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Digital Path To Enhance The Grammar Learning Of L2 Learners

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Abstract

Learning a second language helps to communicate across cultures. In India, English is the second language for many who speak more than one language. As far as India is considered, English is the second language and the second language learners are referred as L2 learners. The L2 learners of today are different. They have grown up with information technology. New technological devices have entered into the teaching and learning avenues and have brought in a lot of changes. Digital technology has changed the way of communication. The learner society is imbibed with digital devices and technological advances. They tend to be digitally literate. So, the teachers have to follow the digital path to teach English language and to enhance the grammatical learning of the L2 learners. The teachers, in other words, facilitators have tuned themselves up to the expectations of the learners.

Key words: second language, L2 learners, facilitators, digitally literate, digital path, grammar learning.

Introduction

Learning a second language helps to communicate across cultures and to conduct business in lands. It helps to address customers in the language that they understand best and in which they are most comfortable. Second language is a language learned by a person after his or her native language as a resident of an area where it is in general use, especially in educational and governmental functions in a region where all or most of its speakers are non-native.

In India, English is the second language for many who speak more than one language. It is a tie that helps bind the many segments of our society together. It is also a bridge between the major countries of the world and India. English has special national status in India. Aastha Mathur, a member of the editorial board in English literature at the Philosophical society of University of Mangalore, in her book, *Principle Guide to Advance English* says,"Second language refers to any language learned in addition to a person first language "(103) .As far as India is considered, English is the second language and the second language learners are otherwise referred as L2 learners. The L2 learners are mostly first-generation learners who are economically, socially, locationally and academically challenged. In the second language learning class, the teacher is looked upon as a facilitator rather than as a transmitter of knowledge.

The L2 learners who are to be focused in this Paper are undergraduate learners who are new to the college level learning and who are limited to syllabus-bound learning. Dr. M. Subha(2019) in her article, 'Classroom Communication in Engineering and Arts at Undergraduate Level in Indian Context' talks about the L2 learners as

> They were limited to syllabus-bound learning. They are expected to step ahead into syllabus-free learning and contribute through innovation. The most important hindrance is that they are very much unfocused teenagers. . . .It becomes the responsibility of the facilitator to enable the learner to actualize his/her needs, requirements and future goals including career (6102).

Discussion

In colleges, whether it is Polytechnic or Arts and Science or Engineering or Medical College, most of the students are first-generation learners. The present first-generation learners are net-generation students who are famous for their multitasking skills; but they do not focus on anything for a long time. They have short attention span. As they have a lot of exposure to on-line, they are quick in processing information from multiple media sources. They ignore anything which is not interesting or boring or uninspiring. For these learners, the traditional method of teaching will not be an interesting or inspirational one. The learners are ready to learn through technology. (https: / www. chapman.edu.students)

The L2 learners of today are entirely different. They have grown up with information technology. Their environment, attitudes, aspirations, expectation and learning styles are different from that of the faculty who belong to the previous generation and who have traditional bringing up. So, the teachers have to adopt different strategy and have to bring in creative teaching methods to cope with the requirements of the net-generation L2 learners. K.Balamurugan(2019) in his article, 'Proficiency in English Language through Practical Experience' has quoted Logan's (1973) statement about the different abilities and disabilities of students as "students have different abilities: they have different modes of learning, they have different disabilities: they have different objectives, they have different interest in the content (qtd.).Today's students have different expectations and skills with regard to technology. John Hill, the President of the Ohio State University, says, "Today's students think about and use technology in their academic and social lives. It will help institutional leaders help their students to become successful and satisfied".(https:/ www. chapman.edu.students).

New technological gadgets have entered into the teaching and learning avenues and have brought in a lot of changes in the perspectives of the teachers and the learners. A vast variety of authentic on-line resources, motivational visual prompts, exciting videos, web-based interactivity and customizable language software, email, discussion forums. Skype, twitter, Aps, Internet Mobiles, Facebook and YouTube have become important tools to enhance competence and performance in English language teaching and learning realms (https:/www./journal.aiac.org.au.vi).

Digital technology has changed the way of communication. The learner society is now imbued with digital devices and technological advances. The Net Generation tends to be digitally literate. They stay connected with their friends and with information all days, no matter where they are .They tend to be experiential. They prefer to learn by doing rather than by being told (insiehighered.com/news/2005/02/25).

This Paper focuses on how the digital technology can be used to enhance the grammar learning of the L2 learners. Of the many technological gadgets mentioned earlier, mobile phone with net connection is the one every learner carries. Nowadays, many colleges and Universities allow their students to have mobile phones with them. Most of the students use phone stealthily when teachers take classes. Even if they are advised not to use during class hours, they do not heed to it. Here, we can adhere to the suggestion of Ignacio Estrada that if the learners are not ready to learn by the teacher's traditional way of teaching, let the teachers adopt the way by which the learners are ready to learn. The mobile which is banned in a traditional classroom is going to be the learning tool of the L2 learners to learn grammar.

