CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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1.0 Introduction

Language is the most significant and colossal work that human spirit has evolved. Being one of the most characteristic forms of human behaviour, it is so familiar a feature of our daily life that we rarely pause to think about it. Among the various definitions distinguishing humanity from other created beings is that of man as the ‘talking animal’. The inescapable fact that man ‘talks’ — and the implications of this human capacity, have been at the centre of investigations by linguists (such as Noam Chomsky) and psychologists (such as G. A. Miller) have been concerned with the innate and, in many respects, infinite capacity the human being has for language and much light has been thrown by such scholars both on the nature of language and on the nature of being human. Such an approach, emphasizing ‘what the speaker knows’ and concentrating on ‘language as knowledge’, has been characterized as an intra-organism approach (Halliday, 1974) However, it has to be remembered that in many crucial respects (such as ‘what the speaker does’ and ‘language as doing’), what is more important is not so much that ‘man talks’ as that ‘men talk’; that is, that language is essentially a social, and inter-organism, activity. We do not use it in isolation from the wider framework of human activity, and even in the extreme case when one is talking to oneself, one still, in a sense has company.

Language, therefore is a community affair. It can not be learnt in isolation. Language has nothing to do with age, level or maturity. It can be acquired by one and all. There are various stages of acquiring language. First the stage of acquisition, then comes the stage of practicing the acquired knowledge. Then the fluency and last comes the accuracy. We on the contrary, always insist on accuracy first and then fluency while teaching L2 in a conscious way, which does not actually happen when a child learns L1. Language cannot be worked out. It comes spontaneously. In the case of a child learning L1, it springs up suddenly. The child has been listening to the people around for a long time. This is how he/she acquires the knowledge required for the skill that he/she is going to exhibit. We, as teachers of English have to create the classroom climate on similar line where after L2 exposure of several weeks, the students will automatically start speaking that language. The speech however, will begin with baby-talk which later on by the means of various techniques and strategies used by the teacher — counselor, will take the shape of a refined adult — talk. The aim
of this project is to develop such conditions inside the classroom using a package of ELT materials developed by the investigator.

1.1 The Problems of Teaching English as a Second Language

Let us look at the problems to begin with, in terms of the learner. If we analyse the problem of second language learners, the first question that should come to our mind is:

'Who learns how much of a language and under what conditions'.

Further the issues arising out of this question will be:

**Who**: Differences in the learner. These include such factors as age, ability, intelligence, specific abilities, special aptitudes, attitudes to learning, to a language and its speakers, motivation, choice among strategies, personality etc.

**Learning**: The process itself. How many kinds of learning are there? What is already there, pre-programmed in some way? What is the difference between conscious and unconscious knowledge? Between knowing and being able to? Between learning a single item and gaining control over various functions of language? How does transfer work? How does learning vary individually and culturally?

**How much learning has taken place?**: What part of language is learned? How does one account for learning single items? How different is the development of functional proficiency?

**Under what conditions**: Is it the amount or the kind of exposure that makes the difference? How does exposure lead to learning? Who is the best person to learn from? Who can learn the best under what conditions? And how does each of these factors interact with the others? This implies that knowledge and skills in the second language of the learner depend on various factors. If we take K as the knowledge and skills of second language then Kf as the knowledge and skills at some future time will be the sum of four group of factors:

\[ K_f = K_P + A + M + O \]

where, \( K_P \) = knowledge and skills at the moment including the general knowledge of the learner’s first and any other language.

\( A \) = ability – physiological, biological, intellectual and cognitive skills.

\( M \) = Affective factors such as personality, attitude, motivation and anxiety.
O = opportunity of learning the language, consisting of time multiplied by kind, the latter covering the range of formal and informal situations in which the learner is exposed to the language.

Learning depends on all the four factors. But more to the ‘O’ factor, i.e. opportunities inside the classroom. Limited exposure cannot accelerate learning. That is why, to make our students acquire communicative competence, we have to create this kind of climate inside our classrooms.

