

Eclecticism in Teaching Spelling

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Introduction

English language has a specific spelling pattern. Being a subskill under writing, spelling is considered as one of the essential skill required for good writing because poor spelling creates a poor communication and at times creating a discontinuity in the process of communication. There are certain rules that govern the spelling of the words. The rules governing these spelling patterns are perplexing, leaving both the teachers and the learners in a state of dilemma whether to follow these rules or not. More than 75 percent of the English words follow these rules whereas the rest of the words have some exceptions in spelling which makes the spelling to be ambiguous with the given words. In second language teaching, primary focus is on developing the four basic skills viz. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing with less or no importance given to teaching of spelling. To improve the students' spelling skills, language teachers must possess certain expertise in teaching spelling and implementing in the classroom according to the cognitive level of the students. Major concern lies in the hands of the language teachers to create an awareness about the importance of spelling to the primary and upper primary children because these children acquire the elements of the language quicker than the higher class children.

Learn Spelling or Acquire Spelling

The words 'learn' and 'acquire' have different meanings. To learn a language is to develop proficiency in the basic skills and communication and intentionally learn proper grammatical structures and various rules of the language in an apposite manner whereas acquiring a language doesn't require any knowledge in the language. The students learn the elements of the second language in a fun filled way through various kinesthetic activities subconsciously. Many linguists often use the term 'acquisition' rather than 'learning'. They use 'Second language acquisition' and not 'Second language learning'. It is because acquisition retains the concepts for a longer time than by learning. The children get bored by learning the language elements through lectures. They constantly need fun and entertainment in their classrooms. So, any language concept must be made to acquire by the children and not learn.

Teaching spelling to the primary children is a challenging job as these children are fascinated to more kinesthetic activities rather than listening to lectures. Therefore in the primary stage of teaching spelling, the teacher should never impart the rules of the English spelling. Instead, the students should acquire the spelling patterns subconsciously as like our mother tongue. A child doesn't learn his/her mother tongue. During a child's speaking stage, the child utter words and speak sentences with numerous mistakes and these mistakes are being corrected by their parents. Here, no importance is given to tense, subject-verb agreement, parts of speech, voices, direct-indirect speech etc. They learn these structures through repeated practice and not by learning rules. Hence it is highly recommended that the children should acquire a language in the primary level and learn the grammatical structures in the upper primary and secondary level.

Significance of Spelling

Spelling – a complex cognitive subskill of writing has gained importance in recent years. One has to master this skill in order to communicate properly and avoid communication errors. The orthographic nature and the relationship between the written letters (graphemes) and the unit of sounds (phonemes) of the English language skill makes it a complex skill. Venezky (1999) pointed out that although English phonemes are typically considered alphabetical, upon a close analysis of the English spelling system is not purely alphabetical. There are several cases where the English spelling deviates from pure alphabetical rules in which letter signal sounds. Thus these characteristics of the English language make the spelling skill a complicated one. The children in the upper primary stage has a good vocabulary knowledge and are likely to use more than 200 – 400 words. Even the poor spellers can use 50-100 words in their routine. The children at this stage should be able to understand the spelling patterns, syllables and affixes. But the situation is opposite in the current scenario. Most of the students are not able to spell properly and directly had a great impact in their academics and also created a communication gap. To become a good speller one has to constantly practice with great effort using different strategies like learning with spelling rules, spelling games, mnemonics, using dictionary, dictations exposure to variant spelling patterns, reading aloud and understanding the phonemes and graphemes. This article focuses on the ways to develop appropriate strategies / techniques for teaching spelling with respect to the analysis of the spelling errors made by the children.

Common Spelling Errors in English

In the process of language acquisition, the children are more likely to make mistakes and errors. This is very common in both native speakers and ESL children. Most of the native speakers make spelling mistakes and not errors while non-native speakers make more errors. During the teaching learning process, the teacher or the researcher should observe the learning strategy or the learning process of the students to understand the causes and sources of the errors made by them. A mistake made by a student can be self-corrected and it occurs due to carelessness or lack of attention. But if a student makes an error, it cannot be self-corrected. These errors occur due to the incomplete knowledge and it can be rectified only through various practices and drills. "Errors are considered to be evidence of the learner's developing competence in the foreign language. For example, they may indicate that learners are applying rules from their own first language to the use of English, or that they are applying rules which they have internalized but which are in some way intermediate between their own first

languages and the language they are learning.” (Parrott, 1993). Pit Corder in his Introduction of Applied Linguistics clarifies the significance of understanding the errors made by the students and he states as, “A learner’s errors are significant in (that) they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language.” (Corder, 1974).

