

ELTWeekly

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Word of the week: Word stress

Word stress indicates which syllables are stressed – or emphasised – in a word.

Example

'Photograph' has word stress Ooo (stress on the first syllable), 'photographer' has word stress oOoo (stress on the second syllable).

In the classroom

There are many ways to indicate word stress visually, including the method above, putting a line above main stress and below secondary stress, and using a board marker to partially rub out unstressed syllables.

[retrieved from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk>]

Video: Shaping the Way We Teach English: Module 04, Pair and Group Work

The focus in this module is on Pair and Group Work. Pair and Group Work incorporates principles and themes from the Cooperative Learning and Collaborative Learning theoretical frameworks. We will look at some real classroom examples, using Stella Ting-Toomey's "describe, interpret, evaluate" process to analyze what is happening with pair and group work in these classes.

An innovative offering from the Office of English Language Programs, Shaping the Way We Teach English, is a 14-module teacher training video series developed and produced in cooperation with the University of Oregon.

Watch the video at <http://www.eltweekly.com/elt-newsletter/2010/11/74-video-shaping-the-way-we-teach-english-module-04-pair-and-group-work/>

Susan Ryan's Tip: How to Use the Correct Syllable Stress Pattern

Stressing syllables correctly in spoken English is often an area of great difficulty for south Asian language speakers.

Speakers of South Asian languages frequently place stress on the first syllable of a word. However, in spoken American and British English the stress or emphasis may fall on many different syllables.

When speakers place stress on the wrong syllable it makes it very difficult for native English listeners to understand what they are saying.

Here is an example.

At a recent Toastmasters meeting here in Florida we were talking about hurricanes. One of our members, a Hindi speaker, said that hurricanes occur when the weather system is depressed. Looking at the faces of the listeners, I could see that they were confused about what he said.

What happened? Our member had used the wrong stress pattern when he said the word depressed. The verb depress should be stressed on the second syllable.

If he had pronounced the word as depressed, with stress on the second syllable, no one would have been confused.

Here is how English syllable stress works:

Every English word has one syllable that receives strong emphasis or stress. The sound of the vowel in a stressed syllable is articulated with a long, high, clear sound. The vowel sounds in the other syllables are reduced.

Although English syllable stress may seem random there are some predictable patterns one can use to learn this. Here are two of the most common patterns.

Two-syllable Nouns

The most common stress pattern for two syllable nouns is to stress the first syllable. Stressed syllables are bolded.

1. All of the records are up to date.
2. I need to buy some produce.
3. Do you have a minute?
4. That show is a repeat. I've seen it before.

Two-syllable Verbs

A common stress pattern for two syllable verbs is to stress the second syllable. Stressed syllables are bolded.

1. Did you record the seminar?
2. The company has not produced much this year!

3. There was a delay at the Airport.
4. Could you please repeat that?

You can see by saying the above sentences that syllable stress placement is key to creating comprehensible speech!

Susan Ryan is an American English pronunciation teacher and accent reduction coach. She currently lives in South Florida. Read more articles by Susan at <http://www.confidentvoice.com/blog/>

Research Article: ‘English At The Primary Level: Realities’ by Mahananda Pathak

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Abstract

This paper presents the methodologies that teachers in a remote village in Assam used to teach English to primary school students. The activities used by the teachers in these classes are not unique to Assam alone, but, are commonly used across all regional medium primary schools in India.

Introduction

The use of English in India is no longer restricted to an elite few in the cities; but, is used extensively by the masses for various purposes pertaining to education, business and communication. This has resulted in a widespread public demand for more access to English within the school education system. As a result, many Indian state governments have introduced English at the lower primary level.

The early introduction of English, while perceived as essential, is also problem ridden. This is because, the way English is taught/learnt cannot fulfil/rise to the variety of demands made on it. In other words, there is a gap between the way English is taught in the classroom and the way it should be taught. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this paper, to see how English is being taught in rural primary schools. For this, a week long classroom observation was done. Ten English classes (Class IV) in five different regional medium schools in Assam (in the rural areas of the Barpeta district) were observed. The following is a glimpse of those classroom observations:

What is happening inside rural primary English classrooms?

