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REASONS FOR THE DIFFICULTIES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



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ABSTRACT

English is the most important language at present. It is considered as the “lingua franca” and also as the “window of the world”. Why is this language so important? Most of the people share the view that however important it may be, however inevitable it can be, ultimately it is the foreigner’s language. Truly, it is neither an Indian language nor is it similar to any of our languages.

KEYWORDS : *lingua franca , Indian language ,Communication Skill.*



INTRODUCTION :

But what to do, in the present context, there is no other option but to learn this language, which is an unwanted burden left to us by the uninvited foreigners. There are numerous reasons for this. First of all, this is the language that can ensure anyone a decent job and a good payment. Even for a less paid job like that of a sales girl or sales man, what is required is “smart, English speaking candidates”. This is only a very simple and single example.

A Look at the Present Scenario

It is a devastating scene, students of even government engineering colleges, flocking to “Spoken English Classes” just because of the reason that in the final round of their tests and competitive exams, that is, in the personal interview (PI) section, they fail.... What a pity! They are highly successful in their respective engineering subjects. But when it comes to Communication Skill, they lag behind. Is it their fault? Highly brilliant students, from the beginning till their BE with distinction throughout, perform poorly in a single subject and are rejected for the job at the last moment! Some of them after repeated attempts and failures, fall into depression! Who is to be blamed for this deplorable state of affairs?

Undoubtedly, it is our defective educational system, poor English teachers and of course the politicians who always shout at the high pitch of their voice that only “desi” has to be preferred. And what an irony! Their sons and daughters are learning either in foreign countries or at least in public

schools. A closer look at our surroundings reveal that now a days even the daily wagers and even the poorest of the poor opt for English medium education. How burdensome it is for them to send their off springs to private English medium schools paying heavy fees! Now it is high time for the government to introduce free education in English medium schools so that even the poor can easily afford to send their children there.

REASONS FOR DIFFICULTIES

It is a commonly accepted fact that English is a very difficult subject for the Indian learners. A closer look into this reality reveals that first of all, most of the difficulties that learners face in the study of English are a consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English. For example, we can see that a native speaker of Chinese may face many more difficulties than a native speaker of German. Why is it so? It is only because of the fact that German is more closely related to English than Chinese is. Language learners often make errors of syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation which result from the influence of their mother tongue or L1. This can be described as "language interference". This is stronger for beginners.

The second reason is cultural differences in communication styles and preferences. This can be clearly analyzed by comparing the differences in the communication styles of our native languages and English. An observation of the communication styles of the South Indians and the North Indians, (except the elite and highly learned ones) will prove this point. For example, some Southerners who are not that educated, pronounce the word "walked" with special stress on "ed", while people hailing from UP especially, pronounce "ischool" instead of "school", "istudy" instead of "study", "ispoon" in place of "spoon" etc. Many such examples are there. But those who are well educated and who pay attention to their pronunciation, utter the words perfectly, whether they hail from the South or the North.

Thirdly, it is the pronunciation of English. It is not the fault of the speaker, but the fact that English contains a number of sounds and sound distinctions not present in some other languages. Undoubtedly, speakers of languages without these sounds face problems both with hearing and while pronouncing them. For example, i) The inter dentals, both written as "th" as in "this" and "thick" are relatively rare in other languages. ii) Native speakers of Japanese have difficulty in distinguishing "r" and "l". iii) Native speakers of Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog, Japanese and Korean have difficulty in distinguishing "b" and "v". Another example is that of the Englishmen who changed "Mumbai" into "Bombay", "Kolkata" into "Calcutta", "Chennai" into "Madras" and "Kozhikode" in Kerala into "Calicut" etc. as they could not pronounce those place names properly.

The fourth reason is grammar and there are different aspects in this such as:

i) Tense, Aspect and Mood. A detailed analysis of English grammar reveals that English has a relatively large number of tense – aspect – mood forms with some quite subtle differences, such as the difference between the simple past "I ate" and the present perfect "I have eaten". Again, the continuous and the perfect continuous forms add to the complexity. This not only confuses the learner but also makes matters worse.

ii) Functions of Auxiliary Verb: some examples for these are:

- a) Negation ex: He hasn't been drinking.
- b) Inversion with the subject to form a question ex: Has he been drinking?
- c) Short answers ex: Yes, he has.
- d) Question tags ex: has he?

