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English and “the Value” Question

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ABSTRACT

In India like around the world, English has established itself as the most dominating language. The new linguistic approach has incited new tendencies, thus a change has come about in teaching techniques and academic courses in almost all the elite institutions. Stress is laid on learning of English language, thereby stimulating a new trend in the educational and cultural environment of the country. Apart from text-books, non-standard English Literature, cheap paper-back thrillers, English fashion magazines and comics, along with English music and films have become a parallel source for learners of English language under the cover of entertainment and pleasure. These non-standard printed and produced materials comprise abusive words and vulgar phrases, embedded in ordinary sentence structures and lack in any stylistic features. Therefore, the awareness of what to accept and what to reject with the language is very essential. This paper will attempt to study the sources of peripheral media, its effect and influence on language learning.

In India like around the world, English has by now established itself as the most dominating language. English is thus being learned both formally and informally, consciously and unconsciously. Whether acknowledged or not, younger readers particularly, irrespective of motivation or purpose, are reading a lot of popular and trashy Literature. Likewise, English movies, films and music are very popular with our younger generation.

This material lacks in all the finer aspects of standard literature, yet is being read by countless members of a specific age group or class. The Hollywood recipe, sex and violence are both the essence and the main theme. Such novels and other written material do not impart any knowledge or contain any linguistic features; in fact some scholars are of the view that such type of literature is a cause of deterioration of language.

Similarly English songs in the present era are especially popular with the younger people of almost all civilized nations. Heavy Metal groups which usually emphasize upon music rather than lyrics show the growing frustration of the youth. Thus only a specific group of young listeners listens to this kind of music and songs. These songs are usually complaints or there are songs which seem to be an outlet of aggression and anger in a vulgar expression, like Metallica's,

SO WHAT

So what, so what
I say so fuckin' what
Who cares???
Who cares???

English is a syllable-timed language where variations in tone and intonation can change the meaning of words altogether. Other than tone and intonation, facial expressions and gestures give the final meaning to language. John McGovern in Video Applications in English Teaching writes: "Video aids are effective in teaching paralinguistic features of language, where facial expressions convey additional information". (68)

Maley and Alan Duff also believe that watching movies enforces language learning. In their book Drama Techniques in Language Learning, they write " Watching a drama or movie provide the authority of expression in language." (134)

Learning can be fun when you are enjoying it. The main negative linguistic influence of these materials is the excessive use of abusive language. Slang words make a major portion of functional language and do not harm language at all. Nevertheless, abusive words learnt, do result in to the deterioration of language to some extent. It definitely prevents students from using correct structures and does not allow accurate construction of sentences and has an enormous impact over those who are passing through an impressionable age. Though reading habits are inculcated, quality reading is amiss. Young readers are not able to differentiate one way from another, comprehension skills have increased due to

more exposure to language, but appreciation of the finer aspects has not been developed.

Linguistic competence requires a person to be able to use the contemporary language as used in native culture, to be able to read the literature of the target language, write the learnt language and be able to comprehend and speak it. Command over language requires the development of four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Non-serious literary works provide up-dated language to its readers, while songs and films add fluency to speaking skills. Listening to different accents and 'Englishes' of the world, one develops listening skills.

By reading non-standard literature, and enjoying films and music one gets maximum exposure to living or functional English. Many linguists believe that the more one is exposed to written and spoken English, the more he/she is likely to internalize the rules of Language. These materials can be an indirect source of habit formation. They motivate a student to develop reading habits. Trashy literature motivates the reader to read till the end comes.

Apart from that Psychological Influences relate to the emotional state of its readers and viewers. As non - standard entertainment material is a source of one's emotional satisfaction and feelings, an individual tries to identify the emotions that he/she is experiencing in his/her environment. Watching a film or a drama or reading such literature becomes a natural outlet in such a state. To further elaborate, these emotions deal with two instincts working on the mind and personality of a person Josh. R. Gerow in the book Essentials of Psychology, quoting Sigmund Freud says:

"According to Freud, behaviours, thoughts and feelings are largely governed by biological drives or instincts. These are inborn impulses or forces that rule our personalities. These can be grouped into following categories: On one hand are 'life instincts (eros), impulses for survival in particular that motivate sex, hunger and thirst. Each has its own action; Freud called file energy through which sexual instincts operate LIBIDO, Opposed to life instincts are 'death instincts' (thanatos). These are largely the impulses of destruction Directed inwards, they lead to depression or suicide,' directed outwards they result in aggression. According to Freud, life is an attempt to resolve conflicts between these two natural but diametrically opposed instincts". (353)

It can be assessed, however, that these drives or instincts make non-standard literature and films and songs more popular, attractive and appealing to young people. Eric Berne M.D. in his book A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis further elaborates the idea of young people's inclination towards watching films, listening to music and reading non-standard literature. He writes:

The creative urge gives rise to generous love and ardent procreation and joyful building up. The tensions which drive man

towards these constructive goals may be called LIBIDO The destructive urge activates hostility and hate, blind anger and the uncanny pleasures of cruelty and decay (as teenage boys watching action movies or violent ones). The tension which leads to such feelings may be called MORTIDO. While bodily contact provides the most direct satisfaction of LIBIDO anything which gives the feeling of "approach", whether, it is physical, mental or emotional approach, may help to relieve LIBIDO tensions. (77)

Mentally LIBIDO is relieved by reading popular/trashy literature, watching movies or listening to such agents which give a feeling of approach or indirect relieving of LIBIDO tensions as in seeing or reading trash magazines since the direct satisfaction in our society is neither appreciable, nor easily accessible. Hence controlling LIBIDO and MORTIDO physically, people try to satisfy it mentally.

In other words, it can be said that non-standard literature, movies and music are "the lesser of the evils" prevailing in our society. They are certainly better than drugs and guns. Secondly, language acquisition and language learning are mental tendencies and activities, hence, are related to Psychology. Recognizing the fact that these materials are basically self-access teaching aids, they influence the tendency of learning and acquiring a language naturally.

Albert Bandura in Applied and General Psychology writes: Imitative behaviour is a key to language learning, attitude formation and personality development Imitation and modeling are a result of innate capacity ... A model in front stimulates learning. (171)

It is a fact, that people do imitate what they find more appealing and influencing language and choice of words show one's attitude, behaviour and personality. These sources are instruments to install cognitive skills.

This new attitudinal change in the value- system is inherited from English language with internet and television acting as catalyst in creating a state of frenzy in every young mind to excel and outshine others, and to be at the same level of liberalism and glamour as his counter-parts in the West, which in our context may not be a very advisable. These non-standard printed and produced materials comprise abusive words and vulgar phrases, embedded in ordinary sentence structures and lack in any stylistic features. Thus other than improper words, an Indian reader does not come across good literary items, and does not have much to learn except tawdry colloquial expressions. It is the responsibility of the parents and teachers alike to ensure that the exposure to such materials and medium is not counterproductive to our national heritage under the guise of maximum target language exposure to learners. Although the word decency is mostly valued by the middle and lower middle classes of the world, yet such a vulgar and crude expression is contrary to our social values and is not considered appropriate in any segment of our society.

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