



**LANGUAGE STUDY AND THE ‘LANGUAGES’ –  
APPLYING INTERNET LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE OF COMICS IN ELT**

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**Abstract**

From the heights of heaven to the depths of hell, the ability to communicate relies on language – the power of words. The target today for most of the teachers is to train the hesitant speakers of English language. Most of the teenagers and youngsters irrespective of their caste, creed and colour are in the magic spectrum of cyber and comic world. A vague analysis of the student’s use of language supplies an interesting fact that the language items used by them contain traces of internet and comic language. The paper analyses the condition in which the internet and comic languages shall be used in an ELT classroom to make learning effective and enjoyable. The shift in the role of a teacher as a knowledge centre to teacher as facilitator implies in itself the infotainment purpose. The paper looks into how the notion of centrality was hammered down by the post –modernist theories, the arrival of cultural studies and how these affect the language teaching. The neo-vygotskian socio cultural theory is also relevant in the context. Learning occurs only when a child internalises external activities, through language as a mediating tool. An analysis of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and how far the feasibility of CLT can be taken for incorporating the internet and comic languages is also stressed. Further a socio linguistic and psycho linguistic angle of the theme is analysed.

**Key Words:** CLT, Comic Language, ELT Classroom, Internet Language, Linguistic Analysis





***By words the mind is winged.***

- Aristophanes

From the heights of heaven to the depths of hell, the ability to communicate relies on language – the power of words. The swift movement of the world records the fact that the red carpet is meant for the competent ones. The strongest point in one's personality is one's tongue. The intriguing thing is that even though one's tongue is stronger, a babel tower enigma twists even the toughest one. Missions were there since the proclamation of vak-artha to unwind the mysteries behind language. Beating all the assumptions, language still keeps its mysterious charm. "To the Nietzschean question: 'WHO is speaking?' Mallarme, the French poet, answered, 'Language is speaking.'"

To speak, we need language. From the abstract term "language", now we have a lot many terms to denote the concrete. A shift from modern to the post-modern era produces marked shift in myriad arenas. Breaking the notion of centrality, language, culture and society step their foot in post-modern era. With the change in life and manners, so does in language. The utter changes in language gave birth to a "terrible beauty" which even deconstructed the connection between vak and artha.

Whatever be the changes, the communicative value of the language is still the same. Though coloured by extra dimensions, communicative ability is often regarded as a yard stick in assessing ones personality. Terms like global village and global language being a trend in the present millennium, the demand for a lingua franca is getting hot. Surveying the status of languages used today in the world, the position gathered by English is quite envious. It is like 'learn English, change your life.' So it is high time to pay considerable attention to the teaching of English especially in a country like India which is striving for a better place among the developing countries. To those who practice language teaching, language acquisition denotes communicative competence. With a conventional curriculum and out dated syllabus, communicative competence is still a utopian dream to most of the Indian students.

The desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently, not the ability to use the language exactly as a native speaker does. The language learning scene is marked with changing perspectives and visions. Whether language should be taught using literature or through communication is a vexing question. Whatever it may be the changing conditions point towards two trends that emerged in the world as a part of the emergence of cultural studies – internet and the world of comics. Most of the teenagers and youngsters irrespective of their caste, creed and colour are in the magic spectrum of cyber and





comic world. A vague analysis of the student's use of language supplies an interesting fact that the language items used by them contain traces of internet and comic language. Their conversations are occupied by words one can often find in cyber world and structures quite similar to those used in cartoons and comic books.

A typical ELT classroom in Kerala is befitted with multifarious problems – those of students, teachers and society. The students use of the listed two brings to light the fact that they are comfortable in using the language structured here. If such is the case, why cannot we use the same as a tool in our academic sector for improving the ELT standards?

Keralites are unenthusiastic in using English. That unwillingness to an extent is modified by the emergence of internet language. Everybody (the term includes everyone irrespective of whether they are educated or not) started showing their language competency in internet and closely related circles through terms they are familiar through the use of internet. Internet provides real-world English language learning contexts, texts, materials and activities. Terms like googling, texting, copy-paste, scraps, surfing, single-click, weblogs, send-mail are a couple of those terms which every user of the internet are familiar with.

