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Communicative English Learning Issues: A Cognitive and Linguistic Study

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Abstract

Teaching English as a foreign language/second language calls for intensive attention of students with involvement and dedication. There are several cognitive and linguistic barriers associated with anxiety viz., strict class room, fear of making mistakes, variations in self perception, linguistic difficulties, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary which affect their effectiveness in communication. Once the learners are freed from the clutches of unnecessary anxieties, there is a large scope for their effective learning and ultimately their English

communication skill too can be developed who are learning English as Second Language focusing Odia learners studying at engineering Colleges in Odisha.

1.0 Introduction

This piece of writing discusses some psychological and linguistic factors that may cause language anxiety and a great barrier in developing communicative skill among EFL/ESL learners at under graduate level (B. Tech) in engineering colleges.

The problem of study declare that how do learners perceive the language learning process with their perceptions on themselves and how do they perform in communicative event and they encounter linguistic difficulty while communicating in English, have been found to be strongly linked with language anxiety.

1.1.Aim and Objectives :

This study is preferred as a consequence of the lack of teaching strategies allowing teachers for systematizing educational conditions to help SL Learners develop not only their communicative skills, but also the so called 'advanced language Skills' in the contemporary, namely: a) Communication and Collaboration ,b) Global awareness, c) Critical thinking and Problem solving, d) Flexibility and adaptability, e) Social and cross-cultural skills, f) Self-direction and initiative, which are multi-dimensional and require a multidisciplinary approach. In order to design an integrated communicative and cognitive teaching model, the study focuses on exploring the possibilities of the cognitive approach to enhance conventional EFL teaching to Engineering students.

1.2. Research questions:

The purpose of study is to investigate the advantages of applying cognitive-communicative pedagogical model to the teaching of English as a second/EF language, accordingly, we have formulated the following research questions for the study:

- i. How does a cognitive-communicative pedagogical model of EFL teaching change students' topic-related vocabulary acquisition?
- ii. How does the designed EFL model of teaching with the focus on cognitive operations with topic-related materials enhance the capacity of non-linguistic majors to perform communicative tasks in English more successfully?

1.1.Cognitive linguistics:

In Linguistics, Cognition is part of mental process, the behavior and ability through which we human being perceive and acquire knowledge. It engrosses such mental activities as emotion, motivation, and power. This cognitive linguistics is an important interdisciplinary branch of cognitive science that is closely related to cognitive psychology and linguistics. It's also an approach to language, which observation has language as a kind of cognitive action, and studies the formation, the meaning, and the rules of language with cognition as its departure. In short, the cognitive linguistics is an approach - 'Based on our experience of the world and the way we perceive and conceptualize it', An approach to the analysis of natural language focuses that language as an instrument for organizing, processing, and conveying information in more restricted sense but one type of a cognitive science approach to language is to be distinguished from other, the case in point, generative grammar and many forms of linguistic research are within the field of artificial intelligence (Geeraerts,1997, pp.7-8). even though cognitive linguistics is a new marginal discipline which has a history of twenty years or so, it does not only broaden our belief about the word 'cognition', but also has striking

influence on the study of the process of second and foreign language learning and teaching, this paper addresses in this sense of the classroom teaching of English vocabulary from the perspective of cognitive linguistics in language learning and teaching in technical study. The study of vocabulary learning and teaching has been the main issues in ESL/EFL learning and teaching research. EFL teachers in India, in particular, are grappling with the effective vocabulary teaching methods. Accordingly the study discusses on main three principles based on cognitive linguistics (CL) a) the study of categorization, b) prototype, and c) metaphor, then the implications of these principles are in formal vocabulary instruction in a Indian context of English learning particularly at UG level in Engineering colleges of Odisha state.

2.0. Strict Classroom Environment

Consistent with past research, the participants appeared to be blaming a strict classroom environment as a significant cause of their language anxiety. They view the classroom as a place where their mistakes are noticed and their deficiencies are pointed out. One Odia learner expressed, "I feel more anxiety in the class because it is more formal but out of class, I don't feel stress to talk to my friends, not afraid of mistakes". Such expressions of the fear of being negatively evaluated under formal classroom environment lend support to the notion that learners feel more anxious in highly evaluative situations, particularly in the L2/ FL classroom where their performance is constantly monitored by both their teachers and peers, Thus, these perceptions can be considered as a clear indication that the teachers should recognize that a strict language classroom could become a highly anxiety-provoking place for students.

