

Uses of Radio for Teaching English to Sadri Students of Upper Primary Schools in Assam

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Abstract

Sadri is used as a *lingua franca* by a large number of “tea tribes” such as Kharia (South Munda), Mundari, Bhumij (North Munda), Oraon and Kurukh (North Dravidian) for communication among themselves in the tea gardens of Upper Assam. A number of speakers of these tribal groups have adopted Sadri as their mother tongue and no longer speak their original native languages in the tea gardens of Assam. Sadri language is largely influenced by the dominant language of Assam, i.e., Assamese and that is why it is quite different from the Sadri spoken in Jharkhand, Odisha, Chattisgarh and West Bengal. This language is popularly known as *Baganiya Bhasha* or *Adivashi Bhasha* in Assam.

The Sadri children go to the regional medium (Assamese) government schools and learn English as part of their curriculum in these areas. In Assam, the medium of communication of these schools is Assamese. It is also found that the quality of instruction and the teaching of English in these schools are very poor.

This paper focuses on the difficulties faced by these children whose parents do not know any English and whose teachers of English also have very poor competence in English. The paper presents information on how we could use Radio to improve the teaching and learning of English in these schools.

Keywords: Sadri, English language teaching, mother tongue, teacher training, Radio, audio broadcasts.

Introduction

India is known for its cultural and geographical diversity. According to Census of India 2001, 30 languages are spoken by more than a million native speakers, 122 by more than 10,000. Hindi is known as the official language of India. It is due to the fact of globalization in all different fields, the learning of an international language has become a necessity. Undoubtedly, English has become a world language, rather than the language of only the English speaking countries such as UK and the USA, because the number of people who use English as a means of communication exceeds the number of people who speak it as their mother tongue. In the case of English in India, for more than two centuries, India has been directly and indirectly under the influence of the language English in all the fields, such as Education, Medical Science etc. So, learning English becomes inseparable, as well as unavoidable in Indian Education system.

Radio for Spoken English

For promoting spoken English, Radio is pedagogically appropriate. Radio has been used widely as an educational tool since the 1920s. Odera's writing on the use of radio program in schools, noted that radio technology is viewed by teachers as a useful tool for teaching and learning languages like English, French, German and Kiswahili at all levels of education. Language programs on the radio helps to increase a student's mastery of vocabulary and pronunciation as students learn to imitate the radio presenters. She further noted that if this learning resource is carefully selected and used, then learning becomes more interesting, effective, and meaningful.

The use of radio lessons motivates the learners if they are used in such a way as to stimulate learning (Bates 1984). Radio also helps the learners and the teachers to avoid falling back to mother tongue. Broadcast lessons help simplify the language teaching process and make it perfect. Furthermore, school radio broadcast English program aims to assist teachers and pupils to develop further the necessary language skills, which enable them to improve on their spoken and written English. It also aims to improve their command of the various sentence structures, vocabulary, various grammatical errors, structures encountered in primary English language and widening their horizon and scope in all subjects (Bates 1984).

Radio lessons are far cheaper to produce and broadcast than equivalent television lessons. It is found that in many rural and urban schools in India, they have radios that could be accessed without too much difficulty. Moreover, unlike television, radio is not dependent on electric outlets, which often do not exist in many urban and rural classrooms. Radio maintenance is far simpler and easily accessible. That is why radio becomes a convenient and practical medium for use in programs for distance learning.

The Sadri Language

Sadri is a lingua franca used for inter-tribal group communication in eastern-central India. The origin of Sadri and other related terms is somewhat obscure. Nowrangi (1956:iff) suggests the term ‘Sadri’ comes from the word ‘Sadan’ which is derived from an old Indo-Aryan word ‘nisada-’, referring to an ethnic group of North-east India. Sadri is known by different names. Lewis (2009) lists the following alternate names: Chota Nagpuri, Gawari, Jharkhandi, Nagpuri, Sadan, Sadani, Sadna, Sadrik, Sradri etc.

Since Grierson (1903), there has been general consensus that Sadri belongs to the eastern group of the Indo-Aryan languages and is regarded as a sister language of Oriya, Bengali and Angika.

