

TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE:

A Study of Error Patterns with reference to +2 Students

of Garo Hills



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of the present study is to observe and analyze the problems of the learners of English at the +2 level in the colleges of Garo Hills of Meghalaya. The decision regarding the choice of the level was deliberate since at this stage all the learners have at least ten years of learning English behind them and therefore offer a good opportunity to evaluate their proficiency in English. Besides, they have been exposed to the syllabus prescribed by the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) and it offers a chance to see the effectiveness or otherwise, of the teaching-learning programme in English. Thirdly, +2 level happens to be the terminal stage of learning English, for a good number of learners as they either go for higher and technical education or take up jobs after this level. Hence, their problems in English at this stage are considered to be of paramount importance.

Attitude, motivation and language use differ according to one's age and sex. As the average age of students at +2 level is normally between 16 and 18, it was expected that there would be minor differences in the attitude, motivation and language use ability of the students chosen for this study, in terms of their age. Therefore there was no need for any comparative study of students of different age groups. However, sex difference plays an important role in learning for which a comparative study of male and female students was undertaken.

In view of the above discussion it was felt that mere analysis of errors of the learners may not help understand the problems of learning English in totality. Hence, it was felt that there is a relationship between the attitude & motivation towards the learning of

English and language environment of the students as well as the attitude & motivation towards teaching of English and language environment of the teachers with the language proficiency of the students.

With this end in view the researcher conducted a survey amongst the +2 level students and the school and college teachers of Garo Hills. The intention was to analyze

- i. the attitude & motivation of the students towards the learning of English and their language environment.
- ii. the attitude & motivation of both the school and college teachers of Garo Hills towards the learning of English and their language environment.
- iii. the language proficiency of the students by identifying the errors of students in their use of English and
- iv. to find out if there is any relationship between the language proficiency of the students and the attitude, motivation and language environment of both students and teachers.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

For the purpose of intensive study, the investigation was limited to the students of Garo Hills alone.

Garos and Bengalis are the two major linguistic communities in Garo Hills. These two communities again constitute most of the student population in the schools and colleges. Hence, for the purpose of the present study, the students of these two communities were chosen.

NEED FOR THE STUDY:

The investigator with his long experience of teaching at the +2 stage and beyond, came in contact with hundreds of students year after year who had not achieved the

required proficiency level as expected of them. Even most of them were weak in the four basic language skills namely - Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Though the language environment in the area is apparently good, the pass percentage in English in the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) examination conducted by the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) every year, is not very encouraging. It was noticed that there was large-scale failure in English, which could be attributed to the errors committed by students. In order to find out the pattern of errors and their causes, this study was envisaged.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

By trying to analyze the errors of the learners of English as a second language at the +2 level, the purpose was to find out the following:

- a) in what areas students commit errors;
- b) what could be the possible causes of those errors;
- c) the strategies of communication employed by the learners in their learning process; and to
- d) compare the errors of +2 students of urban and rural backgrounds;
- e) compare the errors of both the sexes;
- f) compare the motivation and attitude of both teachers (on the basis of rural and urban backgrounds) and students (on the basis of sex, age, linguistic communities and urban/rural background);
- g) compare the language environment, learning situations and learning problems of students (on the basis of sex, age, linguistic communities and urban/rural background);
- h) arrive at conclusions regarding students' errors and suggest remedial measures.

ERRORS TO BE STUDIED:

Students of the +2 stage of Garo Hills commit errors in English at different areas but for the purpose of the present study, errors at the following levels were undertaken:

- a) Tense
- b) Syntax
- c) Communication

HYPOTHESIS:

It was envisaged that

- a). There is a difference in the attitude, motivation; language environment and performance between:
 - i) students of urban and rural background,
 - ii) Garo and Bengali students, and
 - iii) Girls and boys.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ERRORS:

Errors are the indicators of the language learning process of a learner. They give teachers a better insight into the learning process as well as make them conscious of the problems of students while learning a language. The interlanguage used by a learner involves a lot of theoretical interest since it involves his/her learning strategies and transitional competence.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to S. Pit Corder learners' errors are significant in three different ways:

- a) To the Teacher: They tell him how far the learner has progressed towards the goal of mastering the second language, in that he comes to know the deficiency of the learner.
- b) To the Researcher: They provide him evidence of how a language is learnt or acquired and what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language.
- c) To the Learner: They are indispensable because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn. The making of error, then, is a strategy employed by the children acquiring their mother tongue (MT) as well as by those learning a second language (SL).

CHAPTERIZATION:

The proceedings and findings of the study will be organized in the following manner:

Chapter I	:	Introduction
Chapter II	:	Attitude and Motivation
Chapter III	:	Error Theories
Chapter IV	:	Methodologies and Approaches
Chapter V	:	Analysis of Questionnaires
Chapter VI	:	Analysis of Errors
Chapter VII	:	Conclusion
Bibliography		
Appendix		

Chapters II & III have been theoretical in approach.

