

# 4

## CHAPTER

# General Principles of Teaching a Foreign Language

In India English is taught both as a second language and as a foreign language. The term 'second language' is used because it has become a '*lingua franca*' between speakers of widely diverse languages. By treating English as a 'foreign language' is meant that English is taught as a school-subject or on an adult level solely for giving students a foreign language competence. For both, it is essential for English teacher to teach in such a manner that desired goals can be achieved because, in the words of Wren, "In the teaching of class-subjects, the actual work of mind-training is performed. In the early lessons in English, the weapon is forged, the tools are made, with which that work of mind-training is performed.....In the English lessons he (the teacher) is hoeing the soil that it may be able to receive the seed." Therefore, a sound knowledge of the principles of teaching English language is needed. Since these principles are fruitful for all foreign language teaching, they are aptly called as general principles of foreign language teaching. Foreign language teachers must keep in mind the following principles, to achieve effectiveness in their teaching :

(1) **Principles of Naturalness.** The mother-tongue is always learnt easily because there is a natural environment for learning mother-tongue. The mother-tongue is spoken in the environment created by family and neighbourhood. From the very beginning the child listens to his parents, brothers, sisters, friends talking in that language. He awakes with that language and sleeps with that language. In this way, a natural environment for mother-tongue learning is created around him. But this is not true with foreign language. The child encounters this language all of a sudden in one of his classes and only for four or six periods in a week. Therefore, it becomes difficult for him to learn the language. Hence, a natural environment should be provided by :

(i) Talking to students in the foreign language in the class, playground, etc.

(ii) Encouraging students, to converse only in this language because *John Hope-Mason*<sup>1</sup> says, "To make a language natural must be spoken; it is fruitless and impossible to make a language usable that exists only in the written pages."

(iii) Arranging for group discussions.

(2) **Principle of Exposure**—The child learns the mother tongue more rapidly because he is exposed to the environment where this language is spoken and written. In all the places of social exposures—market, cinema, radio, television, station, club—wherever either finds people talking in mother-tongue or posters, papers, signboards written in mother-tongue. The teacher should try to expose students to an environment loaded with the foreign language. He can do this by :

- (i) Distributing pamphlets in simple foreign language.
- (ii) Forming a foreign language speaking club in the school.
- (iii) Putting charts with slogans written in English on walls etc.
- (iv) Showing slides in English.
- (v) Talking students to watch educable movies in foreign language.

The technique of 'advance organize' can also be used. For this the teacher should write some sentences on the black-board, before the students enter the class. When they will come they will interestingly read what has been written on the black-board.

(3) **The Principle of Habit Formation**—Language learning is a skill like learning cycling or swimming. Language is the instrument of all subjects, so it should be automatic, i.e., a habit. It should be learnt to the point that little or no effort is required to speak it. *Thompson* and *Wyatt* call it "unreflective right utterance." *Palmer*<sup>2</sup> says, "Language learning is essentially a habit-forming process, a process during which we acquire new habits."

Language habit should become a nature. An attempt should be made to form habits, as indicated by *Bruce Pattison*<sup>3</sup>, "Habit have to be established, the operation of the system has to become fairly automatic."

The following habits should be formulated in students :

- (i) habit of listening to sounds and distinguishing between sounds,

1 John Hope Mason : *Secondary Education*, Vol. VII. No. 1. p. 25.

2 Palmer : *The Principle of Language Study*.

3 B. Pattison : *English Language Teaching*, 1964, p. 4.

- (ii) habit of speaking with proper intonation and accent,
- (iii) habit of imitating,
- (iv) habit of repeating,
- (v) habit of spelling,
- (vi) habit of reading aloud with exact articulation,
- (vii) habit of silent reading,
- (viii) habit of using correct grammar,
- (ix) habit of using words in their proper contexts,
- (x) habit of correct pronunciation,
- (xi) habit of consulting dictionary,
- (xii) habit of going to library, and
- (xiii) habit of reading news-papers, journals, magazines, story books etc.

**(4) The Principles of Using Mother-Tongue—***Roberts Paul*<sup>1</sup> says, "when we learn first language, we face the universe directly and learn to cover it with speech; when we learn a second language, we tend to filter the universe through the language already known." So we can use mother-tongue in teaching foreign language. Although some linguists stress its negative role but it has been found facilitating in the acquisition of foreign languages, as pointed out by *P. Gurrey*, "The teaching of the mother-tongue and teaching of a foreign language can support and assist each other."

**(5) The Principles of Proper Order and Proportion—**  
The four distinct activities involved in language learning are : (1) understanding, (2) speaking, (3) reading and (4) writing. The classical order of teaching these activities is :

First—understanding, Second—speaking, Third—reading, Fourth—writing.

