https://doi.org/10.3126/nelta.v29i1.72645

Reflections on a la Carte Issues in English Language Teaching

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Abstract

I have taught English literature, English language, and linguistics for fifty years now. My experience as a teacher, teacher trainer, and researcher has given me some personalized insights into issues such as the difference between teaching children and teaching adults, the evolution of the author of this paper as a teacher, the role of technology in teaching, paradigm shifts in English language teaching, the deterioration in the quality of research, the perceptions of the role of the mother tongue, the impact of the linguistic hegemony on English language teaching, and the literature-language divide. The present paper attempts to understand the influence of these issues on language policy, language teaching, language learning, materials production, evaluation, assessment, etc.

Keywords: *teaching, evolution, technology, hegemony, literature, language, research, paradigm*

Teaching Children and Teaching Adults

Over the last fifty years, I have taught English at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels and I have taught English to regional language medium school students as well as to English medium school students. Teaching English to college students has been my profession and teaching English to school students has been my hobby. In this context, some of my colleagues would want to know from me whether there is any difference between teaching children and teaching adults.

Teachers and parents know that children love games; that is why they feel engrossed in mobile phone games and computer games. Their faces exude enthusiasm while playing these games. These games arouse their curiosity. Many of us fail to inject this game element into our classes. Our school classes are as formal and antiseptic as our college classes are. Here it would be worthwhile to note what Shakespeare says about schoolboys. He was not a teacher, but he made a very keen observation on pedagogy when he said, “Love goes toward love as schoolboys from their books, but love from love, toward school with heavy looks”. He further said, “Teach it but how, and thou shalt see how apt it is to learn”.

Hindi movies such as *Three Idiots* and *Tare Zameen Par* [stars on the ground] demonstrate that there is no difference between the way most of us teach in school classes and the way we dole out trivialities in college classes. The one-act play titled The *Refund* by the Hungarian writer Karinthy (1936, Little, Brown, and Company] and adapted by Percival Wilde proves the same point. In this play, Wasserkopf, a past student of a school, returns to the school after several years and asks for a refund of the fees he had paid because he believes that his school taught him nothing worthwhile. Most schools teach their students trivial things, not significant things.

Rabindranath Tagore's story titled *The Homecoming* [1892, Kessinger Publishing (2010)] has a very significant message for teachers teaching children. Phatik Chakravarty is the protagonist of this story. His parents send him to his uncle's house in Calcutta to study there. But his aunt treats him very cruelly like Cinderella's stepmother treats Cinderella. She misses no excuse to nag him. As a result, Phatik becomes homesick and craves to meet his parents, so he falls sick. He sinks into a delirious condition and succumbs to debilitating and scorching fever. The lesson we learn from this story is that we are not only heads but also hearts. The cognitive domain plays an important role in learning, but the affective domain plays an equally crucial role in it. Children crave for affection and encouragement. The displaced and traumatized boy in *The Homecoming* symbolizes emotional starvation, loneliness, and alienation. Yet another story that has a vital pedagogical lesson is Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child* [1932, Vision/Orient (2007)]. The protagonist of this story is a small boy, a child, whose parents take him to a fair. On his way to the fair, he is fascinated by a variety of attractions such as a merry-go-round, a snake charmer, garlands of flowers, sweets, balloons, etc. As a result, he loses his way and his parents. A little while ago, he wanted all those things, but now sweets, balloons and garlands fail to fascinate him. He wants his mother and he wants his father. The story has two important lessons for us as teachers. One, teachers need to design activities that suit different learning styles such as auditory, visual, bodily, olfactory, tactile, culinary and so forth. However, these learning styles may not work if the teacher is not affectionate. The lost child represents our traumatized learner; the stranger who offers the child balloons, sweets, garlands, etc., represents the teacher. The child doesn't want anything but his parents. The child's persistent desire to go to his parents suggests how the affective domain plays a more important role than the cognitive domain. In short, there are differences between teaching children and teaching adults. In the former case, teachers need to inject game elements, and fun elements and teachers need to be affectionate. We need to make our lessons less formal and more like family chats. In the latter case, the cognitive domain dominates the teaching/learning process. As stated earlier, the purpose of this article is to discuss the earlier-mentioned issues and their impact on syllabus design, textbook writing, teaching methodology, and evaluation and assessment.

