



The Influence of Structural Approach in the Syllabus of English for Gujarati Medium Learners at Higher Secondary Level.

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Abstract

Amidst the political leaders with staunch Gandhian philosophy and a late realization of the importance of English language, teaching of English language has passed through several interesting stages in Gujarat. This paper analyses the syllabi, the instruction materials and the evaluation systems of English for Gujarati medium learners at the Higher Secondary levels right from 1976, when Gujarat adopted 10+2 pattern and introduced standards XI and XII as Higher Secondary, till the present day. Since 1976, there have been revisions in 1984, 1994 and 2004. The researcher has analysed all these syllabi along with instructional materials and evaluation systems to find out the influence of Structural approach of Language teaching.

Being populated with business community, Gujarat has always been in need of a language that links them with the other regions of the nation and with the world. However, amidst the political leaders with staunch Gandhian philosophy and a late realization of the importance of English language, teaching of English language has passed through several interesting stages. Through constant revisiting and revising the education policies and language policies, syllabus reforms etc. the government of Gujarat has been trying to educate and equip the students with proficiency in English language.

After the existence of Gujarat as an independent state when Gujarat had to structure its own education policy, the state continued with the system of 11+4, wherein the learners had to undergo eleven years of schooling before they entered into university, and were to undergo four more years of schooling for graduation, including the preparatory year. In 1976, when education was put on the

list of concurrent subjects, the authority to take the policy decisions was vested with the central government, and Gujarat, along with some other states, switched over to the national pattern of 10+2+3.

While defining the terms Approach and Method, one can understand that an approach may be viewed as the philosophic basis for a particular system of language instruction. While the method is the blueprint, the plan of implementation of that philosophy is to achieve the desired outcome conceived through the approach to language teaching. Edward M. Anthony, in his article, *Approach, method and Technique* (1963), defined the terms as follows:

I view approach—any approach as a set of correlative assumptions, dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language teaching and learning. Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of it contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural. (5-7)

Structural Approach

Between the world wars, *structuralism* in linguistics, along with *behaviorism* and *pragmatism* in psychology and philosophy respectively, exerted great influence on the teaching of foreign language. The structural approach is based upon the belief that mastery of the structures of a language is much more important in learning of a language rather than enlargement of vocabulary. The structural approach places more emphasis on automatic drilling and mechanical manipulation of patterns for establishing and consolidating the language habits. The aim is to use language automatically, without being aware of the patterns themselves as it happens in the case of acquisition of the mother tongue.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Structural Approach

Advantages:

- This approach facilitates learning English by mastering basic structures. So, the learners learn the basic elements of the language.
- The oral drilling of various structures help students form a habit and they learn various patterns before they read or write.
- It is scientifically established that the learners have to master a limited number of structures and a fixed number of words for general speech proficiency.
- By learning the structure of the language, the learner indirectly learns general grammar rules, specific word order, formula, usage etc.
- It enables the learners to use the language orally also and follows the fundamentals of language learning, LSRW.

Disadvantages:

- Only selection and grading of structures doesn't serve the purpose of teaching English as second language.
- The structural approach does not take into consideration the limitations of the learners. At the same time it expects a great deal from the teacher.
- Drilling makes the atmosphere in the classroom and the learning process dull and boring.
- Structural approach is not suitable for higher classes.
- For teaching prose, poetry and composition the approach is found inadequate and ineffective.

Higher Secondary

From the year 1976, the Government of Gujarat switched from the 11+4 to 10+2+3 pattern. Instead of standard XI being the last year, schooling was extended for one more year and hence standard XII of school came into existence. Standard XI and XII were separated from general secondary education and was termed as Higher Secondary Education with a view to provide a link between the school education and University education as it is mentioned in the published document by the Education and Labour Department, Government of Gujarat- Syllabus of Various Subjects for Higher Secondary Classes XI and XII.

Syllabus

The syllabus for Higher Secondary was prepared by the sub-committee consisting of the subject experts under the guidance of the Central Syllabus Committee appointed by the Government of Gujarat. The subject of English for the learners of Gujarati medium was called English (Lower Level).

