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Stereotypes in Learning English as a Foreign Language in India

Abstract

Language reflects and affects culture

- Alvino.E.Fantini

With the introduction of a foreign language, the teachers or learners of it are forced to deal with the foreign world, their ideologies and their culture. Thus, by learning or teaching a second language, we unconsciously learn or teach the second strategy to encounter this entire world. But, in between this process, hangs the 'stereotypes' that we develop towards a particular foreign language and its culture. India, being a country with number of contrasts and contradictions, it beholds itself, a lot of stereotypes. It is very obvious for a multilingual country like India to encase surplus stereotypes based on its lingual platform. And, as the consequence of the colonization, these stereotypes particularly attack the English language. In the mid nineteenth century, as English language slowly starts to creep inside the roots of India, the natives are forced to develop and cope up with the new lingual stereotypes, unfamiliar to their cultural forum. And it still haunts the development of both the English and the native languages of Indians. Thus, this paper focuses on breaking those stereotypes and brings out a few possible solutions, which enhances the better learning or teaching of English as a foreign language in India.

Keywords: stereotypes, native language, classroom teaching, teaching methodologies, etc.

The spirit of stereotyping was deeply rooted in the veins of Indians. No matter how social a person is, deep inside, the scent of scent of stereotyping still haunts him and hinders the development of things in and around him. 'Charity begins at home' - says the proverb. Not only charity but for many things, good or bad, home will be the place of evolution and for cultured countries like India, home becomes the 'culture medium' where many stereotypes were carefully nurtured and developed. Sanskrit was the lingua-franca of the ancient and the medieval India. Within a short span of its emergence in India, it had become the language of the high culture and the ruling elites. As a result, most of the religious hymns and the brahminic texts were written in Sanskrit. Thereafter, 'Oh! He knew Sanskrit!' 'He is learning Sanskrit' became the common phrase for Indians, where the scholars or pandits were mentioned and elevated by the language they learnt and not by the texts they read. Thus, begins the roots of lingual stereotypes in India. Soon, this illness was transmitted to another major lingua-franca English.

As history narrates, the English language was brought into the Indian forum in the early nineteenth century, with the successful establishment of East India Company, the first step of colonization in India. With the interception of acquiring better communication with both the educated and the unschooled, and giving free education to all the sects of India, the British launched the idea of giving education in the medium of English. After a span of time, across the states of India, the medium of native language was administered in schools and English in colleges. However, in the upcoming years, the scenario was drastically changed and more importance was given to the English language. More the importance is given; more the stereotypes developed around it. And the focus was given to the myriad of methodologies which familiarizes number of abbreviations like TOEFL, IELTS, PTE, ESOL, etc., even to the illiterates. The universal language brought the universal knowledge to the Indians. But later, this universal knowledge is believed to be achieved with the accumulation of profitable employment both in the domestic and in the foreign countries. Seeking fortune across the

seas is not novel for Indians, but the problem lies in the stereotype that, the employment is eligible, only when he/ she excels in English. Though the English language rules over the countries like America, Britain, Australia, etc., it is merely a second language in many countries and is no way connected with a person's profile and his job eligibility. Unaware of this truth, still the children in India, are introduced the materials in English rather than their native language even before their kindergarten. Here begins the conflict between the native language and English, where at the end, the child himself develops a new language like Tanglish and Hinglish, etc.

The Cornell studies suggests that, language is a 'biological instinct' and babies don't develop or learn a language but are born with it. At this juncture, where the kids are employing their ability to decode their native language through structural analysis, English is forcefully introduced into their forum, which creates nothing but only chaos in their mind. Moreover, as the kid grows, he was pushed into the self decolonizing society, where English is forcefully imposed into his domain. As a result, the kid, in the process of becoming an adult, loses his/her own identity, as he has a foot in both the languages where he mastered nothing and hangs in between. Research also states, bilingualism is healthy, as it strengthens our mental muscle and enhances our executive function. The success in switching languages is achieved when the speaker possesses the ability to control both the languages and to select one that they want to use without consciously thinking of it. But psychologically, with these stereotypes encircling them, the grown up adults, lost their control of both the languages, simultaneously. Thus, such stereotypes should be broken, for the speakers to master both the languages and to have a control over it simultaneously. And it is the duty of the ELT teachers to undertake the process of weeding, where such stereotypes are removed efficiently from the learners' domain.

As bilingualism is not a one way track, the ELT teachers should indulge the students in raising their consciousness about the use of stereotypes along with their degree of validity. And the discussion should be made in the native language, which provides the better

understanding of those stereotypes. Also the myth, 'Only English inside the campus' should be weeded where the teaching and discussing should be made in both the languages and the teachers should not force the learners to acquire the English language but to learn, by associating it with their native language. However, the linguists are afraid that too much use of native language will affect the effective teaching of the target language. But also, the 'only English' scenario too, spoils the development of both the languages. Thus, it is the responsibility of the teachers of English to be unbiased and to be an expert, in balancing the languages simultaneously, thereby promoting both English and the native language. Thus it is evident that, all these stereotypes destine a single a path, the employment. As a result, in recent days, 'Wren and Martin' was replaced with the *Oxford phonetics dictionary*, even among the teachers. With this notion, the native speakers of India are more concentrated in training their children as an eloquent speaker of English. But it is to be noted that, any language is certified to exist, only when it is indulged for both written and oral communication. Taking this into consideration, in the forum of second language learners, the acquirement of English language should not be stopped with the communication alone due to those mere stereotypes but should be enhanced more. Thus it is the prime duty of an ELT teacher to ensure that their learners are not stopped with the communication alone but went for more, where they concentrate in acquiring the language as a whole package. For this reason, the teachers should discuss those stereotypes in classrooms, opening the forum for both the languages, thereby enabling the students to acquire the perfect balance and the mastery over both the languages.

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