

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 10 : 8 August 2010

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

K. Karunakaran, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

Teaching Composition to Adult Learners of ESL: Strategically Bridging Learner Deficiency and Metacognitive Proficiency through Emotional Intelligence A Case Study of Indian and Libyan Situations

Pratap Kumar Dash, Ph.D.

Abstract

This paper reflects on the experience and success of the writer in teaching composition to the adult learners of ESL in the rural and tribal areas of India and remote areas of Libya.

The writer focuses on the problems of the learners associated with formal composition both in speech and writing. The paper gives an account of how after conducting a series of experiments, it is observed that learner deficiency in ESL composition can be improved substantially to arouse metacognitive proficiency by applying the delicate strategies of ESL learning associated with the broad term called *Emotional Intelligence*. Then, it gives information about how the writer diagnosed the problems specifically related to society, culture, environment, individual background, linguistic range and exposure, attitude and performance of the learners and adopted methods of proper motivation, design special syllabus and task, suitable teaching-learning methods and materials to help learners to learn better. The paper also discusses how we can create learners' interest and make them participate in classroom activities; improve the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 8 August 2010

Pratap Kumar Dash, Ph.D.

Teaching Composition to Adult Learners of ESL: Strategically Bridging Learner Deficiency and Metacognitive Proficiency through Emotional Intelligence

136

knowledge of the subject, style, and the range of vocabulary for the development of composition skills.

Introduction

It is very often found that many average adult learners of ESL in rural and tribal areas in India and remote areas in Libya can speak manageably in a given context, although not fully organized. They can communicate somehow with a limited range of words and expressions with a mixture of wrong and right structures.

This happens because these users of English have some knowledge of using greetings, some commonly used discourse makers and unconscious but habituated use of some social expressions in English in day-to-day life. These are mostly informal messages for communication among peer groups. Gradually, when such learners participate in formal occasions of presentation, seminars, debates, discussions, interpretations, appreciations, opinions, reviews and different types of business and academic writings, they are found reluctant to openly communicate through English. They follow some alternative means like memorizing readily prepared materials and reproduce the subject matter somehow at the time of taking an exam or competition, etc., and then forget about it. When these pupils are forced to be dynamic, free and brave enough for this job, then they commit a series of mistakes related to the norms of formal composition. It is evident that a series of negative factors works behind this kind of failure. As a result, real learning for further improvement cannot take place. A huge gap stands between the curriculum target, pupils' interest, achievement and the teaching system of the language teachers.

But, it is pertinent to say that some inadequately trained traditional teachers can manage in their own way of making their pupils memorize some readymade materials for mechanical reproduction. In this way, many pupils cover up ESL at the secondary level and join the tertiary level with specializations in their studies, viz., ESP, EGP or EAP, etc.

Although they are unaware of the skills and required materials for the purpose and task before them, they expect a positive change and development in their pupils. These learners have two modes: having and being (Fromm 1979:52). Pupil with the having mode go on following the traditional ways of writing and composition for purposes of examinations. But, pupils with being mode always try to be resourceful, remember and take keen interest in applying their own resources and might. They do not adopt the so-called copy-paste like readymade things forced upon them. A true facilitator must try inculcating this being mode to help develop learner autonomy and deposit strength of effective SL learning for actual use. Learning the skills for writing and speaking for all purposes along with the art of formal compositions is one of the important aspects of ESL learning. So, the facilitators must realize that the skills, resources and

promptness of writing and speaking with all varieties of compositions should be planted in the hearts and minds of the pupils.

Discussion of the Problem

The writer met in the past and even now many adult students studying different general, technical and professional courses both in India (in the states of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh) and Libya (in the states of Gharyan and Al-shaati), who undergo a series of tests and experiments in learning the skills for academic, general and professional writing. The students are mostly from remote rural/tribal areas of India and remote villages in Libya. So, the deficiencies, shortcomings, lack of skills, mistakes and errors of the pupils of ESL writing of both the countries are detected diagnostically.

Amidst all the commonly found problems related to the art of writing compositions, the following may be focused upon:

- (i) Students are interested to learn and labor, but it is difficult for them to be motivated at an adult stage since they have already come across some easy going, unorganized and irrelevant readymade materials provided by their language teachers for ESL composition.
- (ii) They accept indisputably whatever the language teacher says (may be right or wrong) because they do not have much exposure, freedom, scope, atmosphere, encouragement, social support, and adequate knowledge, smartness and dynamism to detect, counter and participate in bringing about a live, challenging and relevant input providing both inside and outside of classroom.
- (iii) All of them are great in memorizing and mechanically reproducing memorized materials (the teacher-given materials) in the test graphically. But, when their turn comes for understanding and creating ideas, they run short of resources that are essential for composition both in writing and speaking.
- (iv) Typically, the Libyan pupils have a series of unavoidable problems like: (a) Arabic is written from right to left which creates a natural problem of graphic identification and realization of writing. (b) Absence of some of the equivalent phonic and phonemic realizations in Arabic creates wrong listening and speaking comprehension. So, when the teacher says something, they mean something else and take wrong dictation and continue to commit the mistakes. When they read textual materials, it becomes difficult for them to understand the subject matter and remember the graphical settings of the letters as words and phrases.
- (v) These rural Indian and Libyan ESL learners have poor idea of English syntax; interference of the syntax structure of mother tongue/s (MT); and weakness in using discourse makers and markers. In writing, there is confusion of vowel addition or deletion in the words; wrong

perception of both plural and past markers; insertion or addition of extra consonants; poor idea of writing and speaking consonant clusters: plural marker 's' is realized as '-es' for example, cats as cates; whereas '-es' is realized as 'is' for example, name as namis; /e / is received as /I /; /aI/ is accepted as /eI/; /k s/ is understood as /kIs/ i.e. six as sikis; /rn/ works as /ran/ i.e. born as baran ; dark/ l/ is not realized and thus little becomes littel and title becomes titel; and most of the consonant clusters create problem for them.

(vi) Confusion in forming derivatives from stems and roots are some of the common morphological problems. Overgeneralization, omission of main verbs, redundancy ,overextension of analogy, transfer of structure with MT influence, interlingual/intralingual errors, lack of use of down toners, emphasizees, subjunctive patterns, compounding using conjunctions, ordering of adverbs and adjectives are also the problems..

(vii) The range of vocabulary is very poor. Idiomatic, connotative and implicit references are out of range of easy acceptance. The strength and context of argument or presentation is very poor; lack of anaphoric and cataphoric references; inability in bringing accuracy in discourse organization; absence of aesthetic dimension to bring finesse in composition are some other important things to notice.

(viii) Although they use media and modern electronic gadgets, there is hardly any scope for the use of these things for academic purposes. In addition, they have least possibility of using newspapers, magazines, periodicals and books in daily life. Study is confined to teacher-provided materials as well as the textbooks or a few reference books available in the college.

They lack the common ideas of distinguishing formal and informal; abstract and concrete; subjective and objective; generic and specific; inductive and deductive; narrative and descriptive; fact and fiction, etc.

(ix) Since most of the science background students have just formulaic and mechanical knowledge and others have social studies background, they fail to interpret, or create mathematical and scientific or statistical data. Converting verbal to nonverbal and vice versa is yet another problem. They are unable to use jargon or technical terms of critical comparison or contrast reserving their own opinions.

(x) It is found that some language teachers use classroom materials which are neither linguistically graded nor contextually and culturally conducive for the learners. There is information overload too. In this matter, these sensitive learners wage an unconscious and undeclared rebel against the content and context of the materials. They fail to infer and cannot develop schema to further their writing and speaking activities. Since the subject matter is no way related to their concept, culture and system, they feel estranged from the context and content of the teaching-learning process.

(xi) The vernacular background and lack of knowledge of the global affairs, issues, and different concepts restrict them from use of facts, figures and references in different types of writing.

They are deficient in creating a concept, second language management and concentration .But, since they are adult, they are in possession of obstinacy, ego and shyness; have only native social and cultural awareness; conditional curiosity and interest for writing and speaking tasks; exam phobia, easy going, reactive towards any change in learning system. So, it can be said that the degree and percentage of ESL composition tasks runs minus.

Theoretical Framework

The above mentioned problems make us brood over and bring about a useful and viable solution. Thus, thorough observation, experimentation and formulation of a concrete way become the dire need for the learners. It is known to all that teaching and learning language is a great matter of continuous cross-mental and social adherence resulting in multiple effects in changing behavioral pattern. The opinion of Chomsky is highly valued in this context as he says:

Language development, like all human development, will be heavily determined by the nature of the environment....A stimulating environment is required to enable natural curiosity, intelligence, and creativity to develop and enable our biological capacities to unfold. The fact that the course of development is largely internally determined does not mean that it will proceed without care, stimulation, and opportunity ... from nursery to graduate school, teaching is largely a matter of encouraging natural development.

The best “method” of teaching is to make it clear that the subject is worth learning and to allow the child’s or adult’s... natural curiosity and interest in truth and understanding to mature and develop.(Reading Instruction Journal,Fall,1987)

So, in this context, it becomes the unavoidable duty of the teacher/facilitator to develop a system, a custom, a method, an approach and strategies of making the pupils develop the ability of writing paragraphs, short essays, reports, proposals, summaries, letters, compositions for presentation or long factual answer of subjective questions and other such compositions applying both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In addition to Chomsky, the aspect of humanistic learning is taken into account as “The main aim of humanistic approaches is to draw the learners into an affective engagement with learning process, to make classroom activities meaningful experiences which involve the individual as a whole person.”(Widdowson 2002: 13).