Richards (1971) identified certain common errors and mistakes in students. They are:

- i) Orthographic errors : a) Wrong use of capital letters.
b) Word boundaries.
- ii) Omission : missing letters from words – E.g. suddnly
- iii) Transposition : reversing the correct order of letters. E.g. receive
- iv) Salient : only including key sounds – E.g. kittins, butiful
- v) Substitution : substituting one letter for another – E.g. twinkling
- vi) Insertion : adding extra letters – E.g. perculiar
- vii) Phonetic spelling : spelling words how they sound – E.g. buk
- viii) Homophones : words that sound the same but have different meanings
- E.g. there and their
- ix) Silent letters : word containing graphemes that aren’t produced - E.g.
knit
- x) Double letters : may cause confusion – E.g. opportunity
- xi) Over generalization : over generalizing a grammatical rule inappropriately
E.g. cheerful, cloke

Causes of Spelling Errors

English is a non-phonetic language where 26 letters form 44 sounds. A single letter may have many sounds or a single sound may have different spellings. For example letter ‘A’ has many different sounds as in apple, arm, acquire, and cake. Sound /k/ has many spelling patterns like question, cat, chemistry, kite etc. Besides this, there are many other reasons for committing spelling errors.

- Lack of coordination between pronunciation and spelling.
- Influence of L1.
- Confusion with American spelling and British spelling.
- Confusion with silent letters.
- Inadequate knowledge about homophones and homonyms.
- Unawareness about spelling rules.
- Improper usage of affixes.
- Difficulty in unstressed syllables.

Other than these, some of the other reasons are:

- Lack of interest
- Lack of concentration

- Lack of ability to relate the words with their meanings
- Carelessness
- Loss of memory
- Rote memorization
- Usage of electronic gadgets
- Usage of spell checkers.

There are also few reasons like Dyslexia, ADHD, Dysgraphia and Dyspraxia which cause spelling problems with the children.

Eclectic Approach

Approaches and methods have seen remarkable changes and influences in the history of English language teaching that it led to the development of various new approaches and methodologies. Emergence of communicative approaches paved a new dimension for English language teaching and learning. The teacher-centered approaches started to decline with the upcoming of learner-centered approaches and the role of the teacher in the teaching learning process has been transformed from instructor to facilitator. Even though the language teachers are well trained and well equipped with the postmodern methods, the choice of appropriate methods is very important as each and every students have different levels of cognition. Adapting a single approach for all language features such as prose, poetry, supplementary reading and grammar creates a monotony and deteriorates the language learning. Hence the language teachers are in an urge to adapt different methods to teach the language elements. For instance, the teacher may use structural approaches like Grammar translation method to teach grammatical structures, reading and writing and Functional approaches like Oral approach and SLT to develop speaking skills. The teacher selects Interactive approaches like TPR, CLT, Silent way, CLL, Suggestopedia to develop their listening and speaking skills. According to Chitra S (2015), “An approach or a method which involves the development of all four basic skills of English language should be incorporated because all the skills are inter-related and inter-linked. If there was no good listening, good speaking wouldn’t happen and this would reflect in reading and even in writing skill. So it is very important to adopt a good interactive method or to integrate one or more methods for effective teaching”. Thus integration of two or more methods to enhance better language learning has paved the way for the birth of Eclectic Approach which indeed the combination of the strengths of various approaches.

Importance of Eclectic Approach

The basic ideology of Eclectic Approach is to draw the salient features of other approaches, integrate it and deliver it to the students. This new way of thinking became popular and linguists started to use this approach in the classroom. Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Mellow (2000) both have used the term Principled Eclecticism to describe a desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language teaching. Some of the reasons for using the Eclectic approach are:

- Each and every approach has its own merits and demerits.
- A single approach doesn’t cater the needs of the students to develop all the language skills.

- The cognitive level of each and every student differs from one another.
- A monotonous situation is being created with the use of single approach.
- Students expect fun filled interaction and environment.
- The teacher is free to select his/her own methodologies with respect to the aims and objectives of the lesson and the cognitive level of the students.

The above reasons vividly depict the necessity of using eclectic approach in the classroom. Rivers, (1981) a main proponent of this approach discusses the salient features as:

- Advantages of multiple tasks.
- High interaction
- Lively learning
- Fast results.

