UNIT 1 NATURE, NEED AND OBJECTIVES

Structure

1.1 Introduction
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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The nature of teaching-learning of any language in the world will always remain deeply connected to the ‘need’/motivations of the learners to acquire that language. For example,

i) A Bengali child in Hyderabad is likely to pick up Telegu because that is the language spoken by his peers. The child’s need to communicate with his peers motivates him to learn the language.

ii) A child who has Hindi as her mother tongue (MT) may learn English because it is a compulsory part of her school curriculum.

iii) A street vendor, selling handicrafts on the pavement may pick up enough English to be able to sell his wares to foreign tourists.

In this unit we will attempt to examine the link between the needs/motivations of learning English in our country and its influence on the objectives and nature of English language teaching in India in formal settings such as schools, colleges and other English language teaching institutes.

Language is a means of discovery: discovery of the self and of the world. The human urge to share with others or express one’s thoughts and desires drives the learning of a language.

Talking about the ‘functions’ of language, F. Newmeyer (1983) says:

Obviously, communication is a function of language – perhaps, according to some plausible but still indiscernible scale, the most important function. But communication does not appear to be the only function of language. Language is used for thought, for problem solving, for play, for dreaming, for displays of group solidarity, for deception, for certain specialized literary modes such as represented speech... and possibly to fulfill an instinctive need for symbolic behaviour...

As language teachers, it is important for us to remember the natural functions of language. In order to let this functionality remain intact in formal language learning situations, opportunities to ‘communicate’ or ‘use’ the language must form the core of any language learning programme. It is thus that teaching of English in India is becoming increasingly ‘skill’ based in its attempts to make the learner acquire the four language skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) to enable the learner to become an effective and autonomous communicator.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

This unit will enable you to:

- assess the status of English language both within the formal educational set up (in your state/city) as well as outside the classroom;
1.3 THE STATUS AND NATURE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA

According to the constitution of India, English is a second language. But what is it in fact?

Activity A

Think about how English is used in your state. Does it have the status of a second language or a foreign language?

Educators define a ‘foreign’ language as one which is studied for the insight it affords into the life of another nation, and a ‘second’ language, as one which is studied for more utilitarian purposes, because of its direct value to the speaker or writer as a citizen of his own country. This is by no means an absolute distinction (Pride, 1971, 22-23)

To answer the above question you should think about the purposes for which you and the people you know use English.

1. What language is most commonly used in offices?
2. What percentage of people (approximately) read newspapers (a) in English and (b) in the regional language/MT (Mother tongue)?
3. Which language do people generally use in restaurants, at railway booking counters, when shopping, etc.?
4. When people meet people from other states do they use English/Hindi/some other language?
5. What is the language you find used most often in advertisements and hoardings in (a) towns and (b) in cities?
6. What are some of the most popular T.V. programmes? Which language(s) are they in? Has the Cable T.V. become popular among people? If yes, what are the most popular channels? If people watch programmes in English, do they have any difficulty in understanding the language?
7. To what extent does the man in the street use and understand English? For example, if you asked an autorickshaw driver or a shopkeeper in your town a question in English would he be able to understand it easily/with difficulty/not at all? Would he be able to answer in English? Generally/occasionally/not at all?

Answers to these questions will help you to build up a picture of what the status of English is in your state, its importance, and normally, then the extent to which its development is possible.

The question of the status of English in India is important if you want to think about your teaching situations ‘effectively’ because your language teaching situation cannot be separated from the language learning environment outside the classroom. We need to consider the language environment if we are desirous of making a change in the classroom.

Discussion

Be realistic about the general English learning environment faced by your learners, and then you will find your teaching of English will be much more effective. You should think of using all your resources, and supplementing these resources, if necessary.

For example, you may make effective use of newspaper clippings, magazine advertisements, official forms (rail reservation form, money order form, telegram form), billboard messages to motivate the learners to use English in authentic/real life situations.

