

Use of Radio for Teaching Learning of English to the Hajong speakers of Assam

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Abstract: Radio is an important resource of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) which can be used as an attractive teaching-learning Material (TLM) to the students of second language. English being a second language for the Hajong speakers of Assam, we may use radio as an audio aid to make learning interesting and effective as well as to relieve the learners from the monotony of using the traditional TLMs like blackboard, chalk etc. Hajong is a tribe who live in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal in India as well as in some districts of Bangladesh. In Assam, they are living in different districts namely Nagaon, Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Goalpara and Sonitpur. The Hajong students of Assam learn English as a second language. This paper is an attempt to examine the problems of English teaching-learning to the Hajong speakers of Assam and the status of ELLT within as well as outside academic context. The paper also makes some suggestions to overcome them. The problems as investigated clearly indicate the need to improve the condition of English teaching to the Hajong speakers since English plays a vital role in the overall progress of a community. In this regard, radio as a TLM would surely prove better and make the teaching learning process creative as well as effective and would solve the problems if properly applied by trained teachers. The reason for choosing radio is that it is easily accessible even in remote rural areas where the majority numbers of Hajong people of Assam live. Again, it can be used within as well as outside academic sphere and therefore, its use would facilitate not only the regular students but also the school dropouts, adults and even uneducated ones eager to learn English. The Hajongs of Assam are a socio-economically backward tribe. Their literacy rate is very low. The problems of teaching-learning of English as investigated require solution and therefore, this paper examines the use of radio as a measure which surely would help to overcome the same.

Keywords: ELLT; Hajongs of Assam; Context; Radio; Methods and Trained Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The role of radio as a teaching learning aid is noteworthy. Radio is an important resource of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) which can be used as an attractive teaching-learning Material (TLM) to the students of second language. English being a second language for the Hajong speakers of Assam, we may use radio as an audio aid to make learning interesting and effective as well as to relieve the learners from the monotony of using the traditional TLMs like blackboard, chalk etc. One of the remarkable merits of using radio is that its program can be repeatedly used if recorded through a tape recorder and grown up students can practice a lesson on their own. "Radio lessons help in *listening comprehension*, developing *correct pronunciation*, which also presents different types of *conversational forms* by means of dialogues. A rich *vocabulary* and correct *structures* can also be produced with the help of radio lessons." [1].

Hajong is a tribe who live in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal in India as well as in some districts of Bangladesh. In Assam, they are living in different districts namely Nagaon, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Goalpara and Sonitpur. Their mother tongue is known as Hajong which has close affinity with Assamese and Bengali as far as its vocabulary is concerned. It is classified as an Indo-Aryan (IA) language. The language is spoken by approximately 80 to 100 thousand people [2] in the North Eastern states of Meghalaya and Assam.

Objectives

This paper is an attempt to examine the problems of English teaching-learning to the Hajong speakers of Assam and the status of ELLT within as well as outside academic context. The paper also makes some suggestions to overcome them.

METHODOLOGY

In the study both primary and secondary sources have been used. The secondary sources include books, articles and data gathered from internet while the primary source includes data collected mainly from field investigation.

PROBLEMS OF ELLT CONCERNING THE HAJONG SPEAKERS

The problems of ELLT in regard to the Hajong speakers of Assam are found mainly in two contexts - within and outside academic spheres. In this connection, a pilot survey had been conducted in some institutions as well as amongst people (other than students) in the districts of Nagaon and Lakhimpur in Assam. During the field investigation, students of upper primary and secondary level are interviewed to find out the problems in respect of their learning of English. Apart from regular students, others (school dropouts, adults etc.) eager to learn English are also asked about the same matter.

Some of the problems as found out are concerning linguistic features like- pronunciation, intonation, stress, juncture and free variation etc.

Pronunciation

One of the major problems of the Hajong speakers of Assam in regard to learning English is found in its pronunciation. The weakness of appropriate English pronunciation (to serve the communicative purpose) is a vital problem for the Hajong students of Assam particularly those who belong to vernacular (Assamese) medium schools. It is to be mentioned that the majority Hajong students of Assam belong to Vernacular medium. Pronunciation of English to serve the communicative purpose suffers seriously due to various linguistic features of English.

