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LANGUAGE PAVES THE WAY TO WRITING COMPETENCIES

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ABSTRACT

Man cannot live isolated. To live happily where he can share his joys and sorrows, communication is necessary. For this communication he needs to know a language. There are many languages but, since English is a worldwide language it is important to be able to express oneself well through this language. Language is a means of communication. It is because of our communication skills that we as humans are able to make ourselves understood. Languages are based on regions, geographical locations and culture. English is one of the languages spoken worldwide and that is why one needs to learn to speak and write correctly in English. Writing is a skill, which can be mastered by anyone, provided one takes the initiative and shows interest. Further real life situations such as higher education, social interactions, and career and entrepreneurship development necessitate a rich vocabulary; and writing will enable them to accomplish this and achieve their dreams.

In this article the following aspects of the English language and its relation to writing are stressed upon:

Language - its Central place in education; the Significance of language; the Impact of the English language; English in the Indian context; Importance of writing; Expertise in writing; Acquiring the art of writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning another language is like becoming another person.

Haruki Murakami

Language is a means of communication. It is because of our communication skills that we as humans are able to make ourselves understood. Languages are based on regions, geographical locations and culture. There are around 950 languages in the world. English is one of the languages spoken worldwide and that is why one needs to learn to speak and write correctly in English.

According to a few linguists, language is nothing but 'habit formation.' In their view 'the more one is exposed to the use of language, the better one learns.' With good understanding and communication skills in English, we can travel around the globe. Many individuals think that English is rather a complicated language. However with its proper knowledge and usage it can be mastered. Government organizations, companies, offices, and other workplaces, employ qualified personnel proficient in English. Everyone wants their staff not only to be well educated but good speakers, writers and readers of English.

In today's World Wide Web, the Internet has about more than 90% of websites in English. And if one browses some sites in other languages, there is always an option to translate them into English. Further real life situations such as higher education, social interactions, career and entrepreneurship development necessitate a rich vocabulary; and writing will enable them to accomplish this and achieve their dreams.

The main objective of any language teacher is to make the learner realize the need for spontaneous and creative use of language. Language is an inevitable aspect of human existence and advancement. In fact, man would not have existed in the absence of language. Neither would one have tasted the luscious fruit of civilization and advancement. Language enables one to think and to express, to record and to get all that one wants. [Sharma, 2007, p. 17]

Position of Language in Education

"Think like a wise man but communicate in the language of the people."

- William Butler Yeats.

Language definitely has a very important role in the life of an individual as it is seen in our day to day life. Language has a central place in education, especially in a multilingual country like ours. India has and is still assimilating various languages, cultural traditions and religious beliefs. Multiplicity of

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languages has been a potential source of cultural enrichment for our country.

India is a multilingual nation and language plays a very significant role. Language as a medium and language as a subject not only exposes the learner to all types of structures and varied points of view, but also perceives a single concept, and creates an ability to explore the varied fields of knowledge. The general educational achievement and under achievement is dependent on language or lack of it. Educationists today are least concerned about language in their structure of education in the country.

Many Commissions have examined language in education, but language has never received the treatment it deserves. The Indian Education Commission [1964-66] in its Report mentioned how the Central Advisory Board of Education [CABE] of 1956 examined the complex problem of the teaching of languages in relation to the needs of the country and the requirements of the Constitution. The Three Language Formula was proposed by the CABE but the impelling considerations were more political and social than educational. [Bose, 1993, p. 4]

Indian languages have been discussed in the Constituent Assemblies and in the Indian Parliament; but what was discussed in reality was whether English or Hindi should be the National Official Language.

Language in the social context of work or varied programme of institutions gives a clear knowledge of the nature and scope for social interaction in human life. It depicts how participants enact their roles and manipulate language to show their authority; thus language is coordinated with action and is used for different communicative purposes. Hence, language interaction and communication in human life is very necessary not only among us but also with other nations and the world at large.