2.1 Presentation in the Classroom

Like discussion in open-class-forum, giving a short talk or presentation in the class has also been reported to be a highly anxiety inducing one, which makes the classroom environment more stressful for the learners. Speaking in front of the whole class or in public causes anxiety for most of the learners. In Odisha, ESL student expressed, "In class may be I stand up and do the presentation, I usually feel nervous. I don't know when I talk to other students in normal class, May be I lose the confidence". Consequently the study emphasized on the findings of the earlier studies by Koch and Terrell (1991), Young (1990, cited in Young, 1991:429), and Price (1991), they also found a large number of subjects considered oral presentation is the most anxiety-provoking activity in the class room. Mostly used by the students and teachers of all subjects in engineering colleges, there are more oral presentation in technical subjects of different branches, that is practiced in management and engineering colleges studies as per CBCS system of BPUT (Govt. of Odisha)

2.2 Fear of Making Mistakes and Apprehension about Others' Evaluation

The earlier research on both ethnographic and empirical supports the notion that language anxiety, for untold number of learners, has its origin in the fear of making mistakes and attracting the derision of classmates (Jones, 2004:33). The conclusion of this study were in agreement in this respect too. The participants frequently expressed that learners feel afraid and even panic because of the fear of committing mistakes or errors in front of others or in Jones' words (2004: 31) because of a fear of appearing awkward, foolish and incompetent in the eyes of learners' peers or others. Therefore, the fear of making mistakes, some learners expressed that learning and speaking a foreign language in the classroom is always a problem. In Odisha, most of the EFL/ESL learners expressed, Classroom is always a problem that you find many people watching you and try to correct you, laugh at you, you will be

blamed for any mistakes and you have to be correct because it is a class. Students, in spite of reporting feelings of anxiety over error correction, also expressed their desire to be corrected in order to overcome their language imperfections, which a seasoned teacher stated was a "tricky job". Resulting from a fear of negative evaluation, the apprehensive students reported that whenever they anticipate that complete communication is not possible and that they are unable to express a particular point fully, they either try to escape or "end up being quiet and reticent, contrary to their initial intention to -participate. "I try to be silent, keep quiet...so that nobody should notice me, I try to escape... try to keep my conversation short as much as I can", ESL/EFL learner said. Thus, it appears, as we believe, that frustration experienced when a learner is unable to communicate a message can lead to apprehension about future attempts to communicate. This would explain why anxious learners tend to avoid classroom participation (Ely, 1986: cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: 297), because they are either unsure of what they are saying or lose confidence when giving an answer to a question in the classroom.

2.3 Role of Language Instructors

It was also found that students' embarrassment may be aggravated by the role played by language instructors in the class. Teachers' attitude towards beliefs on language learning and teaching, their reaction to the learners' errors, and the way they create stressful environment in the class have been-reported to be significantly related to second/foreign language anxiety. It comes into view that the focus group discussion is the authoritative, embarrassing and humiliating attitude of the teachers towards students, particularly when they make mistakes, there can have severe penalty on learners' cognition and their willingness to communicate in the class room. Teachers' views or perceptions about learning a language

and their ways of error correction are crucial factors to be considered in order to alleviate language anxiety.

2.4. Self-related Cognition; Variations in Individual's "self-perceptions"

The anxiety of learners is produced by their cognitive interference based on self-related cognition, e.g. their self-perceptions, self worth, perceived scholastic competence, beliefs about learning, etc. Some self-related cognition found in studies correspond to previously cited cognition and appeared to be varying in individuals based upon their personality traits and earlier experience of L2/EFL learning. the variations occur in individual's self-perception.

Effective evaluation and treatment of those thoughts is crucial for anxiety reduction as they act as psychological barriers to learning. The highly anxious learners seem to hold negative thoughts about themselves, low perceived self-worth and erroneous beliefs based upon their self degradation (To bias, 1986: cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: 297). For example, a Chinese female ESL/EFL learner revealed, "I don't really believe my English language is good, I think learning grammar and language skills are hard to me". This rumination, in keeping with Bailey (1983: cited in Onwuegbuzie et al. 1999: 220), may come from the competitive nature of students, as a female ESL/EFL practitioner expressed about her learning experience, "I was a little upset when I thought many students were better than me". Such negative cognition put serious impediments in their language development; this leads to heightened awareness of their deficiencies and consequently to reticence when recalled upon to exhibit their competence in the target language. Contrarily, less anxious persons do not have such exaggerated self awareness and can therefore concentrate more fully on the task at hand (To bias, 1986: cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991: 297).