How I Taught Fifty Years Ago and How I Teach Now

I began my teaching career way back in nineteen seventy-four. When I reported for duty, I was given some prescribed books to teach different classes. I used to milk texts to the last drop like a farmer who milks his

cow to the last drop leaving no milk for the calf to suck from the mother cow's udders. Here, I was similar to the farmer, the texts were like cows, my students were similar to calves and my literary interpretations and explanations were like milk. I would gloss over unfamiliar and difficult vocabulary; I used to explain every figure of speech; I lectured on types of literature, elements of literature, approaches to literature, etc. I sermonized and my obedient students listened to me very seriously and religiously. I did all the talking for them. I dictated notes because I thought I was an omniscient person in my classes, but my omniscience was restricted to the prescribed books. I rarely ventured outside the two covers of the textbook. The textbook was sacrosanct; it was a holy book, a force book, and a sourcebook and resource book. I would go to my class holding the textbook close to my heart, tacitly requesting this all-weather friend, this most trustworthy companion, this erudite mentor, this infallible anchor, as it were, to hold my boat on the seashore and prevent it from going astray into the turbulent sea of the classroom. After my class, I would leave my classroom once again holding the textbook close to my heart silently expressing my sincere gratitude for giving me confidence and direction, for providing me relief. I was justified in nursing my perception of the textbook as a holy book because it instilled confidence in me as a teacher and made my students comfortable; it gave me a direction. I followed the sequence of lessons quite religiously as if any deviation was a pedagogical sin. My annual pedagogical journey from the first lesson to the last lesson in the textbook was a pilgrimage.

My students hardly raised questions and I was not very zealous about encouraging them to question whatever I said. As for literature teaching, initially, my first priority was to equip my students with literary competence. As far as the teaching of the English language was concerned, I focused on my students' accuracy of spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. I continued my teachers' legacy. I was a school boy in the early sixties and later a college student in the early seventies. During those days, my teachers would untiringly correct my linguistic errors and I held them in awe for their erudition. When I started teaching, I started treading the road that was trodden by my gurus.

However, after some teaching experience, I began to realize that my sequence of priorities was problematic because the more I rectified their errors, the more diffident my students felt. I began to reflect on my practices and realized that I should reprioritize my priorities and do first things first. As a result, I prioritized fluency and appropriateness over accuracy. Thus, accuracy took a back seat.

Moreover, I stopped explaining things to them and began to encourage them to explain things for themselves. I pushed myself into the background and pushed them under the limelight. The teacher-centric class became a leaner-centric class. Let me cite an illustration here. When I began my teaching career, I milked Wordsworth's *Daffodils* [1807, Lobster Press (2007) to the last drop. I was like Tennyson's Ulysses [1933, Edward Maxon (1942)]. He wanted to "drink life to the lees"; I wanted to "drink literature to the lees". When I first 'taught' this poem, I semanticized the word "host" (in the line "a host of golden daffodils") as 'thousands'. Later, on maturing pedagogically, I asked my literature students what in their view the meaning of the word "host" was. I could see the miracles my pedagogy was working. My students came

up with multiple interpretations of this little word. One of them said that the daffodils were playing the host and the poet a guest. This was a stunning moment in my career. The student went ahead and said that just as a host tried to entertain their guest, the daffodils were entertaining the poet. They were fluttering and dancing in the breeze; tossing their heads in spritely dance; they were outdoing the sparkling waves in glee; they were filling the poet's heart with pleasure. Yet another student offered a revealing and equally legitimate interpretation of the word "host". She offered a biological perspective. She said that we have hosts such as big trees and animals and we have small insects and creepers and climbers that depend on those hosts for nourishment, existence and survival. These are called parasites. One student interpreted the word "host" using the host-guest situation and another tried to explain it concerning the host-parasite relationship.

Thus, I began to administer brain-storming, problem-solving, information gap, and opinion-gap tasks and I could see the change in the nature and quality of my classes. When I began my career, I was almost fully dependent on textbooks; in the second half of my career, I started using support materials such as journalistic cartoons, puzzles, riddles, pictures, short animation movies like Walt Disney's *Paperman* [2012]; silent movies starring Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Laurel and Hardy. In this process, I became a relatively text-free teacher.

