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A Special Issue on Literacy

Call for Papers for *LLT 16* (July 2019)

Guest Editor: Professor Sadhna Saxena

The language of instruction in schools and at the higher education level is an important but unresolved issue in a multilingual country such as India. This is because India does not have a national language and in principle, each state is free to use either its state language or English for the state level official work as well as for communicating with the central government. As education is included in the concurrent list, states can exercise this freedom in the field of education as well. There is research-based evidence that brings clarity on teaching in the mother tongue of the students at the elementary level. However, there is neither a unanimous opinion, nor any evidence or policy with regard to the language of education at the post-elementary and higher education level. One view, that has a very strong rationale, is in favour of teaching in English at higher education levels for two reasons. First, lack of knowledge of English impacts the employment opportunities of the students and second, it hinders their academic progress. That is, without a good command over English, neither are students of higher education able to access knowledge in the academic writings which are mostly in English, nor are they able to publish their research. The other view however is that for the majority of people in India, English is not the language of communication. Therefore, the imposition of a culturally alien language, especially by ill-informed and ill-equipped teachers, has serious learning consequences. That is to say that if the medium of instruction in higher education is English, neither do the students gain in-depth knowledge of the discipline nor do they learn the language.

This special issue of *LLT 16* focuses on issues related to language and education. This covers the role played by language in acquiring knowledge and learning a discipline, and whether the lack of command over the language of instruction has an impact on learning and cognition. As the nature of each discipline is different, for this special issue, we are inviting papers on themes such as language and mathematics, language and social sciences, language and humanities, language and physical sciences and, language and literacy. The last date for submission of articles is Jan 15, 2019. Please see the general Call for Papers for other details, given on page number 41.

Editorial

Even though this issue is not based on any theme in particular one may find that the majority of the six articles, that is, four out of six articles deal with Reading and the other two with Writing and the effect of Language's grammatical system on learners' preferences for categorization. The review article too deals with reading. The first article by Kyung Sook Cho and Stephen Krashen focuses on reading. It describes how a "single sustained silent reading session and a trip to an English library" led to positive changes in the Korean students of English and how it was equally important to have "a time and place to read, and easy access to interesting reading material". Second article is by Suneeta Mishra. She writes on the effect of grammatical gender in Hindi on speakers' perceptions. The paper by Snehlata Gupta critically reflects on the actual practice of how writing, especially in English, is taught in government schools which are more or less perpetually preparing students to write exams, the central concern of all government schools. This leaves, she pleads, very little room for teachers to cultivate any sense of meaning for writing in the minds of young students. In the fourth paper, Brinda Chowdhary discusses the importance of reading in our lives and how reading is actually taught in the primary level classrooms that seem to leave several gaps in what is expected of the whole exercise. Swarnlata Sah's paper discusses the importance of choosing the appropriate children's literature and different strategies of using them appropriately to enhance reading among the early learners. The last article by Mala Palani highlights the importance of "exploratory talk and dialogic interaction" between the pre-service English language teachers and their teacher educator, and how this leads to the better reflective practices and more efficacy in both the groups, i.e. the teachers and the teacher educators.

A review article by Jayshree Murali based on her experience as a Volunteer teacher dealing with young learners trying to learn different language skills, reading and overall literacy being one of them, is a response to Chapter 3 'Reading' of Krishna Kumar's book 'The Child's Language and the Teacher'. Jayshree brings in her experience to argue how many of the suggestions made by Kumar are helpful while a few others may have to be ignored.

Dr. N. S. Prabhu's interview by Prof. Geetha Durairajan (GD) and Deepesh Chandrasekharan elicits his thoughts about some of the key issues in language learning and teaching. Dr. Prabhu shares his thoughts on the changes that have come about in the conception of language and how it has affected the way language learning and teaching is done today. He points out how things have changed since the 1980s when in Bangalore Project he had emphasized 'task-based language teaching', to the present times when he believes that the important thing to understand is that first language learning and second language learning are fundamentally two different processes. Most importantly, in his opinion, such changes have a bearing on what the language teachers and policy makers can do in the light of these new findings and insights.

Prof. Achla M. Raina in her Landmark article chose to inform the readers about the famous but also somewhat out-of-favour Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Her piece begins with the statement of the Sapir Whorf hypothesis followed by an overview of the investigations in the "domain of cognitive dimension of cross-linguistic diversity" and how these have serious pedagogical implications.

A brief Report by Jyoti Chordia and Neha Yadav on the Language Plus Programme of the Vidya Bhawan (VB) Education Resource Centre (ERC) describes how the implementation of the programme, drawing on various relevant researches in education including Multilingualism-as-a-resource view, has had a positive effect on the reading and writing skills in Hindi and English of the students and how it has made the teachers more sensitive to the resources and skills that children bring to the classrooms. The programme, as reported, also focuses on capacity building for teachers and development of resources at VBERC.

The current issue has three book reviews, and Language Activities focussing on learning vocabulary and prepositions in English. It is hoped that the contributions to this issue will be of interest and value to all the stake holders in the domain of language and language teaching/ learning.

Language and Language Teaching (LLT)

Objectives

Published twice a year in January and July, Language and Language Teaching (LLT) reaches out to language teachers, researchers and teacher educators on issues and practices relevant to language teaching. The primary focus of the publication is language pedagogy in elementary schools. LLT proposes to establish a dialogue between theory and practice so that practice contributes to theory as much as theory informs practice. The purpose is to make new ideas and insights from research on language and its pedagogy accessible to practitioners while at the same time inform theorists about the constraints of implementation of new ideas.

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2. *Language and Language Teaching (LLT)* welcomes original papers/articles that have not been published elsewhere and have not been submitted elsewhere for publication at the time of being sent to *LLT*. Copies of letters granting permission to reproduce illustrations, tables, or lengthy quoted passages should be included with the manuscript.
3. Word limit including the reference, abstract and a short bio note is as follows:
Articles: 2500; Interview: 3000; Landmark: 3000; Book Reviews: 1500; Classroom Activities: 750; Reports: 1000.
4. The first page should contain the article title, author(s) and their affiliation(s). It should also contain the abstract and keywords.
5. For correspondence, contributor should provide his/ her name, phone number, complete mailing address and email address.
6. The style for writing numerical expressions should be consistent throughout the manuscript.
7. Notes should appear at the end of the text and before the references. Foot notes are not permitted. Each endnote used in the article should contain more than a mere reference.
8. Single quotes should be used throughout the article. Double quotes should be used only within single quotes.
9. All the references must be cited in text or endnotes, and follow the APA style of referencing in the text.
For example:
(Chomsky, 2010: p. 27) or (Labov, 2010, p. 56) or (Halliday, 2010, pp. 56-57)
10. A detailed list of references in alphabetical order must be provided at the end of the article following the endnotes. All details should be provided like: the author's name, name of the book/ name of the journal with issue number, publisher, place of publication, year and page range/ number (in the case of chapter from an edited book, journal, magazine, weekly, periodicals, newspapers).
11. Page numbers for all direct quotations should be provided. Direct quotations of 45 words or more should be indented.
12. Tables and figures should be clear, readable and comprehensible.
13. Book reviews must contain details like name of the author/editor and book reviewed, place of publication and publisher, year of publication, scanned copy of the cover page, number of pages and price.
14. *LLT* is a refereed journal. All manuscripts are subject to the usual process of anonymous review.

The Impact of Sustained Silent Reading and a Visit to the Library on Establishing a Reading Habit: Helpful but not Sufficient

Kyung Sook Cho and Stephen Krashen

Abstract

Undergraduate university students in Korea who did not have a reading habit in English showed a clear enthusiasm for reading in English after participating in a single sustained silent reading session and a trip to an English library. However, such positive experiences can result in an English reading habit only if students have a time and place to read, and easy access to interesting reading material.

Key words: EFL, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), English library, Motivation, Long-term readers in English

Introduction

We are always disappointed when we find out how little our ESL and EFL students read in English. In this paper, we will present some evidence that the solution to this problem may be closer than we think, that we simply need to help our students overcome some obvious barriers.

The students in this study are undergraduates in the field of Education at a university in Korea; they are enrolled in a class in English education designed to help them teach English in school. All of them have had EFL instruction and may be considered to be at a low intermediate level as they have enough competence to read authentic English books (Authentic English books in this case refers to books that have been written for native speakers of English.)

In this paper, we will describe two experiences: In the first instance, students participated in a two-hour sustained silent reading (SSR) session in which a wide variety of English reading material was made available to them. The students were not required to report on what they had read. In the second instance, approximately three weeks later, the same class

was taken to an English library in Busan, where they were encouraged to browse through books for about 90 minutes. This was inspired by Ramos and Krashen (1998), who studied the impact of a single library visit on elementary school children who had little access to books.

Before each session, the students were asked about their English reading habits. The results presented in Table 1 clearly show that these students do not have a habit of reading in English. They are however, moderate readers in Korean (Table 2). All questionnaires were administered and answered in Korean.

Table 1

Reading Habits in English: Responses to "I usually read English books (novels, etc.) for pleasure."

	Responses	SSR	Library Visit
1	Not at all	10	6
2	No	19	22
3	Moderately	2	4
4	Yes	0	0
5	Very Much	0	0
6	Mean	1.7	1.94

SSR = sustained silent reading
Sample size: SSR = 31, library visit = 32.

Table 2
*Reading Habits in Korean (Library questionnaire):
 Responses to "I usually read Korean (novels, etc.)
 for pleasure."*

	Responses	Library Visit
1	Not at all	2
2	No	5
3	Moderately	15
4	Yes	9
5	Very Much	1
6	Mean	3.07

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)

Thirty-one students participated in a single sustained silent reading session, which lasted for approximately two hours, with a ten-minute break in between. This was the first SSR experience for these students. Approximately 150 English books were made available to them. All the books were "authentic" that is, written for native speakers of English. They were mostly children's story books and included books from the Clifford series, Stone Soup series and The Magic School Bus series.

Table 3
Reactions to the Sustained Silent Reading Session

	Responses	Enjoy SSR	Book Interest	Motivated
1	Not at all	0	0	0
2	No	0	1	1
3	Moderately	4	11	8
4	Yes	18	16	18
5	Very Much	9	3	4
6	Mean	4.2	3.7	3.8

Enjoy SSR: Did you enjoy this SSR experience?
 Book interest: Did you find most of the books interesting?
 Motivated: Were you motivated after SSR to read books in English?

A close look at table 3 shows that the reactions to the SSR experience were quite positive. Despite the modest amount of time allotted for reading and the limited number of books, students found the books interesting and were motivated to read.

Library Visit

According to their website (http://www.bel.go.kr/site_eng/lib_intro/?tgt=data), the Busan English library is a public library that has a collection of about 40,000 English books, including 1000 comic books and about 1000 audio CDs. More than half of their collection consists of fiction. The library is open on weekdays from 9 am to 9 pm, on Saturdays from 9 am to 6 pm and on Sundays from 9 am to 5 pm.

The students were allowed one and a half hours for the visit, with 30 minutes for briefing and the rest for browsing. Not one of them had been to the Busan English Library before. Thirty-two students participated in the library visit.

Table 4
Reactions to the Library Visit

	Responses	Library Card	Books Today	Revisit	Motivated
1	Not at all	0	0	0	0
2	No	0	2	0	0
3	Moderately	2	10	3	1
4	Yes	24	15	22	23
5	Very much	6	5	7	8
	Mean	4.1	3.67	4.1	4.23

Library card: Would you like to apply for a library card?
 Books today: Would you like to check out some books today?
 Revisit: Would you like to visit the English library again?
 Motivated: Did visiting the English library motivate you to read books in English?

Responses to the questionnaire clearly showed that the students were interested in visiting the library again, and wanted to apply for library cards as well. As was the case with the SSR experience, the library visit was instrumental in motivating the children to read in English. The results of the questionnaire were consistent with the observations: The students were obviously interested in the books, especially comic books and graphic novels.

Discussion

In the questionnaire pertaining to the library visit, students were asked why they did not read as much in English. The students came back with more than one reason. About 21 percent (7 responses out of 32) of the students said they had had no experience of reading in English. Almost 63 percent agreed that this was because of a lack of access to interesting books and 53 per cent said that they found reading in English difficult.

Both the SSR experience and exposure to a library with authentic English books seemed to partially solve the problem of a lack of access to interesting books in English as well as the problem of a lack of experience reading in English. Both experiences, according to the questionnaire results, motivated students to read in English (library = 4.32 out of 5; SSR = 3.81 out of 5). The library was a potential source of books, and SSR gave them the experience of reading interesting and comprehensible books.

These optimistic results however may be not enough to ensure the creation of a long-term reading habit. After a review of the case histories of long-term readers in English as a second language, Cho and Krashen (2016) concluded that the following conditions were necessary for establishing a second language reading habit in children:

1. An initial pleasant reading experience
2. Access to interesting reading material

3. A dedicated time and place to read regularly
4. The freedom to select their own reading
5. No tests, no workbook exercises and no rewards with regard to reading

In the case of the students in our study, conditions (1), (4) and (5) were probably met; for most of the students the library and SSR may have provided a pleasant reading experience. It is not clear however whether the second and third conditions were fulfilled.

Finally, we would like to add that the Busan English Library is far away from where many of the students live. Further, undergraduate students have a lot of responsibilities, and it is often difficult to find a quiet place to read regularly in English.

We have however, taken the first step, and have evidence that one or two positive experiences with regard to good reading material can improve the motivation to read.

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Grammatical Gender in Story Texts: Interaction of Linguistic Structure, Culture and Cognition

Suneeta Mishra

Abstract

This paper is based on textbook analysis to explore the interaction of a specific grammatical component-grammatical gender-with the socio-cultural notions of gender and anthropomorphism in children's literature. The language under study is Hindi, which has a two-gender system. Numerous studies (e.g. Boroditsky, Schmidt and Phillips, 2003; Basetti, 2014) have shown that grammatical gender colors speakers' perception of nouns. For the present study, Hindi textbooks of classes I-III used in government schools across India were analysed. The objective was to investigate the tools of personification used for animal characters, in particular gender assignment via cues related to physical attributes or social addresses. It was found that despite the logical possibility of representing both sexes for almost all animal species (using proper names and other means), a significant percentage of assigned gender correlated with the default grammatical gender of the animals. In one instance, the teachers' instructions also followed this mapping. Additionally, the ratio of grammatically masculine to feminine animals was 2:1. Analysis of gender-marking cues other than agreement indicates that grammatical gender affects the speakers' perceptions of animal characters. Given the dominant presence of animal characters in children's literature, such an effect, combined with the skewed representational ratio between the two genders can accentuate the marginal representation of feminine gender even in imagined constructions such as a story. In my paper I have tried to present a possible alternative to this.

Key words: Grammatical gender, Linguistic relativity, Animal characters, Story texts, Skewed representation

Introduction

The term “gender” in linguistic description originated from “genus” or “kind” (Corbett, 2006), and is used to refer to nominal categorization on a number of bases ranging from animacy (nouns being animate or inanimate) to biological sex. There are languages in the world which have more than twenty categories of nouns (or “genders”), while others such as Bangla do not manifest any such nominal categorization. Languages with “natural” gender categorize nouns in correspondence with their naturally existing biological sex (that is masculine/feminine/neuter

corresponding with biologically male/female/neither). Languages with “grammatical” gender, on the other hand, mostly categorize all non-human referents (animals and inanimate objects) on an arbitrary basis into masculine, feminine and/or neuter (debates regarding the arbitrariness of grammatical gender are still on), although there is a high correlation between the biological sex of humans and their grammatical gender.

Hindi is a two-gender language in which all nouns are treated as either masculine or feminine. However, for us humans, gender has a semantic basis, i.e. it corresponds with the biological sex.

In animals, although there are instances of semantic pairs such as *chuuha-chuhiya* (male and female rat), all species have a default grammatical gender which is used in most instances unless there is a special context which requires the “marked” gender to be specified. So, *chuuha* (masculine) is the default grammatical gender that governs the gender-marking on the verb, adjective, genitive, etc., attached to the noun.

Informal approaches to linguistic analysis, grammatical gender, like any other morpho-syntactic component, is taken as a “purely” structural component. But recent studies in cognitive linguistic frameworks have shown that a large component of any human language—not only its use but also its structures—is grounded in the cultural-cognitive processes involved in language-use (Diessel & Hilpert, 2016). Experimental studies based on languages where grammatical gender is contrasted (Boroditsky, Phillips & Schmidt, 2003; Saalbach, Imai & Schalk, 2012; Pavlidou & Alvanoudi, 2013) have repeatedly shown (with exceptions) that speakers are affected by the presence of grammatical gender. Further, gender assignment tasks also show a positive correlation with grammatical gender.

An important finding across these studies is that the impact of grammatical gender on cognition is strongest in the case of “animals” (Bassetti, 2014). This finding is especially relevant for the present study as it is based on the same semantic class. Almost all languages of the world have stories with animal characters. This anthropomorphism serves several purposes, as outlined by Bruke & Copenhaver (2004), such as allowing an emotional distance from a painful or emotionally disturbing situation. For young readers, animal characters are a lot more than mere animals. Their deep association and

identification with animal characters is what gives such texts widespread appeal and an indispensable place in children’s literature. Hence, what goes into the characterization of these animal characters assumes tremendous relevance, socially, psychologically and pedagogically.

According to linguistic relativity hypothesis, “We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages.” (Whorf, 1956). In broader terms, the structure of a language can impose certain kinds of usages and characterizations in encoding information and experience that may differ considerably from the way another language encodes the same information and experience. In this paper, I will explore what kind of specific characterization (if any) grammatical gender imposes on animal characters in Hindi texts.

