CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

At present, English is taught as one of the compulsory languages in almost all educational institutions in India, owing to its status as an international language. Considering the mammoth enrollment of learners opting for English and the enormous human resources involved in the teaching of it, it may not be an exaggeration to conclude that “English teaching in India is the world’s largest democratic enterprise of its kind” (Krishnaswamy & Sriraman, 1994, p.1). As in most third world countries, the attitude of the users of English in India has undergone many changes in recent years. English is no longer regarded as the language of a master or as a symbol of an alien rule. On the contrary, it has taken roots in the Indian soil as an unchallenged second language and is considered, ‘the language of opportunity’; ‘the window of the world’; ‘the language of higher education’ and ‘the language of power, prestige and modernity’.

Despite the perceived need for English in India as a language and the innumerable opportunities thrown open by it to those who master English, one cannot just brush aside the problems it continues to pose to the society in general, and the learner in particular. It is observed rightly by the University Education Commission (1948-49) which states that English has “become so much a part of our national habit”, pointing out at the same time that the use of English also “divides the people into two nations, the few who govern and the many who are governed, the one unable to talk the language of the other, and mutually incomprehending, which is negation of
democracy” (p. 316). Thus when ‘the largest democratic enterprise’ fails to serve everyone uniformly, it inevitably ends up with ‘the negation of democracy’.

Such a kind of ‘negation of democracy’ is not restricted to the broader society alone, but reflected in its microcosm, namely, the English classroom. However, there is a difference to be noted here. In the macrocosm, many do not learn English because they do not go to schools and colleges, while, paradoxically enough, in the microcosm, many do not learn English though they go to schools and colleges. The learning of English inside the classroom has resulted in the achievement of varying degrees of competence – the two extremes being represented by those who gain the maximum and those who fail to gain anything out of the process respectively. This ‘problematic variety’ of learners of English in every classroom is so aptly described by N. Krishnaswamy et al., that it deserves to be quoted in full:

They range from first generation school goers to children from families that have an impressive library at home, they range from children who rarely listen to English outside the English class to those who converse with parents, grandparents and sometime even with the servants in English of some sort! There are urban, semi-urban and rural learners, there are learners who have all along studied in English medium schools of various kinds and those who have studied in the regional medium with English as one of the ‘subjects’. There are learners from the moneyed educated classes and those from moneyed uneducated classes. These learners who have varied socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, obviously show varying kinds and degrees of competence in English. (p. 3)
The two extremes of the above mentioned ‘problematic variety’ is represented by the advantaged learner while the other extreme is represented by the disadvantaged learner whose profile can be drawn along the following lines:

- A disadvantaged learner is one who sits in the back of the class … in the back rows to hide himself from the teachers.
- *She is a passive participant in the classroom. She doesn’t make her presence felt and, therefore, her presence is not felt. She sits anonymous in the class. Typically, she shows no enthusiasm for learning.*
- She hesitates to speak and is reluctant to participate in oral interactions. She is not confident of herself.
- She is usually the one who is not asked questions. Even when asked, she hesitates to answer the teacher’s questions. She takes a long time to come out with answers. She has an attitude of avoiding failure rather than that of striving for success.
- Often this person has to share chores at home – that of her mother, father etc.,
- She comes from a rural, semi-urban background or slums in cities and she has had her school, the schooling mostly in Government or Municipal schools.
- At school, she socializes with the members of her own group: so there is only intra-group movement and not inter-group movement.
- She has very modest career aspirations, tending to question her own worth, fearing challenges and tending to cling to the familiar.

(Adapted from V.D. Singh, The English Teacher, 1993, 10-11)

* The cohorts both pilot and main study are exclusively female. Therefore, the researcher chose to use the pronoun ‘She’. However, there is no gender bias intended in this choice.
It is true that in every English classroom, the teacher is bound to come across such learners. However, all such learners with a similar profile, cannot be branded as ‘disadvantaged’ L2 learners. But, “The real disadvantaged L2 learner is the one whose process of acquiring the receptive and productive skills of L2 is progressively hampered by the cumulative effects of social, cultural, economic and educational disadvantagedness” (Ghosh, 1993, p. 14). According to Fagan, a disadvantaged L2 learner is one who is a “socially, economically or educationally handicapped youth” (1969, p. 1). In the words of K.C. Panda & Das “the term ‘disadvantaged’ means children who come from socio-economically backward section of a community, who cannot profit from school because of deprivation of one sort or another” (1970, p. 262). It results in not only linguistic but also psychological disorders. “The combination of non-verbal orientation and an absence of conceptualization very well accounts for their intellectual deficits and deficits in cognitive skills or in Piagetian terminology, formal logical thinking. The consequences of the cognitive deficiencies are, again, complicated by their pattern of motivation and attitudes” (Panda et al. 1970). Thus ‘disadvantaged’ is a relative term. When we speak of an L2 learner as being disadvantaged, we mean that he is disadvantaged in relation to some other learners. It can be summed up saying that a disadvantaged L2 learner is one, who is unfavorably circumstanced, underprivileged, culturally and intellectually deprived, economically backward, impoverished and one who is an academic underachiever because he is unmotivated.

1.1.1 THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT OF ELT IN INDIA

The study of the teaching and learning of any language has to be made keeping in view the fact that language is a social phenomenon. Language is not only an abstract system of formal, lexical and grammatical features, but also fulfils a social function and
has to be viewed against the social context of its use. Sociolinguistics or the study of language in its social setting, shifted the emphasis from an abstract study of the rules of language to concrete acts of language use. Sociolinguistic studies have highlighted aspects of learning a language in an alien environment, when there is no native speaker present. When a language is learned thus there must be an underlying purpose for which it is learned. The language must have some internal, social function in the community.

English is a foreign language for us and it has little intimate and emotional relationship with life in Indian context. So the aim has to be definitely utilitarian and non-emotional. It reconfirms that the demand of English in our country is not for literary, but for linguistic and practical purposes. Therefore, the important aim of teaching and learning English must be the acquisition of language and not the skill of literary appreciation.

As in most Third World countries, the attitude of the users of English in India has undergone many changes in recent years. English is no longer regarded as the language of a master or as a symbol of an alien rule. On the contrary, it has taken roots in the Indian soil as an unchallenged second language and is considered ‘the language of opportunity; ‘the window of the world’; ‘the language of higher education’ and ‘the language of power, prestige and modernity’.

1.1.2 ELT IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT / TAMIL NADU

The acquisition of English as a second language is still a perennial problem to the rural students of Tamil Nadu. English has been taught in our educational institutions for quite some time now, yet our students feel handicapped in using it effectively in and outside their classrooms. The reasons are many and manifold. But the most obvious and
glaring reason is the use of faulty methods of teaching which still continues to exist, in our educational curriculum. The Grammar-Translation method has been extensively practised by teachers in schools and colleges, laying much emphasis on writing. Consequently, it has not made any impact on the overall strategies of communicating in English as a foreign language. In other words, the method could make no significant contribution in relation to the ability of developing rural students’ oral communicative competence. These methods consider language learning / teaching a mechanical process without considering its cognitive aspects. The learner is considered a mere appendage in the learning / teaching process.

In the present context of English teaching in colleges in Tamil Nadu, students find no relevance in the general English courses offered to them and English teaching at the tertiary level has not been effective for several reasons. There is lack of uniformity and specific purpose in teaching English at the tertiary level. Most efforts made to impart skill in communication through English to tertiary level learners have not been emphatic or systematic.