The 'Objectives' stated for the syllabus of standard XI as well as standard XII indicates the emphasis on the reading and listening skills primarily.

“- to enable pupils to comprehend language material and the content of the prescribed text-book.

- to enable pupils to comprehend about 2400 words through listening and reading.”
(*Syllabus* 1976, 14)

The 'Objectives' also holds the communicative skill important within limited vocabulary and structures learnt by the students.

“ – to enable them to use basic structures they have learnt in the oral as well as written expression.” (*Syllabus* 1976, 14)

Considering the stated objectives of the syllabuses of English (Lower Level), the syllabus seems to be indicating at the structural approach since it aims at developing the comprehension ability within the prescribed structures and a limited set of words. As GeethaNagraj writes, in Structural syllabus, “Vocabulary items too are graded...the syllabus normally consisted of about 250 structures or language items and 2500 to 3000 vocabulary items.” (148)

The syllabus content prescribed for standard XI and XII is a combination of text, grammar and composition activities. “600 new words were to be added to the already learnt 1800 words ...this will bring a total of 2400 words meant for active use at the end of Std. XI” (*Syllabus* 1976, 14) The structures learnt by the learners till standard XI were to be revised to “provide a link between the Xth and XIth Std.” (*Syllabus* 1976, 15) New structures to be taught like,

- Tenses in Active and passive voices
- Modal auxiliaries in active voice
- Non-finite verbs and Infinitives in active voice
- Indirect narration
- Question tags
- Various clause constructions et cetera.

As the objectives point towards structural approach, so does the syllabus. As mentioned earlier, the grading and limiting the number of vocabulary items (2400) and the emphasis on the learning of various structures are the features of a typical structural syllabus.

Instructional Material

The text books of English (Lower Level) prescribed for the standards XI and XII for the Lower Level English were prepared and published by the *Gujarat State Board of School Textbooks*, Ahmedabad. It consisted of two sections. Section I for the detailed study and section II for the non-detailed study.

Though there is no prescribed instructional material for the Grammar and language work or there are no separate sections for grammar exercises, the selection of the textual content has been made with a view to ‘incorporate the essential language material as prescribed’ (*Syllabus* 1976, 16).

The chapter *The Artist*, for example, incorporates various structures.

e.g.: “It was Saturday. It was a holiday. All the summer world was bright and fresh. Everyday in the town was cheerful and full of life. But Tom felt miserable on this glorious day...” incorporates simple past tense.

“Aunt Polly had given him a heavy punishment. He had to paint the thirty yards of the house fence...” incorporates past perfect tense.

The chapters like ‘*On saying “Please”*’ incorporates various structures used while routine conversations cautious talks.

Evaluation System

The prescribed evaluation pattern for the learners of Higher Secondary contained only the summative evaluation in written form. The written examination of 100 marks was supposed to be given to the students for the evaluation of their progress.

As per the question paper design, besides the questions on textual part, the exercises like paragraph writing, letter and application writing are aimed at evaluating students’ writing skills. Paragraph writing exercise enhances the skill to write on various topics while the exercises like letter writing and application writing are focused on using the language in routine and formal situations in written form. Though writing skill is held important in most of the methods and approaches, the special focus on the practical and routine situations points towards Functional approach combined with Situational and Structural approach as both these approaches emphasise on various structures in various situations.

Moreover, various grammar and language exercises consisting of various grammar topics. Besides the focus on various structures of English language, there are also exercises that aim at vocabulary enhancing which is an essential feature of the Structural approach.

Syllabus Revised 1984

After the adoption of the Higher Secondary system in 1975, Gujarat Secondary Education Board started exercise of revising the syllabi of various subjects.

The syllabus of English was designed keeping in mind what the learners must have learnt till standard Xth. The students were supposed to have studied the structures like a few Tenses, Modal Auxiliaries, Simple and Complex sentences, Articles, Pronouns, Prepositions, Non-finite verb forms etc. It was also supposed that the students are already equipped with 1100 active words and 550 passive words. Thus their total vocabulary is of 1650 words. (*Syllabus* 1984, 9-10) The syllabus for the students of Higher Secondary was prescribed in the light of the above mentioned.