Characterization of Animal Characters in Hindi Texts

For the purpose of this study, I analysed the NCERT Hindi textbooks of classes I to III to see if genderization was used to personify the characters. The aim of the study was to explore whether the assumed gender of animal characters in story texts, as assessed by cues other than the usual syntactic marking like kinship terms as address, correlates with the grammatical gender of the animal species.

The coding of relevant information was done on the basis of the correlation between the animals’ projected/assigned gender and grammatical gender. If the two genders correlated, the usual syntactic agreement was termed “unmarked”; additional cues in the form of social addresses, physical features, etc., were coded as “marked”. Two specific texts have been discussed here separately.

The textbook had the following animal characters belonging to two gender categories:

Table 1

Details of Gender Assignment to Animal Characters in Hindi Textbooks of Grades I-III

Grade	Grammatically Masculine Animals			Grammatically Feminine Animals		
	According to GG		Opposite to GG	According to GG		Opposite to GG
	Marked	Unmarked		Marked	Unmarked	
I	3	11	0	2	4	1
II	5	6	1	1	3	0
III	6	2	0	3	3	0
Total	14	19	1	6	10	1

Note: GG- Grammatical Gender

Masculine: mouse (6), bear (2), monkey (3), lion (3), tiger (1), parrot (1), horse (1), dog (1), elephant (2), leopard (1), tortoise (1), snake (1), camel (1), crow (1), wolf (1), offspring of various animals (a total of 7 offspring across 4 species)

Assigned grammatically feminine- mouse (1)

Feminine: cat (5), spider (2), squirrel (1), fox (3), butterfly (2), housefly (2), cuckoo (1)

Assigned grammatically masculine- goat (1)

The following observations were made on the basis of these findings:

1. Most texts have an overwhelming number of grammatically masculine animals. The average masculine: feminine ratio is 2:1 (33 masculine compared to 16 feminine characters). If one looks at the range of masculine and feminine animals, the ratio is even more skewed as there are 19 grammatically masculine animals (including animal offspring shown as males) as opposed to 7 grammatically feminine animals.
2. There is a very high correlation (96 per cent) between the grammatical and assumed gender. Only 2 out of a total of 51 animal characters were portrayed as belonging to

a gender opposite to that of the default (grammatical) gender. Counter-intuitive gender representations included feminine “mouse” and masculine “goat”.

3. The additional cues that mark gender apart from normal syntactic agreement mostly included social addresses and kinship terms. Of a total of 51 cues, there were 18 instances of gender-marked social addresses and 2 instances where physical features (moustache) were used to mark gender.
4. Additional genderization was rendered by the use of adjectives. Generally taken as a part of syntactic agreement, the adjectives nonetheless served to create an additional gendered image of the animal character. Examples of adjectives include *nanha* (little, masc.), *bechara* (poor fellow, masc.), *chhota* (small, masc.). Clearer gendered use could be seen in addresses such as ‘*Are o!*’ (for males) and ‘*Ari*’ (for females).
5. The two texts presented a case where the entire discourse was constructed on the premise that a grammatically masculine animal was male and a grammatically feminine animal was female. This is

analogous to a human world situation right down to the culturally-defined stereotypical behavior of males and females. This is evident from the summary of the first text (*Billi Kaise Rehne aai Manushya ke Sang*, class II):

A cat lives with her “cousin brother” lion and she is unhappy because she has to do a lot of housework. She also prepares food for the “lion”, but he usually eats up all the food. Once, when the “lion” falls sick and other animals visit him, he “orders” the “sister” to prepare food for them. Since there is no fire at home, he orders her to run to a nearby human dwelling to bring fire. When she reaches there, the kids start pampering her because they find her “soft” and “silky”. She feels so good that she is delayed in getting the fire. When she returns late with the fire, lion is extremely angry and growls at her and the cat runs back to human dwellings.

The “maleness” of the lion and the “femaleness” of the cat are constructed using not only the address terms *bhaiya* and *behen* (brother and sister), but also through accompanying visuals (dress, facial expressions, etc.). The dialogues also show a power hierarchy in statements/dialogues such as, Lion: “It’s time for my meal and you haven’t laid it out yet?” and Cat: “Will just do it brother!” The overall plot is entrenched in the positioning of male and female roles in terms of the work distribution, authority and even the physical features of the female, who is described as being “soft”, “little one”, etc.

The second text is a popular story “*Bandar-Baant*” (class III) in which, two cats fight over a loaf of bread. A monkey intervenes to “decide” on the matter and on the pretext of dividing the bread equally between the cats, eats it all up bit by bit.

Apart from the fact that the cats have been portrayed as females (they address each other as *behen*) and the monkey as male (addressed by the cats as *saahab* implying Sir), the overall plot echoes the subtle power positions in the male-female interactions in our society. In such interactions, the male usually has the authority to intervene and to pass a judgment, and often tricks the “dumb” females. The two cats, instead of fighting it out between themselves, prefer the intervention of a male who will “decide” who the bread belongs to. Later, though the cats realize that they have been tricked, are portrayed as helplessly looking on. The most surprising part though, is that the instructions to enact the story clearly state that a 7-8-year-old boy can play the role of the monkey and two girls aged 5-6 years can play the roles of the cats, complete with gender-specific dresses. This clearly shows the gendered cognition of book-writers, who are supposedly native Hindi speakers.

Interaction of “Grammatical” Gender with “Sociological” Gender and its Mapping with “Biological” Sex

It is clear from the above analysis that there is a direct correlation between the gender assigned to the animal characters and their grammatical gender. This is even more relevant considering that this is the only semantic class, logically and factually, in which either of the two genders can be placed in most situations. In addition to the gender-marked sentences necessitated by the grammar of Hindi, one finds additional cues of assumed gender. These range from nouns appended with social addresses and explicit gender-specific physical features such as a moustache, to entire texts constructed analogous to the male-female equations in human society, with grammatical gender providing the basis for gender assignment. It is interesting to note how a small, supposedly “naïve” structural element

of a language can affect the perception of even adult native speakers (book-writers), when they specify roles for male and female children oblivious to the mapping of grammatical gender and biological sex. Such unconscious language use has been attributed to “habitual language use patterns induced by linguistic structure” by several scholars including Gumperz & Levinson (1996) and is in line with the linguistic relativity hypothesis.

The other major point brought out by the analysis is the skewed representation of the sexes (or genders); there were half the number and range of feminine animals as compared to masculine animals (although the overall distribution itself is skewed). This has been addressed by scholars such as McCabe et al. (2011), who term the under-representation of females as a symbolic *annihilation*, that is a conspicuous ‘absence’ of females in linguistic and non-linguistic representations. Others such as Lakoff (1973) and Wodak (2015) talk about the *androcentricity* of English texts. Hindi provides an additional tool in the form of grammatical gender, which further adds to the re-production and expansion of the human world gender-divide and hierarchy maintenance to include the animal world and imagined discourses.

Can something be Done?

The above analysis shows that linguistic categorization of animal species as generic masculine and feminine forces a gender-skewed representation. One alternative to this may be to use more proper names than common names for animals. This can be accompanied by gender-neutral visuals. For instance, instead of a lion/tiger being represented as default masculine (grammatically), or a squirrel/sparrow being represented as default feminine, some of these characters may be assigned names typically representative of the opposite gender. In fact, the popularity of animal characters in

children’s stories comes as a much-needed aid here, because this is the only semantic class (except humans) that has both male and female counterparts. Hence the names of the characters can be from both genders, and alternate sentence-structures can be employed for this. The classic story “*Gillu Gilehri*” by Mahadevi Varma, although meant for older readers, deserves a special mention here as it is based on a squirrel (grammatically feminine in Hindi) who is given a masculine name by the author. The storyline follows it up with a corresponding sentence-structure, even though the feminine form is used for other squirrels. Another such story of contemporary times is “*Roopa Haathi*”, in which the author assigns a feminine name to an elephant (grammatically masculine in Hindi).

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In Government Schools where is the Room to Write?¹

Snehlata Gupta

Abstract

This article deals with writing, more specifically English writing, with regard to students studying in government schools. In these schools, classroom instruction is geared towards preparing students to write for the defining school leaving exam conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) at the end of class XII. The overly centralized system does not give teachers much room to teach students about the diverse meaning writing can have in their lives. Since examinations favour strict adherence to the text with an over emphasis on accuracy, this does not encourage students to connect their writing with their lived experiences. The world of academic English found in school does not accommodate the variety of English that is found in the out-of-school contexts of government school students. In fact, teachers themselves see their writing lives as being quite separate from their role as teachers of writing.

Key words: Writing, ELT, School, Instruction, Examination.

In a system that allows teachers little autonomy to choose what to teach and how to teach it, it is often a schizophrenic experience being a language teacher while also being a literacy researcher, because in the current context there is no meeting ground between the two. The reading² I have been doing as part of my research has opened my eyes to what the possibilities of teaching language and literacy are – what the experience of writing and reading can be, what students can do given the opportunity, and in fact are doing in their lives independently, in their out of school literacy practices, which include reading and writing in English on mobile devices – including reading instructions for video games, reading and writing messages and social media posts and reading on the Internet, filling forms, reading magazines, newspapers and, albeit for rare individuals, books. However, as a language teacher, the reality of transactions in the classroom and the inflexibility of the system that lives and swears by the examination system and the board results weighs heavily on my daily routine, and leaves

me with little choice but to conform to its demands.

This article draws from my experience as an English teacher at the secondary and senior secondary level in a government school in Delhi. In this article, I would like to share some ideas and formulations that have emerged out of my interactions with my students, both within and outside the classroom. I will briefly describe their beliefs, attitudes and practices of writing, especially in English. These are specific to the students I teach and the school I teach in, and of course to who I am as a teacher. I believe this micro view from the grassroots may be useful in gaining insights into some of the issues around writing that have been discussed in the context of teaching and learning how to read. Through this article, I will attempt to add to the conversation around the possibilities for meaningful language and literacy teaching in the classroom that could be created even within the highly regimented and inflexible system that exists in government schools in Delhi, as we

strive to help our students become independent and confident writers.

Writing is a key part of school for all students. Walk into any secondary or senior secondary classroom when students are supposed to be studying by themselves, and you will find a large number of students engaged in writing. Ask them what they are doing and they will respond, “*Kaam poora kar rahein hain*” (We are completing our work). A closer scrutiny of what the students are doing will most often reveal that they are copying notes or answers from a guide or a help-book, or from other students’ notebooks. Great store is set on having answers and notes, and everything copied neatly into notebooks on time. For the teacher, this also adds to the ease of the correction process. Teachers do not need to read anything, they merely have to tick everything and write, “seen”. Teachers also constantly ask the students “*kaam poora hai?*” which in actual terms means: “Have you copied all the required notes and written answers to all the assigned questions?”

As a teacher of English at the senior secondary level in a Delhi Government school, I spend several hours each day assessing and grading the students’ writing, and helping them prepare for the Class 12 board examinations. As I read through the answer scripts of one test after another, I am often struck by the thought that this is probably when my students write the most during the entire academic year. In fact, the first time I saw my students engaged in sustained writing was during their first term examination in September 2017, when they wrote continuously for three hours. The three-hour examinations were held again in December 2017 and January 2018, and for a select few (“weak”) students in February 2018. In the secondary classes, and especially in Class 12, the education system does not leave much time, space or demand for independent and original writing. There isn’t much time for reading widely either, but that is another story. There isn’t much

time for doing anything more than just “covering the syllabus”, which translates into reading the textbooks and writing answers to assigned questions in the books or to the kind that will be asked in the examination. In fact, as a teacher, I find that I am mostly “assigning” writing to my students rather than “teaching” them how to write.

Most writing done by Senior Secondary students is part of the mandated curriculum of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the examining body. This writing is in the form of formulaic letters, speeches, articles or debates on topics selected by a teacher or by the person who sets the examination paper, with no consideration for the learners or the purpose of the examination. The completed assignments are evaluated on the basis of how accurately they can quote the words of the lesson in the textbook, or the extract given for the unseen passage. The teachers’ feedback is also most often limited to correcting mistakes in grammar, spellings and usage of words, or to add “value points”/information from the text that is missing in the answer. Examiners on their part dole out marks liberally when the assignments meet the required evaluation guidelines given in the CBSE marking scheme. At this point, it would be instructive to quote an extract from the marking scheme for the March 2017 Senior School Certificate Examination, available on the CBSE website:

13. If a student literally lifts a portion of the given passage / extract from the question paper as an answer to a question, no mark(s) to be deducted on this count as long as it is relevant and indicative of the desired understanding on the part of the student [reference questions under Q1, Q2 and Q8].

When writing is mostly associated with testing and at almost all times evaluated in an examination-like context, and this seems to be the dominant purpose of writing in government

schools, is it any wonder that students are reluctant writers?

In addition to this, there are some more factors that hamper government school students from writing independently. Many of the writing assignments given to them deal with topics they either do not understand, or do not have a first-hand experience of. For example, never having attended a seminar, or been on excursions and tours, they do not know what to write about them. They struggle to develop thoughts and ideas for such topics as they are unable to relate the topic to their own lived experience.

Even when they do have exposure or experience related to a writing assignment, they do not draw from it as they have never been encouraged to connect their lives, their lived experience and their innate knowledge with the assigned writing tasks. Further, in my experience the teaching/learning experience in government schools does not encourage them to draw on their point of view. For instance, when “eve-teasing” is given as a topic for writing, students struggle to understand what “eve-teasing” means. Even if an empathetic teacher or a kind invigilator explains it to them, they struggle to connect it with the harassment faced by most girls as they negotiate their everyday lives. They end up writing the most formulaic stuff based on model answers from guidebooks and instructions from teachers. This happens because students have been taught to write for the purpose of evaluation, as the average government schoolteacher also focuses on getting students to generate written material that fits within a prescribed range of expected responses to this assignment or question.

In my classes, I encourage my students to write independently. In fact, when a new class is assigned to me, I ask the students why they do not incorporate their viewpoint in their writing. I assume that they would have developed a viewpoint from participating in or listening to

conversations at home, with their friends or in the neighbourhood, or from reading about incidents in the newspapers or hearing about them on the television and news. Apologetically, they reply that they are not good writers because they do not have adequate vocabulary, and their grammar is weak.

It is clear that writing has always been positioned to them as something they do in response to the questions given to them, with the main focus being on producing accurate and error free writing. They hesitate to move away from formulaic ideas that are available in guidebooks as these are easier to express in error free language; and they deliberately relinquish more interesting ideas because they do not have the linguistic resources to express them.

Writing in English therefore produces great anxiety. Even smart, bright and intelligent students, who have many ideas and strong opinions when expressed in spoken Hindi, withdraw into a shell when it comes to writing in English. It is as though English demands different kinds of thought processes and ideas from the ones they possess. It is almost as if they have to take on a different persona to write in English, because their natural thought process is not appropriate for English. Student after student has said to me: “I don’t know what to write.” When I ask them to express their thoughts in Hindi, there is an outpouring of ideas and experiences. When I say: “Why don’t you write this in English?” they look puzzled. Their expression seems to convey: “Really? We can say the same thing in English?” For my students, English assumes this mysterious, mystical, superior status. Hence, they have little or no confidence when it comes to writing independently in English.

However, among the mostly indifferent and reluctant writers, every batch of students also has its share of would-be writers. To my surprise, such students try their hand at writing poetry, mostly in Hindi but also in English. Why

poetry? I have often wondered; why not try writing stories or essays. Is it because poetry allows a flexibility and license that prose does not? Is it because poetry can be brief, short? Or is it because longer forms of writing need more stamina than they have? Why is it that students find it hard to write descriptive, narrative or expository pieces? Do they lack the linguistic resources? Or is it that they haven't been taught the skills to write such pieces?

At this point it may be relevant to share that for a large number of government school students, schools are the main places to learn how to read and write, especially in English. The world of academic English found in such schools does not accommodate the variety of English that is found in out-of-school contexts.

Every writer, and especially a seasoned author, knows the value of an empathetic first reader for her/his tentative first draft. The empathetic first reader does not evaluate to correct and mark, but to guide and nurture. How can we make teachers more empathetic readers?

Also, what about the writing life of the teacher herself/himself? We have seldom had any discussion around that. Are the teachers themselves writers? What do they write about? I know that as a researcher, I am really struggling to write my dissertation as it is unlike anything I have written before. As teachers when do we really share our lives and struggles as writers? By doing so we would be able to share our own lived practices of reading and writing with our students, making for more engaged reading-writing teaching/learning experiences.

At a recent in-service training programme, we had several sessions on teaching students how to write. As I had more or less expected, the sessions focused on the form rather than on the purpose of writing, or the demands of writing in different genres. On the last session of the last day, and I am not quite sure how, a few teachers started reading out some of their original

writings. These writings consisted of poems they had written over the years. Suddenly there was a different air and energy in the room. The stodgy dullness that had characterized the preceding days and sessions vanished, and animation and excitement filled the room. The teachers shared rich samples of their writing. They also shared the context in which some of the compositions had been written, how they had crafted the poems, revised their work. I was struck by what we were doing. My head teemed with questions. Why hadn't we thought of this before? Why hadn't we thought of discussing our lives as writers with each other, shared what we were writing, the struggles we faced?