In Chapter II attitude and motivation have been defined and classified. Theories relating to attitude and motivation have also been discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter III, differences between Errors, Mistakes and Lapses have been outlined. Differences between Error analysis and Contrastive Analysis have also been pointed out. An attempt has also been made to discuss the theories relating to Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis.

Chapter IV deals with the methods used to elicit data for Error analysis and to find out the motivation and attitude of both teachers and students of Garo Hills.

In Chapter V, the responses to questionnaires by teachers and students have been placed in tables and analyzed. A comparative study of the responses of students of +2 level of Garo Hills on the basis of sex, background (urban/rural), community (Garo, Bengali and Others) and college has been attempted. A comparative study of the responses of teachers also on the basis of their urban/rural background and the level of teaching (i.e., school/college) has been attempted.

Chapter VI deals with the analysis of errors. As a kind of a pilot study, the students of +2 level of Garo Hills were given an objective test. The number of errors in Punctuation, Spelling, Tense, Lexis, Article, Preposition, Syntax and Communication have been placed in tables and compared on the basis of sex, background (urban/rural), community (Garo, Bengali and Others) and college of the students and also have been analyzed. On the basis of the findings of the pilot study, the main study was undertaken. The students were asked to write an essay on the topic 'My Last Day in School'. The number of errors in Punctuation, Spelling, Tense, Lexis, Article, Preposition, Syntax and Communication have been placed in tables and compared on the basis of sex,

background (urban/rural), community (Garo, Bengali and Others) and college of the students of +2 level of Garo Hills and analyzed.

In Chapter VII, recommendations have been made on the basis of the findings of the study.

Chapter VII is followed by a detailed Bibliography and the Appendices.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, we have seen how errors are caused, what role motivation and attitude play in the learning of English as a second language; what role the methods of teaching, teaching materials and environment play in the learning of English as a second language. Findings of the previous chapters can be summed up as follows:

The teaching of English in India is mostly a teacher-text-book-classroom affair. English is taught in the class as any other subject. The teachers, generally, give lecture, explain the contents and dictate notes. The learners are mostly passive listeners and rarely take part in the classroom teaching. Further, opportunities are limited for the learners to have an exposure to English outside the classroom. In spite of all the innovations and modifications in the field of ELT, the teaching-learning situation of English in most of the schools and colleges has not changed significantly. As a result, the learners' communicative abilities in English are not still quite good. Learners coming out of schools and colleges of Garo Hills after 8 to 10 years of learning are not in a position to use English effectively for communication or even for performing simple tasks like writing an application for leave.

The problems of teaching-learning of English in Garo Hills are more or less the same as elsewhere in the country. It was observed that in spite of the best intentions of the curriculum planners, teachers and educational administrators, there was a gap between the expectations and actual achievements of the learners. It was found that a number of reasons were responsible for this state of affair. The survey conducted amongst the teachers and students of Garo Hills showed that mother tongue was extensively used in the classroom. Problems related to this study have been discussed in the sections that follow.

The present study revealed that pedagogical, linguistic and administrative factors were responsible for the poor proficiency level in English of the students of Garo Hills at the +2 level. The analysis of the learners' errors made it clear that they had problems in different areas of language operation. The sources of these errors, other than the mother tongue inference were related mostly to teaching inadequacies on the part of the teachers and unsuitable teaching materials. In view of this the following modifications have been suggested:

- i. It has been observed that a great number of teachers are not qualified to teach English. In the absence of qualified teachers learners cannot be expected to learn English efficiently. One section of teachers do not have any grounding in matters relating to English Language Teaching. Another section of teachers, though have the required qualification, do not have the command of the language they are teaching. Hence, in order to improve the teaching-learning condition of English in Garo Hills the Govt. should appoint qualified, ELT trained and competent teachers.
- ii. The Govt., it is understood, goes through a process of selection of employees as well as teachers. Hence, it takes time for the Govt. to appoint teachers from time to time with the desired qualifications, training and competencies. In the absence of trained and qualified teachers the existing teachers may be given short term training with reference to the content and methodologies of teaching of English.
- iii. A very important section in any educational institution is the library.

Unless teachers and students receive the facilities of a good library, teaching–learning situation may not produce the desired results. Hence, educational institutions strive to enrich their libraries or raise a library where there are no libraries. In these libraries apart from books on various subjects written in English there also should be latest books and journals on English Language Teaching.

- iv. It has been observed that the syllabi are not revised from time to time. In fact, they are at times revised after decades. A lot of changes take place in course of time; the needs of the students change, teaching methods and techniques also change. To keep pace with these changes the syllabi also needs to be revised.
- v. In recent times, the ability for communication is considered to be the most important aspect in the learning of a language. Merely learning the rules of grammar is not the only desirable activity in language learning. More important is to learn the functions and not the forms. Hence, the cry of the day is to frame a notional-functional syllabus.
- vi. Nowhere in the syllabi or the text-books of English, objectives have been laid down. Hence, neither the teachers nor the students are clear of the objectives of teaching-learning English. In the absence of objectives in black & white, there seems to be confusion among the teachers as well as the students. Hence, the focus is normally on teaching the contents and asking the students to memorize the answers to given questions. Since emphasis is given on explaining the contents of text-books, language elements are not taught or learnt.

