



## The Student and the Sea of Words

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Language, literature, complexity, resemble

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**ABSTRACT** *Language and literature are the effective tools that come to the aid of any individual who wish to see reality through the mist of human emotions. Education primarily is to acquire knowledge. Knowledge is nothing but knowing and knowing comes only through thinking. Thinking is energy. Many students got admission into engineering but ended in confusion. To reduce the complexity and demystify the knowledge of engineering, the modern student requires language and literature to compete with the challenges of advanced tests and courses. This is a challenge not only to the student but also to any teacher in general and to any English teacher in particular. The students' struggle for word power resembles Santiago's struggle to win the fish in Hemming Way's The Old Man and The Sea. Regular and systematic practice of LSRW skills is the only way to strengthen word power. In the process one will learn to feel the words and know the nuances.*

Moving along the time scale, one can take a pause to gaze at the cross section of human experience from the past to the present. Language and literature are the effective tools that come to the aid of any individual who wish to see reality through the mist of human emotions. In the modern times education is all pervading and it is not an exaggeration if we say that there is not even a hut with out a book shelf. With technological might the human mind started making a dialogue with the universe. List of the wonders of the world increased shaking deeply rooted myths and mysteries.

Education primarily is to acquire knowledge. The only key to unlock the treasure of knowledge is thinking. This free thinking even lies at the heart of democracy. This understanding culminated in spreading education and by 21<sup>st</sup> century professional courses especially engineering gained momentum. However, this could not bring desired changes in the society. Opportunity does not mean success.

Many students got admission into engineering but haunted by confusion. To reduce the complexity and demystify the knowledge of engineering, the modern student requires language and literature to compete with the challenges of advanced tests and courses. This is a challenge not only to the student but also to any teacher in general and to any English teacher in particular. The form and function, style and structure, meaning and context, feelings and emotions etc. are always integrated and any forcible separation mars the beauty of expression.

English in India is a legacy from the British and got permeated through some of the important parts of society: the government, the media, the education system, the legal system and gradually the social sphere as well. The need for proficiency of LSRW skills in English language became inevitable. Not only the student but also the industry expedites word power in communication. Competitive Examinations such as GRE, TOEFL, IELTS, CAT etc., which are gate ways to higher educational pursuits along with job placements accentuated the need. This increased the demand for English teaching faculty in the technical institutions. But mere number cannot match with the diverse needs. The teacher's attention is towards imparting language and in the process the literary aspect of it got muted. The result is that students are getting engineering degrees through medium of English but they are failing in communication. It strained the human relations and communication gap became a common word. Feelings and expressions got desiccated as poetry and prose

are replaced by technical English. Gradually words became reluctant brides to most of the students. The battle to win the words became rigorous and only a fortunate few could enjoy the victory.

The history of English has resulted in a very huge vocabulary, essentially one stream from Old English and one from the Norman infusion of Latin-derived terms. The first step of acquiring mastery over English language for any undergraduate student is to enrich word power. Apart from the basic LSRW skills the process of acquiring word power involves knowing root words, word associations, word collocations, word bunches etc. We wish to depict this entire process metaphorically through Hemming Way's master piece, The Old Man And The Sea. Hemming Way's words: "But man is not made for defeat," might me an impetus to the present day students.

One way the students' struggle for word power resembles Santiago's struggle to win the giant fish in Hemming Way's The Old Man and The Sea. In the story the protagonist, Santiago, is a simple Cuban fisherman who fights against the odds of the sea to get a big catch. For eighty four untoward days without fish he has rowed his skiff into the Gulf Stream in the quest of marlin, a giant fish. In the initial days he was accompanied by the boy Manolin, with whom he talked of better days and about the real sport of baseball, later he was alone in his expeditions. Aged and solitary, he goes far out and hooks a great fish that tows his boat all afternoon and night.

As the second night turns to dawn he finally harpoons his catch, lashes it to his small boat and makes his weary way home. As he sails at once the sharks begin to attack the dead fish to eat its flesh. He fights against the sharks, kills many of them, but is eventually left with his broken teller as his only weapon. The sharks eat all the flesh of the marlin, leaving only the skeleton. Santiago returns to the shore with the skeleton.

