

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

Communicative Language Teaching: A Study on English Syntax and Phonology

Dr. Diptiranjana Maharana

Lecturer in English

Udayanath College of Sc. & Technology

Adaspur, Cuttack, INDIA

DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.4.5.02

Abstract

Language is the most widely used tool that Human beings use for interacting with each other to exchange their ideas, information, feelings and sentiments. It acts as a repository of wisdom, a propeller for the advancement of knowledge and telescope to view the vision of the future in this fast changing world. The English language has played a vital role. It is the most influential language the world has ever witnessed. Super-power politics has not been able to set boundaries for it. It is the closest thing to a lingua franca around the world. English has penetrated deep into all business sectors and has established itself as a global passport for professional success. The teaching skills and strategies should be developed keeping pace with the current demands of the global market. More attention needs to be paid on the development of learners' competence with focus on evolving a more effective and successful method. Language is the most important communicative tool of mankind, and English language has become a universal medium of communication in today's era of liberalization and globalization.

Keywords- Language, Information, Communication, Liberalization, Globalization

Introduction

Keeping in view the significant status of India in the current global market, it has become increasingly important for the technically skilled youth of India to be proficient in English communication. Thus, the role of English language teaching in the technical institutes has become all the more important. It has been strongly felt that the objective of teaching English to the students of undergraduate technical courses is to develop their ability to use English in a holistic way, especially in listening and speaking so that in their professional work and social interactions they shall be able to exchange information effectively. But unfortunately, most of the English language teaching courses offered by these technical institutes feed them with the knowledge of English language per se rather than training them in the use of English for communication. Language teaching should centre on communicative function rather than mere linguistic knowledge and structural patterns. Thus

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

what is required among students is communicative competence (i.e. acquisition of both knowledge and the ability for language use) and confidence which in turn is the central theoretical motto of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

To keep abreast of the latest developments and trends in the field of Engineering and Technology, professional course students must develop their communication skills. The responsibility to equip them with the needed skills has fallen on the English course designers. The syllabi and the course books prescribed for the undergraduates of Engineering and Technology courses have acquired utmost significance. The textbook is thus attracting all the attention of the teachers, students and the researchers as it is supposed to be the main instrument in making the learners fluent and proficient users of the English language.

Engineering and Professional students need to improve their English communication skills and other soft skills in order to cope with increasingly tough competition in the job market. Mere subject knowledge in the chosen field of engineering is not going to be a guarantee for an engineering graduate to get a good job or excel at the workplace. Multinational corporations (MNCs) and major information technology (IT) companies in India recruit engineering candidates who have good English communication skills. In this highly competitive society, proficiency in English is considered one of the employability skills. In other words, English language skills are considered life skills 'or survival skills' in the twenty-first century.

Application of English Language and Linguistics:

The present research is about English Language and Linguistics and its application in the field of Communicative Language Teaching. It deliberately highlights on the major issues of language skills like Linguistics, Phonetics, Phonology, Syntax, Grammar, and Morphology etc. While discussing a wide variety of ideas on the linguistic approach we also come across analysis like applied linguistics that teaches the learner how to master professional communication skills. It is helpful to think of linguistic form as if it were located in a pane of glass through which ideas are transmitted from speaker to listener. Under ordinary circumstances language users are not conscious of the glass itself, but only of the ideas that pass through it. The form of language is transparent, and it takes a special act of will to focus on the glass and not the ideas. Linguists undergo a training that teaches them how to focus on the glass... the experience of becoming conscious of previously unconscious phenomena is one of the principal joys of linguistic work. (Wallace Chafe 1994: 38)

Engineering students need to be able to think critically, solve problems, communicate clearly, be creative and work in a team in order to get placed in a reputed company. As the need for the students of engineering to be trained in a multitude of transferable skills is high (Hatakka, 2005), most private engineering colleges in India hire trainers to train their wards in soft skills including English communication skills and prepare them for on and off campus placement. In many institutes of technology, English

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

language teachers are involved in placement training. As there is an increasing focus on and demand for soft skills, the English for Science and Technology (EST) practitioners in engineering colleges are expected to play the role of communication skills consultants and soft skills trainers. There is a shift from imparting mere linguistic skills to multi-skills in an integrated manner.

The skills and techniques that an Engineering student acquires remain with him for the rest of his working life and it is felt that the prescribed English language textbooks should provide him with a good grounding in all aspects of communication. English language textbooks play a vital role in improving a student's communication skills and his chances of success in the job market and also in getting him a rewarding career.

