

Silence is not golden!

G.J Hamlin

Abstract: “Silence is golden” is an adage used to explain the fact that saying nothing is better than speaking something. But in an English language classroom this is not true. Silence is a mechanism adopted by the learners because of phobia towards the language. Learners who are silent may not have a golden future. Methods of teaching should be adopted based on the needs of the learners and time should be given to students to open their mouth and break the silence that sleeps in the language classrooms. The class should be learner-centered. Teachers must constantly work with the learners and be keen in scanning the problems of the learner. They should ensure that the material and the tasks are communicative, nonthreatening, exciting, relevant, and presented according to the favoured styles of learning of the learners whenever possible. Teachers must take action to reduce anxiety. Teachers should sharpen their teaching spirits and help students win over their fear so that they bloom into flowers of myriad colors. This paper states the factors behind the silence and also focuses on the skills that should be enhanced by breaking the silence in the language classroom.

INTRODUCTION

English is being taught in India in a confined manner that students are shrunk within the walls of the classroom. The learners are like jelly fish unable to take and use the language outside the classroom. The linguistic contexts provided are very limited thus and so the teaching of English as a second language in India has been less influential. Students are able to express themselves clearly though writing but are brought to a state of stillness when it comes to speaking. They grope for words and stammer with difficulty unable to use the appropriate expressions. They lack proficiency in English because the usage of English is very limited and there is less chance of using the language in an Indian society.

Hence, people crave for English medium schools with the notion of building and shaping their fluency in English. The demand for English medium schools is found not only in Tamil

Nadu but also in other states too. According to Nadkarni, this is because “English still continues to be the only sure key to good jobs and careers in the country today.” One who does not have good language skills cannot find any flourishing jobs even if one is highly educated (131). On the other hand, though there is a high demand for English medium schools the less demanding are the skills and proficiency of the teachers. It is indeed questionable if teachers of English provide the linguistic competency to learners. Teachers of English face lots of problems in teaching English as a subject with about 40 minutes per day. The system is set in a way where the students are given an authorizing certificate at the end of the learning programme, even if the students do not acquire any knowledgeable skills of language. It is a well known fact that language is meant

for interchanging thoughts and feelings. Language is the medium that helps to communicate knowledge and makes the mind high-flown and creative. But the question of the hour is, if the English language taught in classrooms is being used by students to communicate, to control their thoughts and direct their action. Frankly, each teacher of English should admit that he/she does not help students to climb the ladder of English. This is because teachers forget the facts that: all is well that begins well; and brevity is the soul of wit. Thus they leave the learners with the question to be or not to be and then end the life of each student as passive receivers of pre-digested content. Hence, it must be accepted that the responsibility of teaching English is with the teachers. It is in relation to these facts, the paper focuses on how to break the voice of the teacher and also the silence of the students.

All's Well that Begins Well

Children grasp their mother tongue painlessly and effectively in a normal developing environment. This is because the first language is acquired unconsciously, with no particular attention but like a conjurer doing a trick with ease. The simple fact behind this is that the child starts listening to the language even when it is in the womb. This process is a happy one and children learn the mother tongue naturally only because the learning process begins well. The foundation of acquiring a mother tongue is well laid and cemented strongly that all can speak it out efficiently. But learners stammer and fear the hammered situation when he/she has to speak something in English. It is evident that only because the process of acquiring a second language has not begun well, the rest is not well, and the learners feel as if they are in a well! English is taught and learnt only with the sole purpose of communication with fluency. Students should be guided in expressing thoughts coherently, and voicing out in public. Hence the teacher of English should begin to like a noisy interactive class. The teacher should change as *change is the law of nature*. If he/she doesn't change and be still that would result in an unproductive still class.

Brevity is the Soul of Wit

A good teacher should be able to express thoughts in words as brief as possible. Thus she/he can spare the rest of the gained time along with the students and help them to speak. The non-directive teaching method advocated by Carl Rogers should be followed in the classroom situation. Here the teacher quits and locks up the traditional teaching methods, instead choosing to be the driving force who focuses on student feelings and needs. Thus the teacher turns to be more tolerant and does not expect sudden and immediate response from the learners.

Revised Manuscript Received on May 29, 2019.

Dr. G.J Hamlin, Department of English, Women's Christian College, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India

Accordingly Rogers points out that “the hard part of figuring out how to teach is learning when to keep your mouth closed, which is most of the time” (295). Hence a teacher should pave way to open the mouth of the learners and close his/her mouth most of the time. According to Corder “the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques”

(20). Silence of the teacher should be the English teacher’s medicine to cure the illness of fear among his/her student. The teacher should break the routine of speaking too much and get adapted to brevity. That would reap success out of a bright and brilliant teacher, by sowing the seeds of interaction.

