

DOGME ELT: A Method for Enhancing Conversational Communication among Engineering Students

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Abstract: *The paper proposes to find solutions for the lack of oral communication skills among the students of engineering colleges in Chennai through Dogme ELT. Many students come from rural areas and would not have had the chance of learning English language until they reach high school. Little exposure to the language creates great hindrance when they communicate. It prevents them from understanding even their core subjects in engineering. So, they need much assistance in day to day communication as well as understanding their subject. Though English is a part of the curriculum for the first year non-semester, it does little to help the development of oral communication in anyway. There, English is confined to the status of any other subject that is needed to be passed through. Even though language labs are introduced as a part of curriculum, its design of the topics have no relevance with what the students need for communication. Thus there is a wide disparage between what is essential for the enhancement of the speaking skills of the students and what is provided. Lack of proficiency in English language may cause anxiety for them when they have to communicate with others.*

Keywords: *Communication, Dogme, ELT, English, Learning, Skills, Speaking*

I. Introduction

The paper proposes to find solutions for the lack of oral communication skills among the students of engineering colleges in Chennai through Dogme ELT. Many students come from rural areas and would not have had the chance of learning English language until they reach high school. Little exposure to the language creates great hindrance when they communicate. It prevents them from understanding even their core subjects in engineering. So, they need much assistance in day to day communication as well as understanding their subject. Though English is a part of the curriculum for the first year non-semester, it does little to help the development of oral communication in anyway. There, English is confined to the status of any other subject that is needed to be passed through. Even though language labs are introduced as a part of curriculum, its design of the topics have no relevance with what the students need for communication. Thus there is a wide disparage between what is essential for the enhancement of the speaking skills of the students and what is provided. Lack of proficiency in English language may cause anxiety for them when they have to communicate with others. Gregersen and Horwitz call this as ‘communication apprehension’. This is due to the mismatch between foreign language students’ mature thoughts and their immature foreign language proficiency... The inability to express oneself fully or to understand what another person says can easily lead to frustration and apprehension, given that the apprehensive communicator is aware that the complete communication is not possible and may be troubled by this prospect. (562)

In turn, anxiety can interfere with learning and performance.

II. Hypothesis

In engineering colleges, students are less likely to receive a good exposure to the use of second language because they spend less time in contact with it. In most cases, the use of second language begins and ends within the language class hour or with the concerned teacher, while other subjects might be explained in the first language. The reasons might be the lack of proficiency in English among the teachers or the students. Another reason is that English is implemented in far smaller range of discourse types. It is difficult for most students to experience learning a second language in a ‘natural immersion environment’, i.e. where they are surrounded by the second language all the time. Mostly, the experience is confined inside a classroom and in classrooms the language taught is formal and disembodied from natural contexts which hamper a student’s oral competence. In contrast, socio-cultural theorists think of language as contextualised and see language learning as an interpersonal process situated in a social and cultural context and mediated by it.

According to Gass, Macey and Pica, the second language teaching-learning process become more effective when it is a part of interaction with others rather than within a text. Interactions allow learners to negotiate meaning of the words they use in various contexts. Interactions among the peers help the learners to shape the idea of the professional world. Learning a foreign language therefore means engaging with the L2 environment, an environment that is constituted by cultural, societal and institutional practices. Human learning

is mediated through interaction with others using language as well as other mediational tools. Keeping that in mind, Problem based Learning (PBL) and Task –based Learning (TBL) gain momentum as an instructional method. These methodologies encourage the students to work together and find solutions to real-world problems or scenarios. This makes learning an interactive and progressive process. This involves reflecting on the problem when a context is presented, looking for appropriate resources and using them to analyse the problems and working out a solution, while teachers play a facilitating role. Technology can provide a context for problem-based language learning. Virtual worlds can offer rich, multimodal environments for such tasks. The fact that virtual environments allow learners to maintain much of their privacy and sometimes even grant them anonymity may also create greater equality for learners. Such facilities are not a common practise in India. Conventional method of teaching has more prominence in language classes. So, though the ideas of implementing technology seems to be a progressive prospect we have no much proof about the efficacy it brought out in the learners. The current research is a study, analysis and experiment in this area.

III. Review

Though Dogme ELT has gained popularity in theory among the ELT practitioners in India, its practical applications are not yet implemented at least as a part of curriculum. Even research in this field seems to be scanty. So there is not much data to fall back when the current research is conducted. But since the motive of the thesis is the enhancement of oral skills of engineering students by keeping in mind their practical needs and interaction among them, Dogme ELT is irreproachably tailor-made for such a programme. Given this, various questions arise in front of a facilitator who wishes to implement technology to develop the conversational communication of learners. The first question that arises would be how this desire could be channelized to enable the learner to achieve more effective communication in a foreign language? How can teachers create a relevant atmosphere in the classroom using virtual or physical means? How far a course book or technology could be used as an educational aid? How can technology be used to assess or monitor the progress or deficient areas of the learners? And most importantly how can this be used in a class where students are bounded by time limit and exam oriented course book? How can a teacher blend the prescribed text book to the technology used to enhance oral skills of the learners?