Language is the medium of communication and instruction. Languages are to be learnt not only for the sake of instruction; but also a means of social transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another. It is an important aspect of the human growth. It reflects the cultural development of a nation and it is a tool for social progress. [Lakshmi, 1989, p. 163]

In order to promote this communication, the need for the study of the English language has risen because English has come to be recognized today as the language of the world. It has rightly been stated, "Man's greatest invention is language. It is man's finest tool, strongest weapon, deepest resource, largest hope." [Lavin, Brown, Monahan, Myers, Pierce and Velte. 1965, p. iv]

Significance of Language

Language, like every human being who uses it, is complicated. But it is fascinating because it is an essential part of what makes us human. In studying our language we are really studying ourselves. [McCabe, Jacobs, Rosenbaum and Caldwell. 1968, p. 214]

Language is the best form of human expression. This can be either in the written or the spoken form. It is an important aspect of human growth. To quote our former Prime Minister, the late Smt. Indira Gandhi, "By language I do not mean words

or the grammar, but I mean an attitude which understands the peoples' point of view."

Language skills help one to interact realistically. Language is a social institution. It is based on history, tradition and the culture of its people. Hence every language is unique and man cannot survive without it. It is a specific outlet of expression and is essential because language skills help one to communicate effectively. Language plays a vital role in the process of sharing thoughts, ideas, as well as feelings. It is the only bridge between the past, present and the future because knowledge is preserved, stored and passed on to generations through language.

Hence language serves two purposes-

- As an instrument of communication;
- As a vehicle of thought.

Communication is a basic human right and serves as a means through which we control our existence. It helps in building relationships and making choices. It is the way of expressing one's feelings, thoughts and emotions, thereby making sense of the world around us. Through communication, messages are sent, read and understood between individuals or groups. In the case of children the process of communication helps them to participate in school activities, thereby bringing significant change in their skills, knowledge and attitudes. Hence one can say that human knowledge is a well developed mode of communication. Without language, communication would not be possible. Language is essential and English takes priority as it is universally used and is also well understood in the world.

The Impact of English as a Universal Language

Though the British left India by the end of the first half of the 20th century, the English language is still dominant. India is not the only country where English is given equal importance next to the National Language. This language which originated in a very small island – England, is now a language of communication throughout the world. The need for English as a language of 'opportunity' and 'development' has been pointed out by several educationists and the use of English in India has now become a 'reality.' The English language is the prime need of our country.

Through this universal language, we have been able to get access to the different countries of the world, and so English is the medium of instruction in many schools. It is a language rich in literature and if under sentimental urges we should give up English, we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge. English is the only means of preventing us from being isolated from the world and we would act unwisely if we allowed ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of the dark curtain of ignorance. Our students who are undergoing training at schools which admit them either to a university or to a vocation, must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasury of knowledge.

We cannot deny the fact that English occupies an esteemed place among the numerous languages of the world, and hence special emphasis needs to be laid on the study of English since world knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India needs to keep pace with the West and must also make her own contribution to it. For this

purpose, the study of English deserves to be strengthened and the student needs to be well educated, trained and refined in the spoken as well as written language.

In the last 500 years, English language, which was formerly spoken by 5-6 million people living within the confines of British Isles, has expanded to become the everyday speech of more than 300 million.

The English language has achieved the status of mother tongue for majority of the inhabitants of the U.S.A and has become the most important second language of around 50 million in Southern Asia and a number of new nations in Africa. English thus enjoys the status of a global language.

English in the Indian Context

The English language has always been a matter of debate as to whether it should be the official language of the country or not. According to several nationalists, English seems to be a big hurdle in the development of other languages in our country. Though we have to admit that English is a sad heritage of our past imperialist masters, it is now the window to project our rich culture.

In the earlier stages, the English language had opened up many new opportunities to project Indians on international platforms. During the freedom struggle, a few leaders gave importance to the mother tongue. But there were others who because of their foresight laid more emphasis on the learning of English and the relative importance of the spoken as well as written language in the world. Therefore, the need to be fluent in speaking as well as in writing English is greatly felt.

The Importance of Writing and Varied Techniques of Writing

Writing is a very important skill. It has received universal acceptance. Writing is a graphic representation of the spoken form. We live in an age in which the written word is of primary importance in the field of education, business and cultural affairs. One who is able to write in a clear coherent manner has the hallmark of a literate man. An individual, who has the ability to write clearly, concisely and accurately, will make a mark in society. Writing occupies a prominent place in all spheres of life, especially in the educational system. It is here that one has to develop the skill of writing. Writing skills and especially varied techniques of writing can be developed through English Composition, as expressed in the three paragraphs below by [Sebranek \[1996, p. 491\]](#).

Writing to Understand and Remember

It's really that simple. When one writes to learn, one is not trying to show how well one can write or how much one already knows about a topic; one is simply writing to gain knowledge. When one writes to learn, one writes freely and is becoming skilled in a particular trait. If one perseveres in this process, it just happens naturally.