The nature of English language teaching in India is an outcome of the status of English within the formal learning curriculum as well as its presence in the real world outside. Though English does not have a uniform status in various parts of our country the following are some of the common ‘roles’ or functional capacities in which ‘English’ is present in India:
English is the associate official language in our country. It is taught as a part of school curriculum for 6 to 12 years, either as a subject or both as a subject and a medium of instruction.

In context of a global society and especially since the opening of the Indian markets to foreign investment, competence in the use of English has become the passport not only to higher educational opportunities but also to better economic gains. As a library language it yields considerable presence in the arena of higher education. It is thus that in school the emphasis has shifted from learning the content of the English lessons to trying to acquire the language skills which will enable the learners to 'use' the language.

1.3.1 The Status of English within the Formal Instruction System

In Activity A, you examined the status of English in your state; now let us examine the status of English language which is set within a formal instruction system. However, before examining a formal language learning situation, let us attempt to look at an informal language learning situation. An informal language learning situation is one when language is not taught or learnt for grammar but for communication. For example, a young child learns to use language functionally, i.e., to get things done or to express himself/herself. This expression could be transactional or self-expressive in nature. Through play and chat, which constitute easy, spontaneous use of language, the child develops language skills. Thus by using language, the child develops language skills, i.e., he/she learns to speak, read, listen, write effectively and independently.

The formal instructional system is, however, very different. Here we are referring to organized learning on a large scale, with the instructional system providing certification at the end of a learning programme.

We must examine carefully the differences in the teaching and learning of languages in formal and informal situations. Early language learning involves learning of the MT (mother tongue) or L1 (first language). Learning English for most Indians is learning a second language (L2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Language Learning</th>
<th>Formal Language Learning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Language taught</td>
<td>MT, L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>From birth onwards, in informal situations of language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use of Language</td>
<td>Functional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Treatment of errors</td>
<td>Parents repeat, encourage and correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Exposure</td>
<td>Oral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L2, L3, etc. from class I (English medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From class III, IV, V,VI (vernacular language medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More formal language descriptions, formal grammar learnt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher may comment, focus on errors or sometimes reprimand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Predominantly in the written form</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

However, these 'characteristics' of formal and informal language learning situations should not be seen as exclusive to each other. Modern language learning pedagogy, in fact, attempts to organise second language learning situations as closely as possible to its language acquisition so that the second language is learnt as 'naturally' as possible and enables the learner to become an independent user of it.
Activity B

What is the status of English in your state in the formal language situations? Answer some of the questions below and see if you can get a picture.

a) What is the pass mark in your school/college? Is English medium compulsory at college?
b) Are other subjects taught in English? If not, in which class does English instruction begin?
c) What does the language exam test, competence of language skills (reading, speaking, writing, listening) or content of the language text (If so, in what percentage)?
d) What do you teach while teaching a language, say English? Grammar or the use of language or something else?
e) Do you let your students make errors? How do you deal with their errors?
f) What percentage of your learners show interest in using English within/outside the classroom?
g) What percentage of students in your class have access to English in the speech communities of their home?

Discussion

Answer these questions one by one. These answers will give you a picture about the needs and objectives of teaching English within your classroom. If you gear your teaching to the actual needs of your learners, they would be far more motivated to learn the language. A need assessment of your learners may be undertaken by finding out, where and when your learners use/would like to ‘use’ English. Questionnaire I given at the end of this unit can help you undertake this activity. This kind of assessment will not only help you utilize all possible resources to facilitate language learning but also enable you to pitch your classroom activities at the appropriate level, keeping in mind the English language competence of your learners and the role that it plays in their lives.

It has been very often seen that grammar teaching or even knowing grammar rules need not lead to correct language use. This is so because an average Indian learner does not get enough exposure to English to internalise its rules as a native speaker would.

In this kind of language learning environment where exposure to the target language is very limited (Acquisition-poor environment) the language class needs to provide opportunities to the learners to use/experiment with the language. The learners should not be spoon-fed answers to exercises at the end of each lesson. They should be allowed to struggle to express themselves, so that they learn to use the language. They should be encouraged to speak to each other and the teacher in English so that the sense of hesitation and anxiety that they feel in using the language gradually disappears. Each and every error of the learner need not be corrected. The habit of peer or self correction should be inculcated so that the learners can monitor and help each other correct their use of English.