1.2 ELT In India

English is an indisputable means of global communication and an integral part of contemporary India. As a major second language in India, English has an adequate institutional support. It enjoys the constitutional status of an ‘associate official language’ in a highly multilingual national context. Indians who use English are estimated to constitute only about 5 percent of the nation’s population, but this group forms a very large proportion of those who are in leadership roles and are concentrated in the metropolis in the country, where English functions as a lingua franca. Only a small proportion of the students being taught English at school, those in the large cities and from highly educated or high-income backgrounds, come into contact with the language outside the language classroom. This may be in subject classes in private English-medium schools or at home. English is, however, widely regarded by the students and parents alike as the language of opportunity, opening up avenues to higher education, a better job, upward social mobility and so on. Consequently, there is a wide spread general desire to learn the language.

During the last few decades the ELT scenario in India has changed with the new developments in language teaching, especially with the emergence of communicative approach, the methods and approaches to ELT have been reviewed and the materials and syllabi have been modified. Unfortunately, these developments have been mostly confined to schools, i.e. primary and secondary levels. Little efforts have been made to update the teaching-learning process at the tertiary level. Some pedagogical inputs in the form of classroom interaction are necessary at this level too. The alienation of ELT teachers from the so called ‘Literature teachers’ is one of the major weaknesses. Most of the universities still use the conventional text-books which consist of about a dozen essays / short stories or one-act plays each ranging between
six and ten pages. The very nature and quantum of the pieces seem to preclude any direct encounter between the learner and the materials for learning. The natural tendency therefore is for the ‘literature teacher’ to explain, quite often in the mother-tongue, the difficult words and ideas and further to summarize or reduce the length. “The inevitable result of such procedures is that the student hardly feels any necessity to have direct encounter with the language, hardly gets any opportunity to use the language. At worst he is driven to a sense of apathy, unreality and irrelevance; at best he learns to be a passive listener” (Krishnaswamy Ar. D. Sriraman, 1990).

However, in a few universities, the English curriculum is revised on the lines of new thinking in language teaching. Even then, the teachers themselves are not trained to teach the course books in the light of the communicative approach. With the result that in most of the cases where communicative syllabus is introduced, it is being taught through the traditional lecture mode.

At present English is being taught everywhere. But the questions are,

- Are the models of teaching uniform in terms of contents and objectives?
- Are the models effective, i.e. do they teach English as a set of skills?
- Do we still consider the teaching of a language (a set of skills) just like that of the teaching of a science subject (a set of information)?
- What is the major objective of teaching English at the tertiary level in India? Is it to make the learners reasonably good readers of the language? Is it to make them actual users of the language in day to day social situations?

### 1.3 Present State of ELT at the Undergraduate Level

In Gujarat most of the colleges have English at the undergraduate level as a compulsory subject. The main purpose of this course is to provide a kind of revision to the students mainly coming from Gujarati medium background, thereby enabling them to understand their course lectures, write answers in tests, refer to reference books in other subjects etc. In short, the objective of the course is to strengthen their knowledge of English and sharpen all the four skills L/S/W/R. This is the case with colleges where the medium of instruction is English. In some colleges, where the medium of instruction is Gujarati, the situation is even worse. Though the objective of the courses offered at this level is to make them real users of the language, it is hardly fulfilled. English is taught like Sanskrit. A collection of short stories or one act plays
or a prose – collection is prescribed as a textbook. Students like parrots cram the answers and manage to pass the exam. Even when a textbook with a communicative approach which is to be taught with the communicative tasks listed at the end of each lesson, is introduced, it is taught using the same old lecture method. With the result, students keep away from their English classes.

To improve the situation, a number of suggestions have been made. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

1. Syllabi at undergraduate level should be revised. Proper courses should be prepared for the students at undergraduate level to make them real users of the language.
2. Orientation of teachers is required for imparting knowledge about the latest approaches and methods in teaching language. Teachers should be trained in teaching functional English.
3. Objectives of the course should be clearly defined. These courses should be based on the needs of the learners at undergraduate level. The courses should be of such type which would interest the students.