Sadri is mainly spoken in Western and Central Jharkhand, but also in parts of Odisha, Chattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam and Bangladesh. Lewis (2009) estimates the total number of speakers to be 1,970,000 for 1997.

In addition to this group of native speakers, Sadri is also used as a *lingua franca* by a large number of so called ‘tribal’ groups, among others the Kharia (South Munda), Mundari, Bhumij (North Munda), Oraon and Kurukh (North Dravidian) and a number of speakers of these tribal groups have adopted Sadri as their first language and no longer speak their traditional language. The Sadri language in Assam is highly influenced by the dominant language of Assam i.e. Assamese and that is why it is quite different from other Sadri spoken areas. This language is popularly known as Baganiya Bhasha, Adivashi Bhasha in Assam.

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Sadri Students and English

The Sadri children go to the regional medium government schools in these areas. In Assam, the medium of communication of these schools is Assamese. It is also found that the quality of instruction and the teaching of English in these schools are very poor. At the moment, English is becoming increasingly important for employment and for further educational prospects of young students completing high school. Moreover, standards of mainstream government schools are very low, reflected in the high failure rates at the matriculation stage in English and poor communication skills of many under-graduate students. Also, English is very important for the pervasive use of computers and opportunities for employment in the IT sector. And the teachers of government schools themselves have very limited knowledge of English. Consequently, little English is spoken or transacted in the classrooms. We can also see, neither their pre-service training nor the limited opportunities for in-service training, has equipped teachers to teach English as a second language. Additionally, parents are also not conscious of their children's education as most of them are uneducated. From the linguistic point of view, it is often seen that not only students but also teachers cannot understand the aspirated sounds, as Sadri and Assamese are both Indo Aryan languages, for example, the speakers cannot differentiate between /p^h/ and /f/, /b^h/ and /v/. To overcome these problems, radio will be a very appropriate medium for educating the Sadri children the proper English pronunciation. For promoting spoken English, radio will be pedagogically appropriate. So, radio will be the most appropriate distance educational technology for teaching English, through the medium of Sadri in mainstream rural and urban middle schools in Sadri speaking areas.

English Language Teaching

English is an international language, spoken in many countries as a native and as a second or foreign language. English is spoken habitually in the United States, the British Isles, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, The Republic of South Africa, Liberia, as well as many territories under the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It is estimated that 300 million people speak English as second language and an additional 100 million people use it as a

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foreign language. In India, English is the associate official language which has over 1000 million people.

Europe and Asia have had a long tradition of teaching and learning foreign languages. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), U.S. defines English language proficiency in this way:

A student fully proficient in English is able to use English to ask questions to understand teachers, and reading materials, to test ideas and to challenge what is being asked in the classroom. Four language skills contribute to proficiency as follows:

1. Listening: the ability to understand the language of the teacher and instruction, comprehend and extract information and follow the instructional discourse through which teachers provide information.
2. Reading: the ability to comprehend and interpret text at the age and grade-appropriate level.
3. Writing: the ability to produce written text with content and format fulfilling classroom assignments at the age and grade-appropriate level.
4. Speaking: the ability to use oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities (such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning activities and question-answer sessions) within the classroom and social interactions within the school.

Great Help through Radio Lessons

Hence, the teacher should keep in mind the factors above, while teaching English to non-native speakers. The English language teacher gets great help through the usage of radio lessons. The use of radio in Indian schools has been fairly extensive. Conventionally, radio has been used as a one-way medium to instruct students on a variety of subjects including History, Geography, Science and English. If we add an innovative, interactive pedagogy like Interactive Radio Instruction, then the radio lessons will be more fruitful. This pedagogy has been very successfully used to teach English and other school subjects to children as well as utilized in educational programs for adults in number of other countries. In India, *Centre for Learning Resources* was the first to use IRI in an intensive fashion for a school instructional program.

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They said that the use of IRI in radio programs was stimulated by the exposure of senior CLR (Centre for Learning Resources) staff members to practitioners in the field in other countries as well as the literature in the field on the use of IRI.