*Mr. J. A. Bright* did an experiment on students learning English as a foreign language and found that the following order of teaching is more advantageous :

First—understanding, Second—speaking, Third—writing, Fourth—reading.

He found that reading becomes easy when writing is learnt before reading because, in this way, associations between symbols and sounds can be made. Therefore, this order of teaching should be maintained. Besides this principle of proper order, principle of proportion should be followed. It means that while teaching a language, due and equal emphasis should be put on each aspect.

1 R. Paul : *Understanding English*, p. 68.

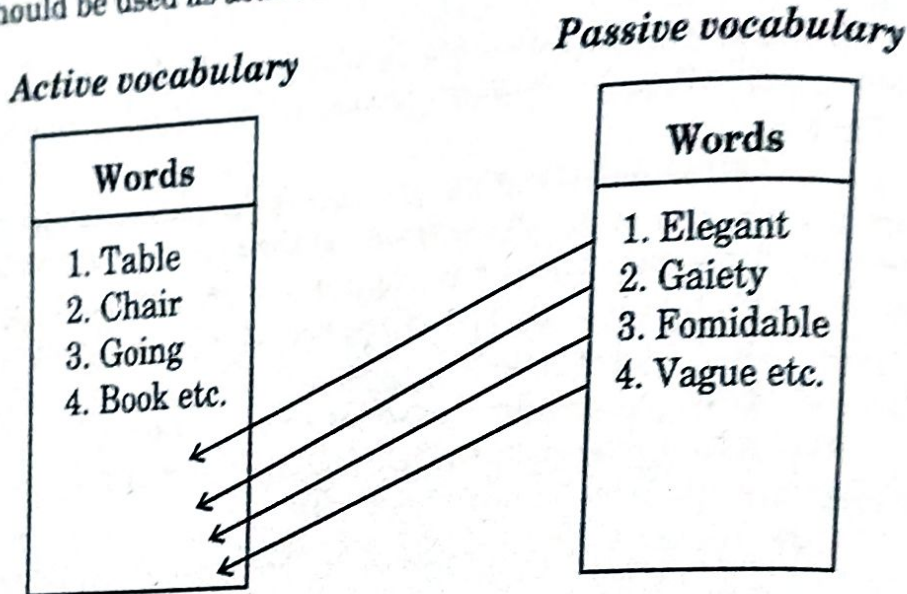
Palmer says, "It simply means that all items in the whole range of the subject and aspects must receive an appropriate degree of attention so that the student's knowledge of them may ultimately form a harmonious whole."

(6) Principle of Passive and Active Vocabulary—Another objective of teaching English is to increase vocabulary of students. There are two kinds of vocabulary :

(i) **Passive Vocabulary**—Those words which are recognized and understood, but never used in speaking and writing, form this type of vocabulary.

(ii) **Active Vocabulary**—Words which are understood and constantly used by the learner in speaking and writing, form active vocabulary.

A fruitful learning is which recognized and understood words are used as active vocabulary. It means words of passive vocabulary should be used as active one, as illustrated ahead :



For instance, the word elegant is in passive vocabulary. The teacher should try to bring this word in the active vocabulary of the students. When the student starts using the word 'elegant' off and on, then the word 'gaiety' should be taken over and so on. Hornby<sup>1</sup> has given suggestions as to how to prepare a list of active and passive vocabulary.

(7) **The Principle of Motivation**—Motivation is the core of learning. Perhaps, no other principle is so important as of motivation because a student motivated to learn a foreign language, can himself manage to learn the language, somehow or the other. But to motivate

<sup>1</sup> Hornby : *English Language Teaching*, Vol. VIII, p. 18.

students to learn the foreign language is an up-hill task as there is no internal force for learning this language. Mother-tongue is learnt in a motivational stage because the child wants to express his thoughts and ideas. For him, there remains no alternative except to learn the mother-tongue. The process goes like this :

Internal desire to express ideas → motivation to learn language  
→ learning the mother-tongue.

But, for the foreign language, there is no such internal desire, because there is already the mother-tongue to express ideas. Therefore, special techniques are required to motivate students to learn the foreign language. They are :

(i) **Arousing Techniques**—These techniques will arouse students from a state of sleepiness. Inducing anxiety, frustration, curiosity are some of the techniques of arousing.

(ii) **Expectancy Techniques**—A person only gets motivated when there are goals to achieve and expectancy to achieve them. So, teachers should formulate clear cut goals before students.

(iii) **Incentive Techniques**—Under these, the following techniques come—Prize, punishment, praise, reproof, grades, competitions etc.

