

Learning Gujarati from Friends; Not learning Marathi at School

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I am a Tamilian brought up in Mumbai. I could speak Hindi, English and Tamil by the age of three. I also started speaking Gujarati because I had Gujarati friends and I learnt a completely new language in the most natural way! But I still can't hold a conversation for more than five minutes in Marathi- a language I learnt for six years at school.

Teaching languages usually starts off with the alphabet- for Marathi it wasn't necessary as it has the same script as Hindi. So we move on to the textbook immediately. The lessons are translated to English. Questions based on the lessons are given and answers are "mugged up" by the students. The same questions appear in the exams; the student writes these answers and passes the exams.

This goes on till Class 10. During the process, the student starts understanding the basic language but is still not able to frame grammatically correct sentences. When it comes to essays and letters, students find it difficult to put their ideas and thoughts in Marathi. We simply have not been prepared for this ability. Less than five to ten per cent of the students in a class do well in creative writing.

The burden of learning language within the tyranny of

syllabus is unbelievable. There are around 25 lessons and poems (really!) and more than 100 answers to "mug up" for a 100-mark paper. Add to this, the fact that the lessons and the stories are uninteresting. However, a student can, even without 'learning,' still get just around 65 marks by rote learning the answers. There is no 'language learning' as such. There is merely a sense of relief after Class 10 as the subject is not compulsory anymore!

The only way this problem can be solved is by altering the method of teaching. The teachers must inculcate a liking for the language. You can't just know a language by force. There should be more emphasis on speaking and listening skills in the beginning, gradually moving on to reading and writing. Lesson-based exam should be done away with. There must be more of comprehensions, compositions and tests based on audio lessons. This will ensure that students will at least have a better grasp of the language and be more fluent in it when they finish school. Isn't there a lesson for the education system from the way I learnt Gujarati from my friends outside school?

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