The answers to these questions were not far away. We see our writing lives as being quite separate from our role as teachers who teach writing. When we are in the role of writing teachers in the classroom, we do not really think about developing our students as writers. We just try to fulfil a very limited objective, that of ensuring that our students acquire the necessary skills to write in the form required by the exam system. So we focus on form. We give our students the sentence structure, the opening and closing sentences and the paragraphs, and even tell them what to put into them. We go as per the CBSE marking scheme—the ultimate guide to writing in schools—1 mark for format, so write the heading and the by line; 4 marks for content, you should have 4-5 value points; 5 marks for expression; 2.5 for grammar and spelling, and 2.5 for coherence and relevance. It is clear that writing is not seen as a pleasurable, or useful, or purposeful activity. Most students only write in a test, the rest of the time they simply copy. In fact, as a teacher, I know very little of the writing lives of my students outside of class and school. It is time we paid heed to this and thought of creating opportunities to teach writing the way it should be ... the way it could be.

Endnotes:

¹ This article is based on a presentation made at the “National Conference on Writing in School: Processes, Practices, and the Writer”, organized by the Department of Education, University of Delhi on 21-22 February 2018.

² As part of my research I have been reading a range of literature on various aspects of language and literacy teaching (especially in a second language) such as processes of reading and writing, reading comprehension, meaning making, the transactional nature of reading-writing, reading-writing connections, etc.

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Teaching to Read: A Critical Discussion

Brinda Chowdhari

Abstract

Reading is an integral part of our lives. The low proficiency in reading skills of undergraduate students has prompted me to take up this critical discussion on how reading skills are taught at the primary level in schools. In the NCERT English text book that I examined for the present analysis, I found significant gaps in the understanding of reading as well as in the classroom transaction of reading skills.

Key words: Reading, Decoding, Anticipation, Integration, Textbook, Exercises

Introduction

Reading is a basic language skill which we are exposed to since childhood. During my primary years of schooling, I recall, reading was not really given much importance as a separate skill; there was more emphasis on writing skills. No special effort was made to promote reading skills. The only activity that we engaged in for improving our reading skills was reading the English lessons aloud in the class and being corrected by the teacher if our pronunciation was wrong. Occasionally, the teacher would explain parts of the text or the meaning of a word as it was read aloud. Reading, it seems, was mostly viewed as decoding and transforming a graphic script into its phonetic form.

Reading is a crucial skill that is required in every walk of life. It is a window to the world and impacts our life significantly. So it is worthwhile to critically reflect upon how reading skills are taught in the primary years of schooling in the present times. As a faculty at Sharda University where presently I am teaching English to undergraduate and post-graduate Engineering students, I feel appalled at the poor quality of reading exhibited by 95 percent of my students. They struggle with decoding of words; they read haltingly; they have no idea where to pause; they have no idea of syllable stress or word

stress; there is no intonation and their whole attention is on decoding the written script. In order to understand the meaning of a text, they have to read it several times. In fact, most of them are rather poor and reluctant readers. All this made me very curious about how reading skills are developed in primary school students in contemporary times.

The present discussion on the teaching of reading is based on a critical appraisal of the reading exercises in a primary level English text book *Marigold*, published by NCERT.

Reading is Strategic

Our understanding of reading as a process has evolved over the years. It is now viewed as a very sophisticated language skill, which comprises of a range of sub skills, the main purpose of which is not just decoding the text, but also comprehending its meaning. Before starting to read, it is important to understand the purpose of reading—whether it is aesthetic or efferent. This will dictate the method we adopt for reading.

Reading is viewed as a strategic activity. A good and effective reader employs various strategies to comprehend the meaning of a text. Meaning is created when there is an interaction between the reader's prior knowledge on the topic of the text, his/her past experience and the text

itself as advocated by Schema Theory (Adams and Collins, 1977). The same text therefore may have different interpretations, depending on the reader's background, prior knowledge and experiences. Besides, reading is not always a bottom up approach as advocated by Skill's method in which the reader begins with the identification of letter, then word, and then moves towards full texts (Sheridan, 1981). The reader reads in chunks, applies prior knowledge, anticipates and builds expectations, evaluates the textual content, makes connections with his existing knowledge and then arrives at the meaning of a text (Grellet, 1981).

According to research, reading comprises three main skills—decoding, anticipation and integration of meaning. Each of these skills is made up of various subskills. Decoding is the process of recognizing the graphic form and converting it to its phonetic form (NCERT, 2005). This process can be developed by improving recognition of word-shape, enhancing sight vocabulary and accessing the internal lexicon. Anticipation is a skill which involves predicting the meaning using the semantic or grammatical context, or the topic of the sentence, or by referring to prior knowledge. Integration of meaning involves connecting the skills across the ideas in order to achieve the main purpose of arriving at the meaning of the text. The psycholinguistic model which views reading as prediction of meaning suggests that reading is a top down approach (Sheridan, 1981). Skimming, scanning and identifying the central idea, the main points and the supporting details of a text also aid the reading process. According to Grellet (1981), an understanding of the organization of the text will significantly impact reading. It is important to practice all three sub skills repeatedly by means of dedicated activities until the reader can use them automatically. According to EduGains, an

education website, this will give the reader more time to integrate the meaning of the text, thereby improving the reading skills remarkably.

With this understanding of reading, one can now create a structured process to teach reading skills, which will involve carrying out appropriate activities before, during and post-reading.

The English Text Book

Analysis of a few texts from the NCERT English Textbook *Marigold* for Class V students gave me an insight into how reading activities are developed in schools. *Marigold* comprises of a mix of short poems and popular fictional narratives covering themes which conform to the learners' immediate physical, social and cultural environment (NCERT, 2005).

The first unit includes a poem "Ice cream" by Rachael Field. The poem is preceded by a colorful picture of an ice cream vendor with children flocking around his van. This picture gives a cue to the reader about the content of the text. There is a second cue in the form of a question, which is a kind of pre-reading activity. It is meant to draw the reader's attention and prepare him/her for reading the text that follows. The layout of the text tells the reader that it is a poem and not a narrative text. It is surrounded by illustrations, which also feeds the imagination and expectations of the child regarding the content of the poem.

The next text "Wonderful Waste" is a short story that emphasizes on avoiding waste of vegetable scraps which instead of throwing away can be reused effectively. This is accompanied by an illustration which allows the reader to anticipate what the text is all about. In fact, the title itself tells the reader that waste can be used in a positive manner. The illustrations are colourful and captivating. There is a cue preceding the text that conveys the message that waste can

be useful. This draws the child's attention to those parts in the story which shows how waste can be useful. The text is followed by difficult words, their meanings, reading comprehension questions and an exercise on identifying true or false statements. There is another exercise on colouring the boxes that have rhyming words, which is meant to improve the child's grapheme-phoneme correspondence, and hence the word shape and to some extent the sight vocabulary.

The last text of this unit is "Bamboo Curry". The text is preceded by colourful pictures and a leading question: "Have you ever eaten a bamboo? Let's read this picture story and find out which part of the bamboo can be cooked and eaten." The question is designed to provoke the reader to scan the text to look for specific information. The exercises following the text focus primarily on enhancing writing skills and pronunciation practice. There is no specific exercise for reading.

The unit ends with a Teacher's Page, which gives explicit instructions to the teacher on how to carry out the transaction of the text. In this, teachers are instructed to encourage students to read folk tales from different parts of the country and also compare the cultural and linguistic aspect of the folk tale that he or she is reading with the cultural and linguistic aspect of his or her own mother-tongue. While in this section the authors seem to realize the importance of exposing children to other interesting texts, they do not suggest a list of supplementary books.

Given here are some sample reading exercises from the English text book 'Marigold'. The reading exercises across the units are of a similar kind. So only a representative sample is presented here. It may be noted that only a portion of the entire question has been presented:

1. There are Reading comprehension questions after every poem as well as the narrative texts.

2. 'True or false' exercises: State whether the following sentences are true or false

(i) Rip was kind to children. _____

(ii) Rip was a hard-working man. _____

3. Complete the following sentences.

(i) Rip's village was situated _____.

(ii) The children of the village loved him because _____.

(iii) _____ was his constant companion.

4. Instructions for reading supplementary Reading Material

The exercises mentioned here are inadequate to train the students to enhance their reading skills. Although exercises 1, 2 and 3 require that the child to go through the text several times, that does not necessarily contribute to an improvement in their general reading skills. Besides, exercise 1 is boring and unimaginative. Exercise 4 is very vague and there is no follow up activity to ensure that children actually read the supplementary books. Moreover, the authors do not provide a list for supplementary reading either.

All texts are followed by a list of new words and their meanings. Attempts have been made to keep the exercises child-centric. The reading exercises are named as 'Reading is fun' or 'Let's read' so as to make the child feel comfortable with the idea of reading and not consider it as a difficult and formidable task. The questions that follow the poem are designed to allow the child to draw the answers from his/her daily life experience. The answers to some questions may be found in the pictures accompanying the text and to others in the text itself. The questions have an interesting, informal, friendly and conversational tone and make a personal connect with the child as she/he can relate them with his/her life experiences. For instance, questions such as "In which season is ice cream popular?", or

Table 1

Approximate Number of Exercises to Develop Various Language Skills (Marigold, Class V)

Language Skills	Vocabulary	Reading Comprehension	Traditional Questions on grammar	Spoken Fluency	Writing Skills	Listening Skills	Orthography	Fun Activities
Approx. No. of Exercises	11	3	32	17	34	1	8	21

“Who feels joyous on seeing the ice cream man?” makes the child recall his experiences with the ice cream man.

Table 1 shows that there are very few questions devoted exclusively to the enhancement of reading skills. Most of the exercises focus on improving writing and speaking skills, vocabulary, phonetic awareness, or grammar. Though reading is implicit in all these exercises, no conscious effort is made to improve the reading skills of the learner.

Analysis of a few texts from the NCERT English textbook *Honeydew* for Class VIII also reiterates the fact that reading skills are not given any special attention. A careful examination of *Honeydew* shows that there is a pre-reading activity to orient the reader to the textual content, and connect it to the reader’s existing knowledge. In addition, there are comprehension check questions within the text and the meanings of ‘difficult words’ as well as colourful illustrations in the margins of the page, which is quite helpful for the reader. The exercises mainly consist of four major parts namely: “Working With Texts”, which are comprehension questions; “Working With Language” which essentially focus on various grammatical aspects of the text; “Speaking” which include exercises to enhance speaking skills, and “Writing”, which include exercises to enhance writing skills.

The Class X English text book *First Flight* is also more or less along the same lines, with pre-reading activities, comprehension check questions, glossaries and exercises “Thinking

about the text”, “Thinking about language”, “Speaking” and “listening skills”.

In none of these books is there any special activity aiming at improving sight vocabulary or word recognition that comes from identifying word shapes. Also, there are very few activities that accelerate decoding through the use of flash cards, by improving grapheme- phoneme correspondence, through nonsense words, by using word games, by recognizing word shape or by improving sight vocabulary. Exercises to improve anticipation skills which require the child to guess, anticipate or question are also conspicuous by their absence. There is an attempt to improve anticipation skills in the pre-reading activity at the beginning of the text. However, additional exercises designed to anticipate meaning from semantic or grammatical cues need to be incorporated. There is also no exercise on how to anticipate the content of the text through pictures, titles, subtitles, italicized words, key words, graphic organizers and flow charts, etc. Likewise, there is no exercise to help the child to learn how to skim or scan a text and look for the central idea, main points, sub-points or finer details. Finally, there is also no exercise on preparing concept maps or on note –making.

There is also little attempt to consciously expose children to the organizational patterns of texts. Reading is a skill which cuts across the curriculum. By confining the learners to the narrative texts presented in the English textbook, we are limiting their ability to tackle texts of other registers and types such as expository, explanatory, scientific texts, etc.

Bridging the Gap

It is evident that there are huge gaps between our understanding of the reading process and the way we actually transact teaching reading skills in the classroom. In the present NCERT books, the reading exercises need to be more carefully designed by consciously focusing on a specific reading strategy.

Interesting Pre-reading activities which encourage the readers to reflect on what they already know about the topic need to be designed. Pre reading activities may be by questioning or using KWL charts (what you *Know*; what you *Want to know* and what you have *Learnt*), or by recalling personal experiences on a certain topic and sharing with the class or some practical activity like exploring some aspect of the outside world or watching a certain television programme on a topic, or reading up certain concepts from a book etc.

Explicit during-reading activities also need to be designed. Some of them are mentioned as follows:

- i. Exercises on skimming texts to get the gist or scanning the text for specific information may be presented in the form of a playful activity where the class is divided into small groups of five and the groups are provided with copies of the same text or different texts. Each group is required to arrive at the gist or locate specific pieces of information within a fixed time period. The teacher may keep track of the time with a stopwatch.
- ii. Interesting exercises on anticipation from semantic context or grammatical context may be designed. For instance- exercises like - Guess the missing word in the sentence – “The deep sea fishermen found a s _ _ _ _ in the sea” and “The deep sea fishermen found a s _ _ _ _ rock in the sea”. In the first sentence, from the

semantic context the reader might guess the word ‘shark’ and in the second sentence from the grammatical context article ‘a’ and the following noun after the blank, the reader might guess that the missing word is an adjective which could be ‘sharp’.

- iii. Another exercise on anticipation could be predicting the content with the help of topic sentence or the first sentence of a paragraph. Usually in a paragraph, all the sentences are an expansion of the first sentence of the paragraph. The teacher may read out the first sentence of a paragraph and ask the students to guess what the content of the paragraph could be. This may be a group activity.
- iv. Another activity on anticipation could be by the use of nonsense words. The teacher might replace certain words in the text by some nonsense words and students are asked to replace the nonsense words with an appropriate word of their choice.
- v. Predicting meaning with the help of textual cues, topics and sub-topics, pictures or graphic organizers may also be carried out as group activities. Anticipation is a very crucial and effective skill and leads to better comprehension because it is easier to make connections between new knowledge and existing knowledge and evaluate, process and assimilate new information faster.
- vi. Exercises to improve sight vocabulary through flash cards or word shape may be carefully designed in the form of playful activities.
- vii. Another activity may be designed to identify the central idea, main points or supporting details of a text. Again if this is carried out in the form of a group activity it can be quite interesting. This will help even the poor and reluctant readers to at least get the gist of the text without focusing on finer details.

- viii. A special activity may be designed to recognize various organizational patterns of texts. This will improve comprehension because if the reader understands how information is organized, it will be easy for him to process information.
- ix. Exercises on taking down notes while reading a text or making flowcharts and concept maps will help the reader immensely to understand the interrelation within the concepts or characters in the text which will lead to a much better understanding of the text.

Post-reading activities such as making notes, critically discussing what has been read, making judgments, responding to the text or considering what is unsaid or unexplored needs to be emphasized. This will encourage the reader to think, reflect, discuss, analyse, comment and be an active reader.

If all these suggestions are implemented the lower level sub skills (mechanical skills) such as decoding, anticipation, word recognition etc. will become automatic after a lot of such exercises have been practiced repeatedly and less time will be spent on these sub-skills. The reader will get more time to focus on higher level skills and will integrate meaning, reflect critically and thus develop a broader, deeper and better understanding of the text.

It is true that language skills are best learnt when the focus is not on language itself, and in this paper, I have argued for a more structured approach to the teaching of reading skills. However, the exercises to teach reading skills can be presented in an apparently unstructured form, i.e. in the form of an activity or a game as discussed in the preceding paragraphs. This will take the readers' focus away from the fact that they are doing the exercise to improve their language skills.

Reading across the curriculum and beyond the curriculum also needs to be incorporated in the

school text book. Besides the English text book, text books of science, mathematics, social sciences should also be read in the English language classroom. The teacher needs to point out to children the various organization patterns and registers of language use. Register specific vocabulary also needs to be consciously looked into. The concept of reading in different registers needs to be introduced. Samples of texts from a social science text book, mathematics textbook (the textual part like the problems or instructions etc.) and English text book may be brought to the class and a careful comparison can be done in terms of vocabulary used, sentence construction patterns, styles of writing like narrative, expository, argumentative etc. and organizational patterns like topical, chronological, spatial, cause- effect, comparison-contrast, problem- solution etc. This may be a group activity and each group may be asked to make a presentation on what they observed. This will sensitize the readers to the various kinds of texts in different registers and it will make them more comfortable with reading in the content area. A list of books for supplementary reading should be provided to the students and a dedicated time slot should be allocated in the time table to ensure that students actually read these books.

Conclusion

There is a dire need to explicitly design proper Pre-reading, During-reading and Post-reading activities to enhance the various sub-skills in the reading process. Training students along these lines will create good, independent and competent readers, which in turn will have a long term impact on the quality of education.

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Literature in the Reading Classroom: Some Reflections

Swarnlata Sah

Abstract

Reading is one of the most important components of language learning. It is also the most essential skill for students in order to perform effectively in different subject areas in school. However, young children can develop an interest in reading only if they have access to interesting, meaningful and age-appropriate books. Appropriate use of children's literature by the teachers can work wonders as it promotes active and engaged reading. In the present paper, I will discuss the criteria for selecting children's literature for early readers as well as the strategies for teaching how to read with the help of this literature.