Intonation

It is a remarkable linguistic feature of the English language. "The patterns of variation of the pitch of the voice (i.e. the way in which the pitch varies) constitute the intonation of a language" [3]. The system of intonation patterns of English is very complex to be followed by non-native speakers. "when a foreign learner is confronted with a passage to be read, or indeed asked to speak, the most difficult problems of intonation he has to face are where to place the nuclear tones and in what direction they should move. Correct habits have first to be learned mechanistically at the conscious level so that later the speaker can use the system instinctively" [4]. Hajong speakers of Assam face problem particularly because they are not familiar with such complex aspects of English.

Word Accent or Stress

Word accent is a very significant feature of English. In words of more than one syllable, all the

syllables are not equally prominent. The more prominent ones are said to receive the accent. Stress is the intensity or prominence given to a syllable. It may be described as 'emphasis on a syllable or word in the form of prominent, relative loudness' [5]. Word-stress and sentence-stress are very significant to determine the contextual meaning of English speech. For example, the word 'object' is a noun if accented on the first syllable ('object) and a verb if accented on the second syllable (ob'ject). Similarly, the same sentence may be different in meaning based on its stressed words such as- 'He is the thief (he and none else is the thief) and He is the 'thief (he is the thief whom the police has been looking for). This aspect of the English language is essential to be followed for communicative purpose absence of which may corrupt the normal meaning of an utterance. For instance, 'He is an important person' uttered with stress on the first syllable of the word 'important' may hear as 'He is an impotent person' which would not only give a different meaning but also might cause bad terms between the speaker and the listener. A foreign learner of English may commit mistake in spoken English due to lack proper knowledge of appropriate accent.

Juncture

An important linguistic feature of English is the transition from one word to the next e.g. a naim [ə + neim], an aim [ən + eim] which is known as juncture. A non native learner may normally confuse while confronted with such feature of English. A Hajong learner is no exception particularly in respect of spoken English.

Free Variation

This is a remarkable characteristic of English which is a cause of difficulty for the Hajong learners of English. If one allophone freely varies with another allophone of the same phoneme, they are said to be in free variation and there is no change of meaning. For example, in English the word 'cut' may be pronounced [k^hət^h] (the final -t with aspirated release) or [k^hət] (without aspiration). In that case, [t^h] and [t] are in free variation in word final position [6]. But such tendency becomes dreadful to fulfill the communicative purpose particularly when non-natives like Hajongs pronounce /s/ instead of /s^h/ resulting in the change of meaning as 'shop' to 'soap' etc.

The above mentioned and other linguistic features of English are not essential to be learned about but to be followed by the learners for appropriate spoken communication. It is through practice and consequent habit that a non native learner of English may acquire these mechanisms of English.

So far the problems discussed above are related with the listening and speaking skills. Besides these, reading and writing are also important skills to

acquire by the students (academic) to fulfill the objectives of teaching- learning English. The objectives of teaching English at the school level may be summed up as developing in the pupils the following skills and knowledge: (i) To understand English with ease when spoken at normal conversational speed, (ii) To speak English correctly and fluently, (iii) To read English with comprehension and at a reasonable speed so as to use it as a library language for gathering information and for enjoying reading, (iv) To write neatly and correctly at a reasonable speed, (v) To enjoy simple poems in English, (vi) To acquire knowledge of the elements of English for practical command of the language, (vii) To translate common English words, phrases and sentences into their functional equivalents in mother tongue and vice versa and (viii) To develop interest in English [7]. The remarkable problem found with majority number of secondary students is the weak composition due to lack of proper drill and insufficient grammar lessons.

REASONS

The main reasons for these problems appear as- (i) the influence of mother tongue, (ii) lack of speaking environment, (iii) insufficient practice within academic sphere, (iii) the teaching methods, (iv) want of expert teachers and (v) the influence of other regional languages.

STATUS OF ELLT CONCERNING THE HAJONGS

Within Academic Context

To find out the present status of ELLT to the Hajong speakers of Assam, a pilot survey had been conducted in a few institutions (upper primary and secondary) of Nagaon and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. The status of English teaching-learning to the Hajong speakers as found within academic context shows: (i) ELLT status of most of the institutions is not satisfactory, (ii) Traditional methods and teaching aids are found prevalent, (iii) Rare use of ICT resources.

