

1.22 Use of Gestures to Promote Speech in L2 Class

D Suwadarathna

English Language Teaching Unit, University of Kelaniya.

ABSTRACT

In Sri Lanka, proficiency in the English language is a strength while non-proficiency in it is a weakness. As Sri Lankans consider error-free English as the hallmark of English proficiency, the learners avoid the language skills that expose them to errors. The learners' avoidance of speech, thus, is a strategy adopted to evade errors. In the light of research, this is absurd for errors exhibit a certain phase, namely "inter language phase" which is vital while acquiring a second language naturally. West likens these inter language specimens to "working hypotheses which permit the learner to approximate to the rules of L2". (West, R 1992:17). The learners, however, are scared of "interlanguage" because of the stigma attached to errors. A technique which can avoid errors through scrutiny of their causes, is bound to dispel this fear significantly.

The main cause of English errors of Sinhala learners is their inability to formulate questions which are more complex than the "inflectional ending" variety of Sinhala. The ignorance of TL linking devices, and the difficulty of recalling TL syntax at short notice to maintain conversational speed are the other sources of errors. The presenter designed a technique to overcome these problems. As its first step a few episodes were presented to the class through illustrations, highlighting the syntactic features intended to be taught. Subsequently these items were associated with simple gestures and consolidated later through diverse examples. Question patterns, discourse markers and lexical items were introduced in this manner. The simplicity of the gestures enabled the presenter to repeat them constantly and this repetition helped the learners to retain the data. With the passage of time they were able to recall these data promptly and use them for communication. (Tried out at the Department of Library science at the University of Kelaniya).