The disturbing cognition in anxious learners appears to originate, according to Gregersen and Horwitz (2002: 563), from learners' high self-expectations and unrealistic self-set standards, as a female ESL/ EFL practitioner said that they think it's necessary if we learn a distant language we want to talk it sort of a native speaker. Another important belief, consistent with the findings of Horwitz et al., (1986), is that language learning is a special gift not possessed by all. The same less anxious student maintained, "You may be good at Mathematics, you have a gift to learn it because some are sensitive about numbers because they have a gift about it, but for a language, I think, it is hard to use some gift". We can say it's the God gift.

Here, everything goes systematic and running freely. We can relate it ourselves

2.5 Linguistic Difficulties:

There are some common linguistic difficulties that cause fears in the minds of the learners. SLA researchers have frequently reported students complaining that English pronunciation is just too hard to adopt which English scheme is so complicated, so irregular and with so many exceptions in spellings and meanings of vocabulary items. In spite of awareness of these difficulties, the results indicate that anxiety still continues to flourish in the learners. This suggests that a series of more in-depth research studies need to be undertaken regarding solutions, rather than just the identification of these inherent difficulties in learning English language as a means to enhance students' proficiency and to reduce their language anxiety.

2.6 Pronunciation

The element of pronunciation also appears to be a big cause of stress for ESL/ EFL learners. An experienced female ESL/ EFL teacher stated with respect to this, "Pronunciation

is an important issue across language groups because of its immediate effect on interaction. When you feel somebody doesn't understand you, you need to enhance your pronunciation within a second, which is usually hard and stressful". The issue of pronunciation anxiety has been found to be at higher level among Odia ESL/EFL learners. Odia female ESL/EFL practitioner remarked, "I am really afraid of some... we (Odia) are really confused what we are talking about. We cannot pronounce like Western [mean whose maternal language is English] people. I am worried about my pronunciation after I ask foreigners". Consistent with Chen's (2005) study on "barriers to acquiring listening strategies for EFL learners", the participants mentioned the difficulties pertaining to immediately linking the word they hear to its meaning. An Odia female ESL/ EFL learner said, 'at the time of listening, I cannot find to search out the sense in time. I can note the word but I cannot find the meaning'.

The participants offered different possible interpretations of the causes of pronunciation anxiety. Firstly, learning good speaking skills depends upon both the number and quality of listening within the target language. The learners in the contexts where English is not spoken as a first language in the community listen to the spoken words only in the class from the teachers or classmates who, consistent with Krashen (1985: 46), don't speak L2 well". The next interpretation deals with the fact of how different particular aspects of L2/ FL (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary items, etc.) are related to learners' L1. While comparing L1 and L2/FL sound structure, the particular difficulty, particularly when pronouncing those sounds that they never have produced or even heard in their own language.

2.7 Grammar

With regard to linguistic difficulties, grammar has been found to be the second most important aspect that the ESL/EFL learners find difficult when learning to speak a second/foreign language. "When I want to speak", said an Odia female ESL/EFL practitioner,

"I am not sure which tense to use". Another female ESL/EFL practitioner expressed, "When I speak I am unsure which form of verb to use, I always have to think before I say". She further explained that verbs only have one form in Odia language (Mother tongue) and people use words like 'today, yesterday, tomorrow, last time, etc. to indicate present, past and future time rather than changing the verb form in the sentences. She complicated this point with an example that I *go* to the supermarket *today*. Or I *go* to the supermarket *yesterday*". This difference in language patterns is a big trouble for Odia ESL/EFL learners. When asked about the most embarrassing grammatical difficulties students encounter, a female teacher specifically mentioned Odia students' difficulty with English 'word classes'. She gave explanation that the problem with the English language is the adjectives, verbs, adverbs or nouns that are from the same root, like *confidence*, *confident*, *confidently*, etc.

The learners face difficulties with the word endings or suffixes that are not the part of their L1 system. In the same way, difficulties regarding prepositions, different uses of article systems in different languages and the use of English modal verb forms, etc. were mentioned as a significant problem that learners face during interaction. So, Students from neighbouring countries like Pakistani and Sri Lankan ESL/EFL practitioners specifically reported that the complex article and modal verb system of the English language causes trouble for them and whenever they encounter this problem they attempt to "be less complex and less interpretative".

Such difficulties can lead to the impression that anxious students are not capable communicators in the second language as they impede learners' fluency in conveying the spoken messages. "It is because they know that this is a problem and every time they see this problem is coming while speaking, they get frightened", said the same teacher.