(8) **Principles of Selection**—These principles are based on the assumption that the whole system of the language cannot be taught within a short period. Since we can teach only limited things within a limited period, teaching-matter should be selected keeping the following principles in mind :

(i) **Frequency**—Those words or structures (set of words, should be selected which have a high frequency of occurrence, *i.e.*, which are used much, *e.g.*, book, pen, table etc.

(ii) **Range**—Every word has its range. Range shows the number of situations in which a word can be used. For instance, there are two words—'sky' and 'have'. 'Sky' word can be used in one situation only whereas 'have' can be used in three situations, *e.g.* :

- (a) I have read the book.
- (b) Have some sweets.
- (c) I have three saris.

Here the range of 'sky' is very short whereas 'have' has a long range. Words of longer range should be selected for teaching.

(iii) **Availability**—It refers to two things : (a) Whether the word is convenient to teach, as table, chair, pen, book are due to their availability in the class-room. (b) Whether the word is useful as plate, spoon, salt, cup are due to their indispensable availability in

house. Words with these characteristics, i.e., convenient to teach and useful should be selected.

(iv) **Coverage**—Words with more covering capacity should be selected. By coverage or covering capacity, it is meant that the number of words a word can display, e.g., the word 'cereal' displaces wheat, rice, pulses.

(v) **Teachability**—Words differ in teachability. The word 'flower' can be taught easily by showing a flower or by sketching a flower or by showing a picture of a flower. But to teach 'affection' is difficult. So, preferences should be given to those words which can be easily taught by various devices.

(vi) **Learnability**—Psychologists are of the view that things should be taught according to age. A word which can be learnt by a XII class student cannot be learnt easily by a VI class student. Therefore, matter should be chosen keeping in mind the learnability of students.

Thus, the above six principles of selection emphasise on the selection of useful material. *W. R. Lee* also opines, "Teach those sentence-structures first, the use of which can be made clear by means of visible action in the class-room."

(9) **Principles of Gradations**—Gradation means 'simplifying the matter'. The idea behind the principles of gradation is 'to so simplify the matter that language learning become more easy'. There are two principles which come under gradation principles, viz :

(i) **Principles of Grouping**—It involves grouping of material on the basis of sound, situation, sentence structures and meaning to make matter easy to learn. When matter is grouped on the basis of sound, it is called 'phonetic grouping', for instance, go, row, bow, toe, show can be taught together. When words are grouped according to situation, it is called 'lexical grouping, e.g., father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather can be taught in one context, i.e., family. Something we can group material on the basis of 'sentence structure', e.g., I am sitting. You are sitting. She is sitting. He is sitting. They are sitting, etc. can be taught together. This type of grouping is called 'grammatical'. We can even group material on the basis of meaning, for instance, beautiful, charming, enchanting, alluring can be put under one head. This is called semantic grouping.

(ii) **Principle of Sequencing**—When the matter is grouped, then this question arises : In what sequence the grouped matter should be taught ? The principle of sequencing helps here and tells which items should follow which items. There are three types of sequences, e.g. :

(a) **Grammatical Sequence**—It is related to structures. It means that first of all simple structures having subject-verb-object, e.g., 'I am going to Delhi' should be taught. Then those structures should be taught which closely follow the first structure, i.e., 'I am going to Delhi to see the exhibition.'

(b) **Lexical Sequence**—It is related to which word follows which. For instance, or follows either; nor follows neither; there follows here.

(c) **Semantic Sequence**—It is done according to meaning of words. Words of same or rather same meaning are taught one by one. For instance :

- (i) We all take meal.
- (ii) We take breakfast in the morning.
- (iii) We take lunch at noon.
- (iv) We take dinner at night.

(10) **Principle of Phonology**—Spoken language depends on sound and written language depends on sight. But it is hard to remember written symbols without attaching them with spoken symbols. Therefore, teaching a foreign language should start with hearing sounds and speaking the language. In no case it should start from writing. Wren also states the predominating importance of speech, "There was speech in the world a long time before there was writing." Thompson and Wyatt<sup>1</sup> also proclaim, "Book-work and pen-work introduce passivity instead of activity. Oral work introduces activity." Prof. Kittson<sup>2</sup> has expressed similar views by saying, "Learning to speak a language is always by far the shortest road to learning to read it and to write it."

(11) **The Principle of Interest**—This is a very significant principle. If the teacher is successful in creating interest in student to learn the foreign language, half the battle is won. Interest can be aroused by :

- (a) Audio-visual aids, e.g., pictures, charts, gramophone, records.
- (b) Making the material meaningful, i.e., related to life.
- (c) Doing different types of activities, e.g., speaking, reading, writing.

