

## CULTURAL LITERACY & LANGUAGE TEACHING: INDIAN SCENARIO

*Dr Sai Chandra Mouli Timiri*  
tscmouli@hotmail.com

### Abstract

Teaching is known as a noble profession. A teacher not only teaches a language or a subject, but also inculcates human values and regard for life, animate and inanimate, in his students. In a language class, basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are taught initially and developed subsequently in a graded manner, under the guidance of a teacher. Tests are conducted and evaluated to award a student with a rank/grade. Not much thought is given to equipping the learners with emotional intelligence to cope with any situation in life. Learner autonomy is the goal of education. Only when awareness is created about multiculturalism and the need to respect all as members of a family, proper literacy in all aspects is possible. Cultural values can be inculcated in an innovative manner by using technology in a language class room. Linguistic and cultural components are to be integrated for multidimensional empowerment of learners to live comfortably and decently in today's world marked by multiple migrations and locations chosen to study or work. This paper seeks to discuss endeavours made in India in this regard.

**Key Words:** Culture, Literacy, Innovation, Cuisine, Technology, Empowerment.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English is a global language used in a majority of countries in the world. In India it is no longer viewed as a foreign language. It is used extensively in education, administration, commerce, trade and diplomacy. Command over the language empowers the teachers and the learners in excelling their respective academic pursuits.

English language teaching/learning acquired supreme eminence in the changed global order. In a uni-polar world, where the language empowers one beyond bounds, it has become mandatory for the teachers to become technology savvy and fine-tune their methods of teaching accordingly. Teacher literacy and love for innovative techniques of teaching not only enliven classroom environment but enthuse the learners to evince keen interest in the proceedings taking place. Knowledge of more languages broadens one's horizon of awareness offering multiple options in selecting mode of communication. Speech and written patterns do enable one to communicate in a facile manner on account of linguistic proficiency. Awareness, knowledge and skills assume significance in intercultural communications.

In the twenty first century use of multimedia, social media and a variety of resources elevate levels of teaching and learning languages. Computers are used to contact, share information and supervise organisational operations in a more dynamic, level-headed manner. Use of technology in content management has proliferated beyond comprehension.

### 2. USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Teaching the teachers of English rudiments of language technology and use of necessary tools is imperative. Harmonious environment is to be created in learning place. Socio-cultural aspects which generally hamper or boost a teacher's capability to deliver goods, take a back seat as technology and appropriate tools make no such distinctions normally found everywhere.

- a. In the tradition bound learning environment, O.H.P s[ Over Head Projectors] were commonly used to teach science subjects. Very rarely language teachers had access to them. Slide

shows using appropriate equipment made way to raise level of teaching/learning. English films were shown to students, basically to offer relief from routine learning and also to familiarise them with the use of the language, especially pronunciation. Cultural aspects too were sought to be noticed and appreciated.

- b. Radio has been a major source of communication. While the shape, size and function of radio have undergone unimaginable transformation, the basic function of communication and dissemination of information has made radio relevant even today. Ham radios are of great significance in moments of disasters and natural calamities in establishing a link to contact and learn extent of damage done and quantum of help needed.

Educational programmes make radio relevant even today. There was a time when Sanskrit lessons were broadcasted over the radio. Programmes suitable for children, youth, women and rural folks were tailor made for sharing information. Radio lessons were a big draw those days; especially language related content had many avid followers.

- c. Television has come to occupy an important place in every household across the world. It is a major source of entertainment with multiple channels telecasting various programmes round the clock. However, it has also been used as a means of disseminating not only information but also educational content. Access, reach and mass appeal make it an attractive mode of educating people in developing countries. In India too 'Country wide class room' programme became very popular and a vital component of distance learning mode of education.

Dedicated satellite channels/service like **EDUSAT** have potential in reaching large audience, including teachers of languages. How much awareness is created is a matter of conjecture. Investment for developing study material may dampen enthusiasm of extensively using TV for educational purposes alone. Data transmitted through animation, audio and video formats always draw learners to TV educational programmes. Telecasting films in English and famous scenes/ episodes from great classics make learning a language like English through the medium of TV more engrossing activity, irrespective of age of learners. Programmes like 'What's the good word', language related 'quiz' contests and 'dumb charades' make learning a language like English more attractive and purposeful. Pronunciation and cultural aspects of English and the native speakers do equip a learner in knowing nuances of the language and its usage.