At the same time, the vital aspects of developmental and structural creativity and dispositional competence like factors are focused through an exclusive focus on the cognitive and metacognitive aspects to yield a definite result and act as a timely remedial factor--- a savior for

overcoming a huge gap of learning deficiency, ignorance and wrong practices. Let “individuals know about their thinking” and “develop learner awareness” (Kellog 1994:74).

It is found that “metacognitive variables play more important role than linguistic competence in successful second language writing” (Devine 93: 116). This is further reinforced by the opinion that there appears to be a potential link between writing performance and the metacognitive knowledge base, which is, in turn, impacted by and composed of three theoretically interactive, but separate variables--- personal, task, strategy. Then, the opinion of Genevieve West is highly valued in this context. There is need of “learning the cultural context of the language.” (West: RWC Guide: 30). These adult learners have their own ego, personality type and attitudes; extroverts and introverts as guided by their self-esteem. However, in the parameters of Jeremy Harmer (2009), these pupils are mostly “concrete learners” or to some extent some of them are “communicative learners”. Their multiple levels of intelligences are to be explored and they need high motivation for developing skills of composition. And all these are done in a patient and moderate way.

In the mean time, it is found that such adult learners develop their own ability, capacity to perceive access and manage the emotions of themselves and their groups too. Their interpersonal capacity can make them understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of the teacher. It helps improving the metacognitive ability through emotional competence. They slowly develop critical thinking and their cognitive modeling is set right for planning, making decisions, and revising texts (Cumming 1995). Normally, these writers face problems associated with rhetorical constrained situations (i.e. audience, topic and assignment), and the writer’s own goal (i.e. how to construct meaning and produce a formal text). These writers are not solely viewed as “individually-oriented, inner-directed cognitive process, but as much as an acquired response to the discourse conventions with particular communities.” (Swales 1990:4).

Emotional Intelligence

So, in this situation, contextual motivation and strong inspiration including striking at the emotion of the learners in different ways work better. It helps the pupils arouse curiosity, self-exploration and creativity. In the context of discourse, they develop desire for knowledge and skill acquisition, establish coordination in action, develop experiential, dispositional and actional competence. Motivation is linked to the factors of the umbrella phrase called Emotional Intelligence. It is self-perceived grand ability to identify, assess, manage, and control the emotion of one's self, of others and of groups. After igniting their emotional intelligence, the adult learners are found to perceive, understand, and engineer the learning strategies tending towards achieving artificial intelligence too. The teacher/facilitator succeeds in designing teaching materials and environment for that matter. Then it develops the habit of observation, clarification, verification, reasoning and memorization etc. Also, as a part of metacognitive strategy, learners develop the habit to oversee the subject matters, regulate, plan, set goals and develop self-directed learning. This helps to have "the active monitoring and consequent

regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear usually in service of some concrete goal and objective" (Flavell 1976:234).

The teacher/facilitator tries to bridge between the factors of Emotional Intelligence and metacognitive strategies of learning to achieve the goal as stated above. The teacher helps and students take care of "the cognitive factors of language production" (Anderson 1985:54) like Construction (i.e. writer's planning using mind-map or brainstorming), Transformation (Language rules applied to transform intended meanings into the form of message, composing and revising), and Execution (i.e the physical process of producing the text).

Observing a little development in learnability of the learners, a befitting task-based syllabus which is friendly to them is prepared with a comprehensive plan to propagate the teaching of guided composition. In this process, they are also actively involved in designing the syllabus.

Application of the Action Plan

(i) The teacher follows all the means (like delivering inspirational speeches to affect the students' sentiment, put forth challenge, influence with personality or make a series of memorable events occur deliberately that help learners to get motivated and committed to accept the assignment) to wash the brains of such type of adult learners. It helps them to develop listening and writing and relate that to their life. The approach and attitude of the teacher is intelligent, active and informative.

(ii) The selection of subject matter of compositions relates the in and around of their environment which they can perceive, react and comprehend interestingly and voluntarily. There are enough of options open for them for speaking and writing. Carefully selected materials are provided by the teacher for extensive and enjoyable reading which supports them. Task-based (both focused and unfocused) are designed with clear aim and objective.

(iii) Mistakes, errors, coherence, cohesion, balanced presentation of fact and style like parameters of written composition are fine-tuned moderately keeping the original frame intact. In writing, restructuring, sequencing and substitution are done convincing the learners. There is competitive atmosphere generated among them with time-bound factors.