As per the educational system in Tamil Nadu, students begin to learn English in the III standard and continue it up to the II year of B.A / B. Sc for twelve years, ‘grammar’ is a major component of the syllabus at every stage. Some of them are very good at grammar for its own sake, but are unable to transfer this knowledge to communicative purposes. Most of them, however, have neither the knowledge of grammar nor the ability to use the language. In order to set right these deficiencies, more grammar is introduced at the tertiary level and this only succeeds in creating grammar fatigue. Unable to find any relevance in the study of grammar, the students have no motivation to learn it.
At present, the content / input given in the form of materials at the tertiary level General English courses are mostly in the form of long, reading passages like essays, short stories and other pieces of continuous writing. Moreover, the exercises and activities found in these course materials are constructed on the assumption that the learners have already acquired a fair competence in the use of English. There are entrants to the tertiary level, no doubt, who have already acquired the desired skills. But in a heterogeneous class, there are a good number of rural/ disadvantaged learners who have not attained the cognitive skills nor the second language learning strategies required to comprehend such materials and the appended language tasks. Hence the need for a separate set of materials for these learners designed with the specific goal of repairing their cognitive, strategic, linguistic and communicative hurdles of a fundamental nature, which would gradually motivate and prepare them to negotiate with materials of higher cognitive and communicative challenge is required.

The present Examination system is also faulty, testing the learner’s memory and luck rather than their competence in the various language skills. In a centralised system of Examination / evaluation, the teacher is under compulsion to ‘finish’ all the content part of the material / course book - a practice which does not leave an option, even for any conscientious teacher to verify whether the learner has assimilated the input. Contrary to the pedagogic imperative of the existing system, any pedagogical intervention for improving the efficiency of the poor L₂ learners has to stop, listen, correct, consolidate and then proceed. Such an approach certainly calls for not only a remedy – specific methodology but also a set of materials that would lend themselves to these pedagogical micro-stages of repairing and rebuilding.
The third reason for the need of special materials is that the core of disadvantagedness of the learners under this study consists in their inability to ‘produce’ language. The current material does not provide them with much scope in stretching their interlanguage. In short, there is little occasion for them to use authentic language in real time. Materials which can facilitate the process of producing language in written and oral form alone can be the real source of building the competency of rural students. Psychologists stress the importance of meaning (semantics) for learning a language. The more meaningful the material, the easier it is learnt and retained.

In the context of the semantic approach, language is defined as the most successful form of human communication. Therefore, the primary aim of foreign language teaching should be to develop in the learner the ability to use language in such a way. A shift therefore needs to be made if our language learning / teaching has to achieve this goal to yield positive results. The communicative materials / methods with its learner–centered focus can help in equipping our students with adequate skills to use language in real-life situations / different situations. Hence an ESP programme within a CALT (communicative approach to language teaching) framework seems to be a more real educational goal than English for general purposes.

1.2 COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

This is the age of communication; in fact, to communicate is to survive. People are constantly involved in the process of communication. ‘To communicate’ means ‘to share’. Communication is possible due to the shared knowledge of a set of conventions. Communicative Language Teaching is a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use that seeks to translate this into a design for an instructional system, for materials, for teacher and learner roles and
behaviours, and for classroom activities and techniques. It aims at the acquisition of all the skills of language to enable the learner to use language effectively. Communicative Language Teaching emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence. As communication through language is the major concern of linguistics and language teachers, a brief reference to the nature of communication is made at the beginning. Major definitions of communicative competence are then examined and a restatement of the notion, relevant to the purpose of this study is arrived at. The need for specific communicative models of language in relation to specific purposes is reiterated at the end of this chapter.

1.2.1 COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE

Communication is being studied today in all its aspects as semiotics – the study of a system of meanings, as body semantics – the study of the proximity of speakers or as a system of gestures, facial expressions, eye contacts or tone of voice; or as paralinguistic phenomena which occurs along with spoken language and interact with it, or as a system of linguistic signs. It is possible to communicate without language as deaf mutes do; it is also possible to employ a lot of verbiage and still fail to communicate. In general language has always been one of the most important means of communication. In order to understand the function of language in society, one needs to consider it in the context of all these other means of communication. Ethnographers of communication attempt a “description of this complex communicative behaviour of which purely verbal behaviour forms a part” (Criper & Widdowson, 1975, p. 160).

Communication involves interaction between the encoder and receiver. The efficiency of communication necessarily depends on the extent to which conventions of communication are shared by both. If there is incompatibility with respect to any of the
ingredients, communication breaks down. As Deverell points out “communication between human beings is necessarily imperfect. Most often, we are not able to say what we mean; many times we don’t mean what we say, this may be deliberate or involuntary, depending on the purpose of communication” (1973, p. 1).

Linguists and language teachers share a common area of interest: the study of language as a means of communication. The linguist attempts to analyse, describe and arrive at a model or theory of a speaker's ability to communicate through his language. According to Chomsky, a grammar has descriptive adequacy if it relates signals to their semantic interpretation in such a way that “this pairing corresponds to the competence of the idealized speaker–hearer” (Allen & Van Buren, 1971, p. 9). A higher goal for a linguistic theory would be explanatory adequacy – “to provide an explanation for the linguistic intuition – the tacit competence of the speaker of a language” (Allen et al.)

The language teacher is mainly interested in developing this ability to communicate adequately especially in second language learners. ‘Communicative competence’ is their common area of investigation. The former attempt to define it and the latter help the learner to acquire it.

**1.2.2 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL APPROACHES AND COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Traditional approaches</th>
<th>Communicative approach</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Focus in learning</td>
<td>is on the language as a structured system of grammatical patterns</td>
<td>is on communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Selection of language items</td>
<td>is done on linguistic criteria</td>
<td>On the bases of what language items the learner needs to know in order to get things done.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Sequencing of language items</td>
<td>is determined on linguistic grounds</td>
<td>is determined on other grounds, with the emphasis on content, meaning and interest.</td>
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<td>4. Degree of Coverage</td>
<td>Aim is to cover the whole picture of language structure by systematic linear progression</td>
<td>To cover only what the learner needs and sees as important.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. View of language</td>
<td>Language is seen as a unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of basic words</td>
<td>The variety of language is accepted and seen as determined by the character of particular communicative needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Type of language used</td>
<td>Tends to be formal</td>
<td>Genuine everyday language is emphasized</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Language skills emphasized</td>
<td>Reading and writing</td>
<td>Spoken interactions are regarded as important as reading and writing.</td>
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<td>8. Teacher / Pupil roles</td>
<td>Teacher–centered</td>
<td>Student–centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Attitude to errors</td>
<td>Incorrect utterances are seen as evictions from the norms of standard grammar.</td>
<td>Partially correct and incomplete utterances are seen as such rather than just ‘Wrong’.</td>
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<td>10. Similarity / dissimilarity to natural language learning.</td>
<td>Reverses the natural language learning process by concentrating on the form of utterances rather than on the content.</td>
<td>Resembles the natural language learning process in that the content of the utterances is emphasized rather than the form.</td>
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1.2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM

The learning environment is the arena wherein a complex pattern of relationships is woven to create a context within which exchange occurs. That pattern derives from the relationships among language input, the process of interaction and the demands of the task. (See Figure)

**FIGURE**

- **LANGUAGE INPUT**
  - focuses on ideas & information

- **INTERACTION**
  - Determines dynamics of classroom

- **DEMANDS OF THE TASK**
  - Meets real – world criteria

- **MATERIALS**
  - Interesting, intelectually stimulating, challenging

- **METHODODOLOGY**
  - Promote interaction through
    - student – centered classroom

- **TASKS**
  - 1. Information–gathering activities
  - 2. Create information gap
  - 3. Promote development of skills and strategies.
1.2.4 ESP: A RE–EXAMINATION

Till recently, language teachers aimed at teaching the whole system of language. Recent trends in linguistics indicate that it is neither possible nor necessary. If a pedagogic programme has to be relevant to learner needs, it should teach him the language adequate to his needs, for the specific purposes he requires. The learner needs language for a specific purpose and the syllabus should enable him to acquire language for that specific purpose. English is now viewed as a tool or skill to be acquired to facilitate accessibility to knowledge rather than as a subject to be mastered for its own sake. In this respect, Strevens refers to the changes in educational aims for language learning: “In the conventional framework for language teaching, language is regarded as a part of general education, an element in cultural experience in the humanistic side. Another type of framework aimed at the acquisition of maximum command of language unrelated to other kinds of education or subject learning. In a more recent framework, language is learned for special or vocational purposes” (1977, p. 19). ESP is often seen as the best example of communicative teaching in that it is supposedly closely geared to students needs. An ESP based on real analysis of students’ needs and expectations can become truly communicative.

