sentences which are grammatically and idiomatically correct. As for example, while in the English sentence 'It is a pen' has the indefinite article 'a', in the Bengali sentence, 'iha kālam' the article is omitted. The indefinite article is also sometimes omitted in Bengali. In English we have "he is the first boy in the class" but in Bengali the acceptable form is "Se Šrenir proth m bālak" where the definite article is obviously omitted. Bengalee learners of English often translate the sentence "Se Šrenir proth m bālak" into 'He is first in the Class'. Such errors are often detected in the writings of young Bengalee learners owing to mother tongue influence.

...Contd...
The researcher has conducted a survey with 600 students belonging to three different types of schools in order to ascertain where they stand in relation to each other in the matter of learning English as a second language. Although the medium of instruction is not similar, the common factor is that all of them have successfully completed their school leaving examinations. Hence the inclusion of EM schools in our project and the result of our investigation will enable the authorities of the Education Department to see at what distance the EM, UEM or RBM students stand from the target and how they stand in relation to each other. In the light of the results of our investigation, the authorities may ponder over the same and may redesign the syllabus to bring the laggards up to the expected level.

Finally, in compliance with the suggestions of the examiners the research scholar has consulted the relevant books and has included them in the updated Bibliography.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


AGNIHOTRI, R.K. The use of articles in Indian English, IRAL, 22.2 115-129.


