

Report & Remarks of the National Secretary Presented at ELTAI's 14th International and 50th Golden Jubilee Annual Conference Held at Amity University, Noida (UP), New Delhi

K Elango

National Secretary, ELTAI

ELTAI staunchly believes in what Albert Einstein has said: “**Be a Voice, Not an Echo.**”

But, paradoxically, we have so far been merely echoing western ELT theories and practices. The west commended Grammar-Translation Method and we religiously abided by it. Then, they dictated the Direct Method, then the Structural Approach and now the Communicative Approach; we obediently toed their lines unquestioningly. All the doctoral dissertations and ELT specialists in our country quote Stephen Krashen's concepts such as *affective filter*, *learning vs. acquisition*, *comprehensible input* and *i+1*, as if his words are the final word in respect of the teaching-learning of English in India. They also advocated ESP for professionals and we faithfully followed their footsteps. Our only achievement is that we have unabashedly canonized the western ELT principles and practices.

The ultimate result of this linguistic and pedagogical servitude is there for all of us to see – our learners at all levels are unable to string even a few words together. Dreams of millions are shattered and they feel maimed and paralyzed; we have dismally failed in our profession. This warrants citing

of a parallel – whenever there is an economic crisis, even if it is marginal, the Sensex and Nifty stumble, the industrialists lash out and the economists create a furore, the government responds with a stimulus package and the path of recovery is meticulously planned and rolled out. But when there is an acute teaching-learning crisis, linguistic deprivation and intellectual stagnation, except for some passing references somewhere, the issue sadly remains unnoticed and ultimately fades into oblivion. The crisis intensifies every passing year but largely remains unattended to, or at best gets glossed over with some cosmetic changes either in the curriculum or in the evaluation pattern.

However, the Golden Jubilee Conference is set to mark a departure – although the secretary's report is only expected to detail the usual activities of the previous year and the occasion of the golden jubilee demands the formal recounting of the milestones of the last 50 years, it attempts to signpost a new pathway for the next 50 years. Considering the ground realities of today, which are not the same as they were in 1857 or 1947, when perhaps some of the prescribed methods worked, but as we are

almost into the third decade of the 21st century we need to evolve new approaches, methods, strategies, techniques or whatever, for optimizing the effectiveness of our classroom dynamics. We are told that English is a second language in our country, but the fact is that it has become a native language for some, remains a second language for many and continues to haunt a vast majority of Indians as a 'difficult-to-learn' foreign language. And, whether you believe it or not, at least for a billion Indians it is babble and a non-issue, as there is no need whatsoever for them to learn it – there are thousands of jobs which require little or no English.

It is said India is not a country but a continent. Diversity and multiplicity are the norms. When there are 1.5 million schools, 42,000 colleges and 900 universities with 250 million students (there are only 4 countries globally which have the population of more than 250 million), it is preposterous to adopt any single approach to teach English at all levels and in all places, especially when language exposure and learners' cognitive capability vary from primary to secondary to tertiary levels, and there is a clear distinction between urban, semi-urban and rural learners. Therefore, there is a paramount need to think of approaching English from multiple angles and acting along different trajectories.

Currently, there is a global shift from monolingualism to plurilingualism; according to an estimate, only 40% of the world population is monolingual, whereas 43% are bilingual, 13% trilingual, 3%

multilingual, and 1% polyglots. Cities that had a predominantly native English population in the past are turning to be multilingual. In London, for instance, people speak 300 languages and in New York more than 800 languages. Neuroscientists have proven that multilingual brains function better than monolingual ones. Another interesting fact relates to the vastly multilingual profile of India. Devy, in his *People's Survey of India*, mentions that there are 780 different languages spoken in India with 86 scripts and the cause of concern is that in the last 50 years India has lost 250 languages. It is a known fact that with the death of a language there is a death of a culture thousands of years old. So, the frightening fact points to the urgency and the need to preserve our languages and cultures. If we don't, then who will? But no attempt has been made to arrest the trend and the painful reality of the death of indigenous languages.

Contrarily, English medium institutions have become viral all over the country and parents, in their desire to provide a prosperous life to their wards, get them admitted to these institutions. This, in turn, has led to certain tricky and undesirable consequences. As English is sloppily taught or 'mistaught' in those schools, learning the language remains almost a non-starter and learners have lost contact with their mother tongue too, except for the ability to use it for social purposes and as a result their competence in their own language has become questionable. Ultimately, learners are calibanized, or left languageless, which

consequently affects their cognitive capability to learn their core subjects as well.