Outside Academic Context

Least effort concerning ELLT has been found outside academic context. During the field investigation, it had been observed that many Hajong people such as school dropouts, adults or even illiterate ones are eager to learn English. But there is no opportunity available for them. Neither government departments nor NGOs have initiated efforts for ELLT to the Hajong speakers outside academic sphere.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

Importance of English

The problems as investigated clearly indicate the need to improve the condition of English teaching to the Hajong speakers since English plays a vital role in the overall progress of a community nowadays. The importance of English is not required to be explained

since all are well aware of it. Though Gandhiji was against English Education, but he also admitted the importance of foreign language especially English. In his book, *Young India* he said: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. I would have our young men and young women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like and expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world" [8]. The Report of the Secondary Education Commission (1952) says: "Many eminent educationalists and scientists have, therefore, expressed the opinion that under no circumstances should we sacrifice the many advantages that we have gained by the study of English. They hold that in matters pertaining to education sentiment should not be the ruling factor and that what was most urgently needed was that our youth acquire knowledge from all sources and contribute their share to its expansion and development. In the attainment of this objective, the study of English was bound to play an important part" [9].

Use of Radio

Radio as a TLM would surely prove better and make the teaching learning process creative as well as effective. The audio-lingual method using radio would solve the problems if properly applied by trained teachers. Radio could be the most effective tool particularly to solve the problems concerning listening and speaking. Through listening to the radio programs on English a learner may gradually be able to follow up the above mentioned features of English practically and be habituated to use them while speaking. Moreover, the reason for choosing radio is that it is easily accessible even in remote rural areas where the majority numbers of Hajong people of Assam live. Again, it can be used within as well as outside academic sphere and therefore, its use would facilitate not only the regular students but also the school dropouts, adults and even uneducated ones eager to learn English. Again, the use of radio is less expensive compared to other ICT resources. The following remark justifies the use of radio for language learning or teaching: "Teaching a language through content is more efficient than teaching the structures of the language out of context. Furthermore, it is well accepted that language is better acquired or learned where the focus is on interesting content, and radio can certainly provide interesting content. In EFL settings, where authentic materials are scarce and students are rarely exposed to the natural pace of native speakers of the target language, the radio can be a valuable source of input and highly relevant to language acquisition" [10].

Existing Radio Programs

There are radio programs on English learning broadcasted by various radio centers such as BBC,

VOA, and AIR etc. Moreover, some Community Radio Stations broadcast such programs to facilitate the concerned community. However, there are no particular radio programs initiated either by government departments or non-govt. organizations till date for the Hajongs of Assam [11]. To facilitate the Hajong learners the existing radio programs may be utilized in the classroom. Community Radio Stations may be set up by govt. or non-govt. organizations and English learning programs can be broadcasted for their benefit.

Trained Teachers

To use the radio as an effective TLM, teachers should be well trained. To train up teachers the concerned authority/departments/ organizations may arrange seminar, workshop, training program, refresher/orientation courses etc. Teachers may be deputed to study certificate/diploma courses on the use of radio for teaching-learning offered by universities such as IGNOU.

Methods of Using the Radio

Regarding the use of radio two methods may be followed: (i) listening to the radio program directly as per schedule; and (ii) use of pre-recorded radio program. The teacher may use either of the two methods according to his/her convenience. However, it is difficult to use the former within normal stipulated class time during school hours and therefore, special class should be arranged. For non-formal learners both methods can be applied satisfactorily. The use of radio may be popularized and applied for mass benefit through setting up Radio Listeners' Club and Community Radio Station. Through these the teachers and students (both formal and non-formal) may take the benefit of teaching-learning of English.

CONCLUSION

The Hajongs of Assam are a socio-economically backward tribe. Their literacy rate is very low. The problems of teaching-learning of English as investigated require solution and therefore, this paper examines the use of radio as a measure which surely would help to overcome the same. However, more intensive investigation is required in this regard and so researchers may consider it a topic of importance.

Abbreviations

ELLT- English Language learning and Teaching; ICT- Information and Communication Technologies; TLM- Teaching Learning Materials; NGO- Non Govt. Organization; EFL- English as Foreign Language; BBC- British Broadcasting Corporation; VOA- Voice of America; AIR- All India Radio; IGNOU- Indira Gandhi National Open University.

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