

## THE PROBLEMATIC INFLUENCES OF FIRST LANGUAGE CULTURE ON ESL AND MODES TO OVERCOME THE SAME

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### Abstract:

ESL teaching is common, all over the world because of the significance and reach of the English language. It is a globally connective language and has become indispensable due to objectives of business, education or simply communication. The main issue while learning a different language comes out to be with the cultural differences in the grammatical concepts that one has been familiar with since childhood. It is rather challenging to overcome such an integral part of language that most of us consider the 'rules' to abide by, so that we can make sense of statements. For example, the Mandarin language has four basic tones, and another fifth neutral tone. The use of tones are extremely important to the meaning generated, and thus are not compromisable. If a tone is missed out, the implication changes, thus leaving the output incorrect. Such tones do not exist in the English language, however it comes with its own set of complexities, such as the tense. The concept of tense in does not influence the verb in Mandarin language.

When referring to an action that occurred in the past, such as 'eat', the English language requires it to be changed to 'ate' (referring to simple past tense), however, in the Mandarin language, the verb remains in the same form (chi).

Research in such areas are necessary to understand and develop methodologies to overcome these issues for faster and better acquisition of language.

Overcoming grammatical and linguistic differences between languages, and the comparison of languages for ESL teaching and learning

ESL is one of those subjects which enjoy maximum demand due to the basic principle on which it is based - communication. In a world which is being repeatedly called a 'global village', it is quite expected that a common ground for interaction will emerge. English is, of course, the most spoken language throughout the world as a result of various phenomenon such as colonisation, immigration etc. The English language has grown to become the "international business language", wherein without business the globe would not be functioning in the manner it currently is.

The purpose of ESL is never put in a position of doubt, for some it might be the acceptance in university or a job, while for others it is a more important deal of settling in a foreign land with a foreign tongue.

While learning a second language, it is expected that there will be anxiety or nervousness among the students. ESL teaching techniques are most important as they are responsible for ensuring comfort and participation, and thus, improvement in the students.

This paper reviews the current methodologies employed in teaching and learning English as a second language, along with the very problematic scenario of grammatical differences between the many languages of the world. It is expected that these 'rules' of grammar or lack thereof in some languages causes some serious struggles in the process of understanding and incorporating English into one's vocabulary. Unless simultaneously learnt, it is quite difficult for someone to

ignore the ways in which a language they have been familiar with since childhood constructs a sentence, as compared to the English language. On top of that, English is a tricky language, with appropriate pronunciation and homophones which takes much time and work to learn and remember. It is a topic which requires acknowledgement.

#### Methods employed for teaching ESL

Due to the complexity of teaching an additional language while the student is already thorough in another, various methods and means have been spun out to suit the particular scenario, and the reception of the learner. Often times the teachers stick to only one method while in other cases, it is seen that teachers employ different methods for different students as per the specific needs. The differences in the methods also lead to the differences in results and this more specific to certain individual goals like aural, written, or comprehensive in general.

Total physical response, silent method, grammar translation and direct method are some of the various means of going about the teaching process. Like mentioned above, some focus on the importance of pronunciation, which is an oral skill while some focus on vocabulary and the strict grammatical rules. There are structural methods which approach the various sets of grammatical components one at a time, so that the differences between them would come across as clear, without any form of confusion.

There are also several methods which take less stringent and technical paths, based more on conversation between tutor and student. In some of these techniques, the teacher refrains from saying much while the student tries to explain themselves solely through English. In other methods, mother tongue is also employed and translation is used for immediate comprehension and allegedly better retention of what is being learnt.

There are no fixed rules which require teachers to follow specifically certain methods unless they choose to specialise in the same. It is a challenging task for the tutor, but success is never guaranteed by using theory strictly, and hence, many apply their own tweaks and ideas to improve upon a given format as per the needs of people training under them.

#### Problems faced by tutors and learners

In every teaching-learning relationship, there are several hurdles that have to be overcome in order to produce an effective outcome, or even just the learning environment. It is to discuss problems such as these, and consequently their solutions that more and more research needs to take place in this area.

Most candidates who require to learn English as a second language are adults, who by law of nature pick up things slower than younger students. This also indicates possibility of lesser interest or lack of motivation as learning a language is a rigorous and time-consuming task.

A major problem is trying to explain a thought in the mother tongue or native language, this inadvertently slows down the process of picking up the style and format of the new language.

A big problem is the comparison of the mother tongue with the new language (in this scenario, English). Each language has a different format and varied rules that it follows, it is not practical to compare any two languages while in the process of learning one.

For example, the Mandarin language has four basic tones, and another fifth neutral tone. The use of tones are extremely important to the meaning generated, and thus are not compromisable. If a tone is missed out, the implication changes, thus leaving the output incorrect.

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Mandarin is one of the more difficult languages, for the discussion, but even 'simpler' languages have definite and inevitable distinguishing features with reference to formation of sentences, or parts of speech.

In a comparison between English and Dutch, Hannah De Mulder writes that the concept of time is represented in a very different manner.

"In Dutch we say half to six instead of half past five when we are both talking about 17.30." (Mulder, 1)

She goes on to represent 17.40 as ten past half to six in the Dutch format, demonstrating how indecipherable it might be for other languages.

English and Spanish languages use their parts of speech in a rather similar manner. However, there are some distinct differences which need to be taken into consideration.

For example, the adjectives that usually are place before the noun in English language is placed after the noun in Spanish.

"Thus we would say *hotel comfortable* for comfortable hotel and *actor ansioso* for anxious actor." (Erichsen)

Another comparison between English and Spanish is made through the usage of its gender pronouns. English only specifies gender of animals/living things while Spanish designates it to any noun, therefore designating the appropriate pronouns as well.

German has a lack of words or phrase to specifically refer to the future, so the English sentence 'I will show you when I see you next' implying future often is mistakenly said as 'I show you when I see you', as per German grammar rules.

All of these examples strengthen the case this paper makes of the big gaps through which any beginner might fall and be confused regarding, because the wrong does not sound wrong to them due to what they have known their whole lives.

How does one overcome such problems?

If one is practical and realistic, it is very difficult to not compare two languages if one of them has been in use since childhood and the other has not.

It is not quite possible to wipe clean all the 'rules' we learn or the ones we don't see as existing rules because of our fluency and practice in our mother tongues.

However, a better option would be consciously listing out the differences between one's native language and the new language one is trying to learn, so as to focus, concentrate and improve on those areas. If one is aware of the differences more vividly, they are likely to remember not to make mistakes with the same.

Moreover, audio-visual content such as movies, TV shows, or actual dialogue between people would naturally enhance the understanding of the English language and accentuate on the differences from the native tongues.

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