



The Role of Communication in Modern India: A Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Perspective

Ashwini Kulkarni

Research Scholar, Department of English,
Gandhinagar University,
Gandhinagar.

Dr. Nirupama Patel

Research Supervisor and Head of Gandhinagar Institute of Liberal Studies,
Gandhinagar University, Gandhinagar.

Abstract

In a country as linguistically diverse as India, communication plays a central role in connecting its people across cultures, regions, and socio-economic backgrounds. With the evolution of technology and educational methodologies, modern India is witnessing a transformation in how communication is perceived and practiced. This paper explores the role of communication through the lens of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), emphasizing both traditional and contemporary modes of interaction. Using cultural case studies, such as the linguistic pride of Tamil Nadu, post covid difficulty of using language in school and examining the impact of historical policies like T. B. Macaulay's *Minute on Education*, the research reflects on how language has shaped identity, policy, and progress. Finally, it evaluates the bridging role of English in a multilingual society and recommends pedagogical practices that balance heritage preservation with global integration. This article also explores how the pandemic has set students back in their language development and how teachers have struggled to re-establish effective communication in the post-pandemic classroom. The paper also highlights the dual impact of the pandemic on both learners and educators and discusses strategies employed to overcome these challenges in the present scenario.

Introduction

Communication, in its various forms, forms the foundation of society, acting as a key driver in human interaction, governance, education, and identity formation. In India is a country with immense linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity communication is both a unifying tool and a point of contention. Traditionally, communication occurred through oral storytelling, letters, and face-to-face interactions, often shaped by caste, region, and local dialects. Non-verbal communication such as hand gestures, facial expressions, and bodily cues has always played a supporting role in conveying intent and emotion (Hall 35).

With the advent of the digital age, these traditional forms are now as been a supplemented and in many contexts, replaced by technology-mediated interaction. Tools such as email, SMS, WhatsApp, and video conferencing have introduced new dimensions to both verbal and non-verbal communication. Emojis, memes, and gifs, for instance, have redefined visual cues in online discourse (Crystal 129).

The medium of communication has also evolved. English, as a result of colonial influence, has taken a central role in urban, academic, and professional settings. While it was once seen as a technique of oppression, English today is regarded as a functional lingua franca that connects India's diverse regions and communities without necessarily imposing cultural dominance (Graddol 72).

Communication in the Indian Context

India's linguistic diversity is woven deeply into its cultural fabric and is prominently reflected in its Constitution, which recognizes 22 officially scheduled languages. These languages serve as a representation of the country's cultural pluralism, allowing each state to choose its own official languages, further strengthening regional identity. However, this multilingualism, while a source of pride, also presents challenges, particularly when it comes to governance, education, and social unity. The sheer number of languages spoken in India complicates communication at the national level, as reflected in the 2011 Census, which reported that more than 19,500 languages and dialects are spoken across the country. This diversity highlights the complexity of achieving effective communication and shared understanding among a population that is linguistically diverse.

In southern states like Tamil Nadu, the importance of language is particularly pronounced. Here, language is not just a tool for communication but is intimately tied to regional pride and cultural identity. The Tamil language, for instance, holds profound significance for the people of Tamil Nadu. It is more than a means of communication; it represents a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage. This can be seen in the resistance to external influences and efforts to assert linguistic autonomy. During a visit to Madurai, it was evident that even when individuals could understand languages like Hindi or English, they often responded in Tamil. This was not due to a lack of understanding but rather as a conscious decision to preserve and celebrate their linguistic heritage. In Tamil Nadu, language is viewed as an essential component of one's identity, and speaking Tamil is a way of maintaining cultural integrity in the face of external pressures.

Scholars have noted that this strong attachment to language reflects a deeper cultural philosophy. In Tamil Nadu and other southern regions, there is a pervasive belief that the preservation of language is integral to maintaining cultural identity and resisting external dominance. As Annamalai points out in his studies, Language in India is not merely a tool for communication, but an instrument of political expression and identity. This idea extends beyond personal or regional pride it touches on broader issues of political autonomy and self-determination. Over the years, there have been various movements that have pushed back against the imposition of Hindi as a national language, particularly in the southern states, where the regional languages like Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam dominate. The promotion of Hindi has led to protests and unrest, as people in these states view such efforts as an encroachment on their linguistic rights and cultural values.