Teacher and Technology

This issue has implications for teacher roles, learner roles and the role of technology and so I'd like to address it at length. The Covid-19 pandemic has proved the all-pervasiveness and usefulness of technology. As we know, technology has demolished all sorts of barriers, especially geographical boundaries. It seems that the world has shrunk to the size of a laptop computer, a tablet, or even a tiny mobile handset. Space is no barrier; time is no barrier. Some technology enthusiasts have begun to claim that technology is the panacea for all maladies such as low attendance, high grade-repetition, and poor learning outcomes. Technology has made inroads in all walks of life. Then how can education be exempt from the advent of technology? Technology pervades modern classrooms in developed and developing countries. It is becoming common to teach physical sciences, chemical sciences, earth sciences and life sciences using technology. Let me illustrate this statement. Let us take the example of teaching geology. For example, we want to teach how tectonic plates deep underneath the earth gradually slide and collide, how earthquakes happen, or how volcanic activities brew deep down the crust of the earth. We can visualize the invisible movements through animation. The use of animation facilitates the teaching of volcanic eruptions and tectonic movements. Further, it presents these invisible geological events pictorially. We can study animal and vegetation organisms and their behaviour through a visual medium.

In teaching, we talk about various learning styles such as auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, gustatory, olfactory, tactile, etc. Traditionally, content subjects as well as skill subjects were taught through lecturing mode. The only graphic component used in traditional pedagogy was in the form of static pictures, graphs, tables, charts, etc. These pictures were useful, but they did not show activities in motion. Technology has made it possible to do that. Students understand geological,

biological, physical and chemical processes faster and better through animation. They remember the visually, and graphically, animated happenings for a longer time. That is why they say, "Tell me and I may forget, show me and I will remember, involve me and I will understand".

In the past, teachers used to teach literature and language through lecture methods. However, this is not to say that the lecture method is useless. It has its advantages. Since there was no Internet, no laptop computers and no smartphones, teachers had to use all their natural resources to make the teaching of literature and language as interesting as possible. They had to use their vocal resources such as tone of voice, word stress, sentence stress, grammatical, attitudinal and rhetorical intonation, and body language such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, etc., to make the teaching of literature interesting and effective. In the same manner, we can show them clippings from a performance of a play while teaching that play. For instance, we can show them the court scene from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* [1600, J.B. Lippincott] wherein Portia, disguised as a lawyer, argues that Shylock can have a pound of flesh from Antonio's body, but without spilling any blood, because the contract says that Shylock can have a pound of flesh but does not give him the right to spill any blood. Thus, we can give a brief introduction to the scene and then play the scene so that my students enjoy it and understand it better.

Now plays, poems, stories are available on YouTube and Google. They are available not only in print but also in audio and visual mediums. The teaching of a play, for example, can be supplemented with a visual performance downloaded from the Internet or with a readily available CD. Performances of almost all Shakespearean plays are available on the Internet. Poetry recitations are available on certain websites. However, there is a hitch here. Some teachers depend so heavily on technology that they do not think it necessary to read the play and to present it or teach it in a dramatic manner. When I teach a play, a story or a poem, I usually teach it my own way, but I judiciously supplement my teaching with information and communication technology. For instance, I play a recorded version of William Wordsworth's *Daffodils* or *The Solitary Reaper* [1807, Ballard] or Robert Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. I see to it that the recorded voice pronounces words properly, maintains rhythm, uses emphasis, tone of voice, pace, pitch, etc., to achieve intended impact. Let me give you a demonstration using Robert Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* [1923, Pamilive]:

Whose woods these are I think I know
His house is in the village though
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake

The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep

When I recite the poem, my first objective is to let my students enjoy its rhythm and music. So, I draw their attention to some usually mispronounced words. For example, many teachers of English pronounce such words as 'village', 'darkest', 'evening' as /viled3/, /da:rkest/ and /ivining/. We know that the normative pronunciations of these words are /vilid3/, /da:kist/, and /i:vning/. Through the recitation, I bring to their notice the contrast between the short /i/ sound and the long /i:/ sound as in 'think', 'fill', 'village', 'give' on the one hand and 'sweep', 'deep', keep' and 'sleep' on the other. Similarly, I highlight the contrast between the vowel sound /e/ in the word 'bells' and the glide /ei/ in 'lake', 'shake', 'mistake' and 'flake'. Then, keeping in mind the pronunciation problems of my students, I play the recorded recitation of the poem again to bring to their attention the importance of proper chunking such as 'whose woods these are', 'I think I know'; and 'to watch his woods', 'fill up with snow'.