Teachers play an important role in design, development and implementation of this approach. A teacher cannot select the approaches according to her choice, put together and call it as eclectic. Mostly linguists integrate Structural approaches and Communicative approaches to design activities such that equal importance is given to the development of all the four skills. There should be a coherence in integrating the approaches and here, the research scholar integrates Structural approach (Grammar-Translation Method), Alternative approaches and methods (Multiple Intelligence) and Communicative approach (Cooperative Language Learning) to teach spelling to upper primary children. All the three methods have their own advantages and disadvantages. So the strengths of all the methods were carefully examined and implemented in the classroom.

Designing the Eclectic Approach to Teach Spelling

Spelling, being a complex skill, can be taught well through Eclectic approach. The activities should be designed according to the cognitive level of the students. The teacher can integrate the following methods and design activities related to those methods.

- Grammar - Translation method.
- MI theory (Multiple Intelligences).
- Co-operative Language Learning. Advantage

Grammar-Translation Method

Grammar-Translation method is a very old method used to teach the second language. Many linguists consider this method as outdated. Yet there are teachers who follow this method even in the current scenario. The main drawback which the educators point out are:

- No attention to listening and speaking.
- Teaching vocabulary through memorization, bilingual wordlist and dictionary.
- Much importance to translating sentences.

In spite of all these oddities, there are also a few aspects which can be used to teach spelling at the beginning stage.

- The teacher can teach vocabulary through wordlist or making individualized spelling lists.
- The students can select the hard words from their lessons.
- Rules are taught to them.
- Students use dictionary to find the synonyms / antonyms.
- They learn the word structures and word patterns.
- Students learn at least five words per day.

Through this method, the upper primary students learn the spelling rules and develop their vocabulary to some extent.

MI Theory (Multiple Intelligences Theory)

Howard Gardener postulates eight dimensions of human talents or intelligences. He defends that these intelligences should be trained, practiced and promoted in early and intermediate education. (Gardner, 1993). The main advantage of using MI theory in the classrooms is that it creates a colorful and joyful situation in our classrooms. Spelling can be best taught by using various MI activities in the classroom. The upper primary students will be familiar with spelling rules at this juncture. Those rules should be well reinforced by MI activities. Some of the activities that can be used in teaching and reinforcing spelling are

- Syllable break-up
- Fun with puns – game related to homophones
- Homophone hero
- Double – trouble – a game dealing with homonyms
- Mind mapping – students create a vocabulary mind map with related words.
- Spell bee
- Online spelling games
- Word games

These kinds of activities help children practice spelling to a greater extent. Each learner has differences and uniqueness. So, designing activities / games based on their differences helps each and every child to master the target skill.

Co-operative Language Learning

Co-operative language learning, also known as collaborative learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p-192). It intends to the maximum interaction of the learners in groups or pairs. The students are highly motivated, involved and interactive in this approach and is best suited for English language teaching. When the students are familiar with word structures and spelling rules, this approach can be used to strengthen the skill among the children. For example, the teacher may give a few words to the students. They are allowed to discuss in groups or pairs and arrive at the appropriate spelling rules and vice versa. The other best examples for teaching spelling are: (Olsen and Kagan, 1992)

- Rally Robin flash cards
- Round Robin
- White board write
- Think – Pair – Share
- Solve – Pair – Share

This type of approach tends to change the normal classroom into an interactive one. The role of the teacher is limited to monitoring the groups and the children are stimulated to actively participate in all group activities. Hence Co-operative language learning promotes students participation to higher level and encourages the children to master the required skill in a cohesive way.

Conclusion

The advent of word processors and spell checkers has considerably decreased the importance of spelling in recent days. Not all the words are caught by spell checkers. So it is necessary that the children develop proper spelling for effective written communication. When an application or portfolio has a good message with poor spelling, the actual information will not be conveyed to the receiver and it creates a great chaos in the communication chain. Many applications are doomed because of poor spelling. To avoid all such eccentricities, it is important for an ESL teacher to make the students feel confident in the target skill. They also should ensure that they don't teach spelling but provide enough opportunities to practice spelling through various methods and techniques. Good spelling makes an effective communication and effective communication create a very good impression about the students. Therefore, it is obvious that spelling plays an important role in everyday life and it also affects the students' learning the second language directly.

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