

Functional English Education: A Platform for Career Development at U.G. Level

Cute Kharbanda

Assistant Prof of English D.A.V. College (Lahore), Ambala City

cutekakria@gmail.com

Abstract

Globalisation has brought us a host of opportunities for the developing countries like India, where an entire young population has been learning English in schools, right upto their college. The skill of speaking, reading, writing and understanding the nuances of English language has given our youth an edge over other non-English speaking countries, in the professional sphere too. However, the language scenario is not entirely smooth and bump-free. There are numerous problems associated with the teaching and learning of English; in fact nowhere is English education as complex and controversial as in a multicultural and linguistically-diverse country like India. This bears out the necessity of a professionally viable teaching of English language skills, especially to the students at the undergraduate level, who would be the prospective employees in the global market. This paper analyses how a Functional English teaching programme in colleges can help utilize those avenues and make our students competition- ready. The paper puts across in detail the structure that such

a course may follow for desirable results and the outcomes, especially in terms of oral proficiency of the students might be. It is an attempt to highlight the dire need to regurgitate the norms that define English teaching in colleges for undergraduate students.

Key-words: Linguistic, Global, Skill, Acquisition, Avenue, Phonetic, Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication.

Introduction:

Functional English is usage of the English language required to perform a specific function like academic study or career progression. Functional English provide the essential knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable the learner to operate confidently, effectively and independently in life and at work. Individuals who possess these skills will be able to participate and progress in education, training and employment as well as develop and secure the broader range of aptitude, attitude and behaviour that will enable them to make a



positive contribution to the communities in which they live and work. It is more important than ever that young people of all academic abilities can manage the demands of the workplace, and of further and higher education. Functional skills are the essential elements of English that help people to develop higher levels of practical skill, which they can apply to real life contexts. For this, stress must be on efforts starting at the school level itself, for developing interpersonal speaking skills of English. It is noticeable that the effort continues at the college level also but what is stressed upon mainly is the reading and writing part of the language and its grammar. On the professional or job front, however, there are practical requirements, that demand candidates with effective spoken skills in English. The point to consider is that the verbal articulation of English is something that has not been given its due in the construction of the syllabi of undergraduate classes.

What the teaching community has to understand and focus on, is the fact that the ultimate aim of any kind of learning in today's world of immense competition, is acquisition of a career or growth in ones choice of career. Our students might be made

to excel in a language of their birth – a vernacular language skill could be considered equally important. However, to find oneself workable and acceptable in the national and international job market, one needs to broaden the horizon of skill structure, of which linguistic capability forms a major part. In clichéd terms, English is the global language. The world itself is a global village society - and one language has been successful in connecting it together, making all citizens understand and communicate with each other - and make the society grow and develop. As compressed as the world has become, so has grown the need for the young people to master themselves in the *language of the world*.

This brings us to the necessity of a course that build conversational English skills among students. The purpose of it is acquiring a job or excelling in one's job. The fact applies equally well to the acquisition of English speaking skills. Eventually the question hangs on to the bitter truth that we all must admit that our college education - which is a lead up to a young person's career is not serving its purpose in the current scenario, as the graduates that are being



churned out of the college machinery are somehow ill-equipped for the same.

Functional English Course

It is a relatively new subject among the college faculty- and has been implemented in a few areas of our surrounding territory (Chandigarh, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh). Observations reveal that in Haryana itself the course has been started in numbered colleges, and it has been introduced as an add-on course, which is on self-financing basis with the college concerned. The gravity of this observation can be understood by dealing with the potential course content of a Functional English and Professional English course and what windows of opportunities are opened to the students who opt for such a course.

The main components of functional English are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The recent Confederation of British Industry (CBI) report (Working on the three Rs, August 2006) states that employers are looking for people who can: articulate clearly, take and pass on messages, deal with customers effectively, read, understand and follow a wide range of documents, write

fluently and accurately, using accepted business conventions of format, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Content

A course that is designed for student of functional English, should be such, as to fulfill its real aim of making English language, in both its spoken and written form, practicable in use. The purpose of developing a course of such nature should be to hone the caliber of students in English and, hence its division should be into *functional speech and functional writing*.