Speaking is also Encouraged

By using IRI in Radio lessons, it allows listeners to not only hear English being spoken, but gives them opportunities during the radio lessons, to speak in English. The radio lessons for English can use a variety of child-friendly formats such as drama, songs, language games and such, in both Sadri and English to hold the interest of middle school children because, it is well accepted that language is better acquired or learned, where the focus is on interesting context. Here, we can depict the example of CLR radio lessons. The CLR radio teacher was a female, and the girl who was one of the main child characters was generally portrayed as being more active and dominant than the second child character – a boy who has a more gentle personality. Meanwhile, we must concentrate on the recording of the radio lessons also. The recording of Radio English Lessons should be done in good sound stations. Here, we concentrate on all aspects of the production of radio lessons. This includes the selection and rehearsals of actors, generating and recording sound effects, supervising and editing the studio recordings and so on.

Culture and Language through Radio

Radio programs on every aspect of life are available, making the medium particularly useful for content-based foreign language instruction. All in all, radio English lessons should not be used passively; students should be assigned genuine and relevant tasks to do, while listening to the radio lessons, to make it successful.

Teacher Training

As Francis Bacon said, ‘knowledge is power’ implies that teaching is an art that can be acquired through a series of a well-designed set of activities; it is imperative, therefore, due emphasis should be laid on the education of the teachers. So, a sound teacher training and monitoring system could produce a literate and understanding teacher which in turn would shape the lives of the students and as a result, the progress of the nation.

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Teacher Training basically refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitude, behaviour and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school or wider community. Although, ideally it should be conceived of, and organized as, a seamless continuum; teacher training is often divided into these stages:

1. Initial teacher training/ education: a pre service course before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher.
2. Induction: the process of providing training and support during the first few years of teaching or the first year in a particular school.
3. Teacher Development or Continuing Professional Development: an in- service process for practicing teachers.

The Impact of the School, Area and the System on Training

Though the path the teacher training should follow is formally spelt out in terms of the syllabi and the course required, the quality of teachers depends on the school, area and the system followed.

Impact of the Medium of Instruction

In India, the medium of instruction in the vast majority of government rural and urban schools is the regional language. There is no difference in the schools where the Sadri speaking student studies. English is now introduced as a second language in class 1 in these schools. However, even after many years of its compulsory study, vast numbers of students completing high school are unable to speak, read or write simple English. The principal cause for the inadequate command of English among high school graduates is that their teachers themselves have a very limited knowledge of English. Consequently, little English is spoken or transacted in the classroom.

Low English Proficiency of Teachers

The vast majority of teachers themselves have a very limited command of English which is highlighted from the 2007 position paper of the Consortium for English Language Teaching in India:

‘The biggest constraint is the low English proficiency of teachers at the primary stage, especially in rural areas, primary school teachers cannot speak English, even if they can read it with hesitation. This is a bigger problem in North and Eastern India. The situation is slightly better in the Southern States. Lacking in the ability to speak good English, teachers all over the country prefer to get children to copy alphabets and words from the textbook and start reading instruction from class 1 itself.’

Need for a Course

It is to be noted that in the 2005 National Curriculum Framework, a principal recommendation of the Focus Group on Teaching English was that ‘All teachers who teach should have basic proficiency in English.’

So, we should develop such a course for the teachers, keeping in mind that teachers in these schools often have an extensive passive knowledge of English, but find it difficult to transact English lessons effectively, because they do not speak the language with confidence, being neither native English speakers, nor having much opportunity to use English in their daily lives. So, this course should design to help teachers to:

1. Improve their listening and speaking skills in English in both familiar and unfamiliar situation.
2. Increase their reading comprehension and basic writing skills.
3. Enhance their confidence to speak in English both within and outside the classrooms.

It is also to be noted that for the preparation of coursework for the teaching of English to the teachers, we should interact with students and teachers in regional medium schools, as well as with research and consultation experts.