Internet provides real world tasks which is missing in class room syllabi. The traditional syllabi of Kerala for high school and undergraduate students focus on the content. This indirectly affects the students' communicative competence. The space it provides through on-line games, software downloading, Facebook, chat rooms etc. facilitates the users to use English. The commands for an internet user are always in English language. The people or students who use it are compelled to read and draft a reply. Chat rooms provide an ample space for letting a show of competence. Conversational skills in English language are being polished during these sessions. All in all, Cyber Space is a linguistic frontier. On the web, language is not just a way of communicating, it indexes and symbolises themes of international security, human equality and self-determination.

How internet transforms English language is another interesting thing to be noted here. Previously errors came out of the use of English are being treated with neglect. Now, thanks to the emergence of numerous –isms and movements and finally the loss of centrality. The trend today is celebration of things out of errors. Wat instead of what, U instead of You are some of the common coinages. How z you? is one of the common error free coinages.

This situation has a psychological implication especially with regard to the Keralites. The formerly hesitant groups of Kerala has entered into the category of 'ready to talk group' with the celebration of error making trend. Errors are the major factors that hinder them from using the





language, now when errors turn out a fashion, people of Kerala are stimulated to talk and express things in their official tongue. Eventually this trend fosters a sort of communicative competence and through communication the cultural differences are to an extent wiped out.

Communicative competence in second language in addition to the first language is a nerve cracking thing for everyone. That too in an atmosphere of incomprehensible sounds is such a daunting experience. Here surviving means to be fit for the new environment. Comics are one of the tools, in addition to the internet linguistics, that make us fittest in the crisis of survival. It makes language learning a less frightening and threatening experience. Starting from basic instruction, it travels a long way by enriching vocabulary and to an enhancement of cultural knowledge.

“Reading material that is high interest and rich in pictorial clues, such as comic books, can help the [AD/HD or autistic] child associate meaning with what is being read,” says Liza A Kurtz in Visual Perception problems in Children with AD/HD, Autism, and other Learning Disabilities. (78)

By using comics, students are able to associate pictures with the action in a book thus helping them comprehend the meaning of the story and familiarize themselves with new words. They tend to utilize daily language commonly used in conversation such as slang, idioms, onomatopoeia, abbreviations, etc. Mastering these aspects of the English language is important for assimilating into a new culture. Intermediate to advanced students can use such comics to compare and contrast with their native cultures and stimulating discussion in the classroom. The universality of comics should be taken into account as well, when considering using them for ESL purposes.

The language of comics is different from that used in the internet. The language here is represented by pictures and drawings in addition to the real language used. The sentence structures employed in comics are hierarchically arranged so that everyone can read it and master it with ease. Children start picking up things easily from comics, both onscreen and through letters, because they are watching it with appropriate actions. Comics present a surety of words by supplementing it with appropriate actions and there by entering into the cognitive level of an individual unconsciously. This unconscious assimilation helps them to use the language in the real tasks.

Teachers and librarians are now realising the importance of comics and their use in educational settings. Many experts see comics and graphic novels a gateway for the reluctant





language learners. Incorporating texts and visuals help the readers in finding the relationship between the two and finally it encourages critical thinking.

Many English language learners are reluctant readers because traditional texts seem overwhelming. Comics have visual appeal with preferably less complex sentences and of course are supplied with some familiar characters that will push the students in. Looking beyond the initial appeal, comics can increase literacy and language acquisition. Overall comics provide a care free ambience for the learners to learn apart from their demanding class room teaching.

