27

Use of Interactive Media for Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This is a maiden attempt to utilize the marvel of interactive technology in the area of language learning. Conventionally, the concept of interactive technology has been utilized in certain areas - right or wrong questions, multiple choice situations and arithmetical answers.

In language learning, the need for "click and hear" concept and a readymade recording facility cannot be underestimated. Of the two, the record and play facility will be extremely useful in the context of online learning and distance education.

We have successfully experimented this idea in SPOKEN THAMIZH – Interactive CD. This CD coupled with a Hand Book, was found to be user-friendly and the learner could learn new words and sentences with effortless ease.

We are planning to extend this idea to run online courses also.

The interactive technology has been used hitherto in the following areas only –

- yes or no simple answers

- multiple choice questions

- arithmetical calculations

- single word right or wrong answers

- demo of software or webpage

Language learning is a ticklish task for the teacher and the learner. Pronunciation plays a prominent part especially in learning the oriental languages. By using Roman letters you cannot bring out the essence of pronunciation because the same letter will have to be pronounced differently depending upon the context, structure of words etc., Moreover, there are some unique letters like zha in Thamizh language which cannot be taught easily.

It is ideal to have a teacher in front of you, who will teach you how to pro-nonce a word, and when you repeat it, he will correct you till you reach perfection. In distance learning and learn yourself scenario, the learner will not have the presence of the teacher. But this handicap can be overcome by using interactive technology.

In simple words, it envisages two steps -

The student should be able to practice how the words or sentences have to be pro-nounced. This can be achieved by creating .wav files and the learner can click and hear any number of times.

The second step is to give the facility of a recorder in every page where the student can record and hear his voice. He can compare his pronunciation with that of the teacher and correct it. Even though windows media player has this option it can be used for a short duration only. By utilizing the tools available in the internet, we have introduced interactive facility for extended periods.

On behalf of TAMBHI (Tamil Book House on Internet) an interactive CD for learning Spoken Thamizh has been launched and it has received widespread appreciation.

Hitherto Thamizh language has been taught in the traditional manner – with alphabets, grammar and the focus is on the written form only. Spoken Thamizh is a new area where you learn quickly, how to understand others and to interact comfortably. Thamizh scholars were shying away from teaching the spoken form, because of regional variations and due to an imagi-nary fear that the language will become corrupt. The gap between the spoken form and the writ-ten form is so wide that even after spending long hours in learning the written form, a student will still be lost when he hears the spoken form.

Learning spoken Thamizh has become inevitable because the radio, the TV and the magazines have started using this form extensively. For those whose mother tongue is not Thamizh, written form is difficult to master and time consuming. This is not to decry the efforts of learning the written form of Thamizh. The rationale behind this approach will be clear, if we look at the way we teach our young children at home. First we start from the spoken form and when the child goes to school, it learns the written form effortlessly.

This interactive CD is meant for grown ups and not for children.

It is aimed at the following target groups -

    i)   those whose mother tongue is not Thamizh

    ii)   those who migrated to other countries a generation ago and are keen that their family members should learn spoken Thamizh quickly

    iii)   those who can understand when others speak but cannot reply in Thamizh