Hence, communication is affected. Keeping these in view, objectives of the syllabi should be made clear to both teachers and learners. It is imperative to print the objectives both in the syllabi and the text-books. It is also equally important to lay down the methodologies of teaching the given texts. In the absence of the knowledge of the desired methodologies, teachers go back to the age old process of teaching the contents and making the students memorize answers to given questions.

vii. English teaching methods have gone through a process of evolution.

One of the recent approaches of teaching a second language is the Communicative Approach, which is an eclectic method. It does not exclude other methods and approaches, which have gone before. It is also a learner-centred approach, where the teachers play the role of a guide or manager of learning. This approach puts emphasis on developing the communicational ability of the learners. Another important approach developed by the Central Institute of English & Foreign Languages is the 'Language through Literature Approach'. Here, the emphasis is not teaching the texts but teaching the language through the given texts. These two approaches have had quite a success in the teaching-learning of English. Hence, teachers should be encouraged to teach through the Communicative Approach and the Language through Literature Approach.

viii. It has been observed that in Garo Hills, mainly in the colleges the teacher-pupil ratio at times is more than 1:300 where as the optimum

number should be around 1:30. As the number of students in the English classes are very large, student interaction in the classes are not possible. In most cases students are not even required to answer any question even. Hence, the students do not get any practice at all inside the classrooms. In order to improve the teaching-learning of English number of students in classroom should be reduced to the ration of 1: 30 (one teacher: thirty students).

- ix. There is no provision for tutorial classes in the routines. In the absence of tutorial classes students cannot be helped to develop their Listening, Speaking, Reading or Writing skills. Tutorial classes are normally small in size, hence, it is possible to give individual attention, which is not possible in large classes. Hence, tutorial classes for the development of spoken and written skills should be arranged as per the requirement.

- x. It has been observed that there are hardly any ELT meetings in schools and colleges. In the absence of ELT meetings, methodologies to teach English cannot be discussed. Problems of teaching-learning also cannot be analyzed. Problems of weak as well as good students cannot be handled either. The focus remains on the average students only. It is also not possible to gain from the experience of other teachers in the same department. Keeping these in mind steps should be taken to organize regular ELT meetings in the schools and colleges.

- xi. A lot of teachers and students have negative attitude towards English. In case of teachers, some of them are not interested in teaching English. If possible the same teacher may be replaced with one who has the right attitude. In the absence of such a substitute, steps should be taken to develop the right attitude. Steps also should be taken to see to it that students also develop the right attitude towards the teaching and learning of English. A lot of audio-visual aids may be required to do so. To improve the standard of teachers in ELT and to keep them abreast of the latest developments in the field of ELT, orientation programmes and refresher courses in ELT should be organized for the teachers from time to time.
- xii. Motivation of the students is apparently high as stated by them. The teachers do not think that the motivation of their students is very high. Though it may appear that in many cases the students attend English classes in larger number but in reality, they do not use English much in real life communication. It is easy to attend classes as there is no interaction in the class and the students have to be passive listeners. Motivation of the teachers, it is clear from the responses, is not very high. Apart from other reasons this could be also due to administrative reasons. Steps should be taken to increase the motivation of both teachers and students in order to improve the teaching-learning of English in Garo Hills.
- xiii. It has been observed that the English texts that the students and teachers use are not graded. No steps have been taken to select the required vocabulary, structures etc. and present them in an organized

manner. This creates hindrances in the learning of a language. Hence, steps should be taken to select the language items such as vocabulary, language structures etc; and present them in the texts in graded order and logical sequence.

- xiv. Teachers and students of Garo Hills do not know the range of vocabulary and structures to be acquired by the students at the +2 level. In the absence of such knowledge, emphasis is given on words or structures, which are not so important while the important words and structures are left out. Hence, this creates a hindrance in the teaching-learning of English. A list of words and structures, which the students would be required to master, be prepared and be made available to both the teachers and students. This also should be done on the basis of needs analysis survey.
- xv. The examination system is also faulty as it is predominantly based on rote learning. It is enough for the students to get by heart the answers to selected questions and reproduce them in the examination. The communicative ability of the students is not tested in the present system of examination. The objectives of evaluation are not clear in the minds of either the question setters or examiners. Instructions to both the examinees and examiners have to be clear, and detailed. In the absence of such instructions, the communicational ability of the students are not tested. Hence, the examination system should be changed which includes the changing of question patterns. The objective of the examination system should be to test the communicative ability of the learners primarily among other things.

It is clear from the above discussion that the students of +2 level of Garo Hills are unable to communicate in English efficiently due to both linguistic and non-linguistic reasons. If these hurdles are eradicated, these students will be able communicators in the English language.

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Bibliography