Language also can be taught through technology. We can play famous speeches delivered by extraordinary orators such as Martin Luther King Jr. His *I Have a Dream* is available on the Internet [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iY1TtS3s]. I usually play this speech three times. The first listening gives my students a general idea, the central theme, the thesis or gist of the speech in brief. Then I play the speech chunk by chunk, bit by bit. I ask the students some while-listening questions. Before I play the speech a third time, I ask them to listen to the speech carefully and note how the speaker uses persuasive devices such as repetition and metaphors to present his argument forcefully, effectively and efficiently. Similarly, we can use Charlie Chaplin's last speech in the movie *The Great Dictator* [1940]. We can use such speeches for a variety of purposes. We can use these speeches to develop our own and our students' listening skills, to enrich our and their vocabulary, to sensitize ourselves and our students to aspects of spoken English such as pronunciation, word stress, utterance stress, emphasis, intonation, tone of voice, voice modulation, and so on. In addition, we can use such speeches to familiarize our students with additional aspects of oratory such as choice of appropriate words, variation in sentence construction, images, illustrations, persuasive language, etc.

We can use technology to teach language in an interesting way. Many teachers want to use technology to make their teaching lively and interesting, but they end up making their lessons monotonous and lifeless due to lack of planning and structure and due to excessive use of technology. They do not know how to use technology, how much technology to use and when to use it. It requires rigorous homework to harness technology to teaching.

Now, let me offer an illustration. Let us say, we want to develop the speaking skills of our learners. This is very important as many of our learners avoid speaking in English. I have always believed that learning how to speak English is similar to learning how to swim or how to ride a bicycle. I remember the day I first jumped into the water to swim. I was scared of water and feared that I was going to drown; but gradually, I gathered courage and confidence and began to move my arms and legs and was amazed at my progress in swimming. Speaking English is very similar to this. Every big thing has a small beginning. Let our learners make a small beginning. Let them make mistakes. We need to break the ice and set the ball rolling. Only then can our students develop their English speaking skills. Let the

learner take initiative. This will not happen if the teacher explains the rules of grammar and sentence structures in a mechanical, mindless manner. This will not happen so long as we teach English through Thai or Vietnamese or Japanese, depriving our learners of invaluable opportunities for language practice in meaningful, relevant, realistic situations. This will not happen unless they themselves use the language in simulated situations. Can we become champion swimmers just by reading a dozen books on swimming? We want our learners to become expert swimmers, but we do not let them jump into a swimming pool. Instead, we spend hours after hours standing by the side of the swimming pool and explaining to them how to swim! How can our learners become confident Olympic swimmers if we do not let them walk into the pool? How can they become champion cyclists if we do not allow them to pick up the bicycle, ride it, fall and rise and fall and rise and then pedal it away? Our job as teachers is just to support them when they first ride a bicycle, just to give the bicycle a push and leave it. Confidence results from falling off and getting up, not from continuous support from the teacher and the learner's parasitic dependence.

Let me discuss an illustration to demonstrate how we can develop the speaking skills of our learners using technology. Walt Disney has several animation movies. We can choose one of these animations and encourage our learners to produce a collaborative, collective spoken or written discourse. We can play a full animation such as *Paperman* that lasts for a few minutes. Then we can play it bit by bit, one shot at a time. Our learners watch it and observe things and people in the movie and speak about what they see. Each student says one sentence. The subsequent students have to make their contributions logically coherent and cohesive. Let us say, they see a tall, slim and oval-faced young man wearing a suit and holding a folder in his right hand and waiting on a railway platform. The first student may say, "I see a man in the movie." The subsequent speakers are expected to describe the man. The second speaker may say, "He looks young, slim and tall." The third speaker may say, "He has an oval face." The fourth speaker may say, "He is wearing a suit." The fifth speaker may say, "He is holding a folder in his right hand." Then they may go on to talk about other people and things they see in the movie. Thus, students will contribute one sentence each and finally, they will come up with a logically developed, collectively/ collaboratively produced oral composition. This integrated exercise will achieve several objectives. It will boost their morale and instill confidence in them. It will give them a context to use their vocabulary, especially their stock of describing words. Moreover, they will learn words from one another. It will give them a pretext to practice their grammar. In this case, they can practice the use of simple present tense and present continuous tense. It will require them to think collaboratively and weave their respective contribution logically. It will develop their observation skills. They will find such activities interesting. Moreover, as everyone in the class will get an opportunity to participate and contribute, they will enjoy the democratic, learner-centric, learning-centric sociology of the classroom.