Key words: Reading, Engaged reader, Authentic children's literature, Response

Introduction

Reading is one of the important components of language learning in schools. It is important to be a competent reader not only to learn the language, but also because reading skills add to the competency of the students in other subject areas as well. Thus, reading can alter the whole schooling experience of a student. The word reading stands for reading meaningfully and not merely sounding out or decoding the written text. For young children, it is very important that the process of learning to read be pleasurable and enjoyable. However, young children can develop an interest in reading only if they have access to interesting, meaningful and age-appropriate books. Books which are somewhat predictable and have a familiar context and vocabulary are especially helpful in promoting active and engaged reading. In fact, if children are given the right exposure in the initial classes, not only will they develop good language skills, but their critical and imaginative thinking will also mature. A rich collection of children's literature in a classroom or in a library of the school can work wonders to make reading interesting and enjoyable for children. Unfortunately, not all

books make for good classroom reading, and so it becomes imperative for the elementary grade teachers to take certain parameters into consideration while choosing literature for children. The correct books, combined with appropriate teaching learning strategies will help to bring books and children close to each other. In light of this discussion, I will first look at the criteria for selecting authentic literature for children. This will be followed by a study of some teaching learning strategies that the teachers can use to create opportunities for meaningful engagement between the children and the literary text.

Criteria for Selecting Authentic Children's Literature

1. The reading should be enjoyable, and without any overt teaching or moralizing.

Reading literature should first and foremost be enjoyable for children, i.e. the reader should get pleasure while reading the literature (Purves, 1972). Purves further explains that pleasure is not the same as laughter, but is a sense of appreciation by the reader that whatever has been written

is as it should be. Rosenblatt (1976) argues that literature is a medium of exploration for the reader. It can help readers to explore their own nature, become aware of their thoughts and feelings, and develop a view point on various issues. One can find such books with publishers such as NBT, CBT, Tulika, Eklavya, and Katha. Story books from these publications are based on themes such as friendship, children's dreams, family, childhood fears, bravery, and so on. The stories are written from a child's perspective and are not written with a view to just teach moral lessons.

2. The text should be written from a child's perspective.

Children's literature should not depict the stereotypical idea of a child's world, which is sanitized and without the internal struggles and contradictions that children actually face in their daily lives. Children are a part of society and they live amidst all the social realities; moreover these realities are complex and have their own contradictions and struggles. They have their fears, inhibitions and constraints. They also face issues such as poverty, exploitation, death and discrimination at the levels of gender, caste, class, religion, etc. Hence it is important that these concerns be represented in their literature (Sinha, 2005). This will enable the children to be informed about such issues and develop a view point regarding them.

In children's literature, the central character is often the same age as the reader, but this may not be the case every time, and it is certainly not a necessary component for the story to be relevant to the reader. Also, it is not essential for the story to revolve around a world of fantasy, where there is one hero who solves all the problems and the story ends on a happy note. Instead, it is more

important that the child should be able to relate to the issues raised in the story in some way (Kumar, in *Shiksha Vimarsh*, 2005).

3. The text should represent diversity and diverse perspectives.

It is very essential that children's literature represents the diversity which exists in society and the world at large. Diversity in terms of culture, language, caste, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and differently-abled people are important elements that can make children's literature beautiful and rich. According to Sinha (2005), in a society which is full of diversity, it is essential to be familiar with different groups of people, and to establish a relationship with them; and literature can be the medium that facilitates this familiarity.

4. The text should include different genres of literature.

It is essential for children to be exposed to different genres of children's literature. Not only does this develop their interest in reading, but it also exposes them to diverse ways of thinking and expression. In addition, it enables children to develop literary understanding and an interest in reading. When they are exposed to a range of literary genres, they can choose for themselves the stories they want to read. For instance, some children may be interested in folktales, and others in science fiction. When the children are given the freedom to choose what they want to read, they are more likely to engage in reading. It is therefore the responsibility of the teacher to identify the reading interest of the students and make provision for books accordingly. Genres can range from traditional literature (folk tales, fables, animal talking stories, etc.), to poetry, picture books, comic books, realistic fiction, historical and science fiction.

5. The text must have original and varied themes.

Originality in themes, topics, situations and characters enhance the quality of a literary text. When children are exposed to original ideas through literature, the possibility of expansion of their thinking horizons also increases. This happens because a good literature engages the reader with itself at different levels. Themes which are related to different social realm as I have mentioned earlier, invites the reader to stretch their mind and think reflectively. Therefore, it is essential that the collection of literature for children should cover the themes ranging from fantasy to various social realities. In fact, good literature has a balance of literary elements such as genre, plot, language, characters, style, theme, and illustrations. All these elements together make the text a satisfying whole.

To conclude this section it can be said that in a classroom it is very crucial for the teacher to evaluate the children's literature from various dimensions. It is imperative to consider that the details given in the story should give a sense reality. Language spoken by the characters, representation of cultural, social, religious, gender and other related aspects should have genuineness to which the reader can easily relate to. Presence of these aspects make any children literature an authentic unit.

So far, I have discussed the criteria on the basis of which one can decide the authenticity of literature while collecting books for children. Now I will discuss some of the strategies through which a teacher can bring children and books close to each other so that children can meaningfully engage with the text.

Strategies to Bring Literature and Students Close to Each Other

1. Space for talking about the literary text

In a literature classroom, it is imperative that the teacher should provide space for the children to express their feelings and ideas with regard to the text they have read. The purpose of using literature while teaching is to strengthen language, develop patience through listening, develop imagination, enhance critical thinking and develop an understanding about human behaviour (Kumar in *Shikha Vimarsh*, 2005; NCERT 2005; Rosenblatt, 1976). It is therefore important that children should talk and share their responses to the text with each other. The teacher can pose open-ended questions to the students about the story to create a space for sharing their responses. A few examples of such questions are:

- What do you think about the main protagonist of the story?
- Which character of the story did you like or dislike?
- Do you agree with the representation of gender in the story? What do you have to say about the way the girl rescued her brother from the strange creatures? Do you think a girl can do such things?
- Which part of the story can you relate to?

2. Read aloud sessions

Simultaneously reading stories aloud from a story book and showing the written text and illustrations can be crucial for the young readers from the point of view learning to read. The teacher must however use books that have a large font size as well as illustrations for such read aloud sessions, as this ensures better visibility of the book. Although there are many such books available in the market, for example

Khichdi from Eklavya Publication, the teachers can make big books of their own. Read-aloud sessions are a very powerful way to bring children and books together in a pleasurable setting. In read-aloud sessions teacher reads for the children. The teacher ensures that the written text is visible to all the children. When the teacher reads the story book for the children by showing them the text of the book the children get an exposure to the print in a meaningful and an interesting context.

Consistent read aloud helps the teacher to achieve two important goals of language teaching. First and foremost, they create an interest in reading amongst early learners. This happens because the teacher reads the story with such a pace that depicts the mood and emotion of the story. S(he)also takes care of incorporating adequate intonations, expressions and voice modulations while reading the story. In this way these sessions support children's literary and literacy development inviting children to share their views on different aspects of the story is also one of the key features of read aloud session. Such literary conversations help the children to understand that their views regarding the story are also very important and can be shared in the classroom, which is one of the important objectives of teaching literature (Rosenblatt, 1976).

Secondly, while reading story for the children the teacher also draws their attention towards her/his change in tone while reading punctuations, directionality of the print, relationship between the illustration and the print written along it, various styles of opening and closing of story, and so on. And therefore we can say that read aloud

sessions introduce and develop an understanding of various writing conventions and the function of the print.

3. Response journals

Response journals are personal notebooks in which students write informal comments about the stories they are reading. The teacher can also ask the students to write about their feelings and reactions to the characters, settings, plots and other aspects of the story in their journal. This gives the students an opportunity to think and reflect about the story. The teacher can give a written feedback in the response journal, and in this way a dialogue can be maintained between the teacher and the students.

Response journals help to enhance the comprehension skills of the learners as it encourages them to make connections between the text, themselves and the world. Learners can question, infer, summarize the content of the story, engage themselves with it, and express personal responses. Rosenblatt (1976) says that children must be given lots of opportunities for aesthetic responses to literature. These are responses in which the reader draws on his/her personal experience to shape the meaning of the text, and so the meaning becomes more personal for the reader.

4. Story mapping or story web

Story mapping is a method in which a teacher uses a specific kind of framework or map related to the story to guide the discussion and develop a clear understanding of the structure of the narrative discourse. A story map generally revolves around the basic plot of the story. For example, a basic story map can ask about the beginning, middle, and end of the story; it could also relate to the main problem, the characters and solution to the

problem in the story. Story-mapping helps the readers to focus on the important parts of the story. By sharing their story maps amongst themselves, students can deepen their understanding of the structure of the story. Figure 1 illustrates a basic story map based on the story “*Haati aur Bhavre ke Dosti*”, a CBT publication.

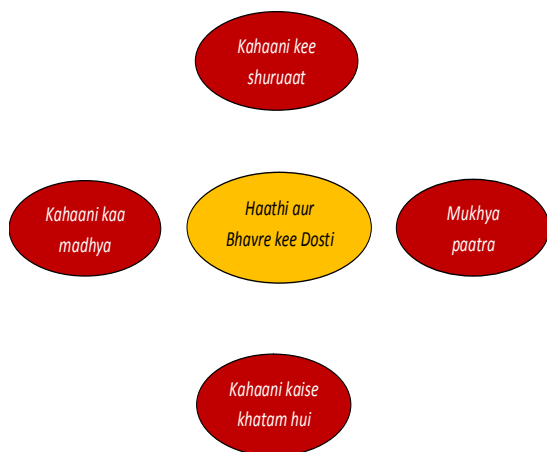


Figure 1. Story Map

Note: A worksheet can be developed within the story map by giving adequate space for writing responses about the story.

5. Class library and reading corner

Creating a pleasurable setting in the class for children’s literature also attracts children towards books. In fact, this is one way in which a teacher can bring books closer to children. I have observed during my school visits for classroom observations that in elementary classrooms, when books are prominently displayed in a class, students are always eager to touch, see and feel the books. They are so enthusiastic about wanting to read the books that they even use their recess period for reading. Interns also used children’s literature as a positive reinforcement for the children to make them

accomplish other tasks. For example, if in a classroom some of the children show interest in reading over accomplishing a maths activity, then the teacher can offer the child to take any book of his or her choice after finishing the task. These kinds of options given to the children actually expedite their speed of finishing their work. This is the power of children’s literature; it can generate a natural zeal for reading amongst children who are often considered as reluctant readers in our government schools (Sah, 2009).

6. Story board

In order to develop an interest in reading, it is essential that children should be surrounded by literature in a literature rich classroom. Developing a story board is an effective idea to push the reading habit amongst students. Story boards can be developed in various ways. One way can be to put a single story on a board. The story can be written in a big font size and can be accompanied by prominent illustrations. The idea behind this is that children can read the story at any time and any number of times, even if they do not have access to the book. They can also share their responses to the story with their friends while doing this they can defend their view points or arguments by referring the story or illustrations depicted on the board. Another way of developing the story board can be to put up an interesting part of the story to generate curiosity. At the end of the story the teacher can write, “What happens next? If you want to know, then read this story book from your reading corner!” By inciting their curiosity in this manner, the teacher can motivate the children to read stories, even with all their limitations.

Conclusion

It is clear that literature plays an important role in developing critical and imaginative thinking as well as developing language skills amongst children, especially in their early years of schooling. However, it will be inappropriate to assume that children can be given any thing in the name of the children's literature. Therefore, it is important to choose the books carefully and wisely. Along with this, meaningful teaching-learning activities are also required to engage children with the text. In this whole process, the teacher has an important role to play. The teacher has to ensure that children have access to interesting, diverse and enjoyable books that encourage them to express and share their responses with each other without any hesitation. Creating a literature rich classroom can help in fulfilling one of the objectives of the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 of developing reading culture amongst the children and making them lifelong readers.

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What am I Doing and Why? Empowering Pre-Service Teachers to Question Their Practice through Dialogic Reflection

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Abstract

This paper reports the positive influence of exploratory talk and dialogic interaction on post-teaching reflective discussions among pre-service English language teachers and their teacher educator. Consistent use of exploratory talk over the duration of the programme seems to deepen reflective thinking and build the self-efficacy of learner teachers.

Key words: Reflective practice, Teacher education, Dialogic reflection, Exploratory talk

Introduction

Reflective practice (RP) enjoys widespread acceptance in teacher education. Along with the use of lesson plans and teacher observation, teacher education courses include reflective journal writing as an integral way of assessing development in a teacher's ability to think reflectively. Dewey, one of the earliest thinkers on reflective thinking described reflection as the "sole method of escape from the purely impulsive or purely routine action" (1933, p. 15). Several studies have acknowledged that pre-service teachers carry memories and beliefs from their own school experiences and these have a significant impact on the pedagogical choices these newly qualified teachers make (Lortie, 1975; Larsson, 1986; Korthagen, 2004; Wall, 2016). Therefore, RP is essential in teacher education, as it serves the critical purpose of questioning the "mindless following of unexamined practices or principles" (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991, p. 37). However, it is often unclear to the teachers how to engage in RP. When learner teachers (LTs) sit down to reflect after a teaching session, what are the cognitive processes that guide their reflective thinking? Do they recall the critical incidents

from their teaching episode and wonder about the circumstances that led up to them? Do they think about and build a repertoire of strategies to deal with similar critical incidents were they to recur in future teaching sessions? Do they tie theory and practice effectively—can they see the connections? Do they examine the effect of a pedagogic decision that led to successful learning and form a hypothesis based on it? Answers to these questions are often not clear to teacher educators.

One of the reasons for this lack of clarity could be that RP is often done when the LT is not in front of the teacher educator as it is given as a home assignment. Since priming the brain of LTs to reflect in this manner needs expert guidance and complex higher order thinking abilities, RP can become a frustrating experience when pre-service teachers have to work on it unassisted. Walsh and Mann fear then that "practitioners quickly learn what supervisors/tutors want them to write" (2015, p. 353), and therefore they begin "faking it" (Hobbs, 2007). Since teacher educators "hear and see" what they want to in these RP assignments, they approve of the "reflection". This can perpetuate a vicious cycle. The National Curriculum

Framework for Teacher Education expresses concern over the inability of teachers to reflect, and the impact this could have on school education. While articulating the vision for teacher education, the Framework recommends that reflective practice be:

the central aim of teacher education. Pedagogical knowledge has to constantly undergo adaptation to meet the needs of diverse contexts through critical reflection by the teacher. Teacher education needs to build capacities in the teacher to construct knowledge, to deal with different contexts and to develop the abilities to discern and judge in moments of uncertainty and fluidity... (NCFTE, 2009, p. 19-20)

While it is important for teacher educators to encourage their learners to learn the pertinent skills and techniques for language teaching, it is equally important to inculcate in them the culture of inquiry. To do this, teacher education must supplement the culture of transmission (wherein the teacher educator transmits the “correct ways” to go about teaching) with the culture of talk (wherein the educator and the learners collaboratively explore ideas through discussions, challenge them, and inquire about ways to facilitate language learning). In this paper, I will present data from a recent study in which dialogic reflection was used to promote RP in pre-service teachers.

Dialogic Reflection

Sociocultural theory upholds the role of social interaction in an individual’s cognitive growth and development. Vygotsky states, “human learning presupposes a specific social nature” (1978, p. 88). Thus the theory simultaneously explains how individuals learn from social interactions, and how collective understanding is created from interactions amongst individuals. With the post-

method pedagogy, it becomes even more relevant for the teacher educator to listen to the LT, understand the teaching contexts and discuss possible strategies, rather than over relying on transmitting information. In this process, not only does the LT learn, but new knowledge is constructed for the educator, the entire learning cohort and the domain of teacher education.

An environment where the learners and the educator are consciously and actively engaged in constructing knowledge by exploring new ideas, unpacking complex classroom scenarios, creating solutions to problems, listening to apprehensions, sharing joy, drawing connections to theories, and constantly inquiring, is more conducive for scaffolding RP. Mercer and Howe use the term “exploratory talk” for this kind of discourse. They say that “talk amongst teachers and students, if of the right quality, can be a powerful motor for the development of reasoning and the improvement of academic performance” (2012, p. 13). Through such talk, learners are more likely to see the relationship between the theoretical and procedural aspects of teaching.

Participants and Methods

This study was conducted over a period of one academic year. The participants were pre-service language teachers with no previous teaching experience. After each teaching session, the entire cohort of pre-service language teachers would meet for an exploratory talk and dialogic reflection. The cohort met a minimum of three times in a week and the teacher educator participated in almost all the sessions. The data was collected in the form of audio recordings of their conversations. These recordings were saved on a computer and relevant parts of the discussion were transcribed. The data was triangulated by observing the LTs’ teaching, studying their observations in their reflective journals, and reading their written assignments.

An Exemplar and Discussion

Here I will present an excerpt from a dialogic discussion between five LTs.

Context for the excerpt: Five LTs are teaching in a rural school. They are working with a group of students from Grade 5. These students have very limited fluency in English. The principal of the school has identified and allocated these students because she feels that despite two years of formal English classes, they have learnt "no English". The LTs have recently begun work with this cohort. It is their second meeting. They are using storytelling to teach English. They aim to eventually develop in these students the ability to write simple stories in English using their rural context. On the day of the current discussion, LT- J has taught the class, while the other four LTs have observed her class and possibly assisted her.

Notes:

Legend: LT: learner teacher; TE: teacher educator; the letters J, A, K after LT refer to the first letter of the names of the learner teachers; Letters P, R and F refer to the names of Grade 5 students.