- d. Computer was once viewed with awe and common man thought it a very expensive tool to learn languages. Initially its use was confined to offices, organisations and research laboratories. Slowly it moved into homes and today has become an indispensable accessory for communication, entertainment and preserving vital data related to professions, personal documents and creative output of individuals.

Today language technology has come to mean use of information technology and the tools integrated to learning languages. Technology utility in disseminating knowledge and various applications developed in course of time have made computer based learning an indispensable part of education at various levels. From Desktop systems to Laptops, and then Tablets have become a part of modern day citizen in most part of the country. Institutional training was deemed necessary to handle computers competently. Along with passage of time and growing affordability to own a computer made it the most sought after gadget in the educational arena.

Teachers have been encouraged to familiarise themselves with the basics of computer and its use, so that computer based teaching has become an integral part of present education system. 'Digital Literacy' has become absolutely essential for a teacher to effectively discharge his professional duties. Special sessions are created with essential know how about computers to train teachers employ technology for sharing information and disseminating

- knowledge in class rooms.
- e. 'Language Labs' are built in every educational institution to effectively teach a language like English to rural and urban students. As a matter of fact, urban learners have better access to computers and use of the gadget does not pose any challenge to them in learning their lessons. Special care and affectionate treatment do endear a rural learner to computers and slowly he sheds his fear and inferiority complex in handling the system. Use of computers in teaching/learning a language like English has enabled a teacher design study material and programmes as per specific requirements of his learners and the topic taught. Sharing information, conducting tests, evaluation of answers and handing over feedback by a teacher makes class room activity lively and engaging. With the help of Internet computers have virtually reduced the world to a village. Virtual classes, webinars, on line presentations, designing content and teaching on line, preparation of study material, interactive teaching, using specific websites for learning pronunciation, correct intonation etc can be carried out using computers in language teaching.
- f. IT revolution has totally changed life style pattern, communications and inter personal relationships. Social media is used to establish contact with and stay connected with others in different modes. Networking and connectivity are the key words in this context. There are both positive and negative aspects related to this powerful platform connecting millions. Rapid strides made in use of technology create fervour and fear at the same time. Misuse of social media can lead to disastrous consequences, endangering personal safety, reputation and social status. Hackers can ruin lives and cause irreparable damage to the interests of industrial or business establishments. Local circles are formed to bring people together to discuss their grievances and requirements, making a concerted effort for redress and realisation respectively. Every state and Central government department has created its own data base, and mode of contacting and learning public demands to run administration as smoothly as possible. Public Learning Network (PLN) makes use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp etc. to share ideas, problems and information. Major benefit of social media platforms is that if one individual is informed or gets involved in any issue, within minutes global response, support or condemnation follow with lightningspeed. Teachers of English are said to be best users of social media both for personal and professional networking and realise goals set as needed.
- g. English language teachers have good access to mobile phones. Use of mobile internet as part of their daily life is on the increase. Teachers report a high level of familiarity with using mobile phones than using personal computers. Now a days many people are using smartphones. There is no definite information about use of mobiles by private and government sector teachers. While accessing information via mobile, four of the most relevant areas to be considered in the process of creating and dissemination of content are connection type, use of mobile internet, use of micro-SD cards and use of educational mobile applications. It has been observed that teachers are more familiar and comfortable with using their mobiles over personal computers. There is a strong conviction that a mobile phone can be more effective channel for CPD, in addition to providing a platform for collaboration among teaching communities [generally through social media].
- i. In many countries culture models are passed on from one generation to another through recitation. Time tested verses and sayings which highlight benefits of virtues and value based life are communicated orally first and absorbed in absolute humility and obedience. The learners memorise the cultural expressions without understanding meaning or social significance of what is communicated to them. Naturally this practice results in hierarchical pat-

terms and hegemony of vested elements. This is how norms of 'high' and 'low' are formed and followed.

Lovable cultural values inculcated at home and school make an individual stand out in a crowd. Jumping queues, breaking traffic rules, staring at strangers are generally deemed uncouth and uncivilised practices. Just as dress reveals a person's class, speech too helps in understanding a person's upbringing and education. Concealed patterns and norms of behaviour do not offer much ground to locate culture of a community.