1.3 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: DEFINITIONS

The term ‘communicative competence’ was first coined/used by Hymes (1972), a sociolinguist in deliberate contrast to Chomsky’s (1965) ‘linguistic competence’, which was felt as being limited in its concerns since it ignored the use of language in social contexts.

The term ‘communicative competence’ seems to be self-explanatory. To reduce it to a simplistic paraphrase, it must involve the competence to communicate; to be
more explicit, it refers to the ability of individuals, to communicate with one another in a manner appropriate to the context i.e., topic, setting and participants. The notion of communicative competence was necessary to account for factors that Chomsky’s ‘Linguistic competence’ failed to include; hence most of the definitions of communicative competence are related to Chomsky’s description of linguistic competence.

Communicative competence is viewed as ‘behaviour’ rather than as knowledge, by Gumperz and Hymes who define it as “What a speaker needs to know to communicative effectively in culturally significant settings” (1972, p.7).

Bell brings in pragmatics in his definition: “Communicative competence, building on the concept of linguistic competence, can be seen as the innate knowledge which permits the user of a language to create and comprehend utterances, to issue the communicative tokens of speech acts, in context. Such knowledge is clearly concerned with the level of discourse in which language operates as an open system in constant interaction with its environment and is therefore an instance of pragmatic knowledge of which syntactic and semantic knowledge are a part” (1976, p. 207).

Richards defines communicative competence as: “The ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom. Communicative competence includes knowledge that speaker–learner has of what constitutes appropriate as well as correct language behaviour and also of what constitutes effective language behaviour in relation to particular communicative rules” (1992, p. 65).
Littlewood defines communicative competence as: “A degree of mastery of a very considerable range of linguistic meaning and appropriacy in language and his or her ability to develop effective strategies for communicating in the second language” (1981, p. 87).

Savignon is of the view that: “Communicative competence is relative, not absolute, and depends on the cooperation of all the participants involved” (1983, p. 9). Brown supports Savignon’s idea. He says “communicative competence is a dynamic, interpersonal construction that can only be examined by means of the over performance of two or more individuals in the process of negotiating meaning” (1987, p. 199).

According to Canale and Swaine (1980) and later in Canale’s (1983) definition four different components or subcategories make up the construction of communicative competence.

- Grammatical competence,
- Discourse competence,
- Sociolinguistic competence.
- Strategic competence.

The first two subcategories reflect the use of the linguistic system itself. **Grammatical competence** is that aspect of communicative competence that encompasses knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence, grammar semantics and phonology. It is the competence that we associate with mastering the linguistic code of a language or the ‘Linguistic competence’ or in other words Linguistic competence is knowing how to use the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of a language. Linguistic competence asks: What words do I use? How do I put them into phrases and sentences?
The second subcategory is **Discourse Competence**, the complement of grammatical competence in many ways. It is the ability to connect sentences to form a meaningful whole, out of a series of utterances. In other words, it focuses on discourse of supra – sentential (above the sentence) level – those properties of language which bind the sentences together such as cohesion and coherence; whereas grammatical Competence focuses on sentence level grammar. It is the ability to interpret the larger context and how to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole. Discourse competence asks: How are words, phrases and sentences put together to create conversations, speeches, email messages, newspaper articles? etc.,

The last two subcategories define more functional aspects of communication. **Sociolinguistic Competence** is the knowledge of sociocultural rules, of knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic and the relationships among the people communicating. Sociolinguistic competence asks: which words and phrases fit this setting and this topic? How can I express a specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect) when I need to? How do I know what attitude another person is expressing? This type of competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used by participants, the information they share and the functions of the interaction. They are concerned with style, register, appropriateness (degree of politeness) and so on.

The fourth subcategory is **Strategic Competence**. Canale and Swain describe strategic Competence as: “The verbal and nonverbal communication strategy that may be called into action to compensate for breakdown in communication due to performance variable or due to insufficient competence” (1980, p. 40). Savignon
paraphrases this as: the strategies that one uses to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules – or limiting factors in their application such as fatigue, distraction and inattention. In short, it is the competence underlying our ability to make repairs, to cope with imperfect knowledge and to sustain communication through paraphrase, circumlocutions, repetition etc. Strategic competence asks: How do I know when I’ve misunderstood or when someone has misunderstood me? What do I say then? How can I express my ideas if I don’t know the name of something or the right verb form to use? (1983, pp. 40-41).

1.3.1 THE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE CAN BE ILLUSTRATED AS FOLLOWS:

- Grammatical competence
  - Linguistic Competence
    - Discourse competence
      - Sociolinguistic Competence
        - Functional Competence
          - Strategic competence
These definitions attempt to specify various features that make competence truly communicative viz., appropriacy, dialogue – constitutive universals; ability to perform in context, the combination of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic knowledge. Communicative Competence therefore includes a) knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the language b) knowledge of ‘rules of speaking’ c) knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts such as request, apologies, thanking etc., and d) knowing how to use the language appropriately.

All these definitions considered together present a general view of what constitutes Communicative Competence. For the purpose of this study, therefore it would be relevant to arrive at a definition that includes all these perspectives without unduly exaggerating any one of them. In the next section an attempt is made to redefine communicative competence along such lines.

**1.3.2 COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: A RESTATEMENT**

For the purpose of the present study, we shall redefine Communicative competence as follows: Communicative competence is the ability of the actual user of a language to produce and interpret discourse with specific reference to particular functions in heterogeneous contexts – this ability being largely determined by the extent of his knowledge of the conventions shared in a given context. In other words, the knowledge of social and linguistic rules that enable us to speak and interact appropriately in different situations is called communicative competence.
1.3.3 CHOMSKY’S DEFINITION OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE – ITS IMPLICATIONS

According to Chomsky “Linguistics is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker – listener in a completely homogenous speech community, who knows its language perfectly, and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance” (1965, p. 1). Chomsky further states “The problem facing the linguist is to discover what constitutes unconscious, latent knowledge – to bring to light was is now sometimes called the speaker’s intrinsic linguistic competence” (p. 33).

This definition has been chosen as the starting point, since most of the definitions on Communicative Competence are patterned on this, or related to this, and in suggesting modification, the same terminology is used. Almost every word in Chomsky’s definition has been challenged, but the purpose here is not to criticise Chomsky for what he did not set out to do; but rather to investigate the possibilities of a more comprehensive definition of ‘Competence.’