Speaking about the importance of English grammar, K. Manigandan(2017) in his article, 'The Importance of English Speaking Skill and Communication Ability of the Students' insists, "If the students do not have the grammar mastery, they will not be able to produce sentences that are grammatically right"(138). The realization that they are weak in grammar make them feel embarrassed. He further adds, "Now, English is an international language. Even technology and working world use English. It is believed that the students want to be the winners in working world

competition that is getting tight day by day" (138). In order to cope with the requirements of the L2 learners, the teachers have to develop themselves professionally. While talking about the professional development of the teachers, K. Manigandan(2019) quotes Schon who suggests,

> A teacher's education and development should be based on the notion of the teacher as a learner and reflective practitioner. The more highly skilled, motivated and effective English teachers are, the more effective learning outcomes will be for students in English classroom (Schon 1987).

The teachers, in other words, facilitators have tuned themselves to the expectations of the learners. The ultimate goal of a L2 class is that there must be teaching and there must be learning. What is teaching? It is communicating or sharing or updating or upgrading. All these aspects are covered by the L2 learners when they are allowed to use their mobiles in L2 classroom. Now we are going to see how the facilitator is going to facilitate the learners in learning collective nouns. After explaining what a collective noun is by giving examples like a team of players, a galaxy of stars etc. the facilitator asks the learners to find the collective noun for dancers, musicians, thieves, lions, wolves, chickens, fish, owls etc. by using mobile. We can see how happy they are to use the mobile. They are very fast in finding out the answer and there is also a healthy competition among them to be the first one to give the answer .Their answer is:

A troupe of dancers

A band of musicians

A gang of thieves

A pride of lions

A pack of wolves

A brood of chickens

A school of fish

A parliament of owls

Here learning has taken place. The learners come to know that there are various terms to refer to a group of living beings. So far they would have been using the word 'group' for all plurals. When the same collective noun is taught in a traditional way, they would not have learnt. Not only that, they are curious to know whether few more collective nouns are there. They come to know about the collective noun of singers, students, sailors, birds, elephants, monkeys, pigs, eagles, penguins etc.

The Net Generation students are good at text messaging by making use of alphabet as abbreviation. For example, GM for Good Morning; GN for Good Night; TU for thank you; How r u? for How are you? etc. They use it in a funny way without knowing that English is a funny language. There is a category called ABC Language in English language learning in which letters of the alphabet and numbers substitute for the words that sound alike. For example, O I C stands for 'Oh, I see';' I 8 10 XS' stands for I ate eight eggs. The following exercise can be given to them:

I O U

I C U

I N V U

S I C

U R MT

I E10 10 XS

U stand B4 the 10is court

Don't T'S a Y'S man

This exercise is something they would not have heard about. The learners who use just alphabet for message will be wondering what all these are and will start thinking. All of us are aware that LSRW are the communication skills which represent Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. But Dr. S.P.Dhanavel(2009) in his book, *English Students* of *Science and Engineering* says,

> Mastery over English is essential in the current global business environment. This must drive you to acquire effective communication skills in English . . . to develop the five communication skills. The (LSRW). In this book, thinking is treated as the first and foremost communication skill. Without thought, the other four skills cannot be acquired or practiced. Therefore, think accurately, clearly and deeply to perform well in all communicative contexts (ii).

Thinking hones the other skills and the learning and communication take place simultaneously.

A good vocabulary is very essential for proficiency in any language. Vocabulary helps the learners to improve their language level and instills confidence in them to communicate in effective way. For the learners who are familiar with homonyms, synonyms and antonyms, contronyms can be taught. Contronyms are words which have two opposite meanings. There are also other names like auto antonyms, contranym and Janus word. While explaining all these terms, the facilitator can say that there is a story for Janus word. By hearing the word story, the learners will be curious to know that story. Now, the learners can be allowed to use their mobile phones to find out why the word contronym has another name as Janus word.

The learners are eager to know the story. In Roman mythology, Janus was the god of beginning, gates, time, duality, doorways, passages, and endings. . He is usually depicted as having two faces; one face looks to the future and the other to the past. In other words, one of the head was old and the other was young .Just like the heads or faces of Janus. There are a few words in English the meanings of which are contrary to each other. Such words are known as Janus-faced words or Janus words. When the facilitator gives them the liberty to use mobiles in the classroom to find answers for the given tasks, the learners are more motivated and this type of strategy makes them associate and to remember their learning for a long time.

The facilitator gives the following examples for contronyms:

Twenty people left the room.

Ten people were left in the room.