A detailed understanding of Dogme ELT can assuage many of these apprehensions. Dogme ELT is a method that encourages language teaching without the aid of a prescribed text book and encourages conversational communication among learners and learners and learners and teacher. It got its root from an article published by Scott Thornbury. It gained its name from an analogy with a Dogme 95 film movement initiated by Danish film maker Lars von Trier, though the connection is not considered to be close. Dogme is the Danish word for Dogma. Dogme ELT is considered to be both a method and movement. The Dogme approach considers that students' produced materials is preferable to published materials or text books to the extent of inviting the teachers to take a 'vow of chastity' in not taking the text books to a language class. This emerged from the view that real life conversation is more interactional than transactional. And Dogme places great value on communication that promotes social interaction. It gives more emphasis on discourse-level rather than sentence-level approach to the language, as it is believed to better prepare the learners for real life communication, where the entire conversation is more relevant than the analysis of specific utterances.

Dogme has ten key principles.

1. **Interactivity:** the most direct route to learning is to be found in the interactivity between teachers and students and amongst the students themselves.
2. **Engagement:** students are most engaged by content they have created themselves
3. **Dialogic processes:** learning is social and dialogic, where knowledge is co-constructed
4. **Scaffolded conversations:** learning takes place through conversations, where the learner and teacher co-construct the knowledge and skills
5. **Emergence:** language and grammar emerge from the learning process. This is seen as distinct from the 'acquisition' of language.
6. **Affordances:** the teacher's role is to optimize language learning affordances through directing attention to emergent language.
7. **Voice:** the learner's voice is given recognition along with the learner's beliefs and knowledge.
8. **Empowerment:** students and teachers are empowered by freeing the classroom of published materials and textbooks.
9. **Relevance:** materials (e.g. texts, audios and videos) should have relevance for the learners
10. **Critical use:** teachers and students should use published materials and textbooks in a critical way that recognizes their cultural and ideological biases.

Based on these principles, three ideologies which can be termed as the cornerstone of Dogme ELT are evolved:

3.1 Conversation-driven teaching

Conversation is seen as central to language learning within the Dogme framework, because it is the “fundamental and universal form of language” and so is considered to be “language at work”. Dogme considers that the learning of a skill is co-constructed within the interaction between the learner and the teacher. In this sense, teaching is a conversation between the two parties. As such, Dogme is seen to reflect Tharp’s view that “to most truly teach, one must converse; to truly converse is to teach”.

3.2 Materials light approach

The Dogme ELT encourages ‘vow of chastity’ in using text books in class. Dogme teaching has therefore been criticized as not offering teachers the opportunity to use a complete range of materials and resources. However there is a debate to the extent that Dogme is actually anti-textbook or anti-technology. Meddings and Thornbury focus the critique of textbooks on their tendency to focus on grammar more than on communicative competency and also on the cultural biases often found in textbooks, especially those aimed at global markets. Indeed, Dogme can be seen as a pedagogy that is able to address the lack of availability or affordability of materials in many parts of the world. Proponents of a Dogme approach argue that they are not so much anti-materials, as pro-learner, and thus align themselves with other forms of learner-centred instruction and critical pedagogy.

3.3 Emergent language

Dogme considers language learning to be a process where language emerges rather than one where it is acquired. Dogme shares this belief with other approaches to language education, such as task-based learning. Language is considered to emerge in two ways. Firstly classroom activities lead to collaborative communication amongst the students. Secondly, learners produce language that they were not necessarily taught. As such, the teacher's role, in part, is to facilitate the emergence of language. However, Dogme does not see the teacher's role as merely to create the right conditions for language to emerge. The teacher must also encourage learners to engage with this new language to ensure learning takes place. The teacher can do this in a variety of ways, including rewarding, repeating and reviewing it. As language emerges rather than is acquired, there is no need to follow a syllabus that is externally set. Indeed, the content of the syllabus is covered (or ‘uncovered’) throughout the learning process.

IV. Technology Used In Dogme ELT

Although Dogme teaching has been seen to be anti-technology, Thornbury maintains that he does not see Dogme as being opposed to technology as such, rather that the approach is critical of using technology that does not enable teaching that is both learner centred and is based upon authentic communication. Indeed, more recent attempts to map Dogme principles on to language learning with web 2.0 tools (under the term “Dogme 2.0”) are considered evidence of Dogme being in transition and therefore of being compatible with new technology.

“For electronic learning activities to be most purposeful and effective, it would seem that they should (a) be learner-centred, with students having a fair amount of control over their planning and implementation, (b) be based on authentic communication in ways rhetorically appropriate for the medium, (c) be tied to making some real difference in the world or in the students’ place in it, and (d) provide students an opportunity to explore and express their evolving identity” ([Warschauer, M. 2000:57](#))

V. Conclusion

Life is catapulting towards faster technology. It is highly imperative to deviate from traditional style of teaching at times and embrace novel methods of teaching that enable to encompass the technology savvy young minds in the classroom. Not that the existing teaching methodologies are wrong but a monotonous teacher-centered classes can inhibit the natural curiosity of the students to absorb things in a more proactive way. Here, Dogme comes to assist students and teachers who want to be a part of a more involve class.

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