To Be or not to Be

The fear of foreign language called xenoglossophobia, would rise the thought among the learners whether to speak in English or not to speak in English. In an Indian class the students are scared to speak in English but are happy and comfortable to write in English. The faulty teaching methods where the central focus is on examinations and where speaking is given least importance is the root cause of this problem. Priority is given to test performance and not to the skill part of the language. Learners are sure that the spoken aspect of language will not be tested. That’s why learners are silent even if they are given time to speak. Examinations are of paramount importance in India. The future of an individual lies in the score he/she would get in his/her terminal examinations. Therefore, teaching is done for examinations. It is only memory that is tested during these examinations. Students are prepared to reconstruct and paraphrase answers to expected questions. This method of teaching eventually does not result in real learning, because of the lack of language skills.

Interactive teaching and learning in an English class can be fun always, provided the students take part in the activities. Even though most of the students would be shy and noncooperative, proper motivation will help them to overcome their barrier. Also, negative factors that are hidden within an individual and that which worries him emotionally would impede communication. Hence, sociological and psychological factors like background of the family and performance anxiety, which are indeed obstacles, would also bring in this thought of ‘to speak or not to speak’. Students of illiterate parents neither get encouragement, nor care and guidance, for speaking English, from their parents. Thus, these students are deprived of showing, exposing or presenting language skills due to cultural and socio-economical hindrance. A feeling of nervousness and frustration is also one of the reasons for a learner to be quiet without responding to the questions in a class. Apart from this, there are some students who would like to expose themselves. But they would be alienated or would be mocked and putdown while speaking English. Such students should be motivated so that they develop a positive approach towards language learning, overcoming their sociological and psychological hurdles. Hence, the learners from the lower strata in a society should be encouraged that they become competent enough to use the language. According to Shenk, “Every human being can grow smarter if the environment demands it. Therefore, if

we demand more of our own students, they will respond to the demand and develop more” (qtd. in Keegan 7). Hence, teachers should restructure the activities and give enough practice to students to improve the performance of the learners. Accordingly, teachers should take measures to understand the students from different backgrounds, different interests and different personalities. A teacher can lend a helping hand to his/her students by understanding their linguistic impediments. Thus, through ceaseless and repeated efforts learners can be shaped and motivated to become strong speakers of English. And here are a few don’ts for the English teachers who don’t help students grow: **Don’t criticize**

Most students do not open the mouth because they are scared of criticism from the teacher or from the peer group. The students are simply passive because of the fear instilled in them because of criticism in the childhood days. Students should be helped to overcome the feeling of criticism and should be helped to fulfill their potential. Hence teachers should never criticize the learners and a sense of criticism or ill-feeling (towards wrong answers) should not be reflected in their faces too.

DON’T BE THE SAME EVERYDAY

One should break the routine so that the students would eagerly wait for their teacher simply because she/he is out of ordinary. As smile increases the face value, the teacher should enter the class with a smile. The feelings of the learners must be respected by the teachers that the figure of a scary English teacher is erased from the minds of the learners.

DON’T ALWAYS PREACH BUT REACH

A teacher, instead of continuous preaching in the classrooms, should reach the minds of the learners. A teacher should not expect the students to be still till the end of the period. Activities that can be done in groups should be given to the class that they move around and finally perform it in front of the class. This will bring in self-confidence especially in students who are shy to face the class. Students should be appreciated even if they don’t speak for the first time and should be encouraged for facing the class, by winning over their fear. This will definitely make them come out of the shyness and communicate the next time they come in front of the class.

DON’T GET DISAPPOINTED

One need not go with full of expectations to a language classroom as expectations will always lead to disappointments. The students may find it difficult if all of a sudden a teacher tries not to teach but to be different, unlike other teachers. Hence, they may not cooperate or may hesitate to involve in activities. Even if this is the condition that prevails, one should not get disappointed and try to build a rapport with the students. The teacher should still be enthusiastic and work harder till the goal of breaking the silence is achieved.



Thus an English teacher should need a well-rounded concept of the teaching–learning process. It is the teachers who should shape the language environment accordingly. Teachers should play an important role in building the communicative competency among their students. Speech should be golden and silence should be silver in an English language classroom. To bring in the truth of this adage, the teachers of English should join hands and be silent in the language classrooms and thus begin a new future just because all’s well that begins well!

REFERENCES

1. Agnihotri, R.K., and A.L. Khanna, eds. *Second Language Acquisition: Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of English in India*. New Delhi: Sage, 1994. Print. Research in Applied Linguistics 1.
2. Corder. S.P. “The Significance of Learner’s Errors.” *Error Analysis – Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*. Ed. Jack C. Richards. London: London P, 1974. 20-29. Print.
3. Keegan, Phil. “Deliberate Practice and High Expectations.” *Modern English Teacher* 22. 2 (2013): 5-8. Print.
4. Nadkarni, M.V. “English in Mother Tongue Medium Education.” Agnihotri and Khanna 130-
5. 141.
6. Rogers, Carl. “Nondirective Teaching: The Learner at the Center.” *Models of Teaching*. 5th ed. New Delhi: Prentice, 2014. 292-301. Print.