



The mechanism and process of teaching English language in the movie “My Fair Lady”

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Abstract

The paper tries to examine the process of English language teaching for improving social prospective. It shows “how cultural and social background affects in way of learning a language”. It tries to analyze the tradition method of unsympathetic, exhaustive, intense and rigorous training of language learning process with respect to modern method of learning the language. It further tries to identify the shortcomings in the English teaching method by going by a throughout analysis of data taken from the film. The paper will strive to find out “why/How learning etiquette along with ELT is essential to fit in a social environment”.

Hypothesis

Traditional method of teaching English (or any language) is very exhausting and outdated. It is needed to make it more interesting and natural. Learning the mannerism and etiquettes of the concerned culture complement in the language learning process. Culture is embedded in language. Language is linked with our identity and it shows how we are, in this way by learning a standard language can help to improve our social position.

Introduction

In this movie (My Fair Lady) professor Higgins provides speech lessons to a flower girl, Eliza Doolittle to pass her off as a duchess. Eliza Doolittle is a poor flower girl, daughter of a sweeper and speaks Cockney version of English. She is crude, ill-mannered and disrespectful as a flower girl. Professor Higgins, a professor of phonetics who is such an expert that he can tell a person’s origin to within six miles, two miles in London and two streets at some places. He takes up the challenge of teaching standard version of English to Eliza. He teaches her the language with traditional approach and methodology. The girl has to pass through a process of rigorous and repetitive practice of speech lesson. Eliza is feed up with this but still she is ambitious. She wants to raise her standard at least to become a salesgirl in a flower-shop. The process of education seems tiresome and difficult to Eliza in the beginning. She is even disturbed by new things she has to adopt from this high class. Professor Higgins is working with Eliza as an object of his experiment. Higgins follows teacher’s centered approach. In the next six months, Eliza is also taught the ways of living and behaving like a high class lady. The play presents the transformation of the girl and how at last the girl is unable to return to her initial status nor wants to maintain herself as a high class lady.

Existing Literature

The movie is based on the play Pygmalion written by George Bernard Shaw depicting the story of a flower girl Eliza Doolittle and her transformation by the process of language learning. The story is based on a real person Henry Sweet, a famous author and phonetician. He took part in the reform movement in language teaching and contributed meaningfully in the field of phonetics. He adopted a new approach called direct method.

Research methodology

Direct method of research has been adopted to work on this assignment. The data has collected from the movie and play “Pygmalion” written by George Bernard Shaw.

Data

The data has been collected here from the movie as the primary data.

Professor Higgins tells Eliza that she must talk grammar. This is a better way to learn the language. It will also help improving the pronunciation. He first teaches and recommends her to talk about health and climate only. She is taught to present herself as a lady and greet people in a sophisticated manner. She is taught some phrases and has to repeat those lines again and again.

“The rain in the Spain stays mainly in the plain.”

The professor tells her to speak the following lines with a lit candle in front of her mouth

“In Hertford, Hertford, and Hampshire, hurricanes hardly happen.”

If the fire lifts up that means she has properly pronounced the aspirated sound and has to correct her if fire does not lift up. People speaking Cockney version of English used to drop ‘h’ sound at initial. So, Higgins recommends her not to drop ‘h’ sound at initial.

Professor Higgins advises the girl to recite Alfred Tennyson’s poem “Mariana”

“With blackest moss the flower pots
Were thickly crusted, one and all”.

He tells her to repeat the vowel a-e-i-o-u. He had a set of many instrumental devices help to reinforce the practice of speech sound.

He told her to put her tongue in front part of her mouth and repeat the following lines - cup cup cup of of
of

He also told her to speak these lines with her mouth stuffed with marble balls. She even swallowed one of the marble balls. He remains very strict and disciplined throughout the language training period. Even the teaching method is teacher centered.

Main Theme

The movie mainly concerns with the professor Henry Higgins’s teaching for the transformation of Eliza’s speech through six months of unsympathetic, intense and rigorous training. The movie shows how language learning helps one to improve one’s own prospect in the society. The language learning removes various hurdles to the ways of uplifting ourselves in the society.

The traditional method of language learning which is generally used in most of the teaching institutes is teacher – centered. It is very time taking and exhaustive for students. It requires a lot of practice, repeated recitation of various phrases and continuous practice of sounds (vowels and consonants). It is always considered better to learn language the natural way.

It is not only the language, but manners are also needed to be learned in order to fit into the class of the concerned language. Language and etiquettes are very well expressive of the culture. Our language reflects the culture, region and group to which we belong. Language plays a crucial role in defining our status in the society.

Findings and Observations

The works shows how learning a language helps to improve the social and hierarchical status of a person. Once moved to the upper status in the society by getting learned the language and mannerism of that community it is even harder to return back to the initial situation. Learning a language in traditional method seems to be time taking, boring and unsympathetic toward students. It is observed that Henry Higgins teaching moves from simpler concept to complex one. He recommends Eliza to talk grammar. According to professor Higgins when we talk in grammar it helps to learn the language easily and effectively. It becomes easy to follow the syntax rules, word formation and pronunciation pattern of the language. Eliza has to learn the perfect pronunciation by repeated practice of reciting the phrases. The Professor instruct the girl to follow the RP (Received Pronunciation) version of pronunciation. The girl gets distressed by this learning process. She even finds disturbing to follow the ways of the upper class. Professor Henry Higgins declares that the manner of speaking of an Englishman absolutely classifies him, the moment he talks he makes some other English people despise him. The professor instrumental set up insures that the girl will learn the perfect way of pronunciation and can practice for many times. He teaches him using direct method where spoken language is primary and is used as a medium of instruction in the target language. He also uses some tongue twisters. Eliza has to learn this language consciously. She puts all her efforts to learn the language by repeated practice, memorization and following the rigid rules of the language. The girl has to pass through various weird experiment of the professor like speaking in front of a lit candle and speaking some phrases with mouth full of marble balls. The way of teaching used in the story is not at all interesting and forcefully implemented on the student.

Conclusion

Movie or literature can be a better way to represent the language learning process and other things concerned to it. It very well presents the significance of learning a standard language and related benefits of it. Eliza transforms herself from flower girl to a fine lady of upper class. She is even misunderstood as a Hungarian princess. Language and mannerism both play a vital role to uplift our status in the society. There are many varieties of language and each represent different culture. Language and culture are interlinked and reflect each other. The instrumental set up accelerates and checks upon the language learning process and thus proper emphasis must be given on the proper functioning of it. Traditional method used in this story seems to be exhaustive, time taking and less efficient .There should be use of more recent technologies and methodology discovered to make this process more efficient and effective. Direct method used was successful to make Eliza learn the language but it was not that natural and easy. The teacher centered or teacher motivated approach used by Higgins made Eliza to learn the language in forceful manner. It would be better if the teaching it students centered and student motivated. Motivation, use of proper instrument and student centered approach makes the learning process smooth and effective. Language learning enhances both our social prospective and our abilities.

References

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