[]: overlapping talk

...: pause

(): nonverbal communication is mentioned in brackets

Excerpt:

1. LT- J: Mm...wanted to teach setting [but... (small laugh)
2. LT- A: yeah]...the plan.
3. LT- J: That wasn't happening...went on to teach character...main character.
4. TE: Oh yes! You had a lesson plan for setting! [What
5. LT- J: I started] the class-told them the story. Suddenly I felt it was easier to ask them "who is the story about?"
6. LT- A: I know ... could have asked "where"...but [that...
7. LT- J: Yeah] it was my second class with them.
8. TE: And you wanted them to be comfortable.
9. LT- J: Exactly. Also standing there ... mm...I realized what'd they say if I asked "where"...
10. TE: Ok?
11. LT- J: There is the river, there is the house, the road... will they say "village"?...I...
12. LT- A: Yes...
13. TE: I see that. Is this reflection-in-action-changing your plan-thinking on your feet?
14. LT- K: This is! (laughter)
15. LT- J: Well... (small laugh)
16. TE: Yes...you're thinking this will work...this won't. I need to make them comfortable. If they like what I'm doing I can come back to them...eh?
17. LT- J: Yes...make them do bigger things may be,... but now...
18. TE: They could answer "who"?
19. LT- A: She asked "who is the story about?" P said "donkey".
20. LT- K: R was like, "washerman".
21. LT- J: That's the problem...I'm asking ...tell me "who is the main character" but...
22. TE: Be fair... isn't the donkey there in most parts of the story...(all laugh).
23. LT- A: I liked what you asked next ...that helped.
24. LT- J: Yeah...it did...thanks...I went like "is the story about the bundle of clothes on the donkey's back... and F said ["no"]" (uses gesture to indicate bundle).
25. LT- K: almost all] said "no".
26. TE: You think they understood the word "character", "main character"?
27. LT- A: Tomorrow I'm using this film story they know-then I'll ask "main character".

28. LT- J: Yes! They'll say Salman Khan (all laugh).
29. TE: How about your learning outcome? You could meet it, right?
30. LT- A: Mm...they were thinking, they were using English... words.
31. LT- J: Listening...they were listening.
32. TE: How do you know they were listening? They understood?
33. LT- J: They could illustrate ... see... this is [a] river, donkey, man...lovely colours! Gosh...(Shows illustration done by the students)

(Dialogic reflection continues)

One prominent finding that emerges from this excerpt is the ease with which ideas are being shared between the LT's. In defining exploratory talk, Mercer and Littleton talk about "a form of co-reasoning in language, with speakers sharing knowledge, challenging ideas, evaluating evidence and considering options in a reasoned and equitable way" (2007, p. 54). The present extract gives evidence of almost all these qualities. As the learners articulate their experiences and find validation of their pedagogic choices amongst their peers, from theories, and from the educator, there is clear evidence of improvement in their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed (Bandura, 1994). The fact that the LT's trusted their instincts, their "feel" of the class, and quickly abandoned their plan and thought on their feet and came up with a new plan is indicative of their emerging confidence. In dialogues 26 and 27, TE and LTA mention using a more apt example to explain the idea of main character. In dialogue 32, they are able to evidence listening by the students. Despite knowledge of some conventional ways of ascertaining listening comprehension in the theory class (such as getting the students to choose an answer from a multiple choice

question, or getting them to write a response), here they use the students' illustrations as evidence. Further, the lessons seem to be planned and taught collaboratively. Using the same collaboration while reflecting aids the LT's in gaining deeper pedagogical insights. In dialogues 23 and 24, we see examples of clear feedback and support.

The LTs try to figure out together how to maximize the English learning experience for their learners. They discuss why learners would find it difficult to comprehend the abstract idea of "setting". They are able to reason that the learners will not be able to make the link that "the river", "the house", "the road", etc., were in "the village". Thus the LTs display reflecting-in-action (Schön, 1987) and reflecting-for-action (Killion & Todnem, 1991), as they analyse their students' language, and psychological and cognitive needs. They think on their feet when it comes to making their students feel comfortable; they constantly try to lower their students' affective filters (Krashen, 1985). There is a clear indication that they have an insight into how students from a rural school background might feel. They even discuss how it must not have been easy for these students when they could not keep up with their class in language learning. Thus the pedagogic decisions seem to be carefully drawn from a thorough learner needs analysis.

A study of the reflective journals of the LT's shows also evidence of consolidated careful thinking and learning. For example, LT J writes in her journal:

When P wanted to answer, I did not look at him. I know he was crushed [,] but he learnt I was not going to look at him if he spoke out of turn. My decision helped G. For the first time in two days [,] she spoke. P had monopolized all talk so far. Maybe, that's the way it is in their community—men talk, women listen.

I noticed, P began listening to her. I know he was listening because she used the word “wet” [,] and then he used it later. I had not used this word at all. It is not in the story.

In one of the theory classes, there was a discussion on turn-taking in classrooms. Clearly, LT J was implementing her learning from this class. LT J has, on several occasions, talked about her extremely conventional schooling. Hence this attempt to make her students take turns, to notice how vocabulary is “picked up”, to notice how her classroom was a microcosm of her students’ world, indicate deep reflection on her part.

Conclusion

Often dialogic reflection and exploratory talk for promoting reflective thinking are not explored in teacher education institutions because of time constraints or an emphasis on conventional assessment methods. Nevertheless, there appears to be some data available to understand how LTs’ develop RP when they are engaged in exploratory talk. While there is value in transmission talk, exploratory talk gives more opportunities to listen to the teachers-to-be and to address their fears, misconceptions and beliefs, thereby strengthening their self-efficacy.

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Review Article

Krishna Kumar on Reading

Jayshree Murali

Krishna Kumar (1986) begins by defining what reading is. He espouses exposure to books even before children can decipher the alphabet. According to him, unless a child makes sense of what he/she reads, and relates it to something else, one cannot call it reading. He defines reading as “a process of finding meaning in written words” (Kumar: 1986).

This compels us to reflect on the current scenario in our classrooms, where the early years resound with rote recitation of the alphabet and a choral repetition of the story, breaking every word. One is forced to reflect about how little children learn and whether the individual letters of the alphabet mean anything at all to a child.

To make the initial teaching of reading meaningful, Kumar (1986) advises teachers to begin with books and NOT flash cards/charts or other such aids, as ultimately the child has to be able to read. He adds that it is the context-embedded experiences, exposure and immersion to culturally and age appropriate children’s literature that forms the basis for reading to take place. Kumar (1986) recommends a list of 20 books in English and Hindi, of which Eric Carle’s *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* is one such book. Rich in visuals, this simple text with its universal appeal, kindles the child’s curiosity and makes for an exciting engagement with print. After all which child would not want to see what happens to the fat “grub” as it breaks open its cocoon, and then goes on to become a butterfly! One cannot agree more with Krishna Kumar when he endorses the use of the story as a bedrock

for language development. Stories help build bridges in our multicultural classrooms. They make learning enjoyable and contextual and allow for a natural expression and operation of language.

How Should the Reading Process Happen?

Krishna Kumar (1986) emphasizes that the story should be read to children as they sit around the teacher in groups of 10, so that they are able to see the book as the teacher reads it. Further, the style of reading has to be flowing and with expression, more in the manner of a relaxed storyteller. This naturally calls on the teacher to have a fair degree of ease with the story. While one is in total agreement about the story circles that have been part of children’s growing up years, in print rich homes and also where oral traditions thrive, the small groups of 10 that Kumar advises poses a real situational challenge in country such as India where the ground reality is that there is almost always a higher teacher to student ratio of almost 1 to 40 or 50 in low income schools, especially in those that are privately run. Krishna Kumar has not talked about using the big book format and shared reading in such situations, which in my experience would perhaps be more apt.

What is Shared Reading?

Shared Reading is an interactive, enjoyable and a co-operative reading activity based on the bedtime story experience. Ideally, the text used

for this activity is in a large format or a big book. Don Holdaway (1979), aware of the power of reading stories to children, developed the concept of Shared Reading in New Zealand in the 1960s. He exploited the use of Big Books as a method of teaching reading, which has raised literacy standards across the world.¹

The stress on syllabi and too much instruction on how to read interferes with the child's natural ability to acquire literacy skills. For many students, learning to read becomes a struggle, a task to be completed rather than an activity to be enjoyed. Consequently, children have little motivation and lose interest. This struggle is compounded for a child who is from a less privileged home, for a child who learns English (as a case in point) as second language, and for a child with special needs.

Acquisition of reading skills can be as natural a process as learning how to speak, when a tolerant, encouraging and stimulating environment to engage with print is created. The Shared Book Approach, with its motivating, non-competitive and non-threatening environment does just this. '[S]haring does not mean having each student "take turns" in reading the book aloud. Rather, the adult reader shares the enjoyment of reading by facing the book towards the children and allowing them to participate in the reading as the adult reads the text in a fluent, expressive and enthusiastic manner'². The following process highlights some elements for a successful "Shared Reading" experience³:

Step 1: Pre Reading

Read and talk about the title and illustration.

Point and talk about the author and the illustrator.

Ask children to guess about the story based on the cover.

Step 2: Reading the story

Read with enthusiasm and expression.

While reading, pause and invite predictions from the children.

You may ask some questions to gauge their comprehension.

Step 3: Post Reading

Listen in a relaxed manner to the children's reaction.

Ask the children what their favourite parts of the story were, if there was anything they did not like.

Ask children if they have had similar experiences like the characters in the story, would they have acted in the same manner or differently.

Let the questions be open ended, this gives children an opportunity to speak and share their own opinion.

Step 4: Reading the story again

This time, you may leave out words from the story for children to fill in; point to the word without saying it. Choose words that are dramatic and often repeated, like Oh! Plop! Gosh!

Make flash cards with words/ sentences from the story for the children to match.

Engage the children in an activity related to the story, it could be drawing, craft, or clay modelling or drama. Let the child be free to express in any manner he/she is comfortable with.

Some children may want to write or even copy, the spellings need not be accurate.

(Remember what the child creates is an expression of his/her interpretation of the reading experience.)

Help children label. Their drawing can have caption in form of sentences written out as they share about it. This will help children to see the connection between the spoken and the written word.

Sometimes children may come up with simple rhymes or a text after a reading session. These can be compiled into big books or small books, and added to the library.

At the end of the session, the children can be encouraged to look through their favourite story books as well as the one that has been read. The idea is to generate interest and curiosity with regard to books. Moreover, when children hold and read a book, it often makes them feel like they are “members of the club of readers”.

While Krishna Kumar urges the teachers not to ask any question after the storytelling session, I do not fully subscribe to his view. What he perhaps means is that one should avoid mining for information or facts from the story. However, if one of the aims of language and literacy education is to engage critically with the text, then this must begin in the early years, and children can be encouraged to discuss their lived experiences in a sensitive manner. This will help children to build connections with the text, within the text and between the text and the world.

Krishna Kumar (1986) highlights the plight of how “the alphabet method”, and the “look and say” methods have evolved without any knowledge of the reading process. He makes an ardent plea that if children get an opportunity to immerse themselves in a book that is being read to them with expression and enjoyment, their familiarity with the pictures and the story will motivate them to try and read the book themselves. It then falls upon us as teachers to ensure that any phonics/drills must be done only after the story has been explored fully.

Poetry

Kumar (1986) also discusses how poetry can make a wonderful contribution towards developing reading skills. According to him, regular exposure to poetry helps the children to familiarize themselves with basic language patterns. The 3 R’s of children’s poetry: rhythm,

rhyme and repetition help to build the skills of anticipation and prediction, which are the key to reading.

I could not agree more with Krishna Kumar. As infants, our first exposure to language is through the lullabies that our mothers or other adults sing to us. Morag Styles, Professor of Children’s Poetry, states:

Children’s responses to poetry are innate, instinctive, natural—maybe it starts in the womb, with the mother’s heartbeat? Children are hardwired to musical language—taking pleasure in the rhythm, rhyme, repetition and other patterning of language that are a marked feature of childhood.

According to Steinberg (Mckim and Steinberg, 1999):

I see children who are labeled “non-readers” standing up and reading what they have written or what someone else has recorded for them. I see children whose first language is not English wanting to find new words for their poems, feeling freer to mix the music of two languages.

Krishna Kumar’s views on poetry are endorsed by Fox (2001) who states that “Experts in literacy and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by the time they are four years old, they are usually among the best readers by the time they are eight”.

In an online resource “Why do children love poems?” the author suggests that rhymes are important for the language, cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of a child. We are further told that “[c]hildren are able to learn new words easily due to the rhythmical structure of the stanzas. Recitation also helps in voice modulation. Helping children understand rhyming is one key skill of phonemic awareness” (Block & Israel, 2005). Poetry aids

children in helping identify patterns and through patterns they recognize sequences.²

The power of poetry to make emotional connections and heal is only too well known. As Robert Frost would say, “Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words”

However, Krishna Kumar does caution us to choose children’s rhymes with care and recommends traditional rhymes.

How to Read Poetry

Krishna Kumar and Children’s Laureate Michael Rosen’s thoughts (n.d.) seem to corroborate the following: The best thing you can do with poetry is just enjoy reading it together with the children. This has to be the starting point. According to Rosen, just before play time or home time, you could gather the children together and say “Hey listen to this” and read them a poem.

Most importantly, Rosen (n.d.) recommends that the teachers should ask open-ended questions. Some examples of such questions are: Does this poem remind you of anything you’ve ever done? Does this poem remind you of anything you’ve ever seen on TV, film, play or music? If you could ask a question from any object/thing in the poem, what would you ask? Pool every answer. Try and get every child to say something. Treasure what each child says. Put the answers down on big sheets of paper so that the children understand that you value what their thoughts and feelings.

Find poems that move you, interest you and amaze you. Share them with the children. Enthusiasm for poems is infectious.

My personal experience in working with children in both the use of prose and poetry has been immensely encouraging. In fact, the Shared Reading Methodology is an intrinsic part of the VIDYA reading program. My work in this area

has been with Sangeeta Gupta, who has studied under Sir Don Holdaway, Father of Shared Reading. Together we have nurtured the practice of Shared Reading at VIDYA (www.vidya-india.org). The Reading Corners in our Beyond School Program, be it in the local community or in school are vibrant places where teachers are actively engaged in promoting reading. The reading corners have in their collection exciting, age and culturally appropriate titles, both in the native language and English. Children read and are read to with enthusiasm, sometimes by peers and sometimes by teachers. As for poetry, it has become a part of our organization, especially when we discovered the joy that it unleashed when teachers and children celebrated it. In fact, our Annual Children’s LitFest in 2016 resulted in a book of poems in three languages English/Hindi/Marathi, written and illustrated by the children of VIDYA. This book comprising of thirty poems is an ode to the joy of learning as we commemorated three decades, and is aptly titled “My Voice, My Verse”, for children’s voices must be heard.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that “The Story/Poetry/Art” is here to stay, for indeed all children shall have their way!

*I would like to thank the participants and the Faculty of the Pedagogy of Early Reading and Writing Program (November 2017) and the children and the teachers of the NGO VIDYA for the opportunity to engage with them which allowed me to appreciate the process of reading better and helped me write this response paper.

End Notes:

¹ For some of the evidence one may visit <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/readingviewing/Pages/teachingpracshared.aspx> Accessed on 20th June 2018.

² The paragraph draws from the content given in “Why do children love poems?” at <http://timbuktu>.

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³ The format and the ideas shared in Step 1 through 4 are largely borrowed from <http://readingtokids.org/ReadingClubs/TipSharedReading.php>

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Interview

Geetha Durairajan (GD) and Deepesh Chandrasekharan talk to N. S. Prabhu (NSP)

Dr. N. S. Prabhu is well known in the field of English Language Teaching as the author of the book *Second Language Pedagogy*, and more importantly, as the person who conceptualized the widely used approach "task based teaching". He has worked at the British Council and the National University of Singapore. For most of us, he is the doyen of ELT in India.

GD: Good morning, Dr. Prabhu. We are very happy that you have agreed to be interviewed by us. Let me begin with a very basic question. Many years ago, you were one of the people who had very clear views on what language is, and how it can be learnt, and how it can be taught. This is with reference to your Bangalore Project. Today, in 2018, what are your views on what is language first of all, and then, what is language learning for you?

NSP: The Bangalore Project, as I see it now, was a kind of halfway house to where I think I am today. If I were to sort of identify two or three stages or points in where I have arrived in my thinking, the Bangalore Project was definitely a prominent one, in that I was able to try out there a growing feeling I had at the time that we can achieve better results by letting language learning happen than by attempting to cause it. We can let it happen by identifying and creating conditions that might be most favourable to its happening, and I saw the most favourable condition as one where the learner's mind is focused on meaning, content, knowledge, not the language itself. It is as though one is saying that a language is best learnt by the learner when it is least pointedly taught by the teacher. Instead, the classroom activity leads to an effort by the learner to make sense of a piece of language in order to get to a piece of

meaning, which is precisely the point of such activity. That was the idea. The Bangalore Project was an attempt to try this out, and the way to get the learner's mind to focus on meaning was what I called task-based teaching. When there is a challenge to the mind in terms of meaning—a puzzle, something to be found out, a problem to be solved—then the mind is on that problem. And there is a sort of natural desire to solve the problem, partly to show that you can solve it, especially in young people but also at all ages. I want to solve the problem if I think I can and even more so if I think the other fellow cannot. It is a legitimate source of enhancing learners' effort. The learner's effort to understand brings about a kind of "intensive exposure" (I am coining this term), that is to say, focus the mind on the meaning, and in the process more sense is made of the language; and the more you do that, the better the learning. So that was the idea.

