The Structural Approach to the Teaching of English: the Possible Grounds for Dissatisfaction

The structural approach to the teaching of English is technique by which students are taught to master the pattern of sentences. In the words of Menon and Patel, the structural approach is based on the belief that in the learning of a foreign language, mastery of structures is more important than the acquisition of vocabulary. This approach employs techniques of the direct method of teaching. Speech is mainly stressed but reading and writing is not neglected. The structural approach is not a method in the strict sense of the term. It is an approach, a technique, a device which can be used to put into practice any method successfully. It is a way to teach English by using only of the traditional method like grammar translation or direct method etc. According to Prof. B. D. Srivastava, “The structural approach is, in fact, the situational approach of language teaching”

Objectives of the structural approach –

According to Menon and Patel the following are the objectives of the new structural approach:
1. To lay the foundation of English by establishing through drill and repetition about 275 graded structures.
2. To enable the children to attain mastery over an essential vocabulary of about 3000 root words for active use.
3. To correlate the teaching of grammar and composition with the reading lesson.
4. To teach the four fundamental skills, namely understanding, speaking, reading and writing in the order names.
5. To lay proper emphasis on the aural – oral approach, activity methods and the condemnation of formal grammar for its own sake.

Principles of the structural approach:-

Prof. F. G. French has entitled the following principles underlying the structural Approach:
1. Importance of framing language Habits – The structural approach lays stress on the importance of forming language habit, particularly the habit of forming words in English.
2. Importance of speech – The structural approach is based on the principle of effective used of speech.
3. Importance pupil’s activity – The structural approach is based on the principles of the pupils’ activity. The importance of pupil’s activity rather than the activity of the teacher is the sure way to learning English.
4. The principle of oral work – Oral work is the sheet anchor of the structural approach. Oral work is the basis and all the rest are built up from it.
5. Each language has its own grammar – Instead of teaching grammar of the target language and its structures are to be taught. Each language has its own grammar.

Main features of structural approach –
The structural approach makes use of the following features for teaching the language.

Word order – Word order or the patterns of form is very important in English language. Each word in ascertain arrangement has a fixed place which can not be changed. If we do so, we distort the meaning, considering the following arrangements -
a) Ram killed a snake
b) A snake killed Ram.

**The presence of Function words** – Function words are structural words. They function as the structural links. Function words help in modifying meaning consider the following sentences –
   a) I kill a snake.
   b) I am killing a snake.
   c) I shall kill a snake.
   d) I have killed a snake.
   e) I have to kill a snake.

**The use of a few Inflections:** Another important characteristic is that English language makes used of an inflection as compared to other languages. Inflection changes are prominent in the following examples:
   a) In verbs; I play; he plays; I am playing; I played.
   b) In Nouns: One boy; two boys; one man.
   c) In adjective and adverb.
      i) great –greater – greatest.
      ii) Great –greatly.

**Limitations of the Approach:**

1. The structural approach has limited application. It is best suited for the early stage of teaching English.
2. The structural approach ever emphasizes oral work and speech manipulation. There is blind repetition of structural items during oral teaching.
3. The approach ignores reading and writing children fail to expand their language acquisition.
4. This approach fails to exploit children’s mother tongue.
5. The proper working out of the structural approach requires efficient teachers. There is acute dearth of such teachers.
6. It is not practicable in Indian schools.
7. It will not help cover the syllabus.