

ENGLISH PHOBIA : PROBLEMS AND POINTERS

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ABSTRACT

English has turned to be the 'breath' of survival. It has become vital for communication being designated as the 'global language' and further serves as the major source for professional and cultural correspondence. Therefore, devoid of creed, colour and sex English is widely used by the cross section of society at all spheres. However, this demand for English and the compulsion to learn it has evoked a sense of fear among some section of the people. It becomes essential to get rid of this 'phobia' at school level since it is the spot where the seed of 'English phobia' is sown. Especially the students from rustic background are worst hit with this 'English Phobia'. This paper ventures to focus on the ways to improve English at primary level through creative teaching and writing which can help to reduce 'English phobia' to a certain extent.

English has immensely developed and widely spread its wing after colonization. David Crystal in his *English as a Global Language* focuses on various reasons for the special position occupied by English in the contemporary era. He answers many questions regarding the need for a global language and also marks the danger of this widely spread language that has marked the death of various native languages. He nevertheless examines the outbreak of language revolution in another work *The Language Revolution*.

As Crystal says, despite being the language of the colonizer, English like a vacuum cleaner has sucked the words from various languages and has taken different forms as ‘New Englishes’ to thrive and flourish. So, English blending with native languages, serves for the official correspondence within the multilingual country and further extends its support for the international correspondence. Being the only source available for global correspondence, the position of English has undergone a drastic change. This boon or bane condition of the colonizers in various nations has created the need to learn English at any rate. Therefore, English is now offered in the form of packages according to the requirement of an individual profession. But apart from these packages, David Crystal provides a positive solution for the possibility of easily learning this global language which is foreign to a Native. He opines,

If a global language is taught early enough, from the time that children begin their full-time education, and if it is maintained continuously and resourced well, the kind of linguistic competence which emerges in due course is a real and powerful bilingualism, indistinguishable from that found in any speaker who has encountered the language since birth.
(*English as a Global Language* 14)

So, are we promoting the English language in our country following the method as stated by David Crystal becomes the next question. An utmost importance towards the primary kids in teaching English language effectively can benefit them but the present state of English in rustic schools shows a poor result. This language along with its utmost popularity has instigated fear among some section of the people. In general, society considers Maths and English on par that leads either to fame or destruction of an individual. This instigated fear for the particular subject can be labelled as a kind of ‘phobia’. Therefore, the major focus of the paper will be on the ways to improve English in schools through creative teaching and writing which can help to reduce this phobia to a certain extent.

A creative teaching of English and an attempt at creative writing in English can reduce the intensity of fear for English even at the primary level. Nevertheless, since the gap between the spoken and the written form has narrowed down, it is easy to impart the language to the beginners. English is no more watched with close lenses for grammar but is widely used to develop it as an effective communication skill. So, children can be trained for the communication purpose rather than mechanically forcing them to study the subject.

The process of teaching English through creative skill becomes indispensable to erase the strong fear instigated in the minds of students especially those from a rustic background. The word ‘English’ threatens them. Grammar and the pronunciation turns out to be a major trouble for these students. Though grammar at the present stage is paid the least attention with more concentration on communication purpose, still the very name English reminds the label of grammar along with it. Therefore, various play methods are currently introduced to encourage the teaching of English in a sportive way like role play, developing stories and solving puzzles.

To capture the attention of students, visual aids such as computer software, videos and audio records are also used.

Recently, teaching English through literature has also become a fashionable and result-oriented trend. More books keep flooding the market providing solutions through literature. It can be an effective method to teach English creatively. For example, one can use the method of I. A. Richards' style of analyzing poems of an unknown author. When a poem is given to the students without the name of the author, the imagination is kindled in due course of deciphering the meaning. The interpretation of a poem followed by analyzes will evoke both the creative thinking and the need in search of proper vocabularies to express thoughts in the right mode. Even the process of writing will instigate a sense of comfort.

Students may hesitate to talk if they have poor English knowledge whereas they will express their thoughts at ease while writing. The written statement can be analyzed later and suggestions can be given to the students in person. It will improve the student-teacher relationship and at the same time a student may not be subjected to embarrassment in front of fellow classmates. It is better to enhance the writing skill initially and then focus on the speaking skill since writing provides a comfortable platform for students rather than speaking.