The syllabus for the higher secondary aims at equipping the students with 600 more active words and 700 more passive words to make the students equipped with around 2900 words. This graded vocabulary system is an important part of Structural approach. As GeethaNagraj writes, in

Structural syllabus, “Vocabulary items too are graded...the syllabus normally consisted of about 250 structures or language items and 2500 to 3000 vocabulary items.” (148)

Further, the Grammatical Structures prescribed were, Past perfect Tense, Present Perfect Continuous Tense, Past Perfect Continuous Tense, Future Perfect Tense, Tenses in Passive Voice, Modal Auxiliaries in various forms, Non-finite Verbs, Casual verbs, Indirect Speech in Past tense and Exclamatory sentences, Yes/No questions in the reported speech, Question tags, Various sentence patterns like exclamatory sentences with ‘How’ and ‘What’, Noun clause, Adjective clause, Adverb clause, Compound sentences, Function words etc. (Syllabus 1984, 12-13)

The emphasis on various structures and the insistence of oral proficiency both are very important features of Structural approach. The syllabus also includes various exercises to improve writing skills of the students in various informal as well as formal situations.

Instructional Material

The text book comprise of two parts namely, Part-I for detailed study and part-II for non-detailed study.

The number of grammar exercises and language work indicates a strong influence of structural approach. Moreover, the overt presentation of grammar and language items by incorporating them into the texts helps students also learn and understand the functional significance and the situational usage of various structures and usages.

Evaluation System

The question paper style is more or less the same as it was previously with questions on textual part, Grammar and language exercises, vocabulary exercises and composition.

A lot of language exercises based on different structures and usages indicate a strong influence of structural approach on the evaluation system. A lot of exercises like transformations, fill in the blanks, synonyms, antonyms, one word substitute and so on, reflect a clear inclination towards structural approach as these exercises are aimed at the evaluating the knowledge about various structures as well as vocabulary learnt during the academic session.

Thus, with the reduction of the weightage of the textual portion, the influence of the Grammar Translation Method seems to be decreasing. The influence of Structural approach, Situational approach and Functional approach seems to be stronger as they emerge from the evaluation system.

New Syllabus, 1994

As mentioned in the syllabus document published by the Gujarat Secondary Education Board, with reference to the New Education Policy, 1986, and in line with the curriculum framework provided by the NCERT, New Delhi, the syllabi for the Primary to Higher Secondary levels were restructured and implemented gradually. (Preface)

Syllabus

For the learners of Gujarati medium, the paper of English was termed as English (Lower Level) in Common Stream and English (Higher Standard) in Science stream.

According to the objectives, the syllabus is aimed at developing the competence among the students to read and comprehend the reading material in the textbook. They should be able to recognise and understand the structural words and structures in their context as used in the textbook. They should also be able to understand various usages, idioms, proverbs etc. in the text book. (*Syllabus* 1994, 17)

The syllabus also aims at developing the speaking proficiency among the students. They should be able to speak simple conversational English with reasonably intelligible pronunciation and be able to make inquiries in English about useful information in day to day life. (*Syllabus* 1994, 18)

The objectives regarding the writing skills include the ability to write correct spellings and punctuations and use appropriate structures and words as specified in the syllabus. They should be able to write paragraphs, formal letters and summary.

These well-defined objectives makes the focus of the syllabus very clear. With the emphasis on understanding the nuances of various usages and structures of English language and the expectation of technical accuracy from while writing, the indication is clearly towards a strong influence of the Structural approach.

Besides the text, in grammar section various Sentence patterns and usages are prescribed like,

- Use of 'too'
- Simple and complex sentences.
- Some specific Constructions like 'How' followed by an adjective or an adverb, reported speech of negative or exclamatory sentences, question tags.
- Verb forms
- Non-finite verbs
- Functional words
- Questions like *Whom* do u like to play *with*? *What* are you looking *for*?
- Modal auxiliaries
- Phrase prepositions like, 'with a view to', 'with regard to' etc. for standard XI,

And for standard XII, the structures prescribed for are,

- Noun clause- subject to be or any other verbs
- Adjective clauses
- Clause of degree of the type 'the more...the more'
- Adverb clause of purpose with 'so that', 'in order that'
- Specific constructions like 'May God bless you'
- Reported speech
- Question tag
- Verb forms
- Non-finite verbs
- Function words etc.