Check Your Progress

Notes:  a) Write your answers in the space given below.
       b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. Does the language teacher need to assess the need(s) of the language learners to learn the language? Give reasons for your answer.

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THE NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES OF TEACHING ENGLISH

In a vast and heterogeneous society like ours, the needs of the learners for learning English will not be uniform.

Teachers should be able to identify the requirements of various groups of students related to the English language precisely and try to provide for each such group the pattern of courses which will be relevant to the needs of the learners (Verma, 1994, 98-99).

Assessment of the English language needs of the learners when translated into the goals/objectives of the language programme would make the language learning situation sensitive and responsive to the differences in the speech communities of the learners. This would facilitate learning by ensuring sustained learner interest and a high degree of motivation.

Despite the heterogeneity of English language learning situations, the English learning environments may be classified into two categories:

1. **Acquisition-rich environments** are language learning environments where besides the normal language learning in the classroom, the learner has access to English in the speech community of his/her home and immediate neighbourhood especially peer group.

For example, for a young child in an urban, educated upper middle class home, the preferred language of communication at home with parents and siblings may be English. In this environment, the chances that the child acquires fluent command over English are far higher because the learning of English is not restricted to the classroom/school. Opportunities for viewing various TV programmes and movies in English are also a part of acquisition-rich environments.

This, however, is an exception and not the normal situation in the context of English language learning in India.

2. **Acquisition-poor environments** are those language learning environments where exposure to the target language (here English) is limited to the classroom and the language is absent in the speech community of the learner’s home or his immediate neighbourhood especially peer group. Such an environment opportunities of learning the language are severely limited and occur only in the formal educational setting. For example, for a child from a lower middle class background in our country, exposure to English is restricted to the English textbook. This makes the learning of the language far more difficult. Majority of English learning situations in India are of this kind. In these situations, the teacher needs to be specially sensitive to the motivation/need of the learners for learning the language so that he/she may adapt the materials and organise the learning environment to fulfill the learners’ needs.

Cite an example, for a learner enrolled in an English language programme at the university. Motivation for learning English will be much higher if the course concentrates on the teaching of study skills, reading, comprehension techniques, note-making, writing term-papers, etc., because these are the skills that a university graduate requires.

In a country like ours where the learners differ considerably with reference to their needs for learning English as well as their competence in the language, an omnibus (i.e. broad-based inclusive) curriculum cannot be relevant. There is a need not only to develop different English learning modules keeping in mind the vast variety of learner needs, but also to train the language teacher to adapt the given material. The teacher should also attempt to use the socio-cultural milieu of the learner as a storehouse of materials and utilise it optimally for language learning.

For example, to practice adjectives the teacher may ask the learners to gather familiar objects around their houses bring them to class and describe them.

Learners may be taught how to give direction by drawing up a map from school to their homes and telling their peers how to get there.

Familiar and simple cooking recipes may be utilized to develop the skill of giving instructions.
1.4.1 Why do we Teach English?

Activity C: Let us examine our teaching priorities.

1. Do we teach English so that students can pass examinations based upon the content of the textbook(s)?
2. Do we view English as a medium for mastering language skills?

Discussion

In case you say that your objective is (1) you are addressing only short-term goals and therefore being unfair to the learners. Though the immediate need of passing the exams is being fulfilled, the learner is not being trained to become an autonomous user of language. Objective (2) helps the learners acquire the skills of the language and any meaningful language programme must prepare the learners to use the language as a medium for communication and not as a content based subject. Also, fulfillment of objective (2) automatically ensures success at objective (1), i.e. if the learners develop language skills they are sure to succeed in the examinations.

In our country too, we can see a shift from content-based teaching to skill-based teaching in schools where interactive learning materials are in use. These materials focus on developing various language skills in English. However, these efforts need to be stepped-up. They should also be extended to lower level, i.e. the elementary, and the primary.