It is interesting to note that Assamese was used extensively to teach English in all the classes.

Scenario 1

Lesson: Revision of the English alphabet.

The teacher asked the students to provide words beginning with the letters 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', and 'E'. The students answered 'A' for apple, 'B' for ball, 'C' for cat, 'D' for dog, and 'E' for egg. Then the teacher asked a student to spell out the word 'Chair' (she pronounced it as 'Siyaar'). The student came up with the wrong spelling 'Chiyar'. The teacher slapped the student and corrected the spelling. She then asked the class to copy the alphabet (A to Z) on their notebooks.

Scenario 2

Lesson: Numbers in words

The teacher asked in Assamese – What is 50 in English? Students replied 'fifty'. She asked the same question for 5, 11, and 100. Then she asked the students to spell out 'eleven' and 'hundred'. The students could not spell them correctly and as a punishment the teacher asked them to stand on the bench for five minutes. After that the teacher wrote the spellings on the blackboard and asked the students to copy those on their notebook.

Scenario 3

Lesson: Poetry

The teacher asked one of the students to read aloud the poem 'Humpty Dumpty' from the textbook. She asked the rest of students to follow the text while listening. The student read it with a lot of mistakes. Then, the teacher asked the students to memorize the poem by reading it several times. Once the students memorized the entire poem (of course it's not too long!), they were asked to write it on their notebooks without looking at the textbook.

Scenario 4

Lesson: General English

The teacher wrote the sentence "Ranjit is a good boy" on the blackboard and asked the students to translate it into Assamese. The students replied correctly. Then she asked them to translate the sentence 'I love India'. But this time the students failed to provide the Assamese translation. Then the teacher explained to the student as follows: I means 'moi', love means 'bhaalpowa' and India means 'bharatbarxa'; therefore, 'moi bharatbarxak bhaal pawo'. After that, she asked the students to frame some Assamese sentences by using 'bhaalpowa'. Students came up with many sentences and the teacher translated those Assamese sentences to English one by one.

What do these scenarios signify?

These observations led to the conclusion that English language teaching did not focus on activities which develop the skills needed to use the language. The teaching stresses on correct spelling (scenario 1 & 2), neat writing, and encourages rote memorization (scenario 4). The assumption seemed to be that children would learn to communicate only through repetition or rote memorization. The English classes mainly focused on unproductive activities like reading of the alphabet and

teaching of words which had no relevance in the lives of the children. Krishna Kumar observed (1986: 2) “words without action or contact with objects remain empty and lifeless for the child”. Therefore, words like ‘apple’, ‘ball’, ‘cat’, ‘fall’ etc. mean very little to the child unless these words have first been used in a context where the child was actively involved with the object or in the act. Most of the time, the children were engaged in activities like copying from the blackboard or textbooks, reading from the text, writing on the blackboard/notebook, etc.

For most of the teachers, teaching the alphabet means, asking the students to copy the letters from A to Z, asking for words that stand for a particular letter and rote recitation of the alphabet. By doing this, the students are deprived of the opportunities to develop the skills required for alphabetizing words which is very useful for the development of dictionary skills. It was observed that the teachers spent a substantial amount of class time in extremely casual reading aloud. This reading aloud was done by the students and not the teachers (scenario 3). Close observation showed that while reading aloud by the students went on, teachers completed non-teaching activities like paper work, filling registers etc., while keeping a casual eye on the pupils. The teacher did not even feel the need to correct the students’ mistakes while reading. Most of the teachers were engaged in providing L1 translations/equivalents while teaching English (scenario 4). Direct translation to L1 is a major, useful teaching technique as far as English language is concerned. But it does not serve the desired pedagogic purpose.