To restate Chomsky’s definition: Linguistic Competence is the unconscious, latent knowledge of an ideal speaker–listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by any irrelevant limitations in applying his knowledge to actual performance. Our definition has substituted the following terms; ability for knowledge; real for ideal; user for speaker – listener; heterogeneous for homogeneous; to produce and interpret for to know; discourse instead of language. We have included a reference to specific functions and shared conventions in context.
Chomsky’s linguistic competence was felt as being limited in its concerns since it ignored the use of language in social contexts. Dell Hymes reacted to this by saying, “there are rules of use without which rules of grammar would be useless” (1992, p. 278). The use of language in social contexts was therefore, sine qua non for learning to communicate effectively. This again implies that acquisition of communicative competence in a second language evolves not so much from learning the rules of sentence formation or even producing sentences as from learning by experience the rules of discourse formation by participating actively in them. According to Hymes, linguistic theory has four parameters not just two: “In sum, the goal of a broad theory of competence can be said to show the ways in which the systematically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce and interpret actually occurring cultural behaviours” (1971, p. 286).

Allwright (1979) draws a logical relationship between linguistic and communicative Competence as in the diagram below:

The diagram implies that linguistic competence is only a part of communicative competence. Teaching comprehensively for linguistic competence will leave a large area of communicative competence untouched. While teaching for communicative competence it will cater to all but a small part of linguistic competence. The ethnographers of communication, however, prefer to use the term communicative
competence as a cover term to include grammatical, pragmatic as well as sociocultural competence; and we have preferred to use the term in the same sense in our definition, as we feel that the ability, to communicate presupposes grammatic competence; but mere grammatical competence does not result in efficient communication.

One may ‘know’ the rules of use as well as the rules of usage, but may still fail to communicate efficiently; for language is not a body of knowledge but a skill and it exists in its use. Language use does not refer to the manifestation of the abstract system of the language alone. It also includes the realization of the above as meaningful, appropriate communication. No amount of theoretical knowledge of swimming can help a man when he is suddenly thrown into the water, he has to learn by swimming. Similarly, one learns a language by using it. The phrase ability to use a language is preferred as it brings in the notion of language as a skill.

1.3.4 COMMUNICATIVE EFFICIENCY / ABILITY VERSUS KNOWLEDGE

“If X is a speaker of English, we say that he knows English; he knows that certain sentences are in the language, what meaning they have, and so on. X’s competence is this knowledge of his language” (Mathews, 1979, p. 32). This is essentially Chomskyean concept. According to Chomsky (1965) who views grammar as a sentence – defining system, knowing a language involves the ability to generate sentences and assign structural descriptions to them. A layman’s criterion for knowing his language as Spolsky (1973) remarks, is more functional. He would rather say: ‘I know enough French to read a newspaper’ or ‘He can’t speak enough English to ask the time of the day’ (p.167). This might seem very unacademic and unscientific but has great implication for language teaching.
Till recently, competence was equated with ‘knowing’ *What* to say, but a speaker knows much more – he also know’s *Why* he says *What* he says and *How* he must say it. The former refers to the grammatical system of the language; the latter includes its use as well. This can be represented as follows:

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Knowledge

 knowing the system–‘*What*’       knowing *how* to use the system
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*‘Why, When, Where’*

It is possible that one who ‘knows’ the system, may say “coffee has been being drunk by me” in response to the question “Would you like some coffee?” An ungrammatical response like “Thanks no, me drink already” would be much better appreciated since it is more appropriate to the situation and indicates the desire to be polite. Knowledge of how to use the system seems to be as essential as the knowledge of the grammatical system per se. Efficient communication does require grammatical accuracy; but that is not the only requirement. There are other contributing factors as well to achieve success in communication. These relate to the cognitive, social and pragmatic dimensions of language.

The basic distinction between autonomous linguistics and sociolinguistics rests on the crucial issue of what constitutes knowledge of a language and if knowing a language is different from using it. To the sociolinguists, knowing a language means not only knowing how to compose correct sentences, but also how to use correct sentences to make appropriate utterances. This involves two kinds of competence, code oriented and context oriented, and one does not automatically lead to the other.
Linguistic competence refers to the grammatical system; communicative competence refers to the communicative system, communicative competence and linguistic competence are not two discrete entities, but the former subsumes the latter. To know how to use a language also includes a knowledge of the grammatical system. Hymes (1971) regards competence as dependent upon both (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use.

1.3.5 KNOWING A LANGUAGE PERFECTLY

There arises a question, is it possible for anyone to ‘know’ a language perfectly? There seems to be some ambiguity in the choice of the term ‘perfect’. If ‘perfect’ means ‘total’ or ‘complete’, then perfect mastery of the lexicon is impossible; no one can know all the words in a language. Perfect mastery of syntactic is more attainable goal; but knowing the structure alone does not constitute perfect knowledge. One also needs to know how to organize these structures into a coherent discourse, and understand ‘conversational implications’, that is to know what is left unsaid as well as what is said. It is generally accepted that a learner of a foreign language can never acquire perfect competence in it, but it is an acknowledged assumption in linguistic investigations that a native speaker knows his language perfectly; a native speaker is regarded as a competent informant. This suggests that he has no problem in producing or understanding anything in his language. The validity of this assumption needs to be examined more closely, in order to arrive at an insightful description of communicative competence.

There are different kinds of native speakers, educated as well as uneducated. An educated native speaker receives formal training in his mother tongue at school and hence acquires a better competence in his language than the uneducated speaker. Two
issues seem to be confused here – that of adequate competence and that of perfect competence. An illiterate native speaker can communicate adequately in contexts familiar to him. When faced with unfamiliar social contexts he would find himself inadequate. Similarly, an educated native speaker from a higher class may find it impossible to identify himself linguistically with a person from a lower class. The upper middle class executive may feel linguistically inadequate in a working men’s club. His communicative competence is restricted to the social contexts with which he is familiar. Similarly, an individual who has had only limited education may feel unable to express himself appropriately at a science congress, should he find himself there: “In other words, we are all confined, to some extent to the styles we have acquired in the social situations within which we have been socialized” (Pride & Holmes, 1972, p. 11).

A concrete example of a native speaker’s inability to communicate efficiently in his mother tongue, is found in The Madras T.V Programmes. Some of these are in Tamil. There was a regular weekly series in which doctors whose mother tongue is Tamil, but who have had their education in medicine through the medium of English were interviewed. When they were questioned in Tamil, they struggled to answer back in Tamil and very often they code-switched to English. They have a better competence in English for medicine than Tamil for medicine, in spite of being native speakers of Tamil.

Even though the researcher is a native speaker, any form of written communication is generally in English as the researcher finds it difficult to write them in Tamil. The researcher tends to use English instead of Tamil because the social context in Tamil Nadu requires such a state of affairs. It is not therefore true that one
can communicate better in one’s $L_1$ than in an $L_2$ in all situations. The field of discourse is a relevant factor that influences one’s communicative competence.

The discussion above indicates that it is possible to find instances where a native speaker’s competence in his own language is imperfect and comparatively his competence in a foreign language is better, with specific reference to certain contexts or functions of a language.

Language serves four major communicative purposes, viz., social, academic, official, and personal – to identify ourselves with society, to pursue academic studies, to communicate ideas in an official (as against a personal) capacity and to communicate with ourselves. Everyone has adequate mastery over his mother tongue for social communication within his restricted social context.

Bernstein (1970) feels that the class system limits access to elaborated codes. A speaker from a lower class cannot communicate freely with someone from a higher class, unless properly trained, as is seen in the marathon efforts of Professor Higgins to pass off Eliza Doolittle as a duchess. This communicative competence with reference to social purposes is very often mistakenly referred to as general competence in a language. This is because we do not need any formal training in social competence, we acquire it by virtue of being born in a particular society. Communicative competence in the academic or official spheres, however is recognized as requiring special training because no one acquires it by birth.

