

Teaching English Theatre to First Time Speakers



How many times I hear from first time learners of English that they want to learn English theatre. Why they want to do it goes beyond simply wanting to “fit in”. The need to do English drama is to get exposed to a global world view of writing. India never experienced the two world wars directly unlike Europe, Japan and America, hence our world view that is seen in dramatic literature is largely based on socialistic principles, mythology or themes that are pertinent to India set within in her cultural model context. The need for English theatre or global scripts translated in English is for a wider exposure.

I never say no to the first time speakers because I totally believe that language is a mode that helps one communicate through emotion in theatre. I see saying the dialogues in English like a film play backer singer in India who sings in multiple languages. I seem to enjoy teaching the first time learners more and more. One thing I make sure is that I don't force them to change or modify their accents as it makes the script odd. I don't need actors to speak like the kings or queens but rather understand the emotion behind the expression. The script and the story line is to be understood within the emotions and the dialogues.

I cant say that I have been successful totally however I

always tell first time learners if I can learn to speak in Hindi so can you learn to speak in English. There are some points I emphasize on:

1. I do multiple readings with the cast, so that they can sound perfect. I totally believe in practice makes perfect.
2. Actors are made to understand how to realise and I make sure that they are given visual cues to pick up the script. For example if the actor comes in and improvises the dialogue while entering the house. In this case say the actor enters the house and says, hello what a beautiful house and visually improvises and moves to a chair, the non English speaker can just say his line and say " hello sir."
3. I encourage the actors to check the pronunciation on google and take help from voice apps.
4. I also encourage the actors to read as per their fluency. The best way is to start reading newspapers or books with a voice clip. They can read along even if they don't understand to get used to the flow, enunciation and pronunciation.

So friends lets get the English theatre on the stage with even non speakers and lets make theatre about emoting the script rather than sounding like someone else or trying to sound like someone that no one can relate to, including themselves. Its really us directors who have to remove the coloured lens of our attitudes towards native speakers and encourage them. The more we encourage them, the more finer actors will be produced. So the buck starts and stops with us!