Hence this study takes up the much needed task of preparing a course for the undergraduate students of science.

1.4 The Problem

"An investigation into the preparation and Try out of a package of ELT materials to develop communicative competence at the F. Y. B. Sc. Level."

1.4.1 Terminology Used

In order to understand the problem stated above, it is necessary to define a few terms. The following terms have been defined for this purpose.

Preparation and Try-out of a Course in English
Planning of a course, drawing up of a syllabus, producing materials based on certain assumptions about effective language teaching/learning.

Learners – Students studying at first year B. Sc. in colleges offering degree courses in the subjects of science. In all, there are three levels: First year B.Sc., Second year B.Sc. and third year B.Sc. F. Y. B.Sc. is the entry point for acquiring a degree of a bachelor of science. At F. Y. B.Sc. the learners form a heterogeneous group, since
some of them have passed the CBSC board exam while others have passed the GEB exam either with Gujarati medium or English medium. They have been already exposed to the English language and have acquired some knowledge of it. Academically they are well placed and motivated. However, they are less inclined towards learning English because they feel the pressure of science subjects and are more worried about them. Though they are fully aware that they are going to learn their science subjects through English, they are less motivated, because the traditional syllabus does not offer them any real scope for the meaningful use of this language. They are not at all convinced that they are going to benefit by attending the classes for English.

Syllabus (course – design)

It consists of all the planned conditions and events to which the pupil is exposed for the purpose of promoting learning plus the framework of theory that gives these conditions and events a certain coherence. It consists of the actual learning opportunities, provided at a given time and place.

Package of Materials

The package comprises language activities based on abstracts from scientific texts and experiments, tables, graphs, charts, cartoon-stories, strips and sketches, pictures, cyclostyled materials, magazines and newspaper clippings, audio materials etc. It also consists of communicative tasks, language activities, problem solving exercises, open-ended exercises, word power building exercises, role play, quizzes, debate and discussion, drama, simulation and situations for various language functions. These materials were used to generate discussion, to bring in language input, to provide language exposure, to improve pronunciation also for simulation, for self correction (i.e. to provide them with a mirror image) and so on.

Communicative Competence

All the four skills, which the students need to develop in order to have a satisfactory command over this language so as to make them use English confidently and effectively in real life situations.
**Listening**: The target is to make the students understand conversations, academic lectures, seminars, debates, discussions, instructions, explanation of various scientific experiments.

**Speaking**: The target is to enable the students to express their ideas clearly, give seminars and presentations, interact with others, to use the language according to the demand of the situations.

**Reading**: The target is to enable the students to read their course books, reference books, notices, circulars, newspapers, magazines and other books of various interests written in English.

**Writing**: The target is to enable the students express their thoughts and ideas cohesively and clearly; to enable them to write their answers, assignments, lab experiments, notes, formal/informal letters, reports, compositions etc.

**1.4.2 Objectives of the Study : Specific Objectives**

1. To review the existing courses being offered at the F. Y. B.Sc. level.
2. To evolve a rationale for the new course.
3. To arrive at a set of objectives for the new course.
4. To design a syllabus in accordance with the students' needs at this level.
5. To prepare materials to develop communicative competence in science students.
6. To make the learners use the language meaningfully thus bridging the lacunae between the classroom language and language in real life.
7. To try out the materials with the learners.
8. To motivate the students to learn English.
9. To find out the difference between the effects caused as the result of two different treatments given to the two different groups.
10. To develop insights into materials production.

**1.4.3 Overall Objectives**

1. To improve the learners' communicative competence in English.
2. Over-all development of the learners' personalities, enabling them to emerge as confident, rational, goal oriented, compassionate human beings.
1.4.4 Hypotheses

To help the investigator follow a set of procedures the following hypotheses were formulated.

1. There is a need for preparing a course to develop communicative competence for the F. Y. B. Sc. students.
2. It is possible to prepare a course which is need based, learner-oriented, task-based and is in line with the current thinking in English Language Teaching.
3. It is possible to prepare a course with such tasks which can be used for improving the learners’ communicative competence.