GD: You said the Bangalore project was a sort of a half-way house to where you are today. So, what are your views today on what language learning is? Are they the same? Would it be different? For example, in the Bangalore Project, at that point, probably because it was at a time when the structural approach was in vogue, there was this focus that the forms of language need to be learnt. Have you changed from that

argument that language learning is learning of form?

NSP: It was a big change to move away from the Structural Approach in the context of the RIE (Regional Institute of English, South India, in Bangalore), because the RIE was the direct successor to the MELT (Madras English Language Teaching) Campaign, which saw the first large scale implementation of the Structural Approach in India. Indeed, the first structural syllabus in the world, written by Dr. Jean Forrester, a British lady who was Principal of a Teacher Training College in Madras, was published in the official Fort St. George Gazette of Madras Presidency in 1952. The Structural Approach also loomed large in the Central Institute of English, which came up in Hyderabad in 1958 and in the state-level ELTIs (English Language Teaching Institutes) that followed. However, I wasn't particularly thinking of questioning the value of that approach while setting up the Bangalore Project. I was interested in seeing how far I can go with my line of thinking that form is best learnt when the mind is on meaning. It so happened that the director of the RIE at the time, Victor Devasundaram, was a close friend of mine and had something of a personal faith in me, as it were, and we spent several evenings talking about it and he said: "Why don't you set it up here?" So, it happened there.

GD: If we go back to the argument that we should let the learning of a language happen and not cause it to happen from the outside, how can we get this learning to happen? What should happen to English language teaching?

NSP: What we do as teachers depends on how we conceptualize the learning process. If we see language learning as a matter of habit formation, then we get learners to repeat words

or sentences so that the correct pronunciation or grammatical pattern becomes the correct habit. If instead you see learning a new language as a kind of moving over from the known language, then you first discover, through contrastive analysis, what the differences are between the learner's mother-tongue and the language to be taught, and concentrate the learner's practice on those things which are different from the mother tongue. Or if you see language learning as a kind of learning-by-doing, that is rehearsing the use of given expressions, then you do "communicative" language teaching by getting learners to say such expressions in appropriately life-like contexts. You therefore have functional syllabuses, not structures, but functions in terms of what you are trying to achieve/do with the language. So it depends on how you visualize the learning process.

Now to answer your question, how do I now see the learning process myself? If you look at whatever has been possible to achieve with several of these pedagogic paradigms, as it were, the results show that there is a fundamental difference between the learning of the first language or mother tongue and the learning that results from these teaching approaches; and it is, once you begin to think about it, such a vast difference, such a fundamental difference, that you are forced to revisit past assumptions. What do I mean by fundamental? Look, the mother tongue is learnt unfailingly by every human child, regardless of what the language is or what the technological, civilizational or cultural level is, etc. It makes no difference. No child fails and if we ignore the literate skills, it is not possible to say that one child has learnt its mother tongue better than another child. Nobody fails and everybody succeeds equally. Put that way, you can see that it is almost an impossible thing. There is hardly any other thing one can say that of. And in contrast, we have all these teaching approaches that we have tried. Typically, the

results are varied, different degrees of dissatisfaction, etc. Many fail, some succeed better than others. Hardly anybody seems to succeed fully; typically the opposite of the mother tongue. Now, that is a big puzzle. And, since the Bangalore Project, the one piece of thinking that has occurred to me has to do with it. If we look at L2 being learnt without any teaching, when people migrate to a foreign country, when a child encounters two different languages inside and outside the home or even within the family, when schooling happens in a language other than the mother tongue, even for only some of the school subjects, the L2 that is learnt is, if not at the same level as the L1, always higher than we can expect from L2 classrooms. In all these L2-learning contexts, language is not the principle of organization and the teachers' and learners' minds are not focused on the language. Language learning is not planned or caused, but happens. So what I now think is that a language is best acquired in the process of making sense of meaning or content. When you try to understand something, your understanding carries with it automatically, the language in which it comes to you. That is to say, language encodes knowledge. It is a symbolic system that encodes meaning. Therefore, understanding any piece of knowledge is sorting out the code. Otherwise you don't understand it. So, the greater the effort and success in understanding the content, the more (or more thoroughly) you learn the language. People tend to think that, in mother tongue acquisition, the child's language learning begins at about its first birthday, when the first word is likely to be uttered, and the babbling that occurs earlier or later represents L1-learning through repetition and practice. I think it begins much, much earlier and silently, with the child beginning to make sense of this bewildering world, bit by bit, and goes on all the time over a year or so before enough has been learnt to produce a word. Then it takes another

couple of years to engage in verbal communication. And the learning is full-time, not one hour a day! So mother tongue knowledge is unique because getting to know a whole new world is unique. Knowledge of a second language begins to approach that level as the experience of understanding new things approaches that level.

GD: To take you further on this statement; you have put together and shown us the differences between the way L2 is taught and L1 is learnt, and spoken about how, when L2 is taught in the ways it generally is, the results are varied but fall far short of not only those of L1 learning, but even the levels reached in untaught L2 learning. Is this then an inevitable difference between taught and untaught language-learning, or do you see some way of closing or narrowing that gap? How would you want English to be taught today in Indian classrooms?

NSP: The aim would be to get the learners' minds occupied with understanding pieces of a new language with effort. The most favourable condition is when learners have a strong desire or great need to make sense of something in a language they don't know. This happens most clearly and completely for new-born children, who have to work out the world by working out the mother tongue. Something less intensive but similar in nature happens when adults have to live and get by in a new language environment, when young people taste the pleasure of stories, games or activities accessible in a new language, or when school subjects are taught in an L2. In all these cases, the effort is to acquire new knowledge by making sense of a new language. The result of such untaught L2 learning may be varied and below the level of L1 proficiency, but it is clearly and uniformly above the achievement of taught L2 acquisition.

At this point, Dr Prabhu spoke at length describing a small project he had been involved in at RIE Bangalore in the 1990's. Based on a government decision, and on the request of Dr. Gayatri Devi, who was then the director of that Institute, he tried to get teachers to tell stories in English to students of classes 1, 2, 3 and 4 as a way of getting them to listen, understand and acquire the language. What is significant here is that for these children, the medium of instruction was their mother tongue. My question to him, at the end of this was:

GD: You have been talking to us about storytelling as a pedagogic practice to enable students to engage with language in the lower classes and how you used stories in the Bangalore Project, but always as a puzzle where the story ends with a question for the child to answer. If we took this idea to higher classes, what would be other possible practices?

NSP: Every child loves to listen to stories (perhaps because they present new worlds to be comprehended), but the attraction seems to wear out for a majority of them within a few years. Those who retain the interest get hooked on story-book writers such as Enid Blyton, with big gains to their English language ability. I am sure millions of young people in the world have learnt a lot of English from J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels, whose world is so vastly different. I think that young people are also attracted by problem-solving as a competitive activity, which was a major assumption in the Bangalore Project, where we used, besides stories leading to a mystery to be solved, various other "tasks", where a problem has to be comprehended (from a linguistic description) and a solution worked out.

I had discovered, while writing the book *English Through Reading* in the 1970's, that reading

comprehension work can use inferential questions at different levels of challenge, thus providing similar problem-solving with older learners. I believe now that this is a very desirable activity in L2 instruction (at about the secondary level), for three reasons. First, texts are not just sequences of sentences; they are structured entities of language and logic: chunks of knowledge, reasoning, facts and opinion, with open as well as implied meanings, references back and forth, and so on. Comprehending a piece of text therefore has a dimension of depth, from superficial/general to thorough/detailed. There can, as a result be comprehension questions at different levels of detail and depth, catering to learners of different levels of ability in a class. Second, being led to perceive the less obvious things in a text, such as suggestions, implications, internal cross references as well as logical relations such as cause-consequence, fact-conclusion, etc., brings about what I would call a more intensive contact with the language than a mere reading with a general understanding, with correspondingly greater value for language-acquisition. Third, such text-based work looks in line with past traditions of schooling and is fully respectable, instead of being threateningly innovative.

GD: Dr. Prabhu, what you are now saying, if I understood you correctly, is that instead of making reading easier for learners by explaining, paraphrasing, simplifying or summarizing texts through the "lecture method", teachers should make things more difficult by asking such inferential questions and asking learners to read, re-read, search, weigh and risk giving wrong answers, in the course of an "in-depth" reading. This will be a major change from present practice. What kind of training do you think our teachers will need?

NSP: The essence of task-based teaching is to get the learner to make an effort to comprehend. A task is successful when the learner manages to comprehend pieces of text a little more (or better) than he could before. Success in such an effort can result in raising both the confidence and (however slightly) the ability of the learner for the next effort, just as failure can be dispiriting. Therefore, the effort demanded should be neither too low nor too high. It is of course very difficult to judge the right level of effort, as difficult for a teacher as it would be for anybody else. But the teacher has an advantage. She is teaching the same set of learners repeatedly and can learn by trial and error, to judge their ability in relation to the effort called for by a task. Each error of judgement increases the chances of her judging better the next time, and each time she judges right, she becomes a little more confident and competent in making such judgements. The teacher, that is to say, trains herself in the course of her teaching, while the learners are getting used to such effort-making. And the teacher's training is not a one-time preparation for a career-long job, but a career-long process of professional growth from practicing the profession, as in other professions such as medicine or engineering.

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Call for Papers

Language and Language Teaching (LLT) is a peer-reviewed periodical. It focuses on the theory and practice of language learning and teaching, particularly in multilingual situations.

We will henceforth invite contributions for papers for the forthcoming issues (*LLT 15* onwards). The references must be complete in ALL respects, and must follow the APA style sheet. All papers must include an abstract (100-150 words) and a set of key words (maximum 6 keywords). papers may address any aspect of language or language teaching. They **MUST** be written in a style that is easily comprehensible to school teachers, who are the primary target audience of this periodical. The articles may be centred around the learner, teacher, materials, teacher training, learning environment, evaluation, or policy issues. They must be original and should not have been submitted for publication anywhere else. A statement to this effect must be sent along with the article. Activities focusing on different aspects of language teaching are also invited.

The upper word limit (including the abstract, key words, references and a short bio-note) for each contribution in different sections of *LLT* is:

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Book Review: 1000-1500 words; Classroom Activity: 750 words; Report: 1000 words; Bio-Note: 30 words.

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Landmark

Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages

Achla Misri Raina

Introduction

Linguists and philosophers have for centuries debated the place of language in how humans think about their world. While there appears to be a general agreement that language is a crucial window to reality, the extent to which it can actually shape our conceptualization of reality has been a contentious issue. One of the debates on this issue centres around the principle of linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that the world looks significantly different in different languages, and that humans understand their world in terms of the conceptual categories made available to them by their languages. While the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been generally discredited in mainstream linguistics as a gross overestimation of language, recent developments in cognitive linguistics and cognitive science suggest that cross-linguistic differences must be factored in for a fuller understanding of the language-cognition relationship. The present note seeks to salvage certain elements of linguistic relativity from the widespread rejection that the principle has been subjected to by linguists and philosophers alike. The title of this note has been adapted from Guy Deutscher's popular read on linguistic relativity, *The language glass: Why the world looks different in other languages*. I will begin with a statement of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, followed by an overview of the recent empirical

investigations into the cognitive dimension of cross-linguistic diversity, sometimes referred to as Neo-Whorfianism. I will conclude the discussion with some pedagogical implications of this renewed interest in the cognitive underpinnings of language diversity.

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

The hypothesis that people understand reality in terms of the linguistic categories made available to them by their languages was born out of the claims of the linguistic anthropologist Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf, an amateur linguist. Sapir made a comparative study of English and several Amerindian languages, and concluded that the differences between the languages changed the way their users perceived the world. Sapir spoke of "the tyrannical hold" that linguistic form has over our orientation in the world, and noted that speakers of different languages are required to pay attention to different aspects of reality simply to put words together into grammatical sentences. Thus, when English speakers have to decide on whether or not to choose the past tense marker -ed at the end of the verb, they need to pay attention to the relative time of occurrence of the event, vis-à-vis the time of utterance. In contrast, the speakers of Wintu, an Amerindian language with evidential marking need not worry about the event time,

but must pay attention to whether the action talked about was known through direct observation or by hearsay (Sapir, 1921). Sapir (1924) went on to suggest that the incommensurable analysis of experience in different languages makes “very real to us a kind of relativity that is generally hidden from us by our naive acceptance of fixed habits of speech as guides to an objective understanding of the nature of experience. This is the relativity of concepts or, as it might be called, the relativity of the form of thought” (Sapir, 1924: 155).

The differences in the aspects of reality that a speaker has to attend to was taken up by Whorf (1956), who argued that Hopi, one of the languages he studied, had “no words, grammatical forms, constructions or expressions that refer directly to what we call ‘time’.” He also reported that the speakers of Hopi had “no general notion or intuition of time as a smooth flowing continuum in which everything in the universe proceeds at equal rate, out of a future, through the present, into the past...”, and concluded that these linguistic differences lead to conceptual differences. According to Whorf, the Hopi conceptualization of events did not view points or durations as countable things. Rather, they seemed to focus on the process, and on the distinctions between the presently known, conjectured or mythical. In a much-quoted passage, he wrote:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to

an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language (Whorf, 1956: 213).

If it is accepted that linguistic differences trigger different conceptualizations of the world, the next logical step would be to claim that language determines conceptualization. The two steps in the Whorfian argument have since been cast into a binary of the weaker and stronger versions of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also termed as linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism respectively. According to this oversimplified binary, the weaker version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis claims that linguistic differences lead to the world being cut up in different ways in terms of the conceptual categories made available by a language. Whereas the stronger version claims that the way a language cuts up the world determines how its speakers conceptualize their world.

Although the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is known by the names of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, the principle of linguistic relativity can be traced back to the reflections of Wilhelm von Humboldt on linguistic diversity. Humboldt made a radical departure from the philological ruminations of his predecessors and contemporaries by nurturing unknown European languages (e.g. Basque), which deviated considerably from the Latin mould. Humboldt wrote that the profound dissimilarities among languages were a window into a world that needed to be explored, as language was “the forming organ of thought” (as cited in Deutscher, 2010). In the domain of anthropology, the works of Franz Boas, who argued that there is an indirect relationship between the culture of a tribe and the language that they speak, have had an obvious influence on the formulation of linguistic relativity. It was Boas who drew the

attention of the linguists to the Eskimo snow vocabulary as an evidence of how language and culture were closely intertwined (Boas, 1911). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been invoked very creatively both by its detractors and supporters. The stronger version of the hypothesis has been labelled with pejoratives such as “the great Eskimo vocabulary hoax” (Pullum, 1991), and “a collective suspension of disbelief” (Pinker, 1994), employed to debunk it as an anthropological canard. In an essay bearing this title, Pullum severely criticises the manner in which an incidental observation by Franz Boas about the number of snow words in the language of the Eskimos, has been blown out of proportion. Pullum compares the reference to Eskimo vocabulary to a general tendency among anthropologists reporting on indigenous cultures to overstate their case: “And the alleged lexical extravagance of the Eskimos comports so well with many other facets of their polysynthetic perversity: rubbing noses; lending their wives to strangers; eating raw seal blubber; throwing grandma out to be eaten by polar bears” (Pullum, 1991: 162). Probably the strongest criticism of the hypothesis comes from Pinker (1994), who debunks linguistic determinism “a conventional absurdity”. Pinker writes:

The famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic determinism, stating that people’s thoughts are determined by the categories made available by their language, and its weaker version, linguistic relativity, that differences among languages cause differences in the thoughts of their speakers [...] is wrong, all wrong. The idea that thought is the same as language is an example of what can be called a conventional absurdity (Pinker, 1994: 57).

Despite this skepticism, linguistic determinism has found expression in contemporary social movements organized around language, as well

as in popular culture. The feminist critique of language which looks upon language as a mode of consolidating a patriarchal world order indirectly subscribes to linguistic determinism of some variety. The reformist agenda of the feminist does so even more directly as it rests on the assumption that changing how we talk about women will change how we think about them. Perhaps the most notable statement of linguistic determinism in popular culture comes in the dystopian vision of the Orwellian Newspeak that looks upon language as the ultimate technology for thought control. Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* is one of the most powerful critiques of historical revisionism of the kind practised by dictatorial regimes, where language is projected as an instrument not only for re-writing the past but also for controlling the present.

Neo-Whorfian Shift in Linguistics

Mainstream linguistic thought in the latter half of twentieth century has been shaped by two tenets: a) universalism and b) modularity. Universalism defines the dominant narrative in linguistics in terms of the theory of universal grammar, pushing cross-linguistic differences to the margins of linguistic inquiry. Modularity dictates that the faculty of language is equated with what is referred to as the computational-representational system or the narrow syntax, while the conceptual-intentional system merely defines the external legibility conditions on the faculty of language (Chomsky, 1995).

With the emergence of cognitive linguistics in early 1990s, the focus of linguistic enquiry appears to be shifting away from these tenets. While universalism continues to occupy an important place in linguistic thought, the universalist narrative has become more inclusive, as the modularity tenet has been seriously questioned by the cognitive linguistic assumptions about the cross-modular nature of

linguistic operations. Thus the new universalism is not about a universal grammar of language, but a universal grammar of linguistic and conceptual systems (Langacker, 1999, 2009). An inevitable consequence of this shift of focus has been the renewed interest in the empirically attested cross-linguistic differences, and how such differences might shape or influence the conceptual structures underpinning language.