(iv) An open atmosphere is created to allow Code-mixing tolerably which is to be improved later. Systematic self-questioning is allowed to obtain answers for the subject matter of a composition.

(v) Learner interest in choosing the theme and style of work is given priority. Developing ideas for speaking on life, society, memorable experiences; contributing articles to wall magazine, writing blogs, sending mails and SMS or sayings to the teacher, writing for rewards, emotional

and comic or humorous writings are encouraged. It paves the way for developing edutainment too.

(vi) Pupils are allowed to explore targeted language resources through team work; by using all the common resources of English language in computer (For example, computer instructions); or television (For example, favorite serials or movies); or even computerized telephone voices and English used in public advertisements, and the games they play etc. They are allowed to display their experiential competence derived from their association with a series of social activities and sensitive matters including even quarrel and natural differences of opinion on the matters of day to day life, their family, friend, festivals, topics related to village and family set ups, favorite dishes, hobby and personal choices.

(vii) They are given the tasks of writing from rebus, pictures, describing equipment and gadgets around them too.

(viii) The teacher helps exposing models of standard paragraphs, essays and a variety of genres of writings including flyers, magazines, articles, letters and so forth. The teacher examines input frequency, nature of comprehensible input, learner output in interaction, and process of collaborative construction.

(ix) Help them to explore similar word forms and cognates, follow Word-processing in DTP in computer regularly; collect instructions, descriptions, letterings in medicine packets, cosmetics, and edibles etc., used in daily life.

(x) Allow them to form academic discourse community, collaborative brainstorming and peer group editing of writings.

Observations

(i) Pupils participate both in spoken and written compositions using 75 up to 200 words at an average. But, it is depends on their interest and subject knowledge.

(ii) Sometimes they run short of words and linking elements to express their ideas. But they look for the words and phrases having equivalent meanings.

(iii) They struggle to maintain unity of tense and sense basically, still then, they try to avoid shyness and try to speak or write using intelligence and experience.

(iv) They are unable to define titles and ideas and struggle to find more of concrete examples for that.

(v) Slowly improving in comparing and contrasting; finding merits and demerits; and distinguish and present things methodically and logically.

(vi) Encouraged to take up writing task at conducive time, place and manner and contribute ideas and in group rather than individual by asserting themselves.

Conclusion

1. The adult learners of ESL composition are motivated for the task and target of ESLT when classroom situation befits to their culture, age, mentality, time, condition, aim and objective of life in future. They do better when they are inspired, motivated, supported moderately and challenged to think, imagine, judge and form ideas.
 2. Arousing their interest towards applying reasoning, intelligence, recalling of ideas and experience help better to write or speak using English what they were not doing earlier.
 3. Instead of using remote culture and language items(including task and study material)s, if the approach and task is subjective and very much associated with their culture and mentality, and graded up to their expectation, then they are interested to work out and participate.
 4. There is recovery of learner deficiency in dealing with ESL composition graphically with the pace of application of varieties of intelligence and aspects of metacognition in a well designed and time bound classroom situation in an academic year.
-

References

- Anderson, J. (1985) *Cognitive Psychology and Its Implications*, New York: W.H.Freeman.
- Carskadon, T. "Use of the Myres, Briggs (1948) Type Indicator in Psychology Courses and Discussion Groups", *Teaching Psychology*, 5(3), 140-42.
- Cumming, A. (1995). "Fostering Writing Expertise in ESL Composition Instruction : Modeling and Evaluation". In D.Belcher and G.Braine (Eds.) *Academic Writing in a Second Language* (pp.375-397). Norwood, N.J: Ablex Publishing Co.
- Devine, J.,et al.(1993) The Implications of Cognitive Models in L1 and L2 Writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing* 2: 203-225
- Flavell, J.H. (1976) "Metacognitive aspects of Problem Solving", L.B.Resnick (Ed.) *The Nature of Intelligence*. Hillsdale,N.J:Erlbaum. pp. 231-236

- Fromm, Eric (1979) *To Have or to Be*. New York: Abacus.
- Harmer, Jeremy. (2009) *The Teaching of English*. London: Longman.
- Kellogg, R.T. (1994) *The Psychology of Writing*. New York: Oxford.
- Putnam, Lillian R. (1987). "Interview with Noam Chomsky." *Reading Instruction Journal*, Fall, 1987.
- Swales, J. (1990) *Genre Analysis : English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- West, Genevie. "Cultural Issues in Teaching ESL Students", *RWC Guide*. P.30.
- Widdowson, H.G. (2002) *Aspects of Language Teaching*. London: OUP.
-

Pratap Kumar Dash, Ph.D , P.G.D.T.E , P.G.D.C.E.
Faculty of Education
Brak, Sebha University
Libya
pratap_dash70@yahoo.co.in