Two significant points should be noted here, a non-native speaker needs training to communicate efficiently for social purposes; even a native speaker requires training to move from one social level to another. What is termed general competence in a
language is not as general and comprehensive as it seems to be; it actually refers to the ability to communicate effectively in a particular social context in which one finds oneself.

In the academic and official spheres, the need for training is more obvious, even in the case of native speaker. A native lawyer, for instance, may have better competence in legal English than his non-native counterpart, but a non-native lawyer, who has had his legal education through English (as in India) has better communicative competence than a native as far as his legal English is concerned.

No one then has perfect competence in a language; whether he is a native or non-native speaker of the language. Both require training. Both need to acquire the ability and their acquisition is neither complete nor uniform. The accident of birth does not ensure perfect competence; to perform certain functions it may be adequate; to perform certain other functions a native speaker needs to cultivate his competence consciously. It is impossible for anyone to acquire the ability to communicate effectively with reference to all functions in every possible social context.

The researcher is then forced to treat with caution two of the axioms in linguistics: (i) the concept that a native speaker has perfect mastery in his language, (ii) the concept of perfect competence in a language as such, which is too idealistic even for an ideal. These axioms may be essential for heuristic purposes, but language teachers need a more practical approach. This reiterates the need to define communicative competence with reference to specific functions, instead of as a monolithic entity, to which we shall return later.
1.3.6 A MODEL OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Our discussion so far has been iconoclastic; Chomsky’s linguistic competence has been shown to be inadequate to account for language in all its complexity and variety. The major question that needs to be answered is: “what, instead?” If generative grammar attempted to make explicit a native speaker’s linguistic competence, we should now propose a communicative grammar that can explicate a language user’s communicative competence, as defined above.

1.3.7 THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A UNIQUE COMMUNICATIVE MODEL

It is impossible to envisage communicative competence as an omnipotent, omniscient ability, a monolithic entity, that endows its possessor with miraculous powers of communication. No human being can communicate efficiently in all the possible contexts of situation, even in his own native language. The verbal repertoire of a speech community is highly complex: “The same speaker uses different linguistic varieties in different situations and for different purposes. The totality of linguistic varieties used in this way – and they may be very many – by a particular community of speakers can be called that linguistic community’s verbal repertoire” (Trudgill, 1974, p. 103). Each one’s communicative competence is highly restricted to those situations (or functions) in which he has to communicate either academically, officially or socially. Part of this may have been acquired by him through the accident of birth in a certain speech community; part of it is acquired through formal training.

In bilingual or multilingual situations it is possible that the same person may have communicative competence in different languages for different purposes, eg., Communicative competence in English for business, in Tamil for social purposes, in French for literary purposes etc., The total communicative competence of an individual
or his verbal repertoire may thus be the sum total of several Communicative Competence.

Communicative Competence of an individual = C.C₁ + C.C₂ + C.C₃ + C.C₄ … C.Cₙ. It is therefore meaningless to define the communicative competence of an individual in absolute terms for it is utopian; one can only define it with specific reference to a particular function in a particular register or dialect or language. Even this is very difficult to specify and define exactly because of the multiplicity of variables involved. This has been the reason for the definition of communicative competence as the ability to produce and interpret discourse with specific reference to particular functions in contexts. If this be the definition of communicative competence, it is futile and impossible to build a unique communicative model of any language. There need to be as many communicative models as there are situations or speakers. In his model for specifying communicative competence, Munby (1977) stresses the importance of a communicative needs processor (CNP) which shall supply us with a profile of the needs of each learner.

1.3.8 DESCRIPTIVE MODELS FOR SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

A single unique theory of language explicating the communicative competence of the user of a language, is an impossible ideal. The very diversity and complexity of the various factors interacting in a speech situation defies any attempt to build such a theory; but several descriptions of language use with reference to specific functions in context is a much more attainable modest goal. “A communicative grammar” fails to present a comprehensive categorisation of all the possible communicative contexts and it has as its starting point, grammar rather than communication. It may be more appropriate to call it “Grammar in Communication” rather than “A Communicative
Grammar”. A truly communicative grammar should first establish a comprehensive taxonomy of communicative contexts; and then establish the various linguistic realisations possible. This is a practical impossibility, since the number of communicative contexts is infinite. For the purposes of our course, we need a specific communicative grammar for ESP (English for Social Purpose) in Tamil Nadu. This cannot be an independent grammar that forms a prelude to the course, but would rather evolve along with the course.

Communication always has a specific purpose; in communicating, one performs certain functions through language. Function is prior to form; language is merely a tool or means for expressing these functions. This is obvious when we express certain communicative functions even without the help of language, eg., through gestures. One cannot, therefore, isolate communicative competence in a language as an abstract entity, a vaguely general ability, to be acquired at first and to be applied to different situations later. A child’s acquisition of language is need-based; so is a second language learner’s, or, for that matter, that of any user of language. Communicative competence exists in realisation, not in abstractions.

The same communicative function has different linguistic realisations depending on different contexts. Consider the range of forms presented by Wilkins (1976, p. 60) to realize one communicative function, viz., seeking permission to use a telephone:

- O.K.?
- All right?
- May I use your telephone please?
Please let me use your telephone.

I should be most grateful if you would permit me to use your telephone.

From the above example, it is clear that the same communicative function, “seeking permission” can be expressed in a number of ways; this is determined by the contexts and role relationships involved therein. Some of these linguistic realisations are systematic and predictable. For example, “May I use your telephone?”. Certain others are ‘adhoc’ and unpredictable, eg., “O.K.”, which can be used in different contexts with different meanings. A theoretical linguist’s basic concern is to relate form and function; he is interested in the systematic and the predictable rather than the non-sterotyped kind of language. He may analyse language starting with a specific communicative function and find out how it may be realized in different contexts. This would enable him to arrive at valuable insights into the nature of language as communication.

The language teacher finds it difficult to arrive at a description of all the possible communicative functions in various contexts and their linguistic correlates. In relation to his learner’s needs he is able to do it only in specific contexts. In a communicative approach to language learning he needs to isolate only those functions which are necessary for his learners. He cannot and need not wait till the theoretical linguist arrives at a total description of language. He has to identify the shared conventions specific to the context of the learner’s needs, and present only those linguistic realisations that are relevant; he then needs to evolve a strategy for enabling the learner to acquire this language. This would provide the learner with the communicative competence he requires, as defined in this chapter.
1.4 SPEAKING AND SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

There are some overlaps between these terms: speaking, speaking proficiency, oral proficiency, oral fluency, oral production and oral communication in the literature of language studies. Therefore, the researcher uses in this study ‘oral communicative competence’ as a blanket term to avoid the confusion that may occur. This discussion will lead to the characteristics of a good communicator as defined by different writers.

The term ‘speaking’ is used in the literature to mean different things. It means ‘Oral production’ if speaking is listed as one of the four language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. This meaning of the term ‘Speaking’ dominates ELT and FLT. Text books are based on this kind of division (Classification) of language skills. Learners of foreign languages as well as a big number of teachers if asked to give the meaning of ‘Speaking’ would probably say ‘producing speech’. The other meaning of ‘speaking’ in the literature is ‘Oral communication’. This is clear from some language testing literature under the title ‘Testing spoken language’. The tasks designed involve both production and reception. The third meaning is a kind of disguised one. Some literature on language testing labels ‘Speaking’ as production and reception but the focus is on oral production. So the problem here is that a precise definition of the term ‘Speaking’ is lacking.