2.8 Vocabulary

The subjects' responses regarding the difficulties of remembering and retrieving vocabulary items are also consistent with past research. The responses lend support to MacIntyre and Gardner's (1991 b, cited in MacIntyre, 1995: 93) research, which found a significant negative correlation between language anxiety and the ability to recall vocabulary items. "I don't have accurate words to express the ideas", "from time to time I am conscious I am not using the right word", I always feel nervous in speaking English because I do not have enough vocabulary, but some of the utterances participants made to show their difficulties regarding vocabulary. As learners can process only a limited amount of information at one time (Light bown and Spada: 2006: 39), the subjects reported that many words do not come out when required to speak in hurry. An Odia female ESL/ EFL learner remarked, "Sometimes I want to speak faster and faster, I try to talk too much in short time, so." (She smiled and made a noise in the throat to show that everything is mixed up and the mouth just produces sounds without meaning).

Implication of vocabulary:

It has long been acknowledged in EFL teaching that vocabulary is essential, in Odisha in particular, to English learning and teaching. It is also nervous, tensioned by the linguist David Wilkins, who points out that 'Without grammar very little can be conveyed and without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (Wilkins, 1974)'. This best saying about the importance learning vocabulary has been welcomed by teachers-learners for many years. The most of learners acknowledge the importance of vocabulary acquisition too. Here are some statements made by some non-major college English learners from Odisha and other states:

- First, learning vocabulary is very essential. It measures a man's English standard.
- The problem that I forget the words afterward I have looked in the dictionary.

- I can't recognize words whenever I come across in reading English books.
- I want to enlarge my vocabulary. I have a feeling that I always use the same expressions to express different sort of things.

On the other hand, vocabulary teaching is not always be very responsive to such problems, and teachers have not been fully recognized, the tremendous communicative advantage in developing an extensive vocabulary. At length, Teaching practice approaches such as Direct Method insists that only the target language should be used in class and meanings should be communicated 'directly' by joining together the speech forms with actions, objects, mime, gestures, and situations but overemphasizes and distorts "the similarities between naturalistic first language learning and classroom foreign language learning and failed to think about the practical realities of the classroom" (Richards, 1986). Audiolingualism gave greater priority to the teaching of grammatical structures. In sequence not to distract from the learning of these structures, the number of words taught was often chosen either because they were easily demonstrated, or because they fitted neatly into the 'structure of the day'.

The arrival of the communicative approach in the 1970s set the stage for a major rethink of the role of vocabulary. The communicative value of vocabulary has always been recognized particularly by tourists. A phrase book/ dictionary provide more communicative mileage than a grammar-in the short term at least. The meaning-making recognition of a potential word is meant by vocabulary that became the learning objective in its own path and In 1984, the introduction to their *Cambridge English Course*, Swan and Walter wrote that 'vocabulary acquisition is the largest and most important task facing the language learner; the course books are included in activities that specially targeted vocabulary'. The most important focus of cognitive Linguistics is on categorization because this linguistics isn't a single theory of language, rather than a cluster of theoretically and methodologically

compatible approaches' (Zhao, 2000). In fact, the general research strategy of cognitive linguistics is characterized by two major features. First, the study of categorization processes in the lexicon is taken as a methodological point of departure for the study of categorization processes in the grammar at large. If linguistic categorization major focuses on cognitive linguistics, then first lexicon study is a plausible step to take: the categorizing function of the lexicon that has received much attention in the linguistics, as lexicon is conceived of as an inventory of meaningful units.

3.0 Conclusion

Language anxiety most possibly can originate from within and outside the language classroom environment. Socio-cultural factors like cultural differences, social status and self-identity, gender, have also proved to be anxiety provoking factors in developing skills in ESL/EFL. In brief, the article discusses why a significant number of second/foreign language students feel anxious and embarrassed when learning and particularly speaking a second/foreign language. The importance of identification and knowledge of anxiety causing factors by language instructors has to be well perceived and suitable measures must be implemented in order to assist students to make progress in their communicative language development.

while most of the issues of cognitive linguistics addressed are not altogether new and what cognitive linguistics offers seem to be the essential questions then linguistics and people are interested in language, have always been asking, we still believe that it's a promising new perspective on vocabulary teaching and learning. Additionally, the traditional methods of vocabulary teaching do and will still play an important role in teaching, but if we make an active use of new perspective in vocabulary teaching, our efforts will be expectedly fruitful. Vocabulary teaching and learning is a cycle of semantics and internalization, which is closely

linked to and to a large extent dependent on the way a word is presented. To condense students' learning load and make sure that the students can enlarge vocabulary efficiently, a cognitive approach based on prototypes, family resemblance/ basic level categories is a worthwhile attempt for us to try out in both elementary and intermediate level of English learning for EFL learners in Odisha.

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