The Basics of Phonetic Transcription: The physiology of speech production forms a part of this section because it help students, understand the intricacies of speech production and handle the control of a few muscles to improve articulation of their own with practice. There is the representation of speech sounds-the concept of phonemic transcription. Since English orthography is inadequate as a representation of the current speech sound of English, the transcription system helps write down the sounds produced in speech so that correct pronunciation as well as, remedial learning

can be done. Word stress, accent, rhythm and intonation in connected speech is an important part of phonetics. Intonation helps in organizing our speech into units of communication. The flow of words and differentiating the same set of words in to sentences, questions, requests, orders etc. is made by the knowledge of correct intonation pattern.

Phonology: It is the study of the organization of the units of sounds of speech into syllables and other larger units. It also refers to the abstract rules and principles that govern the distribution of sound in a language. It contains the concept of phoneme- i.e. the smallest unit at the level of sound. Apart from studying the syllable, the patterns of prominence and stress, aspiration, consonant clusters etc. are also undertaken for study.

Syntactic analysis: Syntax deals with the combination of words into phrases, clauses and sentences. In all languages, sentences are structured in certain specific ways. Hence the concept of syntax studies the structure of a sentence, and all the aspects and ambiguities that are a part of it.

Functional speech: The idea of developing students in functional speech is to make them understand the nuances of communicative English, so that competence in the same can be a big propelling push for their careers.

Psychology of language: Language is used in thought and communication, and it is the task of psycholinguists to discover how knowledge of language is represented in the mind/ brain of fluent speaker; how the information is utilized in the production and comprehensive of expressions, and how speakers acquire these abilities.

Speech production – It is the phenomenon that involves the speaker expressing a message to a hearer : the speaker thinks of a message, plans how to express it, and finally articulates the expression with the vocal tract.

Speech comprehension – It is study of the processes of understanding speech patterns from signal to identifying and manipulating the input.

Non-verbal communication: Effective communication does not always depend on



the use of verbal signals. Laughter, for example, is considered as peculiarly human and is a language of sorts. There are also the gestures and our bodily movements which are important weapons in the arsenal of communication. Non verbal communication includes – the way we speak and move, our gestures, the physical distance between the speaker and the hearer and the facial expressions etc ; and are an important aspect to be taught to every language learner. *Kinesics* is the study of visual aspects of non-verbal inter personal communication. *Proxemics* is the study of the ways in which space is handled in human communication . Spatial changes give a ‘tone’ to communication.

Technical English and Common English (in Indian context) Technical English has several distinguishing features at every level of the linguistic structure. It is a formal variety of language used for specific expressions and not for meeting situations in everyday life. It is a form of language used for transmission, in a systemized manner of particular branch of specialized knowledge pertaining to nature and conditions of life.

Multimedia Classroom: It contains all the equipment and digital paraphernalia for the functional English Lab to be a success and to truly serve the practical purpose. The necessity of supplementing the knowledge provided at theoretical level with a practical environment is a must. Such a multimedia classroom provides the infrastructure for speech stimulation: microphones, speakers, headphones etc. Sound proof cubicles give opportunity to practice their speech clarity and ability- and get a feedback in the form of recordings, so that they may make correctional amendments as well.

In a nut shell Functional English is nothing but the acquisition of language skills to interact in the given situation. Helping learners to become functional with English means helping them to: choose appropriate communication methods, ensure their communication methods are fit for purpose, communicate in ways that meet the needs of the audience and situation, apply English skills in a range of meaningful contexts and become increasingly independent in their learning.