The arrival of alternate thinking which is manifested through things like internet and comic world came in to existence with the rejection of a natural or sole reality. Post modernism has rejected the idea of centrality and brings to the scene many marginalised concepts. The alternate languages have a base from this point of thought. The arrival of something does not mark its presence on the block. It needs proper backing. It is the cultural and social acceptance of a novel idea that enables its further, expanded production or innovation. "Cultural studies is concerned with the social and cultural construction of meaning." Pramod K Nayar says in his work *An Introduction to Cultural Studies*. By constructing new meanings, this area has fostered the acceptance of formerly disregarded items. A deconstruction instead of a reconstruction occurs and previously set aside groups came into the centre as they build a new ideology and pecking order. Popular culture has planted its root in these grounds. The new culture demands new ways of thinking. Adopting such vibes in the ELT field will give the genre a distinct look. When students live in a world of hyper reality, teachers should at least despise with the normal reality.

As mentioned in neo-vygotskian theory, learning occurs when a child interacts with other people in different social and cultural situations. A certain dialogic process is required in the interaction mediated by language. Learning occurs only when a child internalises external activities, through language as a mediating tool. Regarding the arena of ELT, the one approach which facilitates this fresh move is Communicative Language Teaching.

Communicative approach has its origin from the disappointment of the linguists and educators with the audio lingual, notional- functional and grammar translation method. One of the thrust areas of Communicative Language Teaching is that it makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. It provides a platform which motivates the students to communicate in meaningful environment, where they get the feel of using language without deliberate persuasion. The assessment of the students is usually made based on their communicative competence and not on the grammar rules they mastered. For attaining the target of making students communicatively competent, the practitioners of CLT use authentic texts in the learning situations. The involvement of socially sensitive materials in learning infuses





a learning arena where one can have the language plus a view of the language learning context. The more the personal experiences are shared, the more the students find learning easier. This motto has been successfully carrying by the CLT for a number of years. This being the showground of CLT, combining the alternate languages we discussed with this approach has its relevance. Language learning, being an interactive activity, demands an interpersonal connection with society. In this light, discourse analysis has its role to play in language studies. In addition to the linguistic analysis, social and situational studies have its stand in the language study, especially in CLT.

In the context when speakers communicate something to someone for some purpose, Internet language has something to do in a CLT classroom. The interesting thing about the language used in internet is that it is formed out of the speaker's necessity. The want to 'communicate' things in an easily accessible way within a short span of time kindled the need of internet language, which as the name denotes suits the pace of internet.

The major hurdle for an English language learner is the lack of a proper channel to communicate the content they have in mind. Being a second language learner, a student often find difficulty in getting the apt vocabulary to suit his/her purpose. The major reason, maybe, the loopholes in language learning system. If the learner is engaged in doing things with language, they use language for a variety of purposes and finally end up in becoming fluent users. At this point we can use internet language as a tool in language learning. As the major highlight of the CLT is interactive learning, using the cyber language in classroom activities shows a new path. The reluctant clichéd classroom learners find a fresh air in the language they are familiar with. Recent researches show that India stands second among the list of world's leading Facebook users. The statistics reveals the stance of Indians towards cyber communication. Activities like virtual chat rooms can be created for the learners for them to interrelate with their peers on the language they know. Errors being a fashion in the e-world, students can interact without the fear of making blunders. Teachers can design the chat sessions based on the topic they want to teach and if needed they themselves can ensure their participation. Chat groups or pairs can be designed according to the need. Voice chat sessions can also be in cooperated in the same manner. Once the activities are over teachers can evaluate the task and if needed can also direct them to write the activity with appropriate corrections. Every class can be converted in this manner in the forms of discussions. Teachers can distribute information as bunches and can ask the students to share the information they have with them to other groups in the chat rooms in the language they use in real chat room experience. An interaction through the internet language can help the students to come out of their nutshell and communicate with all their hearts.





Similar is the case with comic linguistics. Comic books have been a part of the part of the popular culture since 1940s with the arrival of the series Superman. Learning a language through literature is a usual thing in our curriculum. The traditional textbooks often find clumsy with their lengthy sentences and monotonous narration with hardly any visual cues. Graphic novels and comics show how the actual dialogue can play out. They use fewer words with more visuals which in turn result in attracting the beginner readers than repelling them. Most of the students feel comfort in comics than with their traditional textbooks.