The description and definition of the term ‘speaking proficiency’ lends itself to the same confusion associated with the term ‘speaking’. One of the main sources for describing, ‘speaking proficiency’ is the literature on language testing. But as we referred to above there are two types of description of ‘speaking proficiency,’ One that involves both ‘production and reception’ and the one focusing on ‘production’ only.
As a result of this confusion some authors use alternative terms for ‘speaking proficiency’, one of those prevalent terms is ‘fluency’ (Lennon, 1990). Lennon points out that the term ‘fluency’ has two senses in the literature – a ‘narrow sense’ and a ‘broad sense’. The narrow sense refers to ‘fluency’ as ‘one of the criteria of oral proficiency’ and the broad sense is ‘oral proficiency’. The latter sense of the term was used by some authors who wrote extensively about ‘fluency’, Eg. Fillmore (1979), Leeson (1975) and Brumfit (1984). In the following sub-section more details will be given about these approaches to studying and analysing speaking and speaking proficiency.

1.5 LANGUAGE USAGE AND LANGUAGE USE

Widdowson (1978) makes a distinction between ‘Language usage’ and ‘Language Use’. ‘Usage’ is the manifestation of the language system, both phonological and grammatical. ‘Use’ is the ‘Use’ of Language for a communicative purpose. When discussing the term ‘Speaking’ he points out that this term could be an example of ‘Usage’ or ‘Use’. Some of the examples he gave to make clear this distinction are the following:

- She speaks slowly and distinctly.

- She speaks frankly about her marital difficulties.

The first example is one of ‘Usage’, while the second is an example of ‘Use’. The first example shows the ‘manner in which language is manifested’. The second one indicates ‘the manner in which language is realized as communication’. Then he prefers to reserve the term ‘speaking’ for ‘Usage’ and he used another term for Use: ‘talking’. ‘Talking’ here means both production and reception, i.e., reciprocal act.
Bygate (1987) sees speaking as a skill which is made up of two skills:

(1) Motor – perceptive skill: ‘Involving perceiving, recalling, and articulating in the correct order sounds and structures of the language’. He continues: This is relatively superficial aspect of skill which is a bit like learning how to manipulate the controls of a car on a deserted piece of road far from the flow of normal traffic. It is the context – free kind of skill… (p. 5).

(2) Interaction skill: He suggests that:

A good communicator should be able also to say what he wants to say in a way which the listener finds understandable, by using skills like: 1) using conventional routines (information routines and interaction routines and 2) negotiation skills (negotiation of meaning and management of interaction (P. 22).

Bygate seems to focus on oral production when he speaks of how to convey meaning and how to adjust one’s talk to the need of the listener. He also focuses on interaction skills such as turn taking, negotiating meaning, etc.,

Nunan (1989) speaks of ‘speaking’ as one of the four language skills and as a skill which is interactive in nature. The example he gives for the traditional meaning of speaking, is ‘Oral production’, which means ‘giving a lecture’. But he focuses much on the interactional nature of speaking. He summarizes the requirements of developing successful oral communication as follows:

- ‘the ability to articulate phonological features of the language comprehensibly’.
- ‘mastery of stress, rhythm, intonation patterns’,

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• ‘an acceptable degree of fluency’,
• ‘transactional and interpersonal skills’,
• ‘skills in taking short and long speaking turns’,
• ‘skills in the management of interaction’,
• ‘skills in negotiating meaning’,
• ‘conversational listening skills’,
• ‘skills in knowing about and negotiating purposes for conversation’,
• ‘using appropriate conversational formulae and fillers’ (P. 32).

Fillmore (1979) Speaks on fluency with exclusive reference to production. He suggests four types of native – speaker fluency:

• ‘the ability to fill time with talk’,
• ‘the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned and ‘Semantically dense’ Sentences’,
• ‘the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts’,
• ‘the ability to be creative and imaginative in language use’ (P. 93).

Brumfit (1984) who discusses fluency and accuracy points out that this definition and characterization of fluency is very useful and signifies a deep underlying approach to the nature of language learning and language use. He makes a comparison between Fillmore’s (1997) and Leeson’s (1975) characterization of fluency. Leeson defines fluency as: “The ability of the speaker to produce indefinitely many sentences conforming to the phonological, syntactical and semantic exigencies of a given natural language on the basis of a finite exposure to a finite corpus of that language” (p. 136). As Brumfit suggests, this definition is more inclined towards ‘accuracy’ and ‘form’. 
On the other hand, Crystal (1975, p. 85) deals with fluency as one of the criteria of good conversational language. He suggests the following criteria for good conversational language:

- ‘fluency’,
- ‘intelligibility’ and
- ‘appropriateness’.

1.6 FACTORS IMPEDING RURAL WOMEN STUDENTS’ ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE – AN ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Having recognised the ‘reality’ of the presence of ‘incompetent’ L2 learners in the tertiary level, and having recognized their academic profile, it becomes necessary to analyse the sources of disadvantagedness and work out concrete remedies to surmount them. As the latter happens to be the subject of this study, and it is treated in an elaborate manner in the succeeding chapters, an analysis of the sources of incompetency alone, in a brief manner is undertaken here, with a view of arriving at a scientific solution to the problem.

In order to collect the data regarding the sources which impede rural students’ oral communicative competence, a questionnaire was prepared and piloted on a set of twenty students at wavoo wajeeha women’s college. The most easy and the most difficult, and ambiguous questions were deleted. Then a set of fresh question was prepared for the main study (see Appendix- B). Empirical evidences and theoretical analyses of the responses proved that many variables interact on an L2 learner, thereby contributing to a cumulative effect of incompetency. For the sake of convenience these interacting variables could be broadly classified under three ‘S’s-Society, School and Self.
The following diagram represents the cumulative effect of these three sources of dis advantagedness on the incompetent L2 learners.

1.6.1 SOCIETY

Under this category are included all the sub-categories beginning with the government whose policies influence the learners indirectly and the family, whose complexion affects them directly.

a) The Ambivalence of Official Policy

The linguistic composition of the country and the complex patterns of language loyalties make it almost imperative that English continues to serve as a ‘link language’, a function usually performed by a ‘second language’. Randolph Quirk says: “Obviously the feeling is that any particular Indian language puts at a disadvantage people who are not native speakers of it, whereas English puts everyone on common footing … Moreover, English is still closely bound up with education” (1972, p. 13). The English language has had several roles in Indian education as literate as a second language and library language and now as a service language.

Every learner is aware that mastery in the use of English is essential for the academic growth at the tertiary level, where the medium of instruction and evaluation
in most cases, is English. In addition to these, globalization and open market economy have contributed to the changed focus on English as the language for communication across the World. This is reflected in the expectations of effective communication skills in the potential employer or entrepreneur.

It is in this context that ESP and functionally–oriented courses became relevant. On the one hand, there is an increasing demand for specialised applications of the English language, but on the other, the existing Standards in the use of the English language do not rise up to the expectations.

According to Sood, the average undergraduate in India, even after a minimum six years of learning English as a subject at school and, three years of compulsory English at college often, “cannot speak a correct sentence in English, write his curriculum vitae, or even read an English daily” (1995, p. 167). The State government of Tamil Nadu has made English compulsory from the primary level up to the second year in the undergraduate courses. In the twelve years of schooling, the learner is expected to acquire the major skills of English. Unfortunately, the marks scored in English in higher secondary are still not taken into reckoning for ranking of applicants seeking admission to professional courses, and schools tend to groom their learners for a high score in core subjects and a mere passing percentage in languages. Under this system, the worst sufferers are the rural students who are the disadvantaged learners while the advantaged learner picks up English from sources other than his school, and uses the extra time gained, for enriching his knowledge of the core subjects. The rural /disadvantaged learner feels utterly lost, left merely with a few teacher-dictated essays (often taken down with numerous errors) to be committed to memory. Of these learners, those with reasonable memory manage to pass and others fail.
the sad fact remains that both the groups leave the campus without acquiring effective skills in the receptive or productive areas of English.

