

## **Structural Approach:**

A systematic approach to English language teaching was attempted soon after the Second World War and linguists like Noonan, Mackey and Pattison designed courses in the University of London Institute, with express emphasis upon graded words and structures as teaching units. Mackey in 'English Language Teaching' laid great emphasis upon selection and grading and a planned presentation of structures to the second language learners. Significant contributions were made by researches conducted by Robert Lado and Charles Fries at the Ann Arbor University, Michigan as well. Language is perceived as a structure of words and sentences. Learning a second language calls for a mechanical acquisition of skills through systematic, planned and continual practice and habit formation, as well as cognitive functions where the human beings use the acquired structure creatively and rationally. The structures taught to the learners must be controlled. The patterns of mother tongue tend to interfere while learning the target language, and so the structures taught must be accurate. The learners must be made to emphasize accuracy in acquiring the structures of the target language through structural drills. Contrastive analysis may be allowed for the purpose.

### **Features of Structural Approach:**

- i. Selection of linguistic structures or sentence-patterns and different features of the target language is important. The learners need not be exposed to the unlimited variety of linguistic structures for developing communicative skills.
- ii. Gradation of the structures must be appropriate. A sequential arrangement of the items to be learnt in the order of importance and simplicity has been emphasized by the linguists.
- iii. Gradation of the words and sentence structures are done on the basis of (i)the frequency of their use, (ii)probability of application or range, (iii) productivity ,(iv) teachability and (iv) complexity. The words and structures must be graded according to their difficulty level..
- iv. There is difference between content words and structure words or grammatical items., the former carrying meanings even when used in isolation and the latter are not fit to be used meaningfully unless put in relation to other words. Sentences would have no meaning or proper structure without these words like conjunctions, auxiliaries,

prepositions etc. the number of the structure words being more limited than that of the content words, the selection and gradation of both types must be done carefully and in an stage specific manner.

- v. Active vocabulary refers to the words that the learner can use independently and appropriately in actual speech and passive vocabulary refers to those words that the learner may understand but cannot use independently. A second language learner usually has greater amount of passive vocabulary. The gradation of words must be done in such a way that gradually the active vocabulary is enriched by the passive vocabulary.
- vi. Emphasis is laid upon the oral approach since use of language for communicative purposes is centered around speech and there is certain degree of internal vocalization even in the acts of reading and writing.
- vii. The second language learner's age, abilities, difficulties are also considered for selection and gradation of the structures.
- viii. The structural approach emphasizes a situational approach and the graded structures are presented through carefully designed situations to allow maximum practice.
- ix. Intensive and varied practice is ensured through a Spaced Controlled Practice or planned repetition. Such practice must be designed and the structures presented in such a way that the learner finds them relevant.
- x. Substitution tables are used extensively for a systematic drill of the patterns. Individual or group drills or chorus drills are used. This structural device is based upon the specific sentence situations, namely, (a)Two-part sentences where the sentence has two essential parts- the nominal and verbal, (b)Three-part sentences where there are two parts of a predicate – the first part being verbal and requiring he second part to complete the meaning and (c)Four-part sentences where the predicator is linked by two completers The word-order is fixed in each type and this gives rise to the practice of “fill the slots” where the learner constructs sentences by mechanically substituting appropriate terms in definite slots.
- xi. Previous structures are revised before proceeding to a new structure.
- xii. The structural approach including the oral and situational approaches facilitates student activity.
- xiii. The learner tries to develop an intelligible pattern on his own in the light of his past experiences through a planned and graded exposure to the words and sentence patterns introduced in the class.

- xiv. It may be said that the second language is taught through the play way method.
- xv. The teacher follows the Principle of Specific Practice which asserts that the most effective way of developing a skill is to practice it by oneself.
- xvi. Sentence is considered to be the unit of instruction
- xvii. Certain words and phrases used in very high frequency in English speech like “please”, “Hello” etc are called Formulas and are introduced from the beginning.
- xviii. Certain structures rise spontaneously in the course of classroom teaching and presented judiciously for teaching the structures for relevant use. This is called incidental teaching, practised to some extent in the Structural approach.
- xix. Presentation of the structure is immediately followed by the practice in speaking.
- xx. Consolidation, testing and remedial are important.
- xxi. Usually there is no separate grammar lesson and functional grammar is taught in higher stages.
- xxii. Mother tongue may be used occasionally for contrasting features of linguistic structures in the mother tongue and the target language.

### **Advantages:**

- i. The structural approach has sound sociological, linguistic and psychological bases. The appropriate use of structure constitutes the first, emphasis on the accuracy of the structures constitutes the second and the gradation and selection of structures to be presented to the learners depends on the third parameter.
- ii. The insistence on speaking skill facilitates the establishment of a direct bond between experience and expression.
- iii. The situational aspect facilitates appropriate use of the target language for communicative functions
- iv. The structural approach facilitates accuracy due to intensive focus on specific structures and acquiring them before actual communication
- v. Graded structures facilitate systematic acquisition of the target language.
- vi. Promotes functional grammar
- vii. Selection and gradation of words present standardized vocabulary that helps in easy reading later.

### **Disadvantages:**

- i. Continuous teaching of structures and their repetition make the atmosphere dull.
- ii. Reading and writing skills are neglected.
- iii. It is very difficult to get skilled teachers for this purpose.
- iv. It is not suitable for the higher classes.
- v. A limited vocabulary cannot be considered sufficient to cater to all the communicative needs of the learner in real life.
- vi. The nuances of signification in two distinct sentences with apparently the same structures are often overlooked and thus the language learning remains somewhat mechanical suitable upto a certain stage
- vii. Over emphasis on accuracy in structures tend to put lesser importance on fluency
- viii. Core vocabulary and core structures are taught systematically but grammar taught through such structures tends to leave much unattended, as a result of which the teachers find it difficult to establish a correlation between these later.