In addition to that, most of the teachers treated errors negatively and expected an error-free performance from the children. It was observed that the teacher always considered students’ errors as a ‘deviation from the norm’ rather than ‘a part of the learning process’ (Corder, 1981) or a part of the natural process of interlanguage

forms gradually moving towards target forms (Ellis, 1994). The teachers had a fear of L1 influence in L2 performance and hence did not tolerate any error made by the learner and punished them by 'slapping' or asking them to 'stand on the bench' (scenario 1& 2). The teachers considered error-free performance as an evidence of learning. A child who spelt 'chair' as 'chiar' showed that he/she knew that the letters of the alphabet have their own sounds. But the teacher failed to recognize this creativity and overlooked the students' creative capability. Teacher should realize one thing that spotting children's error is not enough. In addition to that, they have to help the children to identify the errors which will eventually develop their skills to look at own work with a critical eye.

Summing up

In the context of the early introduction of English at the primary level, it has been observed that there is a need to examine how English is being taught in the classroom. More specifically, do our teachers engage the learners in unproductive mechanical activities or are they really teaching them how to operate in English? Do teachers and learners enjoy the experience of teaching/learning English or is it just a boring/mundane activity? Do our teachers just transmit the content that the prescribed materials contain or do they try to be innovative or go beyond the prescribed text? These are questions that need to be addressed seriously to make the early introduction of English in schools, successful.

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Research Article: 'Constructivist Pedagogy in ELT Classroom' by Dr. S. K. Agrawal

Dr. S. K. Agrawal works as an Associate Professor at the Dept. of English, JRNRV University, Udaipur – India.

The term 'constructivism' refers both to the method of learning and nature of knowledge. It means the idea that individuals, through their interaction with the environment, construct their own knowledge. (Fosnot 1996; Steffe and Gale, 1995). The emphasis of the constructivist theory is both on the process and the product. In constructivist approach it is important to know how much students have learnt as well as the process by which they have learnt. Such a theory of knowledge and learning has significant implication for English Language Teaching (ELT). It changes the dynamics of the traditional classroom by empowering the learner as the architect of the learning process while redefining the role of the instructor as a guide and helper, rather than the source and conduit of knowledge.

There are three domains of teacher knowledge that contribute to the effectiveness of constructivist approaches to ELT. These include General pedagogic knowledge, Subject matter knowledge and Pedagogical content knowledge. Constructivist pedagogy is the link between theory and practice. Many theorists and practitioners, such as Brooks and Brooks (1993), Driscoll(1994), Jonassen(1991) have generated constructivist pedagogy with an array of results. While these pedagogies share a set of core design principles, the peripheral principals tend to vary greatly. The following principles (Brooks and Brooks, 1993; Steffe and Gale, 1995) make the constructivist pedagogy effective:

(i) Learning should take place in real world environment: Object-oriented experience is a catalyst of knowledge construction. Experience provides the

activity upon which the mind operates. In addition, knowledge construction is enhanced when the experience is authentic. An English language teacher can well exploit the real world environment by developing the tasks and exercises based on the experience and surroundings of his learners.

(ii) Learning should involve social negotiation: Social interaction provides for the development of socially relevant skills and knowledge. For example, a learner can attain the art of greeting more properly through social contact. An individual gains experience and understanding of a social situation through language, and the knowledge, thus, acquired is certainly much valid than the one acquired simply by reading books.

(iii) Knowledge should be relevant to the learner: Constructivism implies that knowledge serves an adaptive function. The knowledge, i.e. content and skills must be relevant to the individual's need, understanding and goals. The relevance of the content is likely to increase the individual's motivation.

(iv) Content and Skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's background knowledge: It is beyond doubt that all learning begins with an individual's prior knowledge, regardless of constructivist affiliation.

Understanding a student's behavior requires an understanding of the student's mental structure. For example, when a student replies that the sentence 'He is one of the students who are always regular' is not correct, the teacher must not think it immediately to be wrong, but rather try to understand the student's understanding of the concept of concord. Understanding the student's rule usage makes it easier for the teacher to demonstrate the non-viability of the student's understanding. The teacher in this case, for example, may ask the students, who are regular, to form a circle. Now he can illustrate that all of them are regular and he certainly is a part of

the whole group (thus, who representing all the regular students and therefore the use of plural form of verb 'are'.) Thus, the teacher will be able to create effective experiences, resulting in maximal learning.