Basic Objectives of the Study:

The objective of this study was to assess the English language needs of learners of engineering colleges of Odisha. The main purpose was to examine the current English syllabus of different engineering colleges of Odisha and to study how effectively they have been implemented at the classroom level. It also attempted to find out how language skills along with life-skills can be learnt effectively by engineering students for proper utilization by them in real life situations.

The present study aims at identifying students having an opportunity to reinforce their basic communication skills, enabling them to acquire industry-specific knowledge and skills, such as soft skills, management and employability skills. In view of the demands of the 21st century and its world-class education, professionals and the University academicians have been designing course work and textbooks to meet the challenges of the new-millennium. Such of these texts focus on the latest methods and approaches, especially the use of modern software and innovative methods available in the market to help improve the proficiency in language and communication skills of the students. This study aims at finding out how far these textbooks have been helping the students to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills that are considered pre-requisites for employment today.

To meet their communication needs, many individuals with highly specific academic and professional know-how are focusing on the need for speaking exercises as well as an emphasis on LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) skills to improve the student's ability to communicate in one-to-one and one-to-many situations. For these students, the courses that fall under the category, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), holds a particular appeal. ESP can help people become better professionals. But one point of significant note is that whatever the course material may be it is the testing pattern that decides the teaching methodologies of the teachers and learning strategies of the students.

The study Attempted to answer the following Questions:

First, is there a gap existing between the present English language syllabus in engineering colleges and students' academic and professional needs?

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

Second, is there a need to modify and revise the present English language course so that it meets the engineering students' needs to apply it in real-life situations?

The study involved 220 students especially from 4 notable engineering colleges under BPUT, Odisha. These colleges are– CET, NMIET, APEX Inst. Of Tech and Mgt. (from Bhubaneswar) and ABIT (from Cuttack). The study also involves 63 teachers of 20 engineering colleges located in different regions of the state. The tools used for data collection comprised of questionnaire survey among students and teachers. After validating the validity and reliability of the research instruments, the questionnaire survey was conducted among students of 2nd, 4th and 6th semester Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) students and the teachers' survey was conducted at a workshop conducted by the Biju Patnaik University of Technology (BPUT), the only technological university in the state which has around 100 engineering and management colleges affiliated to it. The survey was also conducted among students of other government run autonomous colleges and also at National Institute of Technology, Rourkela, and an institute of national importance. The survey was conducted during the academic year 2014 - 2015. The data collected from the questionnaires were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In this context, the *English Communication Skills* course taught during the first year and second year of the four-year engineering programme in around 100 engineering colleges affiliated to BPUT, Odisha in India, is expected to play a vital role in improving students' communication skills and preparing them to the workplace or making them industry ready.

Though the aim and objective of the course is to enable the students of engineering to learn certain macro- and micro-skills in the English language and use them effectively as students while following other courses and later as engineers/technologists at the work place, most students and professional engineers/technologists who have undergone the course are not proficient enough to communicate effectively in the language. This perceived problem of lack of specific language/communication skills among engineering students and professional engineers and technologists makes the researcher raise a key question whether the *English Communication Skills* course reflects the needs and wants of the learner and whether there are any other factors that affect the successful imparting / learning of the skills required by the target group. It is presumed that there are problems in the teaching of the course at colleges, resulting from inappropriate teaching materials and instructional techniques, lack of English Language Teaching (ELT) – trained professionals and poor teaching methodology.

Vital Focus of the Study

The vital focus of the study is on critiquing the gap that lies between objectives of teaching/learning Technical English at the professional level and the syllabi and textbooks prescribed. The most glaring deficiency in the pedagogy of Technical English lies on certain

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

ground realities. The incompatibility of various objectives is present both at the grass-root and system levels.

The following facts point to some of the most glaring gaps that exist in the pedagogy of Technical English at the Engineering level:

1. First year students belonging to different disciplines in Engineering courses have English as a common subject. Most students expect their English syllabus to improve their communicative skills (this was evident in the survey conducted); but the course seems to do little, either directly or indirectly, with realising this particular objective of the students. This shows that the syllabus as well as the testing patterns in English, as offered by different universities, does not take into account even the primary objective of the professional students studying English in their Engineering course. Further, it also shows how oblivious and indifferent the courses have remained to the practical and realistic needs of the students.
2. There seems to be little compatibility between the objectives of the students and those of the teachers. Most students aspire that the course would somehow improve their English communicative skills; but most of the teachers teach the course in the traditional pattern which is centred on the teacher's responsibility of completing the syllabus rather than on the learner's desire of acquiring proficiency in English.
3. The held objectives of the students and those of the teachers seem to be different from the operational objectives. While most students do hold that improving their communication skills is their main objective in this course, they eventually give importance to getting through the examination. The objective of passing the examination sidelines the primary objective of learning the language.