Writing Naturally

It is said, be yourself. It never sounds natural, for one thing. Sometimes it even sounds dumb or boring. One need not worry because gradually writing will seem natural and pleasing if one keeps one's thoughts above all others.

The writer is never alone. Writing is one - half of a conversation with a reader one invents. Talk to one's "silent partner." Clustering and free writing can help one to write in one's true "voice."

Knowing the Subject

Be honest; don't try to fake it. Be personally involved in one's writing. Be at ease; don't rush or nervously bounce around. Some educators now believe that writing to learn is the best way to truly learn anything, beginning from mathematics to music. Once one commits oneself to writing, this means to learn something, one will benefit in a number of important ways, such as, one will – develop a greater interest in learning, improve one's ability to understand and become a better, more creative thinker, approach classes with a more positive attitude and gain a lifelong learning technique. If one feels the benefits of writing contribute to one's success in life, one could agree with Bergen Evans, as he has aptly said, "Words are one of our chief means of adjusting to all the situations of life. The better control we have over words, the more successful our adjustment is likely to be."

It's very interesting to know that on the 13th February, 2009; 'The Times of India' won one of the world's leading media awards for simple and effective use of the English language. Britain's Plain English Campaign International Media Award 2008 was given to TOI for demonstrating a positive attitude in raising the awareness of plain English within its press coverage throughout India.

Marie Clair of the Campaign said, "We are really pleased to award," 'The Times of India', because India is seen as a leader in commerce and manufacturing. The advent of call centres has put focus on the need for use of English that is understood easily. The media award is a great channel for our campaign because media has a huge influence on the public. [Times of India, Feb13th, 2009] Here one can see the importance of writing and how it affects one's life. If one has to be creative and wishes to be accepted in society, one should be able to rise to the expectations of society. Hence the need to have flair in writing.

Expertise in Writing

A writer wants to be understood. He desires to lead his readers to the gist of his topic by the most sure, simple and direct means that he can find. And readers too, wish to understand and want to arrive at the meaning at the earliest. Hence the characteristic trait of a good writer is his ability to write in a lucid and consistent manner; yet a good writer will never sacrifice meaning to brevity. True economy requires that the writer attends to his meaning; if his meaning requires many words he will use many words. The writer must weigh his idea before he begins to write and give that idea not only the right words but also just the right number of words it needs.

Hemingway was a master at economy of statement: he used language that mirrored his meaning; his words and sentences were no more or less than they needed to be for his particular purpose.

Economy of statement is not achieved merely by removing a word here and there or by simplifying sentences. Economy is,

on the contrary, a high achievement in writing that comes from the writer's full knowledge of what he is doing.

Only when a writer understands the effect he wants to create can he match his style to his meaning and achieve the quality of understatement. In order to strengthen one's ability to use the appropriate language, it should appeal directly to the senses of the reader. Try to let the reader see, touch, taste and smell the experience that one writes about.

Authentic emotions, well-considered opinions and thoughts are an important part of most effective writing. Yet even the most real feelings the most sincerely held convictions do not, in themselves, insure successful written communication. The writer must first come to terms with his own mood; he must organize and define his feelings before he begins to write. And, as he writes, he must constantly remind himself of the "factual" content through which he establishes a mood and on which he lets his feelings play. The skilful writer uses his powers of observation to create clear and vivid images. The natural flow of writing, the shifts from the abstract to the concrete – all these skills of sentence variety, stimulates and develops the main idea. In the hands of a master craftsman like George Orwell, sentence variety is not merely change for the sake of change – it develops naturally from the nature of his ideas. [Lavin *et al.* 1965, pp. 8-33]

One of the best ways to assess the excellence of thought in writing is to scrutinize the writer's word choices. Writing which consists of a majority of general and abstract words is likely to be confused as dull reading; writing which shows a balance between general and specific words is likely to produce clear and interesting reading. The reader sharpens his understanding of general ideas on the precise edges of specific words.

Furthermore, accurate and direct language reveals definite qualities in the writer. It reveals that the writer himself perceives clearly and exactly what he wants to say. It also reveals the writer's attempt to choose words honestly to make them faithful representations of the ideas and images in his mind. The precise and careful writer tries to choose words that mirror, without distorting, the reality in his mind. Sometimes persons believe that the way to improve their writing is to add a moderate sprinkling of big words into their compositions. Honest language is that which is true to the writer's ideas and images and conveys them truthfully to the reader. Clear writing demands honest thinking and honest thinking can create clear writing. By making the picture or the idea come alive through specific examples in precise words, the writer not only improves his own understanding but also enables his readers to participate in that understanding.