Thus, content subjects, as well as skill subjects, can make effective and efficient use of information and communication technology to motivate their learners, to instill confidence in them, to boost their morale, to facilitate the teaching process, to enhance the impact of teaching, to make learning a pleasurable experience, to help learners

understand things better and faster, and to help them remember whatever they learn for a longer period. In short, the use of audio-visual technology can help teachers break the monotony in the classroom by ending the dominance of auditory learning style and introducing equilibrium between auditory and visual teaching and learning styles. Moreover, the use of technology can help teachers enable their students to ascend from lower-order skills of recall to middle-order skills of understanding and application, and from there to higher-order skills of analysis, evaluation and creation.

However, I would like to add a word of caution. Technology is only a supplement, not a substitute. Judicious use of technology will preserve its element of surprise and suspense; excessive use will make it a routine and when something becomes a routine, the element of fascination is over. As long as it is a love affair, it is motivating, fascinating, arresting and gravitating; but the moment the love affair culminates into a wedding, all surprises are over and people start looking for surprises elsewhere. So, the message is: let us enjoy the romance between technology and teaching. Let us postpone or, if possible, prevent their marriage! The pandemic has brought to light the pitfalls of technology. It has shown us that excessive use of technology kills the element of surprise that judicious use of technology creates. Technology can be a supplement, a support; it can hardly be a substitute. I am reminded of what Charlie Chaplin says in his animated and igniting speech that he delivers in the movie *The Great Dictator*. He says that machinery that has given us abundance has left us in want; more than machinery we need humanity; more than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness; we are not machine men with machine minds and machine hearts; we think too much and feel too little.

Paradigm Shifts in English Language Teaching

Like any other walk of life, English language teaching practices are changing. The future of English language and literature teaching is going to be quite different from what it is today. In fact, we have begun to see changes and paradigm shifts. Here I would like to discuss a couple of paradigms that are already changing the nature of learning/teaching materials, the choice of a variety of language, assessment, etc. Firstly, the divide between "our language" and "their language" has been erased. The ownership of the language no longer belongs to the so-called "native speaker". We no longer endorse the use of expressions such as "non-native varieties" and "non-native speakers". Instead, we prefer labels such as "new varieties of English" and "competent users of English" respectively. This shift has influenced our objectives, our priorities, choice of materials, and aims and standards of assessment.

The ways new varieties have been perceived over the years have changed. The English language spread from Britain to other parts of the world. Initially, the new varieties of English were described as inferior, deficient, polluted, contaminated, and substandard. However, the varieties gradually began to be accepted as legitimate varieties. Moreover, the new varieties have contributed very significantly to world literature in the form of "new literature".

The English language has changed at different levels. We first adopted the language and then

adapted it to enable it to express our cultural nuances. The so-called standard British or American varieties or native varieties cannot express certain culture-bound concepts and experiences. For example, Japanese uses four different verbs for the English verb 'wear'. The English verb 'wear' cannot express the culture-specific nuances that the four different Japanese verbs do. The choice of verbs depends on what one is wearing and on which part of one's body. This is so because English is not the language of our emotional make-up; it is the language of or intellectual make-up. Thus, lexical equivalence is a big obstacle in translation. When we translate the various Japanese verbs using just one verb 'wear', we lose a lot on the cultural front. Consequently, we can legitimately justify the process of linguistic adaptation on cultural grounds.

