Aspects of English Language learning in Tripura

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Abstract
Tripura is a hilly state. The community of this state is mostly tribes and Bengalese. The official language is English and Bengali. The Government vernacular medium schools and English medium schools support the use of the mother tongue in classroom. In vernacular medium schools it is obvious that all the subjects are written in Bengali except the subject English. But in English class also the mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction which is a hindrance to the students in the way of learning to speak and write English fluently. The paper focuses on the methods and procedures of teaching English to those whose mother tongue is not English.

Keywords: Pronunciation, response, accuracy, fluency

Introduction
The English language came to India with the English i.e. the Britishers. Since the English had come here for the purpose of trade, in the beginning, they focused their attention only on trade and did not bother to encourage the teaching of English, but with them had come some missionaries who started schools where English was taught as one of the subjects. For better administration the British rulers needed some English knowing natives to assist them. Along with this there also arose the demand amongst the Indian intellectuals for introducing liberal education through English in India. This is how English language first found its way to India. Researchers in English language teaching worldwide are busy in finding out more effective ways of teaching English to the non-natives whether as a second or foreign language. It is in this context that one has to pay a focused attention to an all-round linguistic development of learners of English. In the present article this attention is focused on the picture of English education in Tripura.

Many a times the teaching of English language falls short of fulfilling its goals. Even after years of English teaching, the learners do not gain the confidence of using language in and outside the class. Their output in the language is limited to writing answers of literature by memorizing it and producing grammatically incorrect and isolated sentences. Real communication involves ideas, emotions, feelings, appropriateness and adaptability. The conventional English class hardly gives the learners an opportunity to use language in this manner and develop fluency in it. Thus the main purpose of the language teaching course i.e. developing skills in communication, is unfortunately neglected.

A major issue that continues to challenge language teachers in Tripura especially the government vernacular medium and English medium schools in urban and rural areas is how to ensure that learners develop accuracy as well as fluency in their use of the language. Apart from a one year course in teacher training for school teachers, no formal teacher training is given to new recruits or practicing teachers. There are orientation courses and refresher courses for teachers in general but no course deals with ELT. The examination system is more achievement oriented rather than performance oriented, leading to an emphasis on grades and positions rather than issues of learning and fluency. The primary goal of the institutions run by the government mainly primary, secondary and high schools is to provide education at affordable and subsidized expense to the public. ELT teaching cannot be placed at the widest end for the basic reason that the teachers there do not have much access to latest research and materials for economic reason as well as geographic. But if we compare the private institutions the picture there is brighter. These institutions undertake to make learners proficient English users within a stipulated period of time, of course by charging a higher amount of fee. They are equipped with the latest materials like interactive, multimedia software.

Very often communication in the classroom is confined to answering questions or to completing a task with a partner. Group learning in this case will be very helpful for the learners. They can make their own group and share their task with one another by communicating in the target language under the supervision of a teacher. The environment of the language classroom should be lively and fun oriented basically for the children. When they start to acquire the second language, it is natural that mother tongue will interfere in the acquisition of the second language. It is this factor that makes learners uncomfortable in a language classroom. The teachers have to make every possible measures so that the learners can overcome the fear and do not hesitate to communicate freely with the teacher.

Pronunciation plays a very important role in the language classroom and grammar plays a key role in the processing of the language. The vernacular medium schools almost neglect these two aspects. The grammar books of these schools need to be modified so that students get interest in learning English as a second language. In this case one thing should be noted i.e., there should be adequate pictures in grammar books. For example if the first chapter of a grammar book is “sen-
tence” then the book should have some structures accompanied by some pictures about how the learner at first learns to make sentence. The teachers should be aware of the need for such necessary modifications of the books. Instead of teaching language in a relaxed and comfortable environment the teacher most of the time just mentions the rules of grammar and gives the learners some task to do in the class. As a result the learners hesitate to discuss the problems with the teacher and this problem lingers even when they reach at a mature stage. The output that the teachers get from them is incorrect sentence construction and unnecessary spelling mistakes even when they reach a higher level. Not only that they even fail to distinguish between words according to the context.

The problems that the students of vernacular medium schools are facing need to be checked seriously. New methodologies, modification of books- all these things play a key role in English language teaching. A special teacher training course that deals with ELT should be introduced in Tripura as early as possible. The conditions of the schools of rural areas in Tripura are deteriorating. The students lack the ability to communicate in the target language and when they grow up they gradually lose interest in the subject. It is often observed that students fail to write an application. The reason behind this is improper learning technique from the basic level. A college student especially from a vernacular medium background often finds it difficult to speak in English. When they are asked about it the answer that they give is they are from vernacular medium and find it difficult to communicate in the target language.

Correct pronunciation and grammar are the principle areas in which a learner should focus. The schools of Tripura especially govt. schools do not highlight the problems that the learners face in this area. These two areas basically deal with communication. First of all the learner should be psychologically prepared for the acquisition of the language. Sometimes it is observed that there is a negative feeling among the learners about the foreign languages. These happen because of their emotional attachment with their native languages. At first the learners should be mentally prepared for the learning of foreign language. It is not necessary that people should take their child to English medium schools to make their child proficient in the target language. In fact it is not always possible for the parents to take their child to private institutions. In this case the govt. schools need to be taken proper care so that the students do not have the feeling that they are from Bengali medium background and that’s why they cannot communicate in the target language. It is true that in private institutions each and every subject are taught in English and this makes the students more efficient in the target language. But Bengali medium schools can also make their students able to communicate freely by following some procedures technically.

The teacher instead of dictating notes in the class can give tasks to the students to do it on their own. Apart from the subjects that are prescribed in the syllabus the teacher should give some unseen topics to the learners. The role of the teacher is to motivate and facilitate the students in a language classroom. The students can discuss the topics by making groups among them and then write it on their own. The teacher should check the topics and show the faults that the learners’ make. The language classroom should not only dealt with particular syllabus. There is a method in ELT called content based approach. In this approach the teacher uses different contexts to learn language. As for example the teacher can teach language with the help of a geography book. By giving them different tasks related with the subject the teacher can see the progress of the learner. Language teachers are in a good position to observe patterns of language learning and to appreciate intuitively the characteristics of poor and good learners and to surmise why some students’ progress and others run into difficulties.

Conclusion
Thus we can conclude that good learning involves first of all an active planning strategy. In view of the sheer magnitude of the language learning task the good language learner will select goals and sub-goals, recognize stages and developmental sequences, and actively participate in the learning process. In short the English language teaching in Tripura needs a modified and perfectly programmed planning so that the learners feel confident to communicate in the target language. In this way the conditions can be improved in Tripura.