Reading is a means to writing and if one wants to write efficiently one should be adept in certain skills. This can best be learned through the observation and analysis of the skills that one encounters in reading. The means to written language enables one to consider writing, not as a task to be performed on assignment for a grade, but as a work to be engaged in for a purpose that is real. The underlying principle of language, spoken or written, is mainly to convey one's experiences- ideas, impressions, and feelings- from one person to another. Transfer in writing differs from transfer in speech. There is thus definiteness in writing that does not normally exist in

speech. When we seek to transfer meaning by writing, we must rely once and once only on the words we choose, the way we put them together, various additional graphic signs such as punctuation, paragraph indentions, titles and other headings, and the total appearance of the writing on the page.

This quality of finality in writing requires us always to be intensely conscious of the effect our words will have on our readers. Every time we write we must accept in fact we cannot escape- complete responsibility for what we say and how we say it. The problem is that many individuals feel writing is beyond one's capacity and however much one does it, all seems to be in vain. Therefore they imagine writing to be a nightmare. [Hedge, 1994, pp. 3-6 and iv-v]

Why Writing is an Anguish

When Harold Rosen told his class of advanced students about an article he had been reading called 'Anguish as a Second Language', which dealt with the problems of writing in a second language, they smiled at the pun but agreed with the sentiment. He thinks many students and teachers would recognize, if ruefully, the characterization of writing periods as times of sighing, pencil chewing and foot shuffling agony. This experience will be with any language that a student or learner faces. Why is it that for a large number of English language students writing seems to pose great problems? Possibly, for the same reasons that large number of adult native speakers never achieve a high level of expressiveness in writing their first language. It is partly to do with the nature of writing itself. He explains further: "The writer is a lonely figure. He writes with one hand tied behind his back, being robbed of gesture. He is robbed too of the tone of his voice and the aid of clues the environment provides. He is condemned to a monologue. There is no one to help out, to fill the silences, put words in his mouth or make encouraging noise." As Rosen points out, writing is detached from the wide range of expressive possibilities in speech. A writer is unable to exploit all the devices available to a speaker: gesture, body movement, facial expression, pitch and tone of voice, stress and hesitation. A speaker can backtrack or clarify or revise ideas as listeners question or disagree. A writer has to compensate for all these disadvantages. [Hedge, 1994, p. introduction]

Acquiring the Art of Writing

Although a writer has a lot of disadvantages, Hull has proved in his Research on Writing that a person can acquire the art of writing through proper training. The author says, "In the last 20 years, writing research and instruction have been turned on their heads. We have learnt to think differently about the nature of writing and the abilities of students and how we can best teach them to write. The rallying point of these revolutions has been the concept of writing as an activity, a process with an identifiable set of behaviours and cognitions. To think of writing as an activity, something that one does is more common-sensical than surprising. But to think of writing as an activity that can be studied, analyzed, and understood, that can, in short, be demystified- this is revolutionary, for it turns writing into something that can be acquired rather than something one either possesses or lacks." [Hull, 1989, pp. 104-128]

Writing is a skill, which can be mastered by anyone, provided one takes the initiative and shows interest. This seems to be

valid as, Joyce Carol Oates puts it, "As soon as you connect with your true subject, you will write." [Sebranek *et al.* 1996, no. 011].

Man cannot live isolated. To live happily where he can share his joys and sorrows, communication is necessary. For this communication he needs to know a language. There are many languages but, since English is a worldwide language it is important to be able to express oneself well through this language. Not just oral communication but written communication is also very important. Schools teach English either as a second language or as the medium of instruction and opportunities are given for learning to speak as well as write.

CONCLUSION

This article entails that academic writing has a goal which can be fulfilled by educationists. Since language, communication and writing play an important role in the life of an individual. It is necessary that individuals need to be trained in these skills at all levels. It is thus important to keep in mind that a teacher is the one person who can help learners to assess their full competence in writing skills. Educators and all those in the field of education should work on this area of the learners. Let us remember the educator and the taught are the pivotal points to the future.

To conclude I would like to quote Edward Bulwer- Lytton, "Beneath the rule of men entirely great, the pen is mightier than the sword."

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