The next step to inculcate an effective writing style can be through the creative teaching with personal examples and entertainment programs like T.V shows and cinema. For instance, to teach a proper sequence in writing a paragraph, a teacher can make the best use of the movie. Instead of rather telling that a paragraph should simply follow the spatial order while describing a thing in a detailed manner and then narrow down to the minute details (i.e. from the less important to more important), one can explain through the introduction scene of a movie.

In a movie, the director follows a spatial technique where the first scene is shot at a larger scope, giving the hint to the place where the story will take its shape or may be the place is already associated with some flashback to reveal later. For instance, to hint the place Chennai, the director discloses the spot through capturing the glimpse of central station, central jail or any other landmark of Chennai. Following the disclosure of place, either the hero or heroine is introduced. At times, to break the convention even the comedian is introduced but then they are not introduced as they are. The director uses the camera to zero down on the person. Hint is given either through exhibiting their features part by part or they are introduced through their well-known mannerism and dialogues.

By giving this as an instance, the students can be made to realize the need of following a spatial order in writing which can instigate the curiosity of the readers to read further. Like the proper spatial order that is required in a movie to introduce the person or the story, a proper spatial order in writing paragraphs will lead to an effective communication to the readers. Therefore, rather mechanically explaining the need for a spatial order in effective writing, it is better to quote certain examples from such entertainment section. This kind of teaching will help the students to keep things in memory and at the same time their attention may not get dispersed. A teacher who is highly oriented with academic conscience will teach the spatial order with the following example,

If that was Isabel Gilbert seated by the table in that poorly furnished room, report had failed to do her charms justice. She rested her head upon one hand. Extreme fatigue was signified in every line of her figure; and upon her countenance a deep perplexity was written. Her eyes were grey-irised. Their whites were singularly clear and brilliant, concealed above the irises

by heavy horizontal lids, and showy a snowy line below them. Such eyes denote great nobility, vigour and, if you can conceive of it, a most generous selfishness. (*Ramasamy* 35)

No doubt, this paragraph is highly interesting and the teacher could explain that how the speaker “first looks at the room, then at the woman, her appearance, her posture, her face and finally at her eyes. The arrangement here is from the less important to the more important” (*Ramasamy*). But considering the vocabularies used and the length of the paragraph, the difficulty for a beginner who considers English to be the most difficult subject is evident.

Along with the style of reconstruction and deconstruction of a literary text, the other form of texts like paintings, videos and audios can be used by the teacher in the class. Anything that has the ability to communicate can be used as a text. It can be a traffic signal or an advertisement broadcast in the T.V. So, the creative teaching is possible at various levels. A student can be asked to watch a video in mute. After two or three observations, again the video can be played for which the description can be given by the student. When he/she tries to comment on the video tape like a compere’ for a cricket show, naturally the previous two or three observations would have given him/her a space to think and rethink for the vocabulary to present the muted video as they wished for. Once again both the creative process and the speaking skill in English can be enhanced through this technique.

The best form of literature that can be widely used in learning English is poetry. Both in the process of creative teaching and writing, poems can play a major role. Though superficially the form of poetry seems to be very complicated still it is advantageous for various reasons. Due to time restriction in a classroom, a short poem can be taken for analysis and even in the creative process of writing, just a three or four- line poem is enough to induce both the imagination and the eagerness to learn new words. Moreover, poetry on a large scale is widely open to interpretation. One can interpret as he/she wishes and this can pave the way to kindle interest in learning new words especially to express their imagination.

While inculcating the interest to learn English among students, the teacher is active whereas in the process of creative writing, students take the major role in creative thinking. The act of creative writing is not easy as consuming a slice of pizza or a scoop of ice cream, but it is like a hen hatching the eggs with great care and proper duration. It needs long hours of brooding before penning down thoughts. However, Writing has a soothing effect. The subject to write arises in the mind within a fraction of a second but the instinct to write and the venture to provide a shape to the thoughts takes a long time. So, the students can be actively involved in writing poetry. Writing poetry becomes the most enjoyable act for the students when no restrictions are laid on their writing. More essentially when a student writes a poem, he/she does not need to bother about grammar. Half of the students feel relaxed when they get rid of grammar. So, naturally the fear for the language can be reduced at the first level.

The process of creative writing involves profound thinking. Creative writing does not mean only for the students but to all age groups who would like to initiate the interest in English. As we relish the taste of melting chocolate in the mouth before it completely melts out, so the bliss of writing is experienced. The balm gives us relief after some time but the process of writing yields the benefit in due course of action. So, writing poems yields two way benefits and as Philip Sidney stated that the function of poetry is to ‘teach and delight’. Creatively writing a poem also performs this function.