**b) Socio-cultural factors**

Another factor which impede L2 learning is the milieu or ‘class’ to which the learner belongs. Bernstein (1973) has been the chief source of inspiration behind the theory of ‘language deficit’ or ‘verbal deprivation’, found among the lower middle class, which, according to him, are primarily engineered by the mode of speech practised among its members. He postulates the existence of two varieties of language: the ‘restricted’ and ‘elaborated’ codes. The dominant mode of speech of the lower working class was called the restricted code while that of the middle class, the ‘elaborated code’. Bernstein describes restricted code as short, grammatically simple and made up, often, of unfinished sentences, frequent use of short commands and questions, categoric statements, simple and repetitive use of conjunctions, overuse of pronouns and rigid and limited use of adjectives and adverbs. On the other hand, the elaborated code is characterised by the use of accurate grammatical order and syntax to regulate what is said. It uses complex sentences that employ a range of devices for conjunction and subordination. It also employs prepositions to show relationships of both temporal and logical nature and uses a wide range of adjectives and adverbs and allows remarks to be qualified.

For the present study, a large number of learners (134/180) (74%) were drawn from families of farm labourers and daily wage earners who belonged to the lower middle class. It was found that their use of the second language shared the deficits of the restricted code as data recorded later in this thesis prove.
Most of these learners had been brought up in situations which condition their classroom behaviour. Their interaction with the other communities was limited as they had been subjugated for generations and perfectly resigned to their subservience. They could only respond in silence to the wishes of the dominant society. Their interaction within the community too was restricted in another sense. When they found the elders in their community speak, they choose not to speak lest their words were taken for contradictions. Dialogue with elders was almost unheard of. Asking questions and clarifications were also considered as rude, in a culture that uses language as authority, while effective learning demands active interaction. It was thus surmised that these learners because of their sub-cultural imperatives have problems with volunteering information, turn taking, topic maintenance and other pragmatic strategies demanded of a good learner.

c) The Family Background

The conditions of life at home and the family background of the rural learners under this study are found not very conducive to their acquisition of the skills of English as a second language. The educational background of the parents which is one of the vital influences on language learning behaviour of learners looks very dismal in the case of the rural women students as seen in the following table:

**Table – 1.2: Parent’s Education-wise Breakup of the Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Educational Qualification</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Illiterates</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>5th Standard – 8th Standard</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>52.77</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Table 1.2, out of 180 learners in the tertiary stage as many as 150 (83.3%) were first generation learners. It became evident from the responses of the learners to the questionnaire, that 85% of them did not receive any help whatsoever from their parents or others at home regarding their English assignments and preparation for English examinations; nor was the progress of those learners in their second language acquisition monitored or supervised by them. Thus it was understood that indifference or lack of ability to guide on the part of elders at home was due to their ignorance or helplessness.

The economic status of the family is another factor that determines the nature of second language acquisition of the learners at home. 156 of the 180 learners (87%) of the present study belonged to families of very low income (Rs.3000 to Rs. 5000 per month) and their sources of income too were very limited.

In fact, none of the families of those rural learners had subscribed to English dailies or magazines. It became very evident that middle class counterpart in the same class got exposed to much greater L₂ input at home than in the classroom. For instance, he read English newspapers, went through English magazines, listened to news in English - vital sources of input which created ample opportunities for discussion, interaction and reinforcement of linguistic and communicative competence in L₂. On the other hand, such vital sources of L₂ input were utterly denied to the rural L₂ learners,
due to their parent’s low income. In this context, Cynthia P. Deutsch’s remarks are quite pertinent:

These differences come about apparently because the homes from which the children come are less verbal than the average middle-class home. Verbal interaction between parent and child tends to be in brief sentences and commands rather than in extensive interchange and a great deal of communication in the very low-income home is gestural. Labelling objects and actions in the environment is not emphasized. There are few if any books or magazines in the home, and the child gets little exposure to the printed word as a source of information or of communication. (1967, p. 357)

Thus the low-income family conditions these learners in an impoverished environment and the consequences of such deprivation become cumulative over a period of years in their formative stage.

1.6.2 THE SCHOOL

Before entering the tertiary level, a learner spends nearly twelve years in school and these are the vital formative years in the learner’s L₂ acquisition. Out of the 180 learners in the present sample 149 (82%) of them had their schooling in rural schools and for all of them the medium of instruction was Tamil. The learners had learned English as a compulsory subject for 10 years from 3ʳᵈ standard to 12ᵗʰ standard. The weeds of disadvantagedness in L₂ learning, which this study deals with, had their seeds sown in them, in those formative years. Though the Tamil Nadu Board of Secondary Education boasts of a well-structured and graded syllabus in English teaching with
plenty of language exercises and suggested tasks, English teaching, in general, is still, by and large, confined to the rut of the translation method.

Further, the prevalent teacher-centered teaching of English in the state often tends to promote rote-learning, mechanical manipulation of grammar exercises and reliance on readymade essays supplied by either the teacher or guides in the bazaar. In most schools, the oral aspect of L2 learning is totally neglected. The learners are not given opportunities to develop their writing skill; nor are they encouraged to produce language of their own. Such a kind of spoon-feeding and the sad absence of positive error-management, tells upon their opportunities for acquiring communicative competence. In the terminal English examination of the Higher secondary level, 20 marks are alloted for speaking skills. But the learners admit the fact that most of them got the marks without even uttering a single syllable in English. Further, spoken English is tested in the written mode. Against such a pathetic background, the lucky learners educated at the English medium schools, who have had constant exposure to English, are better placed.

It is quite natural that a beginner faces problems in learning a second language. But as the opportunities to weed out these problems at the root level are ruled out, these weeds grow into a bush, blocking the way of further learning. Errors get fossilized and, for these learners, the cumulative effect of years of deprivation of opportunities to correct, speak, write, listen to and read English, snowballs over a period of time developing into a well marked disadvantagedness at the tertiary level. It is then that they become aware that a sound skill in the use of English is a key to success in the academic venture currently undertaken and the job market and realise, at last, their
pathetic lack of competence which impedes their further progress in studies and careers.

1.6.3 THE SELF

As already discussed, the society and the school have their definite share in engineering and perpetuating disadvantagedness/incompetence in the L2 learners under the present study. They are the primary external factors contributing to language deficit in these learners. But these factors alone do not absolve the learner of his lack of initiative in overcoming his linguistic disadvantagedness in L2 acquisition. Can he make, in some way, a conscious effort to correct his disadvantagedness?

S. Anandalakshmy, a consultant in child development and education makes the following observation: “Fortunately, human beings are endowed with resilience which enables self-repair, self-renewal, even transformation. There is almost no lacuna that cannot be filled, no wound that cannot be healed. Early deficits and distortions can be compensated and reversed” (2000, p. 9). But seldom does the disadvantaged learner make a conscious effort directed towards this ‘self-renewal’, self-repair’, ‘compensation’ or ‘reversal’ of his present predicament. Such an attempt demands a positive self-concept and moral courage to admit that he has to determine his destiny.

It is an acknowledged fact that the rural learners have a very low self-image, which makes them unconsciously resist even external academic efforts directed towards the elimination of their disadvantagedness in L2 learning.