The issue of language and identity has also been linked to the political landscape in India. Over the years, resistance to the imposition of Hindi has become an important aspect of regional politics. The demand for the recognition and protection of regional languages has been a driving force behind many political movements in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. These states have consistently advocated for linguistic autonomy, arguing that the diversity of languages must be respected to maintain social harmony and political stability. The central government's push for Hindi, though often framed as an effort to unify the country, is seen by many as an imposition that disregards the country's linguistic diversity.

At the same time, India's multilingualism poses significant challenges in the realm of education, particularly in terms of language acquisition and communication in schools. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted these challenges, especially with regard to language proficiency. The closure of schools and the shift to online education disrupted traditional classroom learning, causing significant setbacks in students' language skills. Prior to the pandemic, many students were already struggling to improve their English communication abilities, and the transition to online learning only exacerbated these difficulties.

One of the most noticeable impacts of the pandemic on students was the loss of opportunities for face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers. In physical classrooms, students not only learned the subject matter but also developed communication skills through discussions, group work, and other interactive activities. These types of exchanges were crucial for students to practice and improve their language skills. However, in the virtual classroom environment, students lost these opportunities for interactive communication, which affected their language acquisition. The limited interaction in online classes and the heavy reliance on their mother tongues further hindered their ability to communicate effectively in English, which is often seen as a critical skill for academic and professional success. In many cases, students became more dependent on their native languages, which led to a reduction in their fluency and confidence in English. Teachers reported that many students, once comfortable in speaking English, now struggled to express themselves in the language. The lack of peer interaction also played a significant role in this decline. In traditional classrooms, students often engage in collaborative activities like debates, presentations, and group discussions, which provide valuable opportunities for language practice. With online learning, however, these interactions were limited, leading to a stagnation in language development.

Furthermore, online education could not replicate the dynamic, interactive environment that physical classrooms offer. Teachers found it difficult to maintain students' engagement and participation during online lessons. The lack of immediate feedback and real-time communication in virtual classrooms led to decreased motivation among students. As a result, many students began to lose interest in learning, which contributed to a significant decline in language proficiency. Studies suggest that, compared to pre-pandemic levels, students have fallen behind by at least two years in terms of language skills, particularly in English.

The pandemic also posed challenges for teachers, many of whom were not fully prepared to teach in an online environment. Teachers faced difficulties with limited teaching tools, inadequate training in digital platforms, and the challenge of maintaining student engagement through a screen. Unlike in-person lessons, online classes

lacked the immediate feedback and interaction that teachers rely on to gauge student understanding. As a result, teachers found it challenging to offer personalized support to students, which further hindered language learning.

In the post-pandemic recovery phase, restoring pre-existing learning standards has proven difficult. Teachers have had to adopt new methods to help students regain lost skills, particularly in language acquisition. Language-based activities have become essential in rebuilding students' confidence and communication abilities. Some of the strategies that have proven effective include:

1. **Interactive Language Activities:** These activities encourage students to actively participate and engage with the language. Role plays, group discussions, and storytelling exercises are being introduced to help students practice their language skills in a more dynamic and engaging manner. These activities foster an environment where students can develop their speaking and listening abilities, which are crucial for language proficiency.
2. **Peer Learning:** Another effective strategy is pairing students with stronger language skills with those who are struggling. Peer learning has shown positive results, as students learn from one another and help each other improve their language abilities. This collaborative approach also fosters a sense of community and support among students, which can boost their confidence and motivation.
3. **Remedial Sessions:** Special classes focusing on basic language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction, are being conducted to bridge the gap in language proficiency. These remedial sessions aim to help students strengthen their foundation in the language, which will support their overall academic performance.
4. **Teacher Training:** To ensure that teachers are equipped to handle the challenges of online and hybrid teaching, workshops and training programs are being conducted to enhance their digital and communicative skills. By improving teachers' ability to effectively use technology and engage students in online classrooms, these programs help ensure that students receive the support they need to succeed.

