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Abstract

We are passing through a century where ‘what is the first language and what is the second language’ is not the principal question. The question is, which language has the power to communicate and exchange one’s views to the known and unknown of extreme north by sitting in the extreme south. English? Bengali ? Hindi? Japanese? or any other? Whichever we opt for, should serve the ultimate purpose, to know and to be known, but shouldn’t be at the cost of detaching the roots we had. The proper blend and mixture can help one conquer the world.



CAT'S EYE ON ENGLISH

Introduction

Before entering into broad discussion about English as a first language or second, we must know what is meant by first or second language. My mother is the first person who gave me shelter before I felt the sunlight, before I inhaled myself the holy air of this world, my mother was the first person who shouted after my birth as “My Child” or “Meri Bachha” or “Amar Santan”, my mother was the first person who cried for me for the very first time” etc. I heard her language first, I replied in her language first.

So, the language which we heard first or which we are acquainted from birth should necessarily be your first language, rather we can demand this as our native language. Now, what is native language? English as a first or native language means we were born into it, we spoke first and still felt comfortable in speaking it. This becomes the language we use and know the best. Typically it is the same language that your parents use. The language we first learned as a child, is our primary language.

Whichever language we speak in, there may be another language which we use as second. That means, we speak in one language better but the other language has become our more or less compulsion mainly for our knowledge and development i.e. for learning, for discharging our day to day and official duties, particularly in a country where it is the dominant language. It is learnt because a child who has been learning one language in the home, goes out and acquires another in the community, learning it by using it with friends ,colleagues and neighbors, by playing, by

going to school etc. This generally happens when one is from an immigrant family, living in a different language motherland.

The term second language typically means that the person's nationality and/or heritage is rooted in a country where the primary language is not English. Though the person speaks only English and have never been exposed to any other language, but the government and the educational system designates him as a second-language speaker of English. Again, it could mean that the person speaks two languages, but that may not be the truth in actual practice.

We are now living in 21st century where the world is more mobile and multi-functional than it was some decades ago. If we consider the world as a whole, the old conception of first and second language may not be appropriate as on today. Researchers may have a rethink on the terminology. A better term would be "Best language" because a person's so-called first language is not necessarily his or her best language, though that is what the term implies. For example, one's first language is Bengali. His/her parents are both Bengali and speak Bengali fluently. So, he/she is first exposed to Bengali, even before he/she was born. Bengali is, therefore, his/her first language. Now, his parents also, speak fluently in English, as good as Bengali. But English is his/her second language and it is, in fact, his best language.

"Basically, we can divide up countries according to whether they have English as a native/ first language or English as a second language or English as a foreign language. The first category is self-explanatory. The difference between English as a foreign language and English as a second language has nicely been defined by *Linguist Braj Kachru* .

He has divided the English-speaking countries of the world into three broad circles, such as

The inner circle: these countries are the traditional bases of English, where English is the primary language for e.g. Great Britain, Ireland etc.

The outer or extended circle: these countries represent the earlier spread of English in non-native contexts, where the language is part of the country's leading institutions, where it plays a second-language role in a multilingual society. e.g. Singapore, India etc.

The expanding circle: this includes countries where the importance of English is taken as an international language, because these countries had no history of colonization. English has no special administrative status in these countries. English has actually been assigned a communicative status within the country, e.g. China, Japan etc. Here English is a *foreign* language. It is clear that the expanding circle is the one that is most sensitive to the global status of English. It is here, that English is used primarily as an international language, especially in the business, scientific, legal, political and academic communities.

Acceptability of English as a First or Second language

At times, when it comes to primary education in India, there has been long debates and discussions on this aspect. Many preferred regional languages as the best medium to impart primary education to children. According to them it is easy to understand in local language in a particular region. The other large section of the population, thinks English is the best medium of

transmission of knowledge and information. It is accepted worldwide and it tends to develop the personality of a child.

Furthermore, existing debates in postcolonial countries on the issue of use of English as a medium of instruction, gave birth to great views, which are dispersed in different dimension. On one hand dominant and instrumentalist, mainly the policy makers prefer to use English from the point of view of economic growth. Many parents shared their views in favor of the instrumentalists. They think and feel that early immersion in English is essential for success in the labour market. However, their approach does not take into account, the enormous variety of linguistic contexts within and between postcolonial countries. They do not consider how this impacts on the linguistic needs and educational outcomes of different groups of disadvantaged learners. These differences in context count against a **'one-size-fits-all'** approach and the unproblematic transfer of language policies across contexts.

On the other side of the debate, supporters of mother-tongue-based education advocate that education in mother-tongue is a human right. This is why UNESCO also recommends using mother tongue for elementary education (Children Learn Better in Their Mother Tongue). The convincing arguments of these scholars, is that mother- tongue based education for some early years of life say six to seven is essential for mental developments as well as academic point of view. It will also maintain wider language rights in and through education. The significant value in promoting mother- tongue-based education cannot be ruled out.