Empirical studies investigating the issue of how cross-linguistic differences may give rise to differences in patterns of conceptualization cover a broad spectrum, encompassing linguistic phenomena such as spatial and temporal expressions, mass-count distinction in nominal expressions, semantic versus grammatical gender, causal relations, and several others. The research question common to all these investigations can be stated as follows: Languages differ in the way they describe the world. Do these cross-linguistic differences give rise to differences in the way language users cognize their world? Behavioural studies suggest that language does play a mediating role in the conceptualization of reality. Let us consider some of these studies below.

It is well known that languages differ in how they encode spatial locations such as left-right and spatial relations such as containment and support. Let us take up spatial locations first. Levinson (1996) noted that while most European languages use a relative spatial frames such as left-right and front-back to describe locations of objects, Tzeltal, a Mayan language relies heavily on absolute reference (roughly translatable into the English North-South directional system). In Tzeltal, spatial locations that are north are described as downhill whereas the ones that are south are described as uphill. To investigate whether this difference of linguistic frames employed by a language has cognitive consequences, Levinson (1996) conducted a behavioural experiment with Dutch and Tzeltal speakers over a range of non-

linguistic orientational tasks. The results indicated that the Dutch speakers overwhelmingly employed a relational frame, whereas the Tzeltal speakers relied heavily on absolute reference in their performance on a non-linguistic task. The evidence from non-linguistic behavioural tasks thus indicates that the referential frame and distinctions made available by a language constrain spatial thinking in non-linguistic domains.

Similar results have been reported on tasks involving spatial relations such as containment and support. English and Korean are known to be different in the way they encode the spatial relations of containment and support. English distinguishes between putting things into containers and putting them on surfaces (apple in the bowl/letter in the envelope versus book on the table/picture on the wall). Korean crosscuts this containment versus support distinction by distinguishing between loose and tight containment and support. The language uses the relational term *nehta* for “apple in the bowl” as an example of loose containment and *kitta* for “letter in the envelope” as an example of tight fit. *Kitta* is also used for support as in “magnet on the refrigerator”, which is again an instance of close fit. McDonough, Choi, & Mandler (2003), reported a behavioural experiment involving a non-linguistic spatial relations task to investigate whether English and Korean speakers differed in their cognition of space along the parameters of support versus containment and loose versus close fit. Results showed that the English speakers did not distinguish between the close versus loose fit in picture displays, whereas the Korean speakers did. When given several examples of close fit, together with one of loose fit, the Korean speakers could easily pick the odd man out, whereas the English speakers could not. Behavioural studies have shown that cross-linguistic distinctions in temporal descriptors

have similar consequences for the way speakers of these languages conceptualize time (Boroditsky, 2001).

Another area of investigation in this context is the cross-linguistic differences in the domain of gender encoding. Languages are known to opt for semantic or grammatical encoding of gender on nouns. Both English and Bangla for example, opt for semantic gender in the sense that entities in these languages are either masculine, feminine or neuter as per their semantic category. Hindi, on the other hand, opts for grammatical gender in that the inanimate entities are assigned an arbitrary masculine/feminine gender, which also has a grammatical reflex in agreement marking. Behavioural studies have shown that speakers of languages with grammatical gender tend to categorize objects in non-linguistic tasks as masculine and feminine, depending on how these objects are categorized in their languages, and this gender assignment influences the language users' cognitive representations of these objects. In one such experiment, speakers of Spanish and German (both languages opt for grammatical gender), were asked to give similarity judgments on objects. Both groups rated grammatically feminine objects to be more similar to females and grammatically masculine objects as more similar to males. Speakers assigned masculine or feminine properties to objects depending upon whether the objects had masculine or feminine gender in their respective languages (Boroditsky, Schmidt & Phillips, 2003). In a recent comparative study of Hindi/English and Bangla/Hindi bilinguals, Mukherjee (2018), investigated the issue of the relation between presence versus absence of grammatical gender in a language, and conceptualization of inanimate objects in the Indian context, taking into consideration three languages: Hindi, Bangla, and English. Of these, Bangla and English have semantic gender, whereas Hindi has grammatical gender. The study sought to investigate how the presence

or absence of grammatical gender in these languages impacts object categorization by their bilingual users. The tasks included gender and voice assignment to different inanimate and natural objects. The results indicated that the presence or absence of grammatical gender in the first language of a bilingual user has an impact on the user's object categorization judgment. Furthermore, if the second language of the bilingual user is characterized by the presence of grammatical gender, as in case of Bangla-Hindi bilinguals, then the bilingual users show differential behavior with respect to object characterization, depending on whether they are simultaneous or sequential bilinguals (Mukherjee, 2018).

These and several other studies have shown that speakers of different languages think differently. The results suggest that conceptualization is mediated by language, and what we usually call thinking is actually a complex set of interactions between linguistic and conceptual representations and processes.

Implications for Language Pedagogy

Language teachers have for long been interested in how the similarities and differences between the source and target language may help to predict areas of relative ease and difficulty in language learning. Traditionally, however, ease and difficulty have been defined primarily in terms of structural similarities and differences between the source and target languages. The neo-Whorfian perspective takes the pedagogical interest in linguistic diversity beyond structural similarities and differences. Since the perspective considers language similarities and differences as pointers to the underlying conceptual similarities and differences, it prepares the ground for the language teacher to rethink relative ease and difficulty in terms of conceptual similarities and differences. Thus, the notions of relative ease

and difficulty are not defined in terms of structural similarity and difference, but rather in terms of conceptual congruence and incongruence. Accordingly, areas that are conceptually translatable across languages are likely to emerge as easier to learn than the ones that are conceptually untranslatable. Let us consider an example of what this shift could entail for language pedagogy.

Multiword non-compositional expressions such as idiom chunks—an area often relegated to rote learning—could be approached differently. At the core of most of such expressions is a cross-domain metaphorical mapping. The pedagogical materials need to distinguish between cross-domain mappings that the source and target languages share and others that are different, and focus on mappings that are peculiar to the target language. Thus, while metaphorical mappings that entail conceptual metaphors such as “love is a journey” or “argument is war” would seem to cut across Hindi and English, a mapping such as “shy as a bride” would not. Arbitrary differences in how cross-domain mappings work cross-linguistically would therefore be presented as instances of conceptual incongruence. The untranslatable mappings would be acknowledged as potential areas of difficulty and paid attention to. Similar cross-linguistic studies of linguistic and conceptual incongruence in the areas of space and time, grammatical gender, causal relations, etc., would yield areas that need attention in the teaching/learning situation.

Summing up, the neo-Whorfian perspective on linguistic diversity strikes a natural chord with the language teacher. This approach has two implications for the language classroom: a) bringing the source language back into the classroom, and b) focussing on source language-target language similarities and differences in the conceptual domain, rather than in the structural one. Both of these implications

have a cognitive linguistic imperative in common—language learning is a meaning-centred process, where meaning is equated with conceptualization.

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Book Reviews

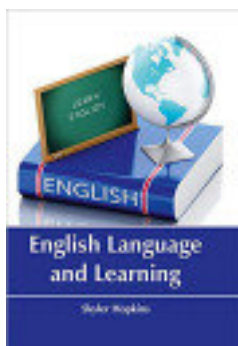
English Language and Learning

New York: Larsen and Keller Education. (354 pages)

Skyler Hopkins (Ed.). (2017).

ISBN: 978-1-63549-107-4

Reviewed by: **Khushbu Kumari**



Language learning has come a long way in the last couple of decades. There is an increasingly common understanding in academia that a new language cannot be mastered unless it is acquired. Rote learning methods which were part of early school learning are now becoming obsolete. In the present scenario, the task/role of a language teacher is to present the target language to the learner in a way so as to so as to engage her/him in learning. Language learning is a continuous process and it cannot be fixed in a time frame. In fact, to learn a language in a limited time frame is not possible. So a teacher's role is to develop an understanding, a flavour for the language. The book *English Language and Learning* by Skyler Hopkins addresses this issue quite technically.

Chapter 1 "Introduction to English Language", begins with the history of English and gives a brief account of the language from its Proto-Germanic form to Modern English. The author then moves on to the current geographical distribution of English and talks about the global as well the global spread of English. The introduction presents an overall view of English, from its origin, spread, variety and growth across the globe. All of this is done through a very brief

introduction to phonology-to-syntax of English. The discussion is not extensive but is fairly exhaustive, and touches on all the relevant grammatical concepts. The latter half of the chapter deals with differentiating between old and middle English, and British and American English. The chapter ends with a description of the status of English across the world.

Chapter 2 "Understanding Learning" deals with the process of multi-level learning in a diverse setting. The chapter includes some of the most influential learning theories. The author also looks at formal and informal learning through different types of conditioning, habituation and sensitization, with a view to provide a psychological understanding of the process of learning, which can then be applied to a heterogeneous classroom.

When it comes to writing or reading a grammar book, the first impression that comes to mind is that the book will follow a formal pattern of using minimum description, and the concepts will be illustrated with the help of examples for each grammatical category. But Chapter 3 entitled "English Grammar: An Integrated Study" is written in a style wherein concepts such as open and closed class, tense, mood, clause construction, and voice are explained through mitigating boundaries. Contrary to the traditional way of placing grammatical categories in a fixed setting, the writer has described them in her own peculiar way.

Chapter 4 titled "Challenges in Learning English as a Second Language" addresses the basic issues of learning a second language. It takes into account the problems related to vocabulary, pronunciation and sentence formation. The chapter also includes topics such as English as a Second/Foreign language, first language, and second-language acquisition.

In chapter 5, “Language Acquisition: Methods and Tools”, the writer talks about mental faculty and language acquisition. She then moves on to how statistical methods such as perceptual magnetic effect and distributional learning could be helpful in language acquisition. Software based learning such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and Babbel and Smigin find a detailed mention in this chapter. In this the author takes cues from natural language processing, although she does not go into too much detail. Writing aids such as dictionary, thesaurus, spell check, etc., have been mentioned under the topic “Foreign Language Writing Aid”.

Chapter 6 “Evolution of English” in a sense is a recapitulation of Chapter 1. The writer chooses to end the book on the same note that she started it on, with the only difference that in the last chapter, the writer includes a descriptive note on the phonological aspects of the evolution of English as a language. The end of the book is therefore in sync with the beginning, which is a good thing, and I am certain that the reader will find the text a coherent read.

Books on language learning are different from traditional grammar books. It is assumed that such books focus on the learner rather than on the teacher. A teacher who has acquired the skills of learning can use the techniques to make the learning process easier.

In the end, I would like to add that all the chapters in this book are very detailed. Each chapter is divided into sub-topics, and each sub-topic deals with a new concept. The arguments are compartmentalized, which helps the reader to understand the text comprehensively. Language learning is not an isolated process, it comprises of lexicon, grammar and structure of the language. In this respect, Hopkins’ book presents a comprehensive account of language learning. Even though the book is about English language and learning, the insights and

observation should make a good supplement to the literature of all languages, not just English.

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Succeed in TEFL: Continuing Professional Development.

John Murray Learning,
Hachette. (300 pages)

Riddell, David (2015).

ISBN: 978-1-444-79606-3



Reviewed by: **Kalyanee Rajan**

Succeed in TEFL is a remarkable book on many counts: its approach, scope, presentation and content are so well etched out, that the reader is hooked to its every word, every page and every illustration. Marketed as the “ultimate guide for developing your career as an English Teacher”, the book is truly as a complete roadmap to the professional development of an English teacher as it covers most of the significant aspects of the job. These include observing, teaching exam-focused classes, becoming a trainer, working out action research, using various online resources, writing and publishing, becoming a good manager, to name a few. The book has twenty-two chapters divided into four neat sections, in which Riddell generously pours out over thirty years of his experience of working in the field in varied capacities—teacher, trainer and on-line management tutor, Cambridge Joint Chief Assessor of CELTA courses for ten years and

his work at International House London since 2003.

The first section titled “A New Beginning” seeks to demystify the task of teaching for the teachers. It addresses the “what and how” of the profession, garnished with a liberal dose of motivation for those who are “sitting still”—the quintessential trap for any professional who has a stable employment. The first chapter titled “Don’t Sit Still” is a shout out to precisely such teachers. In this chapter, Riddell makes extensive use of his experiences to exhort people into action! He pitches the book to teachers placed at various tiers of the profession—those who are starting out and are fairly new to the job, those with a longer experience who may be feeling “stuck”, teacher trainers who are looking for CPD for themselves, and finally the managers/directors of studies and senior teachers working in managerial capacity who are seeking new targets for their team.

The second section titled “First Steps” deals with observing and being observed; sharing ideas in the staffroom; and INSETT sessions. It is in this unit that Riddell, the experienced trainer, begins to charm us with his flowing language, his rich array of primary material including interviews and case studies, and his fine handling of this extremely important facet of a teacher’s life. Observations and staffroom seem to be the most intimidating problem areas for most new teachers and Riddell’s cues to help them are not only effortlessly spontaneous, but also enormously useful in their practical application. Riddell makes a detailed mention of sharing ideas, materials and information within the staffroom. This is one area which requires a great deal of openness in the Indian context, as academic sharing is fraught with uncertainties and suspicion stemming from threats of plagiarism, sabotage or plain unhealthy competition. Riddell emphasizes on the efficacy

of the mutually beneficial task of mentoring of a junior teacher by a senior teacher. He asserts that this results in better interpersonal relations as they develop together, as opposed to unitary, isolated development. Riddell also mentions IATEFL’s SIGs (Special Interest Groups) and their utility in planning and development.

The third and the longest section, which includes thirteen chapters is titled, “Later Steps”. In this section, Riddell talks in great detail about several pertinent aspects of the life of an English teacher. These include using online resources, teaching exam-focused classes or competitive classes, managing and being a part of reading groups, attending and participating in conferences (which can be a daunting task even for some senior teachers unless thus inclined), writing, engaging in action research, becoming a trainer, professional bodies and journals, looking at the why and how of taking a sabbatical, setting and achieving SMART targets, and joining the management.

The unit on “writing” befits a special mention as it deals with a great number of typical problem areas for teachers. Riddell talks about writing for publication; designing course material; and writing books, articles and reviews, all of which form a significant part of a teacher’s professional profile. The unit on “Action Research” also demystifies for the reader, the hallowed concept of research by listing possible topics, making a research plan and outlining the steps for its successful execution. In “Becoming a student again”, Riddell reminds the teachers to show greater empathy towards the peculiar problems of the learners. He covers topics such as learning a new language, reviewing assumptions, and language learning for CPD. The unit on “Professional Groups and Journals” is again a valuable unit. In this unit, the author lays out the step-by-step procedure for joining groups such as IATEFL, TESOL and LinkedIn. He also lists some of the prestigious journals dedicated to the field of teaching and learning

such as *EL Gazette*, *Modern English Teacher*, *The Teacher Trainer*, *IATEFL Voices*, *The TESOL Quarterly*, to name a few. The final section titled “Global views and reflections” covers the views and reflections of the director and manager.

Succeed in TEFL is a complete package, a thoroughly practical handbook that actually delivers what it promises. The layout of the book is comprehensive and reader-friendly, and it offers authentic examples and practical advice. Each chapter includes a wide range of case studies and interviews collected from teachers who have worked in different countries and diverse contexts. There are tips, tasks and summaries in every unit, which make it even more stimulating for the engrossed reader. The writing style is mostly conversational and engaging, without getting too chatty, or too professional, or jargon-laced. The book also packs information on useful web resources and websites for further information. In the current scenario, when academia is vying to work shoulder-to-shoulder with big corporate houses in terms of greater opportunities for professional development and job satisfaction, Riddell’s attempt is commendable to the highest degree. He puts on the table, a refreshing outlook and valuable insights into many traditionally sore areas. The book is indeed indispensable for teachers, managers as also researchers who wish to delve deeper into the intricacies, the recipes and the time-tested stratagems for success as well as continuous development of those engaged in teaching English.

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Global Englishes and change in English language teaching: Attitudes and impact

New York, NY: Routledge.
(134 pages)

Galloway, Nicola. (2017).

ISBN: 978-0-415-78620-1



Reviewed by: **Ramanjaney Kumar Upadhyay**

This book is potentially capable of contributing novel arguments to the ongoing discourse on the movement from English to Englishes, and its consequences for English Language Teaching. It consists of four chapters, followed by two appendices—A and B. Appendix A details nine lesson plans and activities, which serve as a very useful tool for ELT practitioners/teachers in a classroom setting. The lesson plans are quite structured. They formally define the rationale and the aim of the lesson, and list the learning outcomes. Appendix B, enumerates the profile of the participants.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a theoretical backdrop for the study of attitudes towards different varieties of English and ELT. In these, the author has generously used many key terms from the field of ELT. The first chapter covers topics such as World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as an International Language (EIL) and translanguaging, etc., and their implications for ELT. The author also addresses the issue of native and non-native speakers of English, which leads to a discussion on standard versus non-standard varieties of English, and another discussion on Global Englishes Language Teaching (GELT). The author points out the need for more research on the attitudes of stakeholders so that some progress can be made in GELT.

The second chapter carries forward the discussion on needs analysis and underlines its

importance in building an informed consensus on GELT. Galloway begins by defining attitudes of learners, particularly with reference to English language learning. He identifies language learners as the key stakeholders of ELT, and emphasizes that understanding the attitude of the learners towards the language is crucial for any kind of curriculum change to be effective. Galloway also reiterates the need for more classroom research and asserts that there is a severe dearth of research on what GELT would be like and how it would influence the students' attitudes.