All these demand Indianized and contemporaneous theories and practices to make teaching-learning of English meaningful and relevant. Luckily for us, a system is in place: it allows us 12 years and more than 2000 instructional hours for English even in non-English-medium institutions. The question we need to raise is: are we using these many hours merely to teach functional English - "Hello, Good morning. How are you? I am fine. Thank you," the latest expression being *Howdy?* Let us not forget that our talented young learners are beseeching us to enable them to:

- comprehend all the subjects in English;
- prepare themselves for higher education;
- get future-ready and job-ready globally;
- emigrate to other countries;
- excel in jobs they take up themselves;
- develop their thinking and problem-solving skills; and
- be creative, innovative and, ultimately, to excel in their lives.

If we are unable to meet their demands and aspirations, it would only be a colossal waste of human and national resources.

So, we could think of drifting away from the conventional practice of teaching languages separately as L1, L2 or L3 and aim at teaching several languages simultaneously.

In many contexts worldwide, it is the native teachers who teach English and other languages. With well established and acknowledged concepts such as code mixing, code switching, and trans-languaging, we could evolve new models of teaching such that learners acquire required levels of proficiency in different languages simultaneously or whatever language or languages they choose to learn. In the emerging global context, it is no more 'English only' or 'English mainly' but 'English also'.

Fortunately, our learners, unlike their counterparts in affluent societies, are willing learners. They still have fire in their bellies and spark in their eyes, although the modern maladies of getting glued to the three screens – mobile, computer and TV – and reluctance to read any printed text stand in their way. And, for teachers, the cause for concern now is that Translaty (a device which can translate more than 40 languages in real time) is seen in the hands of globe trotters and MOOCs, Apps and other online and offline sources have become ubiquitous, what Nietzsche declared in the 19th century about God (i.e., "God is dead") should not come true of the teacher with the neo-Nietzschean declaration – "Teacher is dead" or, still worse, "The classroom is dead".

The teaching and learning of languages in a formal way may turn out to be a thing of the past; the teacher may not even be human. The juggernaut of the web has opened up limitless possibilities and we have to welcome it and liberate ELT by

contemporizing it. Indianized ELT has to be a living domain, sensitive to multiple variables, most importantly, teachers' competence and the ever-changing learners' requirements in the 21st century. Let us reverse the trend of importing to exporting our insights, intuitions and experiences globally and to that effect ELTAI is planning to initiate a research wing.

I would like to end with the formal recounting of the three significant things that happened during the past one year:

First, ELTAI has become an author to a series of textbooks for grades 1 to 8 published by the Cambridge University Press. To the extent I know of, this is the first time a professional association has become an author for a leading international publisher. We would like to thank the CUP whole-heartedly for the unique opportunity. Secondly, ELTAI in association with Success Manthra, a Chennai-based organization, conducted an online National Word Champion contest for the students of ninth to twelfth standards with the sole objective of popularizing English language learning,

along the lines of Spelling Bee; the response from schools across the country was very encouraging. In the coming years, it will become a major English event in our country. Lastly, Ms. Uma Raman, a materials producer and an educational consultant, has instituted an endowment of Rs. 2 lakh rupees to sponsor two school teachers every year to attend ELTAI conference, wherever it is held and Shri. Sankaranaryanan Seetharaman, an industrialist, has established an endowment of Rs. 5 lakhs to enable ELTAI members to attend international conferences of our MOU partner associations.

With these developments, I am sure, ELTAI will emerge as a truly major movement across the country to spread English literacy but with the subaltern voice whispering into our ears "not at the cost of our mother tongue."

Let me conclude by saying, referring to the theme of the conference:

Learning English is my right.

Teaching English in an indigenous way is our right.

Some useful web tools for speaking skills

Podcasting Tools

Podomatic (<http://www.podomatic.com>)

Spreaker (<http://www.spreaker.com>)

Audioboom (<https://audioboom.com>)

A podcast is an audio broadcast over the web. It is broken up into parts or episodes. Most podcasts are similar to news radio programs and deliver information on a regular basis, but they can also be comedy shows, special music broadcasts or talks. You as a teacher can set up a podcasting channel in Podomatic, Spreaker, or Audioboom.

[**Contributed by Dr. Xavier Pradeep Singh**, Dept of English, St Joseph's College, Trichy]