Another complication is that of the dummy auxiliary verb “do/ does/ did” , which is added to fulfil these functions in the simple present and simple past, but not to replace the verb “to be”. Ex: He drinks too much. Does he? , but in the sentence, “He is an addict” , it is, “Is he?” Most of the people and even English teachers themselves don’t know the use of “did” in past tense and many use double past as in “ Did you went there?” in place of “ Did you go there?”.

iii) Modal Verbs: In English, there are several modal auxiliary verbs, each of which has a number of uses. These verbs are used to convey a special sense or mood such as obligation, necessity, ability, probability, permission, possibility, prohibition, intention etc. “ must, should, can, may, might” etc. are some of these. All these modal verbs or “modals” take the first form of the verb after them. And these modals do not have past or future inflection i.e., they do not have past or future tense. **iv) Idiomatic Usage:** Compared to other languages, English is reputed to have a relatively high degree of idiomatic usage. An example is the use of different main verb forms in such apparently parallel constructions as “try to learn”, “help learn” and “avoid learning” which pose difficulty for learners. Another example is the idiomatic distinction between “make” and “do”, “make a mistake” not “do a mistake”, “do a favour” and not “make a favour”. While asked, “What is your ambition?” most of the students answer with full confidence, “I will make a teacher”, as if it is like “ I will make a chapathi”.

v) Articles: English has two forms of articles. “the”—(definite article) and “a, an”—(indefinite article). Other than this, at times English nouns can or indeed must be used without an article, called the zero article. Some of the differences between the definite, indefinite and zero article are fairly easy to learn, but others are not, especially since a learner’s native language may lack articles or use them differently from English. Though the information conveyed by articles is rarely essential for communication, English uses them frequently, (several times in ordinary sentences) so that they require some effort from the learner.

The fifth reason is vocabulary, which again deals with its different aspects such as:

i) Phrasal Verbs which are also known as multiple – word verbs. In English, these can cause difficulties for many learners because they have several meanings and different syntactic patterns. A number of phrasal verb differences can be noticed between American and British English.

ii) Prepositions: The correct use of prepositions frequently creates a lot of confusion in the English language as it is seen in many other languages also. And this can be a frustrating learning experience for many English language learners. For example, the prepositions, “on”, “of”, “at” etc., are used in so many different ways and contexts. Sometimes the same words are again used as: (a) adverbs, as ex: “come in, press on, step- in”, etc. (b) Part of a compound verb, as in, “make up, give up, put on, give in” etc., or in more than one way with different functions and meanings, ex: “look up, look on, give in” etc.

iii) Word derivation: In English, word derivation requires a lot of rote-learning. For example, an adjective can be negated by using the prefixes “un”, as in “unable”, “in”, as in “inappropriate”, “dis”, as in “dishonest”, “mis”, as in “misconduct”, etc. The learners are greatly bewildered by these variations in prefixes.

iv) Size of Lexicon: A look at the history of English reveals that it has a very large vocabulary, including one stream from Old English and one from the Norman infusion of Latin derived terms. Schmidt and Marsden claim that English has one of the largest vocabularies of any known language. This requires more work for a learner to master the language.

v) Collocations: In English, collocations refer to the tendency of words to occur regularly with others. For ex: nouns and verbs that go together—ride a bike/ drive a car/ sing a song etc. Native speakers tend

to use chunks of collocations and the ESL learners make mistakes with collocations in their writing/speaking which sometimes results in awkwardness.

vi) **Slang and Colloquialisms:** A look at most English speaking countries show that large numbers of slang and colloquial terms are used in everyday speech. Many learners will find that classroom based English is significantly different from how English is spoken in normal situations. This can often be difficult and confusing for learners with little experience of using English. Also, slang terms differ greatly between different regions and can change quickly in response to popular culture.

CONCLUSION

English is a very rich language in every respect. While comparing British English and American English, it is noticed that the latter is easy to master than the former as the Americans follow spelling pronunciation. But, British English, which Indians learn, poses lots of problems for the learners just because of the difference in the spelling and pronunciation. If the word is spelt/ pronounced as it is written, it would have been very easy for the learners, especially the beginners. Then there are many words with the same pronunciation and different spellings, which the learners in the initial stage find difficult to distinguish. A few examples are: "sea-see, hope-hop, pray-prey, race-raise, steal-steel, shoe-shoo" etc. There are numerous difficulties like the above mentioned ones, which make English "the killer subject" for many. But at present, whatever may be the difficulties or however much difficult they are or serious they are..... there is no escape. English is the "most wanted" language now in every sphere for the learned and the learners as well. Hence, the learners are left with only one choice, however great the difficulties are, try, try, try..... till you succeed! Don't be disheartened and give up learning English, as it is the secret/ mantra of your success. Hence strive to overcome the difficulties and master it so that there won't be any further hurdles in the journey to a bright and successful future.

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