The learners should be asked to answer how the word 'left' is used in these two sentences. If they are not able to answer, it must be explained that in the first sentence, the word 'left' means 'departed from' and that in the second sentence, it means 'remaining'. They must be explained how the same word means two different status. Another example is

America fought with England against Iraq.

America fought with England.

In these sentences, the word 'with' in the first sentence states 'alongside' whereas in the second sentence it denotes 'against'. When the learners are able to understand this, they can be asked to use their mobiles to following contronyms: dust, sanction, payment, put out, wind-up, overlook, peer etc. Once the learners know the nuances, they will try to find out more such words on their own interest.

English is a very colorful and beautiful language with fascinating idioms .It is used to make their words memorable and to add life and color to the language. It allows the users to play with words and make it an interesting read. The word 'idiom' comes from the Latin 'idios' meaning 'peculiar'. For the L2 learners, the learning of idioms will be a challenging one because they will be surprised to see that there is no connection between the words that make up the idiom and the actual meaning of the expression. For example, the idiom 'kick the bucket' in the sentence, 'The greedy sons are waiting for their old father to kick the bucket soon' does not mean that the old father is going to kick the bucket like kicking a ball. 'Kick the bucket' is an idiomatic phrase which means 'to die'. The sentence means that the greedy sons are waiting for their old father to die soon so that they can enjoy the properties of their father. The teacher has to explain why or how this expression came into such a use. In olden days, several centuries ago,

people made use of buckets to commit suicide. A man who wished to hang himself, used to turn the bucket upside down, stand on it and then proceed to put the noose around his neck. Once he had completed this task, he would then kick the bucket away. The result is that he will die by hanging.

When an idiom has a story behind its usage, the learners will be more interested in learning as well as using it in their everyday usage. There is another idiom which has a story behind it. The idiom is 'many a slip between the cup and the lip'. This is a very ancient proverb originating from southwest part of Asian continent. The concept is that there is many a time gap between the occurrence of two events and anything can happen in this time gap and things can change in a fraction of second. We should never be sure of our success in our life until we have achieved it and should work for it until the last second. The story associated with this phrase is that in southwest Asia, where the King had a passion for wine. He cultivated grapes and fermented it to wine. There were many slaves working in his vineyard. One of the slaves was a very wise man who could foresee the future. The King asked him to predict the yield of grapes that year. The slave replied that there will be a good yield of grapes. But the King would not live to enjoy the benefits of the yield or to taste it. The King wanted to prove him wrong. He took many precarious measures about his health. After the yield of grapes, he fermented and made wine out of it. He then sent for that wise slave and said that he was going to drink it. The slave replied that there is many a slip between the cup and the lip. The King did not understand it and at the same time, another slave came running and said that a wild boar had entered the vineyard and was destroying the vineyard. The King thought that he would kill the boar and then would have the wine and kept the cup down. He fought with the boar and was killed in the fight Thus he died before tasting the wine which he had got from his own vineyard. So, within a short period, the slip had occurred that the wine which was poured in the cup and was ready to be sipped did not occur at all. That is how the phrase 'many a slip between the cup and the lip' came into existence. Learning this story by searching on their own will make them understand this idiom and to use it very often when they share anything among their friends or family members. They may even narrate this story to others. Once their interest is kindled, they can be asked to make sentences and to find out a story or an anecdote or a belief behind the following idioms: apple of an eye; blow one's horn, blue blood; burn the midnight oil; cloud nine; lion's share; born with a silver spoon; once in a blue moon; many a slip between the cup and the lip etc. When the learners are made to learn by giving space and freedom, the teacher is playing the role of a facilitator by properly guiding and channelizing them to use the mobile for proper use.

To promote reading and writing skills of the learners, they can be allowed to use their mobile to read crisp and concise stories, anecdote sand facts which will be motivating and inspiring in nature. Each anecdote will have a moral which will be very much applicable to life. The stories or the anecdotes will be appealing to the learners because of their brevity as the Net-Generation learners are not patient enough to read long stories or events or the life-time experiences of the writers. They prefer short time reading materials or anything that is conveyed in a brief manner.

While making the learners read short stories or anecdotes which in turn, ,helps them to improve their reading skill, the facilitator can now move on to the next step of initiating them to write a short appreciation of the stories or the anecdotes they read. This will enthuse the learners and each learner will come out with their understanding of the stories and sometimes, if they don't agree with the author, they express their own views. The stories help them to develop their writing skills well as their critical thinking and debating skill .These strategies not only make the learners learn their target language but also learn with interest, fun ,enthusiasm and entertainment.

