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Paper: Sustainability

Halo effect of the English language, its pernicious influence, and techniques to avoid it

Students, on leaving campus, need English speech to secure employment and are therefore interested in mastering speech. Yet, the uncalled for importance attached to English in Sri Lanka makes this task exceptionally difficult.

English, though a 2nd language used by a minority in the country, stands out from other languages representing a host of positive characteristics, and in Sri Lanka English is power and those who wield power have access to English. While proficiency in English elevates a person to the highest strata in society in Sri Lanka, non-proficiency in it reduces her/him to the level of a nonentity, and to be accepted as being proficient in English one should be able to perform in it with perfect accuracy both phonologically and grammatically. Attainment levels falling short of this norm are marginalized as erroneous. Therefore, Sri Lankans wish to make sure that they use only accurate English in their speech. When they cannot do so, they avoid speaking.

This practice is incompatible with contemporary research which advocates the use of interlanguage (i.e. - using the language naturally at the expense of its syntactic accuracy) as being an inevitable phase necessary for "hypotheses testing". Yet the undergraduates who had studied grammar patterns in isolation at school cannot integrate those patterns in order to communicate. At the same time, their inability to use relative pronouns to describe, define etc., and the difficulty of distinguishing stative verbs from action verbs spontaneously are the other major obstacles they encounter in relation to speaking. I am presenting a technique which addresses these problems.

Procedure followed :

- Introduce basic grammar patterns as components of a single action with the help of visuals.
- Isolate target language conventions which are absent in L1 (i.e. relative pronouns stative verbs, impersonal subjects etc.) using familiar examples.
- Use the knowledge gained by initiating short dialogues and expanding their parameters later.
- Arrange the grammar patterns used in the dialogues **in different combinations using new vocabulary** and practising them cyclically to discourage rote learning.
- Exploit the new experience to conduct normal class work using interlanguage.