Culture is associated with ethical norms, notions of good and bad, right and wrong as well as beauty and intelligence. Concepts are not universal just like practices. While functioning according to time frame accorded is the norm in many countries, in some cultures performing a task slowly and steadily is appreciated. They believe that 'haste makes waste. 'In Telugu there is a proverb: 'Parigethi paalu thaagekannaa, nilabadi neellu thaagadam melu.' [Instead of drinking milk while running, better to drink water standing at a place]. This is analogical with English proverb 'Patience pays in the long run'. These proverbs or statements of wisdom are specific to a culture, though similar ideas are conveyed or shared universally at times.

It is observed that the abilities of the students are limited in terms of Communicative Skills on the whole and vocabulary in particular. Therefore, this shortfall of vocabulary may be met with to some extents by enriching the idioms employing technological tools and student centric activities.

### **3. ACTIVITY**

K.VenkataRamana, a Senior Assistant Professor in Engineering College Hyderabad, shares his experience as under:

#### **3.1 Subjects of the study**

Subjects of the research are students pursuing Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE) I year admitted during the academic year 2016-17. Care is taken that the sample contains students of various socio, economic and cultural background. This heterogeneous group consists of 30 students in number.

#### **3.2 Objectives**

The following are the objectives of this activity:

- a. To introduce idioms to students
- b. To develop interest in the vocabulary building
- c. To make them practice idioms with proper pronunciation
- d. To make them communicate effectively

To attain the above objectives, the following methodology is adopted.

#### **3.3 Methodology**

- a. Gap filling exercises
- b. Listening for gap filling
- c. Discussion of the idioms and
- d. Pronunciation practice with Video

##### **3.4.1 Gap Filling Exercises**

The following gap filling exercise is given to the students to check, create interest and to strengthen their idioms vocabulary. This activity is extracted and adopted from the websites <http://busyteacher.org/13991-everything-at-once-song-to-practise-idioms.html> and from the

website [http://old.pglbc.cz/files/DUM\\_2013/Anglicky\\_jazyk-Csibova/DUM\\_AJ\\_Cs\\_31.pdf](http://old.pglbc.cz/files/DUM_2013/Anglicky_jazyk-Csibova/DUM_AJ_Cs_31.pdf). This exercise is adopted looking into the availability of exercise sheet, audio clipping, video clipping, rhythm of the lines, vocabulary required and the possibility of creating interest among students. Students are given 15 minutes to complete the task.

### **LENKA 'Everything At Once'**

As sly as a ....., as strong as an .....  
 As fast as a ....., as brave as a .....  
 As free as a ....., as neat as a .....  
 As quite as a ....., as big as a .....

All I wanna be, all I wanna be, oh  
 All I wanna be is everything

.....  
 As old as ....., as straight as a .....  
 As royal as a ....., as buzzed as a .....  
 Stealth as a ....., smooth as a .....  
 Pure as a ....., pure as I wanna be

All I wanna be, all I wanna be, oh  
 All I wanna be is everything

At the end of the 15 minutes, it was observed that 10% of the students could answer only 25% of the blanks, 75% of the students could answer only 50% of the blanks and 15% students could answer 70% of the blanks.

In continuation to the exercise given, students are asked to fill-up the blanks remained unanswered in the above exercise with the help of audio clipping presented to them.

#### **3.4.2 Listening for Gap Filling**

The audio clipping was in the foreign accent. The lyrics were presented by foreigner with rhythm and intriguing music. It was observed that some of the students are exposed to the foreign accent for the first time. Some could follow it comfortably. The intonation of the lyrics coupled with music developed interest to listen keenly to fill the gaps. It was observed that on an average the audio clipping helped students to fill-up about 20% of the blanks unanswered in the first round of listening. Observing their interest and curiosity to fill the blanks on their own, the blanks are not discussed.

In the second round of listening, students were little more attentive and on an average could fill around 15% blanks unanswered.

Based on their request, they were given third round of listening. At the end of the audio, it was observed that 5 students could fill the 100% blanks and 10 students could fill the 95% blanks, another 10 students could fill the 90% blanks and the rest of the 5 students could fill between 70% and 75%.