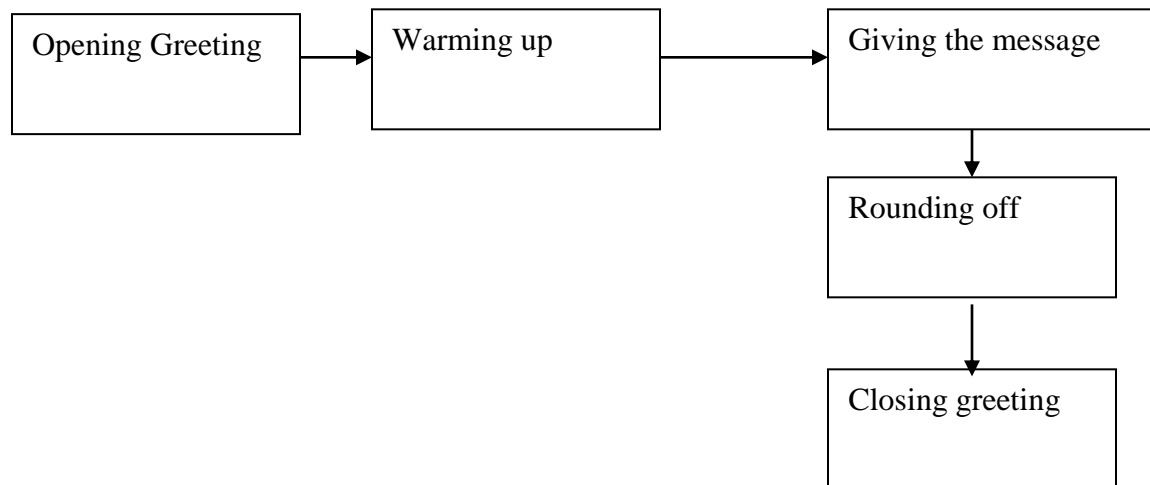
English in the Professional Scenario:

A Course in Functional English would only be complete in all respects, if the learner not only speaks, but communicates and expresses himself well in a business or a professional setting. For this purpose, aspects such as body language, speed, voice–pitch and clarity, intonation, use of visual aids, length of sentences, posture and confidence too must be taught and practiced.

Social/Professional Language: *Greetings and introductions.* A student must be familiar with the different greetings- the beginnings

of it, as well as replying to them. He/ she must be at ease with it and the greeting should not look crammed and forced. Then there are the conversation starters and closers- which usually pose difficulty and embarrassment to the speaker, especially of a foreign language (as second language). These greetings, as well as conversation tips are to be practiced with people who are known as well as with newly introduced strangers.

Phoning: There is a pattern which phone calls especially in business/ formal setting must follow:



There would definitely be some telephonic tactics to be followed by the conversing person on phone to show his talent and command over the language.

Dealing with visitors: Showing courtesy in formal environment as well as exchanging

pleasantries, and in the context of dealing with them for business purposes also. The



skill which is linked with this, is the verbal effort involved in offering help to the visitors and also making them comfortable with smooth and civil language. Offering verbal formal invitation is also included in this skill of dealing with visitors.

Meetings: During meetings the participants use different phases to state opinions and to agree and disagree with them. There are several ways of doing this and it is up to the student to acquire and practice the best possible means of expressing himself in a meeting. Role playing activities can be highly useful confidence-builders for such skills.

Dealing with these aspects of a formal and business settings gives us an idea that English is a form of social language or social communicative form, which can act as a two edged weapon in the hand of the speaker- and the can use it to make or break his career opportunity. Social situations in business are very important in building up confidence between individuals and groups.

Conclusion:

In a time when our complete existence has been bombarded with media and

communication, it is needless to say that communication in English has become an imperative part of everyone's life. However, a young person or a student is doubly in need to build for himself a skill set in English language speech and presentation. This will help him achieve a number of goals in life. It is a fact that professionals with good oral communication skills have more productive relationships with their team mates; they are able to obtain the information they need from organizations and individuals; they can explain things clearly and make a case for themselves; they can relate well with peers and colleagues; they are more successful in their careers and have reduced risk of experiencing conflict and aggression from others. I will not be an exaggeration to say that professional English communication is one of the most highly valued skills by employers.

References:

1. Akmajian, A., Demers, R.A., Farmer, A. K. and Harnish, R. M. (2001) *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.



2. Comfort, J. , Rogerson, P., Scott, T. and Utley,D.(1994) *Speaking Effectively: Developing speaking skills for Business English*. Cambridge University Press
Crystal, D. (1990) *Linguistics*. Penguin Books.

3.Sethi, J. and Dhamija, P.V.(2001) *A course in Phonetics and Spoken English*. Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.

4. Syal, P. and Jindal, D.V.(2005) *An Introduction to Linguistics: Language , Grammar and Sementics*. Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.

5. Verma, S. K. and Krishnaswamy, N.(1989) *Modern Linguistics: An introduction*. Oxford University Press.