The emphasis on various structures and language items point towards the inclination towards Structural approach. The selection of some of the usages that are prescribed are quite useful in routine communication and conversations in specific situations. In line with the objectives to develop a good writing skill among the students, in the composition section consist of the exercises like paragraph writing, formal as well as informal letter writing, summary and precis writing etc.

Instructional material

As per the guidelines laid in the syllabus document, the textbooks are divided into three parts: Prose section, supplementary reading and poems. The prose sections contain a list of lessons consisting of short stories, articles, essays, scenes from plays, and also formal and informal letters and job application. By including the prose sections of their likely fields of vocation, students are also introduced with the language may need to use in their fields.

There are number of structures, grammar items and usages that are prescribed and incorporated in the different lessons of the text. Specific instructions regarding the language items incorporated in each chapter have been given at the end of the chapter under the title, *teaching points* with examples to help the teachers and the learners to identify and practice the language item incorporated in the chapter. The Exercises that follow each chapter also contain various tasks related to the particular language item and vocabulary building exercises. Moreover, in the textbooks of standard XI, after around four to five lessons there is a *Revision* section for the grammar and language items discussed in earlier chapters. The inclusion of structures and language work after each chapter and further, the reinforcement of the same in the *revision* section clearly indicates a lot of significance of various structures and grammar, which shows a strong influence of Structural approach. The method of teaching grammar that emerges from the *revision* section, in which, first the examples of a particular structure are given and then the rules are generalised based of those examples which is followed by the drill of practising the same structure several times. This method of teaching grammar is indicative of the structural approach combined with the communicative approach of English Language teaching.

2004: The Paradigm Shift

With effect from 2004, the entire curriculum got revised in line with the principles of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) which emphasised on the 'Path', 'Consistency', and 'Excellence' for the Higher Secondary level. (*Syllabus* 2004, 3). There was a paradigm shift in the approach and the view point in terms of the school education in line with the increasing need of the education system which aims at more practical and specific learning outcomes.

Syllabus

The rationale stated behind designing the new syllabus for English is the focus shifted from 'What the students must learn' to 'what the students *require* and *want* to learn' according to the practical needs of students after the completion of higher secondary level.

It clearly states that the syllabus is designed on the principles of Functional approach. The aim of English language teaching has been perceived to be developing the four skills that are useful

in real life situations ‘outside the classrooms’ (*Syllabus* 2004, 17). “The perspective on language teaching in recent times has shifted from being a grammatical one to functional.” (*Syllabus* 2004, 17)

“This syllabus is Learner-centred or need-centred. In the conventional syllabus, the competencies have been divided among different skills L–S–R–W, whereas in functional syllabus, the focus is on ‘doing something’ with language in life-like the situations.” (*Syllabus* 2004, 17)

The *learning outcomes* section also states that in addition to the grammar items and syntax required for various language functions and to perform specific language tasks, for forming acceptable and accurate sentences, the syllabus also takes care of the social aspect of the language. “The functional approach to language to language, thus, becomes a practical approach, rather than merely a theoretical one” (*Syllabus* 2004, 17).

Though the syllabi of the previous couple of decades did make attempts to have functional and communicative approaches but they could never come out of the shadow of structural approach being the prominent one.

Summing Up

Having analysed all the syllabi, the instructional materials and the evaluation systems of English for the Gujarati medium learners at the Higher Secondary level, the researcher can see a distinct pattern of a gradual change in the ELT approaches and methods being reflected. The influence of the Structural approach has been predominant. However, gradually, with the changing scenario, with each stage of the syllabus review and revision, the importance of Structural approach seem to be decreasing. Presently, since the new syllabus which is in currency since 2004, the approach seems to have completely shifted from structural. However, one cannot deny that Structural approach dominated the English Language Teaching for several years before passing on the baton to the approaches more communicative in nature.

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