(v) Formative assessment is necessary: A teacher should always take into account an individual's current level of understanding in the ongoing teaching learning process. This he can do by continuously assessing the individual's knowledge. This formative assessment is necessary to create the subsequent series of experiences and activities for the students.

(vi) Students should be encouraged to become self-aware: The underlying principle of constructivism is that learners are active in their construction of knowledge and meaning. This activity involves mental manipulation and self-organization of experiences, and requires that students mediate new meanings from existing knowledge, and form an awareness of current knowledge structures.

(vii) Teachers serve primarily as facilitators: The role of a teacher, in constructivist perspective, is that of a facilitator. He facilitates, provides examples, supports and challenges. He is not to transmit knowledge. In the classroom, the teacher creates experiences in which the learners participate, and which in turn leads to processing and acquisition of knowledge. The task of a teacher, according to the constructivist perspective, is to create awareness about their experiences, as there is no factual knowledge to transmit.

The Constructivist ELT Classroom

A classroom is a rich array of different backgrounds and ways of thinking. Myths, taboos and things one acquires from one's family, friends, teachers, etc. form part of one's cultural influence. Content is embedded in culture and it is difficult to

separate the two. It is, therefore, necessary for a teacher to provide a neutral zone where the student can contribute to the ongoing activity through his creativity. In the constructivist classroom, the focus tends to shift from the teacher to the students. The classroom is not a place where the teacher pours knowledge into passive students. Students are actively involved in the learning process. The constructivist teacher sets up tasks and monitors students' progress, guides the direction of students' inquiry and promotes new pattern of thinking. In a constructivist ELT classroom students' autonomy and initiative are encouraged; in it students are engaged in language tasks and the class uses raw data, primary sources, physical and interactive materials.

The Constructivist Teacher

Constructivism emphasizes that the learner is a sense maker, whereas the teacher is a cognitive guide. The constructivist view of learning means encouraging the students to use active techniques, to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. The teacher tries to understand the learners' preexisting language conceptions and guides the task to address them and then build on them. Questioning is an integral part of constructivist learning. By questioning themselves the students become expert learners. When the learners reflect on their experiences, they develop increasingly strong abilities to integrate new information. The main task of the teacher here is to encourage this learning and reflection process. For example, the groups of students in a class are discussing a problem related to English grammar. Though the teacher knows the answer to the problem, he focuses on helping students restate their problems in useful ways. He prompts each student to reflect on and examine his or her current knowledge. When one of the students comes up

with the relevant answer, the teacher seizes upon it and asks the other students to follow the same steps. They further design and perform more language tasks.

Constructivism accords due significance to the active role of the teacher. It modifies the traditional role of a teacher so that he may help students to construct knowledge rather than to reproduce a series of facts. It also transforms the students from a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process. As a result, the students construct their knowledge actively rather than just mechanically receiving knowledge from the teacher or the textbook.

Instructional Strategies

Constructivist pedagogy envisages learner as an active sense maker and suggests new methods of instruction. It facilitates presentations of materials in a constructivist way and engage students in an explorative learning. It allows the learners to have more control over their own learning to think analytically and critically, and to work collaboratively. A teacher can create constructive learning environment in the classroom by adhering to the following strategies:

- Present new materials in small steps.
- Help students develop an organization for the skills/sub skills not known to them.
- Provide for intensive and extensive student practice.
- Anticipate and discuss potential difficulties.
- Regulate the difficulty of the material.
- Provide feedback and corrections.
- Increase student responsibilities.
- Provide independent practice with examples.

Evaluation

The evaluation in constructive must examine the thinking process. This is, however, not to suggest that the issue of thinking is independent of the content domain. (Bender et al, 1995). The possible ways of evaluation would be asking students to think aloud, address a problem in the field of content and then defend their decision, or reflect on their own learning and record the process through which they have constructed their view of the content. In brief, the evaluation must aim at examining the student's ability to solve the communication problem with viable solution.