Chapter 3 details the empirical work carried out by the author. Galloway provides a vivid understanding of students' attitudes towards English and ELT in the context of Global Englishes, and some crucial factors that influence these attitudes. He presents empirical data and findings based on pre- and post-course questionnaires and post-course interviews. He explains that the study was conducted on one control and one experimental group. The students from the control group were offered a content-based EAP course on Tourism and the students from the experimental group were offered GELT courses based pedagogical content. Reporting on the findings, Galloway reveals that English is seen as a language which belongs to the "natives", and the students want to learn that particular English of the natives. However, the author opines that this understanding of English is due to multi-faceted reasons such as dominance of native English world-wide and its prevalence across the globe as standard variety. Galloway also claims that the GELT course altered the students' attitudes towards English(es). According to him, this change in the attitude of the students, is crucial as it will pave the path for ELT to be examined in the light of Global Englishes. The chapter once again calls for further research in the area. In the final chapter, Galloway offers some practical suggestions on designing and

developing content. To this end, he has suggested a variety of activities in this chapter. The author says that because it might be difficult for an ELT practitioner to design a/an G/ELT course complete in all respects, he advocates that a lot of activities be included in the course. In fact, he even suggests many activities in his book. The chapter again talks about the need for more research in the classroom setting, so that the movement from ELT to GELT can be transacted.

Although the book is based on empirical work carried out at a Japanese university by the researcher, it can be useful in Indian context for Indian teachers, researchers and students alike. Taking cue from the exercises and lesson plans suggested in the book, similar activities can be designed by researchers and teachers. This book is centred around the attitudes towards different varieties of Englishes and their implications for language teaching. However, the research presented in the book can also guide researchers to an empirical study of languages in India, particularly with reference to language and dialect dichotomy and attitudes towards them which impact the teaching and learning of these languages.

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Classroom Activities

Nivedita Bedadur

Activity 1

A Cluster of Activities

In this section, we will present an activity and show how teachers can develop simple as well as complex variations of the same basic activity.

Basic Activity: My Classroom

Objective: To develop the vocabulary of learners

Level: Grade II

Material: 50 Cards (approximately)

Time: 80 minutes

Procedure

(For the teacher) Prepare 5x5 cm size cards as per the number of students in the class.

Step 1: Divide the students into five groups.

Step 2: Give each student a card. Ask her/him to name any one object in the classroom, such as blackboard, table, fan, chalk, homework, window, pencil, etc. If required, help the students by giving hints about the objects.

Step 3: Write the names of the objects on the board. If the students name the objects in their mother tongue, write the English equivalent, speak it out aloud and point to it.

Step 4: Give the students plenty of time to look at the words written on the board. Ask them to point out the word that he/she has suggested. Help them identify and understand the meanings of the words suggested by them as well as the other students.

Step 5: Ask the students to write on their cards the words suggested by them.

Step 6: Get the students to put up their cards on the walls in the room.

Variation 1

Step 1: Divide the students into five groups. Give one task to each group. Some examples of the tasks are:

Group 1: Collect from the wall all the cards related to furniture.

Group 2: Collect all the cards related to a pencil box (pens, pencils, etc.).

Group 3: Collect all the cards that have names of things belonging to the students.

Group 4: Collect all the cards that have names of things belonging to the teacher.

Group 5: Collect all the cards that have names of things found in the classroom cupboard.

Step 2: There may be some disputes among the students about which card belongs to which category. The disputes will help them understand that the categories are not water tight.

Step 3: Ask each group to put up their cards separately and give a title to their collection.

The teacher can introduce other categories such as things made of wood, things made of plastic, etc. The categories can be made depending on the words that have been put up on the theme wall.

If it is not possible to make cards, the teacher can write the words on the board and ask the students to copy them in their notebooks.

Some Other Variations

- Ask the students to write the words in their notebooks. Each group has to present these words with their meanings in the class.
- Ask the students to select word cards which carry a word that begins with the letter “p”

or “c” or “d” (the teacher can choose the letter).

- The teacher can ask the students to pick out words from the word cards which have the letter “e” in their spelling. (the teacher can choose the letter.)
- Ask the students to write the words in alphabetical order.
- Ask the students to use the words to make simple sentences such as: “This is a blackboard; This is a chalk; This is a notebook”, etc.

Activity 2

Extended Activity Based on Activity 1

Objective: To learn how to describe things

Material: Picture cards, or cards with the names of some objects on them. These cards have to be prepared by the students. They can write the names of objects found in and around the classroom such as “table, fan, chalk, duster, pencil”. The cards should be put in a box.

Procedure

Step 1: Divide the students into two groups, group A and group B.

Step 2: A student from group A has to describe the object drawn or written on the card to the students of group B. The descriptions will only be repeated twice.

Step 3: The students belonging to group B must listen carefully to the description and identify the object.

Step 4: Next, a student from group B has to pick out a card from the box and describe the object. Group A has to guess the name of the object.

For example:

Group A: It is black in colour, we can write on this. It is there in every class.

Group B: Black board.

Group B: We write with it. It has a sharp point. It comes in different colours.

Group A: Pen

A variation of this task can be:

Group A: Pick out from the box, two cards naming/showing things that you keep in a pencil box.

Group B: Pick out from the box, two cards naming/showing things that you find on the floor.

Group A: Pick out from the box, two cards naming/showing things that you find on the walls.

Group B: Pick out from the box, two cards naming/showing things that belong to the teacher.

Group A: Pick out from the box, two cards naming/showing things that have words beginning with the letter “A”.

Group B: Pick out from the box, two cards naming/showing things that have five letters each.

Group A: Pick out from the box, two cards naming/showing things that are in your school bag.

While the children name the objects, the teacher can write them down on the board. Later, children can be asked to copy these words in their notebooks.

Nivedita V. Bedadur is working as visiting faculty in the University Resource Centre of Azim Premji University, Bangalore. She has 29 years of experience as an English Language Teacher. She is currently designing and facilitating courses for teachers and teacher educators in the area of early literacy, language teaching and educational psychology.

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Teachers' Page

Using LLT in the Classroom

Mukul Priyadarshini

For the past few years, second year students of B. El. Ed at Miranda House (University of Delhi) have been using the journal of *Language and Language Teaching* as one of the key resources to enhance their understanding of issues related to languages that are crucial for a teacher or other stakeholders in the education system.

As a part of internal assessment task, they choose an article/ interview from an available pool provided to them by the faculty. Articles from *Language and Language Teaching* and the translated volumes of *bhasha aur bhasha shikshan* constitute an essential part of this pool.

The topics students choose include teaching-learning of languages and linguistic issues in the multilingual context of India, second language acquisition and teaching, multilingualism, teaching of English, bilingual education, linguistic imperialism, aspects of language acquisition, critical pedagogy, and state policies related to languages and education, early literacy etc. In pairs or groups students do a presentation followed by classroom discussion based on the issue under focus.

The objective is to widen students' horizon beyond the confines of syllabus with an aim to help them become a thinking and reflective teacher who understands social context languages and their educational implications.

Some of the articles the students have chosen to present in the class from the journal are as follows:

1. 'Filters in Second Language Learning' by Vineetha C. B. and A. Arunkumar (LLT 11: 19-23), January, 2017.
2. 'Key Issues in the teaching of English at Primary Level' by A.L. Khanna (LLT 12: 28-34), July, 2017.
3. 'Face to Face with Prof. Krishna Kumar' by Mukul Priyadarshini (LLT 5: 49-54), January, 2014.
4. 'Teaching Language to Children with Disabilities' by Sudesh Mukhopadhyay (LLT 10: 38-42), July, 2016.
5. Interview with Prof. Anita Ghai (LLT 10: 46-52), July, 2016.
6. 'Chomsky's Innateness Hypothesis' by Ayesha Kidwai (LLT 3: 57-61), January, 2013.
7. 'Language and Culture: About a Saora Class 1 Primer' by Mahendra Mishra (LLT 3: 16-20), January, 2013.
8. 'Literacy Education: Need We Start Early?' by Stephen Krashen (LLT 6: 1-7), July, 2014.

Mukul Priyadarshini has a Ph. D in Linguistics from the University of Delhi and is currently teaching at Miranda House, University of Delhi. Her interests include second language acquisition and language teaching. She has been closely associated with SCERT, Delhi and NCERT books.

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Report

Language Plus Programme:

A Brief Report

Jyoti Chordia and Neha Yadav

Introduction

Recent research has shown that the linguistic and cultural practices children bring from home should be used as a resource for their linguistic and cognitive growth. Unless the languages of learners are provided enough space in the classroom, they may become increasingly silent and indifferent to new knowledge. In the Language Plus Programme of Vidya Bhawan (VB) Education Resource Centre (ERC) started in July, 2017, it was decided to focus specially on English and Hindi without ignoring the languages learners bring from home. In addition to Hindi and English, the programme focused on overall linguistic, mathematical, social and cognitive growth of learners. It was decided to provide students the comfort and space where they can articulate their feelings and views freely and fearlessly. In the traditional classrooms, languages of home are dismissed as *bolis* or *dehati* and learners are discouraged from using them.

Implementation

This model involves a sustained attempt at teacher capacity building and enhancing the resources at VBS and particularly the ERC. The

process is cyclical: starting with workshop with teachers, sharing of activities and making plans, implementation of plans in the classroom, sharing of experiences from the previous plan in the following workshop. Most of the intervention, naturally, is grounded in the classroom; ideas and activities discussed in the Language Plus workshops are tried out by the teachers and ERC resource persons in the classrooms. Their feedback constitutes the backbone of the Saturday workshop sessions. The programme is evolving through a dialogic relationship among the teachers, resource persons and students/children of Nursery and Primary. In the process of learning, nothing motivates a child more than the feeling that she can fearlessly say what she wishes, without any fear of ridicule. It is hoped that as teachers and students progress in this model, they will become fluent not only in basic skills in the two languages but would also be able to negotiate serious discourse in the content areas. The experiment is a classic case of taking theory to the classroom and refining theorizing from practices in the classrooms.

Sessions so far

The programme has been running for 10 months in class 1 of all the three VB schools. The teachers of class 1 along with other interested teachers were invited for initiating the programme. School wise participants are follows:

Table 2

Participants in the programme

S. No	Name of School	No. of teachers	No. of children	Total working days of School	Classes taken by ERC
1	VB Junior School	2	26	223	From July onwards, 9 periods of 40 minutes each in a week (estimated time= 9 periods*35 weeks*40 minutes = 210 hours)
2	VB Public School	4	20	208	From November 27 th onwards, 6 periods of 40 minutes each in a week (estimated time = 27 days*2 periods*40 minutes = 36 hours)
3	VB Basic School	4	13	214	From November 27 th onwards, 10 periods of 40 minutes each in a week (estimated time = 37 days*2 periods*40 minutes = 50 hours)

The Language Plus workshops are often joined by several nursery school teachers and ERC members and the strength in any given workshop may vary between 20 and 25. A total of 21 workshops have been held during July 2017 to April 2018. The atmosphere in these meetings is generally very informal and a lot of effort is put into listening patiently to the experiences of teachers in the classrooms. The focus areas include: nature of language and mathematics teaching, the medium of learning, process of language and mathematics learning, teaching strategies, conceptual understanding and pedagogical process of language and mathematics and sharing of classroom experiences. In these workshops we also share and discuss some relevant readings. During Oct 9 and 11, 2017, a conceptual understanding workshop focusing on language and mathematics and the learning process was held.

Outcomes

The outcomes of this experiment have really been encouraging. In particular, we may point to the following:

- *Teachers have started appreciating the potential learners bring to school as well as their linguistic and mathematical knowledge.*
- *Learners are beginning to shed their inhibitions and given the fact that they can speak fearlessly in any language has helped us all in breaking several barriers.*
- *The evidence of classes being interactive and children trying to learn through peer group activities was evident through some videos that were discussed in the workshops.*
- *Teachers would often bring to the workshops the outstanding work done by their students, often looking surprised at what they had been able to achieve in the domains of language (see for example*

the section on lexical flowering) and mathematics.

- *Constant and rigorous reflection on the implementation of certain theoretical ideas and corresponding activities in the classroom brought a certain kind of unprecedented seriousness to the teaching-learning process; teachers realised that could play an active role in designing their lesson and transacting them in the classroom.*

Periodic assessments

Three different assessments were done during and after the intervention (before the school closed for holidays):

- **December, 2017** (5 months after the intervention): Focus on expression, reading and writing, creativity and oral skills in mathematics
- **February, 2018** (7 months after the intervention): Multilingual lexical development
- **April 2018** (9 months after the intervention): Comprehensive test based on MHRD indicators

The initial results of reading and writing skills in Hindi and English were promising. The number of children who could read unfamiliar Hindi texts with comprehension rose from 28% to 54% and those who could do the same with unfamiliar English texts rose from 4% to 20%. In the case of writing, the number of children who could spell accurately and read what they had written rose from 29% to 64% in Hindi and from 2% to 34% in English.

Lexical Flowering

A comprehensive assessment based on MHRD indicators and on reading, writing and creativity is being prepared. In this short report, we present a brief analysis of lexical development in multiple languages and scripts.

The following activity was discussed in one of the workshops to appreciate the lexical enrichment of children during this programme. For a pilot, teachers tried out a single picture of an animal and asked children to write as many words as they could in any language using any script. The results were promising. A sheet with the following three pictures was then prepared: 'a dog, a bed and a tree'. A total of 45 children of Class 1 participated in the experiment. The total number of words produced by them in Hindi, English, various languages of Rajasthan such as Mewari, Bagri etc. and some fascinating nonce words was 660 (see Table 1, each picture shows a number close to 200 words) an average of say 15 words per picture. As Table 1 shows, 38 children out of 45 (above 84%) wrote more than 11 words for the 3 pictures, an average of 4 words per picture. Table 2 shows the great advantages of using multilingualism as a classroom resource not just because of the number of languages and scripts used or for the number of Hindi and English words that have been internalised but because of the nonce words (Others) invented by children and creative expressions used by them. The space that such an activity provides for the free play of the imagination and fantasy of children and the practice they gain in using script and internalizing the complex relationships that obtain between the spoken and the written language is immense. Consider some words and expressions used for 'bed', for example:

- सोने का बिसतर / सोने का वीसतर / सोने का मासा / मेरा पलंग
- माचा / माचो माजो / माजे / माजा / माछा
- माछो / मासो / मासडो / खटली / खटडि / खाठलो / गटीया / खदीया / इडा
- मसे / माकडा / मासला / मास / मालार / गडीसी / लेटनी / लेटनि
- Bed/bed/BED/BeD/Bat/bat/ beb/bad/ mat

Table 1
Category of children on the basis of number of words written

Words of different languages written for 'dog, bed and tree'		
S. No	Number of Words written	No of children
1	15 to 18	29
2	11 to 14	9
3	7 to 10	3
4	3 to 6	3
5	less than 3	1
Total		45

Table 2
Total number of words in different languages written by all the learners

Words written for 'dog, bed and tree'						
S. No	Object	Words written in different languages				Total
		Hindi	Languages of Rajasthan	English	Others	
1	Dog	108	59	57	5	229
2	Bed	91	76	19	11	197
3	Tree	164	24	37	9	234
4	Total no. of words	363	159	113	25	660

Lexical responses to the picture of a dog in multiple languages and scripts



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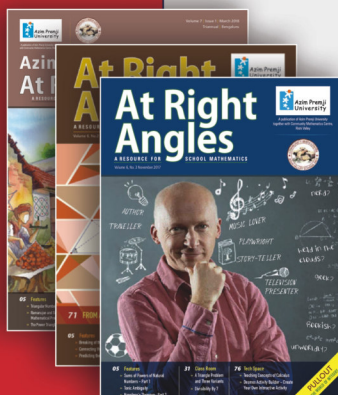


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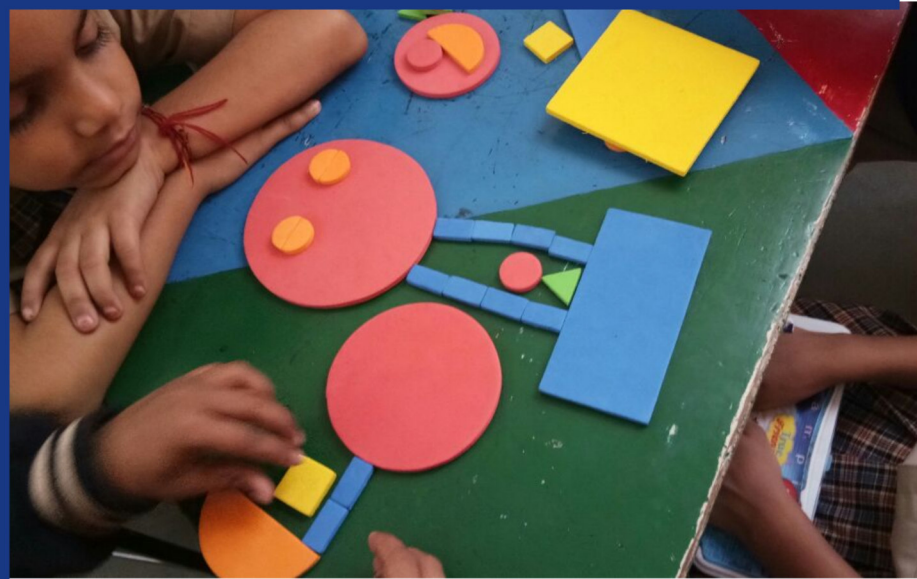
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'There are many aspects of human emotions and knowledge which cannot find expression in words and must therefore get spaces in 'lines and colours, sounds and movements'.

Tagore

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