At the same time, the view of other school of thoughts has become equally significant. According to them, world has become a **global village** and English has become its **global language**. Therefore, knowledge of good English, in today's world is not a power that one possess, but it's a

necessity that every talented individual should be master in. When we are talking about English as a first language, as 'Mother-Tongue English' and English as a second language as 'Academic' or Global English we should remember that the ultimate outcome of both approaches is competence in English.

Certainly, regional language as a medium can be an effective way of education to some extent, but the advantages of English medium of education are much more than regional language. We may consider some of the advantages of an English Medium education, such as:

English is the most widely spoken language – If the kids get their primary education in English, then their fluency in English language is surely going to increase, which will help them to get exposed to greater world in future.

Higher education and English Language – if a student wants to prepare for international colleges for higher education, English is the only medium in which he can survive. Therefore, English medium of education becomes very much important here.

Technologies and English Instructions – Most of the modern technologies are invented, reinvented, modernized and the inventors keep English language for the instruction manual of the technological gadget so that the gadget can be used worldwide. That is only to catch the world market by sitting thousands of miles away from the ultimate users.

English Language and professional field of work – Nowadays most of the job interviews are

taken in English language. Every organization wants their candidate to be fluent in English. In fact, in the current scenario, English language has become the industrial language mostly all around.

Primary learners of English as first language are expected to speak English fluently and possess simple reading and writing skills, which others are not expected to have but should be able to understand simple commands and have some skills in letter and word recognition and formation.

Learners completing the Mother-Tongue English course will develop a good understanding of it, and should be able to respond to a wide range of different types of texts, and gain an appreciation of the major writers of English fiction.

Finally remember an **A** is an **A**, no matter what the subject is.

Therefore, the knowledge of English is invaluable, which one can get if he is exposed through English as a first language.

It is protested by others who recommend mother tongue as first language instead of English as the medium of education because-

1. Easy to understand- Education in mother tongue is understood instantly, even without noticing any difficulty and helps in thought process, which develops the mind through understanding of concepts behind what is being taught.

2. Easy to memorize- It is easy to memorize information in the language we are naturalized by our surroundings, and it remains in our mind for a long time, and develops the greater pattern of understanding of information so gathered. It brings about individual thinking about the subjects,

rather than just believing and holding whatever is being taught.

3. Contribute to the society as a whole- It is actually more beneficial to get informed about science and scientific theories in our own mother tongue, they understand better and it logically develops the individual, which eventually results in more scientific progress as well as betterment of society.

4. Enrich culture- Language is an essential part of the culture. Our language defines how we think, how we behave and how we look at things in general. We certainly do not want to lose our culture and the diversity that it brings.

5. Preserve mother tongue- It can help in preservation of our own mother tongue, and can develop the vocabulary and terminology to denote many things, that the language do not have any word for. Terminological advancement of a language can enhance the thinking ability of the people.

6. Dignified and self-respectful- It looks more dignified, self-respecting, intelligent and justified to have instruction or education in our own mother tongue, which is quite opposite if we use some other language as medium of instruction. It is undignified, self- disrespecting, foolish, and unjustified, not only for us, but also for our mother tongue.

Disadvantage of using mother tongue as medium of instructions

Actually there is no disadvantage of using mother tongue as medium of instruction or education. Whatever disadvantage we see or think is our own construct because of our own intellectual shortcomings. For Example, the thinking that we need English for higher education is because we give higher education in English. That is our own construct because we failed to develop terminology and vocabulary of our own mother tongue, which can suit our mother tongue, because of which we fail to provide higher education in our mother tongue.

One should not say, do not learn English, and not from very beginning, but should say to learn English for the sake of learning English only, not for learning history, geography, science, morals etc. Know the English words and its meaning first, then know the grammar, and then go on to learn the whole sentence and paragraphs, and then speak English. It should not be like learn sentences first, then learn grammar, and then meaning of the words. It destroy the brain's capacity. Using mother tongue as first language and English or any other language as second language will be more meaningful and easy which will not destroy the intelligence we have.

Conclusion

In conclusion we need to dismiss the myth that first language English is 'better' than English as a second language, they serve different purposes. First language English is for native English speakers, wishing to master their mother tongue and emphasize literature and the appreciation, analysis and response to wide ranging kinds of fiction and non-fiction texts. Second

language English is for non-native speakers, wishing to master English in an academic or school environment and focuses on effective use of English, building a wide range of vocabulary, and the skills necessary to communicate effectively through speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The best way, as I think with my limited experience and understanding, is starting with the mother tongue in elementary classes and then slowly moving towards English medium as the student progress. In the process, we need to ensure that the level of English used in classes is such that the student is able to learn concepts easily while at the same time ensuring that he is able to achieve proficiency level in English in a reasonable time.

Ideally, we should have a blend of English and mother tongue, where the parents teach their kids in mother tongue and schools teach in English with some sort of a bridge facilitated by both of them.

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