Historical Roots: Macaulay's Educational Policy

The impact of British colonialism on communication and education in India is inescapable. T. B. Macaulay's infamous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) argued for English to be the medium of instruction, dismissing classical Indian languages as unfit for modern learning. Macaulay claimed that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia (Macaulay 2). This policy institutionalized English in Indian education, marginalizing regional languages and Sanskrit-based knowledge systems.

While this shift enabled India to access global knowledge and administrative systems, it also created a socio-linguistic divide that persists today. English education became a marker of elite status, often alienating rural populations who remained grounded in local languages. According to King, "Macaulay's policy not only alienated Indians from their own linguistic traditions but created a new elite class fluent in English and aligned with colonial power structures" (King 104).

Today, India is still grappling with the legacy of Macaulay's policy. English remains a necessary skill for upward mobility, yet it coexists with efforts to revive and protect indigenous languages. This duality is at the heart of India's communication conundrum: how to embrace global communication norms without sacrificing linguistic heritage.

The Role of English as a Bridge Language

In modern India, English functions as a neutral tool in inter-regional and inter-cultural communication. Unlike Hindi, which is associated with the north and often resisted in the south, English carries less emotional and political baggage. In urban workplaces, higher education, and media, English is often the preferred language due to its perceived neutrality and global value (Graddol 82).

In states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, English serves as a medium for technological education and international collaboration. For instance, the Information Technology industry in Bengaluru thrives in English, even though the local language is Kannada. As Kachru explains, "English in India has developed its own functional and stylistic forms, reflecting both its colonial past and its present-day pragmatic value" (Kachru 197).

TBLT, or Task-Based Language Teaching, offers a pedagogical approach to balance this duality. By using real-life communication tasks, TBLT emphasizes functional language use over rote memorization. It is especially suitable for multilingual classrooms where students may not share a first language but need a common medium usually English for collaboration and learning (Ellis 16).

Task-Based Language Teaching in Indian Classrooms

TBLT has the potential to revolutionize language learning in India, especially in the context of communication. Instead of focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary drills, TBLT engages learners in communicative tasks that mirror real-life situations—group discussions, interviews, role plays, and collaborative problem-solving (Nunan 41). This method encourages not just fluency but intercultural awareness.

In India, where classrooms are often multilingual, TBLT can create inclusive spaces. For example, a group task on local festivals could allow students to share traditions in English, drawing from their cultural backgrounds. This both validates their identities and develops their communication skills.

Moreover, TBLT allows for scaffolding learners can build confidence through guided practice, gradually achieving communicative competence. According to Willis, "tasks simulate how language is used in real life, helping learners use language with a purpose, not just for academic display" (Willis 83).

Conclusion

In India's multilingual, multicultural fabric, communication is far more than the exchange of information it is an act of identity, resistance, inclusion, and negotiation. From the linguistic pride observed in Tamil Nadu to the enduring effects of Macaulay's language policies, India's communication landscape reflects its historical struggles and contemporary aspirations.

English, once a colonial imposition, now plays a unifying role in academia, commerce, and administration, especially when approached through inclusive pedagogical models like TBLT. The future of communication in India must therefore embrace both heritage and innovation—protecting linguistic diversity while equipping citizens to participate in a globalized world.

Works Cited

1. Annamalai, E. *Managing Multilingualism in India: Political and Linguistic Manifestations*. SAGE Publications, 2001.
2. Census of India. *Language Data: Census 2011*. Government of India, www.censusindia.gov.in.
3. Crystal, David. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge UP, 2006.
4. Ellis, Rod. *Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford UP, 2003.
5. Graddol, David. *English Next India*. British Council, 2010.
6. Hall, Edward T. *The Silent Language*. Anchor Books, 1981.
7. Kachru, Braj B. *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India*. Oxford UP, 1983.
8. King, Robert D. *Nehru and the Language Politics of India*. Oxford UP, 1997.
9. Macaulay, Thomas Babington. *Minute on Indian Education*. 1835. In *Bureau of Education, Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781– 1839)*, edited by H. Sharp, Government Printing Press, 1920, pp. 107– 117.
10. Nunan, David. *Task-Based Language Teaching*. Cambridge UP, 2004.
11. Willis, Jane. *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. Longman, 1996.

International Research Journal

IJNRD

Research Through Innovation