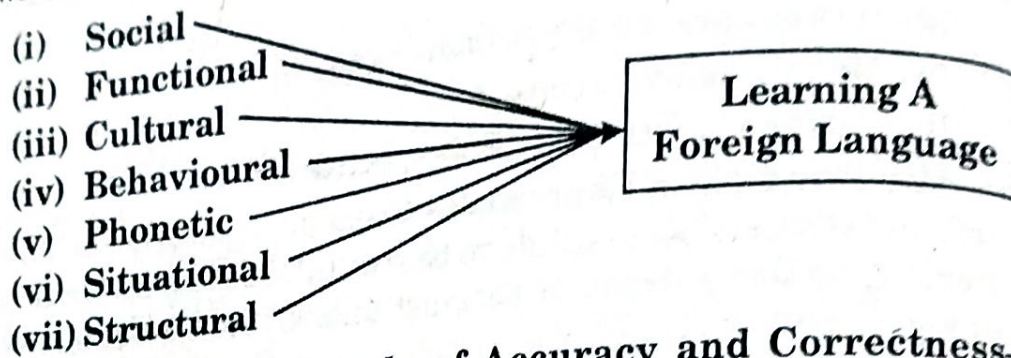
According to Wren, "Lessons can be made interesting by utilizing objects and pictures, by allowing all boys to do something as well as to say something : by making the lesson playful.....".

1 Thompson and Wyatt : *The Teaching of English in India*.

2 Kittson : *Theory and Practice of Learning Teaching*.

(12) **The Principle of Learning by Doing**—This principle emphasises on acquiring skill by doing. For a foreign language acquisition of written work, pronunciation, reading, spelling, writing and hearing are essential activities. Students should be given a good practice of these.

(13) **The Principle of Multiple Line of Approach**—According to R. N. Safaya<sup>1</sup>, "The term-multiple line implies that one is to proceed simultaneously from many different points towards the same end." So, the teacher should adopt many approaches judiciously and rationally to reach the goal." The different approaches which can be used are illustrated here :



(14) **The Principle of Accuracy and Correctness**—Accuracy implies to the use of right or exact words. It means that words should be used which impart meaning for contexts. For this the following points are imperative :

- (a) The selection of words should be right.
- (b) Use of words should be economical.
- (c) Expression should be impressive.

Correctness stands for accuracy of pronunciations, intonation, spelling, structures and articulation. From the very beginning, the teacher should be both accurate and correct.

(15) **The Principle of Concreteness**—This principle is based on the assumption that knowledge can be stored in mind permanently, if it is gained through practical experience. A child can remember 'lotus' more if he has seen the flower himself than when has not. The teacher, therefore, should begin with concrete things. As P.C. Wren says, "The first words of English should be names of things (nouns) and those things should be readily available..... He must say 'book', 'desk' etc. and point to the things he names." For this, the teacher can use either classroom material or should use some handy material. Adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, verbs, adverbs should also be taught keeping in mind this principle.

<sup>1</sup> R. N. Safaya : *The Teaching of Sanskrit*.



(16) **The Principles of Correlation with Life**—While teaching, the subject-matter should be related to life, customs, traditions, peculiarities and characteristics of the particular society to which the students belong. In this way, teaching can be more meaningful and learning can be transferred to real life situations.

(17) **The Principle of Language Aptitude**—Specialists of language like Carroll and Spoon<sup>1</sup> are of the view that for learning a language, language aptitude is needed. There are some main components of language aptitude which should be developed in students. These components are :

(i) **Phonetic coding**—Ability to code sound in such a way that it can be remembered.

(ii) **Grammar**—Ability to handle grammar.

(iii) **Rote memorization.**

(iv) **Inferring linguistic rules, patterns, etc.**

These are the various principles of foreign language teaching. If the teacher wants his teaching to be fruitful, if he wants the rate of learning to be accelerated, he must follow these principles in teaching.

## EXERCISE

### □ Essay Type Questions

1. Describe briefly various principles of Teaching used in the teaching of English.
2. What do you mean by 'learning by doing'? For what class is this method most useful? Illustrate your answer.

### □ Short Answer Type Questions

1. What do you mean by the principle of variety?
2. What is meant by the principles of selection?
3. Explain the principle of interest.

### □ Objective Type Questions

1. Motivation is a process of :  
(a) arousing one's interest      (b) maintaining one's interest  
(c) controlling one's interest      (d) all the above

**Ans.** (d) all the above

1 J. B. Carroll and S. M. Spoon : *Modern Language Aptitude Test*, N. Y. Psychological Corporation, 1958.