Research in ELT: Past and Present

Research in English language and literature in India, barring a few attempts here and there, is going through a very pathetic phase. It is being commercialized. As a consequence, research standards are crumbling. I supervised twenty-four Ph D theses and ten M Phil dissertations and evaluated more than fifty theses submitted to Indian and foreign universities. I have noticed a steady decline in quality research. Plagiarism, duplication, and chaotic organization, shabby presentation and poor language are some of the many major maladies that have infected language and literature research in recent times. If I design a graph indicating originality, impeccable language, cohesive and coherent organization, and perfect presentation, it will show a steady deterioration over the last couple of decades. Part of the onus for this corrosion lies with the University Grants Commission. When you make a research degree obligatory for a teaching job, people tend to resort to shortcuts and unfair practices.

The job of a research supervisor is to mentor the researcher, give them some explorable ideas and discuss how to make an original contribution to existing knowledge. But sadly, the job of a supervisor has been reduced to a proofreader who almost rewrites theses infested with language blemishes and organizational defects. I will appreciate it if we spend our resources judiciously on improving conditions for primary education. We are a developing country and cannot afford the luxury of squandering our resources on trivial research leading to abortive outcomes. I felt disgusted when I came to know that several people are working on more or less the same topics such as "developing speaking skills among Telugu learners", "developing speaking skills among Marathi learners", "developing speaking skills among Tamil learners", etc. Does this mean that Telugu learners, Marathi learners and Tamil learners inhabit the moon, the Mars, and the Saturn respectively? Some years ago, I heard of a research scandal. I heard that there are institutes that churn out thesis after thesis after thesis on pragmatic analysis of novelists. The pragmatic parameters remain the same; only the novelists change. I hope that the state of research in Nepal is not as pathetic as it is in India.

Having expressed my opinion quite frankly and blatantly, let me tell you that I know and believe that there are oases in the desert and there is a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. I am neither a pessimist, nor a nihilist, nor a megalomaniac nor a narcissist.

Mother Tongue: Help or Hindrance?

There are similarities and dissimilarities between languages. For example, in Hindi and Marathi, adjectives precede nouns as in the case of "khoobsurat ladki" and "sundar mulagi". In English, too, adjectives precede nouns as in "pretty girl". This is a similarity between Hindi and Marathi on the one hand and English on the other. On the other hand, Vietnamese places adjectives after nouns as in "gai dep", which can be translated literally as "girl pretty". This is the dissimilarity between English and Vietnamese. Whenever there is a resemblance between two languages, it facilitates learning, but whenever there is dissimilarity between two languages, it causes hindrance in learning. However, all said and done, one's mother tongue is an advantage. The translation method of language teaching is based on the equivalence of various types such as lexical, collocational, grammatical, semantic, proverbial, pragmatic, etc. There are two types of relation: relation of equivalence and relation of alternative. The relation between "pretty girl" in English and "sundar mulagi" in Marathi is that of positional and semantic equivalence. On the other hand, the relation between "pretty girl" in English and "gai dep" in Vietnamese is that of semantic equivalence and positional alternative.

The above discussion has implications for the use of bilingual dictionaries. I don't think there is anything wrong with the use of the bilingual method or translation method. Each language carries with it a huge baggage of culture-specific, culture-bound concepts. When we teach English, we encounter certain concepts that are alien to us. Children may face experiential, cultural, and conceptual difficulties when they read their lessons. In such cases, we can resort to translation. Thus, our own languages are assets and resources and they come to our rescue when we are in trouble. If we do not promote our own languages and do not use them as mediums of instruction and as mediums of everyday communication, a day may come when our posterity will say, like Elizabeth Doolittle, the flower girl in G B Shaw's *Pygmalion* [1938, Dover, (1994)], says to Higgins, "I have forgotten my language, and can speak nothing but yours".