Null Hypotheses

1. New type of courses will not improve the learners’ communicative competence in English.
2. It will not improve their use of different skills of English.
3. It will not motivate the learners to learn English.
4. There will be no significant difference between the mean scores of the group of learners taught through the use of the traditional text and the group of learners taught through the new course.
5. There will be no significant difference in the mean scores of the control and the experimental groups in the university examination.

1.4.5 Procedure

This section gives details about the research design, the sample population selected, the tools used, the limitations of the study and the plan of presentation.

Research Design

This study uses more than one research procedures. The ‘survey type’ is used to analyse the needs of the learners and understand their problems. The ‘Experimental design’ is used to try out the course prepared so as to evaluate the effectiveness of the materials.

The Sample

The first year B. Sc. students of V. P. and R. P. T. P. science college, V. V. Nagar and Anand Mercantile college of science and Technology Anand were
identified for the try out on the basis of random selection. Two groups each of 20 students were formed in both the colleges: one experimental and the other control group.

Tools

Tools used in the study included questionnaires, observation sheets, feedback forms, supplemented by interviews and three tests. A Pre-test was administered before and a post-test after the try-out. Prior to arriving at the final draft, a pilot study of the tests was conducted.

Materials

Preparing materials for the try-out began after identifying the needs of the learners. After understanding the problem of the learners and after taking a close look at a number of existing ESP course-books, the investigator took up the preparation of materials. The course was designed keeping in mind the level and interests of the students. Further, it was in accordance with the present syllabus at F. Y. B. Sc. with a few additions.

Treatment

The control group was taught through the traditional course and methods, while the experimental group was taught through the new techniques and the package of materials prepared by the investigator. Both the groups were given a pre-test before the try-out and a post-test after the try-out. Both the groups were taught from July 2000 to February 2001. The investigator herself taught both the groups, thus avoiding the teacher variable.

Constraints of the study

Owing to a very tight schedule of the students, it was not possible to do any remedial teaching to help out the weaker students.

As the evaluation system at F. Y. B. Sc. level is still a traditional one, the investigator found it difficult to deal with the students of the experimental group and had to prepare them keeping in mind the present evaluation system, as well. During some of the sessions, the investigator had to devote some time to take care of this problem.
The sample for the experiment was selected from the science colleges affiliated to the Sardar Patel University only.

1.5 Plan of Presentation

The plan of presentation of the research report is given below.

Chapter One: This chapter provides a frame of context for the study. It throws light on the present ELT situation at the undergraduate level in Gujarat. The problem and rationale are stated, followed by the details of the research procedure. Finally, the chapter ends with the plan of presentation of the research report.

Chapter Two: The theoretical aspect of English language teaching is taken up. The chapter reviews the existing theories of English language teaching, and discusses the issues related to materials production and current trends and directions in materials production. It also reviews the various research designs.

Chapter Three: This chapter focuses on English for specific purposes as an important branch of ELT. It focuses on the ESP course design and presents the genera of English for science students.

Chapter Four: This chapter gives details of the experiment conducted to try-out the course so as to find out the problems that could arise at the time of the try-out and then revise it to make it better. The experiment, the tasks selected, the techniques used and the tests administered are discussed in detail.

Chapter Five: This chapter gives an account of the data collected through questionnaires, and the analysis of the test scores obtained. For data analysis, the raw scores, mean values, standard deviation, coefficient of variation between the control group and the experimental group are compared and analysed. The investigator applied the t-test scores with a view to ascertaining the statistical significance. The investigator has also interpreted the data qualitatively. Based on the statistical analysis and the information obtained through the questionnaires, the hypotheses are reconsidered and the Null Hypotheses are rejected and the Research Hypotheses are accepted.
Chapter Six: This chapter gives a gist of the study and draws implications for the teaching of English in science colleges. Based on the findings of the study it offers suggestions for the people concerned with the teaching of English. It also makes recommendations for further research. Finally, a conclusion is derived that skill-oriented, need focused courses are the need of the hour.