The Net Generation learners who own a mobile cannot resist the temptation to download WhatsApp. All students are familiar with WhatsApp. WhatsApp as a tool is already existing among the students as a regular method of communication .WhatsApp is fast and maximum number of people are using WhatsApp more than any other application (https:/www.quora.com). WhatsApp is a popular, simple and versatile messaging app. It is currently used in nearly 180 countries. It is the second largest social network in the world. Students are familiar with WhatsApp. The younger generation actually prefer communication through WhatsApp than face-to-face interaction. This combination of student and teacher familiarity makes WhatsApp one of the most accessible application to use in English language learning classroom. The WhatsApp group between the teacher and the students make the students more motivated to start communicating with the teacher and also among themselves freely. It gives them an opportunity to practice writing and speaking in an environment they are familiar with (English.com).

Sometimes, the teacher has to manage a large class of 60 students. He/she can record his or her own audio messages questions and images and send to the students. As a result, the teacher and the student will have a direct channel to access each other and in this way, the learners also receive a personal support from the teacher. Sometimes, the shyer students turn be very active communication when they use WhatsApp. It also helps them in gaining confidence and to take part in the activity with more interest. WhatsApp as a tool helps the learners to develop a positive attitude towards learning (English.com).

The Net Generation learners are intended to learn by doing than by listening. They favour immediacy. They like to do all the activities through online and want to get an immediate response. They don't have the patience to write and submit and then to wait for two or three days to know the result of their activities .They are activity-oriented. Aastha Mathur says, "The activity enabled is more important to the Net Generation than the technology behind" (2.10).

The facilitator is to be well equipped. Through WhatsApp, the facilitator facilitates the learners in acquiring more skills by involving them in many activities. Name of one of the activities is **Incorrect Sentences.** In this activity, the teacher will select one or two sentences from their textbook and text it with mistakes in spelling, grammar and vocabulary and send to the students. The students will refer the textbook, do corrections wherever necessary and send it back to the teacher. When the teacher goes through their answers and responds, the students are happy in getting the evaluation report immediately .It also saves the time of the teacher when compared to the evaluation of the answer scripts. **Spelling Exercises can** also be done in this way.

JAM stands for just a minute. Just a minute presentation can also be done through WhatsApp . The facilitator can send different topics to the learners asking them to prepare and record their one minute presentation and send it to the teacher. The learners are happy to use mobile and internet to gather ideas and points for their preparation. They are excited to hear their own voice. This activity indirectly involves them in learning skimming and scanning strategy and to prepare their presentation in a coherent manner. Another activity is **Mime**. The facilitator can send a verb to them asking them to show their comprehension of the verb by recording a short video of the action. These types of activities make them multi skilled.

Another activity is **Odd-One-Out.** The facilitator has to send four words. One of the words should be different from the other three in some way. For example, in the following group of words

Summer, Winter, March, Spring

the learners will easily pick out the word 'March' .That is not enough. They should be asked to explain why March is the odd one. Another example is

Tokyo, Sydney, New York, Brazil

When the learner chooses the word 'Brazil', he/she should be able to explain that Brazil is a country whereas the other three are cities. The categorization gives them thinking practice. As Dr. S.P.Dhanavel has rightly pointed out that the thinking skill plays an important role in this activity. The facilitator can send the following exercise to the learners:

1. Alexander the Great, Columbus, Winston Churchill, George Washington
2. study, work, books, achieve
3. study, work, books, swim
4. integrity, sincere, simulated, straightforward
5. detached, adjacent, disconnect, remote
6. undertaken, pursued, attempted, neglected

Sometimes, it makes the learners disagree with the other's answers. In such a situation, they come forward to justify their answers. It makes them explain and it helps them in enhancing their argumentative or debating skills.

Suggestions

Technology undoubtedly provides a vast source of information in the field of education and especially in teaching English language. While talking about the effective ways of English language teaching through You Tube Video Clips, Dr. D. Jaisankar (2019) in his article, 'Integration of You Tube Video Clips in the Classroom for Teaching English to the L2 learners' suggests

To make English language teaching effective to L2 learners . . . to make the process of teaching happen effectively, extra infrastructure is needed. A smart classroom with ICT enabled TV, Wi-Fi enabled internet facility with laptop and student Console to monitor the process of the performance of the students are mandatory for the innovative teaching and learning' (1328).

Conclusion

There are many such creative activities which make the learners learn in a jovial spirit without knowing or undergoing the tediousness of learning. Isaac Newton, the great physicist has said," For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction". The L2 learners find the digital devices, internet and WhatsApp very interesting, advantageous and useful in learning the language. As Newton has pointed out that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, the same devices and apps can be disadvantageous. It may distract them and may tempt them to chat with their friends instead of taking part in the activities to improve their proficiency in learning. The facilitators must help the learners make effective use of the digital devices for innovative learning methods because nowadays, it is impossible to imagine life without the digital devices .They are the need-based technology which gives the learners a can-do-confidence and instills a learner-friendly approach.

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