Linguistic Hegemony and Colonial Mindset

Despite the changing paradigms, the colonial mindset persists. Let me briefly talk about a few manifestations of this mindset. One, some foreign agencies hire Indian examiners to conduct tests that youngsters take to qualify for jobs abroad. Some of these recruits develop a colonial mindset. They think that they are special people chosen by God's chosen people. The fact that they have been hired by a foreign testing agency is enough for them to project themselves as select people. Two, they try to approximate the so-called native speaker accent. Hardly do they realize that the Received Pronunciation of English is a tiny and negligible minority. There is nothing like the BBC accent any longer because the BBC news readers come from different parts of Britain and therefore have different accents. Many teachers of English behave like schizophrenics: they cannot speak with the so-called Received Pronunciation accent, but they expect their students and examinees to speak with that accent. It is beyond my comprehension why they expect their learners to ape the so-called native speaker. It is neither necessary nor desirable to speak like the native speakers do. Raja Rao,

an Indian English novelist, rightly says in the preface to his novel titled *Kanthapura* [1963, New Directions] that we should not speak like them. He adds that English is not the language of our emotional make-up; it is the language of our intellectual make-up. Many teachers blindly follow the so-called native speakers and spend a lot of time and energy on teaching how to aspirate the three sounds /p/, /t/ and /k/ and how to insert the /r/ sound between two vowels as in 'my idea is' remind me of Professor Henry Higgins in G B Shaw's play called *Pygmalion* whose profession and hobby is phonetics or the science of speech. He says that some people can spot an Irishman or a Yorkshireman by his brogue; but he can place any man within six miles, even within two miles, sometimes within two streets! Some of these phonetics enthusiasts seem to believe as Higgins does, that a person who utters depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere, no right to live. These linguistic schizophrenics seem to be saying to their students that they are human beings with souls and the divine gift of articulate speech and that the English language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and the Bible. We are surrounded by Higginses who maintain that the kerbstone English of their students will keep them in the gutter to the end of their days. These split-personality teachers want to convert their students, these "incarnate insults to the English language", to use Higgins's words, to absolutely mindless apes. Three, when you read articles published in quality journals, you hardly find Indian scholars cited in articles written by Indian scholars. Almost all the names listed under 'works cited' are so-called native-speaker writers. There are many Indian researchers who believe that if they cite an Indian scholar in their paper, the paper may lose credibility. Fourth, when there are two concurrent presentations happening during a conference and one of the two presenters is a lesser scholar but a native speaker and the other one is a scholar of international standing and a competent user of the English language, but a non-native speaker, at least some attendees would attend the former presentation just because the presenter is a "native speaker". Thus, biases in favour of native speakers and against non-native speakers prevail everywhere and at all levels, and quite surprisingly, these biases prevail among Indian scholars more than among British, American and Australian scholars. Five, many Indian students study and know a lot about Saussure, Chomsky and Halliday. Do they know anything about the ancient Sanskrit linguists such as Panini and Bhartrihari to name just two? The answer is a plain NO. Panini was a Sanskrit philologist and grammarian in ancient India. He was known for his seminal contribution to phonetics, phonology and morphology. Bhartrihari was an ancient Indian philosopher known for his contribution to linguistics. Do our teachers and students know about his work? The reply is an instant NO. Our teachers and students know something about the educational views of Western educationists. Are they aware of the educational contributions of Indian and Nepali thinkers and other Asian educational philosophers and educationists? The answer is in the negative. Part of the blame lies with the syllabus framers and members of the Board of Studies of our universities. Many of them do not read and recognize our own educationists and so do not prescribe or recommend books written by our own great minds. However, can we complain about Western scholars who do not include or even just refer to Nepali and Indian thinkers in their books? A book such as *Fifty Great Modern Thinkers on Education: from Piaget to the Present* edited by Joy A Palmer and published in 2002 by Routledge, London, does not include even one Asian educational thinker! Six, many

administrators, parents, and teachers hold the view that students who study in English medium schools are superior to those who study in regional language medium schools such as Nepalese and Hindi medium schools. They seem to believe that the English language "has a spark of divine fire", to use the words of Professor Henry Higgins, one of the two central characters in G B Shaw's play called *Pygmalion.* They do not seem to know the simple educational principle that Bhartrihari, an ancient Sanskrit linguistic philosopher, expressed so beautifully centuries ago: whether you fill a pitcher from a well or from an ocean, it can only hold water according to its capacity! Whether you study in an English medium school or a Nepalese medium school, you learn what you want and you can learn.

