

### Study on the Communication and Language Skills

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**Abstract:** Communication and Language Skills introduces you to the essentials of how to master the usage of the English language for communicative purposes. To say that the English language is the most prestigious language in the world at the moment is stating the obvious, and there is no point in deceiving ourselves by saying otherwise. For this reason, the way we use the language is viewed critically, especially if our usage is not up to the expected benchmark. In the developed world, especially in places like the United States of America, mastery of the English language determines who you are in the society. In Nigeria, many people burst into laughter when they consider your usage of English to be less than standard. The defence that many people put up is: “English is not my mother tongue.” As much as one agrees with this assertion, one should also be honest enough to acknowledge that this is a lame excuse for not making an effort to overcome such deficiencies. The reality for the average Nigerian is that, for now, the language with which you do almost everything outside of your home (and even sometimes in your home) is English. It thus appears wise to learn the essentials of communicating in this language. It is not a matter of whether you like it or not—the decision about using English was taken out of your hands long ago when it was adopted as Nigeria’s second language. Falling in line has therefore become the only option left if you want to function beyond the basic communication needs in your home. Communications is the act of conveying information from one place, individual, or organisation to others. Subjects are of knowledge-oriented and skill-oriented. Knowledge-oriented subjects are taught and learnt, but skill-oriented subjects are tried, trained and practised. No one can deny the fact that skills are acquired, not taught or learnt. Enthusiasm is the most propelling force in acquiring mastery over any skill targeted. Learning a language is like learning skills such as swimming, driving and painting. Though language is a tool for communication, it is a powerful tool for communication for any effective communicator. Mitchell says, “Language development is based on pragmatic communicative needs and that forms of language are used to convey meanings”. (117) Mastery over skills is acquired by means of constant practice. Scoring high marks is not the indication of one’s language proficiency, because marks are awarded on the basis of what one writes in the exam, not on the basis of what one knows. One can score high marks by learning lessons by rote and reproducing them in the exams. Language proficiency cannot be attained just by studying the rules of grammar or some prescribed textbooks, but by constant practice interwoven with zeal and zest.

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#### Introduction:

Communication takes different forms among living organisms. For instance, animals have means of telling their mates that there is danger or food, and so forth. Humans also communicate their feelings, views and desires to fellow humans and other living organisms through different means. Some means of communication are shared by both humans and non-humans. Examples are gestures and vocal symbols, such as screaming, mewing, roaring, bleating and barking, among others. But there is one mode of communication that is peculiar to humans, and that is language.

Language can be used to show solidarity. In a gathering of people from different ethnic groups, people who speak the same language can decide to use it to communicate. In such a gathering, those who

cannot understand the language are excluded. At times, those excluded may feel threatened because they are unsure whether there is a conspiracy against them. In the same vein, those who understand the language of a particular trader may use it to bargain. Such a trader may be joyous that they have seen somebody who understands their language. This kind of situation may be to the advantage of the buyer and may also fetch the seller some sense of belonging.

#### IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH TODAY

Of all languages, English enjoys its unique privileges as native language, official language, semi-official language and second language. The world has shrunk mainly due to the astonishing technological developments. The English left us, but not English. A good command over English is indispensable for any ambitious and aspiring candidate to keep abreast of

latest developments in science, technology, business, management, medicine and all other disciplines and to have a rosy future. Mahatma Gandhiji, despite his being against the British reign, he was in favor of study of foreign languages, and English in particular. He said, "I don't want my house to be walled in all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. I would have our young men and women with literary tastes to learn as much of English and other world languages as they like and expect them to give the benefits of their learning to India and to the world". (Young India-484) English continues to be the language of domination, status and privilege in India. One of the major problems of India Unemployment- has left those who lack proficiency in English in the lurch, as English as an international language is widely used for interaction across the globe in terms of business, trade, aviation and other project-based discussions. Thus English has become a stark necessity. In technical institutes also, study of English is given as much importance as given to study of technical subjects. In interviews, primary importance is given one's communicative competence in English. Language labs are established in technical institutes with the purpose of involving learners in language activities online, besides regular classroom teaching. In software companies, an intensive training on communication skills is given to the newly recruited.

### **Characteristics of Language**

Certain qualities are common to all natural languages, some of which are explained below.