When the subject is chosen for writing a poem, the building of words begins in our mind. Like the technical designer who will design the machine for convenience and purpose, the choice of subject is also made with convenience and purpose. As stated early regarding the choice of subject, it becomes possible for the writer to grasp the subject in a minute but the problem arises at how to write than what to write.

The following situation which led to the birth of a new poem helps to explain the process of conceiving an idea and the process of writing a poem. In a conversation through mail with a friend regarding the thesis, every mail ended with a note of thanks. I thanked him for the notes he gave and he thanked me for the trivial favour which I did for him. All of a sudden in the last mail he talked about the insufficiency and redundancy of language, especially with reference to the usage of the word 'Thanks'. That note on 'Thanks' rang a bell in mind and pulled the string to write a poem on 'Thanks'. In a fraction of a second the word 'Thanks' became noteworthy. The idea conceived in the mind to write about this only word which is often used to express the sense of gratitude.

But the act of writing was not initiated immediately. The notion remained untouched in the mind. The very next day, a thank you note to another professor, instigated to attempt on the word 'Thanks' in the form of a poem. The flow of imagination becomes necessary to shape a poem. Decisions on the style whether the poem is to be subjective or objective and tone of the poem is then arrived at. Following the decision on style, attempts to imagine what if the word 'Thanks' speaks for itself and pleads to the people takes over and the poem assumes its form.

The initial decision to make 'Thanks' to speak in an authoritative tone gets changed due to the general perception of considering 'Thanks' as the most courteous word. Therefore, 'Thanks' from being written in a strenuous and sturdy tone changed into a simple and humble tone. Once the tone of the poem is decided, it leads to the interrogation of what the plea of thanks could be. The idea of considering that thanks must have gone tired due to its excessive usage sprung up when imagination overpowers. So, the requirement of thanks could be for one more word which could replace its position. After all, 'Thanks' could take rest with a replacing word. The feel for 'Thanks' at that state gains momentum and it got a new shape as follow:

Thanks – I plea for.....

I am t-h-a-n-k-s
The six letter word;
Everybody uses me
Sometimes with sense
At times no (n) sense.

I am tired of my
excessive usage;
exhausted more through
Heart, tongue and hands
Why can't I have an alternative?

Love has her sister
Affection
but not me
give me a break...

I am very formal
used for formalities
absent in midst of
people with no formalities
Yet my plea is informal.

To make the language
More adept
To avoid redundancy
To get away my aloofness
Do give me a sister word
To replace in my absence
Or more in need of want.

The editing process after writing forms the funniest part of creative writing. It induces to think about rewriting. Even before the editing, labelling the poem gives great pleasure like giving a name to a child. As we select name for kids in random you can't label a poem with numerology or horoscope directions. So, usually we read the poem twice or thrice to label it. Sometimes, a label carries the expectation of the poem. For this poem, since it is the first person narration with a combination of plea, the title- "Thanks-I plea for....." seems to be apt. So, after reading the poem we would come to know for what exactly thank pleads. The title should stir the interest of the audience to read the poem. As I stated early, labelling is followed by editing. The final version of this poem 'Thanks' evolved after revising the poem twice. The elimination of some of the words which seemed to be ridiculous and redundant and some other corrections of adding and deleting, the poem can be read aloud to have a feel. Stumbling over some words and the sign of a monotonous tone leads to the necessity of manipulating words that can induce the search for new words. One can capture the feel of a poem through three dimensions:

1. Reading the poem as you feel and wish it to be.
2. Reading the poem with the shoes of third person.
3. Asking for the feedback from an outsider after reading the poem.

So, a poem can be finalized at the end only after the above three process.

Corrections are carried out according to the feedback. Nevertheless pay little attention to rhyme scheme. The content of the poem becomes more vital and therefore words are chosen carefully to accommodate the emotions. This baby step to write poetry just for a few lines to express one's own imagination will ensure the learning of new words to express thoughts in a perfect way. The curiosity to learn and express more can be slowly directed to write in the form of a sentence. The writing process will give more confidence to venture into speaking. The need for communication no doubt can be fine tuned through the process of writing poems. The act of writing poetry is always connected with the elite group but approaching poetry from this perspective will turn highly productive. It is not necessary that one should write poetry aspiring for name and fame to be a great poet. Writing poem can be used as a technique to achieve the basic skill in reading and writing English.

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