Geographically and politically, we are no longer a British colony, but mentally we still retain the legacy of linguistic slavery. Our blind emulation of the native speaker, our attitude to our learners, our attitude to errors, and our attitude to the English language still showcase colonial hangover. Having interacted with thousands of teachers, having recorded their attitudes and opinions, and having heard their questions, I have come to certain conclusions that may not be palatable to some teachers. Needless to place on record that these are my personal opinions and others need not necessarily agree with these views, and these observations are based on limited experiences, on limited interactions with limited groups of teachers. Teachers are expected to be "mentors" and not "tormentors". But over the years I have observed that many teachers are tormentors and their students are tormented; the tormentors have two tools of torment in their hands: the text and the test. Many textbooks are drab and age inappropriate and most of our tests end up exposing the ignorance of our learners and hurting their self-esteem.

Literature-Language Divide

I have always believed that content and code, matter and manner, subject and style are organically inseparable from one another. They are in complementary and not contrastive relationships. The animosity between literature departments and language departments is a result of a misconception. In fact, language can be taught without using literature, but literature cannot be taught without studying and analysing its language. It is the special use of language that makes literature what it is. However, we need to remember that teaching language through literature enhances the quality of our linguistic competence. Let me illustrate this point using George Herbert's *The Pulley* [1933, The Temple] and William Wordsworth's *Daffodils*. Let us look at the following expressions culled out from *The Pulley:*

1. rest in the bottom lay,
2. rest in Nature,
3. let him keep the rest

Obviously, the poet toys with the word 'rest'. Teachers can fruitfully and meaningfully use these expressions to develop learners' dictionary skills. Learners can look up the dictionary entry for the word 'rest' and identify the contextual forms and meanings of this keyword. The word 'rest' in 'rest in the bottom lay' is a noun signifying 'peace of mind'; the same word in 'rest in Nature' is a verb meaning 'relax and forget'; the word in 'let him keep the rest' is a collective noun referring to 'the various gifts such as strength, beauty, wisdom, honour, pleasure' that God has given man.

Now, let us try to understand how we can teach grammar, especially the order of words and phrases using William Wordsworth's

Daffodils. Let us look at the following lines from the poem:

1. ten thousand saw I at a glance
2. what wealth the show to me had brought
3. and then my heart with pleasure fills

Teachers can draw learners' attention to the deviant word orders in these lines. It goes without saying that the deviant word order is purposeful. Moreover, teachers can ask learners to normalize the word order and come up with the following prosaic lines:

1. I saw ten thousand at a glance.
2. The show had brought great wealth to me.
3. And then my heart fills with pleasure.

Let me cite one last example, this time a story called *The Moth and the Star* written in 1940 [Fables for Our Time] by James Thurber. The story opens like this: "A young and impressionable moth once set his heart on a certain star. He told his mother about this and she counselled him to set his heart on a bridge lamp instead". I would like to draw your attention to the words 'this' and 'instead'. The function of these words is to avoid repetition. When we remove these words and reword the sentences, we get a very awkward construction such as this: "A young and impressionable moth once set his heart on a certain star. He told his mother that he had set his heart on a certain star and she counselled him to set his heart on a bridge lamp instead of setting his heart on a star". In grammar, we talk about given information and new information. In the very first sentence the words 'set his heart on a certain star'is new information. This same information becomes given information in the next sentence. In this sentence, the word 'this' substitutes the following ten words: that, he, had, set, his, heart, on, a, certain, star. The word 'instead' serves the same purpose. It renders the following nine words redundant: of, setting, his, heart, on, a, certain, star. This deletion, or avoidance, or erasure of words is called ellipsis. Ellipsis is a very important strategy in developing conversational skills. When we converse, we frequently drop given information and avoid repetition. Teachers can come up with a variety of activities based on this or any other story. Since the story provides a context for language study, the exercise becomes meaningful and interesting.

The above explanation is a testament to the organic inseparability of the story and plot on the one hand and language use on the other. Language and literature are like a dancer and a dance. Can we separate the dance from the dancer? Understandably, the answer to the question is in the negative.

Conclusion

The views I have expressed here are my own views. However, it is possible that other scholars hold similar views. The similarities may just be coincidental. These views that I have explained here are a tiny tip of the iceberg of the distilled essence of my personal teaching-learning experiences gathered over nearly five decades. I am not, to use Iago's words about Cassio in Shakespeare's *Othello* [1603, W Bower and J Nichols], "an arithmetician" or "a mere theoric" and my observations are not "mere prattle without practice"!

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