#### **i. Language is conventional**

A group of people have to agree before there can be a language. This agreement makes the structure of the language conventional. Without this quality, there will be chaos because each person could choose the name of an object or decide how to write a word. The origin of this conventionality is difficult to trace. What language A calls X may be called Y in language B. For instance, God has the following different names in different languages: Yahweh (Hebrew), Olorun (Yoruba), Chineke (Igbo), Ubangidi (Hausa), Oita (Okpe), Oshinegba (Okpameri), Osanobua (Bini), Oghene (Ijaw), Ohimohi (Ebira) and so on.

#### **ii. Language is arbitrary**

There is no one-to-one correspondence between the words in a language and the entities they refer to in the real world. The connection is arbitrary and derives from the conventional nature of language. For instance, there is nothing intrinsic in the following

words and the actual entities they refer to: goat, cow, table, urine, blade, man, fellow, house, sin, ball, church, gun, etc.

#### **iii. Language is human**

This derives from the fact that only humans use language. There is no known natural language without a community of people using it. This implies that without humans there is no language. Language is therefore peculiarly human.

#### **iv. Language is dynamic**

Language changes in time and space. With inventions and new technologies, new words enter into language, e.g. infotainment, cybernetics and cybercafé, which, some twenty years ago, were not in dictionaries. There is always the need to name new products and inventions, and this increases the vocabulary items of a language. Some words also fall into disuse. Some items that had pejorative meanings centuries ago now have positive meanings. Slang also serves as a means of changing a language.

#### **v. Language has forms**

Language exists in different forms: spoken, written and signed. The oral form of a language is exhibited by all languages—there is no natural language that does not exist in the spoken/oral form. This is the primary form. Some languages exist in the written form. This does not mean that languages that do not yet exist in this form are inferior. Sign language is specifically used for interaction with people that have hearing and speech challenges. People who do not have these challenges but have been trained in the language can conveniently interact using signed language.

#### **vi. Language is adaptive**

An important nature of language is that it adapts to situations, and the same language can be made to suit different purposes. For example, a language can be formal, informal, colloquial or derogatory, among other things, all dependent on context. What is a taboo in one culture may not be so in another. An appropriate adaptation of language to contexts shows good communicative competence.

#### **vii. Language can be learnt**

One fascinating feature of language is that it can be learnt. Ideally, a child picks up the languages of its environment without being taught. However, it is possible to deliberately learn a language in a formal or an informal setting. There is no limit to the number of languages a person can acquire, and there are many polyglots around.

#### **viii. Language is pluralistic**

Language is not monolithic. That is, there are many languages in the world, and nobody has yet been able

to indicate the exact number. In Nigeria alone, there are about four hundred languages (Bamgbose 1971: 36). Each of these world languages has its own unique features, although it may share some with other languages.

### STUDY OF LITERATURE

We have come across leaders blessed with gift of the gab and enter the hearts of people through their communication skills. One of the main reasons can be honestly attributed to the study of literature. Communicative competence is one of the desirable leadership qualities. Bacon says, "Reading maketh a full man; writing an exact man". To be a successful communicator, one must be a full man and exact man too. Reading and writing, the productive language skills can be developed well through study of literature. Ezra Pound says, "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree". Alfred North Whitehead says, "It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression". Literature is not mere description of something; it is the reality, adding value to reality. It enhances the essential competencies that life requires and provides. Literature irrigates the deserts that human life has already become. Literature is the mirror and central part of life. To study literature is to study life. Great works of literature treat innumerable themes that further result in the birth of further themes that resonate with readers across centuries. Literature thus serves as the gateway to a deeper level of thoughts and ideas.

### COMMUNICATION SKILLS THROUGH LITERATURE

Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing are not communication skills, but language learning skills. Communicative competence is attained through mastery of language learning skills. All these four skills are interrelated. Even though there are many approaches to language teaching-learning such as Grammar-Syntax-Organization approach, Lexical approach, Communicative approach, Genre approach, Product approach, Process approach and Task-Based approach, LiteratureBased approach has got its own unique advantages over other approaches. In other approaches, the focus is on developing the skills and sub-skills of the target language, but in literature-based approach, learners, besides developing communication skills in English, understand life and human values.

### CONCLUSION

Technology has its own unique and tremendous advantages. But as far language teaching-learning is

concerned, too much dependence on the use of technology shall not yield the desired output. For example, the frequent use of SMS language even in formal contexts may result in learners losing knowledge over correct spellings. Technology was not much available during the days of excellent communicators such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mrs Indira Gandhi. Most of the leaders, it is well-known fact, had and have been blessed with communication skills due to their perennial interest in literature. Thus study of literature enables learners to develop their communicative competence.

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