Thus there is a wide gap between the held and the operational objective of the students and that of the teachers.

4. Many a time, the Technical English course does not seem to follow even the explicitly stated objectives, which renders the existing practices of evaluation meaningless.
5. Admissions to Engineering course are made through an open entrance examination (JEE Main Exam or in Odisha as OJEE) irrespective of their medium of instruction at the +2 levels of different disciplines. Consequently, the heterogeneous academic backgrounds of the students are not taken care of by the course. Thus the entry behaviour of the learners, which varies, is not paid any attention.
6. Since there is no continuous or formative evaluation, the students do not get opportunities to learn from their mistakes. In the entire four-year programme, the students take just one examination either at the end of their first semester or first year. Even this examination is conducted only with the sole purpose of promoting them to the next level. The students do not get any feedback on their performance.

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

The students are never given any opportunity to verify their scripts after they are valued and to find out their mistakes or errors in their presentation skills. Consequently, the writing skills of the students do not show any considerable improvement even by the end of their four-year B. Tech. programme.

The hypothesis of the study:

The hypothesis of the study is that if the *English Communication Skills* course offered during the first year of the four-year engineering programme at engineering colleges affiliated to the BPUT, Odisha is redesigned or modified based on the corporate expectations /needs / requirements, delivered (taught) properly by competent English teachers and students' language skills are assessed effectively during and at the end of the course, then the course will achieve its goal by instilling confidence in the students and preparing them to higher education, campus recruitments and thus to the workplace.

Research Questions and Hypotheses:

The present study is an attempt at answering a few questions that pertain to the performance of students of BPUT, Odisha in LSRW skills in ESP (English Language for Specific Purposes) contexts.

The objectives of the investigation can be spelt out through the following research questions posed:

1. What are the students' needs to learn Technical English, in the global context?
2. Is there a correlation existing between the learners' needs and the syllabus being used to teach Technical English?
3. What is the significance of the existing syllabus and is there a need for significant change?
4. What is the role of the ESP Course-Designer and Material-Producer in this context?

All these questions can be expressed in terms of the following research hypotheses.

- H1. Majority of the students will have stronger needs for learning Technical English in the global context.
- H2. There has been a negative correlation between the syllabus and the learners' needs.
- H3. The changes required in the existing syllabus are hence of utmost importance.
- H4. The role of the Curriculum-Developer in an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific and technical knowledge language-learning.

Conclusion and Findings

In the light of the data for 'needs assessment' collected from different sources, the study identifies the situations that are encountered and the skills which are required by the engineer, as a student and in professional life, evaluates the English course critically and suggests changes to make it effective. The present system of Education has recognized the need for making use of the latest Informative Communicative Technology (ICT) for better results. This could be seen in the introduction of the language labs in the Engineering colleges

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

www.thecreativelaucher.com

to impart various language and allied skills to the prospective Engineers as well. Still, it is the textbook which is supposed to carry on the aims and objectives of the syllabi. Hence a critical appraisal of the textbooks used in different Universities becomes imperative.

To sum up, the traditional method of teaching English language could not improve the communication skills of college students. But the communication skills of the students could be improved a lot if they were taught through communicative tasks in the English class room in engineering colleges as per the suggestive redesigned English curriculum. The hypothesis of the current research work indicates that engineering students need not only linguistic skills in English, but at the same time these learners need certain life skills linked with CLT, and ELT or ESP that need to be implemented in the English syllabus of B. Tech course of BPUT, Odisha to overcome the problems of real life situations on completion of their four year degree engineering course. This study therefore probed the fulfillment of Linguistics and ELT related goals with reference to the context of engineering and professional studies in Odisha. The current English Communication Skills curriculum of BPUT partially fulfils the objectives and communicative language needs should be addressed instantly to develop the standard of Communication skills training and application of ELT and CLT in the engineering curriculum.

References

- Bhatia, V. K. *Analyzing Genre: Language use in Professional Setting* (p.14). Longman, 1993.
- Bose K. *Teaching of English: A Modern Approach*, Doaba House Naisarak, 1988.
- Dudley-Evans, T. & Jo St John, M. *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Halliday, M .A .K. *The Struggle to Teach English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. *English for Specific Purposes: A Learner-Centered Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Munby, J. *Communicative Syllabus Design*. Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Nunan, D. *Language Teaching Methodology. A Textbook for Teachers*. Prentice Hall International, 1991.
- P'Rayan, A, *Making Students Speak, MAP Formula*, Education Express, The New Indian Express, 2007., 24 Aug. p. 2.