He feels proud of his catch though they are mere bones. Santiago goes directly into his hut as he reaches a condition of absolute physical exhaustion. He is found by the boy and the other fisher man who marvel at his catch. Santiago sleeps and dreams of his past experiences which were his better days. His victory is a victory of having persisted in his purpose without permanent damage to his belief in the worth of what he has been doing.

Present day students require the grit and determination like that of Santiago. He says, "But I will kill you dead before this day ends". It is the hunt man's code to admire the courage and the strength of his opponent. Even students should learn to admire and admit the strength of the words. Every student wants to learn the words and master the expression. They use the word instantly in the sentence and forget about it. The more words they learn, the more they forget. Their inability to remember words is unbelievably frustrating.

Santiago fails and comes back without a fish every day. He never gives up and continues throwing bait to the fish for nearly eighty-four days. In the process he became weak physically but his understanding of sea grows stronger and on eighty-fifth day he keeps his bait deep in the sea, a right place for the giant fish. Without a miss, Marlin the big fish gets hooked up to the bait. Santiago feels happy and tries to pull it. Without all these efforts the present day students are memorizing the meaning without knowing the truth that a word gives taste and smell. The meaning of the word might be there in their mind but fail to permeate into their feelings. One should decorate a word or adorn it if the emotion demands. This aptly makes the word fit into the context. With absence of feeling words become killer whales.

Santiago tries to pull the giant fish out of the sea and the fish tries to pull Santiago into the sea. The tug of war continues till both of them get exhausted. The relentless efforts of old Santiago makes him to win finally. He happily tries to return to the shore with his catch but carrying the giant fish is not an easy task and throughout the way he is attacked by wild sharks. His journey has an epic dimension as Santiago learns to win losing everything. He reaches the shore with the bones of the fish and goes into dreams in exhaustion. In the entire process he smells his catch fights against it, calls it as brother and ultimately owns it. The story of Santiago communicates the message that the process of journey is more important rather than its destiny.

The most important characteristics of Santiago in the novel *The Old Man and The Sea* are the resolve, the persistence, the patience, the self-confidence and the invincible will power. If a student can have all the characteristics of Santiago in learning the words, definitely they can reach their targets. This course of action demands from students not intelligent but industry. Regular and systematic practice of LSRW skills is the only way to strengthen word power. In the process one

will learn to feel the words and understand the nuances.

The voyage in the sea of words requires certain land marks or else one might get drowned in confusion. For the sailor, ship is a vehicle to travel but for the student words are the tools to think, communicate, and learn. The more words one knows, the better one can think, communicate, and absorb knowledge. Words are the building blocks of thought. It is an indisputable fact that student's chances for success increase with their word power. Building a larger vocabulary doesn't require a student to spend hours memorizing meanings but it is mandatory for the student to be word conscious. Right word at the right time is a tag line for effective communication and a better life. We are witnessing gradual progress and development in all spheres of human life. Yet paradoxes continue to exist. At the juncture it is worth reminiscing the words of Dr. Ernest Klein, Compiler of *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. He said: "What the elements are to chemistry, what the sounds are to music, are words to language. However, words are not only the elements of a language but also of the history of the people speaking it. They are important milestones along the way leading to the majestic Palace of Human Knowledge".

In the process of making this journey every student is free to design their own tools. Besides etymology they can even look for word associations, collocations and can even associate words with story narration or event description. Thus, the story of Hamlet can acquaint the student with expressions such as soliloquy, Hamletian dilemma and Dr. Faustus can elucidate black magic, witch craft, blasphemy, necromancy, sorcery, wizard, exotic etc. This process will help the student stretch their imagination and learn objective correlation. The fact is that the process of language learning is idiosyncratic and one can be different and unique in one's method as reflected in the words of Robert Frost in his *Road Not Taken*:

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood and I;  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Sea is vast, so also the words. One should be a Santiago to explore and acquire with persistence. Ultimately effort is important not the end result.

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