1.4.2 How do we Teach English?

Language skills can be developed in the learners by providing them opportunities for active processing and using the language on their own. The focus must be on the learner – how often and how well he/she can use English. The teacher needs to function as an organizer and a facilitator in the classroom and provide the learners opportunities for language use. For example:

i) For a group of mother tongue medium beginner level learners the teacher may point out and name in English the various objects in the environment. She may later ask the learner to name a few objects in English.

ii) The teacher may demonstrate how to greet others and introduce oneself and ask each of the learners to do this one by one. In this way the teacher can help the learners develop oral skills in an authentic communicative context.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.
   b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

2. What is the link between need for learning a language and its teaching objectives. Explain with an example.

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

The nature of English language teaching in India is an outcome of the status of English within the formal learning curriculum as well as its presence and role in the real world outside. The following are some of the common functional capacities in which English is present in India:

- as an associate official language;
- as a library language;
Language teaching programmes must be oriented towards catering to the needs of the learners so that in an acquisition-poor environment, the learning of English is facilitated by the intrinsic motivation and interest of the learners. Any language programme must aim at making the learner an autonomous and efficient user of the language. The teacher can facilitate this process by providing opportunities for active language-use to the learners.

1.6 KEY WORDS

**foreign language**: a foreign language is one which is studied for the insight it affords into the life of another nation (Pride, 1971).

**second language**: a second language is a language other than one's first language. It is learnt for utilitarian reasons because of its direct value to the speaker or writer as a citizen of his own country (Pride, 1971).

**acquisition-poor environment**: a language learning environment where access to the language is restricted to the classroom, thus making acquisition of a specific language difficult.

**acquisition-rich environment**: a language learning environment, where besides formal language learning in the classroom, the learner has access to the target language in the speech community of his home, making acquisition easier.

**content-based teaching**: a language learning programme where the learners are taught and examined on the content of the textbook(s).

**skill-based teaching**: a language learning programme where the learners are given opportunity to develop their language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and examined in terms of their competence in these skills.

1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The language teacher not only needs to assess the need of the language learners to learn the language but also needs to evaluate their existing competence in the target language in order to be able to organize the language learning activities and materials to fulfill these needs. If these needs are catered to, the learners will be extremely motivated to learn the language.

2. The objectives of a language learning programme should emerge out of the need(s) to learn that language. For example, a senior secondary learner from a vernacular medium school, who plans to enrol in an English medium bachelor's degree programme in Commerce will need to be familiar with the English terms used in Commerce. He/she will also need to be trained to acquire study skills like note-making, reading comprehension techniques, etc.

If a learner needs to learn English only because it is a compulsory part of the school curriculum and if the evaluation pattern in a school concentrates primarily on writing and reading, the teaching of these skills will gain importance over the other two (especially speaking). So the learner may not make sustained effort to speak the language.

**Questionnaires - 1**

NAME: ..............................................................

AGE: ..............................................................

CLASS: ...........................................................

ADDRESS: ......................................................

MOTHER'S PROFESSION: ..................................

FATHER'S PROFESSION: .................................
### A. When do you use English?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In the Classroom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Many Times</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>When talking to friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>When talking to the teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>During the English period</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>When talking to your brother or sister</td>
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<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>When talking to friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>When talking to guests</td>
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<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>When talking to your mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>When talking to your father</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f)</td>
<td>When talking to neighbours</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>When asking for information at the Bank or Post Office, etc.</td>
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### B. Can you read, speak or write any other language besides Hindi and English?

Answer: .................................................................

### C. Which language do you use the most?

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>At home</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii)</td>
<td>In school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii)</td>
<td>With friends</td>
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### D. Which books and magazines do you read?

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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>In Hindi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii)</td>
<td>In English</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### E. Which newspaper(s) do you read?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
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</table>

### F. Which T.V. programmes do you watch?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>In Hindi</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ii)</td>
<td>In English</td>
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</table>
1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

