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Teaching and Learning of English in the Context of Use of Mother Tongue

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Introduction:

The present paper explores the use of mother tongue in teaching and learning of English. Keeping in mind that it is advisable to know how much of use of mother tongue affects on learning and teaching of English. It also suggests some of the strategies to facilitate teaching and learning.

Mother tongue is defined as the language which a group of people considered to inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually becomes their natural instrument of thoughts and communications. Mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. It is, therefore, generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the mother tongue of the child is of utmost importance.

With the advent of the British, the teaching of English came to India. But they did not concentrate their attention on the teaching of English from the very beginning. They had come as traders; and hence their first attention was focused on trade. But with them had come missionaries, who started schools, where English was taught as one of the subjects. English is a second language in India.

Opinion about the use of the mother-tongue in the teaching of English differs. The supporters of the Direct Method forbid the use of the mother-tongue in the teaching of English. Some teachers say that the use of mother tongue is an obstacle to the learning of English. Others regard the coordination of the teaching of the mother-tongue and English as one of the cardinal principles of the teaching method. Hence, the cooperation of the mother-tongue should be sought in the teaching of English.

The use of mother-tongue in the teaching of English has been justified by many educationists. This, however, doesn't mean that we should make an extreme use of the mother-tongue and translate each and every word, phrase and sentence into the mother-tongue, nor should we totally avoid the use of mother-tongue. The best thing for us to do is to follow the middle path.

Occasions for the use of Mother-Tongue:

Use of oral work:

If a speaker talks freely and fluently in his own language he can soon learn to speak well and easily in another language. This means that oral expression in English very greatly depends upon oral expression in the mother tongue. Hence, it is necessary that before the students are taught English they should have thorough grounding in oral conversation in the mother-tongue. Before they are asked to relate a story in English they must be able to relate it in the mother-tongue.

Use of Pronunciation:

Clear pronunciation in English is possible only when the student's pronunciation in the mother-tongue is clear. As English is a foreign language, its sounds are quite peculiar for an Indian child. For example, the sound of 'Z' in 'zero' is not the same as of ' ' in Hindi. English has a very complex system of vowels, particularly the diphthongs which are not

sounds in any Indian language. Hence, before giving pronunciation drill of certain words a comparison and contrast of the articulation and intonation of English sounds with those of vernacular sounds will help the students to become exact.

Use in Reading:

Students, who have been taught to read in their mother-tongue well, can quickly learn to read English after one or two years of oral English. Hence, reading attention, reading posture and reading habits are to be developed in them through reading exercises in the mother tongue.

Use in Grammar:

The grammar learnt by a student in the mother-tongue forms the background of the English grammar. For example, if he/she has a good knowledge of *sarvanam* (pronoun) and the words used as such, their person and their function he will very easily learn their English equivalents. This makes the work of the English teacher very easy. In case, he finds that some complexities of English grammar are still left, he can explain them in the mother-tongue. He can also present a comparison and contrast between the grammatical form in English and those in mother-tongue.

Use in Translation:

The mother-tongue has a very important place in translation. It gives the students ample practice in expressing in English the nearest obtainable equivalents presented in the mother-tongue.

In the past, the prevalence of grammar–translation method led to the extraordinary phenomenon: students were unable to speak fluently after having studied the language for a long time. This led to the idea that all use of the mother-tongue in the language classroom should be avoided. (Harmer, 2001:131). Translation has been thought as uncommunicative, boring, pointless, difficult and irrelevant. Recently, there has been a revival of interest to translation due to the shift of its emphasis–to using a mother tongue as a resource for the promotion of language learning. Translation develops three qualities essential to all language learning: accuracy, clarity and flexibility (Ross, 2000:61). Therefore, the use of mother-tongue and **translation** can serve as a tool for improving language skills.

Mother-tongue and translation in English Language Teaching:

It is necessary to discriminate between the teaching of translation as a vocational skill and the use of the mother tongue in the teaching situation as an aid to language learning. The need for some translation in language learning is usually supported by non-native teachers. Native teachers of English argue that foreign language learning needs as much exposure to the L2 as possible during precious classroom time, and any usage of the L1 or translation is a waste of time. Translation is sometimes referred to as the fifth language skill alongside the other four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Translation holds a special importance at an intermediate and advanced level. Mother-tongue has potentially both positive and negative consequences; it may serve social and cognitive functions (Carless, 2008:331). Use of mother tongue relates to learner identity.

In conclusion, we can say that the mother-tongue is of great use, in teaching each and every aspect of English. Whenever the teacher feels that there is danger of misunderstanding or misinterpretation or wastage of time and energy, he should not hesitate to use the mother-tongue. Hence, the use of mother-tongue should be encouraged. The teacher, however, should make a very judicious use of it and only when there is a real need for it. He would do well to bear in mind that, 'the strength of the mother tongue will mean strength in English'. It means all the learners customarily rely on their mother-tongue in learning English. The students' generated reading comprehension exercises, summary writing, story writing activities help to

raise learners' awareness of differences between English and the mother tongue and facilitate linguistic development.

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