#### **3.4.3 Discussion of the Idioms**

At the end of listening activity, the identified students are asked to explain the key in parts to the group. All the 5 students shared the key and the reason behind their ability to fill-up quickly. The presentation of key in parts helped them to face the audience and share their thoughts in solving the key. The faculty discussed the key at the end in detail, the logic behind the key, utility of the idioms in day-to-day communication and the impact it can create. The key is given hereunder:

**KEY:**

As sly as a **fox**, as strong as an **ox**  
 As fast as a **hare**, as brave as a **bear**  
 As free as a **bird**, as neat as a **word**  
 As quite as a **mouse**, as big as a **house**

All I wanna be, all I wanna be, oh  
 All I wanna be is everything

.....  
 As old as **time**, as straight as a **line**  
 As royal as a **queen**, as buzzed as a **bee**  
 Stealth as a **tiger**, smooth as a **glider**  
 Pure as a **melody**, pure as I wanna be

All I wanna be, all I wanna be, oh  
 All I wanna be is everything

In continuation to the discussion by faculty, video clipping of the lyrics given above was presented for practice. This is only one activity cited as an example regarding the efforts made by teachers of English to familiarise learners with sounds and cultural aspects of a foreign language like English.

Enterprising teachers are using various tools and technology to inculcate cultural values and create awareness to learn and appreciate languages, so that they can adapt, acclimatise and absorb nuances of a new language and new life style of a community amidst who they have to live, when they to foreign countries either for higher education or better professional benefits. In the Twenty first century marked by ever increasing instances of migrations and locations to lead better life, use of technology becomes imperative in integrating linguistic and cultural components in spreading literacy and refinement.

“Food as a marker of cultural identity, tells us who we are, about our memories and the history we share. Because food is strongly related to identity, talking, writing and representing food necessarily raises important cultural issues. Food is not a mere act of consumption but illuminates the behaviour of people and society. This paper has been an attempt to show the interplay of language, food and culture. It also shows how regional language adds the local flavour to the English language used in the novel. We are shown a glimpse of South Indian Tamil cuisine. Gastronomic tradition is dependent upon culture, and is a promising tool for learning about cultural difference.”[Lata MarinaVerghese, Virtuoso, Feb2017].

**4. CONCLUSION:**

Cultural literacy is aimed at and accomplished in diverse modes, depending on the ability, resourcefulness and disposition of teachers of English. Analysing a literary work focussing on cuisine mentioned in narration of the story is an innovative way of approaching language teaching.

**5. REFERENCES:**

- Barthes Roland, ‘Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption’, in Carole Couhinan& Penny Van Esterik, *Food and Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Byram, , M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2002). Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers. The Council of Europe. (Retrieved

April 29, 2009 from <http://lrc.cornell.edu/director/intercultural.pdf>)

Crystal, David, (1998). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge : Canto.

Eivind Jacobsen, 'The Rhetoric of Food', in Marianne E. Lien & Brigitte Nerlich, *The Politics of Food*, Oxford: Berg, 2004.

Kramsch, Claire. (1996). "The Cultural Component of Language Teaching." <http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/ejournal/kramsch2.htm>

Lata Marina Varghese. 'Learning Language, Learning Culture: Anita Nair's *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*.' in *Virtuoso*, ISSN No.2249-6076, Vol 6 No2. February, 2017.

Maria Lorena IRMIA . "Developing The Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching," *International Journal of Communication Research*. ( volume 2• issue 4 October / December 2012 .. p325.)

Nair, Anita. *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*. India: Harper Collins, 2015.

Parasecoli, Fabio. *Cultural History of Food*, Oxford: Berg, 2012.

Sai Chandra Mouli, T. *Essential Communication Skills for Dynamic Development*. Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2016.

Venkata Ramana, K. 'Teaching Idioms Employing Technological Tools and Student Centric Activities' *Virtuoso*, ISSN No.2249-6076, Vol 6 No2. February, 2017.

Lenka Kripac performer. "Everything at once." Youtube, uploaded by LLenka VEVO, 10, February 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eE9tV1WGTgE>

Lenka Kripac performer. "Everything at once." Tegos.ru, (2016, September 10.),

[http://tegos.ru/new/mp3\\_full/Lenka\\_-\\_Everything\\_At\\_Once.mp3](http://tegos.ru/new/mp3_full/Lenka_-_Everything_At_Once.mp3)