An English classroom can be made enjoyable by inserting the textbooks in the form of comics and graphic novels. Applying CLT here paves way to interesting activities. The activities of the groups made in the classrooms can be effectively imbibed into the curriculum by asking them to prepare a comic or graphic novel out of their textbooks or syllabi. The materials made such can be displayed in the class rooms for further understanding of the text. The comic versions of different classics have already been on the block for years. CLT provides ELT an effective space to share the world of comics. If the teaching occurs in a smart classroom then the teachers can stick on to online comics and graphic novels. There are instances of parts of speech comics where one can learn grammar, there is Archies which makes the students socially sensitive by conveying a moral lesson at the end. Even if one is interested, there is a provision for online creation of comics through [makebeliefscomics.com](http://makebeliefscomics.com). The daunting problem before a English as a second language learner is not the gaining of mere academic knowledge but to be competent speakers in his target language. One of the literary tools that help learners to bridge the gap of competency is comics. When used effectively in CLT, it creates miracles for sure.

The language is considered as a social and cognitive phenomenon, so as language learning. While using language, the objective of a speech community is to accomplish their purposes. The term communicative competence itself implies the skills needed for using language, skills in the sense a 'sociolinguistic competence', which means how utterances are produced and understood in different socio linguistic contexts. Bhaktin's dialogism states that the real nature of language is to be found in conversation – the dialogue. It is regarded as metaphor of human existence itself. In such a case language learning through dialogues is advisable. Applying the alternate languages in the field of language learning meets this criterion. Learning language within a sociolinguistic context helps them to perform in all socio cultural situations. Dell Hymes, who proposed the term communicative competence, focuses on language as a social behaviour. By encouraging learners to use linguistic and non-linguistic resources in learning they could muster to negotiate meaning like asking for information, seeking clarification, using circumlocution, the teachers are invariably leading learners to take risks – to venture beyond memorized patterns. This risk taking procedure enables the learner to pass through all





hurdles in their social interaction, where they normally face a bridging of one who speaks out and one who speaks not. Taking on this note, applying the languages said in the language study surely has its socio linguistic function. It enables the learners to construct an English of their own in a social constructivist sense. Dialogues give such a free space where one person is the owner of his own language which is different from an idiosyncratic condition, but a communicative social interaction with others.

A successful teaching programme is the one which takes into account the cognitive aspects of language learning and seeks to involve the learners both psychologically and intellectually. The wider the meaning based activities, the greater the chance for learners to get involved into it. It gives the learners a venue for self-expression, where the teachers show a respect towards the language used than finding out the formal errors. CLT practised in this respect feasibly provides the capacity to use language with maximum attention to communication and minimum attention to form. There by it promotes a cognitive assimilation of language. The main problem for ELL learners is that they are actually studying English and not cognitively working on it. In the format prescribed, the cognition of language occurs rather than a rote learning procedure. The less threatening atmosphere created here puts the learner in an 'easy to learn' pathway. Psychologically this induces the learners to master the norms and rules unconsciously as they find it as their individual task to use language. The freedom of accusation of errors also prompts them to climb up the wall and eat the fruit which they formerly find as impossible. Internet language celebrates errors and in comics, due to the simple structure and fewer words it follows there is less chance to commit mistakes. The socio linguistic and psycho linguistic realities of the enchanted garden of English seem to be open before them if they practice the language in a care free atmosphere. The dicto 'I think therefore I am' naturally comes when one develops a confidence in using the language. The psycho linguistic impact of this teaching methodology is that it gives confidence to assert the 'I' figure and thereby stressing on ones use of one's own language.

Overall the 'languages' discussed here is an integrated approach where it pays equal attention to the four skills which every teacher of English wants to accomplish. The concept of integrating the 'alternate languages' into language teaching leads to the conceptualization of language learning as cognitive, emotional and behavioural creation of "My language is my own" phenomenon.

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