There are teachers engaged in the unenviable task of teaching English to the rural learners who conclude sadly, ‘I cannot teach these students English!’’. Similarly, there are rural learners who surrender saying, ‘I cannot learn English’. In both cases,
such utterances are pointers to a debilitative frustration emanating from defeatist tendencies.

Significant insights to L2 learning can be gained when the psychological theory of locus of control is applied to analyse the ‘No-I-cannot-learn-English’ syndrome of the rural learners. The concept of locus of control refers to the perception of contingencies between action and outcome and in proportion to the extent, an action produces an outcome. Those who believe that their action produces the outcome are said to be internals with internal locus of control and those who believe that the outcomes are not produced by their actions are said to be externals with external locus of control (Pareek, 1996, p. 52). There is enough evidence to show that a close relationship exists between the locus of control and academic achievement. According to Udai Pareek:

Internals have been reported as being more sensitive to new information than externals. They made more observations. Internals were more likely to attend to cues which could help them resolve uncertainties Internals appear consistently better than externals and both intentional and incidental learning … An internal in order to influence the outcome would want more information. His control over events could increase as a result of his learning new tasks. (p. 60)

Most of these rural L2 learners could be labelled as externals as they firmly believe that they cannot effect any change in their acquisition of English language and hence their lack of persistence in learning. A most relevant concept in this regard is that of causal attribution advanced by Weiner (1974). According to him, failure is attributed to variable factors. If a person perceives that his failure is due to factors which can
change, he still has hope for improvement by taking more effort. On the other hand, if a person attributes his failure to stable factors, he is likely to give up his efforts.

From the researcher’s formal and informal interaction with the rural Women L₂ learners identified for this study, it was assumed that these learners normally feel that their accrued deficits in respect of their acquisition of English is so enormous and stable that their individual effort cannot bear any fruit. They resign themselves to the condition of being permanently disadvantaged. As V.D. Singh puts it, “… there is more to disadvantagedness than just certain factors – social or geographic or cultural … He has a longer distance to go, the distance discourages him. Quite often, he might feel like giving up, as he often does” (1993, p. 9). Hence, these rural L₂ learners are in need of affective encouragement and materials and a relevant methodology that bolsters up their self-image and achievement motivation.

1.7 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Second language learners across the globe face problems for they do not acquire adequate communicative skills in the languages. The educational goal of language is not achieved even after 12 years of completing higher secondary education. Learners are unable to communicate their ideas and culture to others. English teaching is deficient in the schools and students who pass out and enter the colleges are not efficient in spoken or written mode of language. Rural students of Tamil Nadu join the department of English at the rural colleges with expectations, attitudes and rote learning styles adopted in the primary stages of learning English. The situation continues at the tertiary level where students try to apply the same traditional methods and techniques for improving their speaking abilities and that results in low achievement of oral communicative competence. This phenomenon becomes more prominent at the tertiary
level because students are expected to master speaking ability at this level before they become teachers of English at the preparatory and secondary schools. At the same time, students become more aware of the problems and difficulties they encounter in the target language and as a result they avoid communicating with proficient speakers of English in real communicative situations even after their graduation and even after when they became teachers of English.

1.7.1 WHY DEVELOP THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF GIRLS? /
THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to clarify and demystify the confusion surrounding the oral skills which have hitherto remained unexplored and uncharted in the language class. The skills of listening and speaking have so far remained the most neglected of the four skills of LSRW. One reason for this is the greater emphasis given to the written skills of reading and writing. A more basic and important reason, however, is the prevailing ignorance in the minds of teachers/designers with regard to the handling of oral skills. This lack of understanding is reflected particularly in the individual teacher who feels diffident when handling the oral skills. As a consequence, the average user of English in India is less confident of his spoken language than his written one.

Competency of girls has pedagogic relevance since the language problem of the girls has come into prominence in recent years. As a result of continuous increase in educational opportunity, a large number of girls in developing countries are entering universities and technical institutions and educated young women occupy key positions in society.

Studying in a mixed class should prepare the young women for future jobs in which they have to work with men. If women have to enjoy equal status with men, they
have to be competent in language. The growing multinational companies spot out students who are competent in oral communication. During such campus interviews organised by these firms, most of the students from rural institution do not find a place and they are filtered out because they are incompetent in spoken skills. There is a great amount of inconvenience for students from rural areas due to their inability of using the language in appropriate context. So communicative competence of rural women students need greater emphasis.

1.8 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Rural students’ low achievement in oral communicative competence at the tertiary level has always been the main concern of the mass media experts and advisors of English language in Tamil Nadu. Moreover, students of English belonging to rural parts of Tamil Nadu complain that they feel disappointed because they have not achieved the expected standard even after they had spent three years of study in the Department of English at rural colleges. Local and chief inspectors of English at the ministry of education are of the view that teachers of English who graduate from the English Department at rural colleges are not qualified enough to teach ‘spoken English’ in their classes at the preparatory and secondary schools because they themselves have many serious problems in this area.

The acquisition of English as a second language is still a perennial problem to the rural students of Tamil Nadu. The need for research in this area, therefore, arises from the problems and obstacles that rural women students of English encounter when they are involved in real communicative situations. This study will be relevant to the entire rural colleges in Tamil Nadu, since the subjects selected for the study are rural students who come from different backgrounds.
1.9 HYPOTHESES

The researcher hypothesizes that there is a correlation between:

- The students’ low oral proficiency and traditional teaching methods,
- The students’ low oral proficiency and lack of communication strategies,
- The students’ low oral proficiency and lack of learning strategies,
- Students’ low oral proficiency and lack of exposure to the target language and its culture.

1.10 BASIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following factors affect the rural women students’ oral communicative competence most, and lead to communication breakdown. These factors are the basic research questions taken into consideration for analysis.

- Traditional methods of teaching
- Lack of communication strategies
- Lack of learning strategies
- Lack of exposure to the target language and its culture.

1.11 SELECTION OF THE TERTIARY LEVEL

Tertiary level refers only to the undergraduate level in this context. As per the educational system in Tamil Nadu, a learner enters the tertiary level after twelve years at school. The undergraduate course comprises three years of study, and students learn general English only in the first two years. The present experimental study is confined to the first and second year of the basic degree course.
The selection of the tertiary level is based on the following two reasons: Firstly, in Tamil Nadu we find that the teaching situation especially in preparatory and secondary school level, teachers have no control over the choice of textbooks or materials prescribed for their students. This is always the choice of the Ministry of Education. Therefore, teachers of English at these stages are compelled to follow a rigid syllabus according to specific plan prescribed by the Ministry of Education.

This situation is different at the universities of Tamil Nadu. Especially in autonomous institutions, the teachers are free to select and adopt the materials that suit their teaching situation. This flexibility paves the way for any recommendations, suggestions or remedial work to be implemented in the Department of English easily to develop students’ oral communicative competence.

Secondly, the colleges from where the students’ data have been collected are situated on the outskirts of the town and a large number of students come from different neighbouring villages such as Kayamozhi, Nangaimozhi, Poochikadu, Manathi and many such hamlets. Therefore, the findings of the present study can also be applied to other rural colleges in Tamil Nadu as the English language situation is the same.

To sum up, it is hoped that this study will find out the main reasons behind rural women students’ low oral communicative competence which apparently lead to their communication breakdown in real communicative situations with competent speakers of English. At the same time, it will help raise their awareness of the usefulness of communication strategies in overcoming their difficulties and solving communication problems that may occur in the target language.
Having specified the target population this study is concerned with, and having set directions the study should take, the next chapter reviews the corpus of related literature offering speculative and empirical information about issues connected with the present study.