It is, thus, clear that constructivist pedagogy of learning signals a departure from theories, which view the world as objective truth to be explained and accepted. It accords new status to the learner as an active constructor within the learning activity instead of being the passive participant in the externally determined world of education. It defines teaching to be an exciting process of joining in the intellectual discovery of others. The constructivist becomes a fellow learner with the students he serves. It is observed that most of us try to transmit a vast amount of information within a limited time, using textbooks and multimedia. This is how the human brain is not properly utilized. The use of computers can substantially reduce the burden of human brain by storing vast amount of information. Human mind, thus, can advantageously be used to perform those tasks that cannot be done by a machine, such as decision-making, creative thinking, problem solving, etc. In brief, the constructivist pedagogy heralds a paradigm shift and the abandonment of traditional practices and principles; it also emphasizes that the notion of pedagogic space needs to be rethought by making it truly a productive activity.

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Article: ‘Video recorders in the classroom’ by Jamie Keddie

“I have just become an uncle! My new nephew Tomás is three weeks old today. Mummy and daddy live in Barcelona but his maternal grandparents and great granddad live in Scotland. As you can probably imagine then, Tomás is currently getting used to the mobile phones, Flip camcorders and other video recording devices that are being habitually pointed at his little baby head – all of this so that his UK family can see him sleeping, feeding, having his nappy changed and sometimes just lying in wonder at it all.

Welcome (Tomás) to the age of video sharing, where the rise of accessible and relatively inexpensive video tools are, increasingly, becoming a part of the baby’s everyday life. These tools include seemingly ubiquitous video recording devices, faster Internet connections, user-friendly video editing applications, and video-sharing sites such as YouTube”.

Read the complete article at

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/video-recorders-classroom>

Book of the week: 'Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers' by J. Michael O'Malley & Lorraine Valdez Pierce

This 268-page practical resource book familiarizes teachers, staff developers, and administrators with the latest thinking on alternatives to traditional assessment. It will prepare them to implement authentic assessment in the ESL/bilingual classroom and to incorporate it into instructional planning.

Readers' Voices

Lexine Mainwaring: "I have just completed a graduate course in Assessment for teachers of ELLs. Almost all of the students in this class, including me, found this book to be a very valuable resource. Some of the information is redundant, but for a teacher looking for ideas on how to construct an authentic assessment of student work (reading, writing, speaking or listening) it is full of great insights and models that can be copied from the book or revised for individual use."

Heidi Rogers (Indiana, USA): "This book is awesome for any teacher. Not only does it discuss many aspects dealing with authentic assessment and the importance of it, but it also gives many examples of how it can be used in an actual classroom (more applicable to LA learning, however it can be used with any subject). I loved this book because it will be a great resource for my classroom. I recommend it to any teacher."

Get more information on J. Michael O'Malley & Lorraine Valdez Pierce 'Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers' at http://www.amazon.com/Authentic-Assessment-English-Language-Learners/dp/0201591510/ref=pd_sim_b_2

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

- 1. Papers / Articles:** All articles should be computerized using double-spacing, including tables, references and footnotes. Submission of manuscripts should be done in electronic form only. Electronic version of the article/research paper should be e-mailed to the Editor, ELTWeekly at info@eltweekly.com.
- 2. Abstracts:** An abstract in approximately 200 words should assist the article.
- 3. Abbreviations:** No stops are needed between capitals e.g. ELT, IELTS.
- 4. Figures and Tables:** Tables should be numbered sequentially with Arabic numerals.
- 5. Notes:** Notes should be consecutively numbered and presented at the foot of the page.
- 6. References:** References in the text should follow the author-date system. The complete reference list should be given at the end of the article. They should be in alphabetical order.
- 7. Book Reviews:** Book reviews must contain the name of the author and title / subtitle of the book reviewed, place of publication and publisher and date of publication.
- 8. For Event Submissions:** Please submit your event details at least 30 days prior to the event.
- 9.** For a **more detailed stylesheet**, please write to The Editor, ELTWeekly at info@eltweekly.com.