Radio and Available Audio Broadcasts

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Radio has been used as educational tool since the 1920s respectively. Neil (1981) contends that educational radio can be effectively utilized by employing the following techniques:

1. Using educators with long (and preferably recent) experience of living in rural areas.
2. Communicating, in detail and continually, with the leaders of village learning groups where these exist.
3. Paying careful attention to and learning from, the work of local communities or other organized groups (for example, farmers, agricultural and health service radio broadcasters).
4. Working through valid intermediaries such as chiefs and head men in villages, through established and accepted social structures.
5. Encouraging illiterate people to communicate their ideas and concerns through trusted and better educated villagers who can act as scribes if required.

General Approaches to the Use of Radio Broadcasting in Education

There are three general approaches to the use of radio broadcasting in education:

1. Direct class teaching where programming substitutes for teachers on temporary basis.
2. School broadcasting, where broadcast programming provides complementary teaching and learning resources not otherwise available.
3. General educational programming over community, national and international stations which provide general and informal educational opportunities.

Various Known Programs

One of the most dominant and widespread examples of the use of educational radio is known as 'Farm Radio Forum'. It was started in Canada in 1941 as a radio discussion program and served as a model which was adopted subsequently in a number of developing countries. The lessons learned from Canada such as the use of forums, multimedia, printed materials, two way communications and various production techniques (drama, interview, and panel discussion)

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were then introduced in India early in 1956 with the project named *Adult Education and Community Development Project*.

The Radio Club of Bombay broadcast the first radio program in India in June 1923 (Sharma, 2002a). In the year 1947, the AIR (All India Radio) network had only six stations located at Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai, Lucknow and Tiruchirapalli with a total complement of 18 transmitters - 6 on the medium wave and the remaining on short wave. Presently, the broadcast scenario has drastically changed with 198 broadcasting centers, including 74 local radio stations, covering nearly cent percent of the country's population. Today, AIR network broadcasts nearly 2000 program hours each day in 24 languages and 146 dialects.

Radio Educational Programs

Different radio educational programs have been commissioned in India since the 1930s. The project named *School Broadcast Project* was commissioned in 1937 and the target group was school students. This program starts from Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. In this project, AIR tried to make its radio broadcasts more curriculum-oriented. The project called *Language Learning Programme* which was started in 1979-80 jointly by All India Radio and the Department of Education, govt. of Rajasthan aims to teach Hindi to school going children as their first language. Other important educational Radio projects which are broadcasted by All India Radio in collaboration with IGNOU are *IGNOU – AIR Broadcast* (1992) and *IGNOU – AIR Interactive Radio Counseling* (1998). Gyan Vani is another famous educational FM radio channel of India which was launched in the year 2001. It is not only for the conventional educational system but also a main tool in making available the dream of education for all come true. In India, after the Supreme Court's judgment of February, 1995 that 'air waves are public property', the educational community radios are allowed in India under somewhat stringent conditions. Anna FM is the first campus community radio launched on February 1, 2004 which was run by the Education and Multimedia Research centre. By, 30th November, 2008, there were 38 operational community radio stations in the country, which were run by educational institutions except two which were run by NGOs. Sarang 107.8 FM is one of the successful

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examples of community radios in India, which is run by Aloysius College (autonomous), Mangalore, Karnataka.

So, if we can utilize the available audio broadcasts for the teaching of English to Sadri speaking students as well as for the training of teachers, it will give us surely a very positive result.

Conclusion

In this paper, it is found that the Sadri children go to the regional medium government schools in the Sadri speaking areas in Assam. The quality of instruction and the teaching of English in these schools are very poor. The students as well as teachers do not have proficiency in English. The English language teacher gets great help through the usage of radio lessons. The use of radio in Indian schools has been fairly extensive. If we add an innovative, interactive pedagogy like Interactive Radio Instruction, then the radio lessons will be more fruitful. By producing and broadcasting qualitative and interesting radio English lessons both in Sadri and English language for the Sadri students, we will be successful in getting some proficiency in English among Sadri speaking students. In the mean time, due emphasis should be given to the training of the teachers' English language. So, we should develop such a course of English for the teachers by consulting experts and researchers in the field, as well as interacting with the teachers and students of regional medium schools in India which aim to develop the confidence of teachers to use English proficiently in any situation.

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